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**BACES Working Papers
No. 03-2021**

Determinants of Individual Support for European Integration: The Case of Ukraine

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Jean Monnet Center of Excellence

Working Paper Series



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ISBN: 978-84-09-24453-9

ISSN: 2696-4554

BACES Web: <https://www.upf.edu/web/baces>

BACES E-mail: baces@upf.edu

Publications in the Series should be cited as: **AUTHOR, TITLE, BACES Working Papers No. X/YEAR. [ISBN][ISSN] [URL]**

The Barcelona Centre for European Studies (BACES) of Pompeu Fabra University (Spain) is a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. This Working Paper Series is peer reviewed by an Editorial Board led by prof. Javier Arregui and prof. Fernando Guirao.

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Abstract

This paper investigates micro determinants of public support for EU integration in Ukraine as one of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Drawing from the vast literature focused on the post- communist Central and Eastern European states of the fifth EU enlargement, this study tests both utilitarian and value-based hypotheses of support. Giving a strong pro-EU orientation of Ukrainians and strengthening EU-Ukraine links amid the country's complicated security situation, Ukraine can serve as a 'hard test' for checking the validity of predictors. As there is little systematic research on individual determinants of support for the EU in the EaP countries, in this paper I use data from an original survey conducted among Ukrainian youth as a case study for investigation. The results show that adherence to democratic values and personal exposure to the West are strong predictors of pro-EU attitudes. Linguistic divisions tangible in Ukraine's society before Crimea's annexation in 2014 were found to have a low salience among Ukrainian youth, yet regional background is still a significant determinant for differing opinions on the EU integration.

Introduction

The link between public preferences and national foreign policy was first closely studied in the context of the United States and its involvement in the Vietnam War (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017). Later, in the late 1990s, the issue of mass attitudes formation became increasingly relevant with the booming expansion of the European Union eastwards. Public support of the EU or its policies in its present or potential member states received scholarly attention as what citizens think of the EU could largely define success or failure of the integration process. However, researchers tend to disagree over which factors could better predict whether a person supports European integration or opposes to it. The great bulk of literature dealing with the EU public support in newly-established democracies was primarily tested within the set of the post-communist Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries of the EU's fifth enlargement. Yet, there are scarce studies on the countries of the Eastern Partnership and hence what determines the public perception of the European Union in this part of Europe remains generally understudied.

Scholars focusing on links between public opinion and foreign policy in the context of the EU enlargement usually refer to two main explanatory approaches: utilitarian and value-based perspectives. According to the first line of argument, following rational costs and gains calculation an individual might support the EU integration if it will bring personal or group-related economic benefits (Cichowski, 2000; Doyle & Fidrmuc, 2006; Gabel, 1998; Gabel & Whitten, 1997; Herzog & Tucker, 2010; Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003; Tverdova & Anderson, 2004; Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002). Here higher education, more flexible skills, and better competitiveness and adaptability to the free-market economy were found to positively correlate with pro-EU attitudes. The second stream of literature challenges this argument given low salience of the EU for the majority of Europeans and complex cost-benefit calculations involved. The values-based approach instead focuses on shared values associated with the EU, like belief in democracy and market liberalisation, which might make citizens support their countries' membership in the EU (Cichowski, 2000; Ehin, 2001; Konitzer, 2011; Siftci, 2013; Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003; Tanasoiu & Colonescu, 2008; Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002). However, it is not yet clear which one of the two families of explanatory factors has the lion's share when it comes to explaining attitudes towards the European integration in the neighbouring countries to the east.

In this respect, given its considerable pro-EU aspiration among citizens amid a challenging political and security situation with the on-going military conflict in the east, Ukraine can be treated as a 'hard test' for testing the determinants of the EU support. As one of the biggest EU partners within the Eastern Partnership, Ukraine has not been officially recognised as a candidate for EU membership

but only as a country that has a European perspective ('Association Agreement', 2014). Yet, due to strengthening links between the EU and Ukraine, the attitude of Ukrainians towards the EU and the idea of EU membership can be quite revealing for both sides. Majority of Ukrainians favours the country's EU integration and as a result, Ukraine has the highest public support for the EU membership when compared to other EaP countries. The public in six Eastern Partnership countries, all except for Ukraine, were also found to prefer neutrality and non-alignment, and there are geopolitical reasons behind it (Charap, Shapiro, & Demus, 2018, p.25). Indeed, the post-Soviet region to the east from Poland has been oftentimes regarded as a contestation area on the grand chess-board of the global powers, which could explain well why citizens of those countries might favour 'third way'¹. Yet, depicting the EaP countries as an 'apple of discord' between Russia and the US or the EU strongly impinges the subjectivity of the citizens to influence and shape their states' foreign policies. Hence, it is highly relevant to explore what orientations and aspirations the citizens in the EaP countries have. And, more importantly, what factors do determine their attitudes? Can we rely on the factors that showed explanatory power in the case of the CEE countries?

The current study deals with individual foreign policy preferences evolving on micro level. It contributes to a wider understanding of factors that boost pro-EU support and could be applied to other countries from the EU Eastern Neighbourhood, in the first place Georgia and Moldova, as they demonstrate similar pace of relations with the European Union. Moreover, the results can be relevant for both the EU and Ukrainian officials as they might reveal potential space where the pro-EU attitudes could be enhanced. This paper hypothesises that adherence to democratic values, as well as personal exposure to the West, can be strong predictors for individual support for the European Union and Ukraine's further movement towards the EU. Moreover, it is expected that regional cleavages, which were oftentimes debated both within Ukrainian and western scholarly literature², became irrelevant in the newly established political realm since 2014 (Birch, 2000; Kubicek, 2000; Mazyliis & Skirmantiene, 2008; O'Loughlin, 2001).

For the purpose of this study, the above-mentioned assumptions were tested on the youth population of Ukraine, which is seen as the most 'pro-EU' among other age groups. To test the link between individual identity and perceptions of the EU as a foreign policy direction data was gathered through an original survey conducted among the young citizens of Ukraine (N=316). The sample shows a representative distribution based on gender, regional background, and type of employment. The data

¹ Meaning neither integration with the European Union nor with the Eurasian Economic Union.

² Throughout the 90s and first decade of 2000s, Ukraine was usually presented as a deeply divided country with strong regional and linguistic divisions, with Ukrainian-speaking pro-EU West and Centre and Russian-speaking pro-Russian East. But after the Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, some scholars point out to a 'new national consensus' which means that majority of Ukrainians from across all the country's regions declare pro-EU orientation.

included socio-demographic parameters and answers reflecting the variables of the study. It was coded using the SPSS tool and the relationships were tested using logistic regression method.

The paper has the following structure. The first and second sections present the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis and the hypotheses that are tested, respectively. Next, a brief explanation of the research design will follow. The fourth section will shed light on the key results revealing the relationship between the independent variables and the support for the EU integration. In the last part of the paper, the discussion of the findings will be presented alongside its implications for the wider debate on foreign policy orientations of the citizens in the EaP countries. The results demonstrate that adherence to democratic values and personal exposure to the West are strong predictors of pro-EU attitudes. Also, linguistic divisions tangible in Ukraine's society before Crimea's annexation in 2014 were found to have a low salience among Ukrainian youth, yet regional background continues to be a significant explanatory factor for different opinions on the EU integration.

Theoretical Framework

The issue of public opinion and its influence on foreign policy became particularly salient after the Second World War. The idea of 'what people think has an impact' obtained more attention from the scholars of international relations in the USA at times of the Vietnam War, when US society was sharply disunited over the military involvement in the conflict. Throughout the 20th century, public opinion studies were divided into three schools: the first one which presented the public as ill-informed on international matters and not capable of forming any opinion, the second one stating that public reaction is predictable and well-structured per se, and the third one which insisted on the elite-driven formation of attitudes among citizens. Yet, more recent studies refute the latter claim by pointing out that oftentimes despite elites' unity citizens might stay divided over some international event (Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017).

The claim that the public opinion matters and its formation does not have an entirely top-down direction becomes increasingly valid nowadays. Although the public might be less educated on foreign policy matters than elites, oftentimes citizens do show their ability to oppose to elites' preferences. In Ukraine, this assumption was proven during the 2013-14 Euromaidan protests when an unexpected refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU caused long-term anti-

government demonstrations³. These events showed that despite pro- Russian sentiment of the then political elites, the civil society showed the ability to resist and to have a say in the country's internal and foreign policy directions. But the Euromaidan was not the only climax moment of support for the EU in Ukraine: in the subsequent years a majority of Ukrainians have been demonstrating their steady support for the country's EU integration, and the numbers are not dropping below 51% since 2014 ('Democratic initiatives' foundation, 2018b). Ukraine also has the highest support for the EU membership among the EaP countries like Georgia or Moldova where only 25-30% articulate their pro-EU attitudes (in Armenia and Belarus – 5-10%) (Charap, Shapiro, & Demus, 2018, p.25). Despite various attempts to explain what can predict a person's favourable attitude towards the EU integration (age, regional background, language etc.), this question is far beyond being well-researched in the context of the EaP countries.

The issue of what determines public support for the EU integration started to increasingly get attention from scholars at the beginning of the 90s. Since the studies were mainly focused on the mass opinion towards the European Union in its then member states, the theories resulting from these inquiries were therefore mostly applicable to advanced industrial societies of Western Europe (Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002, p.558). With the grand eastern enlargement of the EU in the early 2000s, already existing theories were retested within a new context of the post-communist Central and Eastern European countries, which had a distinct historical and economic legacy. As a result of those studies, two strands of the arguments emerged: utilitarian and value-based perspectives, which give economic or cognitive explanations, respectively.

The utilitarian or rational actor approach focuses on micro-level economic factors that can shape a person's stance in foreign policy. Individual choice in international politics hence results from a cost-benefit analysis of assumed personal gains and losses linked to the EU integration. Since EU integration embodies a particular international economic policy aimed at liberalising the movement of goods, services, capital, and labour (Gabel, 1998, p.937), those who can benefit from such liberalisations are expected to be supportive of the EU membership (Doyle & Fidrmuc, 2006). Therefore, not only objective change in a financial situation but also predicted improvement of individual well-being can boost support for the EU and the integration (Gabel & Whitten, 1997). Also, citizens weigh their perceived benefits based on their group membership since gains from the

³ The protests started in November 2013 after the former Russia-backed president Viktor Yanukovich renounced to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union just a week before the day of the Summit. It caused numerous student protests across Ukraine which later transformed into a full-scale confrontation with the government.

EU integration can be dispersed unequally across the population (Gabel, 1998; Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003; Tverdova & Anderson, 2004).

Literature suggests that in the CEE countries those individuals who saw themselves as having benefited from the post-communist transition and supported free-market economy were more likely to support the EU membership. In the eyes of those transitional ‘winners’, the EU was a guarantor of continuing the reforms and hence cementing the political and economic transition to liberalisation and capitalism (Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002). Interestingly, this gap between ‘losers’ and ‘winners’ was widening when a country was approaching the EU membership and it was most tangible in the most economically prosperous countries (Herzog & Tucker, 2010). This also gives considerations for rejecting the political-economic perspective, which argues that successful macroeconomic performance of national governments increases pro-EU support in the member states (Gabel & Palmer, 1995). Additionally, this argument was heavily criticised as it did not manage to explain the rise of Euroscepticism among the EU public in the old EU member states demonstrating high economic development (Cichowski, 2000).

Similarly, some authors also argue that socioeconomic status per se may serve as a plausible predictor of a person’s position towards the European integration (Siroky, Simmons, & Gvalia, 2017; Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003). Education and income can be relevant indicators here as they reflect individual human capital and personal adaptability to competitive and uncertain conditions of the EU free market. Indeed, individuals possessing higher income and better education were usually found to be more positively predisposed towards the EU (Doyle & Fidrmuc, 2006; Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Siroky, Simmons, & Gvalia, 2017; Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003). This was explained by the fact that those people were more likely to be the ‘economic winners’ of the EU integration due to their higher personal competitiveness at times of market liberalisation (Gabel, 1995).

A similar link between economic status and foreign policy orientation was also confirmed in the non-EU countries, such as Georgia, where the post-Soviet ‘transitional losers’ with lower economic satisfaction favoured closer ties with Russia rather than with the EU or US (Siroky, Simmons, & Gvalia, 2017). However, some scholars stressed the danger of absolutising the predictive power of socio-economic status: due to low public awareness of what EU accession brings, individual competitiveness might not always reflect personal expectations of the economic benefits from the EU membership (Ehin, 2001). In other words, individuals might not be able to adequately assess their economic opportunities brought forth by the EU integration, and, therefore, age, education, income or human capital cannot serve as pertinent predictors of the favourable opinion on the EU integration.

Satisfaction with democracy performance is also well-established within the literature that deals with utilitarian predictors of the pro-EU attitudes. In many respects, the EU integration for citizens in the aspiring countries brought hopes and expectations of democratic stabilisation which would not only have direct political benefits but also help to strengthen the market economy and hence contribute to personal well-being (Cichowski, 2000, p.1249). Scholars also point out that it was valid not only for the countries of the EU's second enlargement, where EU membership was seen as a means for boosting their democratic transition, but also for the CEE states (Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002, p.558). Similarly to the citizens of the Mediterranean states, which joined the EU in the 1980s, 'Poles, Czechs, and the Hungarians... [hoped] that the European Union could do for them what it had done successfully for democratic consolidation in Spain, Portugal, and Greece' (Rupnik, 2000, p.123). Moreover, the EU accession in the CEE countries marked a 'return to Europe' which was said to reflect coherence with the EU democratic norms among the post-communist countries (Ehin, 2001).

However, some researchers criticise utilitarian approach for being excessively focused on market liberalisation as the only result of the EU integration and disregard the redistributive and social-democratic commitment of the European Union. Such argumentation could, therefore, conceal the benefits that the EU membership could bring for the 'losers' of post-communist transitions, such as unemployed. In particular, such social groups might gain from the integration mechanisms, such as the allocation of the EU structural funds or other financial support to poorly developed regions. In some of the CEE countries that adopted radical 'laissez-faire' approach before the accession, EU could potentially embody stronger social-democratic protection for the most vulnerable groups in poorest regions or across most heavily affected economy sectors (Ehin, 2001).

Unlike the utilitarian approach that sees the economic rationale behind personal choice in foreign policy, the values-based one stresses that it is political beliefs that determine favourable attitude towards the EU. This approach questions the ability of citizens to rationally analyse the opportunities of the integration, as the European Union on average has a low salience for a majority of Europeans and the information on the EU policies gets only scarce attention. Building on the Inglehart's ideas, scholars claim that political awareness and beliefs impact an individual ability to express an attitude towards and an affiliation with supranational institutions, like the European Union (Cichowski, 2000). Arguing that higher education and income level are usually a result of stronger cognitive capacities, authors state that those who favoured the EU integration were also more cosmopolitan and had higher political awareness. Yet, valid in the context of the Western European democracies, the effect of post-materialist values was heavily doubted in the case of the CEE countries as they were considerably less industrialised before their accession if compared to the EU-15 (Ehin, 2001).

Nevertheless, testing the link between personal values and stance on the EU demonstrated that satisfaction with democracy could positively enhance pro-EU position. In the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, democracy not only had a clear utilitarian character being both a means and a goal of post-communist transition. Supporting democratic institutions could also say a lot about individual values of citizens and show adherence to economic and political values of the EU, such as democracy and capitalism (Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003; Tanasoiu & Colonescu, 2008). For instance, a research focused on the CEE countries showed that there was a strong correlation between a positive evaluation of democracy and capitalism and individual support of the EU integration in these states (Cichowski, 2000). However, in another study, the link between pro-EU stance in foreign policy and belief in the free market values was confirmed but the results were not so clear in the case of democratic values (Tverdova & Anderson, 2004).

Across many empirical studies, partisan preference was also identified as another strong explanatory factor of personal position towards European integration. Authors state that parties' stance on the EU can largely shape citizens mood related to their country's membership in the union. For example, in the case of Poland liberal and social-democratic parties' supporters were in favour of Polish membership in the EU three times more often than non-voters even when controlling for ideological preferences and values (Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003). However, some scholars state that on average parties in the post-communist states had a much lower impact on citizens' opinion on the EU as the party system was less stable than in the Western European countries (Herzog & Tucker, 2010). As a result, they saw the link between partisan preference and the EU support to be of a reversed direction: citizens prefer those parties that reflect their attitudes or even make parties adopt a more pro-EU narrative rather than being influenced by what a chosen party says about the EU. This was confirmed both in the case of the former candidates from the CEE or current ones, such as Serbia (Konitzer, 2011; Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002).

Empirical studies show that how citizens view their government's role can also shape the expectations and the attitude towards foreign policy direction or EU integration. For example, in Georgia, a correlation was found between individual longing for the paternalistic government and aspiration for a stronger relationship with Russia. Valid mainly for older age citizens, the desire for paternalism resulted from their nostalgia for the USSR whereas Russia was seen as a substitute of the latter (Siroky, Simmons, & Gvalia, 2017). On the other hand, a more negative account of the past socialist system and satisfaction with current democratic governance were related to a more favourable attitude towards the EU membership (Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003). Confidence in the national government was one more factor that had a significant impact on whether a person supported EU integration or

not. However, the results are mixed, and while dissatisfaction with home leaders' performance was found to provoke higher support for EU integration in Bulgaria (Tanasiu & Colonescu, 2008), in the Baltic countries trust in national elites was converted into the pro-EU stance (Ehin, 2001). While in the first case citizens had expectations of the Brussels' monitoring over corrupt local elites, in the second case approval of the government also led to support for its pro- membership agenda.

'Return to Europe': Why CEE Explanations can be Valid for the EaP Countries?

Empirical data gathered both in the older democracies of Western Europe and in the Central and Eastern European countries showed that utilitarian and values-based predictors can well explain citizens' preferences on EU integration (Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003). However, it is worth to mention that not all the hypotheses that proved their explanatory power in the context of the CEE can be valid in the case of the Eastern Neighbourhood countries, such as Ukraine. The first limitation of the CEE literature analysed above comes from a tangible difference in the integration stage of the CEE and the EaP countries, as the later are not granted the EU membership candidates status. Also, rapprochement of the CEE states with the European Union was developing simultaneously or as a result/cause of the countries' democratic transition process in the 90s, whereas the links between the EaP region and the EU are not that homogeneous and on average can be characterised by a lower level of density and speed. For example, Ukraine's political establishment was largely muddling throughout the 90s and early 2000s, balancing between Russia and the West, therefore the foreign policy was considerably shaped by this two-vector direction. Yet, it is only nowadays, after the Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014 followed by the Russian military aggression that Ukraine's foreign policy direction did become more sharply focused on deepening the integration with the EU.

Nevertheless, all these considerable differences between the two sets of countries cannot eliminate a possible pertinence of the explanations confirmed in the CEE case. First of all, all these countries have a communist legacy of being a part of or a satellite state of the Soviet Union, hence the challenges they were/are facing are comparable: transition to democracy and market economy. Strengthening of democratic institutions and improving economic well-being was a crucial point of the EU integration for Central Europe 20 years ago as it is now for Ukraine. The same narrative of 'returning to Europe' aimed at leaving behind the Soviet past was and is present in both cases. Secondly, Ukraine-EU relations follow a path similar to that of the Visegrad countries (yet not the pace), which started from the Association Agreement and launch of the so-called industrial free market and proceeded to a strengthening integration in subsequent economic areas (Cichowski, 2000). Unquestionably, facing Russian military aggression on the eastern borders and having Crimea

being occupied since 2014, Ukraine is in a more dramatic and intricate situation than the former post-communist states of Central Europe twenty years ago. Moreover, up to this time, Ukraine's perspective of EU membership has not been acknowledged by the EU unlike in the case of Poland or Estonia, which is understandable given the security threats in Ukraine and the EU's internal problems combined with so-called 'enlargement fatigue'. Nevertheless, in theoretical terms, the development of the EU-Ukraine relations follows the similar logic of integration as that of Ukraine's western neighbours despite Ukraine's limitations put forth by the military conflict and bigger size of population and economy. Therefore, the literature dealing with the public opinion on the EU in the former post-communist states is expected to be highly relevant for Ukraine's case.

Given the fact that candidacy for the EU membership is a relatively distant perspective in the case of Ukraine and other EaP countries, the utilitarian explanations can be less relevant. The Ukraine-EU relationship is now evolving around the deepening of the Association Agreement signed in 2014. Unlike in the case of the Western Balkans where candidacy is right on the agenda, Ukraine's membership is not yet being widely discussed in practical terms. Moreover, Ukraine is one of the biggest countries on the continent, and this fact potentially can complicate the analysis of membership benefits both for citizens as well as economic sectors. For that a reason, it is very likely that for a majority of Ukrainians the discussions about the possible individual or group-/industry-related gains from the EU membership seem quite distant. On the other hand, the narrative around the European Union and Ukraine-EU cooperation focuses on values as the EU is associated with democracy, high standards of life, transparent and professional governance, better-working economy, and rule of law (Yakymenko & Pashkov, 2018). Therefore, arguments related to utilitarian microeconomic determinants of individual attitude towards the European Union are supposedly less pertinent in Ukraine.

Hence, the hypotheses which explain the pro-EU attitudes by higher personal readiness to benefit from the free-market economy (e.g. more educated with higher incomes) (Gabel, 1995; Herzog & Tucker, 2010; Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002) will not be tested in this paper. Out of the utilitarian explanations, one of the more probable indicators for Ukrainian context could be personal exposure to the EU. Some scholars state that individual 'exposure to the West' can predict well whether a person would support their country's membership in the European Union. For example, in the case of Poland, those people who travelled to the EU (or wished to do so either for work or leisure), knew foreign languages, and resided in urban centres of commerce or tourism possessed higher human capital to adapt better to open market conditions and hence were more likely to support Poland's membership in the EU (Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003).

As the visa-free regime was launched in June 2017 for Ukrainian citizens travelling to the EU as tourists, practical experience of what the EU ‘really looks like’ became more real than it was ever before. Moreover, a decisive portion of Ukraine’s population has left the country seeking a better job in the EU. According to different estimations, up to one million of Ukrainians are currently working in Poland (Vinokurov, 2020). Although oftentimes having lower-paid jobs in construction or elderly care sectors (Sociological Group ‘Rating’, 2018b), these people move to the EU and there obtain an experience of relatively better economic conditions than in Ukraine. As a result, the experience of living in the EU, although only as a worker, is somehow shared with the families and friends of Ukrainian work migrants.

Hence, it is expected that practical interaction with the EU, either personally after having travelled there or through the experience of relatives who work or study there, can boost a positive image of the EU as well as favourable attitude towards the EU integration of Ukraine. Knowledge of English as a language of international communication (compulsory studied in all schools in Ukraine) will also be expected to positively impact a personal exposure to the West and the EU in particular.

H1: personal exposure to the West boosts pro-EU attitude.

The second hypothesis will test the relationship between personal values and support for European integration. Previous studies have shown that individual values and association with the EU can be a robust predictor of the pro-EU orientation. For example, in the post- communist context if a person had paternalist expectations of the government’s role this was usually linked to a stronger pro-Russian position (Siroky, Simmons, & Gvalia, 2017), whereas belief in capitalist values of individualism and pluralism had a positive correlation with the pro-EU stance (Slomczynki & Shabad, 2003; Tanasoiu & Colonescu, 2008). As the EU is associated with the latter values, a person favouring free market could more willingly support European integration. Yet, the research on the relationship between democracy and favourable attitude towards the EU’s integration brought mixed results. For instance, individual adherence to democratic values did not predict well a person’s positive attitude towards EU membership (Ehin, 2001). As Ehin pointed out, the impact of personal democratic values on pro-EU attitude is mixed on the micro-level, although the narrative of democratic values was oftentimes invoked on the country-level. Party preferences were also oftentimes among values-based indicators, however, the causal relationship between party choice and favourable perception of the EU remains unclear (Herzog & Tucker, 2010; Konitzer, 2011; Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003; Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002).

In Ukraine, like it was earlier in many other post-communist states in Eastern Europe, the EU is widely perceived as a prosperous and democratic community that bears ‘European values and

freedoms' (though oftentimes not clearly defined) (Ehin, 2001; Tanasoiu & Colonescu, 2008). And while for Western Europeans democracy and the EU might not always be directly connected due to widely discussed democratic deficit in the EU, for Ukrainians such concerns are more than distant. In Ukraine, 'democratic values' have different framing and they are usually put in counter-position against Soviet governance, marked by lack of transparency, corruption, strong hierarchy, paternalism, and planned economy measures. Hence, it can be assumed that persons holding democratic views will be in favour of Ukraine's integration towards the EU and will have a positive perception of the European Union. Similar findings were reported in another study in the context of Poland (Slomczynski & Shabad, 2003). Partisan preference will not be tested given the high electoral volatility (Rybiy, 2013) as well as not very stable party system. For instance, the newly established political party run by the incumbent president of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky obtained almost 60% of seats in the parliament during the last year election ('Deputy Factions and Groups of IX convocation', 2020).

H2: The stronger individual support for democratic norms, the greater likelihood of supporting the EU integration.

The last hypothesis will be based on the Ukrainian scholarly literature and will check a widely circulated, yet quite recent, narrative of 'new national consensus'. When interpreting the issue of shifting foreign policy preferences of Ukrainians, experts identify various identity markers that might predict those changes. Some scholars investigate the causal links between independent factors such as ethnic background or language of everyday communication of respondents and their stance on the country's direction in international relations (Pop-Eleches & Robertson, 2018). Others focus on macro-regional changes (Kulyk, 2016; Mihaylov & Sala, 2018); in particular, they stress recent changes in public attitudes in eastern regions of Ukraine, which were usually the most sceptical towards Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU and NATO (Yakovlyev & Haran, 2015; Stepanenko & Pylinskyi, 2015). Certain experts suggest that the main clash in Ukraine lies not in a regional dimension, but rather in a generational one ('Soviet' vs 'European'/'Ukrainian mentality': younger Ukrainians show themselves to be usually more supportive of Ukraine's enhanced cooperation with the EU) (Polegkyi, 2016). The fourth group of scholars, the most Euro-optimistic one, stress the emergence of the 'new national consensus' meaning that despite regional differences a growing approval for European integration is established within the Ukrainian society (Halling & Stewart, 2015). They explain that 'support for joining the European Union has grown since the Maidan, if only because Moscow's actions in Crimea and the Donbas have made the alternative [...] a great deal less attractive, if not inconceivable' (Ibid, p.2).

These explanations lead to the final hypothesis in this paper which will combine generational and ‘new national consensus’ hypothesis. As the youth is identified by the scholars as the core supporter for the EU integration in Ukraine, it is worth to test whether regional background stays to be a valid predictor of the foreign policy preferences among young people. Heavily industrialised and urbanised East and South regions were usually showing lower support for the EU integration till 2014⁴, yet after the military conflict in the east of Ukraine erupted, people there started to express a more favourable opinion about the EU. Therefore, there is an expectation that regional and linguistic background will not be a strong predictor of support for the EU among youth. If these predictors of region and language are no more pertinent among youth, this will help to confirm the ‘new national consensus’ hypothesis.

H3: Cross-regional ‘new national consensus’ on EU integration among youth.

Data, Variable & Methods

Giving a strong pro-EU orientation of citizens and strengthening links with the European Union amid the country’s complicated security situation, Ukraine can serve as a ‘hard test’ for checking the validity of predictors. As there is little systematic research on individual determinants of support for the EU in the EaP states, in this paper I use data from an original survey that could be potentially extrapolated to other countries of the region, such as Georgia or Moldova.

The hypotheses about the individual-level factors that determine a person’s stance in foreign policy and specifically attitude towards European integration are tested on the data from a survey with a help of logistic regression models. This is a big-N quantitative study (N=316). The survey was conducted in May-June 2020 in Ukraine via an online questionnaire among the youth population of Ukraine.

The reason for launching an original survey is twofold. First, unlike candidate countries, such as Serbia or Turkey, Ukraine is not included in Eurobarometer surveys, which gathers substantive data across Europe. Ukraine was a part of the panel study but only for a few years in the 1990s being within the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer group. Second, the Ukrainian research companies either do not possess the data that could satisfy the range of dependent and independent variables or

⁴ As survey show, older generation mainly in the East and South of Ukraine had anti-EU sentiment and widespread nostalgia for the Soviet Union (Sociological Group ‘Rating’, 2018a). A plausible explanation for that can be that they largely benefited from Soviet industrialisation, and with the collapse of the Soviet system of economic planning, many of them lost jobs. In quasi-market conditions in Ukraine throughout the 90s and early 2000s when whole industries went under oligarchic control, these people were ‘losers’ of market liberalisation. The double cleavage reinforced by the Russian language widely spoken in the East and South of Ukraine can be explained by strong urbanisation of those regions during Soviet times.

refused to share it with the author of this paper⁵. All in all, the results of the surveys held in Ukraine did not encompass the independent variables from the first two hypotheses, namely adherence to democratic values and personal exposure to the West. When exploring the link between personal indicators and the EU support, the majority of surveys present results of correlation analysis between pro-EU attitudes and the indicators like age, partisan preference, or regional background. This all takes place as foreign policy is not usually a primary issue compared to domestic political questions. Hence, the reason for conducting an original survey was based on a lack or inaccessibility of the required data.

This study bears its limitations brought forth by the Covid-19 pandemic as the virtual interaction was the only possible way to access the respondents contrary to the usual and preferable face-to-face communication. There were two main reasons for choosing young people (aged 18-25) as the target audience of the study. First, it is pertinent to explore the youth views in the realm of ‘new national consensus’ hypothesis explained above, given that they show more pro-EU attitudes if compared to elder generations. Second, internet coverage among youth is extremely high, as 91% use various social media according to various public opinion polls (Zaremba, 2017, p.114).

The study provides a balanced distribution of the sample in terms of gender, regional background, urban/rural type of settlement, and types of employment⁶. The respondents were accessed via social platform Facebook through the local groups of residents of a particular settlement⁷. In each of the 24 Ukrainian regions (oblasts) except for the temporarily occupied Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts⁸, urban and rural communities were selected on a random basis as to keep the ratio of urban vs rural residents characteristic for every macro-region (North, West, Centre, South, East).

⁵ Before conducting my survey, I addressed several Ukraine-based research organisations asking for data that would comfort my variables of interest. Kyiv International Institute of Sociology has kindly shared results of the recent surveys, yet they did not cover the whole range of necessary variables (only socio-demographic) or the wording of the questions was not pertinent for the present study. The other organisations either did not respond or refused to share the data.

⁶ The required sample composition was calculated based on the data of the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (<http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/>).

⁷ According to estimations, 81% among the youth of 18-29 years uses Facebook (Tashchenko, 2020). Due to a ban on Russian social media in Ukraine in 2017 (e.g. Vkontakte and Odnoklassniki), the lion’s share of internet users, especially among youth, moved to other social platforms, Facebook being primary destination for them.

⁸ Because of the lack of accurate statistics on how many people still live in the non-controlled regions of Ukraine, such as Crimea and separate areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the present study did not include the residents of those areas as not to distort the final representativeness. Besides that, the Ukrainian citizens (in particular, Crimean Tatars) living in the Russia-occupied territories of Ukraine might be less inclined to vocalise their opinion even in social media due to a lack of rule of law and a fear of persecutions on those territories (for further information see: Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2020, February 20). ‘UN report details grave human rights violations in Russian-occupied Crimea’. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22140>; Klymenko, A. (2015). Human Rights Abuses in Russian-Occupied Crimea. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2015/human-rights-abuses-russian-occupied-crimea>.

The survey contained 20 questions related to socio-demographic characteristics, beliefs, opinions on Ukraine's integration with the EU, attitudes towards the EU.

The dependent variable of this study is support for the EU membership. It was operationalised as a response to the question, 'If a referendum on Ukraine's accession to the European Union was held in the near future, how would you vote?', the response 'I would vote FOR' was coded 1, 'I would vote AGAINST' as 2, and 'I would not take part' as 3. Two last responses were later re-codified as 0 set as a reference category. The answers 'I don't know/It's hard to say' were omitted in the final analysis, as it is more theoretically interesting to identify the characteristics that strong supporters of the EU integration have rather than those undecided. The final distribution of the dependent variable is 70% in favour of Ukraine's membership in the EU, 27% against it, and 3% undecided.

Among the independent variables, adherence to democratic values was measured with two questions. The first one asks respondents 'Which of the two proposed statements best reflects your opinion?', and the answer 'Although a democratic system has many shortcomings, it is better for our country than other systems' obtained code 1, while the answer 'The democratic system has too many shortcomings and is therefore not suitable for our country' got 0. The second question with the same wording had answers: 'The government works best when there are many opinions and strong opposition can criticize and find weaknesses' (coded 1) and 'Strong opposition only hinders the government and makes it ineffective' (coded 0).

'Exposure to the West' is a composite variable measured as a sum of three questions reflecting whether a respondent travelled to the EU in the last three years⁹, whether they have relatives working/studying in the EU (1 for yes and 0 for no, for both questions), and their subjective assessment of their level of English (5-point scale from 'very good' to 'I don't speak English', coded from 1 to 5; later for clarity and parsimony of the data output transformed into 1 – very good, good, and intermediate, and 0 for a beginner or no English skills).

A third independent variable 'regional background' was operationalised as a set of two questions: region (categorical attributes coded from 1 to 6 as reflecting Ukrainian macro- regions¹⁰) and language of everyday communication (Ukrainian coded 1, Crimean Tatar¹¹ 2, Russian 3, and other languages coded 4; later recoded into 1 – Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar, and 2 – Russian, other

⁹ On June 11, 2017, Ukraine obtained the visa-free regime for short-term travellers to the EU. Hence, as travelling to the EU became much easier (only international biometric passport is needed), this period might be a good reference point for asking about travels to the EU.

¹⁰ North, West, Centre, South, East, and Kyiv

¹¹ Crimean Tatars are an indigenous people of Ukraine.

languages were omitted). A number of the questions contained control variables, such as sex, age, income, employment status (student, employed, unemployed), ideology, education level, residence.

For estimating the effects of the predictors on the dependent variable a set of binary logistic regressions were run (using SPSS pack). Before running the regressions, all the independent variables were checked for multicollinearity, and the tests showed a very low chance of independent variables correlating with each other (variance inflation factor (VIF) values lower than 2,5 across all the predictors).

Comparing to linear regressions, the logistic ones have a different set of indicators showing whether a model fits well the data. In this study, two tests will be used – Hosmer- Lemeshow test and Cox & Snell R². When checking the model with Hosmer-Lemeshow test, one should check if the p-value is not lower than .05; if it is lower, this would indicate that there is enough evidence to say that model does not fit the data, hence the opposite would mean that the model fits well the data. Interpreting R² is more complicated within a logistic regression model, and scholars tend to disagree over how to interpret or compare different pseudo-R² (Smith & Cornelius, 2013). However, here Cox & Snell R² will be used as a comparative indicator across different models. Hence, the models with higher values will be preferred over others.

Results

Tests of various binary logistic regression models with multiple indicators showed that if having included the independent and control variables, all the socio-demographic control variables, such as a residence (urban/rural), income, occupation (student/employed/ unemployed), age (three age groups within 18-25 years-old), and ideology had low significance. Hence, as not to overload the model which is run on a relatively medium-sized sample (N=316), the least significant control variables were omitted from the final table leaving only gender and higher education in the model. Therefore, it is worthy to mention that low significance of these variables and considerable standard error might indicate that complex socio-demographic differences among youth do not draw sharp lines within the population sample. Probably, youth can be assumed to be a more homogenous social group, comparing to the elder ones as more differentiating markers might appear within the course of one's life.

The results of the logistic regression are reported in Table 1. Two final models showed a higher utility compared to the other ones. The first model included all the independent variables combined with gender and education as socio-demographic categories. The second model shows a regression with

only the most significant independent variables and gender as a control variable. Both models work reasonably well in predicting the attitudes of the public – 80,6% and 80,3% respectively. It is worth to note that both of them are twice more precise in explaining support for the European integration of Ukraine (around 94%) rather than opposition to it (43-45%). However, that seems to be quite plausible as the present study is focused on exploring the predictors of pro-EU attitudes.

Table 1. Logistic regression of support for Ukraine joining the European Union^a on gender, education level, the language of everyday communication, exposure to the West, adherence to democratic values, and regional background (N=316)

<i>Independent variables</i>	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>EXP (B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>EXP (B)</i>
<u>Demographic variables</u>						
Gender (0=male)	,359	,316	1,432	,341	,296	1,407
Higher education ^b	-,347	,367	,707	-	-	-
<u>Adherence to democratic values</u>						
Support for democracy ^c	1,442	,339	4,229***	1,534	,307	4,638***
Support for pluralism in governance ^d	,399	,356	1,491	-	-	-
<u>Exposure to the West</u>						
Knowledge of English (intermediate and goodlevel) ^e	,563	,356	1,756*	-	-	-
Travelled to the EU ^f	,715	,337	2,044**	,798	,304	2,221***
Relatives work/study in the EU ^g	-,613	,345	,542*	-,573	,321	,564*
<u>Regional and linguistic background</u>						

Ukrainian-speaking ^h	,448	,404	1,566	-	-	-
Residing in West, North, Centre, and Kyiv ⁱ	1,058	,406	2,881**	1,219	,312	3,384***
Constant	-1,480	,542		-1,058	,353	
Hosmer-Lemeshow test	,192			,287		
Cox & Snell R2	,208			,192		

^a An affirmative answer to the question: *If a referendum on Ukraine's accession to the European Union was held in the near future, how would you vote?* (reference category – I would vote against, I would not take part);

^b dummy variable – high school and vocational training;

^c Questionnaire item: *Which of the two proposed statements best reflects your opinion: Although a democratic system has many shortcomings, it is better for our country than other systems (1), The democratic system has too many shortcomings and is therefore not suitable for our country (0);*

^d Questionnaire item: *Which of the following statements is closer to you: The government works best when there are many opinions and strong opposition can criticize and find weaknesses (1), Strong opposition only hinders the government and makes it ineffective (0);*

^e dummy variable – beginner level or no knowledge of English;

^f Questionnaire item: *Have you travelled to the European Union in the last 3 years: Yes (1), No (0);*

^g Questionnaire item: *Do you have family members who study/work in the EU: Yes (1), No (0);*

^h dummy variable – Russian-speaking; ⁱ dummy variable – coming from East & South;

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Since the first model encompasses all the predictors, the interpretations of the results will be based on this model. The first column lists the explanatory variables, which belong to all three hypotheses: adherence to democratic values (support for democracy and support for pluralism in governance); exposure to the West (knowledge of English, travels to the European Union, and relatives working/studying there), and regional background (residence and language of communication). The second column shows the meaning of coefficient for each of the indicators, the third one – the standard errors, fourth – the significance of each variable, and the fifth – odds ratio. The same logic applies to the second model.

The results of the logistic regression only partly confirm the hypothesis that adherence to democratic values determines support for the EU integration of Ukraine among youth (Hypothesis 1). While support for democracy as a system of government is statistically significant and the coefficient is quite high (1,442), it cannot be said about ‘support for pluralism’ (need for opposition), which has low significance. As ‘support for democracy’ has a positive sign, it is consistent with the hypothesis.

Hence, those who agree that despite its shortcomings democracy is the best model of governance were four times more likely to support Ukraine's membership in the European Union than those who are less favourable towards democracy.

Support for pluralism and variety of opinion within government came out with statistically low significance and low regression coefficient. This could be explained by a considerable dissatisfaction of large part of the Ukrainian society with the current reform process, specifically its slow pace. As public opinion polls show, almost two-thirds of the adult population in Ukraine agree to some extent that 'for the normal development, the country needs a "strong hand"' ('Democratic initiatives' foundation, 2018a). The sentiment for strong leadership is also widespread among youth: as a nationwide youth poll results suggest, 51% of young Ukrainians support the argument that Ukraine needs a strong leader (Zaremba, 2017, p.22). Yet, it remains unclear should this be interpreted as an inclination towards authoritarianism or as a desire for strong leadership within democratic system¹². Experts state that these somewhat dualistic attitudes are a clear manifestation of a still existing paternalism in the post-Soviet societies coming from the USSR times ('Democratic initiatives' foundation, 2018a).

Next, the data also demonstrates that all three indicators characterising a personal exposure to the West are statistically significant (Hypothesis 2). Whereas knowledge of English has lower significance, two other variables – whether a person travelled to the European Union during the last three years and if she/he has relatives who work or study there, showed their equally high impact on the dependent variable. 'Travels to the EU' has a sign consistent with the hypothesis, hence those who visited the European Union in their recent past were twice more likely to show support for the EU membership compared to those who had not been there. However, contrary to what was expected, if a person has family members studying or working in the European Union this could strongly impinge the support for Ukraine's integration with the EU.

Taking into account that both regression coefficients have almost equally strong yet opposite effects (0,715 and -0,613), this might suggest that a deeper investigation of this issue is critically needed. Supposedly, this might reflect a different nature of the causes that drive touristic travels and the work migration of Ukrainians to the EU (migration for study reasons has a marginal percentage comparing to those who move to the EU for work-related reasons¹³). While short-term tourism to more

¹² According to the Sociological Group Rating survey, among the leaders of other countries, Ukrainians show the most positive attitude towards Aliaksandr Lukashenka (the President of Belarus) - 66% positive, as well as to Angela Merkel (the Chancellor of Germany) with 60% positive (Sociological Group 'Rating', 2019).

¹³ According to the estimations, around 80,000 Ukrainian students pursue their degrees abroad (8% of the total number of students in Ukraine) (Stadny, 2019), while the number of Ukrainian work migrants in the EU rises to one million only in Poland (Vinokurov, 2020).

economically developed countries oftentimes helps to establish a rather positive picture than a balanced opinion about the life there, this might explain high support for the EU integration among recent travellers to the EU. Yet, this experience should be quite different from that of a working migrant who might more likely face violations of her/his rights or other unequal treatment from the side of employers (and later share this experience with family upon return back home).

The third hypothesis was only partly confirmed. Here the idea was to test whether the attitudes of young Ukrainians towards the European Union depend on their regional background. Therefore, this hypothesis sounded like a null hypothesis stating that youth in Ukraine will be equally supportive of the European integration across all the country's regions and notwithstanding the language they are using most of the time. As it was expected, the language of everyday communication has a low significance and hence it showed its weak predictive power for defining pro-EU stance. Yet, the second predictor demonstrates its high significance and strong impact on the dependent variable. Here for the purposes of parsimony regional background was grouped into two macro-regions as they were usually presented in the literature on Ukraine's political divisions (Birch, 2000). In this case, the coefficient is quite substantial with high odds ratio, which suggests that youth residing in West, North, Centre, and Kyiv were almost three times more likely to support Ukraine's EU membership than those who live in East or South.

However, if we run a regression test with all the regions separately included in the model and add only the most significant predictors, then more accurate yet different conclusions can be made. The model also passes well the Hosmer & Lemeshow test and has a similar Cox & Snell R² value. Controlling for gender and education level, while keeping the East as a reference region in the model, the results show that residence in South, Centre, or Kyiv cannot be an indicator of a person's stance towards the EU integration, but coming from West or North has high significance (0,001 and 0,003 respectively), positive coefficient and quite high odds ratio (around 4,5-4,3 respectively). In this scenario, it might be stated that a more accurate difference is revealed between several regions if we run a test with separate regions rather than grouping them into two murky macro-regions. Nevertheless, this suggests that the results run on indicators related to regional background should be interpreted cautiously.

Discussion

Previous research on the EU public support contributed to establishing a great bulk of scholarly literature focused on Western Europe. Subsequently, in the early 2000s, the factors which could

explain the variation in individual support for the EU integration were tested among the publics of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe. While the scholarly inquiries demonstrated insightful yet mixed results in the context of the CEE countries, the Eastern Partnership states receive scarce attention from researchers and hence what determines the public perception of the European Union in that part of Europe is overshadowed by a general narrative explaining foreign policy change in those countries as a mere result of great powers interests interplay.

The contribution of this study to the literature on determinants of support for the EU integration is threefold. First, the paper presents an original attempt to explore the causes underlying pro-EU support adapted to the context of the Eastern Partnership countries.

Previous studies have mainly focused on describing and comparing the results of various public opinion polls, in Ukraine in particular, rather than building a theoretical model that would suffice for predicting people's choices. Empirical evidence suggests that socio- demographic characteristics obtained the lion's share as explanatory independent factors. Hence, this study challenges these explanations showing that among the youth as a target group for this research socio-demographic distinctions demonstrate low significance. Even the line between Ukrainian-speaking 'pro-EU' and Russian-speaking 'anti-EU' citizens is more blurred than it was assumed by earlier investigations. Though regional cleavages so widely discussed within Ukrainian and Western scholarly literature seem to be still tangible even among Ukrainian youth despite its generally favourable opinion on the EU integration, these findings have to be always analysed cautiously as they leave a wide door for interpretations and can be used for political manipulations in transitional contexts.

Second, the study suggests that both values-based and utilitarian indicators might work well for predicting people's support for the EU membership of their country. In Ukraine, adherence to democracy as a preferable system of governance can consistently determine positive individual attitude towards the European Union. Also, personal exposure to the West demonstrated its high validity among the predictors. Analysis of the empirical data showed that regardless their demographic characteristics persons who had an intermediate and higher level of English and who travelled to the European Union were almost twice more likely to vote for Ukraine's membership in the EU if a referendum took place. However, contrary to what was expected, availability of relatives who work in the EU lowered personal chances to have a positive attitude towards the EU.

Third, the study contributes to a wider understanding of factors that boost pro-EU support even amid the challenging security and economic setting and could hence be further applied to other transition countries from the Eastern Partnership with concluded Association Agreements (and similar security threats), such as Georgia or Moldova. Identifying the mechanisms that explain citizens support for the EU can be also relevant for both the EU and domestic officials as it reveals potential space for enhancing a deeper public understanding of how the EU integration works and how it can be beneficial for two sides.

Hence, this study is a pioneering effort to explore what stands behind public opinion towards the European Union in the countries covered by the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy, and hence it can serve as a starting ground for future EaP-related studies. Also, it could be equally interesting to shed more light on what determines a negative attitude towards a country's EU integration, possibly searching for qualitative explanations from citizens (e.g. via focus groups). Further research could also provide a cross-country comparison within the region, probably to identify stable patterns or changes over time. Exploring why and how some citizens in the countries of the EU closest neighbourhood are pro- or anti-EU will be an increasingly important issue throughout the strengthening integration between separate countries of the region and the European Union.

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Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union