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The Gender Gap in Public Support for EU Integration  
in the CEE Countries. A Theoretical Overview

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### Abstract

The process of EU integration has been researched in some detail, although while feminist scholars agree that gender is a main organizing principle of social relations, the great majority of the related studies have dealt with integration as a gender-neutral process. The few studies that have examined this problem have applied a gender-centric perspective, mainly focusing on Western European countries, while Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) relations – which are fairly different due to the post-socialist heritage of the region – remain under-researched. The present research note provides an overview of the relevant scientific literature on the models of support for integration, first highlighting the previously neglected aspect of gender, and later on describing the factors that make its study difficult in a CEE context. The article argues that, in contrast to the assumption made in prevailing approaches to the topic, EU integration is a highly gendered process and may have special characteristics in CEE countries.

*Keywords:* EU integration, public support, gender gap, CEE.

## *1. Introduction*

To understand, sustain and potentially recalibrate the process of EU integration, nuanced and multifaceted knowledge is needed (Best, Lengyel and Verzichelli, 2012). Although the topic of EU integration is a well-developed research field both at the theoretical and the empirical level, the great majority of studies have dealt with EU integration as a gender-neutral process (Liebert, 1997). Consequently, feminist scholars claim that although gender is a main organizing principle of social relations, it is fairly under-researched in EU studies (Kronsell, 2005). In order to gain more comprehensive knowledge related to the EU integration process, research into the public opinions and attitudes of EU citizens toward the integration process is fertile ground, while this approach can also provide valuable feedback and information about further expectations, and, potentially, causal relationships at the same time (Gabel, 1998).

Comprising half of the population, women have great potential for shaping and evaluating the integration process<sup>1</sup>. Numerous studies have argued that women and men are differing concerning their general values, attitudes and behavior (e.g. Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Wood and Eagly, 2002; Wood, 2015) and their perceptions of EU integration are no exception. Previous studies on this topic have shown that there is a gender gap in attitudes toward integration (e.g. Liebert, 1997; Nelsen and Guth, 2000; Best, 2012; Vitores, 2015). Nevertheless, the currently available literature on this topic is scarce and the topic requires further, more focused investigation. Discovering and examining the gender gap in EU support is not only a useful process by which to gain multifaceted knowledge about the European integration process, but can also reflect in a highly important way on the effectiveness and success of the EU's explicit commitment to gender equality.

Theorizing support for integration has a broad literature in general, although only a few studies have examined gendered patterns in this regard. Some approaches consider the EU to be an economic entity and explain support for integration using utilitarian-economic reasons (e.g. Gabel, 1998). From this perspective, the gender gap in support for integration is theorized, for instance, using women's different responses to economic vulnerability (Nelsen and Guth, 2000; Vitores, 2015) or their relative deprivation (Liebert, 1997). Other scholars have emphasized the effect of political perceptions and preferences on support for integration (e.g. Gabel, 1998; Inglehart, 1970) and explained the gender gap by referring to the different political behavior and interests of women (e.g. Inglehart, 1977; Norris, 1986; 1999).

Besides these explanations, other research has examined the impact of identity on support for integration and investigated how various group affiliations could influence perceptions of the European integration process (e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2004). Moreover, previous findings on the topic highlight the importance of political elites by emphasizing their impact on the European integration process concerning the direction of policy making, agendas, and scheduling (Best et al., 2012);

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<sup>1</sup> The power of women's attitudes towards certain political issues is clearly observable, considering, for instance, the Norwegian referendum on EU membership, in which a significant number of 'nos' came from women, and as a result, Norway stayed out of the EU (Liebert, 1997).

additionally, in terms of their role in influencing and shaping public opinion (e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2008). In the current author's opinion, these theories have not addressed the gender perspective in sufficient depth, despite the fact that a wide range of academic literature provides the theoretical basis for such an examination: on the one hand using knowledge about the different identity of women (Kohli, 2000), or their underrepresentation in political elites (e.g. Krook, 2010) on the other, underline the relevance of the question.

Another problematic issue is that previous research has placed too little emphasis on examining regional conditions; however, the heterogeneous 'composition' of the EU, caused by the various social, political and also historical backgrounds of the states, implies that the investigation of the gender gap in attitudes toward the integration process should focus in particular on this aspect. Some authors have already stated that the formation of gender relations has taken a fairly different and unique path in CEE countries throughout the past century (Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2005; Havelkova, 1996; Einhorn, 2005). Decades of state socialism - and its legacy after the change of the political system - created quite different perspectives about the issue in these countries compared to those of Western Europe (Gal and Kligman, 2000). As most of the related studies have been dominated by Western feminist theory, this diversity often remains unrevealed and unexamined (Havelkova, 1996: 243).

Consequently, by describing the relevant theoretical literature and previous research findings on the topic, this research note is designed to shed light on the gender gap in attitudes toward European integration and the special character of the CEE region in this respect in order to establish the theoretical ground for a new - and until recently neglected - research direction. The relevance of opening up this new direction is two-fold: firstly, it revisits the scarce literature about the gender gap in attitudes toward EU integration and completes the current explanatory models - namely, those incorporating the effects of economic-utilitarian drivers (e.g. Liebert, 1997; Nelsen and Guth, 2000; Best, 2012; Vitores, 2015; Gabel, 1998) and political behavior and preferences (e.g. Gabel, 1998; Inglehart, 1970; 1977; Norris, 1986; 1999) - with two other relevant, recently neglected elements: the role of the elites (e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2008), and the effect of identity (e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2004). In doing so, the new analytical lens should help us to properly theorize the dynamics behind men and women's different perceptions of EU integration. Secondly, to goal is to integrate the CEE perspective into research into the gender gap in attitudes toward the EU, which perspective has been generally neglected, despite the fact that more than twenty percent of the population of the European Union live in CEE countries<sup>2</sup> and gender relations in this region are significantly different compared to those of previously examined Western European countries (Gal and Kligman, 2000).

Emerging from the theoretical basis (e.g. Gabel, 1998; Hooghe and Marks, 2005) and related earlier findings (e.g. Liebert, 1997; Nelsen and Guth, 2000), the present review highlights the gender differences in perceptions of the European integration process and identifies four possible explanations for these: economic-

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Eurostat. see:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00001>

utilitarian drivers, political behavior and preferences, the role of the elites ('political cueing' - e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2005), and identity: moreover, it also shows why is it important to place this investigation into a regional comparative framework, or more precisely, why CEE countries should be considered a special case in this respect.

The present study is divided into two main sections. The first section describes how public opinion about EU integration is being shaped, and what the factors that could increase support for it are. Furthermore, this section also draws attention to the phenomenon of the gender gap which exists in public attitudes toward European integration. In the second subsection, the relevant conditions in CEE are discussed. The study describes how attitudes toward EU integration are shaped in general in the CEE region, and later highlights why these countries represent a special case in the investigation of the gender gap in public support for integration. The paper focuses on gender-related regional peculiarities of CEE countries compared to the other countries - or regions - of the EU.

## ***2. Support for integration and the related gender gap: Theories and earlier empirical findings***

In order to construct proper theoretical ground for the subsequent investigation of the gender gap in attitudes toward integration, in the following part of the paper the most oft-cited explanatory models of support for integration are described. The relevance of studying public attitudes to the process of European integration is guided by the insight that these public opinions serve as a foundation for integration: they form and constrain the integration process through mass political behavior such as lobbying, protesting, or elections (Gabel, 1998). As already mentioned above, borrowing from the relevant literature on the topic the paper identifies four models for explaining public support for integration; namely, economic-utilitarian drivers, political behavior and preferences, the role of the elites, and identity. In the following, these models are briefly described. Gender-specific differences are highlighted in relation to the explanatory models. For each model, preexisting empirical findings about the topic are also included as an integral part of the discussion.

### ***2.1 Political behavior and preferences***

Researching public support for EU integration has been a priority issue since the early times of the integration process (Hooghe and Marks, 2005). Early studies often explained citizen support using models based on concepts of political behavior and preferences (e.g. Inglehart, 1970; Inglehart et al., 1991; Franklin et al., 1994).

Inglehart's theory of cognitive mobilization assumes that (generally more educated) citizens with a 'high level of political awareness and well-developed skills in mass communication' are more likely to identify themselves with a political community existing on the supranational level (Inglehart, 1970: 47). Inglehart, Rabier and Reif (1991) examined data from Eurobarometer surveys from 1973-1986 and found that cognitive skills and a high level of political awareness increase support for EU integration.

Other scholars (e.g. Franklin et al., 1994) have highlighted the importance of a citizen 'partisanship effect' on attitudes toward integration. Class partisanship supposes that citizens' insight into European integration is shaped by and reflects on their preferred political party's attitudes. Inglehart, Rabier and Reif (1991) also examined the impact of class partisanship – a research direction also taken by Franklin et al. (1994) – and concluded that supporters of left-wing parties are more likely to demonstrate Eurosceptic attitudes than supporters of right-wing parties. In contrast, recent work has presented contrasting – and even country-specific – findings concerning the effect of party locations on the left-right spectrum: data from The Chapel Hill expert survey shows an inverted U-curve, meaning that parties on the center-left and center-right are generally most supportive of the EU (Bakker et al., 2015).

Inglehart's different explanatory approach assumes that support for integration emerges from a citizen's value-orientation concerning economic and political issues. The author confronts materialist and post-materialist values and supposes that citizens with post-materialist attitudes – which refers mainly to an individual's need for intellectual fulfillment and self-actualization – are more likely to support integration than those with materialist values such as prioritizing economic and physical security (Inglehart, 1990; Gabel, 1998).

The gender gap concerning support for integration is also often explained through reference to women's different political behavior and preferences. The theory of 'women's deficit' assumes that women are either more apolitical, or – if they show an interest in politics – are more conservative and/or nationalist than men, which results in a more Eurosceptic position. The varying extent of the gender gap among the European states is correlated with the level of 'structural gender advancement' of the countries under investigation (Liebert, 1997). In contrast to Inglehart's 'female conservatism' theory, Norris (1986) offers a new viewpoint. She suggests that a 'reverse gender gap' has emerged in Western societies; namely, a liberal-leftist turn by women voters.

Although these theories mainly focus on the national level, and in a few places contradict each other (e.g. female conservatism (Inglehart, 1977) versus the liberal left-turn (Norris, 1986)), they generally agree that there are differences in male and female political behavior and preferences (Liebert, 1997). According to these approaches, women may be considered less likely to support integration than men. Even though 'female conservatism' has been challenged, the literature shows that women's apolitical stance results in them (compared to men) 'admittedly suffer[ing] from a lack of political information, even on those specific national and EC-policies that should be in their proper interest;' a situation which is liable to decrease their support for EU integration (Liebert, 1997: 8).

## *2.2 Utilitarian - economic approaches*

Utilitarian theory – proposed and developed by Gabel and Palmer (1995) – suggests that citizen support for integration is firmly shaped by – and positively correlated to – the welfare benefits they receive from pro-integration policy. This approach recognizes and emphasizes the importance of the different socioeconomic

backgrounds of the investigated citizens – or even the nation states – in the formation of attitudes toward integration (Gabel, 1998). Hooghe and Marks (2005) also see this theoretical approach to cost-benefit analysis as a potential explanation of support for integration.

Gabel (1998) examined five theories of support for European integration – namely, the theory of cognitive mobilization, the theory of political values, the theory of utilitarian appraisals of integrative policy, the theory of class partisanship, and the theory of support for government – in order to investigate the reason for the varying nature of citizen support for integration. Through the empirical testing of these theories (conducted using Eurobarometer survey data from 1978 - 1992) Gabel found that, although citizen support for integration is a flexible feature, the strongest influence on opinion-formation is utilitarian theory. Gabel also notes that support may have a ‘fluid’ nature: citizens can change their strength of support depending on certain factors such as the impact of integration on their perception of welfare, their political partisanship, and their support for the government. It is also worth noting that, according to Gabel, in the ‘new’ member states<sup>3</sup> the political elite has a greater influence in shaping public opinion than in the ‘old’ member states (Gabel, 1998).

Regarding recent results, Levy and Phan (2014) – using data from the Eurobarometer 2009 survey – examined the effect of citizens’ economic perceptions on attitudes towards EU integration. They find that citizen support for the EU tends to be driven by sociotropic rather than egocentric economic evaluations, particularly as concerns individuals with an exclusive national identity.

The vast majority of studies of the gender gap in attitudes towards the EU have employed utilitarian explanatory models. Working on Eurobarometer survey data from 1994, Liebert (1997) finds that the gender gap in public attitudes to the EU is caused by women’s relative deprivation. She defines this phenomenon as a psychological condition in which a perceived negative discrepancy exists between a current position and future gains regarding social, political, and economic achievements, or, to put it differently, that women were afraid that EU unification could relatively deprive them of the achievements they had already obtained at a national level (Liebert, 1997: 21). The author argues that the perceptions of female relative deprivation vary between countries, and that such variation depends on ‘how feminist discourses are able to articulate their critiques of the EU within the context of inter-party conflict and public controversies on issues of European integration’ (Liebert, 1997: 42). Liebert concludes that where the impact of critical feminist discourses is significant (e.g. Denmark), the gender gap is large, in contrast to countries where the effect of these feminist discourses is limited (e.g. Spain) (Liebert, 1997: 41-42).

Other scholars have approached the topic of the gender gap in attitudes toward EU integration from the perspective of economic vulnerability. Nelsen and Guth (2000) also examined Eurobarometer data from 1994 and clearly confirmed that a gender gap exists in attitudes toward integration. More specifically, they find that women tend to be less supportive than men in this respect; and, agreeing with Liebert

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<sup>3</sup> Gabel uses the term ‘old member states’ for Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands and West Germany, and ‘new member states’ for those which joined later, until 1992 (Gabel, 1998: 345).

(1997), also underscore that the extent of the gender gap varies between nations. Nelsen and Guth also agree with Gabel's (1998) perspective, considering EU citizens to be rational actors whose acts and attitudes are shaped by individual cost-benefit assessments of integration (Nelsen and Guth, 2000). The researchers used multiple regression models to predict support for EU integration. Results indicate that economic uncertainty is the strongest explanatory factor of women's lower level of support: women's attitudes are significantly affected by objective characteristics (such as number of children, social class, education and the existence of women-friendly welfare state policies, which are indicators of the state's engagement in supporting the role of women as caregivers) and subjective economic vulnerability - such as economic optimism (Nelsen and Guth, 2000).

In her recent study, Vitores (2015) worked on the 8<sup>th</sup> wave of the European Election Study (carried out in 2014), examining the 14 member states which made up the EU before the 2004 accession<sup>4</sup> and obtained results that contradicted previous studies in several respects. She found that women tend to trust the EU more than men when they perceive it offers satisfactory economic conditions, but their trust declines when they perceive economic vulnerability. She also found that the perception of economic vulnerability is connected to marital status and number of children: single women consider themselves less vulnerable. Nevertheless, the overall effect of the economic situation of women remains stronger than these other factors: women with families and no livelihoods face serious difficulties yet are still more supportive toward the EU than men (Vitores, 2015).

In another recent piece of work on the topic, Glüpker-Kesebir (2015) also emphasized the effect of utilitarian dynamics in explaining the gender gap in public support for the EU. This author examined Eurobarometer data from 1995 - 2012 covering the EU-28 (and also other candidate countries such as Iceland<sup>5</sup>, Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey) using a multi-level regression model. She found that, with increasing age, women tend to be less positive toward the EU than men, and also that women in higher occupational positions are less supportive than men in similar positions (Glüpker-Kesebir, 2015).

### *2.3 The impact of European identity*

In contrast to approaches that deal with the EU as an economic or political entity, Hooghe and Marks (2005) apply an approach which highlights the effect of national identity on support for integration. They focus on how group affiliation and, in connection, identity affects individual-level support for European integration (Göncz, 2010). However, later work by Hooghe and Marks (2008) applies a 'post functionalist' approach, highlighting the increasing impact of mass opinion (besides the elites'), noting that identity has the greatest impact on mass opinion.

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<sup>4</sup> Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, The Netherlands, UK, Ireland, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria.

<sup>5</sup> Finding is not valid more recently. See: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/iceland/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/iceland/index_en.htm)

According to Best (2012), attitudes toward integration are linked to the level of an individual's 'Europeaness', which may be classified into three dimensions: an emotive dimension, which covers the notion of identity, a cognitive-evaluative dimension, which covers perceptions about representation, and a projective-conative dimension, which is represented by attitudes toward the scope of governance (Best, 2012).

Hooghe and Marks (2004) empirically examined what drives public support for EU integration in earlier studies when they investigated data from the Eurobarometer survey (2001) and World Development Indicators Database (World Bank, April 2003.). They find that citizens' identity appears to be more powerful than their economic perceptions in influencing opinions about EU integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2004: 4), a finding which greatly contradicts that of Gabel who emphasized the effect of utilitarian considerations (Gabel, 1998). However, it is worth noting that both investigations assumed that – besides economic and identity-based explanations – the impact of political elites is a key factor in shaping citizens' attitudes (Hooghe and Marks, 2004; Gabel, 1998).

Recent work has also confirmed the great impact of identity on attitudes toward integration. Maier and Adam – using experimental methods with the participation of 1379 individuals from nine countries – find that exclusive national identity is the strongest predictor of Eurosceptic attitudes (Maier and Adam, 2011: 24).

From a gender-centric perspective, studying the impact of identity on support for integration is also important and fruitful. Women gained political, civil and social citizenship rights later and in a different way to men (Lister, 1997; 2012; Walby, 1994) which certainly affects their formation of national identity, and also might impact their supranational identity. For instance, scholars have already noted that women are less likely than men to consider themselves European (e.g. Kohli, 2000: 125).

#### *2.4 Role of the elites*

According to the theory, support for integration is tied to citizens' support for their own government, because of the pivotal role of the political leaders – the political elite – who represent member states' interests vis-à-vis the EU (Gabel, 1998). Hooghe and Marks (2005) also highlight the role of the elites, but from a different angle. Their theory of 'political cueing' draws attention to the elite's role in shaping and forming public opinion. This approach is also supported by the assumption of the mutable nature of mass opinion (Zaller, 1992) which is firmly shaped by elites.

In their empirical research, Hooghe and Marks put political cueing into focus and attempt to synthesize economy-based and identity-based models – which mainly reflect on the psychology of group membership – in order to construct a third way of understanding and demonstrating how 'political cues mediate the effect of economic calculation and community membership' (Hooghe and Marks, 2005: 420). The authors examine Eurobarometer data from 2001; their findings confirm their earlier conclusions that identity has a greater influence than economics in explaining public support for EU integration. Additionally, they provide considerable evidence about how identity and the role of the elites – in the form of political cueing – interact. They find that when political elites reach consensus about their support for integration,

exclusive national identity and supportive attitudes toward EU integration tend to coexist, but when national political elites are divided about Europe, national identity creates Eurosceptic public attitudes (Hooghe and Marks, 2005: 437).

Maier and Adam (2011) also examined the impact of political cueing during their above-cited experimental research. While investigating the effect of party campaigns on individual attitudes, they confirmed Hooghe and Marks' results; namely, that when political elites are divided according to their perspectives about EU integration, citizens show significantly less support for the EU than in countries where the political elites are more united (Maier and Adam, 2011: 25).

From a feminist perspective, the role of the elites regarding support for integration is fairly closely connected to women's underrepresentation among the elites (e.g. Várnagy, 2013; Clavero and Galligan, 2005), which might also affect mass opinion. While Best (2012) claims that the women who are part of the elite demonstrate a higher level of 'Europeaness' because of the gender equality and mainstreaming policies promoted by the EU, other scholars assume that women of the economic elite are liable to support integration less strongly due to male domination in supranational affairs which is perceived as having a negative effect on their career chances (Nelsen and Guth, 2000).

### *3. CEE peculiarities*

As can be seen from the above, previous empirical research on the topic has mainly dealt with utilitarian models. Nevertheless, the literature infers the existence of other relevant differences among genders, such as identity (Kohli, 2000), political interests (Coffé, 2013) and women's underrepresentation in political elites (e.g. Várnagy, 2013; Clavero and Galligan, 2005), which also make the investigation of the issue using other explanatory models relevant. It is clear that the gender gap in public attitudes toward EU integration is a relevant problem that is worth examining. The following section lays emphasis on why CEE countries represent a special case in this regard. First, the article discusses how public opinion about EU integration is shaped in CEE countries generally, while later it focuses on the gender relations in the region to show why this CEE perspective is relevant and interesting in research into the gender gap in attitudes toward the EU.

#### *3.1 Attitudes toward EU integration in the CEE countries*

Attitudes toward EU integration in the CEE countries are fairly complex and variable. Although the CEE region's changing relations to the EU from the beginning is an interesting topic in itself, because of space limitations and interpretative frames the present study will only focus on the period starting a few years prior to the enlargement to the East - specifically, from the millennium - until the present time.

Before the enlargement, a piece of qualitative research<sup>6</sup> investigated perceptions about the EU involving 15 member states and 8 acceding countries (plus Romania). The results showed that CEE citizens consider the EU as a symbol of Western-Europe and economic prosperity. The findings generally show that support for EU was mainly driven by expectations regarding economic development, and therefore the newly-acceding CEE countries tended to be more positive about EU integration than the 15 member states (Göncz, 2010: 37).

A subsequent study conducted 3 years after the Eastern enlargement - which examined data from the Intune survey 2007 that contains information from 16 countries, using both general population and national elite samples - found that, *ceteris paribus*, Western Europeans and citizens of Mediterranean countries tend to have more positive attitudes to the Europe<sup>7</sup> than Eastern Europeans. The study also noted that these positive individual attitudes are cued by political elites (Lengyel, 2011: 128).

Regarding attitudes toward integration in the CEE countries, it is also important to consider the effect of the financial crisis that started in 2008. Eurobarometer data show that positive attitudes toward the EU generally decreased from 2007 - 2011 (albeit with a small increase in 2009), stagnated from 2011 - 2013, and have started slightly increasing since then (Eurobarometer 83, 2015). These results could be interpreted to mean that the decrease in support for the EU is driven by utilitarian factors (namely the deteriorating economic situation), but Serrichio, Tsakatika and Quaglia (2012) - while examining Eurobarometer data from 2007 - note that the actual causal relationships are far more complex. The authors find that, although the data show a positive correlation between utilitarian perceptions and the decrease in support for the EU for a few counties on the eastern periphery (e.g. Hungary and the Czech Republic), support for integration is increasingly driven by identity and institutional trust.

Recent work examined data from The Chapel Hill expert survey from 1999 - 2010 regarding the effect of party positions on attitudes toward EU integration. Findings indicate the considerable differences between Western states and CEE countries. Bakker and his co-authors (2015) found that by 2010 among the Western EU member states anti-EU parties had entered the center of the political space<sup>8</sup>, while in contrast in CEE countries the central space is dominated by the pro-EU parties, while the most anti-EU parties are located on the far-right.

From the above-described results it appears clear that the four explanatory models in question (namely, the economical-utilitarian approach, political behavior and preferences, the role of the elites ('political cueing'), and identity) are worth being applied in the CEE context.

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<sup>6</sup> Optem S.A.R.L. (2001) *Perception of the European Union. A Qualitative Study of the Public's Attitudes to and Expectations of the European Union in the 15 Member States and in 9 Candidate Countries. Summary of Results.*

[http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/quali/ql\\_perceptions\\_summary\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/quali/ql_perceptions_summary_en.pdf) Accessed: 28-10-2016.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that Lengyel distinguishes between 'attachment to Europe' and 'attachment to the EU' and finds that Europe is generally better supported (Lengyel, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> As considered using a generalized, left-right ideological spectrum (Bakker et al., 2015).

### *3.2 Gender relations in the CEE countries*

As discussed above, previous studies which have attempted to theorize the gender gap in public attitudes toward the EU have not reflected regional differences in detail or have generally neglected the CEE perspective (e.g. Vitores, 2015). In order to verify the relevance of incorporating this factor, this paper now highlights the theoretical considerations behind the specificities in the gender relations among CEE countries, compared to the other EU member states.

The peculiarities of gender relations in the CEE countries can be fruitfully captured through the notion of citizenship, which here is considered an appropriate tool for examining the changing gender relations across Europe. Citizenship represents a 'relationship between the individual and the state, in which the two are bound together by reciprocal rights and obligations' (Heywood, 1994: 155). Women's relationship to citizenship has followed quite a different pattern compared to men's throughout the twentieth century on a national level (Lister, 2012). Furthermore, the gaining of rights and development of a national identity has been a central issue in the transformation of gender relations (Walby, 1994).

As Walby discussed in her influential study, access to citizenship is a highly gendered and ethnically structured process (Walby, 1994: 391), although it is worth noting that the patterns, modes, characteristics and the extension of gendered citizenship may also be variegated as concerns the political, historical and social background of a given society.

In addition, the formation of the civil, social and political elements of citizenship in Eastern Europe have been created in a different way to how they were in Western societies. According to findings by Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2005)<sup>9</sup> and Havelkova (1996), it is clear that the influence of socialism has produced fairly different patterns of citizenship formation for women throughout the twentieth century, and this effect is still observable in post-socialist countries. Thus the application of a Western analytical lens to gendered citizenship is not entirely appropriate in the case of the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe.

For example, as Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2005) find, women's political mobilization was a conscious process and a key issue during the period of 'Bolshevik experimentation', not a struggle by women for acceptance, as it was in Western societies. Havelkova (1996) also argued that, even in the pre-socialist times of the Czech Republic, the position of women - regarding the civil, social and political elements of their citizenship - was one of more equality with men than in other countries of Europe during the same period.

Consequently, Walby's (1996) notion of 'caring' also needs to be revisited from the post-socialist perspective. In the socialist era, the 'caring' position of women was not essentially distinguished from their role as workers - or, to put it differently, in

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<sup>9</sup> Although Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2005) examine Soviet relations, which are in some practical points different from those of the socialist Central European countries, their thorough and comprehensive understanding of the formation of gendered citizenship in the Soviet and post-Soviet era is relevant to this study because it clearly describes the main ideological environment behind the formation of gender relations, which was also the same in socialist CEE countries.

state-socialist societies the expected behavior of a female citizen was both to care and work (Zdravomyslova and Temkina refer to this using the expression ‘Soviet superwoman’). The question raised by Walby, ‘is being a carer compatible with being a full citizen?’ makes less sense in socialist countries – or even in countries with a socialist heritage. In state-socialist countries the choice between being a carer or contributing economically did not exist for women because they were expected to do both. This double burden experienced by women throughout the time of socialism makes a deeper investigation of the situation in CEE countries even more relevant.

Last, it is worth noting the contradictory explanations and usage of the terms ‘traditional’ and ‘conservative’ in the discussion of post-socialist gendered citizenship. The traditional roles of women in Western discourse are related to women’s function as wives, mothers and housekeepers, while in the socialist era the traditional role of women related to productive and reproductive activity both in the family and in the economic spheres of life (Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2005).

The mainstream connotations of these terms regarding the civil, political and social elements of gendered citizenship are rooted in Western discourse. Nevertheless, in Eastern European discourse, because of the state-socialist system and its heritage, these terms are interpreted significantly differently from how they are in Western theory.

From the previous argument it is clear what the theoretical considerations and historically constructed conditions are which make the study of the gender gap in EU support from a CEE perspective important. In the following section of this article, empirical results will be presented in order to capture the contemporary consequences of a post-socialist heritage.

As already discussed, the situation in CEE countries<sup>10</sup> is under-researched, although one-fifth of the European Union’s population lives in one of these countries<sup>11</sup>. Earlier studies about the topic were published before the process of Eastern enlargement, but recent work has also failed to address the issue (e.g. Vitores states that she only examines Western European states because ‘Central and Eastern European countries introduced unnecessary complexity to the models’ (Vitores, 2015: 9)).

It is worth highlighting two interconnected characteristics of CEE countries which possibly influence the peoples’ attitudes toward EU integration; namely, the relatively low level of gender equality, and women’s persistent underrepresentation and low interest in politics – when compared to the other EU member states. The Gender Equality Index (GEI) scores are a good proxy for capturing the main characteristics of gender equality among the EU states. The GEI, which is constructed by the European Institute for Gender Equality, measures indicators of gender equality in various countries, such as work, money (income), knowledge, time, power and health, and also deals with two so-called satellite domains called ‘violence’ and

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<sup>10</sup> The CEE countries are Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia (OECD glossary. <http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=303> Accessed: 10-12-2016.)

<sup>11</sup> Eurostat. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00001> Accessed: 10-12-2016.

‘intersecting inequalities’. The aggregated GEI index from 2012 is shown in Figure 1. It is clear that the GEI scores of all CEE countries except for Slovenia are significantly below the EU 28 average. The countries with the two lowest values in the EU are Romania (33.7) and Slovakia (36.5), while the highest scores – not surprisingly – are awarded to Scandinavian states.

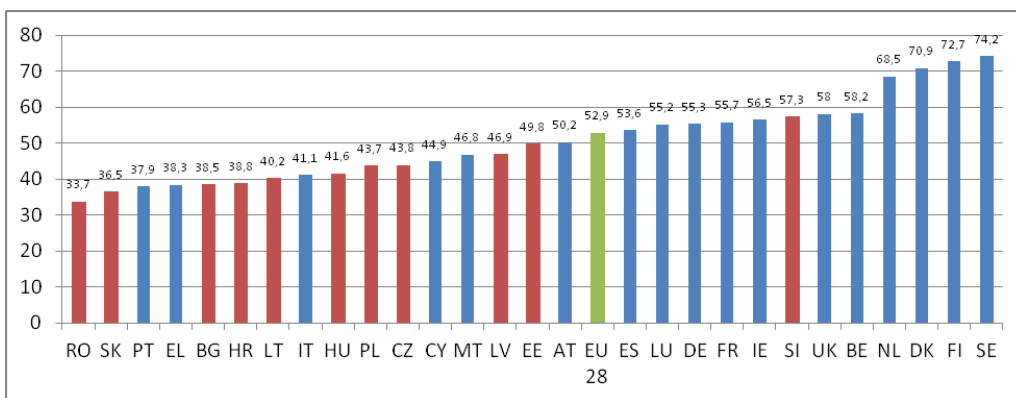


Figure 1. Gender Equality Index scores<sup>12</sup> (2012) - EU 28 (source: EIGE/GEI)

The level of gender inequality in 2012 among the CEE countries can be explained from two perspectives. First, recent studies have argued that the effect of the transformation shock in the early 1990s is still palpable in the region. Second, the economic crisis of 2008 also hit these countries hard. However, the effect of the crisis is rather complex. Fodor and Nagy (2014) argue that, although in the Eastern periphery job segregation has protected women more than men (as compared to the core – i.e. Western – countries), women’s unemployment and poverty rates still increased more rapidly than among women in the core countries of Europe. The authors find that, considering core countries, the position of women has not changed significantly, and the distance between genders has decreased. In the Eastern region, this decrease happened under different conditions: in contrast to the core countries, the position of women also declined, and the gap between genders lessened under these general conditions of deterioration (Fodor and Nagy, 2014: 19).

Besides the general issue of gender equality, another important feature should be recognized: namely, women’s underrepresentation in politics, which is mostly incorporated in the gender equality score, although it is also discussed in itself. Earlier research findings from the Enlargement, Gender and Governance (EGG) Project<sup>13</sup> from 2002, which analyzed female visibility in political and civic decision-making, find that there was a significant decrease in women’s political participation after the transition in the early 1990s which is still having an impact. They also argue

<sup>12</sup> Interpretation of GEI scores: 0 means total inequality, while 100 means total equality. For further information, see: <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/gender-equality-index/about>

<sup>13</sup> See: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/egg/>

that women's relative share of representation is considerably higher at lower levels of governance (EGG WP2, 2002)<sup>14</sup>. Recent data<sup>15</sup> from the Inter-Parliamentary Union<sup>16</sup> about the share of parliamentary seats among genders in national parliaments also indicates the low number of women in political elites in CEE countries<sup>17</sup>. The EU 28 average share of women MPs is 26.6 percent<sup>18</sup>, but 9 of the 11 CEE states have less than this. The two exceptions are Slovenia (36.7 percent) and Poland (27.4 percent), while the smallest proportion of women MPs in a national parliament is found in Hungary (10.1 percent).

What clearly emerges from these briefly described findings is that, in terms of gender relations, CEE countries are distinct in several ways compared to other parts of the EU, and this may be impacting the gender gap in attitudes toward the EU. This conclusion validates the application of comparative, regionally focused research.

#### *4. Conclusion and further directions for research*

The relevance of the above-outlined research problem is manifold. First, consideration of gender issues in the study of public opinion towards EU integration is important for obtaining deeper understanding of the issue, as well as sustaining and even modifying the European integration process. Understanding how women see the integration process and what factors shape their attitudes represents valuable input – and feedback – for European gender policy making and mainstreaming, which are considered key issues in the EU.

Consequently, the CEE perspective is also highly relevant in this context: scholars have already noted that the issue of gender equality raised by the European Union and preexisting research on the topic is shaped by Western feminist theory, thereby neglecting the CEE perspective and decreasing the relevance of the findings to the post-socialist context (Einhorn, 2006; Havelkova, 1996). As described in this paper, earlier research has argued for the effect of economic factors such as vulnerability (Nelsen and Guth, 2000) and relative deprivation (Liebert, 1997) regarding the gender gap in public support for European integration, while other scholars have emphasized the effect of women's different political behavior, interests (e.g. Inglehart, 1977; Norris, 1986; 1999) and identity (e.g. Kohli, 2000). All of these factors should be examined in a CEE context due to the differences that exist with economic performance and gender relations – such as the different level of gender equality (e.g. GED) and women's underrepresentation in politics (e.g. Várnagy, 2013; Clavero and Galligan, 2005) – compared to Western European countries.

Given the above, and in consideration of the broader context, the present review article seeks to highlight the fact that EU integration is not gender-neutral but is

<sup>14</sup> Recent studies support this assumption that 'woman stay local' (e.g. Coffč, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> The data show the situation as of 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. 2016.

<sup>16</sup> IPU (2016) Women in National Parliaments. <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> Accessed: 10-12-2016.

<sup>17</sup> Although the present research focuses on CEE countries, it is also worth noting that the Mediterranean countries and Ireland show similarities concerning objective gender equality indicators.

<sup>18</sup> Considering only the lower or single house seats.

rather a highly gendered process. To reveal *how* and *to what extent* gender may be influencing attitudes towards integration in the context of CEE – so as to deepen understanding of the actual state and process of integration – more relevant empirical research is needed.

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