



# Spotlight on...

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## Who Wants More? Attitudes Towards EU Enlargement in Time of Crisis

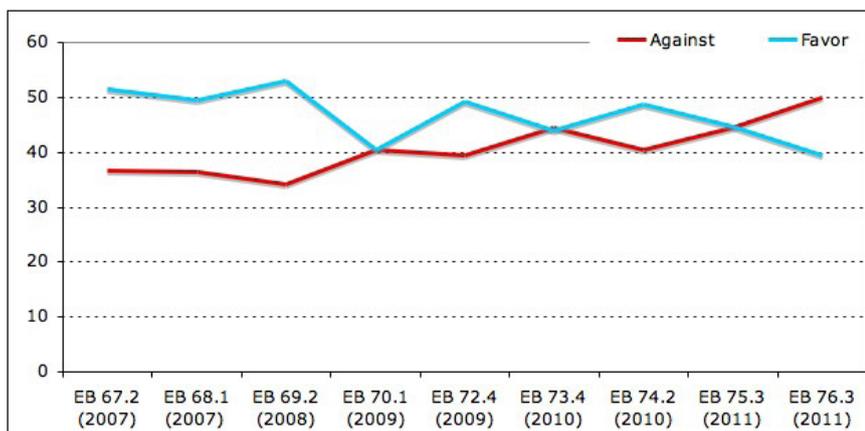
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### General attitudes towards enlargement 2007-2011

Opinions in favor/against “Further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years” reveal that Europeans have become, over the past five years, less favorable towards further enlargement. Until the end of 2008, around the 36% of people said they were against further EU enlargement. This percentage rises to 40% since 2009 with two peaks of almost 45% in May 2010 and 50% in November 2011. At the same time, since 2009, the percentage of people in favor of further enlargement dropped below 50% (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentages of people supporting/opposing enlargement 2007- 2011.

Source: authors own elaboration on EB data 2007-2011



The Observatory on Public Opinion, Political Elites and the Media focuses on the analysis of the attitudes and preferences of electorates, the media and elites.

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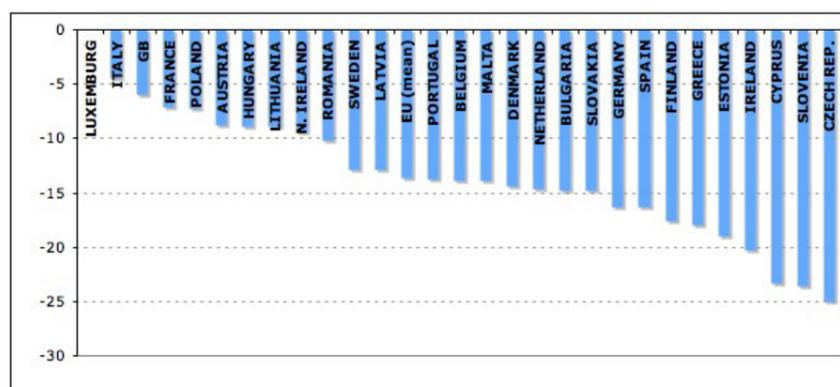
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Percentages by country show interesting variations. In May 2008, the (EU) average of people in favor of EU enlargement was 53%. Opinion in eleven countries<sup>1</sup> was below the mean level: between 26% (Austria) and 50% (Portugal). The remaining 16 countries<sup>2</sup> showed favorable attitudes towards

enlargement: between 53% (Denmark) and 74% (Slovenia). Most of them are East European countries (no country of the East has a percentage below the mean) and Southern European states (Cyprus, Malta, Spain, Greece).

**Figure 2. Difference in percentages of attitudes towards enlargement by country: 2011-2008**

Source: authors own elaboration on EB data 2008 and 2011.



At the end of 2011 (EB 76.3) this situation had slightly changed. First of all, the average of people in favor of EU enlargement dropped to 39%. Although there is a general trend of decrease in the percentage of people in favor of EU enlargement, Figure 2 shows this trend to have been especially intense in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Cyprus and Ireland (Figure 2 shows the amount of change in each country).

Generally speaking East European countries remain supportive of EU enlargement. At the same time, the great majority of these states show strong decreases in the percentages supporting enlargement, no matter the geographical origin: among the countries with the highest differences we may find Eastern and Southern European countries as well as Germany and the Netherlands. As a result when we look at the differences between the period before the economic crisis and during it, no clear geographical pattern could be detected.

### Attitudes towards specific “member candidates”<sup>3</sup>

Within the EB surveys observed above, there are some questions asking opinions about the opportunity to bring some specific countries<sup>4</sup> into the EU. Depending on the country indicated as potential candidate, the percentage of people in favor (or against) changes dramatically: Switzerland and Norway have a large consensus (almost 80% of Europeans want them in the EU) while other states’ memberships are supported only by 30% of respondents. Less popular states (Turkey, Albania and Kosovo) present different religion and cultural traditions. In between there are former Yugoslavian countries and Ukraine. This picture appears consistent in the two years observed (2008 and 2010): all the “candidates” during this period lose support, but their order remains very much the same (see Figure 3).

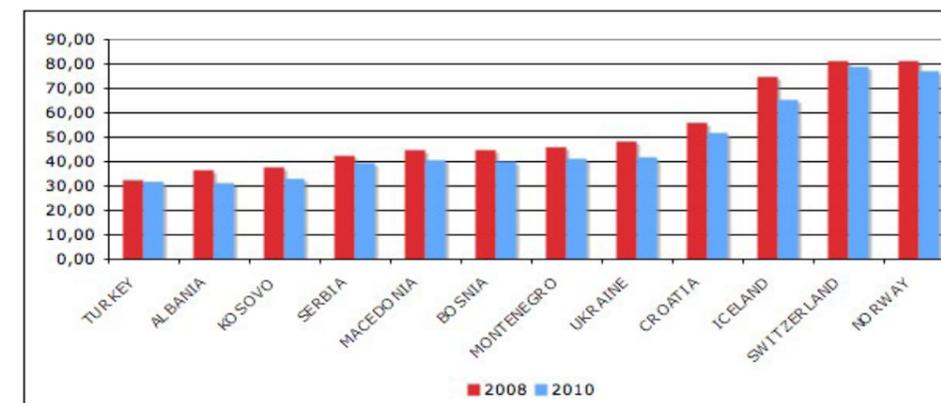
In the previous paragraph we observed that by using the EU mean as a point of reference we can distinguish, broadly speaking, between countries pro and anti enlargement. Have pro (or anti) enlargement countries different attitudes towards specific candidates?

We compared an indicator distinguishing pro-enlargement countries, with another variable rating people’s opinions towards each candidate. Three main findings emerged. First, pro-enlargement countries are more supportive than anti-enlargement countries towards all the candidates considered. Second, there is a big difference in terms of preferences between pro- and anti-enlargement countries. Pro-enlargement

1. Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Luxemburg, N. Ireland, Italy, Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal.  
 2. Denmark, Sweden, Latvia, Spain, Greece, Slovakia, Czech Rep., Estonia, Malta, Hungary, Cyprus, Romania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia.  
 3. Those countries are not necessarily formally candidate: they are the countries mentioned by EB questions.  
 4. The exact questions read as follow: “For each of the following countries and territories, would you be in favor or against it becoming part of the European Union in the future? Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Albania, Turkey, Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine, Macedonia and Iceland.

**Figure 3. Percentage of people supporting enlargement per country, 2008-2010**

Source: authors own elaboration on EB data 2008 and 2010



countries show more support for all the specific countries except Turkey, Albania, and Kosovo (2010). By contrast, anti-enlargement countries are in favor of only three of these countries (Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland) out of the twelve considered by the survey. Finally, there are differences between 2008 and 2010: percentages of people against each candidate increased in 2010 both for pro- and anti-enlargement countries. Kosovo and Albania joined Turkey in a group of “refused” countries (countries where the percentage of people against their admission is higher than the pro-membership percentage) even among pro-enlargement supporters; while percentages in favor even of the most highly-supported countries (Norway,

Switzerland and Iceland) decreased in 2010.

To sum up, there seems to be a trend of decline of support for enlargement in all the 27 EU member states. This decreasing trend coincides with the first effects of the economic crisis in 2008, as perceived by EU citizens. Figure 3, however, also suggests that the characteristics of the candidate country make a great deal of difference to the support for its membership. Particularly non-Christian countries - such as Turkey, Albania and Kosovo - gain the lowest levels of support. According to this finding, along with an influence of the economic crisis in support for enlargement, there could be “cultural/religious” reasons affecting support for enlargement.

### Economic versus cultural reasons for supporting EU enlargement

We tested the impact of economic and cultural reasons for supporting EU enlargement by using the more recent wave of Eurobarometer data (76.3). The analysis<sup>5</sup> tried to account for differences between those who want more members from those who are against enlargement<sup>6</sup>. Explanatory variables comprehend perceptions of the current economic situation in the respondents’ country<sup>7</sup> and an indicator of those who believe the EU to be a “cultural threat”<sup>8</sup>. Socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, education, social status) were included in the estimation as well as other control variables: interest in politics<sup>9</sup>, trust in the EU<sup>10</sup>, “European union means democracy” and Europe means a “stronger say in the world”<sup>11</sup>.

5. A binary logistic regression on a dummy (dependent) variable.  
 6. The exact question reads as follow: “What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it: Further enlargement of the EU to include other countries in future years”.  
 7. The exact question reads as follow: “How would you judge the current situation in each of the following? The situation of the (NATIONALITY) economy”.  
 8. The exact question reads as follow: “What does the European Union mean to you personally? Loss of our cultural identity”.  
 9. Political interest index results from three questions: When you get together with friends or relatives, would you say you discuss frequently, occasionally or never about...? 1) National political matters; 2) European political matters; Local political matters.  
 10. The exact question reads as follow: “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it: The European Union”.  
 11. The exact questions read as follow: “What does the European Union mean to you personally? Democracy; Stronger say in the world”. Also dummies for each country have been used as control variables.

The estimation yielded the following findings. First of all, age is negatively related to attitudes towards enlargement: older people are less likely to support enlargement, while more educated people are more likely to be supporters. Second, as expected, trust for the European Union increases acceptance of further enlargement: those trusting the EU are 15% more likely to support EU enlargement. Third, people thinking that the EU means “democracy” and a “stronger say in the world” are more likely to support enlargement. In those cases both the role of the EU as promoter of democracy and its “power” at the international level do not provide reasons to oppose further enlargement. By contrast, Europe as “cultural treat” had the opposite effect: people perceiving the EU as a threat to their cultural traditions are 11% less likely to support EU enlargement. Previous literature has convincingly shown that those citizens tend to oppose the European Project in general and the EU itself. Our interpretation is that, after the last enlargement to 27 member states, the effects of viewing the EU as a cultural threat are even stronger when it comes to further enlargement because such enlargements imply consideration of candidates with completely different cultural and religious backgrounds, such as Turkey. Finally, we also find evidence of the effects of people’s perception of the economic situation. Those who are concerned about the economic situation in their countries are 5% less likely to support further enlargement (see Table 1). Previous “Spotlight on...” have shown that the economic crisis increased the extent of pessimism regarding the state of the national economic situation in large parts of Europe. Here we also show that those sentiments appear to imply a defensive closure towards new member states. These effects are small compared to others we have reported in this document, but the increase in those other effects with the coming of the economic crisis strongly suggests an indirect effect of the economy on supportive attitudes towards enlargement by way of cultural attitudes.

**Table 1. Factors Determining the Probabilities of Supporting EU Enlargement**

Source: Our own elaboration on EB.

|   | Estimates            | Average marginal effect |
|---|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Female                                    | 0.069<br>(0.025)     | 0.00<br>(0.006)         |
| Education                                 | 0.069**<br>(0.025)   | 0.01**<br>(0.005)       |
| Age                                       | -0.213***<br>(0.016) | -0.04***<br>(0.003)     |
| Subjective social class                   | -0.002<br>(0.023)    | -0.00<br>(0.004)        |
| Political Interest                        | -0.012<br>(0.017)    | -0.00<br>(0.003)        |
| Trust EU                                  | 0.763***<br>(0.032)  | 0.15***<br>(0.006)      |
| Negative views about the National Economy | -0.265***<br>(0.043) | -0.05***<br>(0.008)     |
| Cultural Treat                            | -0.526***<br>(0.048) | -0.11***<br>(0.009)     |
| EU means Democracy                        | 0.178***<br>(0.038)  | 0.04***<br>(0.007)      |
| EU Means Stronger Say in The Word         | 0.308***<br>(0.038)  | 0.06***<br>(0.007)      |
| Constant                                  | 1.288***<br>(0.131)  |                         |
| Pseudo R2                                 | 0.13                 |                         |
| Observations                              | 21123                |                         |

Estimates are logit coefficient and their robust standard errors in parenthesis. Country-dummy coefficients are not showed. Average Marginal Effects are  $dy/dx$  and their corresponding delta-method standard errors in parenthesis. Legend \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

## Conclusions

We found that the perception of deep economic crisis has a negative effect on attitudes towards enlargement. People expressing pessimism regarding the current economic situation appear less likely to support further EU enlargement. However, cultural barriers also appear to have a strongest negative effect. Those perceiving further candidates to the EU membership as a cultural treat are 11% less likely to support EU enlargement. This is evident when we compare different candidates with different cultural and religious background (Figure 3) as well as when we test it in our statistical model (Table 1).

This conjoint effect of both economic and cultural reasons to oppose further enlargement of the EU may explain the negative trend of attitudes towards enlargement that has emerged in the last four years. The economic crisis potentially increases protectionist sentiments. At the same time, after Europe grew recently to 27 members, further enlargement implies the inclusion of countries with radically different cultural and religious traditions. Pro-enlargement attitudes appear mainly to coincide with cultural affinities between countries: Western EU countries supporting enlargement only towards other western countries, Eastern EU countries supporting enlargement more generally and especially towards Ukraine and former Yugoslavian countries, all the 27 (broadly speaking) opposing enlargement towards Turkey, Albania and Kosovo.

Do those considerations imply only fear towards diversity? Or, are they a symptom of the desire to maintain a “cultural” coherence among EU members? Those questions are at the core of future challenges to prospects of EU enlargement as well as to the European Project as a whole.