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Vogel, Lars; Rodriguez-Teruel, Juan

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## Staying on Course in Turbulent Times: National Political Elites and the Crisis of European Integration

*Lars Vogel & Juan Rodríguez-Teruel\**

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**Abstract:** *»Auf Kurs in turbulenten Zeiten: Die nationalen politischen Eliten und die Krise der europäischen Integration«.* European Integration is currently facing tremendous challenges caused by a series of cumulating crises. Their onset was the global financial and economic crisis in 2008 that rapidly evolved into a sovereign debt crisis, further into a crisis of the Eurozone and led eventually to a political crisis of the entire EU. National political elites have been among the core actors to cope with these challenges. Their behaviour is driven by their Europeanness, i.e. their emotionally and rationally determined attitudes, cognitions and strategies regarding European Integration. Given their pivotal role, the purpose of this introductory article is twofold: Firstly, providing an overview about the elitist approach to European integration by introducing the main concepts, the methodology and the data basis on which the country studies in this HSR Special Issue rely on; secondly, enfolded a comparative perspective on the development of national elites' Europeanness during the course of the mentioned crises. The article shows that the crises have affected national elites' Europeanness in complex ways that are determined by the diverging impact they had on the investigated countries and by how elites perceive the efficiency of supranational integration to cope with them. Beyond national differences, the general evaluations of Europeanness remain quite stable pro-European while preferences regarding the concrete organization of integration are rather prone to change. Elites' Europeanness primarily shifts in countries, in which strong Eurosceptic parties gained ground during the mentioned crisis indicating that there is a challenge of responsiveness for the still overwhelmingly pro-European elites.

**Keywords:** European integration, Political elites, Crisis, Euroscepticism, Europeanness, Comparative elite survey.

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\* Lars Vogel, Institute for Sociology, University of Jena, Carl-Zeiss-Strasse 2, 07737 Jena, Germany; lars.vogel@uni-jena.de.  
Juan Rodríguez-Teruel, Department of Constitutional Law & Political Science, Faculty of Law, University of Valencia, Avinguda Tarongers, s/n., 46071 Valencia, Spain; juanrote@uv.es.

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## 1. The Scope of the Research: National Political Elites in the Context of European Crises

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### 1.1 Analyzing the Europeanness of National Political Elites

In a moment in which the EU is facing tremendous challenges, in which – for the first time in its history – one of its Member States has declared to leave the EU, this HSR Special Issue addresses the core actors in these processes, i.e. national political elites, and analyses their attitudes and behaviour towards European integration asking how they were influenced by the sequence of cumulating crises ongoing since 2008. It does so by presenting case studies for 10 EU Member States thereby relying on a unique longitudinal research design that encompasses – for most of the investigated countries – three surveys among national parliamentarians. Those surveys were conducted in the international research projects IntUne (2007 and 2009) and ENEC (2014) with identical questionnaires, thereby spanning various stages of the mentioned crises.

This elitist approach on the process of European integration considers national political elites as the pivotal driving forces who establish, maintain, transform – or even dissipate – the institutions and politics of the European Union. Elites are those ‘persons, who are able, by virtue of their strategic positions in powerful organizations and movements, to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially’ (Higley and Burton 2006). According to this view, the process of European integration is an ongoing process, in which national political elites do bargain – and usually find accord – about the distribution of competences in the European system of multilevel governance. In this process, national *political elites* actions are not entirely autonomous, but their relative importance is greater in comparison to non-elites due to their formal empowerment as members of the national legislative and executive institutions and the associated authority and resources. *National* political elites have a pivotal role in the multilevel system of the EU: they are simultaneously members of the core institutions, European Council and the Council of Ministers, and they are the *Herren der Verträge* (Masters of the treaties, as coined by the German Constitutional Court in its judgment on the Treaty of Maastricht), who consent and ratify the treaties shaping the integration process. Thus, they ultimately decide on the restriction of national sovereignty and the continuance of European integration. The parliamentarians (or MPs), who are in the focus of this special issue, are an important subgroup of the national political elites. Although their individual influence may differ depending on the particular position they occupy within their party or in the parliament, they decide collectively about the state budget and thus the broad direction of policy, select or deselect the government – none of the investigated countries is a presidential

system<sup>1</sup>, and many of them are precedently or simultaneously to their legislative mandates members of the executive, since parliaments are central recruitment pools for governmental elite positions. Moreover, owing to their position as representatives of their respective populations, their stances towards European integration and those of the population are mutually influencing each other. Moreover, the top-down influence of elite behavior on populations' perceptions and opinions about the EU prevails in comparison to the opposite direction of opinion molding (Gabel and Scheve 2007; Sanders and Toka 2013).

Finally, the actual scope of political elites' impact varies substantially between countries and within time, as it is enlarged or constrained by the elites from other realms (e.g. from the economy), by their voters and the entire population, and finally by the institutional, political, economic and cultural context elites are embedded in. Crises are critical junctures in which elites' constraints are especially weak, since they are characterized by abrupt and tremendous events for which no institutional or otherwise proven solutions are at hand, entailing uncertainty about the consequences of action. In such situations actors pursue strategies to overcome this uncertainty. Those who are successful establish an institutional framework that makes behaviour more predictable in terms of costs and benefits, but simultaneously reduces the leeway of action by restricting particular behaviour and promoting others. Although crises increase the uncertainty about the consequences of behaviour, the room of manoeuvre for elites is enlarged simultaneously (Best and Vogel 2014).

If elites are the central actors in the process of European integration in general and in particular in times of crises, the question for the premises and rationales underlying their behaviour emerges. All contributions in this special issue refer in one way or another to the concept of Europeanness, which is defined as multidimensional set of attitudes towards European integration encompassing multiple and sometimes even contradictory components that structure – but not determine – elites' behavior (Best, Lengyel and Verzichelli 2012a). It encompasses different modes (e.g. cognitions, emotions, evaluations) and objects (e.g. institutions, actors, policies) of attitudes toward European integration. National elites vary, moreover, with respect to the different dimensions of Europeanness entailing a variety of party- and country-specific patterns of Europeanness (Cotta and Russo 2012). Although not applied in a uniform way, all articles in this Special Issue report on those dimensions which the country experts judge as most relevant for the respective country but consider as well the core dimensions that have been already identified as relevant in comparative studies. Among them is the emotive dimension including attitudes like the emotional attachment to Europe expressed by the self-identification as

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<sup>1</sup> Lithuania is a semipresidential system in which the president is elected, but the government is responsible to both the parliament and the president.

European, while the cognitive dimension evaluates the state of European integration oscillating between the two poles of deepening and rolling back (Best, Lengyel and Verzichelli 2012b). The conative-projective dimension (Best, Lengyel and Verzichelli 2012b) or scope of governance (Cotta and Isernia 2009; Cotta and Russo 2012) comprises the approval or rejection of particular policy delegation to the EU, which is independent from the rather general emotive and cognitive evaluation of European integration. The dimension of representation (Ibd.) encompasses different means and concepts of integration, whereby intergovernmentalism and federalism constituting the two opposing poles. Other facets of Europeanness that are considered throughout the articles and that are in manifold ways linked to or differentiated from the mentioned dimensions are trust in European core institutions, threats to the EU and European integration, and the perception and evaluation of the performance of EU institutions during the course of the crises.

## 1.2 Elites' Europeanness before the Crisis: The IntUne Survey 2007

To analyze the state and the development of the Europeanness of national political elites the special issue takes advantage of the unique research design that is provided by the integration of three standardized surveys among national parliamentarians conducted in 2007, 2009 and 2014. The IntUne project<sup>2</sup> was a comprehensive study on European citizenship between 2005 and 2009 that surveyed national political elites<sup>3</sup> and their populations in eighteen European countries regarding their political attitudes towards European Integration. Results of the first wave of surveys in 2007 provided empirical evidence that elites' support on all dimensions of Europeanness was significantly more pronounced than among the general population, and anti-European attitudes were exceptional (Best, Lengyel and Verzichelli 2012a; Jerez, Real-Dato and Vázquez 2015). However, the picture of a 'permissive consensus' (Hooghe and Marks 2008) among European national elites consensually supporting European integration needed some qualifications. The results indicated a 'Europe à la carte' (Cotta and Russo 2012), in which elites possess partly contradictory attitudes towards Europe and its integration condensing to country specific combinations of Europeanness. In particular, the favoured allocation of policies to the national or the supranational level has been proven as the result of elites' strategic considerations about which losses and gains this allocation would entail for them among their national electorates. In contrast, the integration in

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<sup>2</sup> The theoretical fundamentals and the methodological design of the research for the IntUne Project at the elite level, see Best, Lengyel and Verzichelli (2012). For the IntUne Project at the citizens level, see Sanders, Toka, Bellucci and Torcal (2012).

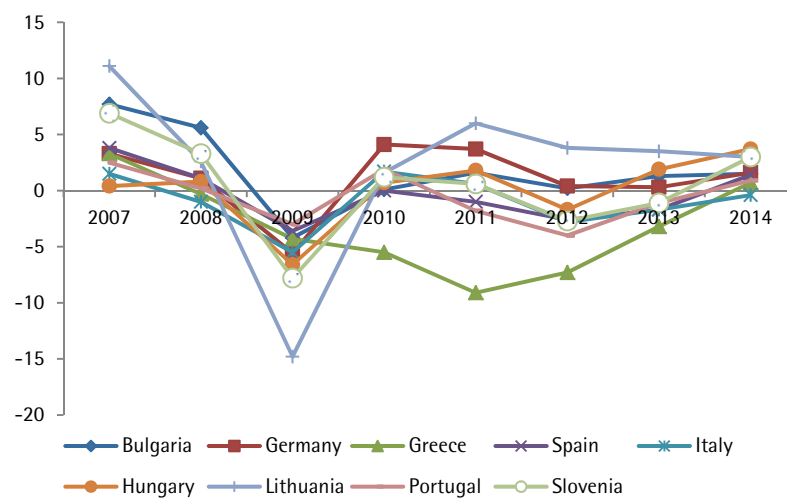
<sup>3</sup> Economic, media and trade-union elites were also interviewed.

the transnational elite network and the interaction in the European institutions did only weakly intensify the commitment to Europe. However, the perceived benefits the own country has gained from EU-membership was proven as the pivotal driving force for pro-European attitudes. The national political, economic and cultural context appeared as primarily shaping the accordingly heterogeneous elite attitudes towards Europe. Although this heterogeneity provides flexibility in the EU bargaining and decision making processes, it was doubtful whether such commitment prevails in face of a massive threat to the national and the common interests of the Member States and their elites (Best 2012).

### 1.3 The Global Financial and Economic Crisis since 2008: The IntUne survey 2009

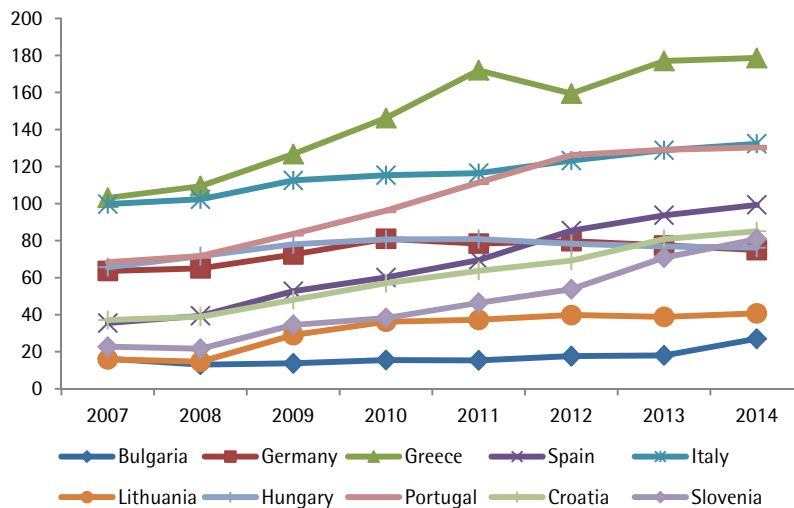
Such a massive threat was just before dawn when national elites in Europe were surveyed in 2007. Following the economic boom, which was sustained by an increasingly overheating financial system, the onset of the global financial and economic crisis was marked by the spectacular bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008. The burst of the real estate bubbles worldwide and primarily in the US undermined the credibility of banking houses severely leading to serious credit crunches and resulting in economic contraction and rising levels of unemployment worldwide comparable only to the economic recession witnessed during the Great Depression in the 1930s (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Development of GDP Growth Rate 2007-2014



National governments responded with deficit spending and expanding public debt in order to bail out the banking houses allegedly ‘too big to fail’ and substituting for investments otherwise not provided by market-based credit flow. The national political elites of the Member States of the EU coordinated their efforts and supplemented them by attempts to tighten the regulations of the banking and financial system. These measures followed the assumption shared by political elites in Europe and beyond that the neoliberal release of regulations in the past and the lack of efficient political control of the globalized financial markets were among the main causes of the disastrous financial and economic situation in 2009 (Reinhart and Rogoff 2011), which was the year the second IntUne survey was conducted.

Figure 2: Development of Government Cross Debt (Percentage of GDP)



The bailouts of the respective national banking sectors and the surrogate public investments – financed by deficit spending – added to the already existing levels of sovereign debt and evolved the crisis further into a sovereign debt crisis in some EU Member States (s. Figure 2). In consequence, the interest rates for state bonds of Ireland, Greece and Portugal increased tremendously, since financial market actors lost confidence that these countries would continue to perform its debt service and major rating agencies downgraded their credit rating. In order to prevent their default – which would have implied a return of the banking crisis to the northern countries, since their banks were main creditors of Greece (Hall 2012, 364; Tsebelis 2016) – the EU members agreed on several bailouts for these states, primarily funded by the EU but under

participation of the European Monetary Union (EMU) and the IMF (Hodson 2011). Subsequently, the temporary European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the permanent European Stability Mechanism (ESM) were established to institutionalize a permanent rescue mechanism for those Member States encountering difficulties in selling their state bonds at the private financial market and thus at risk of default. At this stage, the sovereign debt crisis had eventually evolved into a crisis of the entire Eurozone, given that the exit of some Member States and its subsequent disintegration appeared as likely scenarios.

All rescue measures and mechanisms were based on loans provided by the financially prosperous Member States, the EU and the IWF. The availment of these loans is conditional and requires that debtor states enact austerity policies to reach and/or maintain fiscal stability (bailout-against-austerity policy). These conditions have been fixed in the diverse Memoranda of Understanding but ultimately in the European Fiscal Compact (EFC) and comprise amongst others a balanced state budget, a debt ceiling installed in the constitution of each country (or comparable level), and automatic sanctions should members fail to meet the conditions of the EFC. The EFC is a multilateral treaty ratified by most EU Member States except the Czech Republic and Great Britain, thereby circumventing the decisional mechanisms and institutions of the EU. The conditions for loans formulated in the Memoranda of Understanding and the EFC, esp. austerity as policy goal, enfolded their impact not only in those countries that formally requested financial aid. For instance, Spain and Italy were risking contagion in terms of increasing interest rates and although they were not actually facing default, their governments felt urged to pursue preventive policies. Accordingly, they reduced their public spending and initiated reforms intending to prevent the further increase of interest rates and avert to rely on the support by international and EU rescue mechanisms.

The austerity policy of the EU entailed shrinking public expenditure in times in which the economic recession was still ongoing in most of the debtor states, esp. in Southern Europe. This combination caused persistent economic difficulties, which fuelled social unrest, increased political disaffection of the population with their governments and with the EU (Roth 2009; Sanders, Tóka and Magalhães 2012; Wozniak Boyle and Hasselman 2015) and made populist, extremist or anti-system political alternatives gain ground. They even became part of the national governments (like Syriza in Greece) or at least had significant impact on their policies (Ukip, Podemos, Fives Star Movement). Simultaneously, non-elites expressed doubts about the efficacy of the current institutional architecture of the EU to cope with the crisis and linked the deteriorating economic situation of themselves or of their country to the austerity measures imposed by the EU, which undermined the output legitimacy of the latter (Bellamy 2010). In sum, the Eurozone crisis has evolved even further into a political crisis of the entire EU.



#### 1.4 From Crisis to Crisis: The ENEC Survey 2014

Since the IntUne project was finished in 2009, it did not capture the roughly sketched events drifting the development of the global financial and economic crisis to a sovereign debt crisis, to a crisis of the Eurozone and ultimately to a crisis of European integration. To fill this gap, the ENEC project (*European National Elites and the Crisis*)<sup>4</sup> was initiated as follow up study by scholars in eleven European Countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain) and surveyed elites' attitudes again in 2014 and thus six years after the onset of the crisis. The ENEC survey and its integration with the IntUne data provide the unique opportunity of a longitudinal examination of elite's Europeanness. Given that the first survey was conducted before the outbreak of the crisis in 2007, in most of the countries a quasi-experimental design can be applied to compare elites' attitudes before and during the crisis, examining the impact of one of the most contemporary critical junctures of the European integration process.

The countries in the sample represent different stages of integration and are differently affected by the crises. Germany and Italy are two of the founding countries of the EU while the remaining countries are eight newcomers of different waves. Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovenia and Croatia are four former communist countries with different economic and democratic performance. With the exception of Croatia and Bulgaria all other countries are members of the Eurozone. Most important for our research in the impact of the crisis of European integration is, however, that the sample contains countries that were bailed out by the sketched rescue mechanisms (Greece and Portugal) or adopted the accompanying austerity policies due to rational anticipation and political pressure (Spain and Italy). On the other side, the sample includes Germany as the main advocate of austerity policy and the most important creditor state (see chapter on Germany in this special issue). With this coverage the selection of Member States is indeed not representing the totality of national elites in the EU, but it covers main regions of the EU and the salient conflict lines that were structuring the most recent crises.

In analyzing the impact of the sketched crises on elites' Europeanness, we consider elites as strategic actors, who perceive supranational integration as strategy to reduce the uncertainty of risky developments and environments – such as globalization – and to empower themselves, when they perceive the resources and capabilities of their nation state too limited to pursue their interest (Moravcsik 1999; Haller 2008). For instance, the initial establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and the European Economic Community in the Treaties of Rome in 1957 was a response of Europe's na-

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<sup>4</sup> <<http://enec-2014.wix.com/enec-2014>>.

tional elites to overcome the post-war economic devastation and political descent of Europe after 1945, and to counter the threat of Soviet-style communism. Their underlying rationale was that Europe – and its national elites – could not survive in face of these global challenges, if they had relied exclusively on their national resources and continued the blatantly destructive rivalry for hegemony in Europe that culminated in WWII. This insight established a common interest of the national elites in the founding countries of the EU and fostered a ‘consensually unified elite’ (Higley and Burton 2006) whose members share a ‘permissive consensus’ (Hooghe and Marks 2008) on the necessity of European integration and its institutionalization.

This perspective suggests that national elites’ Europeanness remains unchanged – or even increases – in case they perceive the EU as more efficient means to cope with arising crises compared to alternative national solutions. This assumption helps to understand why national elites throughout Europe accepted the ‘bailout-against-austerity’ policy although it stratified the EU, enlarged asymmetries based on the power of the national economies, and entailed domestic social and political upheaval. They accepted this policy, because they perceived this as the only solution to prevent the explosion of their national state indebtedness and the further breakdown of their economies, which otherwise would be at the mercy of the globalized financial market. If we turn around this argument, elites’ level of Europeanness may decrease in the course of the crises, in case they see their room of maneuver shrinking in the conduct of European integration and if they can rely on alternative national solutions to cope with the challenges of the crises.

Elites act, however, not completely autonomous. The mentioned concept of permissive consensus stresses elite autonomy, because the established political elites in the Member States did not offer Eurosceptic stances to their voters for a long period and, accordingly, European integration did not constitute a politicized and salient issue in the competition between the established parties. This period of elite autonomy regarding the issue of European integration, basing on elite consensus and a quiescent public, in which articulation of Euroscepticism was restricted to the fringes of the party system, came to an end with the Maastricht Treaty and has been incrementally replaced by a ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe and Marks 2008). This latter concept underlines that the room of manoeuvre for national political elites in Europe becomes increasingly constrained by the politicization of European integration among the population, because the population is on average less supportive for European integration (Müller, Jenny and Ecker 2012). This politicization can be fuelled by emerging Eurosceptic parties or by the established mainstream parties, if the latter expect electoral benefits from proposing Eurosceptic stances. In this respect, all the contributions in this special issue regard the two underlying mechanisms that may lead to an alteration of Europeanness during the course of the crisis. On

the one hand, Eurosceptic parties enter parliament for the first time or enlarge their number of seats, which may result in shrinking Europeanness due to electoral turn-over. On the other hand, elites of the established mainstream parties may change their Europeanness either due to their individual reasoning or due to opportunistic adjustments caused by the (anticipated) perception of attitudinal shifts among the population.

The politicization is further boosted, since elites and population differ in their reasoning about European integration. While elites are strategic actors (s. above), who additionally possess reliable information about the EU and whose actions matter for the stability and performance of European integration, the population is more distant, less informed and bases their judgment on proxies such as the performance of the domestic government (Gabel 1998; Gabel and Scheve 2007) or rather general evaluations such as issues of national identification (Carey 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2005; Hobolt and Wratil 2015). Despite these general evaluations, the combination of economic recession and ‘bailout-against-austerity’ policy imposed by the dominant actors of the EU during the crises was a highly salient political issue among the populations. They may increasingly perceive the EU as cause of the economic deterioration of their country or their individual hardships and withdraw their support for European integration, especially in those countries that had to request for the support of the rescue mechanisms and were urged to impose austerity measures (Roth 2009; Sanders, Tóka and Magalhães 2012; Wozniak Boyle and Hasselman 2015).

In general, we expect that the development of national elites’ Europeanness during the course of the crisis reflects the trade-off between the empowerment and political support national elites gain from European integration and the risk that they will be pushed to enforce unpopular policies imposed by the EU, for which they are then likely to be punished by their national voters.

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## 2. Methodology of the Research

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Beside the analysis of longitudinal developments offered by the integration of the IntUne and ENEC data, the other major contribution of the articles in this HSR Special Issue is the analysis of the new data carried out from the ENEC project in 2014. The content of the ENEC questionnaire consists of several questions taken from the previous IntUne surveys conducted in 2007 and 2009, and new questions specifically addressing the management of the Eurozone crisis by the EU institutions.

In the 2014 ENEC wave, the sample design started with determining the sample size, an amount of interviews large enough so that the overall results were valid, but not so high as to jeopardize the viability of the survey. As other authors have pointed out before, conducting surveys of elites often presents

additional difficulties compared to public opinion surveys, such as the difficulty of access (either for institutional or agenda reasons of the interviewee) or reluctance to respond to questions that are outside the scope of the interviewee's expertise or that may be politically or personally uncomfortable (Rodríguez-Teruel and Daloz 2016). Given these difficulties, the countries with the largest number of parliaments (more than 300 seats in the main chamber) had a total number of 80 interviews, while in those with less MPs, the number of interviews was reduced to 50. Then, as seen in Table 1, each team made the maximum number of interviews that were possible, in some cases exceeding the assigned quota (for example, in Portugal, where 80 interviews were achieved), while in others teams were below target.

**Table 1:** Main Features of the Survey ENEC-2014 for each Country

	Population	Designed sample	Final sample	Start fieldwork	End fieldwork	% interviews face-to-face
Bulgaria	240	50	53	05.11.2014	19.12.2014	100,0
Croatia	151	50	70	20.06.2014	31.12.2014	91,4
Germany	631	80	70	08.10.2014	17.12.2014	0,0
Greece	300	80	74	14.02.2014	03.03.2015	93,2
Hungary	198	50	57	16.09.2014	31.12.2014	100,0
Italy	630	80	82	20.01.2014	26.06.2014	5,6
Lithuania	141	50	54	01.05.2014	30.06.2014	100,0
Portugal	230	50	81	20.02.2014	23.06.2014	98,8
Slovenia	90	50	50	24.03.2014	09.03.2015	58,0
Spain	350	80	81	21.10.2014	18.02.2015	76,5
Total	-	-	718	20.01.2014	15.06.2015	73,3

Source: Real-Dato 2015.

The sample for each country was designed to be as representative as possible of the parliamentary chamber to which the interviewees belonged. The sample employs three stratification criteria: the size of the parliamentary group, the sex and the degree of experience in the chamber, differentiating in this case between parliamentarians with more than one legislature in the chamber of those who were in their first term. The aim was to prevent the final sample from overstepping low-experienced parliamentarians, who generally do not hold positions of responsibility in the chamber or parliamentary group and tend to have a looser agenda that makes them more accessible. However, the claim of complete representativeness in this kind of surveys is limited. On the one hand, the success of data gathering in the fieldwork usually depends on the active consent of the interviewee (or his cabinet). This necessarily means that the survey result contains an inevitable bias of self-selection – that is, respondents are often those who are most interested in responding.

A relevant issue deals with the resulting gap between the initial sample and the one finally achieved. Along with the small misalignments previously noted

in the total of interviews in some countries, there are also some differences in the strata of the sample (party, sex and degree of experience). In general, these mismatches are lower in the case of party stratification and by sex, but greater in terms of political experience. In order to prevent these mismatches affecting the representativeness of the data, we have prepared the corresponding post-stratification weights, which are applied in the analysis presented in the following pages.

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### 3. Elites' Europeanness in Times of Crisis: A Comparative Analysis

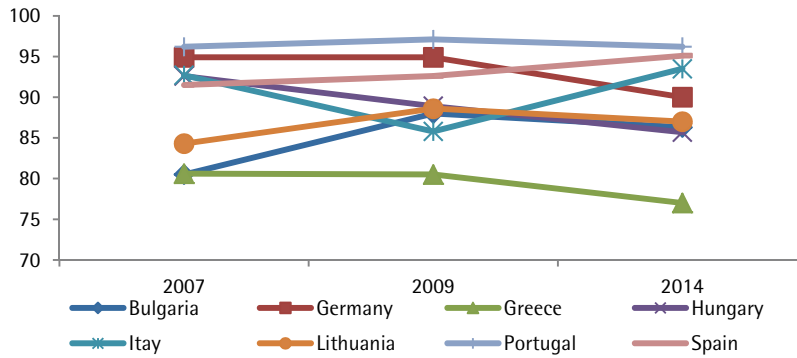
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In this section, we introduce a cross-country longitudinal analysis covering the evolution of the main features of national elites' Europeanness between 2007 and 2014. This analysis is complemented by an overview of the country specific findings provided in the articles of this Special Issue. The aim is to identify across countries general patterns of the main consequences of the financial crisis on the elites' attitudes towards the EU, and the resulting main challenges for the future of the European project.

#### 3.1 Evolution of Elite's Attitudes Towards Europe (2007-2014)

In this comparative introduction, we focus on the country similarities and dissimilarities regarding the main aspects of the elites' Europeanness. The aim is to observe to what extent there has been a general European pattern of stability (or change). We also check whether country or regional particularities affect the views of national political elites regarding the future of the European project. In this respect, some specific country evolutions (as the arrival to power of right-wing nationalism in Hungary, or the severe consequences of the bailout in Greece) have produced particular patterns of change. To begin with the identity dimension of Europeanness, we can observe the remarkable stability of the attachment to Europe expressed by the parliamentary elites (see Figure 3) over time, with the relevant exception of Greece.

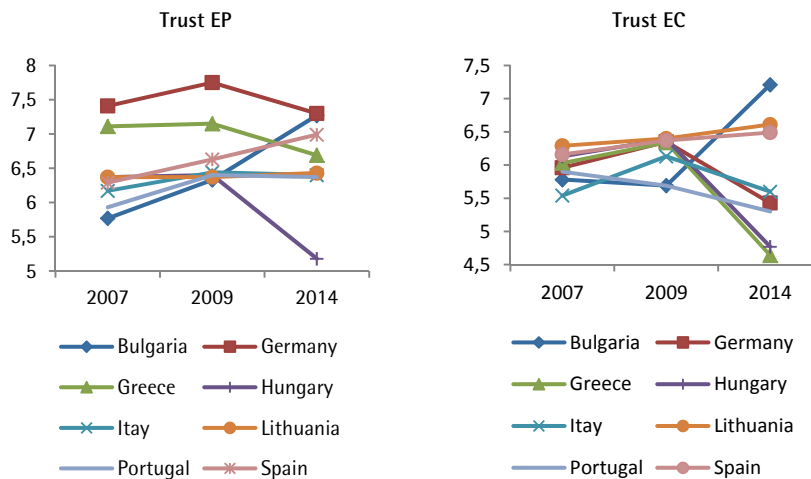
Figure 3: Attachment to Europe



Source: INTUNE and ENEC projects.

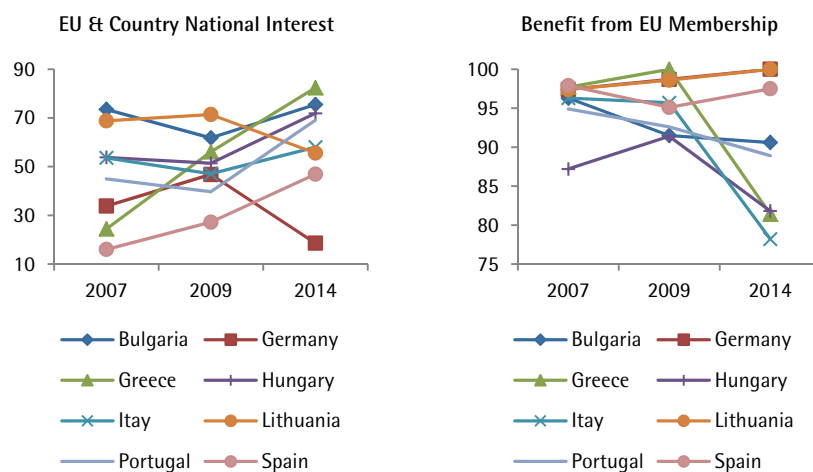
The significant decrease of the attachment reveals the distance produced by the Eurozone crisis since 2009 among the Greek elites, although they were already among those countries with weaker attachment to Europe in 2007 and 2009. Similarly, we observe stability in the trust to the core European institutions, although the feeling deteriorates in some countries (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Trust in European Institutions and Satisfaction with Democracy in the EU



Indeed, the trust in the more intergovernmental institution (the Council of the EU) has evolved towards more heterogeneity among countries in 2014 than we could see in 2007 and 2009. This increasing gap between Member States is the result of two different patterns. While Bulgaria and Lithuania reinforce their trust in these institutions, the other countries tend to reduce it, particularly those Southern countries more affected by the austerity measures imposed by the EU, like Portugal or Greece. The same occurs with the trust in the European Commission (EC). On the contrary, trust in the European Parliament (EP) remains unaltered for most of the countries, except Hungary. Besides, in all these indicators, the important increase of the trust in the European institutions among Bulgarian parliamentarians is a specific effect of the learning process after the entry in the EU (2007). Furthermore, the perception about how democracy works at the level of the EU shows a common negative trend, as it has slightly decreased for all countries between 2009 and 2014. This is not surprising, since the levels of institutional trust seem to be positively connected to the satisfaction with EU democracy (Ruivo and Tavares 2015, 113). Here, Germany appears as a significant exception. Overall, this portrait reflects how the financial and subsequent crises may have fed feelings of disappointment among the national representatives, who anyway still displays a stronger European identity compared to their represented (Sojka et al. 2015, 79).

Figure 5: Elite's Perceptions of EU: National Interest and Membership Benefit



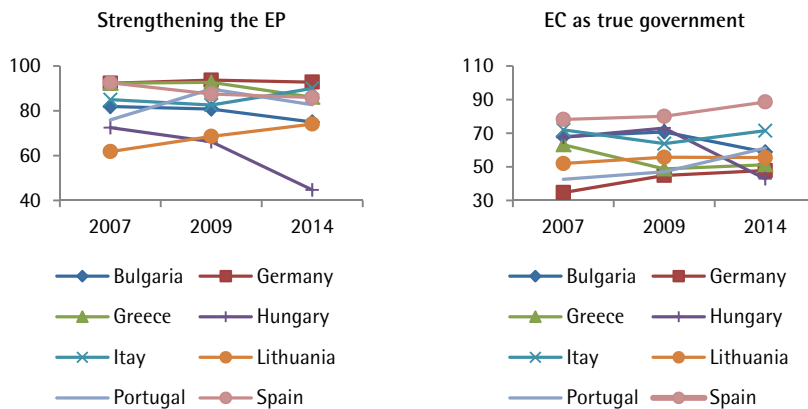
Source: INTUNE and ENEC projects.

Following the utilitarian explanation of Europeanness, these signs of decline in attachment to Europe and trust among the elites could be related to the perception of how the national interests are represented in the EU. Accordingly, in

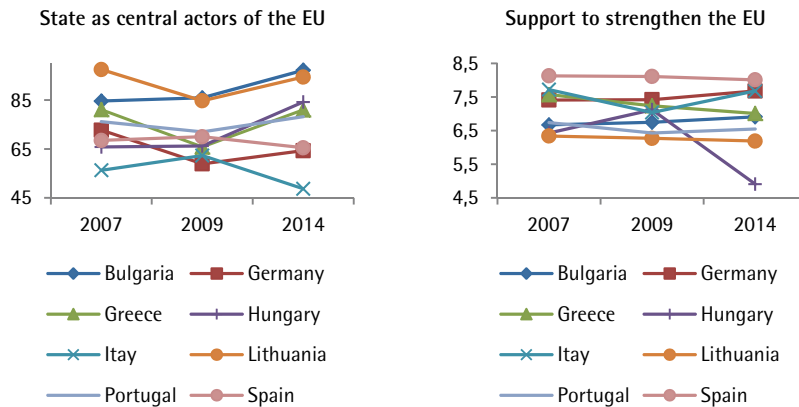
2014 we can observe an increase of the conviction that the decisions made at the EU level do not take the national interest sufficiently into account (Figure 5). With the sole exception of Lithuania and, remarkably, Germany, all the countries increase their criticism in this aspect, particularly the Southern countries such as Portugal, Spain and, above all, Greece (where MPs answering this issue critically rose from 24.4 to 82.2). This evolution is reflected to some extent in the view of how each country has benefited from the EU membership likewise. While there was a strong consensus about this benefit in 2007 (when all countries' elites but Hungary shared a positive view in this aspect, above 95%), the Eurozone crisis has coincided with a decline in some countries, particularly in Greece and Italy. Still, the majority of the MPs acknowledge that the EU has provided important benefits for their Member States. This idea remains a core attitude defended by almost all the national parliamentarians in Germany and Spain.

The identity or emotive dimension of the elite's Europeanness is substantively related to the cognitive-evaluative dimension (s. 1.1), although not in a mechanical way, as lower levels of attachment or trust could not necessarily dissuade representatives from supporting the strengthening of the EU (Cotta and Russo 2012, 21). Therefore, stability is also the main trend regarding the attitudes about the preferred institutional design claimed by the parliamentarians (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Elite's Attitudes Towards the EU Institutional Design







Source: INTUNE and ENEC projects.  
 Note: Support to strengthen measured between 0 (non) and 10 (totally).

The great support for strengthening the EP remains unaltered, with the only exception of the Hungarian MPs (for whom this attitude has clearly deteriorated) and Lithuania’s parliamentary elite (who have steadily increased their support between 2007 and 2014). There is also important continuity in the perception that states should remain the central actors of the EU. In this case, there is a country divide between those with strong support to this intergovernmental view of the EU (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Hungary) and those other where this view is slightly decreasing (Italy, Germany or Spain). Instead, some of these countries prefer to foster the European Commission as a true government for Europe, while in Hungary this idea has sharply declined. Overall, there are no relevant changes in the patterns of support to strengthen the EU, despite the collapse among the Hungarian MPs. However, the support for a state-like democracy for the EU reveals a deep divide between the elites from countries with a more federalist view (like Spain, Italy and Slovenia, with rates of support around 90%) and those others like from Hungary (with only 20%), who has a majority not supporting this federal approach for the EU.

One important indicator about the role of the EU in the policymaking process are the elites’ preferences regarding which institutional layer should be responsible for dealing with certain policy issues. According to this, respondents were asked where a specific policy should be allocated: at the EU level, at the national or regional level, or both sharing the competence. We may distinguish several patterns of evolution in this aspect (Table 2). Hence, there has been an important advance of the support for the EU level as the main policy level for issues like unemployment, immigration or environment. This change shows the perception that policies beyond the control of the national states need to be managed at the European level in order to grant an effective outcome. In

all these areas, the preference for policy allocation exclusively to the national or regional policy levels has decreased substantially across time. On the contrary, the health policy and the fight against crime are still perceived as an issue that should be managed by national (or subnational) institutions. Therefore, most countries still defend the national or regional levels for the health policy (higher than 60% in all of them, except Greece), although the EU level has also gained support in many of these countries. In term of country patterns, we may distinguish those where most of the policies should be allocated only at the EU level from those that are still supporting for a national control of these issues (Hungary), or the case of Italy, with a prevailing support for cooperation across levels for most of the policies.

**Table 2: Preferred main Policy-Making Level for the Mentioned Issues**

	Unemployment			Immigration			Environment			Crime			Health		
	07	09	14	07	09	14	07	09	14	07	09	14	07	09	14
<b>Bulgaria</b>															
Only the EU	0,0	1,3	5,7	8,6	17,1	11,3	16,0	19,7	24,5	6,1	14,5	5,7	1,2	2,6	3,8
EU + nat./reg.	33,3	9,2	43,4	59,3	43,4	56,6	53,1	43,4	49,1	52,4	42,1	47,2	40,7	18,4	18,9
Only nat./reg.	65,4	80,3	50,9	28,4	26,3	32,1	30,9	22,4	26,4	41,5	28,9	47,2	58,0	63,2	77,4
<b>Germany</b>															
Only the EU	9,3	7,6	34,3	73,3	51,9	72,9	61,3	38,0	67,1	36,0	16,5	47,1	8,0	6,3	12,9
EU + nat./reg.	10,7	1,3	15,7	12,0	10,1	14,3	9,3	11,4	11,4	17,3	13,9	14,3	4,0	2,5	7,1
Only nat./reg.	80,0	91,1	50,0	14,7	38,0	12,9	29,3	50,6	21,4	46,7	69,6	38,6	88,0	91,1	80,0
<b>Greece</b>															
Only the EU	5,6	14,6	47,3	17,8	26,8	54,1	23,3	29,3	70,3	7,8	7,3	20,3	3,3	4,9	24,3
EU + nat./reg.	58,9	51,2	33,8	67,8	70,7	32,4	61,1	65,9	20,3	60,0	53,7	29,7	45,6	61,0	25,7
Only nat./reg.	34,4	34,1	18,9	14,4	2,4	13,5	15,6	2,4	9,5	32,2	36,6	50,0	51,1	34,1	50,0
<b>Hungary</b>															
Only the EU	15,0	16,7	17,5	52,5	66,7	47,4	46,2	69,4	45,6	30,0	38,9	31,6	7,6	9,7	14,0
EU + nat./reg.	12,5	8,3	31,6	28,7	11,1	35,1	8,8	8,3	24,6	36,2	19,4	42,1	13,9	4,2	17,5
Only nat./reg.	71,2	70,8	50,9	18,8	22,2	15,8	45,0	20,8	29,8	33,8	41,7	26,3	78,5	86,1	68,4
<b>Italy</b>															
Only the EU	31,0	22,9	37,0	56,0	61,4	40,7	64,3	67,1	77,8	29,8	30,0	23,5	4,8	5,7	12,3
EU + nat./reg.	20,2	25,7	38,3	26,2	25,7	45,7	22,6	22,9	19,8	28,6	34,3	44,4	20,2	11,4	21,0
Only nat./reg.	48,8	50,0	23,5	17,9	12,9	12,3	13,1	10,0	2,5	41,7	35,7	30,9	75,0	82,9	66,7
<b>Lithuania</b>															
Only the EU	17,5	12,9	38,9	43,8	61,4	61,1	47,5	61,4	61,1	23,8	34,3	51,9	6,2	18,6	3,7
EU + nat./reg.	0,0	4,3	0,0	6,2	7,1	0,0	3,8	5,7	0,0	5,0	4,3	0,0	1,2	5,7	0,0
Only nat./reg.	80,0	81,4	61,1	47,5	30,0	38,9	46,2	31,4	38,9	68,8	61,4	48,1	90,0	75,7	96,3
<b>Portugal</b>															
Only the EU	37,5	35,3	46,2	71,2	75,0	60,5	67,5	63,2	64,2	38,8	60,3	35,8	10,0	42,6	14,8
EU + nat./reg.	20,0	23,5	33,8	22,5	20,6	27,2	20,0	17,6	18,5	30,0	26,5	29,6	13,8	35,3	23,5
Only nat./reg.	42,5	41,2	20,0	6,2	4,4	12,3	12,5	19,1	17,3	31,2	13,2	34,6	76,2	22,1	61,7
<b>Spain</b>															
Only the EU	10,6	23,5	34,6	38,3	58,0	70,4	41,5	67,9	70,4	27,7	50,6	51,9	2,1	17,3	14,8
EU + nat./reg.	25,5	14,8	33,3	36,2	18,5	23,5	28,7	18,5	18,5	36,2	23,5	24,7	21,3	8,6	21,0
Only nat./reg.	62,8	61,7	32,1	24,5	23,5	4,9	28,7	13,6	11,1	34,0	25,9	21,0	75,5	74,1	67,2

Source: INTUNE and ENEC projects.

Note: Percentages are per column (same country, policy field and year). Other answers are not included.

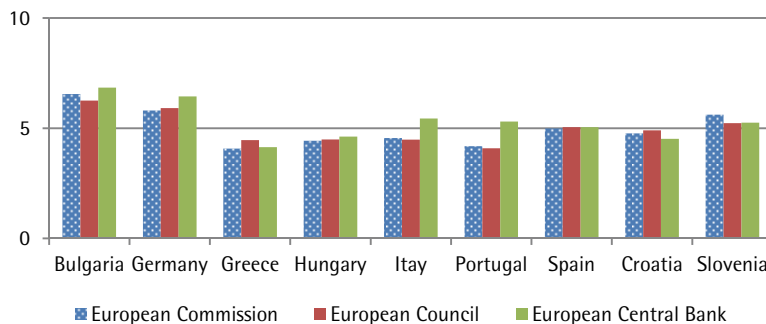
The general overview suggests strong continuity in the core dimensions of elites' Europeanness. Still, some relevant patterns of change could be identified

in the comparative analysis. First, there are some signs of disappointment or criticism towards the functioning of the European institutions. Conversely, these negative attitudes do not have eroded the support to strengthen the EU level as a central arena for policymaking, particularly in some policy areas. Finally, this evolution is largely influenced by country factors, which has produced some increase in the heterogeneity among countries. In this case, Greece and Hungary – for different reasons – appear as the most prominent exceptions to the general trend of stability reflected in the elites’ attitudes.

### 3.2 Evaluating Crisis Performance and the Future of the EU – the View of Elites in 2014

This longitudinal and comparative portrait of the emotive and cognitive dimensions suggests that the financial crisis might have produced less negative effects among political elites than other scholars have found for the general electorate (Sanders et al. 2012; Freire and Moury 2015; Teixeira et al. 2016; Wozniak Boyle and Hasselman 2015). However, we may also observe how this may have also shaped the attitudes and perceptions of the conative-projective dimension of elites’ Europeanness. In this respect, the 2014 ENEC survey included some questions about MPs’ perceptions about how the EU managed the financial crisis, and about their expectations and threats towards the future of the EU.

**Figure 7:** Assessment of the Role Played by the EU Institutions During the Financial Crisis (2014)



Source: ENEC project

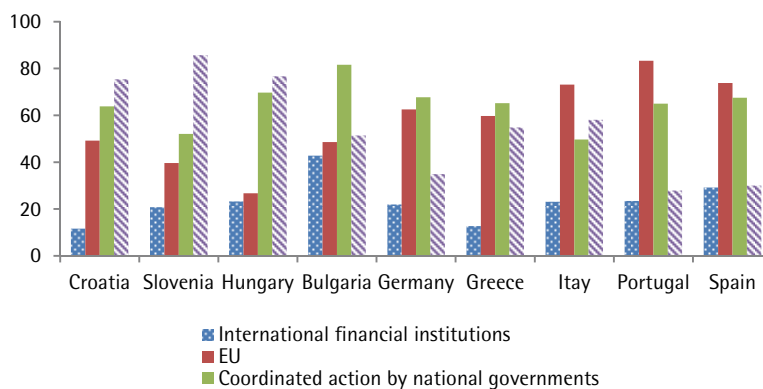
Note: Assessment measured between 0 (very bad) and 10 (very good).

The perceptions regarding the management of the crisis reflect a critical perception shared by most MPs. For instance, there is a common moderate assessment of the role played by the EU institutions during the financial crisis (see Figure 7). Using a scale from 0 to 10, the national political elites give a

bad score – below 5 – in this issue. Significantly, the representative institutions (the EC and the EP) are slightly worst considered than the European Central Bank (ECB). Germany and Bulgaria, and to a lesser extent Slovenia and Spain, are the few countries with moderate better assessment. There is an ideological divide in this assessment, since in most countries the Social Democrats and, particularly, the new left use to score these institutions lower than the liberal and the conservative parties, except in Hungary and Italy.

This moderately poor assessment does not necessarily make political elites more reluctant to support a greater role of the EU institutions in managing the financial crisis (Figure 8). There are two patterns of opinions regarding the main alternatives preferred. On the one hand, there are those countries which would prefer firstly the EU to lead the actions to manage the crisis (Italy, Portugal, Spain), or to the same extent than a coordinated action by national governments (Germany, Greece). On the other hand, the East European countries are more clearly in favour of actions led by national governments, either coordinated or even autonomously, to the detriment of the role of the EU institutions.

**Figure 8: Main Alternatives Preferred to Manage the Financial Crisis (2014)**



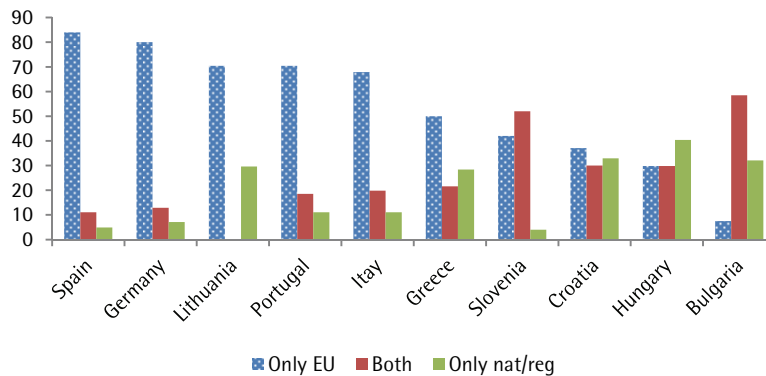
Source: ENEC project.

Note: Columns show the proportion of MPs selecting each option as first or second choice.

These perceptions about how the EU managed the crisis are helpful to understand the elite's conative attitudes towards the future. Indeed, the national divide is even stronger when analysing which should be the policy level for dealing with financial policies (Figure 9). Again, one set of countries clearly prefers that only the EU should be responsible for decisions in this field (particularly strong in Spain and Germany). On the contrary, those countries (exception Lithuania) preferring a national solution of the financial crisis also

support that this issue should be left in the hands of the national governments, or should be shared with the EU.

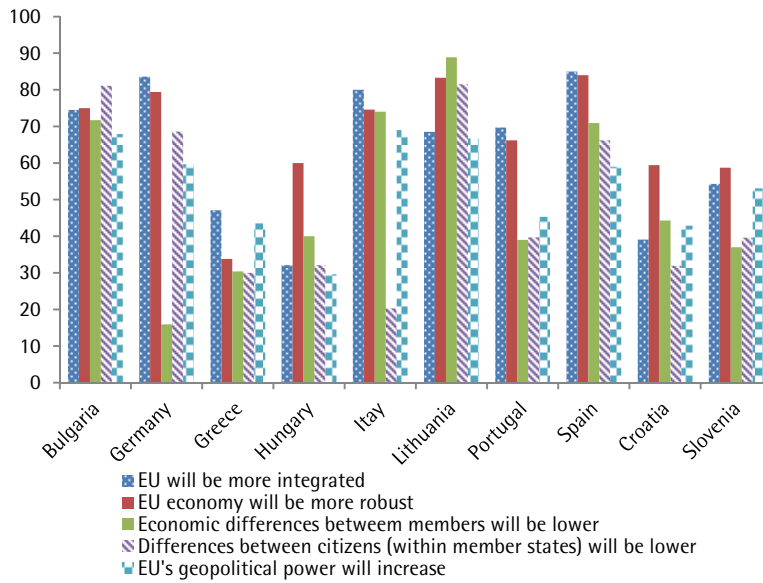
**Figure 9:** Preferred Policy Level for Finance Policies (2014)



Source: ENEC project.

From a broader perspective, the national political elites show different expectations regarding the medium term evolution and the performance of the EU (Figure 10). Despite a national divide appears again, the set of countries differs from the previous aspects analysed above. On the one hand, there are some countries reflecting an optimistic prospect about political and social achievements by the EU in the next decade (Germany, Lithuania, Italy, Spain, and Bulgaria). Hence, the national political elites in these countries expect a deeper integration in the EU, and a positive evolution of the European economy towards a more robust situation. For these respondents, political integration and economic performance shape together the main political horizon for Europe. This optimistic view is also reflected in other prospects, like the strengthening of the geopolitical power of the EU, and the positive social contribution to reduce the economic differences among state members as well as among citizens within the same state. However, these economic prospects vary substantially among countries. While for Bulgaria or Lithuania this is the main prospect for the next ten years (which suggest the main priorities for their representatives), in Germany and Italy this is the opposite situation, as they express the lowest expectations among the surveyed countries regarding these policy outcomes. On the other hand, the other set of countries tend to express lower expectations in every policy, and particularly in the reduction of economic differences among states and citizens. These perceptions reflect largely their current weak economic situation (as it is the case of Greece, Portugal or Slovenia), or the increasing Euroscepticism of its national political elite (Hungary).

Figure 10: EU Long-Term Perspectives: in 10 years... (2014)



Source: ENEC project.

While the perspective of reducing the economic differences between Member States fluctuates notably among countries, all of them consider this factor as the main threat to the future of the EU (Figure 11). Similarly, to put states' national interest first when making decisions at the EU also appears as a challenge to the EU, while the competition from emerging countries was amongst the three main threats for most countries (except Bulgaria and particularly Germany). These are the main similarities when identifying challenges and threats for the European integration. However, countries are divided regarding other political threats. At the end of 2014 immigration was mainly unconsidered as a real threat for Europe, except for Eastern countries. Indeed, Bulgarian and Hungarian national elites considered it as the first challenge for Europe. To a lesser extent, Greece and Croatia (but not Slovenia) shared this perception. Interestingly, Germany or Italy did not have a great concern about immigration despite of having an increasing population of immigrants. In the same vein, those countries close to the Turkish border were more concerned about the risk of the enlargement to Turkey.

Figure 11: Threats to the EU

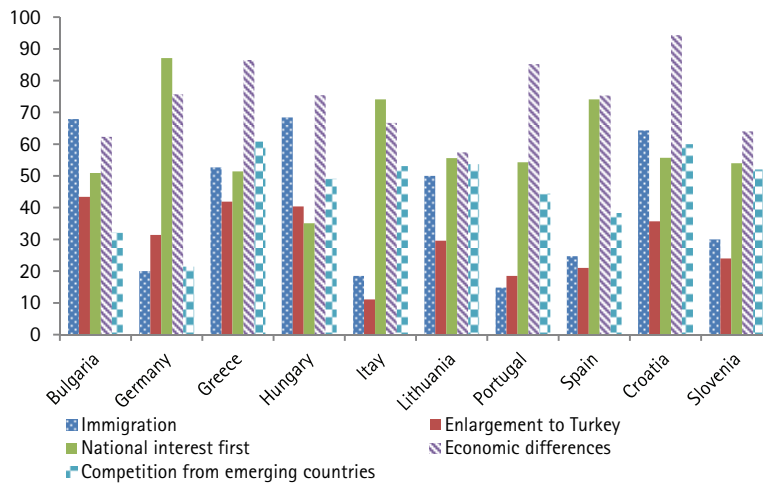
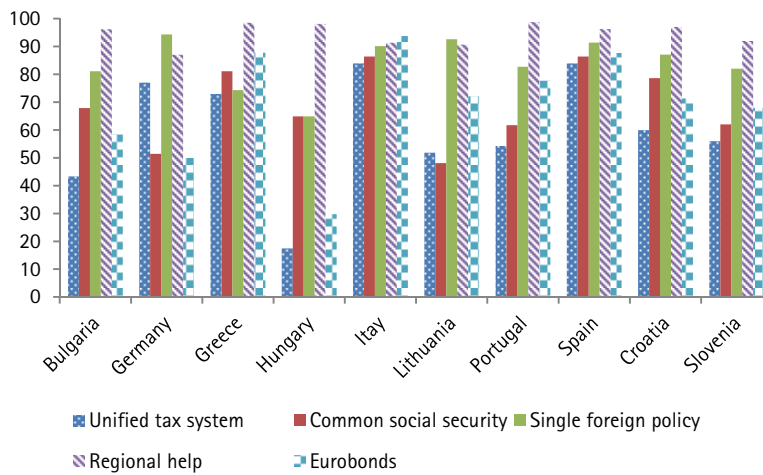


Figure 12: Policy Preferences in 10 Years



According to the importance given to the economical threats, it is unsurprising that there is a strong consensus across countries (and within them) about achieving a European framework to help EU regions with economic and social difficulties in the next years (Figure 12). To a lesser extent, the aim of developing a single EU foreign policy is another policy preference for the next years. On the contrary, other economic issues such as achieving a unified tax system

or the issuance of Eurobonds – related to traditional core policies of state members – are more divisive across countries. Those countries that required a bailout after the financial crisis shows indeed stronger support for the issue of Eurobonds.

### 3.1 Country Specific Paths of Evolution

The previous comparative analysis has demonstrated general developments but revealed country specific patterns as well. It is therefore important to take a closer look at the national peculiarities and explanatory factors, which are provided by the country experts in their articles.

The analysis by *Bojana Kocijan and Marko Kuvec* captures the moment one year after Croatia accessed the EU in 2013. While the Croatian national parliament unanimously voted in favour of this accession, slight tendencies of ‘soft Euroscepticism’ can be observed just one year later. The Europeanness of Croatia’s national elites is primarily driven by economic cost-benefit calculations (‘the beneficiary member mindset’) while issues of cultural identity are of secondary importance. Croatian elites are strongly pro-European in nearly all dimensions of Europeanness, since they are almost consensually unified regarding the economic benefits from European integration given the status of Croatia as net receiver in the EU. Nevertheless, conservative parties tend to be slightly reluctant when it comes to cultural issues, for instance regarding immigration.

Germany is one of the countries in which the effect of the global financial and economic crisis was heavy but short-lasting, while its economy recovered quickly afterwards. This situation, combined with a comparable flat increase of state budget debt, made it to the main contributor to the EU rescue mechanisms and bailout packages and allowed to transform its own austerity policy to the EU-wide dominant political approach to cope with the crises. *Lars Vogel* demonstrates that the Europeanness of Germany’s political elite is structured by the five dimensions of general support, trust in EU institutions, ideological aims and cultural boundaries of European integration, and the means of integration (intergovernmental or federal conceptions, and policy delegation to the European level). While most of them proved to be stable, the different stages of the crisis are associated with minor adjustments: The global financial and economic crisis fostered paradoxically national policy solutions and growing trust in federal institutions, while the Eurocrisis unleashed a return to European policy solutions and the impression of amplified and problematic national asymmetries. Most of the attitudinal change is not due to electoral turn-over of the national parliamentarians, but are caused by MPs slightly shifting their stances. This stability is explained by the marked absence of strong Eurosceptic parties in domestic politics during the period of investigation.



The case most different to Germany is Greece, since it has been the country most severely hit by the global financial and economic crisis as well as by the sovereign debt crisis. *Dimitri Sotiropoulos and Yannis Tsirbas* demonstrate that Europeaness nevertheless still prevails in core dimensions of Europeaness: emotional attachment remains pronounced, deepened integration and further Europeanization of particular policy areas are supported. Even despite their economic recession and the harsh austerity measures Greeks' elites Europeaness is mainly due to the perception that Greece has benefitted from the EU. Thus, the management of the crisis by the EU is negatively evaluated and the growing asymmetries within the EU are perceived as most important threat indicating that the cost-benefit calculation may become negative, if elites are going on to perceive Greece's interests as not appropriately regarded in the EU. The management of the crises by the EU constitutes the main conflict line in Greek politics with the left wing SYRIZA and the right wing ANEL sharing a less pro-European stance and evaluating the EU policy as more inefficient in contrast to the so far established parties. This shared perception separated them from the so far established parties and was underlying their coalition formed in 2015 immediately after the survey despite their antagonism on the left-right-dimension. The after all still moderate decline in Europeaness of Greek's elites is thus mainly due to electoral turn-over.

Judging from the comparative analysis conducted before, Hungary stands out as the country in which Europeaness has declined most severely in the course of the crises. *Borbála Göncz and György Lengyel* do, however, raise attention to the fact that this decline can be first of all attributed to electoral turn-over and the tremendously increased share of parliamentary seats for FIDESZ, a party that have been significantly less pro-European long before the crisis of European integration. In accordance to FIDESZ increased share of seats in the national parliament, the inclination of Hungary's elites to solidarity within the EU has deteriorated and the preference for intergovernmental and national policy solutions has increased. Nevertheless emotional attachment to the EU remains quite high and the perception of Hungary having benefitted from being member of the EU as well. Although much of the change is due to the growing importance of FIDESZ, the other parties have become less pro-European as well.

Similar to Germany, *Nicolò Conti, Maurizio Cotta and Luca Verzichelli* demonstrate that Europeaness of Italians political elites had not altered significantly during the course of the crises until 2014. This comes as surprise given that the Italian party system had undergone a tremendous change in the same period with the advent of the populist and anti-European Five Star Movement as its pivotal rearrangement, a public opinion significantly less in favour of European integration than their elites, and finally the need to enforce austerity policies to prevent making demands of the EU rescue mechanisms. All the Eurosceptic parties in the Italian parliament are less attached to Europe, do

support supranational institutions less but in sum they voice only moderate Euroscepticism. Elites from all parties even share a consensus that most of the investigated policy areas should be Europeanized.

The Europeanness of Lithuania's political elite is determined by their small size and their geographical exposition at the eastern border of the EU with Russia as neighbour. *Irina Matonyte, Gintaras Šumskas and Vaidas Morkevičius* demonstrate stability regarding the more general facets of European integration (attachment, trust, deepening of integration) during the course of the crises, in which Lithuania was especially hit by the global financial and economic crisis. The authors explain this stability by the advantages 'pooled sovereignty' provides for the elites of a small state feeling constantly threatened by Russia. However, the prevalence of neoliberal preferences combined with intergovernmental conceptions of European integration makes Lithuanian elites at the same time reluctant to deepen integration in the realm of fiscal and economic policy, in which they rely on national solutions. However, conservative elites favor this neoliberal, intergovernmental focus more than elites from the left.

The impact of the crises in Spain has been tremendous and is comparable to Italy in the sense that both countries adopted austerity measures without being formally intervened by the rescue mechanisms of the EU. The Spanish population made the EU primarily responsible for the austerity policy and the economic deterioration of the country, which led to tremendous changes in the party system with the emergence of the new parties – among which Podemos is the most Eurosceptic – while the established left and conservative parties lost ground. However, this party system change was restricted to the European elections of 2014 while the strength of parties in the national elections remained unchanged until the elite survey was conducted. Thus, the decisively pro-European orientation of the Spanish elites prevailed during the course of the crises as *Juan Rodríguez-Teruel, José Real-Dato and Miguel Jerez* demonstrate in their chapter. Moreover, Spanish elites favour a federalist conception of European integration and a further Europeanization of core policy areas even more in 2014 than they did before the onset of the crises. At the same time and similar to Germany, the perception that economic and political asymmetries within the EU become increasingly threatening has increased as well. The stability of this permissive consensus among the Spanish elites is due to the lack of strong electoral achievement of Eurosceptic parties within the time under investigation. This had led to an increasing distance between elites and population, which fuelled the emergence of the populist and Eurosceptic Podemos.

Slovenia's political elites are characterized by 'reserved Europeanness' as the article by *Matej Makarovič, Lea Prijon, Mateja Rek and Matevž Tomšič* shows. In general, they share a consensus about the necessity to be part of the EU. However, Eurosceptic stances are proposed by the centre-left parties in government since they perceive interventions by the EU as shrinking their

room of maneuver. In contrast, centre-right parties perceive them as mean to attack government which makes them slightly more pro-European in contrast to, for instance, Lithuania or Croatia. Beyond these differences, which are caused by the competition between opposition and government, elites from centre-left are skeptical about the dominance of neoliberal policies within the EU, the way EU institutions coped with the challenges of the recent crises, and perceive the EU as a threat to their cultural identity – surprisingly even more than the elites from the centre-right.

Like Greece, Portugal was bailed out in the framework of the EU rescue packages and mechanisms and had to adopt an unpopular austerity policy. While this has decreased the public support for European integration, the political landscape did not alter tremendously with no relevant populist or Euro-sceptic parties entering parliament in the national election held one year after the survey was conducted in Portugal. *Pedro T. Magalhães, João Cancela and Catherine Moury* give evidence that the Europeanness of Portuguese national elites remained unchanged at the most general level of support for European integration which is due to the widespread perception that Portugal has benefited from European integration. However, with the exception of the EP trust in European institutions has declined especially among left elites, which may be due to doubts about the efficiency of these institutions in coping with the crises.

The report provided by *Dobrinka Kostova* targets the political elites in Bulgaria. It demonstrates that they share strong pro-European attitudes. Their Europeanness is especially pronounced with regard to European institutions. They trust their national institutions less than the supranational institutions of the EU, which Bulgarian elites perceive as promoters of democratization, efficient delivery of economic stability and social integration.

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#### 4. Staying on Course in Turbulent Times: Continuity and Change in the Europeanness of National Political Elites

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The aim of the article was to provide an introductory and comparative overview of the development of national elites' Europeanness in the turbulent period of crises since 2008. The empirical analysis of the several aspects has shown that stability and continuity are the prevailing trends over change. Hence, we have detected a few common patterns across countries. There is still a strong permissive consensus about the more general emotive and cognitive aspects attaching individuals to the European project. Indeed, the European sense of belonging, trust in the European polity and the positive assessment of how the EU has contributed to each country's development and welfare remain the columns of the legitimacy in the European integration project. Moreover, we could identify a common pattern towards slight reinforcement of several aspects of Europeanness, particularly the support for a stronger role of the EU as

an arena for decision-making in core policies. And when the trend shows some decline in specific aspects – especially for the attitudes regarding the concrete institutional organization of integration – these are relatively modest and do not jeopardize the general trends.

Beyond these general trends, however, the multiple dimensions of elite's Europeanness are strongly shaped by regional and country-specific patterns, which could be related to four causal explanatory factors: historical path dependencies in regional areas where some countries share cultural attributes and legacies (in this case, Southern and Eastern Europe); the influence of the economic development and the particular situation in each country; the specific influence of the global financial and economic as well as the sovereign debt crisis and its political consequences (particularly, in those countries that have experienced processes of bailout); and finally the recent political evolution (that could be eventually related to previous factors), indicated by changes in governments and party systems. In this respect, Hungary and Greece have shown particular remarkable changes in some attitudes and perceptions on Europe.

Certainly, the method and the data employed in this article (and the other studies of the special issue) possess some limitations that restrict our inferences when trying to carry out some interpretations from this portrait. The time span of the ENEC project is a major constraint, as consequences may arise after a longer interval than the one covered by the research. In this vein, we should avoid to force excessively mechanical interpretations in terms of causes and consequences when observing the link between historical events and political elites' opinions and attitudes.

Overall, the article, as well as the different country studies included in this HSR Special Issue, shows that the financial crisis has not substantially eroded the Europeanness of the national political elites. Indeed, the stable trends shown by most countries in this study allows to discard short-term consequences for the legitimacy of the European Union. In some aspects, it seems that the recent economic and political challenges have provided solid reasons to strengthen the role of the European institutions in the policymaking process. Accordingly, many members of the political elites in different countries express better prospects for the European integration. These findings give credit to the assumption that national elites' Europeanness reflects the trade-off between the empowerment and political support national political elites gain from European integration. The crises were severely threatening the room of manoeuvre for elites, since the economic recession and the risk of default decreased their state resources tremendously. Relying on (financial and political) support by the EU appeared as efficient way to cope with the challenges of the crises, which reinforced elites general Europeanness. However, the result that growing asymmetries are considered by most of the elites as the strongest (internal) threat to European integration underlines that the strategy of 'empow-

erment by integration' can cause divergent results for the national elites. Accordingly, elites' Europeanness has decreased especially in countries, which perceive the crisis management by the EU as inefficient.

Given this stable pro-European attitudes among elites, the risk of an increasing gap between elites and non-elites' attitudes regarding the EU occurs, because of the deterioration of support and the negative perception of the EU among the population. The analysis in some countries suggest that this gap could be further eroding the popular basis of the elites' permissive consensus on Europe, paving the way for new actors seeking the vote of those voters less enthusiastic with Europe. In rational anticipation of these developments and the entailing electoral losses, established elites may adjust their Europeanness to prevent or curb the emergence of populist anti-European parties. Given the multidimensional structure of Europeanness, it is most likely that they adapt their preferences towards the concrete organization of integration rather than to the general dimensions. The presented results corroborate this view demonstrating that the shift in Europeanness during the course of the crises is rather regarding the means but not the aim of European integration.

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