

# Historical Patterns of Euroscepticism

## An Analysis of the Romanians' Confidence in the EU in the Context of the Schengen Affair

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(Habermas).*

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### 1. The Concept of “Euroscepticism”

**T**HE ORIGINS of the term “Euroscepticism” can be traced back to the British political discourse, which is traditionally associated with a strong opposition to the process of European integration. It became a significant political force in the context of the French and especially Danish referenda on Maastricht (1992), which opened up both the political elite’s and the academic discourse on the importance of public opinion in the process of integration (Milner 2000, quoted in Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008a, 4). From a relatively isolated, mostly British

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phenomenon, Euroscepticism has grown into an EU-wide trend and has become a legitimate object of study for various disciplines. The arguments of Eurosceptics are numerous, but irrespective of how they conceptualize Euroscepticism as such, they all gravitate around a hard core consisting of the following concerns: European institutions are too strong and lack transparency, the European super-state becomes distant from its citizens, the EU supports unpopular policies, the sovereignty of the national state is under a threat, European requirements are not fully applicable to the situation of the developing economies from the Central and Eastern Europe (Bârgăoanu 2011, 42–43).

The literature on Euroscepticism has developed under the influence of several factors. First, until the late 1980s, the process of European integration was accompanied by a so-called “permissive consensus” from the part of the European citizenry: an arguably “ill-informed, disinterested, and generally favourably disposed public gave political elites free reign in pursuing integration” (Edwards 2005, 5). Since then, there has been a constant decline of that permissive consensus, meaning that “a positive or neutral majority opinion of the public [which] allows for elite autonomy and imagination in foreign policy, in particular public action toward the objective of European unification, is all but exhausted” (De Beus 2010, 23). Second, the tendency to resort to referenda in order to ratify treaties has turned into an opportunity for citizens to express their feelings of discontent or scepticism. The most striking examples come from France and the Netherlands. The Dutch and French rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 was more than a public refusal of an important EU proposal, but a clear indication of the underestimated ambivalence of the public opinion towards the political integration process. The shockwave of the powerful “*nee*” and “*no*” to the European Constitution had not completely dissipated when the level of public support for the EU was seriously hit again in 2008 by the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty by the Irish people. Third, the enlargement of the EU and the crisis the European political project have led to new political patterns and ways of perceiving and debating the European issue (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008a, 3). Fourth, the economic and financial troubles confronting the EU, the eurozone in particular, has put the whole process of European integration, the fundamentals of the EU, under a cloud.

Many scholars have focused upon the conceptualization of Euroscepticism, with notable results. One must mention Paul Taggart’s widely cited definition of Euroscepticism as “contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008a, 7). The same author differentiates between hard and soft Euroscepticism; while “hard Euroscepticism is a principled opposition to the EU and the European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose

policies toward the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integrations as currently conceived,” party-based soft Euroscepticism is characterized by opposition not to the European integration or the EU membership as such, but to one or many policy areas or where there is “a sense that national interest is currently at odds with the EU trajectory” (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2003, 2). Petr Kopecky and Cas Mudde (2002) responded to the initial hard and soft typology with a critique that emphasized the difference between underlying attitudes to the European integration as a principle and attitudes towards the EU as an actual project, and came up with a fourfold distinction between Euroenthusiasts, Eurorejects, Eurosceptics, and Europragmatists (Kopecky and Mudde 2002, 303).

An alternative definition makes the distinction between *diffuse* support—support for the general *ideas* that underlie the European integration—and *specific* support for the general *practice* of European integration: the EU as it is and as it is developing (Kopecky and Mudde 2002). Trezn and de Wilde (2009) denounce the reactive nature of Euroscepticism, which is, in their opinion, a discursive formation in the public sphere rather than a collection of party positions or characteristics of the public opinion. The bottom line of the discussion around Euroscepticism is that it is part and parcel of assessing the worth of European integration.

Krouwel and Abts (2007) suggest that Eurosceptics may differ in intensity and in their arguments for opposing the EU, by focusing their criticism on different political targets and/or aspects of Europeanization. The authors try to expand the existing research on popular Euroscepticism by developing a twofold conceptualization that allows them to investigate simultaneously both the targets and the degree of popular discontent towards the EU and the European integration. By combining targets and the degree of discontent, the structure of Euro-related attitudes can be described as a sliding scale of political attitudes ranging from confidence and scepticism at the positive pole to distrust, cynicism and alienation at the negative end of the scale.

Another conceptualization of contemporary Euroscepticism integrates existing theoretical insights into public opinion and legitimacy with targeted empirical indicators, establishing four categories: economic, sovereignty-based, democratic and social Euroscepticism. Each type can assume a hard or a soft degree of intensity (Sørensen 2008, 87). During the recent history of the EU, the weight of these categories has differed. While around the year 2007, the only concern of both EU elites and EU public focused on sovereign-based (political), democratic, and social Euroscepticism (that is, with input-based legitimacy), the crisis that has been confronting the EU since 2008 has violently brought to the surface the concern of economic Euroscepticism and put the output-based legitimacy, the economic success of the EU project, under a severe question mark.

## 2. Euroscepticism, Eurocynicism, Eurodenial, Eurofatigue

**W**E CONSIDER Euroscepticism more of a neutral position, situated between outright confidence and outright rejection. Euroscepticism finds itself on a broader attitudinal spectrum, which also incorporates distrustful, cynical, plainly oppositional or detached public views on the EU. Eurosceptics are supposedly more alert and more critical of the information on the EU they receive. They constantly monitor the EU's political and socio-economic environment and scrutinize the decision-making process. Their views on the European construction are flexible, and highly influenced by a series of circumstantial factors, including the personal, interest-based ones. Once these factors are fulfilled and the amount of information required to evaluate them is accumulated, their sceptical attitudes may change into a more confident and approving stance. As Krouwel and Abts noticed, Euroscepticism seems to be "a matter of doubt rather than denial" (Krouwel and Abts 2007, 259). Eurosceptics may change their position from distrust to confidence in light of a substantial transformation in the future development of the EU, provided that this transformation satisfies their reflexive efforts and their interests. Their support for the EU may not be unconditional, but all requirements being met, Eurosceptics do not utterly reject the principles underpinning the European integration.

It is this shift from Euroscepticism to Eurodistrust or, even worse, to Eurocynicism (Krouwel and Abts 2007, 262) or Eurodenial that appears to be a real threat to the evolution of public attitudes towards the EU and its policies. In order to grasp these newly developed attitudes towards the EU, Jürgen Habermas introduces the term "Eurofatigue," meaning an indiscriminate rejection of any further transfer of sovereignty from the member states to the EU in *any* field and in *any* area: "it is probably true that the fatigued European public would currently reject any further transfer of sovereignty, even in one of the EU's core policy areas" (Habermas 2011, 85).

The increase of mistrust in the European project is a consequence of the rising gap between the evolution of the public discourse on the EU and the EU performance as such, on the one hand, and the citizens' demands and expectations, on the other. People who distrust the European decision-makers and their actions or who take a cynical stance towards the EU are more inclined to political pessimism than the sceptics are. Their lack of confidence is harder to combat because of their generalized negativism towards the EU politics. Distrust makes people evaluate the EU unfavorably and leads to the consolidation of a disdain for the European construction. We believe that the leadership crisis the Union is currently facing is a strong predictor for the explosion of Eurocynicism. Distrust in the EU is primarily an indicator of unfavorable public assessment of the European

leadership. If actions of the European leaders are not perceived as positively affecting the everyday life of the citizens, trust cannot be cultivated. “The public’s perceptions of the motivations of actors are what determine their trustworthiness” (Cappella and Jamieson 1997, 142). Should the EU want to restore public confidence and ensure the citizens of its pursuit of a general (European) interest, the consolidation of the leadership would probably be a good starting point. At this time, doing something wrong or, worse, doing nothing would deepen the erosion of the public support of the EU due to the absence of trust, on the one hand, and to Euroapathy—political alienation and a chronic lack of interest for the European affairs, on the other. The best case scenario for the Union would be that those people who might feel deceived will join the Eurosceptics. The worst case scenario is that they either turn to Eurocynicism or become totally Euroapathetic, which means that they give up on the EU and offer no support whatsoever for the EU’s initiatives.

### 3. Euroscepticism: Sources, Causes and Explanations

**T**HE DEBATE around Euroscepticism has also developed towards another area: identifying its sources, causes and possible explanations for its emergence. Gabel (1998) describes and tests for validity the different theories explaining why public support for EU varies. The first theory (cognitive mobilization) involves the relationship between the citizens’ cognitive skills and their attitudes toward European integration. Ronald Inglehart, who first investigated this relationship, argued that high cognitive mobilization, characterized by a high level of political awareness and well-developed skills in political communication, enables citizens to identify with a supranational political community. As a citizen’s cognitive mobilization increases, (s)he is more familiar with and less threatened by the topic of European integration (1970, quoted in Gabel 1998, 335).

The second theory, political values, posits that support for European integration is associated with value orientations regarding economic and political issues. According to that theory, citizens’ political attitudes are shaped by the socioeconomic conditions surrounding their formative or pre-adult years, when the person adheres to certain values and attitudes. Citizens with post-materialist values should be more supportive of European integration than those with materialist values (Gabel 1998, 336).

The utilitarian theory of public support for European integration first proposed by Gabel and Palmer (1995, quoted in Gabel 1998, 336) argued that EU citizens in different socioeconomic situations experience different costs and

benefits from integrative policy; that these differences in economic welfare shape their attitudes toward integration; and consequently, that citizens' support for integration is positively related to their welfare (personal) gains from integrative policy. The utilitarian theory is improved by the concept of "political allegiance," formally defined as "the willingness of a national public to approve of and to support the decisions made by a government, in return for a more or less immediate and straightforward reward or benefit to which the public feels entitled on the basis of it having rendered approval and support" (van Kersbergen and Netjes 2005, 11). The support for European integration translates into the evaluation of citizens of the extent to which supranational institutions allow national political elites to provide political, social, psychological and economic security and well-being.

Lauren McLaren (2005, 2006) argues that the utilitarian theory fails to address the more fundamental reasons for variation in support for integration. The researcher finds a key-factor related to identity. As long as the national identity can provide people with a basis for self-esteem and self-value, it is likely that these people will oppose threats to that national identity. Some find the EU to be more threatening to their national identity and culture than others, thus explaining the variations (McLaren 2006, 18). Although attempts have been made to improve identification with "Europe" (i.e. the European Union) and, among other things, introduced some well-known European symbols such as a flag and an anthem, early expectations that nation-states and their people would become more European and gradually develop a European identity, at least as strong as the national one, have not been met. The European Union is not seen as a nation, and patriotism comparable with that of nation-states may hardly be detected (Hanshew 2008, 11).

The fourth theory is related to political partisanship: citizens adopt attitudes toward integration that reflect the position of the party they support (Gabel 1998, 338). Another group of scholars posits that parties play a different role in shaping public support for integration. Several studies by Franklin and other scholars (1994, 1994, 1995) have argued that voters tie their support for integration to their support for their government in general—the presidency in France, in that particular case (Gabel 1998, 339). Looking at the way in which the European issue is contested in European party systems, three patterns of contestation can be identified: limited contestation, open contestation, constrained contestation (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008b, 348). Systems of limited contestation in the major parties of the party system have little space for, and therefore usually a very limited historical record of Euroscepticism. Systems of open contestation have taken a position of Euroscepticism (whether hard or soft—see Taggart's distinction above). The issue of European integration has been in



this case an important component in party competition. The final category, systems of constrained contestation, covers party systems in which European issues play a role and where Euroscepticism is certainly present, but where there appears to be less likelihood of European issues affecting domestic party competition directly. The cases making up this category are all the new EU member states from Central and Eastern Europe (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008b, 349). Abts and Krouwel (2007) draw the attention upon the relation between populism and Euroscepticism in the party system. Populist politicians deliberately amplify negative feelings of the electorate. The justification for linking attitudes of distrust and cynicism with the rise in populism is derived from the robust empirical finding that generalized distrust, combined with political efficacy, can become an independent determinant of political attitudes and activities (Easton 1975; Craig and Maggiotto 1981; Levi and Stoker 2000, quoted in Abts and Krouwel 2007, 265). Negative political attitudes such as distrust and cynicism can be used to mobilize voters.

After empirically testing these theories, Gabel concludes that the utilitarian (cost-benefit) theory and the class/political partisanship theory provide the most robust explanations for variation in support for integration. The other two theories—political values and cognitive mobilization theories—provide some valid explanations for citizens' perceptions in the original EU member-state and less valid explanations for what happens in the new member states.

Related to the emergence and evolution of Euroscepticism in the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe, researchers noticed that pre-accession negotiations have a very deep influence on party positioning. The benefits of EU membership and the traction of the EU's pre-accession process—reinforced by the severe costs of being excluded or falling behind—sooner or later foster a lasting consensus among mainstream political parties in candidate states regarding the imperative of attaining membership, with the observation that opposition parties tend to be less predisposed to support European integration (Hooghe and Vachudova 2005, 11).

Other types of research focus on the formation of opinions in the public sphere and the role played by the media. The work of de Wilde et al. (2010) shifts attention from diffuse, non-articulated and isolated attitudes on European integration to targeted, publicly articulated statements as elements of the ongoing discourse of public legitimacy of the EU. By analyzing online media on the occasion of the elections for the European Parliament, the authors approach Euroscepticism as part of the “existential debates” contesting the EU or the European integration in terms of polity. The authors found that the democratic function of the European Parliament is met only to a limited extent. Online campaigning reinforces the electoral gap between EU citizens and the EU policy process by

focusing solely on domestic concerns. Today, Euroscepticism is a form of opposition that relies on media infrastructures for salience or amplification (de Wilde, Trenz, and Michailidou 2010, 17).

Claes de Vreese (2005) analyzed how the media influence the variation of public support for European integration. Cynicism at the level of the political debate and political elites may help to understand why citizens do not support or even reject specific policy proposals, such as those put forward in national referenda. More precisely, exposure to strategic news (news that focuses on winning and losing and is driven by ‘war and games’ language) leads to Euro-cynicism. However, this effect is conditional upon two factors: the pervasiveness of strategically framed news reporting and individual level characteristics, such as the degree of political sophistication (de Vreese 2005, 12–13).

#### **4. Changing Patterns of Public Attitudes towards the EU in Central and Eastern Europe**

**R**ECENTLY, CRITICISM and contestation of the integration process and the European Union have intensified. This situation has led to a decrease in the level of public trust in the EU over the last decade. As the Eurobarometers<sup>1</sup> show, in the spring of 2007, more than half of the Europeans said that they trusted the EU. This percentage has dropped gradually until the present moment. In the autumn of 2010, the average of public trust was 43%.<sup>2</sup> In the spring of 2011, 41% trusted the EU, while 47% of Europeans (+2 points compared to autumn 2010) took the opposite position. Nevertheless, trust in the EU is still predominant in 16 EU countries, with the highest levels recorded in Romania (62%), Estonia (61%), Slovakia (61%) and Belgium (61%).

The figures in the Eurobarometers speak for themselves, yet they do not convey the whole story, which may be even more complicated. At least three points can be raised in this context. First, Eurobarometers measure popular Euroscepticism; to this, elite Euroscepticism must be added, which is also growing (Leonard and Guérot 2011). Second, various other surveys, which ask different types of questions than those present in Eurobarometers, reveal even higher levels of distrust. For example, according to a recent poll, two thirds of EU citizens believe that the single market has benefited only large corporations (Strohschneider 2011). Third, Euroscepticism—both popular and elite—must also be explained along national lines; one can talk about German Euroscepticism, a Danish or a French one etc. Besides, these types of Euroscepticism differ in weight, relevance and implicit symbolism. The results of a survey published in



January 2011, carried out by the Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research, indicate that “the percentage of Germans who have little to no faith in the European Union has risen from 40 percent in 2002 to 67 percent in 2011. The majority of them regret the introduction of the Euro” (Wohlgemuth 2011, 13). Another poll carried out by the German Marshall Fund and published in September 2011 found 76 percent of Germans were in favor of the European Union, but that percentage dropped to 48 percent when asked about the monetary union ([www.eubusiness.com](http://www.eubusiness.com), 18 September 2011).

Irrespective of the type of research and of the questions asked, it is certain that the UK, the Scandinavian countries, France, Germany and Austria are the main Eurosceptical members of the EU. What is the situation in Central and East European Countries? Previous studies on public support of the EU (McLaren 2006) and results of the Eurobarometers have shown that the level of Euroscepticism is significantly higher in the old member states than it is among the newcomers that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, respectively. Despite this initial enthusiasm in countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the current political and economic challenges to the future of the European construction have triggered variations in supportive attitudes towards the EU in these countries, too. The newcomers to the EU have been generally known as big supporters of European integration. However, this rule is about to be broken if we are to consider the latest Eurobarometers that we previously quoted. The data show that CEE Member States such as the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Romania have become less confident in the EU than they were at the beginning of their membership. Talking about elite-driven Euroscepticism, the position of Polish high-profile leaders provides a case in point. Just before his country assumed the 6-month presidency of the EU, the Polish Prime-Minister Donald Tusk warned at an event in Warsaw on 1 July 2011: “The union is going through one of the most difficult and complicated moments in its history. When I speak of a new Euroscepticism, I am not talking about traditional Euroscepticism as in [the UK] . . . I am talking about the birth of a phenomenon which does not declare itself. I mean the behavior of politicians who say they support the EU and further integration but at the same time take steps that weaken the union” ([euobserver.com](http://euobserver.com), 1 July 2011).

One of the explanations advanced for the erosion of trust in the CEE Member States is that they naturally follow the trend of the rising Euroscepticism in the Western Member States. The citizens of Europe are more concerned with their welfare in a Union more powerfully shaken than ever. Economic and political measures promoted by the EU apparently do not pay off as they are supposed to.

To this interpretation of the rise of Euroscepticism we can add another one. These countries have attributed a strongly emotional dimension to the accession process. Prior to becoming Member States, both masses and elites in the CEE

countries were unanimous in their ardent desire to join the EU. A metaphorical, highly emotional meaning was attached to the membership, and the EU was envisioned by the people as having a “messianic” touch. Furthermore, the accession to the EU was seen as a “return to Europe” (Kopecky and Mudde 2002). However, the level of popular enthusiasm severely dropped during the first years after the accession in most of the CEE countries. The overwhelmingly positive appreciation of the EU has faded away, while uncertainty and mistrust have entered the stage. Even the metaphorical approach has been changed; Europe is no longer perceived as a “savior,” but in more pragmatic and opportunistic terms. People and elites now evaluate the EU based on the cost/benefit model. The utilitarian metaphor currently best grasps the popular views on the European project across the EU. Economic Euroscepticism, which, in our opinion, is the most powerful one, is growing—even if it is measured or not by different polls.

## 5. Euroscepticism in Romania

### 5.1. General Context

**R**OMANIA IS an even more interesting case to study due to the powerful and emotional popular attachment to the EU and the integration process. According to two renowned Romanian researchers in the field of Europeanization and the European public sphere, one can identify, in the case of Romania, “a rhetorical consensus on the topic of European integration as the expression of the public will. Surveys and Eurobarometers alike indicated [during Romania’s pre-accession negotiations] that the vast majority of people were in favor of the European integration; hence, the absence of the so-called Euroscepticism among Romanians” (Beciu and Perpelea 2011, 9).

Although it seems that the cost/benefit-based assessment of the EU is also gaining ground among Romanians, the emotional assessment of the EU’s actions has not entirely disappeared. Nonetheless, as our research shows, the positive metaphors in the public discourse have been replaced by a negative one: Europe is not here to save us anymore, but to punish and to “scold” us. Eurobarometers indicate that, in the autumn of 2007, Romanians were highly optimistic regarding the EU, immediately after the country’s accession to the EU (75%, compared to the 66% European average). This situation has changed over the last three years: in the autumn of 2010, Romanians’ Euro-optimism was still above the European average, but the percentages had decreased (68% compared to the 59% European average).

The research on the degree of Euroscepticism among Romanian citizens, as presented in this paper, is part of a larger research project conducted between

10 January and 22 March 2011 by the Center for Research in Communication, at the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations (The National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest). The project took advantage of a particular context in Romania: the negotiations for the country's accession to the Schengen area. The Schengen affair became a hot issue for Romanian politicians and decision-makers, journalists, and the general public alike between the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011, due to the letter publicized by the French and German Ministers of Internal Affairs on 21 December 2010. The letter, addressed to the European Commission and the Belgian and Hungarian presidencies, respectively, of the European Union, proposed an indefinite postponement of Romania's and Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen area, which, at that time, was intended for March 2011. The research comprised an analysis of the public perception, the media coverage of the topic and the political elites' related opinions. We have used a multi-method research design including a national survey, a content analysis of media coverage and a series of in-depth interviews with high profile Romanian political figures. The survey focused on the manner in which Romanians generally relate to the European Union and on the manner in which the "Schengen affair" influenced Romanians' attitudes toward the EU, and this article reports only on the results of the national survey. Some results of the survey were previously published, in Romanian, by Bârgăoanu (2011).

## 5.2. Methodology

**T**HIS ARTICLE reports on a survey carried out in January 2011, less than one month after the explosion of the "Schengen affair" in the Romanian public sphere. As we have already explained, the "ground zero" of the heated debate on the postponement of the accession was the proposal of the French and the German Ministers of Internal Affairs to postpone Romania's and Bulgaria's accession to the Schengen area. A CATI collection method was used, on a multi-stratified, probabilistic, representative sample of 1,168 respondents, > 18 year old, with a sample error of  $\pm 2,9\%$ . The sample is representative of the adult population of Romania who has the right to vote.

The research questions that directed the survey aimed at examining three key aspects related to how Romanians perceived the "Schengen affair":

RQ1. What is the general level of knowledge regarding the Schengen area (the level of knowledge)?

RQ2. How do people perceive the costs/benefits of Romania's accession to the Schengen area (the public perception)?

RQ3. Does the postponement of Romania's accession to the Schengen area affect the public attitude towards the EU (the level of public support)?

### 5.3. Data Analysis

WHEN DESIGNING the survey questions, one of the most important concerns was the degree of trust in the European Union. 55% of those questioned answered that they have a high degree of trust in the EU, while 40% showed a low degree of trust (the remaining 5% do not know/do not answer). When asked “Do you believe that the European Union as a whole is heading in a good or in a bad direction?” 58% answered that the direction is a good one, while 24% said the direction is wrong (17% do not know/ do not answer). The answers to the questions above indicate that the majority of Romanians relate to the European Union in a favorable manner. The degree of trust is not correlated to demographic variables, such as age, residence or media consumption, but is correlated to education ( $\rho=-0.160$ ,  $p<0,01$ ,  $N=1,178$ ).

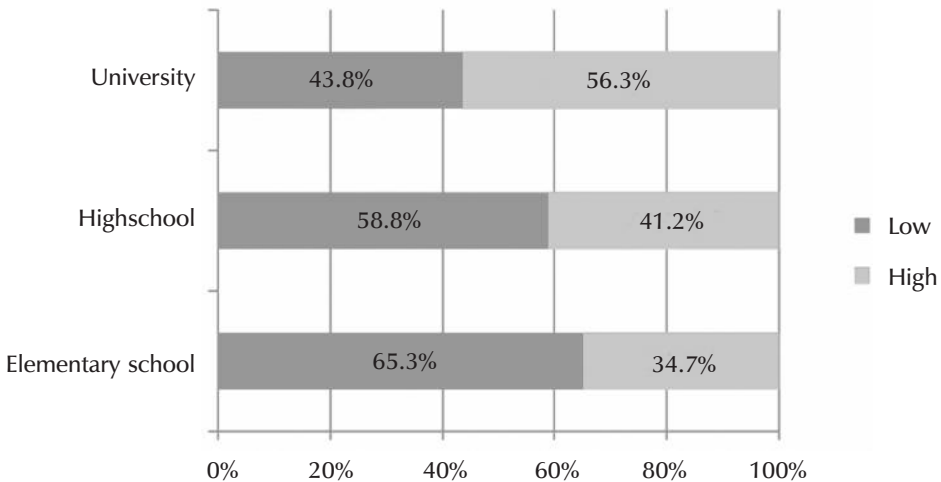


FIG. 1. Degree of trust in the EU, according to the level of education

Furthermore, as the income increases, the degree of trust becomes higher; in this case, there is an obvious although not linear trend, of having more trust in the European Union as the income becomes higher.

The perceived level of knowledge about the European Union is rather low, as shown in the chart below. Generally speaking, the level of knowledge about the EU matches the level of knowledge about the Schengen area.

Romanians hold a positive perception of the European Union despite the general belief that Romania has not fully exploited the opportunities brought about the European integration. 70% of Romanians believe that the country does not take advantage of such opportunities and only 14% believe the contrary (while 7% do not know/do not answer).

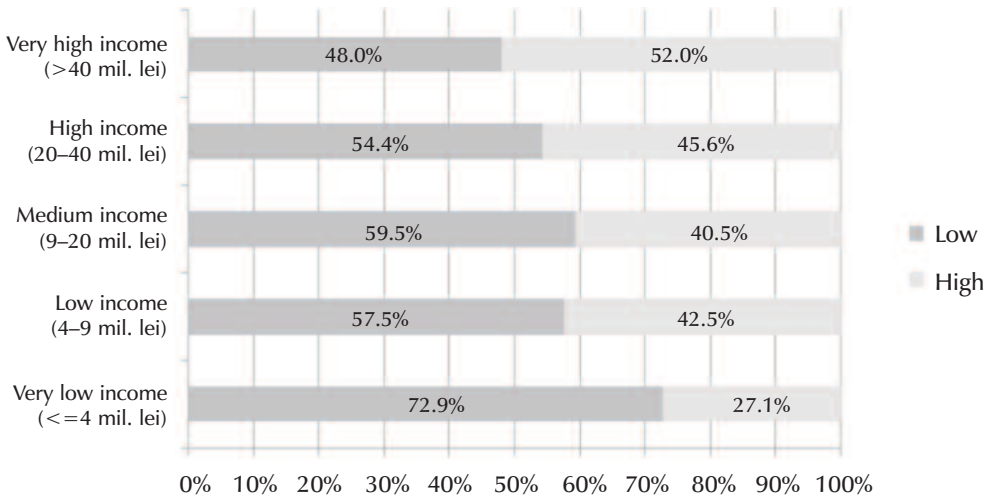


FIG. 2. Degree of trust, according to income

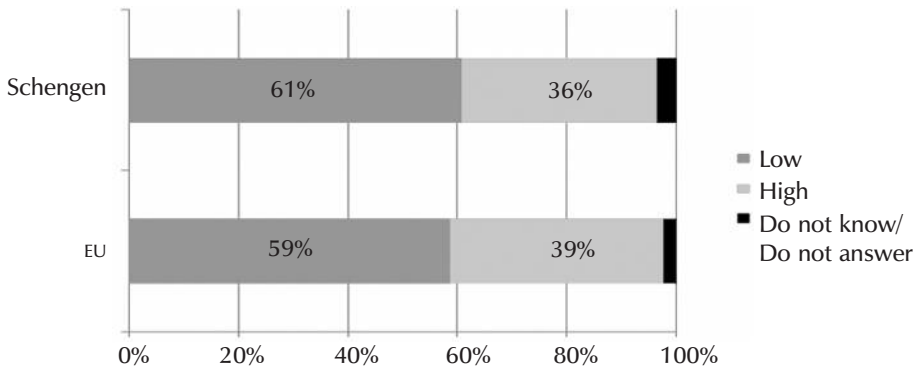


FIG. 3. The perceived level of knowledge about the EU compared to knowledge about the Schengen area

An indirect proof of the degree of trust in the EU can be found in the answer to the question “Is Romania on the right track?” 78% of Romanians believe that it is on the right track, while 15% think that the track is wrong. What is significant is the fact that 68% of those who believe that Romania is on the wrong track think that the EU is on the right one. This result is consistent with the general results of recent Eurobarometers, which show that, despite growing scepticism, the European Union is still considered to be the most effective player to respond to the impact of the crisis (22%), ahead of the national government (20%). The European Union is mentioned first in Greece, Poland and Luxembourg (34% each) and Bulgaria (33%). The European Union is also at

the top in 13 other Member States: Belgium (29%), Italy (28%), Estonia (28%), Slovakia (28%), Romania (27%), Ireland (26%), Lithuania (26%), Spain (25%), Hungary (25%), Portugal (25%), Cyprus (24%), Austria (23%) and Slovenia (23%) (Eurobarometer 75, 2011a). Overall, the most recent Eurobarometer (Spring 2011) shows that Europeans gave credit to the European Union for its strategy to emerge from the crisis and face the new challenges: a majority of them believed that the European Union was on the right track (46%, unchanged since autumn 2010). Less than a quarter held the opposite opinion (23%, stable), while 20% spontaneously answered “neither one nor the other” (Eurobarometer 75, 2011).

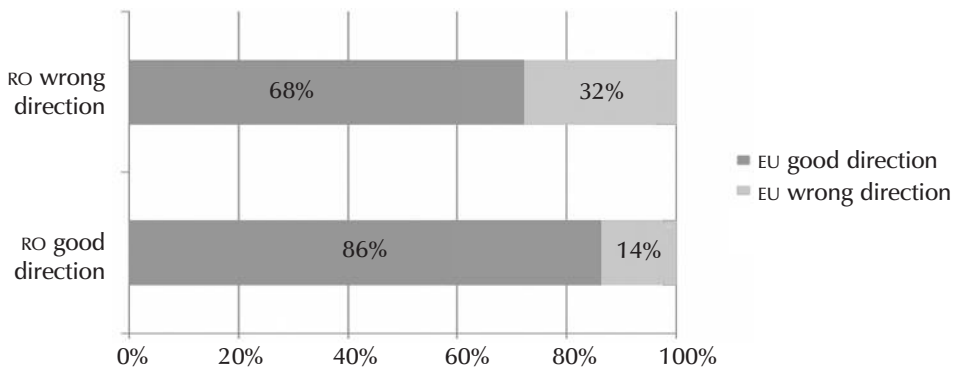


FIG. 4. “Is Romania on the right track?” vs. “Is the EU on the right track?”

Our data corroborates other results previously recorded by Eurobarometers, that is, a constant decrease in the Romanians’ trust in the European Union. In the fall of 2007, less than a year after Romania’s accession to the EU, 68% of Romanians stated that they trusted the EU, meaning 20% above the European average. In comparison, the survey carried out in the neighboring state, Bulgaria, indicated that at that time only 58% of citizens admitted to have trust in the EU. Nevertheless, the Romanians’ degree of trust decreased constantly since 2007, with the only exception of the year 2009, as shown in the chart below. The lowest degrees of trust have been recorded for the year 2010, when only 54% of respondents answered that they trust in the EU. But even then, the degree of trust remained 10 percentage points above the European average of 42% in the spring of 2010 and 43% in the fall of the same year.

We have used two indicators—the trust in the EU and the estimation regarding the right/wrong track in order to assess the Euroenthusiasm of the Romanian citizens four years after the EU accession, in the particular context of the negative event created by the delay in Romania’s accession to the Schengen area. From



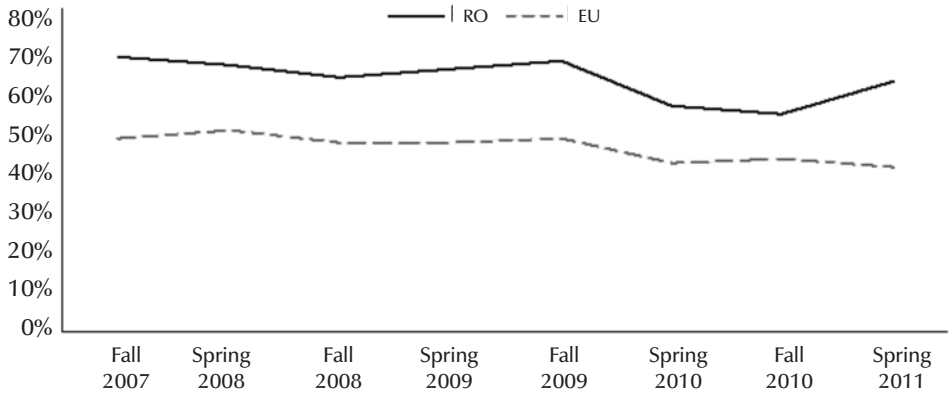


FIG. 5. Evolution of trust in the EU: Romania vs. the European average

this point of view, a decrease in the degree of Euroenthusiasm is visible, from 68% in the year of the EU accession to 54% in the case of the most recent Eurobarometer and to the 55% revealed by our survey. When asked to assess whether the EU is on the right or wrong track, our data show that 58% of Romanians believe that the track is good, while 24% believe it is wrong and 18% do not know/do not answer. The data are consistent with the 2007–2010 Eurobarometers (see the chart below).

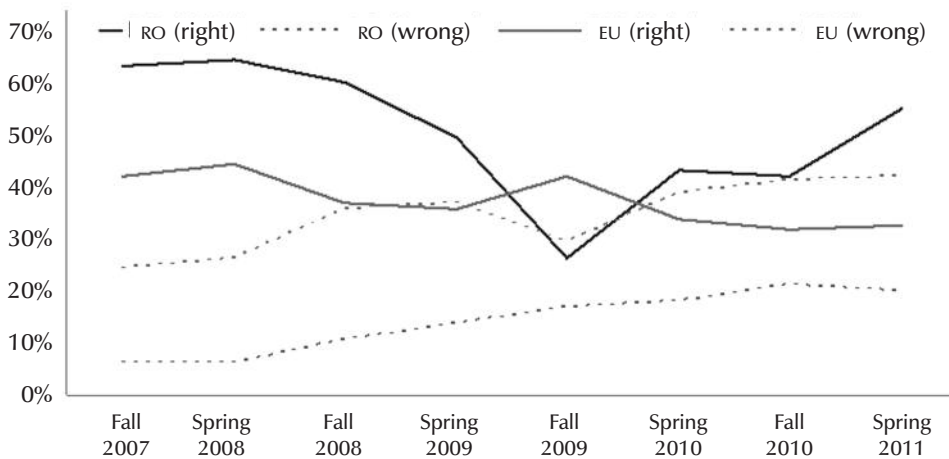


FIG. 6. Estimation of the right/wrong track (Romania vs. EU)

There can be several explanations for this constant—yet slow—decrease in enthusiasm. First, as a number of Romanian authors have revealed in the case of Romania and other researchers from Central and Eastern Europe revealed as valid for the whole area, the levels of Euroenthusiasm among Romanians and among the newest European citizens at the moment of the EU accession was excessive. Immediately after accession, all these new member states recorded a drop in confidence. Second, as Beciu and Perpelea (2011) reveal, the Romanian public discourse on the EU has turned from highly charged emotional terms to a more technical, institutional one. Previous research on the public discourse on EU funds showed the prevalence of two frames—“Messianic Europe” and “EU penalizes us,” without being able to show which was more powerful at the time (Bârgăoanu et al. 2010). The comprehensive results of the more recent research project on the Schengen affair indicate that the media have abandoned the “Messianic Europe” approach in favor of the “penalizing Europe” one, focusing more on the penalties and conditions that the EU policies impose on any member state (Bârgăoanu 2011, 129–130). It remains to be decided whether the prevalence of this “penalizing Europe” frame at the expense of the previously more popular “Messianic Europe” is an instance of the specialization, institutionalization of the EU public discourse that Beciu and Perpelea (2011) discuss or whether it is attributable to a growing sense of Euroscepticism in the public discourse and the public sphere. Third, there is a thin red line between being disappointed with the EU and being negatively influenced by the difficulties in your own country in general. It is possible that some people may confuse the two issues and extrapolate their dissatisfaction from a national to an (indiscriminate) European level. As we have previously shown, empirical research has shown that voters tie their support for integration to their support for their government; hence, it is possible that the inverse trend may emerge, that a general dissatisfaction with the national government may extend into a general feeling of dissatisfaction, including with the EU.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

**T**HERE IS little doubt that Euroscepticism should be a major concern of European leaders. The slow, yet constant amplification of the people’s mistrust in European integration is a serious threat to the future of the EU. Empirical evidence across the EU points in this direction. The findings of our study show the propagation of Euroscepticism in one of the newest Member States, one which is still above the EU average in terms of EU trust. The results

reported here generally support some findings from other studies on the topic. First, the ascent of Euroscepticism in Central and Eastern Europe follows the trend recorded in the Western Member States—although the reasons may differ widely. It is not only the disappointment of post-accession that determines the sceptical attitudes, but the combination between that disillusionment and the changes in the metaphorical meanings that people attribute to the EU. Europe is no longer perceived as a savior, as a Messiah, but as an opportunistic adventure which is assessed in terms of costs/benefits. In this respect, the results of our work are consistent with previous findings (Gabel) showing both the statistical and substantive significance of the utilitarian, cost/benefit theory in explaining citizens' support of the EU.

People's [Romanians'] emerging distrust in the EU is a result of complex factors, of which the Schengen affair appears to be but a circumstantial one. The concrete results of our survey indicate that Euroscepticism is growing in Romania, even if it has not become a dominant stance yet. The result is relevant in itself, given the quasi-absence of this trend in Romania before and immediately after its accession to the EU. An accumulation of negative feelings towards the EU does exist and it may ultimately lead to a decline in the people's confidence in the European construction, supplemented by a general decline of confidence in politics and political life—irrespective of whether it is about Romanian or European political life. Just like anywhere else in Europe, the most dangerous phenomenon that may emerge in the near future may not even be the ascent of Euroscepticism as such, but the ascent of Europopulism, Eurocynicism or Eurofatigue.



## Notes

1. In this paper, we shall refer to the findings of the Eurobarometers spanning from 2007 (pre-crisis year) to 2011 (last publicized wave of Eurobarometers—Spring).
2. The results of the spring and autumn waves of the 2010 Eurobarometer recorded an inversion—a genuine inflection point—regarding the trust-distrust ratio. For the first time in the history of the EU and in the history of European public opinion research, distrust in the EU outweighed trust in the spring of 2010; 42% of the respondents said that they trusted the EU, whereas 47% said that they distrusted the Union. The dissatisfaction with the European construction has produced some modifications of the labels used to describe various attitudes towards the EU. Hence, the attitudinal specter tends to include more Eurosceptics than Euroenthusiasts.

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## **Abstract**

### **Historical Patterns of Euroscepticism: An Analysis of the Romanians' Confidence in the EU in the Context of the Schengen Affair**

This paper discusses some historical patterns of Euroscepticism across the entire EU in order to analyze the dynamics of the Romanians' attitudes toward the EU against this general background. The paper presents some findings related to the arguably rising phenomenon of Euroscepticism, which were gathered in the context of the proposal of the French and German Ministers of Internal Affairs on 21 December 2010 to delay Romania's accession to the Schengen area of free movement. At the beginning of 2011, we carried out an ample research project for which we used a multi-method research design including a national survey, a content analysis of related media coverage and a series of in-depth interviews with high-profile Romanian political figures. For the purpose of this paper we shall only present the data obtained from the survey ( $N = 1,168$ ). The first part of the paper is dedicated to the existing literature on Euroscepticism—conceptualization, historical patterns, causes and explanatory mechanisms—, while the rest is dedicated to the results of the survey.

## **Keywords**

Euroenthusiasm, Euroscepticism, Schengen area, European identity, European Union