

## **DETERMINANTS OF SUPPORT FOR EU INTEGRATION: THE CASE OF BULGARIA**

Cosmina Tanasoiu, Ph.D.  
American University in Bulgaria

Constantin Colonescu, Ph.D.  
Grant MacEwan College, Canada

Address for correspondence:  
Dr. Cosmina Tanasoiu  
AUBG, Georgi Izmirliiev Sq. No. 1  
2700 Blagoevgrad  
Bulgaria  
E-mail [CTanasoiu@aubg.bg](mailto:CTanasoiu@aubg.bg)  
Tel. (+359) 73 888 441

### **Abstract**

Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in January 2007 benefited from strong public support. This paper uses a unique set of data for identifying the factors that determine Bulgarian public attitude towards European integration. Such factors were found to be distrust of national government, level of knowledge of the EU, and social environment. Contrary to findings for other EU member states, expectations of rapid improvements in the standard of living and unemployment are not major determinants of public support for accession.

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## 1. Introduction

Observers of the European integration process point out that the objectives of the EU are political, while the means of achieving them, such as the creation the European Single Market are primarily economic. It is hard to believe that any reasonable person would not agree with the desirability of such objectives as peace, freedom, and prosperity, but how those objectives can be achieved is still a matter lacking the consent of the public at large. To what extent citizens of Europe internalize the Union's objectives? To what extent citizens of Europe confound the economic means with the political ends? Research on the determinants of citizens' attitudes toward European integration tries to find at least some partial answers to these questions. This study examines the factors determining public support for Bulgaria's membership in the European Union.

Since 1989, Bulgaria has struggled with a difficult political, economic, and social transition, facing at the same time the complex process of accession to the European Union. Bulgaria applied for EU membership in 1995, started the accession negotiations in 2000, and became a full EU member in 2007. The country was excluded from the 2004 wave of EU accessions. One year later, the European Commission froze the accession negotiations due to the inability of Bulgarian government to implement judicial reforms. In spite of all difficulties, public support in Bulgaria for EU membership has been constantly high, rating about 60 percent, which places Bulgaria among the most pro-European countries of the former communist bloc, according to Eurobarometer.

Scholarship in international politics is still to clarify how national circumstances affect an international issue such as EU membership. This article contributes to this ongoing debate through a new data set, an innovative survey design that tries to better measure the variables involved, and an alternative empirical model tailored to investigate why people support or oppose the European project.

## 2. Literature overview

Utilitarian theories identify collective or individual costs and benefits of integration for the main determinants of public opinion concerning EU membership. Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) looked at how aggregate economic indicators covering the period of 1973 to 1992 affected citizens' support for European integration. As the vast majority of EU support studies, Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) used Eurobarometer data. These authors found that Europeans evaluated the European Community according to their country's economic performance and its role in international relations. Authors such as Anderson and Reichert (1996), Gabel (1998) and Doyle and Fidrmuc (2006) also use utilitarian approaches, sometimes complemented with control variables such as demographic characteristics. Tucker et al. (2002), looking at Central and East-European countries, takes a somewhat particular view of utilitarianism, in that citizens evaluate their country based on their individual economic success during the transition period. The authors find evidence that winners from the transition are likely to support EU integration, while losers would oppose.

Public opinion determinants that lie in the 'political values' category point to Europeanism or on the contrary, an individual's degree of identification with the nation, as well as a person's more general political beliefs and values. Inglehart (1977) proposed a very appealing, in its simplicity, theory of how post-materialist political values determine support for international integration. He claims that 'post-materialists,' that is the generation raised after the Second World War in relative affluence would be more inclined to support the European project. On the contrary, 'materialists,' persons who had to struggle in their lives with scarcity, would be less informed about such an abstract issue, therefore less inclined to support it. However, recent studies showed that post-materialist variables have little or no effect on subjective evaluations of EU membership (Janssen, 1991; Anderson and Reichert, 1996; Gabel, 1998a). Concerns about the EU's democratic deficit, the quality of the democratic process and its institutional framework also seem to shape public attitudes (Rohrschneider 2002; Karp, Banducci, Bowler, 2003).

An important contribution to our understanding of opinion formation is the idea that referendums over an international issue such as European integration boil down to low-information popularity

contests for the domestic government. According to this theory, those citizens that support the incumbent government would adopt the government's view on the issue of which the referendum is concerned, while those that are not satisfied with the performance of the government would take the opposite view. Schneider and Weitsman (1996) challenge this view. They show that referendums are not pure plebiscites; besides the popularity of the incumbent government, the value that individuals place on the international treaty being voted on also plays an important role in determining the outcome of the referendum. This line of inquiry aims at highlighting the effect of domestic politics to the shaping of international relations.

Finally, another strand of literature that bears significance for our inquiry maintains that citizens use proxies, or 'shortcuts' when they are called upon to make decisions on issues of which they have little or no information. Based on Eurobarometer data concerning seven West European countries, Anderson and Christopher (1998) find evidence that citizens tend to look at their governments or their parties when deciding whether to support European integration. Huckfeldt et al. (1995) show, in a more general context, that the average citizen is ill-informed about international politics. Therefore, citizens rely on their informal social environments such as friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and neighbors when called upon to evaluate abstract issues. In the extended literature, clues that are indirectly related to the topic under consideration are referred to as heuristics, proxies, or shortcuts.

### 3. Theoretical framework

Some of the factors determining public opinion are independent of the country under investigation, while others are country specific. For example, if a country traditionally has maintained low inflation, it is expected that inflation is not a significant determinant of public opinion. On the contrary, if a country has faced severe inflation problems over extended periods, an international arrangement such as EU membership that implicitly promises to curb inflation may benefit from public support. What is specific to the group of countries where Bulgaria could be placed?

Bulgaria is among the poorest European countries in terms of GDP per inhabitant; it has been through a process of transition from a socialist political and economic system to free markets and democracy; it has a significant labor force occupied in agriculture; extended family life, friends and social interaction are highly regarded in Bulgarian culture; and public institutions are perceived as weak and corrupt. Some of these characteristics have been shared by other countries that have acquired EU membership in the past. Therefore, similarities between Bulgaria's EU accession profile and countries such as Greece, Spain, Italy, or some of the other former socialist countries should be found. One expects to find lower trust in national institutions, political parties, and politicians in these countries than in the West. While in the West citizens look at their elites for cues about international affairs, people of the East look at 'Europe' to solve their country's internal problems.

As the previous section suggested, scholars have found that, to some degrees both utilitarian and the other categories of variables matter in the formation of public opinion. Our purpose is to identify those that are most likely to be crucial in the context of Bulgaria. When one analyzes cross sectional data in one country, as it is here the case, it is not possible to account for aggregate measures of the country's economic performance such as GDP or inflation. However, to introduce macroeconomic variables in our empirical model, we asked the respondents what was their evaluation of the country's economic performance. Arguably, this way of accounting for macroeconomic circumstances is even better than using 'true' macroeconomic data because answers to these 'macro' questions carry more information. When a person is asked, for instance, how well the country's economy is doing, the person will base the answer on own observations of family, friends, and relatives. If most of the interviewee's acquaintances are doing poorly, the person's evaluation is most likely in the lower range.

Thus, the performance of the country's economy, measured through the citizens' subjective evaluations becomes richer than what national accounting statistics show; it incorporates such things as perceived income inequality, informal economy, and the citizens' level of information. Moreover, it is a person's perception of the big economic picture that determines the person's decision and attitude, rather than the 'true' situation expressed in numbers. Gauging macro

variables through individual perceptions also evades the shortcomings that are known to plague the standard measures of national account aggregates. However, it is expected that the perceptions about the economy to be on average closely correlated with the 'true' economic performance of the country. (Our data display positive and significant correlation between a person's income and the person's evaluation of the domestic economy, which seems to support this theory.)

In the next section, theoretical considerations are focused on formulating five testable hypotheses. Then an empirical model is constructed, and the method and data are discussed. The last part of the article discusses our findings.

#### 4. Hypotheses

Five hypotheses are formulated. (A list of the hypotheses is provided at the end of this section for convenience and later reference.) Some of them show that Bulgaria is not different from Western countries, and some show similarities between Bulgaria and other Southern or Eastern states. We conduct an analysis at individual level and focus on domestic politics, while controlling for macro-level factors as reflected in our survey.

Prior to the 2005 national elections, Bulgarian politics was characterized by elite consensus over EU accession (Giatzidis, 2004; Dimitrova and Dragneva, 2001). The public was therefore presented with a coherent discourse over European integration. In this context, one could explain support for EU membership through government popularity and the elite consensus regarding membership. However, in Bulgaria the trust in public institutions is remarkably low and trust in government lingers around 10 to 15 percent. National politicians are seen untrustworthy, driven by personal interests rather than national wellness. Plagued by accusations of corruption and inefficient governance, successive Bulgarian governments have been suspected of potentially endangering EU integration by failing to introduce the required reforms. Hence, support for EU accession, which has been a priority of their foreign policy agenda cannot be explained by the government rate of approval, quite the contrary. Bulgarians might hope that Brussels would

monitor their national government. Based on these considerations, a first hypothesis is formulated: distrust in national government increases support for European integration.

This hypothesis challenges some of the results of previous studies on Central and Eastern Europe (Ehin, 2001) as well as some research concerning West-European states. As already mentioned, it has been argued that the popularity of an incumbent national government is likely to determine support (Franklin et al., 1994; Franklin et al., 1995). However, Sanchez Cuenca (2000) shows that, when controlled for trust in the EU institutions, the effect of trust in national governments on support is reversed: discontent with local governments increases support for EU membership. To test this hypothesis for Bulgaria, we introduced in our empirical model a measure of trust in the national political class, and a variable gauging trust in EU officials.

A second hypothesis concerns the impact that citizens' level of information about the EU institutions has on their support for membership in the EU. Political awareness is often considered an important factor determining voting patterns or citizens' attitudes (Lassen, 2005). Individuals take cues from elite discourse, media coverage, and their social environment. Although negative elite messages about European integration appear to decrease public support for Europe, no clear evidence was found to suggest that the effect of elite messages matters for more politically aware individuals (Gabel and Scheve, 2005; Hobolt, 2004). Our second hypothesis maintains that a citizen's level of information about EU institutions is related to support for membership in the EU.

We base this hypothesis on the evolution of public attitudes towards European integration in the new member states and previous studies showing that political awareness does not necessarily increase support for Europe (Gabel and Scheve, 2005). By mid 1990s, Euro-skepticism was observed in party politics in Central and Eastern Europe (Szczerbiak and Tggart, 2002).

The closer these countries moved towards accession, the lower the support for membership (Szczerbiak 2001). Such was the decrease of enthusiasm in EU accession, that it raised concerns over the possibility that in some countries even the accession referenda might not pass. It has

been argued that, as the intensity of an electoral campaign increases more information is available to citizens and voters will rely increasingly on more sophisticated criteria that might change their attitudes and voting pattern (Hobolt 2004). Indeed, one of the things that changed in the Central and Eastern European countries as they approached the date of accession was the level of political debate and as such the amount of information released to the public. The closer those countries came to accession the more detailed, extensive, and in-depth the political and public discourse in relation to integration and the European Union.

As far as Bulgaria is concerned, despite the political elite's consensus over EU membership prior to the 2005 national elections, one would expect that the more individuals know about the EU institutions, and about the costs and benefits of accession the less enthusiastic they become about the prospect of accession. We measured the level of EU knowledge through knowledge of EU institutions, a method also used by other studies of EU support (Karp and Bowler, 2006; Eurobarometer). EU institutions are often mentioned in Bulgarian public arena through media coverage, country reports, and policy recommendations, therefore knowledge of EU to institutions is likely to have a significant influence on people's attitude.

Our third hypothesis belongs to the 'values' category. Scholarship on Central and Eastern Europe suggests that democratic and free market values, positive attitudes towards minorities, and liberal values increase support for European integration (Ehin, 2001; Slomczynski and Shabad, 2003; Cichowski 2000; Tucker et al., 2002). Hence, apart from beliefs in economic benefits, individuals perceive EU membership as a way of consolidating freedom and democracy in their countries. EU requirements, such as the rule of law, respect for human rights, and treatment of minorities meet expectations for good governance, transparency, and irreversibility of reforms. Support for EU membership is therefore related to liberal democratic values (see also Schimmelfenning 2001). Such expectations are not unreasonable. Scholars have revealed the benefits of EU conditionality in terms of both political and economic developments in Central and Eastern Europe (Grabbe, 2006).

Identification with Europe, or Europeanization, is a positive factor in determining support for EU

membership (White et al. 2002). The strong support for EU accession at the beginning of these countries' transition period, when information about the EU was scarce was essentially based on the systems of values attached to the idea of Europe. By contrast to their countries, perceived as provincial, underdeveloped, corrupt and authoritarian, 'Europe' was seen as civilized, prosperous, cosmopolitan, and democratic. In this case support for EU integration is not information based or utilitarian, but value based. While concerns about democratic deficit of the EU and the quality of the democratic process with its institutional framework are matters of concern for the Western European, for the Eastern European the state of national democracy is still too far behind to worry about the democratic process in Brussels (Rohrschneider, 2002; Karp et al., 2003).

Data for Bulgaria are expected to show that individuals with strong beliefs in the rule of law, separation of powers, freedom of expression, and free markets are more supportive of the integration of their countries in the EU. We measured the belief in democratic values through a respondent's position towards pluralism, the importance of elections, and attitudes towards the different branches of power (i.e. someone prioritizing government over parliament was classified as exhibiting authoritarian values). We formulate a third hypothesis as follows. 'Belief in democratic norms increases support for EU membership.'

Turning to the 'utilitarian' category of factors influencing public attitudes towards membership in the EU, we look at national economic conditions. Would a person that regards highly national economy be in favor, or against EU membership? Previous studies show that attitudes towards European integration are positively influenced by national economic conditions (Anderson and Kaltenhaler, 1996), low inflation rate (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993), and the individual's ability to adapt to, and benefit from market liberalization (Gabel 1998a; Anderson and Reichert, 1996; Gabel and Palmer, 1995). Attitudes toward integration are also grounded in the different perceptions of how economic integration will impact individual economic welfare (Gabel, 1998a).

Empirical results for Central and Eastern Europe appear to indicate that support for membership increases with socio-economic variables such as income and education, but it also depends on a

person's confidence in a free market economy (Caplanova, Orviska, Hudson 2004). Economic expectations at individual level seem to out-weight macroeconomic determinants (Ehin, 2001).

Bulgaria lags behind most of the EU member states in terms of economic performance measured by GDP per capita. One should therefore expect that for the average Bulgarian economic incentives would be important determinants of support. We measured an individual's perception of the country's economic performance through perceived inflation, perceived unemployment, and perceived performance of the economy as a whole.

The way an individual's perception of the country's economic performance influences his or her attitude toward EU membership is the result of tradeoffs between opposite forces. One may think that trust in the home economy should increase support because if home firms are strong they are able to compete with foreign firms, thus integration is not likely to induce loss of jobs. An opposite argument would be that someone who does not trust the country's economy would perceive integration as an opportunity to find jobs abroad when jobs at home are scarce.

Theories of international trade in goods and factors of production show that there are winners and losers from the liberalization of markets for factors of production such as capital and labor. In a country like Bulgaria, where labor is abundant relative to capital, European integration should benefit workers and hurt capital owners. According to this model, workers should be in favor of EU membership, while capital owners should oppose it. Since the number of workers exceeds by far the number of capital owners, it should be expected that in general Bulgarians are supportive of EU membership.

However, this model does not allow for differences among skills in the labor force or for differences among sectors of production. If such differences are accounted for, one could identify more diverse groups of citizens who are likely to win or to lose from economic integration. For instance, both workers and capital owners might be losers from integration in an import competing sector, while in an exporting sector workers along with capital owners might benefit from liberalized trade.

It appears that economic theory, though rich in identifying various channels of influence between domestic conditions and public support for trade liberalization, fails to give us a clear guidance about the direction in which the people's general trust in their home economy changes their attitude towards integration. Therefore, the most we can do is to hypothesize that there is a significant relationship between citizens' confidence in their economy and their support for EU membership and to look forward to find out whether this relationship in Bulgaria resembles the one that scholars have found in the West. This is the substance of our fourth hypothesis: an individual's attitude is influenced by his or her perception of the country's economic performance.

For the fifth hypothesis, we rely on our previous discussion concerning the 'informal social ties' channel of opinion formation. The theory goes that individuals do not form their opinions based on personal effort for proper information, but rely strongly on other members of their social environment for guidance. Akerlof (1997) builds on theories of social decision making to explain how group opinions are formed. He assumes that each group member likes to be as close as possible to the group's average opinion. The implication of this theory is the existence of group ('neighborhood') traps, which can be explained by the strong influence of the group on individuals.

There is, however, a problem of identification in Akerlof's model: does the individual choose a certain group because the group corresponds to his or her views, or does the individual form opinions under the influence of the group to whom he or she already belongs? Akerlof suggests that causality goes from group to individual, rather than the other way around. Any quantitative test of this hypothesis ought to account for the possible mutual influence (endogeneity) between individual and social environment. If it is true that people tend to believe what their friends believe, then strategies of persuasion need to take this fact into account through identifying and targeting those influential members of the various social groups.

One may suspect that such a hypothesis may hold when the marginal cost of acquiring

information is high, while the marginal private benefit is low. Hence, providing information that is of great social value but low individual marginal benefit has the characteristics of a public good. Our fifth hypothesis states that there is a significant correlation between an individual's support for EU integration and the attitude of his or her social group.

In concluding this section that has set the theoretical grounds for our model, here is a summary of the five hypotheses that were formulated. (1) Distrust in national government increases support for European integration; (2) A citizen's level of information about EU institutions affects support for EU membership; (3) Belief in democratic norms increases support for EU membership; (4) Support for EU membership is influenced by the citizens' perception of the country's economic performance; and (5) There is a significant correlation between an individual's support for EU integration and the attitude of the social group to whom the individual belongs.

## 5. The Method

Unlike most studies on public support for various aspects of European integration, which mainly use Eurobarometer data, this article relies upon a unique public opinion survey conducted in June 2006 in Bulgaria. Brinegar and Jolly (2004) point out that Eurobarometer data are based on answers of the 'yes/no/don't know' type, which fail to capture the diversity of opinions and are hardly appropriate for quantitative analysis. Such data is likely to induce measurement errors, since they confine the respondent from expressing qualifications in its answers. They may also create systematic errors, since their variability is limited. When available for similar variables, we use Eurobarometer information to further the explanation for our findings.

For data collection we constructed a random sample, representative for the country's adult population. The sample was stratified according to the population weight of each administrative unit. A number of 1016 persons were interviewed and 20 percent of the interviewees were back checked by phone. The interview was conducted with the member of the household who most recently had a birthday. The survey took place in June 2006. The construction of the survey

instrument looked to balance survey principles, such as simplicity and the possibility of coding with cost efficiency and the need to adequately address the research hypotheses. (See survey instrument in Table 3.)

The principle of constructing the variables was to avoid as much as possible dichotomous (Yes/No) values, using instead a continuous scale of 1 to 100 to provide room for nuances and diversity in opinions. Some of the variables are equal-weight indexes, obtained by the summation of the components. The purpose in constructing the indexes was both to increase the variability of the data and to obtain better measures of the variables of interest. Here is the list of variables and their construction. We used correlation tables (not included here) for the choice of individual variables that entered the indexes.

‘EUsupport’ is the dependent variable. It measures the individual’s support for the country’s membership and acceptance of the idea of European Union. This variable is equal to the sum of the percentage points indicated by respondents to questions B2.1 to B2.5 (see Table 3, the survey instrument). All the questions in this index are positively correlated, and the index is highly correlated with each of its components. Since the correlations are not too close to 1, one can safely conclude that each component of the index measures just another aspect of the dependent variable.

‘KnowEU’ measures to what degree the respondent is familiar with the institutions of the European Union. The variable is a sum of scores to questions B3.1 through B3.11, which were assigned as shown in Table 1. A shortcoming of the way this question was formulated was that it did not allow for an ‘I don’t know’ answer. Thus, missing data cannot be distinguished from ‘I don’t know.’

Variable ‘Info’ was meant to gauge a person’s overall interest in the news. It is equal to the average number of minutes per day a person spends reading, listening, or watching the news. It is an index based on question B4 (Table 3.) Variable ‘Unemployed’ is equal to 1 if the person is unemployed and 2 otherwise. A person was considered unemployed if the person did not have a

job, was looking for one, and was not in school. 'Unemployed' is an index based on question B6 of the survey instrument.

'HomEc' captures the respondent's perception about how its country's economy performs. It is the sum of answers to the group of questions B10, except B10.5, for which the correlation with the other variables was lower. Therefore, Question B10.5, which refers to inflation, was treated separately, as variable 'Prices.'

Variable 'DemValues' is based on question B14.11. It measures to what extent an individual associates the European Union structures with democracy. 'ConfidHome' reflects the respondent's confidence in the country's political class. It is an index based on question B8. 'ConfidEU' expresses confidence in EU officials, as an index based on question B9. 'Group' captures to what extent the respondent's friends are favorable to the idea of European Union and the country's accession to the EU (question B12). 'FinAid' is based on question B14.6. It measures how much the respondent believes in the importance of financial aid coming from the European Union.

'Natidty' gauges an individual's concern about the country's losing its national identity on becoming an EU member. This variable was constructed based on question B15.2. 'Type' is a stratification variable. It takes the following values: 'Type' equals 1 for Sofia, 2 for large cities, 3 for small towns, and 4 for villages. 'Age,' 'Edu,' and 'Sex' are additional control variables.

Questions B13 were meant to measure a person's left-right orientation, based on the person's attitude towards a few aspects of a liberal economy. Surprisingly, the three variables, B13.1, 2, and 3 turn out to be very weakly correlated, thus inappropriate to form the 'left-right' index.

Questions B14 and B15 were used to form an alternative measure of 'EUsupport.' This variable was named 'Support2,' and so far it was only used to verify the validity of the dependent variable. This was done by checking that there was indeed high correlation between the two variables.

Based on all the theoretical considerations discussed in the previous section, a generic model would include variables in various groups as indicated by the following equation, where L(...) stands for a linear combination among the variables in the brackets.

$$\text{EUsupport} = L(\text{DemValues, ConfidEU, ConfidHome, KnowEU, HomEc, Group, Left-Right Variables, Control Variables}) + \text{Stochastic term}$$

A preliminary OLS regression on such a specification gives a low R-square, while appropriate tests (Sroeter, 1978, Breush and Pagan, 1979, and Cook and Weisberg, 1983) reveal heteroskedasticity problems. The low R-square may indicate specification errors; most probably some of the variables are redundant. For instance, it may be that a person's democratic beliefs and knowledge about the EU and domestic economy are closely linked to the person's age and education. After conducting a few specification tests, the following model resulted.

$$\text{EUsupport} = L(\text{DemVal, ConfidEU, ConfidHome, KnowEU, HomEc, Group, FinAid, Natidty, Prices}) + \text{Stochastic term}$$

All calculations have been performed using the econometric software package STATA. Here are the results of an OLS regression of this model.

```
. reg EUsupport DemVal KnowEU Confi dEU Confi dHome HomEc Group Fi nAid Nati dty
> Pri ces
```

Source	SS	df	MS			
Model	9296417.93	9	1032935.33	Number of obs =	716	
Residual	6368226.5	706	9020.15085	F( 9, 706) =	114.51	
Total	15664644.4	715	21908.5936	Prob > F =	0.0000	
				R-squared =	0.5935	
				Adj R-squared =	0.5883	
				Root MSE =	94.974	

  

EUsupport	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95 percent Conf. Interval]	
DemVal	.3437849	.1388134	2.48	0.013	.0712485	.6163213
KnowEU	-7.635131	3.125041	-2.44	0.015	-13.77062	-1.499644
Confi dEU	1.624292	.1549766	10.48	0.000	1.320022	1.928562
Confi dHome	-.5093704	.2226299	-2.29	0.022	-.9464663	-.0722745
HomEc	.1255538	.0444441	2.82	0.005	.0382953	.2128123
Group	1.784197	.1545482	11.54	0.000	1.480768	2.087626
Fi nAid	1.134373	.1393501	8.14	0.000	.860783	1.407963
Nati dty	-.3674545	.1129187	-3.25	0.001	-.5891511	-.1457579
Pri ces	-.347268	.1193454	-2.91	0.004	-.5815824	-.1129536

```
_cons | 77.21038 12.39239 6.23 0.000 52.88003 101.5407
```

To check if the model meets the assumption of homoskedasticity, we use a Szroeter test (see for instance Judge et al., 1985, pp. 450-3.) The test results are indicated in the table below.

```
. szroeter, r mtest(sidak)
Szroeter's test for homoskedasticity
Ho: variance constant
Ha: variance monotonic in variable
```

Variable	chi 2	df	p
DemVal	5.72	1	0.1415 #
KnowEU	0.07	1	1.0000 #
ConfidEU	20.77	1	0.0000 #
ConfidHome	6.53	1	0.0914 #
HomEc	17.05	1	0.0003 #
Group	7.18	1	0.0644 #
FinAid	5.79	1	0.1361 #
Natidty	5.23	1	0.1826 #
Prices	3.11	1	0.5180 #

```
# Sidak adjusted p-values
```

The test suggests that variables ConfidEU and HomEc are most likely to violate the assumption of homoskedasticity. To correct for heteroskedasticity, we compute a Weighted Least Squares regression, where the weights were the squared residuals. The results of the regression are given in Table 2. A plot of the residuals (not included here) against the fitted values of the dependent variable indicated that heteroskedasticity has been substantially reduced.

**Table 2:** Weighted Least Squares regression results (STATA output)

```
. wls0 EUsupport DemVal KnowEU ConfidEU ConfidHome HomEc Group FinAid Natidty
> Prices, wvars( ConfidEU HomEc) type(e2) graph
WLS regression - type: proportional to e^2
(sum of wgt is 3.1085e-01)
```

Source	SS	df	MS	Number of obs = 714		
Model	4481806.81	9	497978.535	F( 9, 704) =	214.74	
Residual	1632539.61	704	2318.94831	Prob > F =	0.0000	
Total	6114346.42	713	8575.52093	R-squared =	0.7330	
				Adj R-squared =	0.7296	
				Root MSE =	48.155	

  

EUsupport	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95 percent Conf. Interval]	
DemVal	.3149221	.128544	2.45	0.015	.0625465	.5672976
KnowEU	-7.062767	2.718834	-2.60	0.010	-12.40076	-1.724774
ConfidEU	1.654823	.135944	12.17	0.000	1.387919	1.921727
ConfidHome	-.4091124	.1869783	-2.19	0.029	-.7762144	-.0420105
HomEc	.1058061	.0258301	4.10	0.000	.0550928	.1565194
Group	1.691711	.1444139	11.71	0.000	1.408178	1.975245

Fi nAi d	1. 036236	. 1369557	7. 57	0. 000	. 7673451	1. 305126
Nati dty	-. 3646411	. 1105083	-3. 30	0. 001	-. 5816065	-. 1476758
Pri ces	-. 2541512	. 1021268	-2. 49	0. 013	-. 4546608	-. 0536416
_cons	86. 26906	12. 7087	6. 79	0. 000	61. 31758	111. 2205

The model yields an R-squared value of about 0.73, which is rather high for survey data. Of the variables in the model, variable Group may raise some suspicion concerning its independence. A Durbin-Wu-Hausman (DWH) endogeneity test was undertaken to address this problem. The DWH test was suggested by Davidson and MacKinnon (1993), based on earlier work of Durbin, Wu, and Hausman. The test involves a two-stage regression. First, Group is regressed on all independent variables of the problem, including the ‘control’ variables that were subsequently excluded. Then, EUsupport is regressed on its set of independent variables, plus the residuals of the ‘Group’ regression, denoted ‘G\_res.’ The null hypothesis, which is Ho: *Variable ‘Group’ is exogenous* cannot be rejected if the coefficient of the ‘G\_res’ in the second regression is insignificant. The result of the DWH test did not permit rejecting the hypothesis of exogeneity of variable ‘Group.’

## 6. Findings

One can note that some of the variables are missing in this model. Besides, some of the control variables, such as ‘Age,’ ‘Edu,’ and ‘Sex,’ the missing variables are ‘Info’ and ‘Unemployed.’ Therefore, it seems that unemployment and general interest for the news are not important determinants of EU support. However, while general interest in the news (variable Info) does not seem to be a significant factor in this model, information about the EU (variable ‘KnowEU’) is highly significant, having a negative coefficient. This finding confirms our Hypothesis 2. Moreover, the coefficient of this variable indicates that public support to integration is very sensitive to specific knowledge about EU institutions. This result may suggest that individuals that know more about the EU and its institutions, besides being able to see the advantages of EU membership (ability of EU institutions to monitor government’s activities, eligibility for EU subsidies, and additional rights as EU citizens), they also understand that there are significant costs involved (of which loss in national identity seems to be important for some respondents).

Since around 20 percent of the respondents choose either not to respond to the open ended question on implications of EU membership, expressed confusion or state clearly that they ‘do not know,’ it is safe to assume that the level of information remains low. This coincides with Eurobarometer data. According to Eurobarometer 65.2 (Spring 2006) data the level of knowledge for Bulgaria is below average. The respondents were asked to self-assess their knowledge of the EU on a scale of 1-10, 1 being ‘I do not know anything’ and 10 being ‘I know a lot.’ The average number for Bulgaria is 4.3. The current level of support is 53 percent of Bulgarians, who thought the EU membership is ‘something good ‘ in Spring 2006 according to Eurobarometer 65.2.

As stated above, exposure to media does not show impact on an individual’s attitude towards European integration (variable ‘Info’). Eurobarometer data show that 14 percent of Bulgarians never look for information and those who do rely essentially upon television (78 percent), daily newspapers (34 percent) and radio (30 percent). Our findings show that the extent of pro-integration attitudes seems to depend significantly on a person’s social environment, as the coefficient of variable Group indicates. This finding connects to the Eurobarometer 65.2 data which shows that Bulgarians spend 30 percent of their time discussing EU related topic with friends.

Our model reveals that a person’s group of friends is an important determinant of support for integration. This finding may explain why some policies (sometimes very expensive), intended to increase mass support may fail or result in limited impact. A theory of how opinions are maintained, and whether there is inertia in beliefs when informal social ties are strong would be helpful in understanding mass support for integration. Political actions aimed at increasing public support for EU integration should draw on the importance of friendship and extended family ties that seem to be stronger in South East European cultures than in Western cultures.

Irrelevance of a person’s employment status in the formation of his or her opinion toward EU is unexpected. While qualitative data show that the opening of borders and labor migration is definitively a determinant for support, one would think that people who are unemployed would

look forward to the liberalization of labor markets that would supposedly come about with accession. Qualitative data also show that the perspective of new jobs abroad is seen both as an opportunity ('for the young,' 'for better income') and as a problem ('the young will leave'). Although qualitative data reveal that Bulgarians look positively towards accession especially because of the increased opportunity to cross borders freely ('looking for jobs'), this particular finding, related to the fact that individuals who have a more optimistic perception about the home country's economy tend to be more supportive towards EU accession (note the positive coefficient of the variable 'HomEc'), suggests that those who are unable to find a job at home do not expect to find one in an enlarged Europe. In other words, the losers of transition perceive themselves as future losers of the integration process as well. It is reasonable to believe that the great majority of the potentially migrating labor force is comprised of people who already have a job at home but are looking for higher wages abroad, rather than individuals who do not find employment in their country.

The coefficient of the 'HomEc' variable, which is significant and positive in our regression, seems to tell an interesting story. It suggests that those people who believe that the home economy is doing fine are also those who are stronger in favor of European integration. This result may also suggest that, on average, the main determinants for positive attitudes toward EU integration are not economic or, to be more precise, are not macro-economic. In fact, support for accession appears to be driven by hope for a better future for the young and improvement in the administrative and political life of the country ('less bureaucracy,' 'less corruption,' 'more norms,' 'less crime'). Hence, the impact of accession is seen in terms of the future rather than the present: while the older generation fears accession ('high prices' but 'low pensions') it sees it as an opportunity for the young, 'our kids.' Hence, support for accession is understood in terms of sacrifice for the betterment of the next generation.

This finding does not imply that people do not expect improvements at macroeconomic level from accession. In fact, Eurobarometer 65.2 data shows that 48 percent of Bulgarians believe that the EU plays a positive role in determining the economic situation in Bulgaria. Moreover, our qualitative data shows that Bulgarians expect economic growth, 'investment,' 'foreign

investors,' 'development.' It also shows that the expectations that accession will have positive implications ( 'we'll live better') out-weight expectations that EU accession will bring about a worsening of the standard of living ( 'higher taxes,' 'higher prices,' 'expensive life'). Hence, this finding only says that disillusion with the performance of the home economy is not a determinant of support, as some may have expected. This result may also have an important policy implication. If a strong home economy is likely to increase people's support for integration, then a pro-European and pro-integrative government should in the first place facilitate the development of their domestic economy. In other words, a good domestic economic policy makes for a good pro-EU policy. Benefits exceeding costs of integration are, nevertheless, expected at individual level. Qualitative data reveal that Bulgarians expect an increase in the standard of living despite fearing 'European prices and Bulgarian wages' and 'lower income.' In particular, the farmers expect subsidies; the pensioners expect higher pensions (despite being generally fearful of accession); and the young hope for job opportunities (both within the country and outside), studying and traveling possibilities.

Variable 'Prices' was constructed based on the question 'Prices do not increase at a too high rate' (0 = 'I do not agree,' 100 = 'I fully agree'). This variable reflects the respondent's perception about the existing inflation in the country. Its coefficient comes out significant and negative in our regression. This result is rather puzzling for two reasons. First, it is interesting because the inflation rate in Bulgaria has stayed at relatively low levels since the institution of the Currency Board back in 1997, compared with the hyperinflation period of before. Second, this result is somewhat at odds with the positive influence of the 'HomEc' variable on 'EUsupport,' which suggests that those who believe in the domestic economy also believe that EU membership is a good thing. One possible explanation of this unexpected result could be that individuals having a better understanding of the economy believe that the economy is doing fine, but they also understand that the current rate of inflation is high in absolute terms, if not compared with the previous hyperinflation period. In other words, those who trust the economy have a more realistic understanding of inflation -- they know that higher rates of inflation must come with high rates of economic growth.

Variable 'ConfidHome' reflects trust in the country's authorities. Its coefficient came out negative and statistically significant. This confirms the hypothesis that Bulgarians are unsatisfied with their political leaders' performance and perceive European integration as a possible remedy. Eurobarometer 65.2 (Spring 2006) data for Bulgaria supports this finding: confidence in Bulgarian Parliament 17 percent (no confidence 71 percent), Government 24 percent (no confidence 63 percent), Judiciary 20 percent (73 percent no-confidence, the highest out of all countries included in Eurobarometer) and confidence towards political parties 10 percent (no confidence 77 percent). The socio-demographic analysis points out that the largest no-confidence is shown by the respondents in middle age, who also belong to the relatively uneducated population, usually workers or unemployed.

Variables 'FinAid' and 'Nativity' are, as expected, significant and have the 'right' signs. 'FinAid' reflects people's hope that EU membership comes with substantial inflow of subsidies. The positive sign of this coefficient indicates, as expected, that the higher the hope the higher the support for EU accession. Variable 'Nativity' shows that nationalistic views tend to generate anti-integration attitudes.

Our qualitative data obtained from the open-ended question shows that Bulgarians hold their politicians responsible both for meeting the membership criteria and for the further success of accession. How precisely do people expect EU membership to influence the governance of their country? Bulgarians expect that EU membership will 'lower corruption,' bring about respect of 'norms,' induce 'order,' and 'change mentalities for the better.' While it is not clear how Bulgarians expect these changes to happen, the quantitative data certainly shows that dissatisfaction with their home political class is an important factor inducing a pro-accession attitude. It is worth noting that this result may be specific to the countries that have recently experienced transition to market economies and liberal democracies, while in the developed countries of Europe the opposite is true: the more people trust their politicians, the more are they in favor of European integration.

While Bulgarians distrust the national government and national politicians, they trust Brussels to

keep check on them. The Eurobarometer 65.2 socio-demographic analysis shows an immediate correlation between the awareness and information Bulgarians have about the EU and their trust in it. Those who express firmer confidence in the EU are the students and those among the most educated circles of society in the age range of 40-55. The respondents who express the strongest hesitation in their judgments are mostly women, as well as retired and unemployed people, who have only vague knowledge on the EU and who are among the least educated population in Bulgaria. According to Eurobarometer 65.2, level of trust in European institutions is as follows: confidence in the European Parliament 51 percent (35 percent could not decide), European Commission 44 percent (around 25 percent uncertain), Council 41 percent (43 percent uncertain about their confidence), European Central Bank 45 percent, European Court of Justice 39 percent (46 percent abstained from answering).

Our findings show that trust in EU officials, measured by variable 'ConfidEU' is highly significant and has a positive coefficient. Though the positive relationship between trust in EU officials and support for integration is understandable, the magnitude of this coefficient may convey valuable information. Compared to the coefficient of variable 'ConfidHome,' the coefficient of 'ConfidEU' is larger in absolute values. In other words, credibility and respectability of the European Union's institutions and officials is a more important determinant of support than lack of credibility in the domestic political leaders. (However, home governments should not worsen their performance and credibility for a pro-integration policy. Such an interpretation of the results of this report would be both inaccurate and unfortunate.) Although in open ended questions, the respondents do not refer to EU officials showing that as a determinant of support this is secondary to national determinants, the answers do imply expectations that the EU (and possibly its officials) can induce changes.

As expected, people with democratic views are more in favor of integration, probably because the European Union is perceived as democratic (which seems to be a characteristic in Eastern Europe as opposed to Western Europe). This is what the positive sign of variable DemVal indicates. Correlated with the low degree of trust in national governments and a relatively high degree of trust in EU officials, this indicator also seems to suggest the respondents' belief that following EU

accession the regimes in their countries will consolidate their democratic features due to conditionality and constant monitoring from Brussels. It has been previously suggested in the literature that EU conditionality has determined a positive evolution of political reforms in terms of transparency, reducing corruption, rule of law and protection of minorities. Qualitative data supports this argument (Bulgarians expect 'less corruption,' 'less bureaucracy,' 'norms' and 'laws,' Roma persons expect 'their life will improve'). However, this factor seems to be less important than the others. It may be that in correlation with increased knowledge of the EU and consolidation of democracy domestically, the democratic perception of the EU may change and we may have a U-shaped dependency of support with respect of democratic values. Hence rather as in Western Europe, we may see a similar concern in Eastern Europe in relation to the EU democratic deficit and the functioning of EU institutions as shown by current literature.

## 7. Summary and Conclusion

A data set collected via public opinion survey in Bulgaria in June 2006 revealed that support for European integration and Bulgaria's accession to the EU are determined mainly by an individual's knowledge about the European Union, perceptions related to how well the home economy performs, trust in EU officials, influence of the social group to which the individual belongs, distrust in local authorities, and democratic values. A poor performance of the home economy is not a factor that would increase support for European accession. Therefore, people seem to wish to join the EU mainly for reasons other than economic. Lack of trust in national governments as a determinant of support for integration seems to be specific to some Southeast European countries such as Bulgaria.

One may think that rational choice theories, which assume that individuals take only those actions that are best for themselves, do not explain well Bulgarians' quest for EU membership. Not every choice individuals make is however based upon a cost-benefit analysis. Akerlof (2000) suggests that people may often have deep psychological motives to react in a particular, apparently irrational way to their social environment. These motives are so subtle that individuals themselves are unaware of them. It might be possible that a nation like Bulgaria, with a culture so

different from Western Europe wishes to join the EU in pursuit of a new, more 'respectable' national identity. It might be possible that Bulgarians are willing to pay the costs of the transition to being a member of the EU club in exchange for world's recognition and respect. As interesting as these questions might be, our data cannot deliver a complete answer. However, it has been argued that, apart from the factors identified above, the motivation behind the Bulgarians' support for EU accession was also determined by a need for validation of their own identity as being not only Bulgarians but also Europeans. Bulgarians might also seek a sense of belonging to the club of democratic and developed nations and preventing a u-turn to the old days of totalitarianism and arbitrariness. Such arguments already exist in qualitative studies (see for example Verdery 1996; Schopflin 2000). Therefore, apart from basing their options upon costs-benefits considerations, either based on an economic rationale or assessment of performance of national politicians, individuals are also motivated by factors not necessarily connected to their economic well being.

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**Table 1.** Construction of variable KnowEU

Question	Question No.	Score if answered Yes	Score if answered No
Council of Europe	B3.1	-1	0
European Parliament	B3.2	1	0
European Court of Human Rights	B3.3	-1	0
NATO	B3.4	-1	0
European Commission	B3.5	1	0
European Court of Justice	B3.6	1	0
Council of Ministers	B3.7	1	0
CEFTA	B3.8	-1	0
Commonwealth of Independent States	B3.9	-1	0
WTO	B3.10	-1	0
IMF	B3.11	-1	0

**Table 3.** The survey instrument

Question No.	Question
B1	Please tell us what is your opinion about the European Union and the accession of your country to the European Union. Point out what, in your opinion is good

	and what is bad about European integration.
B2	On a scale of 1 to 100 (1= 'I strongly disagree ', 100= 'I strongly agree ') assign a score to each of the following statements. (Write your score in the brackets.)
B2.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Our country's accession to the European Union is a very good thing.
B2.2	<input type="checkbox"/> Our country should join the European Union as soon as possible.
B2.3	<input type="checkbox"/> European integration should be our government's highest priority.
B2.4	<input type="checkbox"/> The European Union itself is a good idea.
B2.5	<input type="checkbox"/> The European Union will last for a long time.
B3	In the following list, mark with an 'X ' those institutions that are, in your opinion, institutions of the European Union.
B3.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Council of Europe
B3.2	<input type="checkbox"/> European Parliament
B3.3	<input type="checkbox"/> European Court of Human Rights
B3.4	<input type="checkbox"/> NATO
B3.5	<input type="checkbox"/> European Commission
B3.6	<input type="checkbox"/> European Court of Justice
B3.7	<input type="checkbox"/> Council of Ministers
B3.8	<input type="checkbox"/> CEFTA
B3.9	<input type="checkbox"/> Commonwealth of Independent States
B3.10	<input type="checkbox"/> WTO
B3.11	<input type="checkbox"/> IMF
B4	<input type="checkbox"/> How many minutes a day, on average, do you read (watch, listen to) news?
B5	<input type="checkbox"/> How much of the time that you spend with friends do you discuss politics? (Use a 1 to 100 scale: 1= 'I never discuss politics with my friends ', 100= 'I discuss politics with my friends all the time, we never discuss anything else. ')
B6	We would like to understand your employment status. Please mark with an 'X ' the answer that applies to you.
B6.1	Do you have a job or your own business? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (Yes=1, No=2)
B6.2	Are you trying to find a job? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (Yes=1, No=2)
B6.3	Are you still in school? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (Yes=1, No=2)
B7	<input type="checkbox"/> On a scale of 1 to 100, rank yourself in terms of wealth, compared to the average person in your country (1 is very poor, 100 is very rich)
B8	<input type="checkbox"/> On a scale of 1 to 100, rank your confidence in our country's politicians. (1=no confidence, 100=full confidence)

B9	<input type="checkbox"/> On a scale of 1 to 100 rank your confidence in EU officials. (1=no confidence at all, and 100=full confidence)
B10	The following statements concern the state of the economy in our country. On a scale of 1 to 100 (1= 'I strongly disagree ', 100= 'I strongly agree ') assign a score to each of them. Write your score in the brackets.
B10.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Overall, our country's economy is doing very well.
B10.2	<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the people who wish to work can find work.
B10.3	<input type="checkbox"/> Most people's well-being increases at a fast pace.
B10.4	<input type="checkbox"/> Most people earn incomes that allow a very good standard of living.
B10.5	<input type="checkbox"/> Prices do not increase at a too high rate.
B10.6	<input type="checkbox"/> Standard of living in our country will approach fast other EU countries.
B10.7	<input type="checkbox"/> Income inequality is at an acceptable level (it is not too high.)
B11	On a scale of 1 to 100 (1= 'I strongly disagree ', 100= 'I strongly agree ') assign a score to each of the following statements. (Write your score in the brackets.)
B11.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Though elections are costly, we should pay these costs.
B11.2	<input type="checkbox"/> It is better to have too many political parties than to have only one party.
B11.3	<input type="checkbox"/> Elected constituencies (such as Parliament) should be stronger than non-elected ones (such as governments).
B12	<input type="checkbox"/> What percentage of your friends do you think would support your country's EU membership?
B13	We would like to know more about your political views. Please assign a score between 1 and 100 to each of the following statements (1= 'I strongly disagree ', and 100= 'I strongly agree. ')
B13.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Privatization should be extended to as many activities as possible, including the production of electricity, water supply, rail and air transportation, and postal services.
B13.2	<input type="checkbox"/> Taxes should be extremely low, because the government spends money inefficiently.
B13.3	<input type="checkbox"/> Labor unionism should not be permitted, because it only increases costs of production.
B14	To what extent EU accession will have the following positive effects in our country, in your opinion? On a scale of 1 to 100 (1= 'I strongly disagree ', 100= 'I strongly agree ') assign a score to each of the following 12 possible effects. Write your score in the brackets.
B14.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher wages at home
B14.2	<input type="checkbox"/> Lower prices, or prices will increase less than wages
B14.3	<input type="checkbox"/> Better jobs at home
B14.4	<input type="checkbox"/> Freedom to travel abroad

B14.5	<input type="checkbox"/> Freedom to work abroad
B14.6	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional money from the European Union
B14.7	<input type="checkbox"/> Foreign investment
B14.8	<input type="checkbox"/> Better public administration (customs, passport services, judiciary)
B14.9	<input type="checkbox"/> Better public services (e.g. education, health, and pension systems)
B14.10	<input type="checkbox"/> Less corruption
B14.11	<input type="checkbox"/> More democracy
B14.12	<input type="checkbox"/> Other advantages of EU membership
B15	To what extent EU accession will have the following negative effects in our country, in your opinion? On a scale of 1 to 100 (1= 'I strongly disagree ', 100= 'I strongly agree ') assign a score to each of the following 12 possible effects. Write your scores in the brackets.
B15.1	<input type="checkbox"/> Loss of national power (EU will tell us what to do)
B15.2	<input type="checkbox"/> Loss of national identity
B15.3	<input type="checkbox"/> Less democracy
B15.4	<input type="checkbox"/> Having to pay taxes to the EU
B15.5	<input type="checkbox"/> Loss of jobs in our country
B15.6	<input type="checkbox"/> Loosing our workforce towards the EU
B15.7	<input type="checkbox"/> Foreigners will buy our land
B15.8	<input type="checkbox"/> Multinational companies will take our businesses
B15.9	<input type="checkbox"/> Prices will increase
B15.10	<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic firms will be driven out of business by foreign competition
B15.11	<input type="checkbox"/> More bureaucracy
B15.12	<input type="checkbox"/> Other disadvantages of EU membership