

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
Institute of Sociological Studies  
Department of Sociology

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**Bc. Valérie Chytrá**

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Institute of Social Sciences  
Department of Sociology

**Public attitudes towards European integration  
in the Czech Republic**

Master's Thesis

Author: Bc. Valérie Chytrá

Study programme: Sociology

Supervisor: prof. PhDr. Ing. Ondřej Císař, Ph.D.

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2. I hereby declare that this thesis has not been used to obtain any other academic title.
3. I agree to this thesis being used for learning and scientific purposes.

In Lysice, 31. 07. 2023

Valérie Chytrá

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## **Abstract**

The European integration project started as a primarily economic project of political elites. Over time, it developed to deal with political and cultural issues and became an object of interest for the European general public. We recognize various factors that are connected to citizens' support towards European integration which reflect the issues that European integration brings together. Research commonly distinguishes three lines of explanation for public attitudes towards European integration. In this thesis, we are asking which factors are associated with support towards European integration in the Czech Republic. The regression analysis is based on European Social Survey data from 2020. The results show that support for European integration in the Czech Republic is recently connected the most to cultural factors which are support for immigration and the strength of national and European identity. Fairly strong predictors are also political factors such as trust in domestic political institutions and satisfaction with democracy. To a lesser extent but still significant are also economic factors, specifically evaluation of personal financial situation and national economic situation. Overall, the support is linked more strongly to issues that tend to be more stable over time, rather than to issues that fluctuate based on current affairs.

## **Abstrakt**

Projekt evropské integrace začal jako primárně ekonomický projekt politických elit. Postupem času začal projekt evropské integrace řešit také politické a kulturní záležitosti, a stal se předmětem zájmu široké evropské veřejnosti. Rozeznáváme různé faktory, které jsou spojovány s podporou evropské integrace na úrovni občanů. Tyto faktory odrážejí ty záležitosti, které evropská integrace propojuje. Výzkum obvykle rozlišuje tři linie vysvětlení veřejných postojů vůči evropské integraci. V této práci zjišťujeme, které faktory jsou spojeny s podporou evropské integrace v České republice. Regresní analýza je založena na datech European Social Survey z roku 2020. Výsledky ukazují, že podpora Evropské integrace v České republice je v současnosti nejvíce spojena s kulturními faktory jako jsou podpora imigraci a síla národní a evropské identity. Poměrně silnými prediktory jsou také politické faktory jako důvěra v domácí politické instituce a spokojenost s demokracií. V menší míře jsou významné také ekonomické faktory jako hodnocení osobní finanční situace a národní ekonomické situace. Celkově je podpora spojena silněji s takovými záležitostmi, které bývají v čase stabilnější, spíše než se záležitostmi, které se mění v závislosti na aktuálních událostech.

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## **Table of Contents**

1	Introduction	9
2	Theory and previous research	10
	Theories of European integration	10
	Three lines of explanation of the attitudes towards European integration	13
	Economic factors	13
	Cost-benefit analysis and utilitarian approach	13
	Political factors	14
	Spill-over effect and cues	14
	Ideological left-right position	16
	Cultural factors	17
	National identity	18
	European identity	20
	Anti-immigration attitudes	21
	The debate between cultural and economic explanations	22
3	Data, operationalization, method	24
4	Results	29
5	Discussion	34
	Economic factors	34
	Political factors	36
	Cultural factors	37
	The debate between economic and cultural explanations	39
6	Conclusion	39
	Závěr	42
	References	44
	Thesis project	49
	List of Appendices	53



# 1 Introduction

The project of European integration started as an economic project of political elites to establish economic cooperation among member states to ensure economic prosperity and political stability on the continent. In the first decades, its direction was determined by political authorities and experts as representatives of the participating countries without substantial engagement or interest of the general public. As a turning point in this status quo is considered the Maastricht Treaty, which constituted the European Union (EU). With the EU, European integration project progressively expands its agenda from economic to political and cultural issues as well.

These changes were acknowledged by European public. Attitudes slowly shifted from a permissive consensus regarding the decision-making of the elites towards a constraining dissensus voiced through referenda, elections and public opinion. This shift is connected to increasing politicisation of the issue of integration, which became more visible, contested by various actors, which often hold polarized positions. Furthermore, it is connected also to the question of identity, which is highlighted by further strengthening of the integration process, emphasising the role of European polity and shifting power to the supranational level.

The Czech Republic joined the European Union in May 2004, even though the preparations for accession began already in the 1990s. The referendum on joining the EU took place in June 2003, with 77,3 % of voters supporting the accession and a 55,2% turnout. In a Eurobarometer survey in May 2003 concerning specifically candidate countries around the time of referendum, Czech respondents voiced their expectations associated with joining the European Union. When asked what EU means for them personally, most often they mentioned freedom to travel, study and work anywhere in the European Union (69 %), Euro (61,9 %), and economic prosperity (47,8 %). These answers concerning economic matters were mentioned most frequently, and cultural issues such cultural diversity (37,1 %), or loss of cultural identity (22,7 %) were far less frequent. And when asked what their fears are, Czech citizens were most often afraid of difficulties for farmers (66,7 %), that joining the EU will cost too much money (64,5 %), and transfer of jobs to countries which have lower production costs (57,4 %), which are again economic issues.

These general attitudes are supported by research on the whole Central and Eastern European region, as researchers emphasized personal and national utilitarian self-interest in explaining support for European integration and cost-benefit analysis of candidate country's membership in the EU (Caplanova, Orviska, Hudson 2004; Tverdova, Anderson 2004). However, later studies show that also normative and affective reasons were important, and they were becoming stronger after the accession, compared to instrumental reasons that shortly after accession seemed to be losing their importance (Schlenker 2012). The project of European integration connects economic, political and cultural matters which is reflected in the theories of European integration and in the public attitudes towards the issue. We are about to find out how these associations developed almost twenty years later.

In this thesis, we will attempt to find an answer to what explains the attitudes towards European integration in the Czech Republic. First, I will introduce theories of European integration and lines of explanation of public attitudes that follow from them. I will also try to present the debate about the way these explanations complement or contradict each other based on recent research. Next, I will analyse data from European Social Survey 2020 and create a linear regression model derived from the discussed theory, that will test which economic, political and cultural factors help to predict support for European integration in the Czech Republic.

## **2 Theory and previous research**

### **Theories of European integration**

For better understanding of the different lines of explanation of public attitudes towards European integration, it is useful to set the debate in broader context, as the different factors used to explain the attitudes have their roots in different theories of European integration. We can distinguish three major theories that have been developed since the beginning of the European integration project until now – neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism. They differ mostly in whom they consider as the key actors of the integration process, and also what they consider to be the main driving force of it.

First, there is intergovernmentalism. The main idea is that European integration comes from the decision making of national governments. Each state has its own economic interests which are represented by national political elite in negotiations with the others. They come to such an agreement that will be beneficial for all members, which often leads to interdependence and establishment of international institutions. The national interests can be motivated by interests of national firms, but the arrangements are made in domestic political arenas, and only after that represented by national political leaders on international level (Hooghe, Marks 2019). Then there is neofunctionalism. The difference from intergovernmentalism is that European integration is not carried by national governments but by non-state actors, mainly supranational organizations. It is still mostly economic interests that are at stake, and based on cost-benefit principle, it is usually profitable to collaborate and become interdependent. The emergence of new opportunities and obstacles in their growth creates need for further integration of shared policies and for strengthening the role of international institutions, which reinforces the integration process. Once they go far enough in the same direction, it becomes more difficult to take actions separately rather than to cooperate further, and with that the integration continues (Hooghe, Marks 2019).

Both neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism (classical and liberal) were the main schools of thought in the field of European integration studies since the late 1950s to the early 2000s. And both also overlooked two important aspects of European integration, which are brought into the light by postfunctionalism. First of them is the aspect of politicization. Hooghe and Marks (2009), authors of postfunctionalist theory, say that the previous theories were based on the first few decades of the European integration, which were indeed mainly about economic coordination of business relations. The impact integration had on the lives of most people was unclear and it was not an issue for the general public. The attitude of citizens towards political actions of the elite could be described as a permissive consensus. However, with growing power of supranational institutions, the European integration gathered attention of the publics and became politicised. It became an issue for elections, referenda, party competition and political conflict in general, and the general attitude shifted towards constraining dissensus.

In fact, scholars following the cleavage theory are coming to the conclusion that the issue of European integration has developed as a new structuring conflict (Hutter, Kriesi 2020;

Hooghe, Marks 2018). The merit of this conflict relates to multiple aspects of the European integration along the lines of economic competition, political sovereignty, and cultural belonging. The contestation over this issue is taking place between national governments as well as between political parties, making the integration project salient and visible for mass publics that have increasing opportunities to participate in the decision-making process. Neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism have seen the European integration as a project of elites, and public opinion did not seem to influence the process to some considerable extent. In Kuhn's (2019) overview, neofunctionalism allowed for the possibility of politicization, but mostly expecting positive effect and mobilization in favour of integration, while intergovernmentalism did not address politicization directly at all, assuming that it will be still a domain of governments rather than masses. This is a shortcoming for explanatory power of both these theories.

Apart from bringing attention to the role of public opinion in the process of European integration, the second overlooked aspect is that of identification with the newly establishing supranational institution. Neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism both have economic rationality at its core, for which emotional attachment is not of great significance. Paradoxically, as Risse (2005) points out, the aspect of collective identity was already present in the definition of political integration by one of the most influential neofunctionalist scholars, Ernst Haas, who defines political integration as: 'the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations, and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states' (1958: 16 in Risse 2005: 292), but the shifting loyalties were further mostly neglected. Hooghe and Marks (2009) acknowledge this, and they build their argument around the negative effect of exclusive national identity, which is in contradiction with the increasing influence of supranational institutions and becomes an obstacle for European integration. The strong national identification is further mobilized by political parties, especially of the populist right, that take actions towards strengthening the negative public opinion.

Overall, the aim of further research does not need to be an attempt to prove which theory is the most accurate and discard the others. Recent studies find that each theory might have an explanatory power, only for different situations, such as different European crises in recent past (Börzel, Risse 2018). The benefit can be obtained by evaluating which ideas

from each theory might be fruitful for better understanding of developments in the European integration process, and the responses of different actors to it.

### **Three lines of explanation of the attitudes towards European integration**

In line with theoretical considerations about the unimportance of public opinion to the cause of European integration, it was not until the 1990s that researchers, with some exceptions, began to rigorously pay attention to the public opinion. The growing power of mass attitudes can be traced back to the referenda already in early 1970s, with the continuation of this trend for referenda about Single European act in 1980s and about Maastricht Treaty in 1990s. There are three main lines of explanation for the public support towards European integration – economic, political, and cultural.

#### **Economic factors**

##### **Cost-benefit analysis and utilitarian approach**

Since the European integration project started with the aim of economic cooperation and trade liberalization, this was supposed to be reflected also in the public attitudes. First line of explanation is therefore economic. The main argument is that citizens will have positive or negative attitudes based on their assessment of how profitable the European integration is. It means that citizens that will evaluate the strengthening of the integration process in economic terms. If they see it as a source of new opportunities that they can benefit from, their attitude will be in favour of further integration. This is usually labelled as the utilitarian approach, and it was the most influential mainly in the 1990s.

When evaluating the utility, we can be considering different recipients of the benefits – one can think either about personal benefit, or the benefit of the country as well. This is called egocentric and sociotropic perspective, respectively. And these two levels apply also when we try to decide what are the indicators of the utility. There are individual characteristics that might increase the chance of benefiting from integration, such as one's education or occupation. Anderson and Reichert (1995) use the logic of economic costs and benefits and argue that it is direct and indirect benefits on national and individual level that are the most helpful in explaining support for European integration. They find that potential winners of the integration process, meaning among other characteristics those

more educated or wealthier, who might take advantage of the new opportunities from the integration of the labour and financial markets, are more supportive of the European integration. Based on this we formulate our first hypothesis:

H1: Level of human capital will have a positive relationship with support for European integration.

Then there are also macroeconomic measures that indicate the economic benefit, such as GDP or inflation. These we would call objective factors. Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) stress out that the support for European integration is related both to international, as well as domestic level factors, economic and political in nature. They show that it is not only benefit from integration itself, such as level of export to other member states, but also positive national economic conditions, such as inflation, that relate to the support. In addition to these findings, the individual image that one has, either of her own finances or of national economy, enter the evaluation of the potential benefit. These are labelled as subjective factors. Gabel and Whitten (1997) expand upon Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) and instead of using only objective sociotropic economic factors, they add subjective economic evaluations. They claim that the subjective perceptions, namely of the national economic situation and personal financial situation, have even stronger influence than measures of objective conditions, and that citizen support for European integration depend mainly on their own experience of the economic situation. According to these findings, our second hypothesis will be:

H2: Subjective evaluations of economic conditions will have a positive relationship with support for European integration.

## **Political factors**

### **Spill-over effect and cues**

The second line of explanation formed alongside the economic approach and eventually began to criticise it. The argument is that attitudes towards the issue of European integration begin on the level of domestic politics. Despite the intensifying reach of European integration, this level of politics is still somewhat removed from most of the general public. Whether it is because of citizens' indifference to the issue or its

inaccessibility to them, citizens might use the context of domestic politics as a benchmark for evaluating European integration. They can do it either indirectly, which is sometimes called as spill-over effect, where support for national political institutions translates into support for European institutions and European integration in general. Or it can be more direct, where citizens take cues from domestic political authorities and adopt their standpoint towards the European integration.

Anderson (1998) claims that the cost-benefit analyses rely on the assumption that citizens are well informed about politics on the European level and its implications for their lives when assessing the benefits of European integration, which is mostly not accurate. Instead, people use proxies from domestic politics. He conceptually distinguishes diffuse support for the system, which he measures by satisfaction with democracy, and specific support for the government. His analysis shows that system support, but not government support, is useful for explaining the attitudes towards European integration, even compared to the subjective economic evaluations. On the other hand, Gabel (1998) makes the opposite claim. He also tests competing theories that try to explain support for European integration and concludes that the strongest and most robust explanation is the utilitarian cost-benefit analysis, with individuals with higher levels of human capital being the most supportive of the European integration. As a result of his comparison, he also makes a point that attitudes towards European integration are variable, as they do not rely that much on static personal or political characteristics, but they are better explained by ever changing influences such as economic situation, and also support for government and political parties and their framing of European integration. This is further explored by Hobolt (2007), who shows that citizens might also take cues from political parties. She finds that the knowledge of the stance of preferred political party has the same effect on voter choices as knowledge of information on EU politics. It can be assumed that citizens do not choose simply what they are told to choose by their political party, but rather that they use party endorsement as a shortcut to information about their issue preferences.

Armingeon and Ceka (2014) provide further evidence that decline in support for European integration can be attributed to the decline in support to national governments. While they find also partial direct evaluation of the EU, mostly it stems from evaluation of domestic government. They argue that neither the emerging European identity, nor possibly unfavourable EU policies make citizens more interested in European politics, so that they

would decide their attitudes towards European integration directly. Ares, Ceka and Kriesi (2017) try to unfold the mechanisms behind this relationship and find that it also depends on the level of politicization of the issue of European integration in given country. If the issues of EU politics are more salient and the connection to national politics is visible, the spill-over effect is stronger. They also show that satisfaction with national economy and national government tend to be interconnected. Overall, they confirm the effect of specific support for national government on support towards EU, but they conclude that it is not as strong as diffuse support and trust in national institutions. In line with these findings, our third hypothesis will be:

H3: Diffuse and specific support for domestic politics will have a positive relationship with support for European integration.

### **Ideological left-right position**

Apart from domestic political situation, citizens can also base their support for European integration on their own position on the left-right spectrum. When it comes to left-right cleavage and its understanding, it usually encompasses the traditional economic dimension, with advocates for redistribution on the left and advocates of free market on the right, and also the newer cultural dimension, with proponents of green, alternative or liberal (GAL) politics on the left and proponents of traditional, authoritarian or nationalistic (TAN) politics on the right. Both of these dimensions relate to the issue of European integration differently. And when interpreting the position on the left-right scale, one must keep in mind that meanings behind the placement on the left-right spectrum are changing over time, as citizens have different understandings of the concepts of left and right, that stems from the merge of the economic and cultural dimension. Van Elsas and van der Brug (2015) argue that the relationship is changing with the change of the European integration project itself. While it was primarily an economic project, those sceptical towards it were mainly on the left. But after European integration shifted towards more of a political project as well, it mobilized negative attitudes on the right, which is a trend in Western Europe that has been developing since the 1990s to these days. It is therefore argued that the negative attitudes towards European integration can be found on both extreme ends of the spectrum. Additionally, van Elsas, Hakhverdian and van der Brug (2016) argue that while this is true, there is an important distinction in what radical citizens in the West



oppose to. While those on the right are against the project of European integration as a whole, those on the left tend to oppose not European integration in itself, but they are critical of the current functioning of the EU.

However, the situation in Central and Eastern Europe is different. Countries of this region that are members of the EU are mostly post-communist, which means that the development of the left-right conflict was different. They also joined the European project only recently, in 2004 or later, which also shaped its relationship to the European integration in a different way compared to the West. Vaduchova and Hooghe (2009) show that in these countries, those parties who are Eurosceptic are most often successors of communist parties, therefore negative attitudes towards European integration are mostly joined with the left-TAN position and they mobilize proponents that could be considered as losers of the European integration. But the authors also argue that this dynamic was the strongest around the accession of these countries and it can be expected in the future that CEE countries will follow the Western patterns. And as Mach (2022) argues, in recent years, there was a rise of populist, especially right-wing parties in the CEE region, that gained political support of the citizens. These parties mobilize nationalistic and traditional sentiments, which fuel the Eurosceptic attitudes on the right. Therefore, we can expect a similar overall pattern as can be found in Western Europe, and our fourth hypothesis will be:

H4: Placement on the left-right scale will have a curvilinear relationship with support for European integration with citizens on the far-left and far-right being the least supportive of the European integration.

## **Cultural factors**

In the early 2000s, third line of explanation began to form. As the project of the European integration changed, there has been a shift in the connotations linked to it, and also in the implications it had for the public. As the point of change is considered the arrangement of the Maastricht treaty in 1992 and the establishment of European Union. The project of European integration became increasingly more focused not only on economic cooperation, but it also increased the strength of European supranational institutions, brought changes in various areas of policy such as foreign and security policy or social

policy, and introduced the European citizenship. With this accent on political integration and the building of community arose the question of identity. It was not an entirely new issue for the field of research, however, with the changes of the European integration project towards further enlargement and unification, the question of identity gained its salience, and therefore it also gained the attention of the researchers.

### **National identity**

Collective identity is about a sense of belonging to a certain group (Tajfel, Turner 2004 [1986]), which might be based on gender, ethnicity, social class, religion and, among others, also territory. People commonly embrace multiple identities with varying level of attachment to political-geographical units such as their town, their country, or the European Union (Steenvoorden, Wright 2019). When we consider national identity, it is useful to see it as a multidimensional concept. On one hand, we can distinguish inclusive and exclusive identities. For some people, multiple identities do not have to be implicitly mutually exclusive. When people have inclusive identity, they can identify with more than one territorial group simultaneously. But for other people, having a strong sense of national identity means also hostility towards other groups, and the national identity excludes other sources of identification apart from the nation. Hooghe and Marks (2005) rigorously test economic, political, and cultural factors, and they find that although all three theories have explanatory power, exclusive national attachment seems to be the most influential and is negatively related to the support for European integration. This later led to their formulation of the influential postfunctionalist theory of European integration (Hooghe, Marks 2009).

On the other hand, we can distinguish civic and ethnic identities. Ethnic identity is characterized by belonging in the ethnic majority to which was a person born and shares its language, traditions or religion. Civic identity bases the membership on citizenship and compliance with given legal and social settings, and therefore allows for more identities to be held at the same time, which is often the case for the national and European identity together (Fligstein, Polyakova and Sandholtz 2012). Aichholzer, Kritzingler and Pleščia (2021) construct a typology based on distinguishing these different dimensions of identity. They find that those especially negative towards European integration have a strong sense of ethnic and chauvinistic national identity, while those who have a strong civic and

patriotic notion of national identity are positively supportive. However, the largest group of European citizens who support EU have some conception of all these dimensions combined, but this conception is relatively weak.

One of the first analyses that brought identity to the fore was carried by McLaren (2002). In her research, that formed as a reaction to proponents of economic approach, she recalls the argument that citizens usually do not have sufficient awareness to base their attitudes on cost-benefit analysis. But instead of basing the attitudes on support for national political institutions, she proposes that cost-benefit analyses overlook another different important influence, which is the perceived threat from other cultures, rooted in nationalistic sentiments. Since European integration does not mean only possible economic benefits, but also possible threat to national sovereignty, it can mobilize fear of other cultures and minorities. She shows that the perceived threat and hostility toward minorities has an equally strong effect as the economic explanations. Carey (2002) confirms that various conceptualizations of identity relate strongly with support for European integration. National pride and fear of other cultures have negative relationship to support, while attachment to Europe relates positively to support. Results also encourage the claim that national and European identity does not have to be in opposition, because stronger attachment to Europe remains positively related to support for European integration even in combination with stronger level of attachment to the nation.

Later, the global financial crisis provided new circumstances for the exploration of public attitudes towards European integration and a reason to question the effect of identity. Serricchio, Tsakatika and Quaglia (2013) decided to test the hypothesis that economic crisis would bring economic factors back to the fore. In a model that compares all three types of factors before the crisis in 2007 and after the crisis in 2010, the economic indicators have not increased in their explanatory power during the crisis, while exclusive national identity did. Clark and Rohrschneider (2019) perform longitudinal analysis between the years 1993 and 2017 for the relationship of national identity and support for European integration, and confirm its strengthening over time, especially after the economic crisis, but also already before that. Additionally, they put the strengthening of the relationship into perspective by examining the relation to the ideological position on the left-right scale. They show that around the time of Maastricht treaty, exclusive identity was relevant for the support for European integration primarily for the citizens on the

extreme right, and since that time it strengthened for citizens of all ideological positions. Importantly, the relationship for moderate citizens is recently as strong as it was in the beginning of the 1990s for the extreme right, which clearly points to the increasing importance of identity for evaluations of EU. These findings inform our fifth hypothesis:

H5: National identity will have a negative relationship with support for European integration.

### **European identity**

We have asked how much identification with one's nation relates to her support for European integration. But we can also ask also how the identification with the European polity relates to the support for European integration. Weßels (2007) shows that it is mostly the case that having a European identity also means support for European integration. He presents a typology of orientations towards EU and distinguishes several categories, with the largest one being those European citizens that identify as Europeans and evaluate EU positively. Although, this should not be taken for granted, as there is also a small category of critical Europeans, which are citizens that have European identity, but also evaluate EU performance as negative. Kuhn (2019) analysed the role of European identity in Brexit, which is the most recent embodiment of public's constraining dissensus. She points to the complex relationship of different level identities, since English voters that voted leave had stronger sense of national identity than remain voters, but in Scotland it was the opposite story, as those who voted remain had higher levels of national identity than leave voters. Overall, she notes that those who voted to remain in the EU had significantly higher level of European identity than those who voted leave, and highlights the main argument of postfunctionalist theory, which is that support for European integration is increasingly becoming an issue of identity politics. This motivates our sixth hypothesis:

H6: European identity will have a positive relationship with support for European integration.

## **Anti-immigration attitudes**

Bringing up the issue of identity also sparked a growth of research in one specific direction, which is the relationship of support for European integration and anti-immigration attitudes. The argument builds on the theorizing of collective identity and the idea that identity is based on a group membership. The group that a person identifies herself with, in this case it is the nation, is the in-group towards which individuals tend to show a positive bias. But often they also develop a complementary negative bias towards out-group, which can result in direct hostility (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, Prior 2004). De Vreese and Boomgarten (2005) expand on McLaren (2002) and point out that anti-immigration sentiments and national identity might be related, but essentially, they are different concepts. It is because anti-immigration sentiments directly show negative bias towards out-groups, which does not have to be inherently present in strong national identity, so only a combination of these factors creates a position of negative attitudes towards European integration. They find out that fear of immigration is a stronger predictor of support towards European integration than economic or government evaluations.

One of the engines of the interest in anti-immigration attitudes was the debate around the potential membership of Turkey in the EU. Azrout, Spanje and de Vreese (2011) build on the out-group argument which says that people tend to conceptualize their nation as their in-group towards which they have positive bias. They show that people with strong anti-immigrant attitudes frame the issue of Turkish membership as an out-group conflict, where the out-group poses a threat to the in-group. This framing mediates the effect of negative immigrant attitudes on support for Turkish membership, which highlights the underlying mechanism of attitudes towards immigration and support for European integration in general. Another important motivation for focus on anti-immigrant sentiments was the refugee crisis, as it raised the question of how the crisis influenced attitudes towards immigration. Stockemer et al. (2020) find that based on data between years 2012 and 2016, contrary to expectations, the anti-immigration sentiments did not strengthen after the crisis, nor did the negative support for European integration. Other intuitive expectation would be that also the number of immigrants in a country would result in lower support to European integration. Research shows it also does not hold true and suggests that it is not directly the negative implications of immigration, but rather the

perception of them that motivate the attitudes (Stockemer et al. 2018). Although, van der Brug and Harteveld (2021) specify that even if there is not an overall increase of anti-immigration sentiments in Europe, we can still see stronger polarization of the attitudes between left-wing and right-wing citizens in Western and Southern Europe, but generally not in Central-East. Nevertheless, negative attitudes towards immigration over time remain indisputably related to negative attitudes towards European integration, which is the basis for our seventh hypothesis:

H7: Immigration attitudes will have a negative relationship with support for European integration.

### **The debate between cultural and economic explanations**

The response to the identity argument by proponents of the economic approach has been diverse. Some researchers tried to synthesize the two lines of explanation by highlighting the dependence of cultural indicators on economic indicators. De Vreese, Boomgarden and Semetko (2008) show that while economic evaluations influence support for Turkish membership in the EU directly, they have additionally also indirect effect, as they are mediated through anti-immigration sentiments, which applies also to national identity. Nevertheless, cultural factors still prove as stronger predictors of attitudes towards European integration. Garry and Tilley (2009) make similar argument by showing the effect of macroeconomic national situation. Their point is that wealthier countries attract more economic immigration, and therefore the fear of exploitation is greater there, and on the other hand countries receiving more transfers from EU recognize the benefits of the membership and do not develop such strong exclusive national identity. While wealth of a country and country net benefits of EU funding do not have direct effect on support for European integration, they have an indirect effect through exclusive identity and economic xenophobia, which are cultural factors that do relate directly to support for European integration. Moreover, Verhaegen, Hooghe and Quintelier (2014) apply the argument of economic utilitarianism to the development of European identity. They show that economic factors can explain to some extent not only support for European integration, but also the identification as European citizen, although not as effectively, but still significantly. However, we should keep in mind that the causality of the relationship between European identity and support for European integration is unclear and possibly

reinforcing. But as authors note, this at least reminds us that identity is not based only on affective attachment, but also on cognitive determination.

Other researchers pointed to the systemic change of the European integration project over time. Eichenberg and Dalton (2007) present a follow up of their previous analysis (Eichenberg, Dalton 1993) and address the fact that the relationship of economic factors and support for European integration lost its strength over time. Specifically, they attribute the change to the Maastricht treaty and its various implications. On one hand, with creation of the European Monetary Union and its monetary and budgetary implications, national macroeconomic factors such as inflation are no longer as telling just by themselves as they used to be. But above that, Maastricht Treaty did not present changes only to the sphere of economics but also other areas which are not economic in their nature, and it is therefore expectable that other factors besides economic will start influencing the public opinion. Contrary to this interpretation, van Klingeren, Boomgaarden and de Vreese (2013) provide analysis that compares the relative strength of cultural and economic factors in 1994 and 2005. Their research shows that contrary to the belief that cultural factors became important for attitudes towards European integration only further along the way, they were already influential in 1994 as much as in 2005. In fact, they had more explanatory power than economic factors, but as they were not even considered as a factor in the analyses performed in 1990s, their effect was unnoticed at that time.

The hypothesizing about the influence of period effects continues in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. Hobolt and Wratil (2015) focus on a more specific dimension of European integration which is monetary integration and support for Euro. They claim that for this aspect, the utilitarian considerations became more important after the crisis, but with a substantive specific. The support for Euro remained high and economic factors more relevant for the countries that are inside the Eurozone, but for the outsiders the results were more negative. This points to differences in support for the European integration in different European regions. But some authors do not want to settle for the argument that economic factors became less important over time and were brought back by the financial crisis. Foster and Frieden (2021) provide longitudinal analysis between years 1993 and 2018 and conclude that both utilitarian calculations on the individual level and macroeconomic performance on the country level are consistently significant for

predicting support for European integration. Above that, they find support also for the claims that the level of national identity is dependent on the economic factors as well, since exclusive national identity is more likely to be found in individuals that do not have high levels of human capital and also in countries with high unemployment rates.

The debate between proponents of economic explanations and cultural explanations is lively and the evidence from both of the camps is ever growing. The economic and cultural approach are often seen as competitors, while the political approach is seen as an addition to either of them. But there is no reason that they have to be seen as such. Establishment of these distinct approaches inspired a body of research that tried to compare their relative strength, often for varying groups of countries or time periods. It shows that crucial for meaningful interpretation is to always take into account the socio-political events that are taking place in given country, in Europe, or even worldwide – from legal and organizational changes of the European institution, or various crises that came along the way, to the level of politicization of the issue in a given country. In my research, I will further focus on the public attitudes towards the European integration, with the aim to find out which factors are associated with the citizen attitudes towards European integration in the Czech Republic, with equal attention given to all three lines of explanation.

### **3 Data, operationalization, method**

For my analysis I will be using the latest available data by European Social Survey, which is Round 10 from year 2020. For Czech Republic the dataset consists of 2476 cases, and the final number of cases in the model is 1891. The data collection took place from July to September 2021, and despite the pandemic, the mode of collection was through face-to-face interviews. My research question is: Which factors are associated with public support for European integration in the Czech Republic? Based on theory and previous research, I will be testing seven hypotheses formulated in the previous chapter.

My dependent variable are the public attitudes towards European integration, specifically the support. Support for European integration is a multidimensional concept and there are several possible ways in which this variable can be operationalized. Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001) in their study of Euroscepticism in political parties distinguished its



hard and soft form. Hard Euroscepticism meant rejection of the European integration process as a whole, and soft Euroscepticism meant opposition towards specific policies and affairs that come along with the process, especially after the Maastricht treaty. This conceptualization was later refined with the use of the concept of political support from David Easton (1975), which he developed for the analysis of political systems. He distinguished two modes of support, diffuse and specific. Diffuse support is a generalized attachment to a political object – regime, community, or authorities – that is independent of the specific outcomes of the object, and rather encompasses a goodwill towards what the object represents. On the other hand, specific support is an evaluation of the performance of political authorities and specific results of their actions that respond to citizens' wants and needs, or in other words, it is the satisfaction with what the authorities as a political object really do.

Kopecký and Mudde (2002) elaborated on the idea behind the distinction of soft and hard Euroscepticism and proposed to distinguish two dimensions of support for European integration based on diffuse and specific modes of support. They see diffuse support as support for the ideas of European integration, which are currently represented by European Union as a supranational political organization. And the specific support means to them support for the practice of European integration, which is the functioning of the EU, the policies that are being adopted and decision that are being made. Later, Boomgarten et al. (2011) distinguish up to five different dimensions of support for European Union, from aspects of its performance, utilitarianism, and strengthening, to the aspects of identity and affection. However, most researchers agree on at least the two different dimensions of political support. In my analysis, I will be interested in diffuse support for European integration. I am going to use the support for European unification as a concept measuring diffuse support, which is a commonly used indicator for this purpose, together with for example the support for EU membership. The *support for European unification* is asked by survey item “Now thinking about the European Union, some say European unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far. Using this card, what number on the scale best describes your position?” on a scale from 0 (already too far) to 10 (go further).

The predictors are based on the three lines of explanation and the three types of factors following from them. First, there are economic factors. The level of human capital is

operationalized by the level of education and the skill level of occupation. *Education* is asked by item “What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed?” with 7 levels based on ISCED 1997 classification. The lowest category (less than lower secondary education) was omitted from the analysis due to low number of cases (which was 1). *Occupation* is an interviewer-coded variable based on the ISCO 08 classification. There are 10 major groups sorted out into 4 skill levels. I have decided that I will recode this variable into a binary variable of occupational skill level with categories of lower-skilled occupations (skill level 2: groups 4-9) and higher-skilled occupations (skill level 3 and 4: groups 1-3). One category (group 0) was again omitted for low number of cases (which was 3).

Then there are subjective evaluations of economic conditions, national and personal. Personal economic conditions are asked not for the individual, but for her household, since it is typically the basic unit of measurement for finances (such as income, social benefits, etc.). *Evaluation of national economic situation* is asked by item “On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?” on a scale from 0 (extremely dissatisfied) 10 (extremely satisfied). *Evaluation of personal financial situation* is asked by survey item “Which of the descriptions on this card comes closest to how you feel about your household’s income nowadays?” on a scale from 1 (living comfortably) to 4 (finding it very difficult). I have made two changes to this variable for more consistency with other variables and easier interpretation of the coefficient. First, since this is the only continuous independent variable that is not measured on an eleven-point scale, I have decided to rescale this variable to have a specified minimum and maximum values 0 and 10, respectively. Second, since this is also the only continuous independent variable that attributes positive evaluation to low values and negative evaluation to high values, I have reversed the coding to go from lower values as negative to higher values as positive.

Second, there are political factors. I chose two separate commonly used indicators for measurement of diffuse (domestic) support, which are trust in national political institutions (Easton 1975) and satisfaction with national democracy (Anderson 1998). *Trust in domestic political institutions* is operationalized using three survey items: “Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 1) ...[country]’s parliament? 2) ...the legal system? 3) ...political

parties?“ on a scale from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust). These three items were added up and then divided by three, creating an index of trust in domestic political institutions with the same scale as original variables and Cronbach’s alpha of 0,855. *Satisfaction with democracy* is asked by an item “And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?“ on a scale from 0 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied). Specific domestic support is operationalized using *satisfaction with national government*. This is asked by an item “Now thinking about the [country] government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?“ on a scale from 0 (extremely satisfied) to 10 (extremely dissatisfied).

*Placement on the left-right scale* is asked by survey item “In politics people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?“. Since the hypothesised relationship is curvilinear, the quadratic term of the position on the left-right scale will go into the analysis as well.

Third, there are cultural factors. The theory is built on a notion of exclusive national identity, which used to be mostly operationalized with a well-known Eurobarometer survey item that asks how respondent sees herself with respect to her nationality and Europeanness, for example whether she sees herself as Czech only, or Czech and European, or European only. Unfortunately, the last time this question appeared in a Eurobarometer survey was in 2018, because since 2010 Eurobarometer started to issue a new trend question, asking about feeling as a citizen of EU. This new item is also used for operationalization of exclusive European and national identity, with the national identity being considered implicit. However, European Social Survey asks two questions since 2016 concerning the attachment to a nation and to Europe. Even though these two questions do not allow to assess the exclusivity of these two identities (at least not directly), they still provide more information about both of the identities explicitly, and also about their respective strength. It is because attachment to the two polities measures the also the affective dimension of social identification based on the intensity of emotional identification, apart from only the cognitive dimension of identification based simply on recognition of belonging to a certain group (Citrin, Wong, Duff 2001). This is the reason why I preferred ESS data to those of Eurobarometer for my analysis. Therefore, *national identity* is operationalized using item “How emotionally attached do you feel to [country]?

Please choose a number from 0 to 10, where 0 means not at all emotionally attached and 10 means very emotionally attached.“ And *European identity* is operationalized using item “And how emotionally attached do you feel to Europe?” measured on the same scale.

*Immigration attitudes* are operationalized using three items, that combine different aspects of immigration: 1) “Would you say it is generally bad or good for country’s economy that people come to live here from other countries?“ 2) „Would you say that country’s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?“ 3) “Is country made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?“, all of them on a scale from 0 to 10. These three items were added up and then divided by three, creating an index of immigration attitudes with a scale from 0 (negative) to 10 (positive) and Cronbach’s alpha of 0,867. As for control variables, *age* is computed from the year of birth, and *gender* is a binary variable with vales recoded into 1 for male and 0 for female.

The model is estimated with ordinary least squares (OLS) regression in two statistical packages, IBM SPSS and Stata, since there are some functions useful for the analysis that are not included in SPSS, but they are in Stata, and vice versa. Rounded up to three decimal places, both packages estimate the same model parameters. Once I have constructed the model, I have also performed regression diagnostics, specifically checking several assumptions for using OLS regression. The outcome variable is measured on an eleven-point scale which makes it technically an ordered variable, although it can be safely treated as an interval variable. This applies also to most of the predictors. All predictors are either continuous (or can be treated as such), or dichotomous variables. There are no outliers – Cook’s distance value is not greater than 1 for any case, meaning no extreme cases influence the model parameters. There is no perfect multicollinearity – variance inflation factor (VIF) values are no greater than 2,06 and the complementary statistic, tolerance, does not fall below 0,48, meaning predictors are not too highly correlated. Residuals are normally distributed. Unfortunately, there is heteroskedasticity in our data – Breusch-Pagan test results in rejecting the null hypothesis which assumes the variance of the residuals is constant. The consequence is that OLS estimators are no longer best linear unbiased estimators. One way of correcting this would be to use generalized least squares instead of ordinary least squares as a method for parameter estimation. However, I will not choose this solution. It is still possible to assess the significance and

relative strength of the parameters estimated by OLS. Nevertheless, I am reporting robust standard errors, so that also the standard errors are unbiased. Generally, the differences between the two models are very small and do not affect the interpretation of results in any way.

## 4 Results

Table 1 presents results of the regression analysis of relationship between the support for European integration and economic, cultural, and political factors. First, we will evaluate which of the hypothesised factors are related to the support for European integration by looking at the significance of estimated coefficients and the direction of their relationship with the dependent variable.

Table 1. Linear regression model of diffuse support for European integration

Variable	b	Robust SE	Beta
Level of education	-0,034	0,041	-0,018
Skill level of occupation	-0,002	0,129	0,000
National economy evaluation	-0,075*	0,035	-0,060
Personal finances evaluation	0,081***	0,021	0,079
Trust in domestic institutions	0,279***	0,033	0,225
Satisfaction with democracy	0,160***	0,034	0,129
Satisfaction with government	-0,035	0,031	-0,031
Left-right placement	-0,034	0,106	-0,025
Left-right placement <sup>2</sup>	0,010	0,009	0,087
Attachment to nation	-0,205***	0,030	-0,137
Attachment to Europe	0,159***	0,029	0,132
Immigration attitudes	0,419***	0,030	0,336
Gender	-0,053	0,107	-0,009
Age	-0,008**	0,003	-0,050
Constant	2,053	0,471	

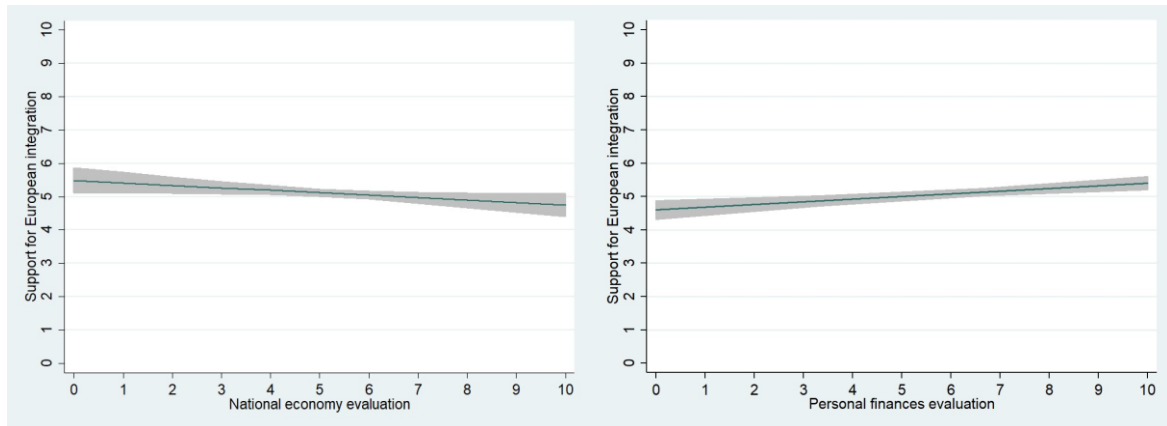
Note. Source: ESS 2020, Round 10. N = 1891. R<sup>2</sup> = 0,371.

Significance indicated by asterisks: \* p <0,05; \*\* p <0,01; \*\*\* p <0,001.

We begin by looking at the economic factors. We can see that when it comes to the level of education and the skill level of occupation, neither coefficient is statistically significant. Therefore, we reject H1 (*level of human capital will have a positive relationship with support for European integration*). These results are surprising, since education is being reported as a stable predictor of attitudes towards European integration over time across the EU, with the expectation that higher educated citizens are more supportive of the European integration, which applies also to certain occupations such as managerial or professional positions. I have also checked whether only certain categories of education might have been related to the support for European integration by recreating the model where education was entered not as continuous variable, as is presented in Table 1, but rather as categorical variable. The results were the same, with no particular educational category predicting the support for European integration in the Czech Republic.

In the case of evaluation of national economy and evaluation of personal financial situation, both estimated coefficients are statistically significant. However, we find only partial support for H2 (*subjective evaluations of economic conditions will have a positive relationship with support for European integration*) because while evaluation of personal financial situation is positive, the evaluation of national economy has a negative relationship (Figure 1). That indicates the opposite of what we expect in the second hypothesis, meaning that the more dissatisfied are Czech citizens with the present state of national economy, the more supportive they are of European integration. When looking at the evaluation of national economy, we should take into account possible period effects, considering that the survey took place in the middle of the pandemic which caused most EU countries including Czech Republic to experience economic hardship. Therefore, I replicated our model on data from different time point, specifically ESS Round 9 from 2018, to perform sort of a robustness check and to see whether this relationship could be a part of an ongoing trend. The relationship for evaluation of national economy before the pandemic is again significant and negative, which indicates that our results are not a deviation (Appendix A).

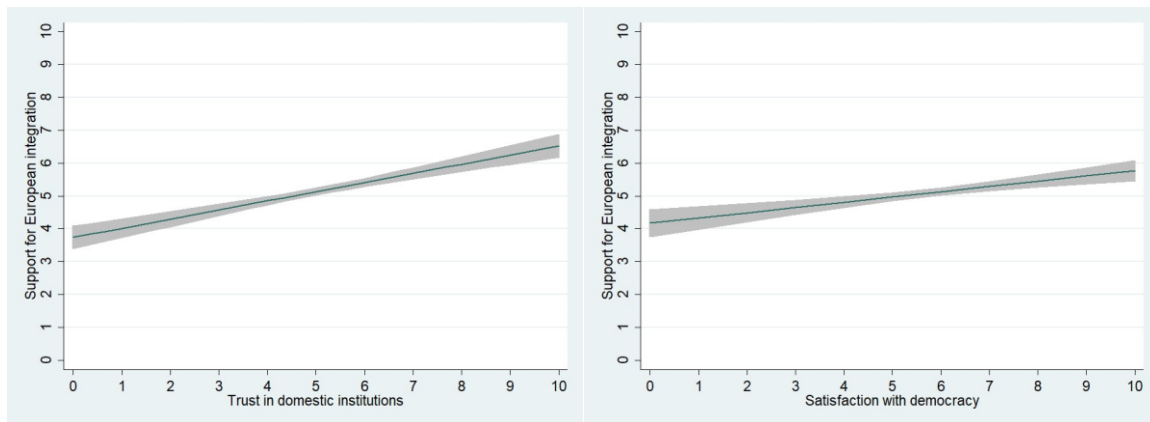
Figure 1. Marginal effects of evaluation of national economy and personal financial situation on support for European integration



Then we have the political factors. Both relationships for trust in domestic institutions and satisfaction with democracy are positive (Figure 2) and statistically significant, which is in line with the third hypothesis. Nevertheless, the relationship for the satisfaction with government is not significant which was not expected, so we only partially fail to reject H3 (*diffuse and specific support for domestic politics will have a positive relationship with support for European integration*). It means that the more Czech citizens trust national political institutions and the more satisfied they are with democracy in the country, the more supportive they are of European integration.

As for the position on the left-right scale, both the linear and quadratic term are not statistically significant, and therefore we reject the whole of H4 (*placement on the left-right scale will have a curvilinear relationship with support for European integration with citizens on the far-left and far-right being the least supportive of the European integration*). We do not find any relationship between left-right ideology and support for European integration in our model for the Czech Republic.

Figure 2. Marginal effects of trust in domestic political institutions and satisfaction with democracy on support for European integration



Then we have the cultural factors. Here, the estimates for national identity are significant and negative and for European identity they are significant and positive (Figure 3). For attitudes towards immigration, estimates are significant and positive (Figure 4). Therefore, we fail to reject all remaining hypotheses, H5 (*national identity will have a negative relationship with support for European integration*), H6 (*European identity will have a positive relationship with support for European integration*), and H7 (*immigration attitudes will have a negative relationship with support for European integration*). It means that those Czech citizens that are more supportive of the European integration are also those who are less attached to their nation, more attached to Europe and are more positive towards immigration. Out of the three lines of explanation, only the cultural factors are fully consistent with theory and recent research.

Lastly, as for our control variables, gender is not statistically significant. while age has a significant negative relationship with the support for European integration (Figure 4). The results suggest that the younger Czech citizens are, the more they are supportive of European integration, which is a standard result for this control variable.



Figure 3. Marginal effects of national and European identity on support for European integration

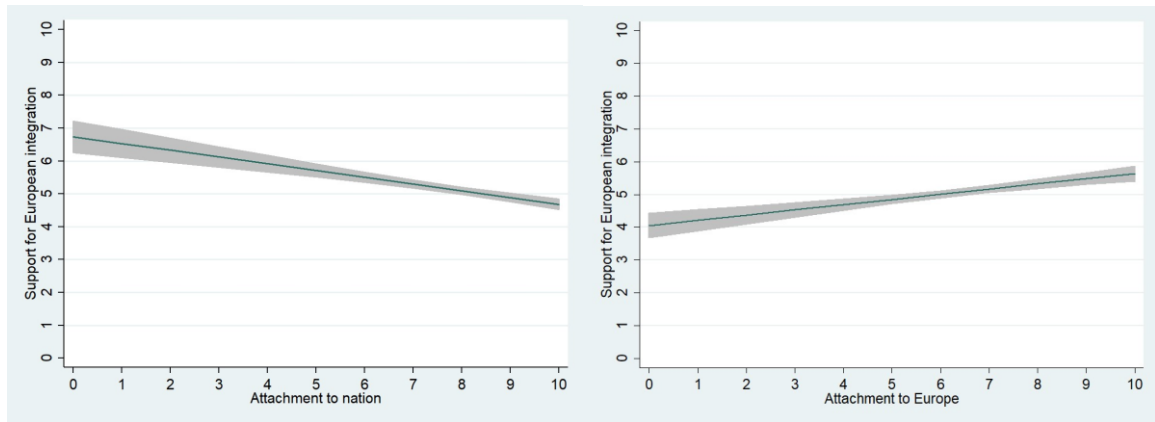
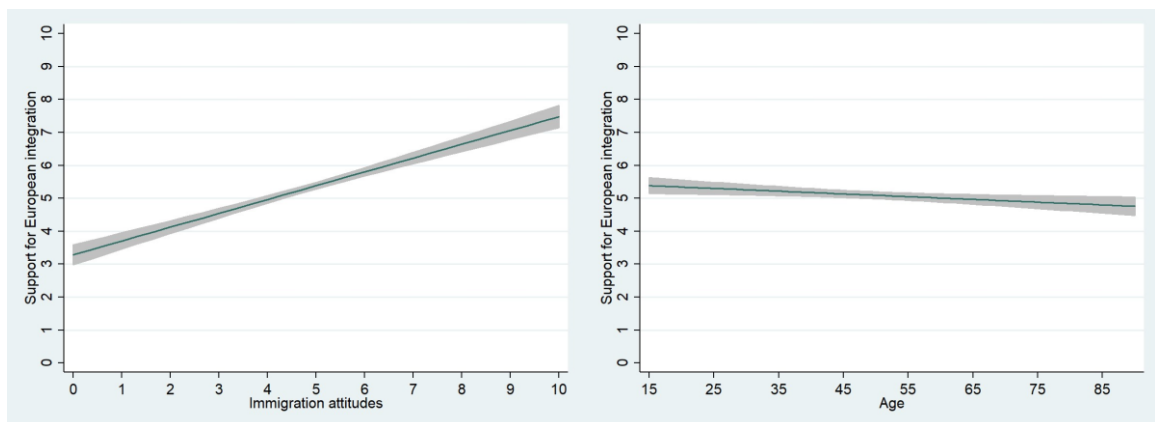


Figure 4. Marginal effects of immigration attitudes and age on support for European integration



We will also briefly assess how big of an impact these factors have on the dependent variable compared to each other. For this purpose, we will be looking at standardized betas, although in our model we would arrive at the same conclusions assessing only unstandardized coefficients as well. We will also focus only on those variables that are in this analysis statistically significant. The strongest predictor in our model by far are the immigration attitudes (0,336), followed by the trust in domestic institutions (0,225). Then we have a few predictors of a similar strength, which are national identity (-0,137),

European identity (0,132), and satisfaction with democracy (0,129). The least strong predictors are evaluation of personal finances (0,079) and evaluation of national economy (-0,060), followed by our control variable age (-0,050). We can see that for the support of European integration, the most explanatory power is held by the cultural factors, partially also the political factors and in a comparatively limited extent the economic factors.

## **5 Discussion**

### **Economic factors**

The case of education is surprising even more so that it is possible to theorize its effect in multiple ways, not just directly as part of the human capital that is supposed to help the individual benefit from integration through access to labour and capital markets. The effect of education can be also assumed indirectly, following that higher education is positively related to higher political awareness and sophistication, or also because higher education is negatively related to cultural values such as ethnic exclusionism, all of which usually help to predict support for European integration (Hakhverdian et al. 2013). Nevertheless, the missing effect of education in combination with missing effect of occupation suggest that support for European integration in our model is likely not conditional on cost-benefit analysis in the sense that individuals would assess their personal chances to profit from strengthening of the European integration.

Another puzzle is presented by the evaluation of the national economy, as the relationship goes in the opposite direction than what is suggested in past research. It has been stated that citizens use proxies from national level to form their attitudes towards European integration. The more popular and perhaps more commonly found relationship is that satisfaction with domestic situation, both economic and political, translates into support for European integration (e. g. Gabel 1998). In this case, European level is seen as sort of an extension of the domestic level. However, there are other studies which report that in some countries a different mechanism might be at play. The supranational level can otherwise be seen as a counterpart to the national level, and negative evaluation of national political and economic performance can lead to more support for European integration, meaning that support can be seen as a sort of a symbolic protest towards domestic situation (Kritzinger 2003) and that the transfer of power from nation to Europe

that follows from further integration is seen as an opportunity for improvement rather than a threat to sovereignty (Sanchez-Cuenca 2000). While we cannot provide support for these claims on the political level, as evaluation of national government is not significant in our model, but the significant negative relationship between evaluation of national economy and support for European integration suggests that these claims might apply for the Czech Republic on the economic level.

We might also want to know why Czech Republic falls under this alternative explanation. A possible interpretation could be that one difference between Czech Republic and the majority of other EU countries in terms of national economy is that Czech Republic has not yet adopted euro as its national currency. Some differences were previously reported between Eurozone member and non-member states in economic issues, specifically that members are more supportive of the euro and remained supportive even after the Eurozone crisis, since they perceive the benefits of economic cooperation more strongly (Hobolt, Wrátil 2015). Therefore, the Eurozone membership might be associated with the relationship of support for European integration and evaluation of national economy due to the fact that economic situation of Eurozone members is perceived as more tightly joined with the whole EU economy, at least compared to countries that are non-members. Then, in member countries, positive evaluation of national economy translates into support for European integration. One way to gather more support for this ad-hoc hypothesis could be through comparison. I chose to compare Czech Republic with Slovakia, since it is a country that has similar economic conditions, but also differs in using euro as a national currency. I replicated our model on data from Slovakia ESS Round 10 from 2020, same as our original model. The relationship of support towards European integration and evaluation of national economy is also significant, but positive (Appendix B), which supports the claim that there are differences in Eurozone members and non-members in terms of economic evaluations. Therefore, one possible explanation for the result that those Czech citizens that wish for further European integration also evaluate national economy more negatively could be that these citizens are more aware of the benefits that economic interdependence brings and see the postponing of adoption of euro as a missed opportunity, which plays a part in their negative evaluation of national economy. These claims deserve further attention in future research which should include other Eurozone non-member countries as well.

## **Political factors**

Diffuse domestic support being significant for predicting support for European integration, while specific domestic support not, is not an entirely surprising result, as it is in line with some previous research (Anderson 1998). However, more recent research (Armingeon, Ceka 2014; Ares, Ceka and Kriesi 2017) with analyses based on all EU countries indicated that not only diffuse domestic support, but also specific domestic support should also be relevant for diffuse support towards European integration, which is not confirmed by our model for the Czech Republic. We might want to look closer at the methodology of the studies, as it appears that there is not a consensus in operationalization of some of the central concepts which results in the incoherence of the results. The recent studies use as their dependent variable trust in European Parliament, which serves as a measure of diffuse support. But other studies (van Elsas, Hakhverdian, van der Brug 2016) use the same variable as a measure for specific support, as European Parliament and the attitude towards it reflects more the practice of European integration, rather than its ideas, which is the distinction between diffuse and specific dimension of the attitude towards European integration made by Kopecký and Mudde (2002). Also, analysis performed by Boomgarden et al. (2011) suggests that trust in European Parliament reflects utilitarian considerations of the EU performance. Based on this reasoning, we can say that our results do not differ from previous studies with more similar operationalization. Our results indicate that diffuse support for domestic political institutions in the Czech Republic translates strongly into diffuse support for European integration, but this mechanism does not apply to specific support for domestic political institutions. This also highlights that there is considerable heterogeneity in research methodology which means that one should pay special attention to each study's methodological decisions to avoid inaccurate interpretations of the results.

The insignificance of the self-placement on the left-right scale came also as a surprise. A possible objection against these findings could be methodological. Studies suggest that the self-placement on the left-right scale might not be the best way to measure political ideology, at least not in Central and Eastern European countries (Caprara et al. 2017), as the understanding of the meaning of these political concepts is not universal among respondents (Bauer et al. 2017). This can be seen as a limitation to our analysis. One way

to approach this differently would be to examine the relationship between support for European integration and specific values that are behind the ideological positions, accounting for both the economic and cultural dimension of the concepts. Another way would be to focus on the relationship between support for European integration and citizens' voting behaviour with analysis of the national political party system. Such alternative approaches deserve further attention in their own separate analyses. Nevertheless, the self-placement scale is still a widely used instrument for this type of research (e. g. Armingeon, Ceka 2014; van Elsas, Hakhverdian, van der Brug 2016).

This also brings us to an important distinction that needs to be acknowledged while interpreting the relationship between the left-right ideology and attitude towards European integration. We need to distinguish that we can assess this relationship on the level of citizen attitudes and on the level of political parties. There is plenty of research pointing to the fact that populist and radical parties on left and right embrace Eurosceptic sentiments (de Vries, Edwards 2009; Pirro, Taggart, Kessel 2018). This is followed by research asking whether the relationship of the left-right cleavage and support for European integration of the political parties is mirrored on the citizen level (e. g. van Elsas, van der Brug 2015). While it often is the case, it does not always have to be. A possible mechanism behind this is suggested by political psychology research. Capelos and Katsanidou (2018) show that people that are anti-EU integration often hold reactionary political orientation, characterized by resentment, perceived injustice and nostalgic hope for return to the past, which is in this case triggered by the fear of European integration and its consequences. This orientation is implicitly ideologically neither left nor right, but it is often exploited by populist and radical left and right political parties that promise the restoration of social order, hence the link between left-right ideological position and Euroscepticism. This could be a possible explanation for why left-right ideology in our model does not predict support for the European integration, as it might come from sentiments that cannot be simply attributed to the left-right ideology.

## **Cultural factors**

Both national and European identity are relatively strongly associated with support for European integration. As is expected, stronger attachment to Europe means also support for European integration. The national identity in our model is not measured in terms of

exclusivity and inclusivity, as is suggested in the theory, which is sort of a limitation of this study. But even though we do not focus only on those with exclusive national identities, generally those with strong attachment to the nation are less supportive of the European integration. However, we might still be interested in how much exclusive or inclusive the citizens are, even though we do not use it for the estimations in our model. Different identity combinations (Appendix C) show that most citizens have at least to some degree inclusive identities, and by far the most frequent category of 52,5 % are those who feel strongly attached to the nation as well as to Europe. It seems that for most people, having multiple identities is not problematic, however the mechanism of their interaction, for example whether these identities are perceived separately or rather interconnectedly, remains a query for following research.

The strong relationship of immigration attitudes and attitudes towards European integration is to be expected, as they are sometimes even considered to be twin issues. Both these issues are being increasingly politicised in the recent decades especially around the times of crises (Hutter, Kriesi 2020; Hutter, Kriesi 2022). Specifically, the refugee crisis provoked a salient debate about EU-wide immigration policies, which were heavily criticised mainly by integration opponents as incoherent and ineffective. However, we should be reminded that the politicization of these issues has been under way for some time before the crises, which did not directly trigger the politicization, only amplified it. Additionally, the refugee crisis did not generally increase neither anti-immigration attitudes nor Euroscepticism, and also did not strengthen the link between the two (Stockemer 2020). But the relationship that exists between European integration and immigration is more complex to mark the issues off simply as twins. For example, McDonnell and Werner (2019) provide evidence from Western Europe which indicates that when it comes to support for radical right parties, which commonly embrace both anti-immigration and Euroscepticism, the reception of the issues from their voters is different. The standpoint of radical right parties is in alignment with their voters concerning the issue of immigration, but the voters are less negative towards European integration and perceive it as less important topic than is presented by the parties. Nevertheless, immigration attitudes and attitudes towards European integration remain closely connected, as is suggested by a long line of theory, and also by our model.

## **The debate between economic and cultural explanations**

It appears from the relative strength of all three cultural factors that the European integration is for the Czech Republic predominantly a cultural issue. However, based on our results we cannot conclude with certainty that economic factors have no further influence on the public attitudes, since there can be different mechanisms at play. There is growing research (de Vreese, Boomgarden, Semetko 2008; Garry, Tilley 2009; Verhaegen, Hooghe, Quintelier 2014) that indicates that the cultural factors themselves can be dependent on the economic conditions, therefore that the effect of economic factors is mediated or at least moderated through the cultural ones. I have checked these claims by adding interactions of evaluation of national economy and all three cultural factors, national identity, European identity and immigration attitudes, in our original model (Appendix D). The evaluation of national economy will serve here as a proxy for the real economic situation, which is often measured in multi-level models by macroeconomic indicators such as GDP or unemployment as country-level variables. I unfortunately cannot employ such variables in our model that is based on individual-level data, which is a possible limitation of our analysis. Nevertheless, out of the three cultural factors, only the interaction of European identity and evaluation of national economy is statistically significant. It is also negative, meaning that those who support European integration evaluate national economy more negatively when they have stronger European identity. Overall, we can find some support for the claims that economic factors have both direct and indirect effects on the support for European integration, but in comparison with the cultural factors only to a limited extent.

## **6 Conclusion**

Research on European integration commonly mentions three lines of explanation that help to predict public attitudes towards European integration. In this thesis, we have created a model with several economic, political and cultural factors following from the different European integration theories. We found that factors from all three lines of explanation hold some explanatory power.

First, we had economic factors. Our model for the Czech Republic based on European Social Survey data from 2020 shows that the more positively Czech citizens evaluate their

household's financial situation, the more supportive of European integration they are, but it is the opposite relationships for evaluation of nation's economic situation. On the other hand, one's educational or occupational level do not help to predict attitudes towards European integration. The economic explanation lies in the premise that citizens base their attitudes towards European integration on a cost-benefit analysis, evaluating whether they or their country might profit from further integration. Despite this, both measures of human capital are not significant in our data. But since the support is associated with feelings of financial security, this can be interpreted as those who feel financially stable are not as afraid of the possible challenges that integration brings. However, theory also expects that the same should apply not only to personal situation, but also to a whole country, which is not the case for the Czech Republic. Our suggested explanation for this deviation is based on the argument that European governance in this case is not seen as an extension, but rather as a counterpart to domestic level affairs. Therefore, those who are unsatisfied with national performance are more in favour of the supranational institutions. What the interpretations of personal and national evaluations have in common is that in both cases, further integration is not seen as a threat to one's position, but as an opportunity to improvement. This leads to support, which is in line with the utilitarian argument. Although, these economic factors hold the least amount of explanatory power.

Second, we had political factors. The results of our model are that the more Czech citizens trust in domestic political institutions and the more satisfied they are with nation's democracy, the more they are supportive of European integration. According to the theory, the same should apply to satisfaction with national government, but this indicator is not significant in our model. Therefore, it is the diffuse support, which is not dependent on current affairs, and not specific support, which is conditional on the performance of current political authorities, that helps to predict attitudes towards European integration in the Czech Republic. This does not contradict the main premise of political explanation, which is that attitudes towards European integration begin on the national level and then spill over on the European level, as in this case it only applies to one dimension of political support. Next expectation was that those with more radical ideological positions, both on the left and on the right side of the political spectrum, should be also less supportive of European integration, although for different reasons. However, this is not supported by our model for the Czech Republic. One offered interpretation is based on the



argument that opposition towards European integration might not be in its nature left or right, but rather reactionary. Nevertheless, the other political factors still have considerable explanatory power.

Last, we had the cultural factors. We can see from our model that generally those with weaker national identity and stronger European identity are more supportive of the European integration. Additionally, those with positive attitudes towards immigration are also more supportive of the European integration. The significance of both identity factors and immigration is in line with the cultural explanation, which is that attitudes towards European integration have their roots in collective identities. The argument is that some citizens exclusively identify with their nation, which prevents them from identifying with some other polity, and possibly makes them hostile to those who do not belong into the same group. This consequently translates into opposition towards European integration. But some citizens can also identify with Europe, which results in support for European integration. In sum, cultural factors have the greatest explanatory power, which is in line with the postfunctionalist theory. Overall, support for European integration according to our analysis is in the Czech Republic associated more strongly with more stable factors such as immigration attitudes, identities and diffuse domestic support, and the factors that tend to fluctuate such as economic evaluations or specific domestic support have limited or no association.

This research of the public attitudes towards European integration in the Czech Republic does not allow for generalization to other European countries. However, it still contributes to the body of research on the attitudes towards European integration. Partly, it provides further corroboration of the established theories and explanations. But in those aspects where it diverges from them, it points to possible regional trends which might get lost in the more generalizing types of studies. In our case it is some possible differences in Eurozone members and non-members that could be potentially applicable also to other countries from the same region, although these claims should be further explored in following research. More suggestions for following research stem from this study's limitations, namely substituting self-placement scale for more robust instrument for measuring one's ideology, or exploring mechanisms behind the interplay of citizens' collective identities, or introducing macroeconomic measures of national economy.

## Závěr

Výzkum evropské integrace obvykle zmiňuje tři linie vysvětlení, které pomáhají předpovídat postoje veřejnosti vůči evropské integraci. V této práci jsme vytvořili model zahrnující ekonomické, politické a kulturní faktory, které vyplývají z různých teorií evropské integrace. Zjistili jsme, že faktory ze všech tří linií mají vysvětlující sílu. Nejprve jsme se zabývali ekonomickými faktory. Náš model pro Českou republiku postavený na datech European Social Survey z roku 2020 ukazuje, že čím pozitivněji čeští občané hodnotí finanční situaci svojí domácnosti, tím více podporují evropskou integraci. V případě hodnocení národní ekonomické situace je ale vztah opačný. Na druhou stranu, výše vzdělání a povolání předpovídat postoje vůči evropské integraci nepomáhají. Ekonomické vysvětlení spočívá na předpokladu, že občané staví svoje postoje vůči evropské integraci na základě analýzy zisků a ztrát, kdy hodnotí, zda by oni nebo jejich země mohli profitovat z další integrace. Toto není naším modelem zcela podepřeno, jelikož oba indikátory lidského kapitálu nejsou v našich datech významné. Jelikož je ale podpora spojována s pocitem finančního zabezpečení, může to být interpretováno tak, že ti, kteří cítí finanční stabilitu, nemají z potenciálních problémů plynoucích z integrace obavy. Nicméně teorie předpokládá, že to stejné by nemělo platit pouze pro osobní situaci, ale také pro celou zemi, což není případ České republiky. Námi nabízené vysvětlení této odchylky je založeno na argumentu, že evropské vládnutí není vidělo jako rozšíření, ale jako protiklad domácích záležitostí. Proto jsou ti, kteří jsou nespokojeni s výkonem národních institucí, také více nakloněni nadnárodním institucím. Interpretace osobních a národních hodnocení mají společné to, že další integrace není chápána jako ohrožení, ale jako příležitost ke zlepšení dané pozice, což vede k podpoře a je v souladu s utilitárním argumentem. Ekonomické faktory i přesto mají nejmenší vysvětlující sílu.

Poté jsme se zabývali politickými faktory. Výsledky našeho modelu ukazují, že čím více čeští občané důvěřují domácím politickým institucím a čím více jsou spokojeni s fungováním národní demokracie, tím více podporují evropskou integraci. Podle teorie by mělo to stejné platit i pro spokojenost s národní vládou, avšak tento indikátor není v našem modelu významný. Je to tedy difuzní podpora, nezávislejší na měnících se aktuálních událostech, a ne specifická podpora, podmíněná výkonem současných politických autorit, která pomáhá předpovídat postoje vůči evropské integraci v České

republice. To ovšem neodporuje hlavní premise politického vysvětlení, tedy že postoje vůči evropské integraci začínají na národní úrovni a přelévají se na úroveň evropskou, pouze to platí jen pro určitou dimenzi politické podpory. Dalším očekáváním bylo, že ti, kteří zastávají radikálnější ideologické pozice na levé i pravé straně politického spektra, by měli podporovat evropskou integraci méně, i když z rozdílných důvodů. Pro toto ale v našem modelu nenacházíme oporu. Nabízená interpretace je postavena na argumentu, že opozice vůči evropské integraci nemusí být ze své podstaty pravicová nebo levicová, ale spíše reakcionářská. I přes to mají jiné politické faktory značnou vysvětlující sílu.

Nakonec jsme se zabývali kulturními faktory. Z našeho modelu můžeme vidět že obecně ti s nižší mírou národní identity a silnější evropskou identitou více podporují evropskou integraci. Dále ti, kteří mají pozitivní postoje k imigraci, více podporují evropskou integraci. Významnost faktorů obou identit a imigrace je v souladu s kulturním vysvětlením, což je že postoje k evropské integraci mají kořeny v kolektivních identitách. Argument spočívá v tom, že někteří občané se identifikují výlučně se svým národem, což jim zabraňuje identifikovat se s nějakým dalším společenstvím, a také to způsobuje nepřátelství vůči těm, kteří nepatří do stejné skupiny, což se projevuje jako opozice vůči evropské integraci. Avšak někteří občané se identifikují také s Evropou, což vyúsťuje v podporu evropské integraci. Kulturní faktory mají největší vysvětlující sílu, což je v souladu s postfunkcionalistickou teorií. Podpora evropské integrace v České republice je podle naší analýzy celkově více spojena se stabilními faktory jako jsou imigrační postoje, identity a difuzní domácí podpora, a faktory, které se často mění, jako ekonomické hodnocení a specifická domácí podpora mají omezené nebo žádné spojení.

Tento výzkum veřejných postojů k evropské integraci v České republice neumožňuje zobecnění na další evropské státy, i přesto ale přispívá k řadě výzkumů postojů k evropské integraci. Částečně poskytuje další podporu zavedeným teoriím. A v těch aspektech, kde se o nich liší, ukazuje například na možné regionální rozdíly, které by mohly být platné i pro jiné státy – v tomto případě státy v Eurozóně a mimo ni – které se jinak mohou ztrácet ve více zobecňujících typech studií. Tato tvrzení stojí za to prozkoumat v navazujícím výzkumu. Další návrhy pro navazující výzkum vyplývají z limitací této studie, konkrétně nahrazení sebezařazovací škály jiným robustnějším nástrojem na měření ideologie, nebo prozkoumání mechanismů za propojováním kolektivních identit, nebo zapojení makroekonomických indikátorů národní ekonomiky.

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## **Thesis project**

### **Projekt diplomové práce**

Jméno a příjmení studujícího: Valérie Chytrá

Studijní program: Aplikovaný výzkum a jeho metodologie

Předpokládaný název práce: Postoje vůči evropské integraci v České republice

Předpokládaný název práce v angličtině: Attitudes towards the European integration in the Czech Republic

Klíčová slova: evropská integrace, politické postoje, veřejné mínění

Klíčová slova v angličtině: European integration, political attitudes, public opinion

Vedoucí práce: prof. doc. PhDr. Ondřej Císař, Ph.D.

#### **Námět práce**

The topic of European integration is an important topic in social sciences, and for sociology is becoming relevant ever more. The project of European integration formally culminated by the Maastricht Treaty that established the European Union (EU) in the nineties of the last century. The integration process still continues and strengthens the mutual economic, political, social and cultural connection of most of the European continent. From its beginning after the Second World War, its main purpose was to ensure political stability and economic prosperity of its members, and the project was originally handled mainly by the political elites (Vobruba 2002). But especially after the creation of EU, although the roots can be found even earlier, the topic of European integration is becoming increasingly politicised. It means that the political elites can no longer rely on “permissive consensus” of the citizens (Hooghe, Marks 2009). It is becoming a salient issue for various political actors; citizens express their public opinion both by support and by protest, and political parties can utilize the topic for the mobilization of their voters (Grande, Hutter 2016). Consequently, the European integration became a new issue with the power to structure political conflict, similarly to classical dimensions of socioeconomic and sociocultural left and right (Bakker, Jolly, Polk 2012). Although the EU, or more precisely the preceding projects of European integration, were primarily political and economic in nature, the EU is intensifying its focus on being also a community of shared values such as freedom, democracy, tolerance or equality, which are reflected in the values of the citizens of the member states, although to a various degree (Akaliyski, Welzel, Hien 2022).

When it comes to the research of this topic, the focus is usually on the positions of political parties, but increasing attention is given to the citizen attitudes towards European integration, as the European integration project is increasingly influenced by the public support (Hobolt, de Vries 2016). There is growing research on the factors influencing attitudes towards European integration and also on its connection towards other political attitudes and values. One of the commonly examined relationships is to left-right ideology. It has been argued that we can see a pattern where the support for EU is linked with the economic left and liberal attitudes, and Euroscepticism with the economic right and

conservative attitudes. However, there are several specifics to this generalization. It has been pointed out that in relation to the left-right scale, the support for EU generally declines on both ends of the political spectrum, with more extremist parties and voters having more distrustful and Eurosceptic attitudes than those closer to the centre (Kutiyski, Krouwel, van Prooijen 2021), but other evidence suggests that the inverted-U-shaped support is not straightforward and varies across countries (Toshkov, Krouwel 2022). According to other researchers, the relationship also changes over time, where for the Western countries, the Euroscepticism began to be related with the political right only after the Maastricht Treaty, and before that the right was associated with the support for European integration (van Elsas and van der Brug 2015). It was distinguished that this relationship is valid mostly for North-western European countries, but in the Southern Europe, the support for European integration is associated more with the economic right, and in the case of Central and Eastern European countries, the attitudes toward European integration have similar pattern as in North-western Europe, but the opposite pole to the support for European integration has different connotations to it (Hutter, Kriesi 2019). Some researchers also present evidence that more useful than left-right scale are transnational-nationalist attitudes, that help to predict voting in European parliament elections better than both economic and cultural left and right (Jackson, Jolly 2021). This evidence further confirms that the attitudes towards European integration are becoming an issue in itself, not easily inserted into existing brackets, and it is meaningful to explore them further. When it comes to operationalization of the attitudes towards European integration, it is possible to measure either the support for EU or Euroscepticism, which are often considered as the same phenomena, only oppositely oriented. However, some studies suggest that the attitudes towards EU are rather not a simple one-dimensional concept, but we can distinguish several dimensions which are reflected in the overall attitude, such as the affection or the identification with the EU, and also the evaluation of its performance, competencies, or benefits (Boomgarden et al. 2011). The aim of this thesis will be to describe and explore the attitudes towards European integration specifically in the Czech Republic and their development in the last three decades. It will seek to extend the body of sociological literature on the attitudes toward European integration, guided by previous research when constructing a model for the Czech Republic.

### **Předpokládané metody zpracování**

This analysis will utilize data concerned with topics related to EU, which are provided namely by the Eurobarometer survey. Eurobarometer gathers information about the state of public opinion and other political or social attitudes consistently over time and provides access to long-term data (Eurobarometer 2022). The analytical part of the thesis will be working with regression analysis, which is a type of analysis where is predicted the level of dependent variable – outcome, from the level of independent variable – predictor. We can distinguish several models within the regression analysis, for example linear models and logistic models, that are generally estimating parameters of the model based on the data. Linear models are modelling linear relationships using continuous variable as dependent and continuous or binary variables as independent. Logistic models are modelling probability of an event using categorical variable as dependent and continuous or binary variables as independent. There is a debate about the best way to operationalize the support for EU (Guinaudeau, Schnatterer 2019), which will be taken into account for the further analysis and the choice of the most suitable statistical elaboration.

## Etické souvislosti zvažovaného projektu

I am not aware of any ethical concerns for writing this work, as I will be using data by an expert institution that are freely available for academic purposes.

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## **List of Appendices**

Appendix A: Linear regression model of diffuse support for European integration in the Czech Republic 2018 (Table)

Appendix B: Linear regression model of diffuse support for European integration in Slovakia 2020 (Table)

Appendix C: Relative frequencies of national and European identity categories (Table)

Appendix D: Linear regression model of diffuse support for European integration in the Czech Republic 2020 with interactions (Table)

## Appendix A

Table: Linear regression model of diffuse support for European integration in the Czech Republic 2018

Variable	B	SE
Level of education	0,132**	0,041
Skill level of occupation	0,074	0,119
National economy evaluation	-0,065*	0,032
Personal finances evaluation	-0,047*	0,020
Trust in domestic institutions	0,210***	0,028
Satisfaction with democracy	0,112***	0,026
Satisfaction with government	-0,046	0,028
Left-right placement	-0,005	0,092
Left-right placement <sup>2</sup>	0,011	0,008
Attachment to nation	-0,168***	0,031
Attachment to Europe	0,193***	0,026
Immigration attitudes	0,497***	0,028
Gender	0,037	0,100
Age	-0,013***	0,003
Constant	1,675	0,424

Note. Source: ESS 2018, Round 9. N = 1848. R<sup>2</sup> = 0,340.

Significance indicated by asterisks: \* p < 0,05; \*\* p < 0,01; \*\*\* p < 0,001.

## Appendix B

Table: Linear regression model of diffuse support for European integration in Slovakia 2020

Variable	B	SE
Level of education	0,035	0,067
Skill level of occupation	0,013	0,201
National economy evaluation	0,130**	0,046
Personal finances evaluation	0,095**	0,034
Trust in domestic institutions	0,056	0,045
Satisfaction with democracy	0,184***	0,045
Satisfaction with government	0,034	0,044
Left-right placement	-0,034	0,101
Left-right placement <sup>2</sup>	0,010	0,009
Attachment to nation	-0,020	0,037
Attachment to Europe	0,178***	0,034
Immigration attitudes	0,297***	0,041
Gender	-0,105	0,159
Age	-0,011	0,005
Constant	0,720	0,586

Note. Source: ESS 2018, Round 9. N = 1011. R<sup>2</sup> = 0,348.

Significance indicated by asterisks: \* p < 0,05; \*\* p < 0,01; \*\*\* p < 0,001.

## Appendix C

Table: Relative frequencies of national and European identity categories

National identity	European identity		
	weak	moderate	strong
weak	1,8 %	1,1 %	0,5 %
moderate	2,2 %	9,2 %	4,6 %
strong	8,5 %	19,8 %	52,5 %

Note: 11-point scales recoded into 3 categories: weak (values 0-3), moderate (values 4-6), strong (values 7-10) attachment.



## Appendix D

Table: Linear regression model of diffuse support for European integration in the Czech Republic 2020 with interactions

Variable	B	SE
Level of education	-0,034	0,041
Skill level of occupation	0,012	0,127
National economy evaluation	0,080	0,116
Personal finances evaluation	0,078***	0,020
Trust in domestic institutions	0,278***	0,029
Satisfaction with democracy	0,158***	0,032
Satisfaction with government	-0,037	0,029
Left-right placement	-0,045	0,090
Left-right placement <sup>2</sup>	0,011	0,008
Attachment to nation	-0,169*	0,066
Attachment to Europe	0,264***	0,051
Immigration attitudes	0,353	0,056
Nat.economy* nat.attachment	-0,007	0,012
Nat.economy*Eur.attachment	-0,021*	0,009
Nat.economy*imm.attitudes	0,011	0,009
Gender	-0,059	0,106
Age	-0,009**	0,003
Constant	1,429	0,666

Note. Source: ESS 2020, Round 10. N = 1891. R<sup>2</sup> = 0,373.

Significance indicated by asterisks: \* p <0,05; \*\* p <0,01; \*\*\* p <0,001.

