ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM

Turnout rates in European Parliament elections

Determinants of observed turnout rates in EU member states

MASTER THESIS "INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND POLICY"
ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM

July 9th, 2014

Author: Desislava Katsarska
Student number: 400537

Supervisor: Prof. dr. Markus Haverland
Second reader: Prof. dr. Steven van de Walle

Word count: 22 272

ABSTRACT:

Elections to the European Parliament (EP) are considered to be the most important and significant political event European citizens can participate in. However, the observed turnout rates in separate member states, as well as the average for the European Union (EU), show a general decreasing trend since the first direct elections were held in 1979. This trend has even turned into a phenomenon in political science, which still has not found its main determinant. As a consequence, the issue inspired conducting this particular quantitative research. The analysis of the institutional country-level factors across all EU countries in the 1994 – 2014 timeframe placed the emphasis not only on the most recent and socially relevant period, but on a period of considerable development for the integration process, as well. The contribution of this study is expressed by testing the validity of existing theories (the theory on Euroscepticism, the rational theory of voting and the influence of compulsory voting, namely) in the academic literature by applying two regression models for the last 5 elections and establishing the reasons behind either differences, or similarities observed. Backed with the empirical data gathered, the outcomes of the analysis confirm the influence of mandatory voting and concomitant national elections. However, they disprove the assumption that people base their decision whether or not to vote on their personal perception of the country benefitting from the EU.

As far as my personal motivation for the choice is concerned, I have decided to deal in detail with this particular topic not only because of its salience and leading place on the EU agenda. Having dedicated considerable amount of time and hard work to acquiring a solid theoretical ground on almost all aspects of EU matters (i.e. decision-making, institutional setting, fields of competences, main political actors through the years, etc.), gives me confidence in my personal abilities to conduct a scientific research and write a master thesis on this particular subject. In addition, I see it as a head-start for my future prospects of building up the desired career in the EU institutions.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

1. Introduction

European Parliament (EP) elections are perhaps the most important political affair that Europeans can participate in (Nardis, 2013). However, citizens do not seem to take advantage of their right and opportunity to take part in such a salient event as the decreasing levels of turnout reveal. Rates are differing among countries and the underlying reason is often the subject of discussions, with "old vs. new member states" being not the only cleavage identified by social scientists. There seem to be other factors leading to such results which require further investigation and research. With the most recent elections from May 2014, the significance and efficiency of the Parliament is once again put on the agenda and widely discussed in the media. For the first time debates between the candidates for the post of European Commission (EC) President were held[1]. From what we have witnessed, it seems that opinions among citizens, researchers, journalists and politicians encompass the whole spectrum of perception – from undoubted support, through moderate and strong levels of scepticism, even up to disrespect of the actions and authority of the European Union (EU) as a whole.

Since the first time direct elections took place in 1979, they carried high expectations. They were meant to help establish a common European identity among the peoples of Europe, to legitimise policy through the normal electoral processes and to provide a public space within which Europeans could exert a more direct control over their collective future (Marsh & Mikhaylov, 2010). The EP as an institution represents European citizens and thus MEPs should give voice to the most salient issues for citizens in particular. Their job is to pursue the accomplishment of interests neither of the different nation-states, nor of the Union, but of the very own European citizens they represent (TFEU, art.223 to 234). However, questions about the legitimacy, power and influence of the EP have stirred movement in the perception and importance of these elections. It seems that with the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis and the inability of institutions to find a proper solution, we have reached ever so high levels of Euro-scepticism across countries, even within the newly accessed members of the Union.

Every five years, both politicians and academics try to come up with ideas to improve the abovementioned deficiencies and to provide answers to questions such as: How to increase

[1] "First ever live debate between EU presidential candidates" - http://www.euronews.com/2014/04/14/what-will-you-ask-the-potential-future-president-of-the-european-commission/
"EU 'Spitzenkandidaten' debate in Brussels" - http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014/wrap-eu-spitzenkandidaten-debate-brussels-301779

turnout? How to best communicate the European idea and the benefits of European integration? How to bring Europe as close as possible to citizens and make them more involved in the on-going initiatives? With the Lisbon Treaty in force since December 2009 the role and powers of the European Parliament on the political stage have increased significantly. The EP has become a stronger lawmaker by bringing up to 50 new fields under the co-decision procedure in which it has equal rights with the Council of Ministers (European Parliament, 2009). In addition to that, the budget-setting powers have been extended as the distinction between compulsory and non-compulsory expenditures has been abolished. However, "*with great power comes great responsibility*" (F.D. Roosevelt, 1945). This means that the Parliament has new tools to give a stronger voice to the 500 million citizens it represents and to hold the EU accountable to them[2]. In accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights embedded in the Lisbon Treaty, the EP has become the guardian of EU citizens' rights. Stating that the principle of human dignity is at the basis of their political action, MEPs tend to cite this charter when human rights violations in the EU are witnessed and action is to be taken. All of the above are only prerequisites to get people more interested in the only democratically elected institution of the EU and to try to receive their attention and support not only in the event of elections, but every day, with every decision made.

1.1 Research Aim and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to provide scientific-based insights on the potential activity of EU citizens in the voting process for the next EP, to make clear how involved they are in the process of influencing the possible way of development of the EU. That is why we need to look in-depth for the eventual answers of the questions bothering our minds at the moment, namely what are the underlying reasons for people that determine whether they would decide to cast their vote in the polls or not, are these reasons grounded on a systemic or individual level. The research question I have formulated with this background is:

What determines the voter turnout rates at European Parliament elections?

[2] European Parliament website - http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/0042423726/Parliament-and-the-Lisbon-Treaty.html

1.2 Theoretical and Social Relevance

If my thesis can "*contribute to the specific scientific discourse and to the advancement of the knowledge produced by it*", then, according to Lehnert, Miller and Wonka (2007) it would be considered as theoretically relevant. In the framework that would be provided further in the study three theories are to be presented: theory on Euroscepticism, the rational choice theory and the one based on the latter, the information theory. What these three have in common is that they all examine possible factors affecting turnout and try to present an accurate answer to the main research question formulated above. It is not to my knowledge that any previous work has combined and used them as a theoretical foundation of an academic investigation. Therefore, the final outcomes and conclusions drawn from them should prove to be valuable contributions to the existing scientific discourse on this particular topic.

A research is considered to be socially relevant *"if it addresses social problems, improves citizens' and policymakers' understanding of the problem and, possibly, offers solutions*" (Gschwend & Schimmelfennig, 2007). As there is a demand for more democracy and legitimacy of institutions at the EU level, the topic does not concern merely political scientists, politicians and political parties, the question raised affects individual citizens as well. They are the ones represented in Strasbourg and Brussels, their present and future are shaped through the decision-making process that takes place at both national and European level. The increase of powers of the EP after the Lisbon treaty as a possible solution in the direction of decreasing the democratic deficit of the Parliament should also have effect on the results of the next elections, the argument here being that a more powerful institution should attract more attention by the public. The answers I hope to get at the end of this research should be of value in order to find further ways for increasing stability and legitimacy of the EP in times when even the future of the EU is at stake.

1.3 The 2014 European Parliament elections – This time it's different![3]

The EP elections of 22-25 May 2014 give voters the opportunity to influence the future direction and path the European Union will take in the next five years by determining the winning political party with their ballots. Due to the fact that each member state has its own electoral laws and procedures, each government decides on what day of the four-day election period its citizens will go to the polls (European Parliament, 2014). Up to now, since Croatia

[3] EP elections 2014 website - http://www.elections2014.eu/en/press-kit/content/20131112PKH24411/html/Overview-of-Parliament-and-the-2014-elections

joined the Union in July 2013, there have been 766 MEPs but according to the Lisbon Treaty this number is scaled down to 751 and will remain at that level in the future. The elected deputies will represent over 500 million citizens from 28 countries with the seats being allocated on the basis of 'degressive proportionality' (TFEU). This means that member states with larger populations have more seats than smaller ones but the latter have more seats than strict proportionality would imply.

As the slogan of this year's elections implies, these may turn out to be one of the most important elections to date, with the EU putting every effort in an attempt get more citizens involved in the process of shaping Europe's future political course by simply voting. In addition, they are the first elections since a number of new powers of the Parliament were introduced with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. One of the major new developments is the provision that when the EU member states nominate the next president of the Commission in autumn 2014 (which is when José Manuel Barroso's mandate expires) the heads of states and governments will have to take into account the elections results. "*This means voters now have a clear say in who takes over at the helm of EU government*" (European Parliament, 2014). The new political majority will also shape EU law over the next legislative 5-year period in areas from the single market to human rights and civil liberties. "*The Parliament - the only directly elected EU institution - is now a linchpin of the European decision-making system*" (ibid).

1.4 Research Structure

The structure of this research will proceed as following. The purpose of Chapter 2 will be to provide some background on EP elections through a brief overview of the already conducted academic studies in this area of social sciences. Chapter 3 will shed light on the existing theories and the relevant concepts and causal relations in this research, elaborating and formulating the necessary hypotheses. Chapter 4 will provide an overview on available research designs and justify the choice for a regression analysis. What is more, the methods and sources of data collection will be clarified. The following two chapters – 5 and 6 will deal with the analysis of the empirical data and the reader will be introduced to the separate steps undertaken in the process of statistical analysis as well as the arguments for the chosen design and its applicability. While the first one is dedicated to analysing the determinants of turnout in the 15 established MS in the timeframe 1994 – 2014, the second analysis chapter takes a look at the three most recent EP elections in all EU countries. The purpose of Chapter 7 then

will be to present and elaborate on the findings in order to test the formulated hypotheses in order to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Finally, Chapter 8 will serve as a place for highlighting general trends observed in this study, drawing up conclusions, providing an answer to the central research question and recommendations for future analysis.

2. Literature Review

In order to formulate the necessary hypotheses and provide an accurate answer for my main research question, I have conducted a literature review on the determinants of turnout rates at EP elections, based on relevant academic articles. The reader will be introduced first with studies dealing with observed general trends at EP elections and more causes considered, followed by articles by authors that have narrowed the scope to a single factor they have found to be of great importance, such as the role of media and individual level variables.

Perhaps the article "Why bother? Determinants of turnout in the European elections" (2003) by Mikko Mattila is as close as possible to my research. The results of the regression analysis in his study show that most of the variables of significance at national elections are similar to the ones at European ones: "*Compulsory voting, weekend voting and having other elections simultaneously with EP elections increase turnout*." Additionally, the author identifies some EU specific factors which affect turnout, but to a lesser extent. Yet again, although he analyses the elections in the period between 1979 and 1999, Mattila (2003) focuses on the most recent elections at that time, mentioning the importance of not only individual level variables such as trust in the EU and/or the EP, level of information about the EU and/or the EP, but of system level ones as well. These are, for instance, a specific country's share of seats in the EP or the benefits from the EU to the member state. For practical reasons, however, Mattila (2003) chooses to concentrate on his research on system level data by implementing three models in the analysis section.

Following suit with the abovementioned article, Daniel Stockemer (2011) uses the empirical data gathered to analyse the relation between citizens' support for the European Union and participation in European Parliament elections. The author states that citizens' satisfaction with the EU is among the factors with significant influence over turnout rates in EP elections, claiming that citizens' opinions about the EU is a significant determinant of voter

participation levels. His conclusions may turn out to be crucial in the process of testing my hypotheses, which rely on the impact of citizens' perception of the EU and EU membership as a whole: "*the extremely low turnout in EP elections, in part, stems from the fact that there is a growing percentage of EU citizens who do not support their country's membership in the EU*". Stockemer (2011) concludes his elaborations on the topic by stating that academics should devise "*effective strategies to further connect citizens to the European project and create policies with which EU citizens can identify"*, thus leaving room for further research and analytical thinking.

The 2004 elections are a distinct and interesting event in European integration history worth examining. On the one hand, they were not an exception to the continued decline in voter turnout and wide variation among the rates in member states (MS) observed up to that moment. On the other hand, the Eastern enlargement and the addition of 10 new MS presented the opportunity to test for the first time established explanations of turnout in EP elections to a larger amount of countries. This is why researchers Richard S. Flickinger and Donley T. Studlar (2007) identified and examined models of turnout in European Parliament elections after 2004. At the end, among the main conclusions they reached when distinguishing rates between old and new MS was that "*national level concerns"* such as trust in government and satisfaction with democracy were of great importance to citizens in the new member countries. On the contrary, citizens of established members considered *"EU-level factors"*, among which were trust in the EU and its institutions and general perception of the Union, as much more influential. The only significant and common factor between the two groups of countries was turnout at the last national elections.

With the growing role of media and the mass communication means in our everyday life their effect on the decisions we make should not be neglected. More and more researchers pay attention to the influence of media in the democratic political process, especially during electoral campaigns (see Banducci, 2005; de Vreese, 2007; Bilska, 2012; Nardis, 2013; etc.). A relevant study which presents media coverage and media exposure as explanatory factors for the voter turnout in the 2009 EP elections was conducted by Marketa Bilska (2012). She examines the impact of EU news coverage and media exposure in these particular elections with one of the study's main arguments being that the likelihood of people casting a vote is greater among the citizens exposed to "*highly visible EU news coverage*". In this line of thought, the author presumes that low voter turnout may be due to individual factors such as

"voters' lack of interest in the EU and low level of knowledge about the EU". Moreover, her findings indicate that there might be a relation between the lack of EU's external communication and further deepening of the democratic deficit in the Union.

Exploring a slightly different aspect of the issue, by highlighting news exposure and trust in the EU as determinants of turnout, Yioryos Nardis (2013) studies the divergence of voting behaviour in newly accessed and established EU countries. In the process of reviewing the relevant literature it became clear that media and news exposure seem to play an essential role in the process. That is why the author came to the conclusion that the difference in news coverage partially explains higher trust in EU institutions among citizens of new member states, which in turn is a stronger predictor of turnout for these citizens. To put it in a nutshell, news coverage could strengthen the trust associated with EU institutions and the European Parliament in particular. The results of the research led to the author concluding that "*news exposure had stronger relationships with trust among people in these nations as opposed to established members*". Moreover, findings show that not only is trust vital, but in the event of EP elections, trust in European institutions is even more important than trust in national ones.

In this line of thought, Matsusaka (1995) develops the so called *information theory*, which comes from two observations. First of all, according to it most citizens are predisposed to vote and second, some citizens provide as a significant reason for abstaining from voting the fact that they were not able to evaluate the candidates because they simply did not know anything about them or the issues in the particular elections: "*Citizens who do not even go to the polls sometimes explain that they are too uninformed about the candidates to vote*" (Matsusaka, 1995). Various factors may have an impact on voter participation with different explanations proposed for potential correlations. The purpose of his paper is to explicitly embed 'information' in the traditional rational voter theory model in order to provide an explanation for the regularities spotted. The key link identified is that a person's expected benefit from casting a decisive vote is increasing if he is convinced he/she is supporting the best candidate. As a result, the individual is more likely to vote as the 'price' of information falls and level of knowledge rises.

Therefore, as a possible solution to this problem and a way to fill the existing gap between political parties or individual candidates and potential voters, a greater amount of money spent on national parties' campaigns was accepted by the majority of people running for

positions of representatives. If the assumption that campaign spending increases the levels of information absorbed by the people and the knowledge on the matters discussed, which consequently would motivate them to participate in the elections and increase turnout rates, turns out to be true, then the investment could definitely be labelled as successful. Campaign expenditures as a factor with observed impact on voter participation has been investigated in other pieces of academic literature as well[4] and the positive effect achieved has been agreed upon. Researchers have put forward arguments such as: "*Campaigns increase information and awareness levels within the electorate and decrease the costs of information acquisition*", which would consequently raise the degree of probability of turning out. Living in such a digital and technologically advanced era, it makes sense that candidates and political parties would target to a highest degree sources of information such as the television and electronic media to convey their messages and campaign slogans in order to reach a greater amount of people.

Blondel, Sinnott and Svensson (1997), realising the extent of the problem of low turnout rates, examine the linkage between representation and voter participation in EP elections. It is worth noting that this is a study of already established member states as we define them today, with strong factors back then such as compulsory voting and concomitant national elections, being analysed (as for now, the share of EU countries with compulsory voting is rather small). The conclusions derived in these two instances are rather obvious and not very intriguing for the scholars – "*if there are laws which say people must vote, more people will vote*". What is more, since turnout in national elections is substantially higher than the one in EP elections, "*holding the two events on the same day increases EP turnout*". The two other institutional variables widely discussed – proportional versus non-proportional electoral systems and weekday versus Sunday voting – stir more interest in the effects they bring because the possible outcomes are not as easy to predict. First, evidence suggests that the move from a majority system to a list system of proportional representation for the European Parliament elections may depress turnout. On the other hand, Sunday voting may lead to higher turnout rates as work and time are identified as main obstacles associated with voting on a weekday. As the authors conclude, "*since the European Parliament is a system of representation in the making*", if a uniform electoral system were to be adopted, careful thought should be given to the possible consequences on turnout.

[4] In his article Matsusaka (1995) gives Dawson and Zinser, 1976; Chapman and Palda, 1983; Cox and Munger, 1989, etc. as examples

An article which investigates the effects of individual level variables and more precisely the effect of generation and age on turnout to the European Parliament was written by Yoseph Bhatti and Kasper Hansen (2011). Based on observed declining rates of turnout in almost every Western country, EP elections follow this trend and make no exception. What is distinguishing about their research and perhaps never done before is the fact that they consider the possible impacts of these variables on future turnout in order to establish whether a significant reason in previous years could be informative of future outcomes. As we are well aware, however, forecasts tend to be quite uncertain because they attempt to predict future events on the basis of current trends. Nevertheless, the predictions made in this study give us a strong indication about what will happen and provided the fact that there no dramatic shocks, "*turnout will decline to EP elections in almost all the countries under investigation",* the underlying reason being demographic development.

A theory that could be implemented in this research is Reif and Schmitt's (1980) "*second order national elections*". The authors define them as such because they play no role in deciding who rules the country and because there is "less at stake" than in national elections. "*European elections are … determined more by the domestic political cleavages than by alternatives originating in the EC, but in a different way than if nine first-order national elections took place simultaneously. This is the case because European elections occur at different stages of the national political systems' respective 'electoral cycles'.*" This very first analysis justifies the assumption that the EP direct elections should be regarded and treated as "*nine simultaneous national second-order elections*" or twenty-eight as is the case nowadays. In 2008 Simon Hix and Michael Marsh wrote an article based on this theory in their attempt to try to understand EP elections and the way voters see them – either as punishment, or as protest. The authors conduct their research by looking at and examining all EP elections up to 2004, placing the emphasis more on voters' preferences rather than participation at elections. What they conclude is that even though the European Parliament has continuously acquired much more power in the decision-making process "*neither position on matters regarding European integration, nor on matters regarding "normal" left-right policy, has much of an effect on electoral outcomes.*" Even though their piece of work is written before the Lisbon Treaty came into force and they do not deal with turnout rates, they have accepted the second-order elections theory and its application in the case of EP elections, which might turn out to be useful.

Nick Clark and Robert Rohrschneider (2009) analysed the way voters perceive the representation process in a multi-layered system of governance. In their study the authors test two competing hypotheses – a transfer hypothesis, according to which individuals presumably apply their evaluations of national-level phenomena to the EU level when voting in EU elections, and a sui generis hypothesis which stipulates that voters evaluate the EU on its own performance terms. At the end they sum up their conclusions by highlighting that as a consequence of the relatively weak EP, national issues are still very high on the agenda in the event of EP elections which is a strong implication for future research. What is more, as the authors claim, it affects the way *"we view the sophistication of voters in the context of multi-layered institutions.*"

In order to make a fluent transition to the next chapter, the following paragraphs are dedicated to presenting the existing foundations in academic literature of the phenomenon that is of greatest interest to me in this research, namely Euroscepticism. As far as providing an accurate definition for Euroscepticism, authors and political scientists Robert Harmsen and Menno Spiering (2004) define the concept as the opposition to membership or the existence of the EU. According to them, there are supposedly two forms of Euroscepticism - 'hard' and 'soft'. 'Hard' or 'withdrawalist' Euroscepticism is the opposition to membership or the existence of the EU. On the other hand, 'soft' or 'reformist' Euroscepticism supports the existence of the EU and membership to the Union, but opposes further integrationist EU policies and the idea of a federal Europe.

In an attempt to develop this definition and to provide a more detailed and accurate classification of the concept, Flood and Usherwood (2005) propose six categories so that the distinction between the different shades of Euroscepticism is made more visible. It was their deliberate intention to avoid using the term itself and to resort to other terms, more conventionally applied in political science. The categories go as follows (all of them carrying the prefix EU-): Maximalist, Reformist, Gradualist, Minimalist, Revisionist and Rejectionist. Except from being very comprehensive, this classification manages to escape the trap of too inclusive categories. These categories encompass the whole spectrum, ranging from unrestricted support to outright rejection and still are not necessarily mutually exclusive. This is because it is possible that some people would find themselves matching the characteristics of a certain category when it comes to one specific policy or area of competence and at the same time maybe in a completely different category as far as the overall direction of the

European integration process is concerned. However, what should be highlighted is that very seldom political parties, let alone citizens, elaborate their visions on key issues of the EU in such detail that one can categorise them in such a fine-grained scheme proposed by the authors (Hansen, 2008).

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter's aim is to present the theoretical framework for the research. Three of the most often used in academic literature theories are explored, which leads to the presumption that they are most probably going to provide accurate responses to the main question, namely what determines the turnout rates in EP elections. I have come up with several hypotheses, derived from relevant theoretical and empirical literature. In the following pages the most significant and influential factors selected for this study will be elaborated upon in detail.

3.1 Theory on Euroscepticism

In this first section the existing theory on Euroscepticim will be elaborated upon, describing and highlighting the key dimensions of the concept that have been recognised as most suitable in the process of writing this thesis.

It cannot be denied that public opinion, through mass political behaviour, is among the key factors that shape and direct the process of European integration (Gabel, 1998). Briefly, public opinion can be defined as the aggregate of individual opinions held by the adult population in a given country or in this case, in the European Union (Hansen, 2008). Although in the beginning relatively little importance was attributed to what people think and decisions were mainly taken by the political elites of the member states, in a larger and more integrated Europe this assumption has become harder to sustain. The publics grew to become more and more questioning and wary of prospective consequences. Without the approval and consent of their citizens, a great deal of the political leaders, experts and activists' ambitious objectives would have remained unaccomplished, especially in countries with constitutional requirements for holding a referendum on such sensitive matters (for example, the No-votes in France and the Netherlands in the referenda on the Constitutional Treaty). Most people believed in the European idea and were convinced that steps deepening the process of integration such as the establishment of the Internal market, the adoption of a common

currency or the enlargement of the Union would be beneficial in a social, economic and sometimes even personal aspect. However, there has always been a tangible variation in the extent of support citizens of different member states expressed. Perhaps this is due to factors such as trust in the EU institutions, compared to national ones, or unclear decision-making process and division of competences. In this regard, the question raised by scholars in the past (and still without a definite answer) is: Why do EU citizens vary in their support for the European project? What are the most significant and influential reasons behind it?

If we are to provide a historical overview of the concept of Euroscepticism, it should be noted that this phenomenon emerged in the mainstream discourse in the early 1990s (Harmsen & Spiering, 2005). Even long before that, a term related, known as "anti-marketeers", appears to have surfaced in Britain. These people were the oppositionists to the participation of Great Britain in the European integration project in the 1960s. Since then, a variety of forms of Euroscepticism have assumed a prominent place not only there, but in continental Europe as well, and as a consequence, the political debate preceding EP elections in every member state inevitably had to include the topic. Today, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a "Eurosceptic" as "*a person having doubts or reservations regarding the supposed benefits of increasing cooperation between the member states of the European Union*". After looking through the academic literature, it has become clear that many of the understandings of Euroscepticism are very broad and multidimensional concepts. My purpose in the paragraphs to follow would be to present the already identified specific categories on the matter, highlighting the most relevant ones to this research.

One can say that in the last few years Euroscepticism has been overly used in the media, the political and academic worlds, and as a result has acquired many labels, bearing certain connotations and meanings. The different degrees, from being pessimistic and critical to sceptical and even euro-phobic, have been illustrated in the various definitions of the concept. For instance, Flood (2002) is of the opinion that it *"carries the meaning of doubt and distrust on the subject of European integration"* and is only directed to certain aspects and areas of the EU (such as the Common Agricultural Policy), whereas Harmsen and Spiering (2005) trace its roots back to Britain, concluding that the phenomenon can only be viewed as principle scepticism towards the European project as a whole. However, it seems that George's (2000) definition of Euroscepticism takes a further look in the phenomenon by showing its degrees. The author distinguishes three separate levels of being a Eurosceptic: 1)

one having doubts about the form that integration is taking, 2) being doubtful about potential benefits of further integration and 3) having a hostile attitude towards the very idea of the EU.

To summarize, it is evident from the existing literature on the subject of Euroscepticism that the focus has been moved from what it actually entails rather than to splitting the concept into separate categories. The above theoretical discourse and various definitions all have their pros and cons. Without a doubt, their analytical categories would be really difficult to operationalize when trying to realise what lies beneath such Eurosceptic stances (Hansen, 2008). To put it in a nutshell, Euroscepticism is an attitude of disapproval and reservations which are of a more long-term character and are either directed to a special policy area, or towards the entire EU.

Whether it will be framed as scepticism or low levels of support, even lack of satisfaction with the European project is not that salient, as they all infer a negative attitude of the public towards the EU. The subject of interest in this thesis would be to establish if this phenomenon has an effect on voter participation and to what extent. An assumption that can be derived from all of the above is that the less people in a certain member state approve of the Union, the less salience they would attribute to the EP elections and therefore the turnout rates would be lower. Moreover, recent public opinion polls show that Euroscepticism is on the rise. There are low levels of trust in the EU institutions, little support for further integration, let alone federalisation, in general. The impact of the Eurocrisis in particular is dramatic and most surveys reflect this trend (Müllerleile, 2013). That is why I have formulated my first hypothesis in the following way in an attempt to study the general attitude towards a country's membership in the EU:

Hypothesis 1: The higher the levels of Euroscepticism in a country, the lower the turnout at EP elections.

In order to be more specific and to reflect on the impact of the conducted categorization of the concept in academic literature, the next paragraphs aim at reflecting on the different dimensions of Euroscepticism, which demonstrate the diverse nature of scepticism towards the EU. The assumption above is not based on any specific category or type of Euroscepticism, however, it measures the effect of the concept as a whole over turnout rates by simply posing the question "Do you think your country's membership is a good idea?" to

the public. Even though the influence over voter participation only of the utilitarian dimension will be examined in addition as a separate hypothesis, I think it is worth noting briefly the other ones as well for the purposes of presenting a full and complete theoretical framework on this matter.

The Democratic Dimension

As already mentioned, when it first emerged in the public discourse in the 1990s, scepticism was mostly associated with the idea of the democratic deficit. Just like the case with Euroscepticism itself, it has been a struggle providing a clear-cut definition of this concept. Nevertheless, the democratic deficit is essentially concerned with the degree to which the EU adequately represents and accounts to its citizens (Hansen, 2008). McCormick (2005) describes it as "*the gap between the powers of the European institutions and the ability of European citizens to influence their work and decisions*". In its aim to be as close to the citizens of the EU and consequently receive high levels of support, the Union's solid democratic standing is very high on the agenda. According to Weiler's (1995) 'standard approach' the basic problem is rooted in the shift of political control from the democratic parliamentarian systems of government at national level to the executive-centred one at European level[5]. The author seems to accuse the EU's system and division of competences of an overall lack of transparency, especially in the decision-making process, as well as of the underrepresentation of the interests of the European citizens. The widespread perception of EP elections as 'second-order' and the still too weak Parliament in comparison to the Commission and the Council in the institutional configuration exacerbate the lack of direct input from citizens and lead to low levels of voter participation in the case of elections. The reason why I have not formulated a separate hypothesis based on these assumptions is the fact that the academic world acknowledges the existence of democratic deficit within the EU but finding the right measureable indicators remains a challenge.

The Sovereignty Dimension

Another approach to understanding Euroscepticism is by investigating the concept of sovereignty of member states, defined as the right to hold and exercise authority (McCormick, 2005). In democracies it lies with citizens, although the sovereign power is usually exercised by the institutions elected to represent them (in the case of the EU – the European

[5] The executive at the European level consists of both the European Commission and the European Council which are not accountable to the national parliaments

Parliament). Based on this argumentation, the notion of the integration process leading to a loss of national sovereignty partially explains levels of public unease towards the European project and the deepening of integration. As national identity is such a salient and sensitive issue, EU citizens tend to attribute great importance to it when determining their attitude towards the Union. Some authors even explain becoming Eurosceptic with the perception of integration as a threat to national identity - "*Opposition is less about hostility to the institutions of the EU or concerns about personal economic/ financial losses and more to do with fears of symbolic threat to the national community*" (Hansen, 2008). In this line of thought, people could neglect potential benefits when considering going to the polls on election-day and thus the turnout rate would decrease. However, as with the previous dimension, fear of losing national identity or demands for higher degrees of sovereignty of the member state would be very difficult to establish among EU citizens, let alone confirm and measure and for the purposes of this thesis I have decided not to include this dimension of Euroscepticism in a separate hypothesis. Moreover, with today's world being globalized to such an extent, boundaries and concepts such as that of sovereignty seem to gradually lose their salience and impact.

The Utilitarian Dimension

In accordance with the definition provided by George (2000)[6], perhaps the most significant dimension of Euroscepticism is doubt related to the potential benefits a certain society may obtain from further integration. A key feature of the discussion about utility in the academic world is the calculation of expected economic gains and losses through membership (Hansen, 2008). The main argument lies within the rational idea that individuals evaluate the EU according to its economic achievements and progress by a simple cost/benefit analysis of their country's membership. So, the people that believe membership is of their interest would be supportive towards the EU, while the ones perceiving it as disadvantageous to their own benefit would disapprove of the Union (Gabel, 1998). The author describes market liberalisation as the core and primary objective of the integration process. Due to the fact that it provides various benefits for EU citizens depending on their physical proximity and access to other EU markets and their financial, as well as human capital (income, education, occupation for instance), these are respectively associated with either support, or scepticism towards European integration. Whole nations may be sensitive to their collective economic

[6] See paragraph 3.1

circumstances, but they are felt by individual citizens, too. Therefore, the utilitarian approach may be perceived both at a micro (in which case socio-economic determinants are assessed in respect to the personal cost and benefits) and macro-level. A study of opinions among EU citizens[7], conducted by Gabel (1998), shows that people tend to base their support for the EU institutions and the Union as a whole mostly on *"utilitarian concerns"*, rather than on emotional appraisals. Therefore, a suggestion could be made that perhaps citizens' voting decisions and preferences, even the attitude towards the act of voting itself, may also be affected by economic concerns.

According to studies conducted by authors like Gabel (1998) and Mattila (2003) potential voters in countries that are net-donors to the budget of the Union may be of the opinion that the EU is financed with their tax money from which they do not get back enough, as this money is mainly spent on projects aimed at the poorest MS. Eventually, it is inevitable to expect a negative effect on their willingness to participate in all EU related events, including such a salient one as the EP elections. It must be noted that one could not possibly claim that every single EU citizen is aware of the fact that his/her country is a net contributor or a net beneficiary from the common budget. Nevertheless, in member-states known to show large imbalance in that aspect the media and some opposing the European integration process and its course politicians are likely to bring this exact point up during the election campaigns (Mattila, 2003). On the other hand, the opposite effect may be observed in the countries benefiting the most from a financial perspective. Of course, citizens themselves may not benefit directly from the EU subsidies provided, these potential voters may simply notice the impact of the subsidies realised as a public good which promotes well-being, better lifestyle and higher living standard in their homeland. It may even be a prerequisite enough that they know that the country (or the region) where they reside is benefiting from the EU subsidies to raise their willingness to take part in the EP elections (Mattila, 2003).

However, it seems more likely that the public takes into consideration a broader array of arguments when formulating their opinion. Often, people estimate and take into consideration all the potential benefits of EU membership and not only the economic ones. Based on this argument, it seems reasonable to expect that citizens who perceive their country benefits more from being a member of the European Union will be inclined to support European integration,

[7] The aim of Gabel's investigation is to test the explanatory power of five different theories of public support for the EU i.e. cognitive mobilisation, political values, class partisanship, government support and the utilitarian approach.

and as a consequence, will show higher interest in EU matters by participating at EP elections. In accordance with the abovementioned arguments for Hypothesis 1, this kind of attitude will lead to an increase in the turnout rates in the particular member state. The assumption to be further investigated goes as follows:

Hypothesis 2: The more people perceive their country benefits from EU membership, the higher the turnout rates at EP elections.

Having finished with presenting the dimensions of Euroscepticism and in order to achieve greater accuracy when providing an answer for the main research question in the thesis, system level factors need to be taken into consideration as well. Based on the reviewed literature on this topic, I have made up my mind to concentrate and explore the potential effect of 'concomitant national elections' in a country and 'weekend voting' on turnout rates as they seem to be under-researched. Even though variables such as 'compulsory voting' for example are likely to have obvious outcomes, it has to be taken into consideration in order to control for potential errors when the final conclusions are drawn; therefore it would also be of interest to my study.

3.2 Rational theories of voting

As a starting point of this section I have set the assumption that voters are rational actors who weigh the potential costs and benefits of the process of voting itself and then make their decisions accordingly (Mattila, 2003). It seems that people take into serious consideration these particular elements before going to the polls and that is why when the costs of voting decrease or the benefits increase, citizens are more likely to vote and vice versa.

The already mentioned in Chapter 2 "second-order elections" theory by Reif and Schmitt (1980) has been recognised and accepted as a standard approach to exploring the European Parliament elections. Its central idea is that in second-order elections there is '*less at stake'* than in the so called first-order elections. Usually national parliamentary or presidential elections, to which greater importance is attributed by both political parties and voters, are labelled as the latter. According to the theory, citizens are likely to compare the powers of the EP to the formal level of powers of their national authorities by evaluating the direct impact of the decisions made on their everyday lives. For instance, MEPs do not decide on the level of income tax or on the quality and access to public schools and hospitals, such matters are

still in the area of competence of member states and the EU institutions can only give out recommendations at this point. No matter what their level of knowledge on the EU is, voters are aware of this and thus attribute a lot less weight to EP elections, which leads to lower levels of voter participation. We can conclude that Reif and Schmitt's theory explains the low turnout observed in general, but there are a couple of problems with it (Mattila, 2003). First of all, nowadays the Parliament has much more power than when the second-order elections theory was conceptualised and with the '*more at stake*' turnout rates should rise. Furthermore, the theory fails to explain the variations of turnout in the different EU countries.

From the perspective of rational choice theory, the majority of people see voting as a low cost, low benefit activity (Aldrich, 1993). To make it clearer, this means that voting decisions are made "at the margin" and even slight alterations in the cost/benefits ratio may change a person's decision to vote or not. For instance, voting in the EP elections must be considered as a low cost, and *very low* benefit activity (when compared to voting in national elections) because the power of the Parliament is still much smaller than the power of national parliaments (Mattila, 2003). As a consequence, the benefits of having a person's desired candidate been elected into the EP or even casting the deciding vote are smaller, which therefore leads to lower turnout rates. In this case, my presumption would be that in the event of national elections held on the same day as EP elections, people would attribute greater importance to casting a ballot, which would increase voter participation levels.

Concurrent national elections can be expected to have an influence on voter's participation because any individual citizen is likely to be at least to a certain degree concerned (even though not equally) with all of them (Geys, 2006). Two specific reasons, in particular, for an existing positive relation between voter turnout and concomitant national elections have been uncovered up to now. First of all, with more elections going on at the same time the probability that the media pays attention to at least one of the elections increases the amount of money spent by parties on campaigns (Cox & Munger, 1989; Matsusaka, 1995; etc.). This should lead to higher levels of the general awareness and information gathered of the population, which can consequently be expected to increase the turnout rates. Second, as the rational theorists have established, the cost of going to the poll booth is a fixed one, one that is not related to the number of elections the citizen needs to cast a ballot upon. Therefore, the likelihood of a person realising the salience of voting is greater compared to the cost of the voting process itself increases, which should also lead to higher turnout rates.

Hypothesis 3: In the event of concomitant national elections in a country, the turnout rates at EP elections are higher.

Rational choice theorists have appreciated the "paradox of not voting", which is to say that in a large election (such as the EP elections), the probability that an individual vote might change the final outcome is vanishingly small (Downs, 1957; Aldrich, 1993; Feddersen, 2004; Geys, 2005). But if every single citizen only votes for the purpose of influencing the election outcome, then even a small cost to vote like a minor schedule conflict or mildly bad weather should dissuade anyone from voting (Feddersen, 2004). Turning out to vote is considered to be the most common and important act of political participation in a democratic society and yet still under-investigated empirically (Aldrich, 1993). The problem of explaining turnout is well-known to rational theorists, according to which although all may benefit from voting, it is seldom in the individual person's self-interest to cast a ballot.

If we are to continue with the cost/benefit analysis of going to the polls, scheduling the elections for the weekend lowers the costs of voting (Mattila, 2003). During the week people are either at work or at school and for their convenience in most EU member states elections are typically held at the weekend. Following these tracks, we may presume that citizens would find time to go to the polls on Saturday or Sunday because usually at weekends they are not busy with activities such as going to school, university or work, which leads to the formulation of our next hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Elections held during the weekend are likely to lead to higher turnout rates.

As Aldrich (1993) concludes, it would be false to see the rational choice theory in general as inappropriate for understanding politics, in spite of some narrow interpretations drawn from it. However, I share the author's opinion that overly narrow interpretations might have missed some genuine and important opportunities for developing insightful theoretical accounts of elections and more precisely, for providing a better understanding of how and why people vote or abstain. Therefore, I have included one more theory, a contemporary and relevant one such as the existing theory on Euroscepticism in this framework in an attempt to make it complete. Controlling for unwanted errors and unreliable outcomes, the following variable would be a valuable ingredient of this thesis.

3.3 Mandatory voting

Differences in election laws are an obvious place to examine when in search of a determinant of turnout rates (Flickinger & Studlar, 2007). In previous research conducted on this topic compulsory voting has invariably been found to be a significant predictor of turnout (Powell, 1986; Franklin, 1996; Franklin, 2001; etc.). It seems quite self-evident – if a certain rule is enforced, then as a consequence the costs of not voting increase, therefore citizens will have a solid reason to vote (even in the event of lack of motivation) which will consequently lead to higher turnout rates. But this argument is also based on a certain perception – disobeying the law might also affect a person's social status and prestige. To the extent that one wants to be known and accepted as a law-abiding and trustworthy citizen in general, the person's utility decreases if he/she is caught not-voting. Hence, in theory, there should be a positive correlation between voter turnout and mandatory voting (Geys, 2006). Currently, voting is obligatory in only a few EU member states (Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece and Cyprus respectively). In three of them sanctions are still imposed, only Greece ceased to put this practice into force in 2000. It makes sense then for citizens in these particular countries to reduce the risks of potential costs by just simply going to the polls in the event of elections. Even if they have not found their ideal representative to the EU, casting a blank ballot would be sufficient. In practice, however, it has become evident that even where non-voting is considered a crime, it is seldom punished (Franklin, 2001). Although this variable may not be very interesting from a theoretical perspective, its influence should not be ignored, but the effect controlled for before making inferences about the impact of other factors (Mattila, 2003). That is why the final hypothesis to be tested in this research is formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 5: In member states where compulsory voting is enforced, the turnout rates at EP elections are higher.

As a conclusion of this theoretical chapter, I would like to highlight that this study is going to deal with and explore institutional, system-level variables (including the two measuring public opinion in a country). The units of observation may be at an individual level, but the units of analysis selected are the EU member states, thus guaranteeing that all variables are measured at the same, national level. The individual/system level division is reflected in the empirical data investigated, as well. While in most instances on the individual level researchers use survey data, on the system level they use constituency or country level data

(Mattila, 2003). However, my purpose here is not to say that individual level analyses are of a lesser value than the others. On the contrary, I am of the opinion that a researcher should use both kinds of analyses to create a full picture of the factors affecting turnout, but in order to come up with a feasible study, the focus is set on system-level institutional variables.

4. Research Design and Operationalization

In this chapter the design of the study will be discussed. The beginning is dedicated to the selection of the most appropriate one, given the problem under investigation. In the following section the operationalization of the variables is presented. What are the operational definitions of the concepts? How do we define the concepts so that they accurately measure what we want to know? And how do we ensure their validity and reliability? These paragraphs deal precisely with the dependent variable voter turnout and the five independent variables.

4.1 Selection of the proper research design

Provided that for any given political science research situation implementing an experiment often turns out to be unworkable (sometimes even impossible), an observational study appears to be a much more suitable choice (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2009). After getting familiar with literature on large N designs and previous research conducted on this topic, the most appropriate one for this thesis proves out to be a pooled cross-sectional time-series design in which a regression will be used to analyse the data gathered.

4.1.1 Pooled non-experimental large N design

Since a non-experimental design, which relies solely on observations and interpretations, is going to be applied in this research, a certain disadvantage should be noted in the very beginning – "*these methods are not as strong for making causal inferences*" (Buttolph Johnson & Reynolds, 2008) compared to experimental designs. However, this is the only type of design that makes it possible to study such a realistic problem like decreasing turnout rates, also allowing us to examine differences among countries. The large N design corresponds to the large amount of cases that is included in the sample. This design is used instead of a comparative or single case-study, because it is of great salience for the purpose of this research that not only all EU member states are investigated, but the differences over time as

well. In comparative or single case-studies, on the other hand, one or a few cases are studied in depth. By focusing on a lot of cases it will be easier to identify general trends, which would consequently increase the external validity.

As the chosen research design is based on some features of a cross-sectional design some positive feature of it should be mentioned in comparison to an experimental design, namely that "*it allows observation of phenomena in more natural, realistic settings, increases the size and representativeness of the population studies, and allows the testing of hypotheses that do not lend themselves easily to experimental treatment*" (Buttolph Johnson & Reynolds, 2008). Even though the causal effects may be more difficult to measure, the external validity will be guaranteed. However, we should keep in mind that "*Cross-sectional designs improve external validity at the expense of internal validity*" (Buttolph Johnson & Reynolds, 2008).

The other observational large N design to be implemented in this study is a longitudinal, also known as time-series design. A comparative advantage of it is that it puts under examination the variables at different points in time, making it possible to identify and measure alterations in the level of variables and to even establish the direction of causation. Moreover, a time-series design requires a lot of observed cases at many points in time which would prove to be of great use when researching the EP elections over the years. "*Neither approach is inherently better or worse than the other, but they shed light on different aspects of social reality*" (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2009). That is why I consider a combination of the two quantitative designs most suitable to the research question posed in this study.

4.1.2 Unit of analysis

The units of analysis in this research are the member states of the EU[8]. In order to provide accurate, recent and most relevant information with the outcomes of this research, the time frame that has been selected is 1994-2014. The period of twenty years with five EP elections that have taken place in between has been deliberately selected in order to take into consideration existing differences among the separate countries. Furthermore, after 1992 and the coming into force of the Maastricht Treaty (a moment considered as one of the milestones of European Integration history), the European Community became truly a European Union based on shared values, ambitious targets to reach and much more power and competences at

[8] In the period of investigation due to the enlargement process and the accession of new members to the Union, their number has grown from 15 to 28.

hand. What is more, the member states in the 70s and the 80s had much more in common and were at close enough stages of economic, political and social development. With the enlargements to the East, however, countries that were very different from the established MS became part of the 'European family' and exacerbated the existing inequalities that were to be removed in the integration process. That is why my main efforts will be concentrated on dealing with and investigating as many as possible of the EU countries to show the variety of the Union expressed in the turnout rates observed in the separate member states.

Two data-sets are used in the analysis chapters of this thesis, which consist of country-level data derived from official turnout statistics, along with other variables to be discussed in the following pages. As it is a large N design, the sample of the population should be as big as possible in order to increase the external validity[9]. Therefore, the first data-set used in the analysis of turnout rates in old MS in the elections of the 1994-2014 timeframe (see Chapter 5), comprises 75 cases: 15 for 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 respectively (including Austria, Finland and Sweden in the 1994 time-point even though their first EP elections were held in 1995). The second data-set used in the analysis of voter turnout in MS in the three most recent EP elections (see Chapter 6) adds to the established MS the ten new member states from the Eastern enlargement, as well as the elections that have taken place immediately after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania because the EP takes into consideration these percentages when calculating the average turnout rates for the EU. To sum it up, there are 81 cases examined – 27 for 2004, 2009 and 2014 respectively. A certain detail has to be mentioned - the data from the newest EU country – Croatia are not added as it joined the Union in July 2013 and thus we cannot make comparisons with earlier outcomes.

4.1.3 The regression analysis

The regression analysis is a statistical tool for the investigation of relationships between variables. Most often, the researcher tries to make sure a causal relation between the dependent and the independent variables is actually present in his/her study - which in our case will be the effect of the independent variables on the turnout rates in European Parliament elections. To explore such an issue, as a researcher my aim is to assemble data on the underlying variables of interest and employ regression to estimate the quantitative effect of the causal variables upon the variable under influence, namely the dependent one. What is

[9] Currently, according to official statistics, there are around 500 million people living in the 28 EU member states.

more, typically the “statistical significance” of the estimated relationships is assessed, that is, the degree of confidence that the true relationship is close to the estimated relationship (Sykes, 1986). Even though regression techniques have long been central to the field of economic statistics (also known as econometrics), over the years they have become quite useful and important to political scientists and policy makers as well.

Various methods are used when the focus of the analysis is on the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. To make it clearer, a regression analysis helps one understand how the value of the dependent variable alters when any one of the independent variables changes its value, while the other independent variables are held fixed. In this research a multiple regression analysis will be carried out, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to be more precise. Usually, in such cases the estimated equation is $Y = ß0 + ß1X1 + ß2X2 + ß3X3 + \hat{e}$ where the ßs (the coefficients) are the OLS estimates of the Bs. These estimates are known to be: unbiased, consistent, normally distributed and to have minimum variance (Field, 2009).

Three uses of the multiple regression analysis have proven to be considered in literature as major – as a description or model of reality, as a means for testing hypotheses based on theory and also for making predictions or forecasts about future events. The latter, however, would not be the case in this study, as all of the necessary data will already be available before the actual work with the SPSS software takes place. Another use of the regression analysis that has to be mentioned is to understand which ones of the X - variables are related to the dependent variable, and to explore the specific forms these relationships take. In a limited number of cases, this type of analysis can also be used to infer causal relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Nevertheless, this can lead to certain illusions or assuming false relationships exist, so caution is advisable (Armstrong, 2012); for instance, one should be aware that correlation does not imply causation. Widely used methods such as linear and OLS regression are parametric, which means that the regression function is defined in terms of a finite number of unknown parameters that are estimated from the data.

As far as the performance of regression analysis methods is concerned, it actually depends on the form of the data generating process, and in what way it relates to the regression approach that is being implemented in a particular research. The quality of a regression analysis is often

interconnected (to a certain extent) with making assumptions about this process, since the true form of the data-generating process is generally not known. These assumptions are testable in general, provided that a sufficient quantity of data is available. Further in this thesis (see paragraphs 5.2.1 and 6.2.1), the assumptions of normal distribution, linearity, homoscedasticity, etc. will be discussed in greater detail. However, we should not ignore the fact that in many applications, especially with small effects or matters of observational studies, a certain limitation of the regression methods is that they can give misleading results (Freedman, 2005).

4.1.4 Reliability and validity

In order to provide outcomes, which are as accurate as possible, the measurements of the variables in this thesis need to be both reliable and valid. According to Buttolph Johnson & Reynolds (2008), *"The measurements are reliable when the measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials"*. In addition, to make sure measurement validity is achieved as well, it is crucial "*that you measure what you are supposed to measure*" (ibid.). Further in this research the reliability and validity of each variable is discussed in the operationalization section (see paragraph 4.2).

An essential requirement of every research project is to guarantee both the internal and external validity of its results. What internal validity actually means is that we ensure the independent variable causes the dependent one and at the same time this cause-effect relation is not affected by other factors. In this research we have added more independent variables in the regression model, which increases the probability of defining the most important and influential determinant (Field, 2009). Applying a combination of the two basic types of quantitative designs in this thesis – a cross-sectional and a time-series – increase the validity of the conclusions drawn. The argument behind that is that in this way the outcomes are not based on the analysis of a certain point in time only or a specific country/sector/policy. The simplest way to define the meaning of external validity is by saying that "*it stands for the extent to which the results can be generalized to the rest of the world*" (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2009). In this particular case, when the EU countries are examined, we cannot actually apply the outcomes to the rest of the countries in the world as the EU is such an unusual and specific type of international organization, but the last three assumptions made (see paragraphs 3.2 and 3.3) can easily be generalized because they are based on institutional variables and can be tested when researching national elections as well.

4.2 Operationalization of Variables

The purpose of this section is to go more in depth with the different phenomena and factors identified in the hypotheses in the previous chapter. To put it in a nutshell, our objective will be to investigate more thoroughly the conceptual clarity, dimensions, indicators, reliability and validity of the variables in regard to the thesis.

4.2.1 Operationalizing Voter Turnout

"*Turnout varies much more from country to country than it does between individuals*" (Franklin, 2001).

Starting with the dependent variable that is analysed in this research, *voter turnout*, it can be defined as the absolute number of people voting in the election or as the share of the population that has cast its vote. In the event of EP elections, *population* encompasses all EU citizens in all the member states who are legible to vote according to the individual national voting rules and procedures.

Voter turnout is one measure of citizen participation in politics. It is usually expressed as the percentage of voters who cast a vote (i.e., "turnout") at an election. This total number of voters includes those who cast blank or invalid votes, as they still participate. The pool of eligible voters can be defined in different ways. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)[10] uses two measures: the number of registered voters and estimated voting age population (VAP).

There are advantages and disadvantages in using either of these calculations as the basis for turnout statistics. Registration is useful in that in many countries it is a prerequisite for voting, so the number of registered voters reflects those who may actually be able to cast a vote. However, in some countries registration is not applicable or the register itself may be inaccurate. On the other hand, in the event of using voting age population we would be able to make an estimate of the potential number of voters, if all systemic, institutional and administrative barriers were to be removed. And yet, as an estimate, it is not able to exclude the ratio of the population who may not be eligible for registration or voting due to various factors such as non-citizenship, mental disabilities or serving a sentence in prison.

[10] IDEA official website - http://www.idea.int/vt/

As far as voter turnout at EP elections in particular is concerned, other more renowned and respected researchers have also struggled to come up with one single most accurate definition. According to Geys (2006), not only is a clear operationalization of the concept necessary, but the issue is "*much less trivial than it at first appears and should receive the attention due to it"*. The meta-analysis conducted on this topic by him points out that most studies define turnout as some kind of ratio and because of that, clear definitions for the denominator should be provided (the numerator *Number of people voted* does not need a scientific definition). For the purpose of this thesis the ratio to be used is the most popular one in the academic literature (see in Table 1. below) – *number voted/ voting age population*. The denominator in this case (the age-eligible citizens) would leave out those who have not yet reached the legally allowed age to vote (most often 18, in Austria – 16). Most probably the majority of researchers relied on this particular ratio because of the ease of access with which it can be obtained (or calculated if necessary) from official statistics.

The source, which is going to be used in this study, is the percentages published on the official website of the European Parliament[11]. Therefore we had to make sure they use the same definition and after a small research conducted, it became clear that in order to achieve consistency between the member states, the EP (in cooperation with the MS themselves and TNS/Scytl[12] as sources) calculates and reports turnout as the ratio *total votes (both valid and rejected)/ electorate* (Mellows-Facer et. al, 2009). Since as electorate[13] we view the citizens in a certain country or area that are entitled to vote at elections (Oxford English Dictionary) and after comparing both ratios mentioned, it turns out they are in compliance and there is no contradiction between them.

[11] European Parliament Elections 2014 website - http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/turnout.html
[12] Scytl and TNS opinion have been selected to provide the website for the 2014 EP elections - http://www.scytl.com/news/scytl-tns-opinion-provide-results-website-2014-eu-parliamentary-elections/
[13] Definition of electorate obtained from http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/electorate

Table 1

Turnout defined in 83 aggregate-level empirical analyses

Definition	*Frequency*
Absolute number of votes cast	3
Number voted/ voting age population	36
Number voted/ number of eligible voters	13
Number voted/ number registered	23
Number voted/ size of electorate	2
No clear reference given	10

Source: B. Geys (2006) Explaining Voter Turnout: A Review of Aggregate-level Research

4.2.2 Operationalizing Euroscepticism

To begin with the independent variables, *Euroscepticism* could be labelled as quite a misleading concept, partly because of the great amount and variety of critique that it encompasses (Usherwood, 2012). However, there are two main strands and two main types of reasons behind it: political and economic, with the first one concerning political cooperation among countries and the latter envisaging the existence of free trade areas similar to the WTO structures.

As most of the formulated hypotheses in this study deal with system level variables and based on the example set by Mattila (2003), I think it is important to include some kind of a measure of public opinion in the research to control for the potential effects of the public attitudes towards the EU. For the specific design selected, Eurobarometer surveys would turn out to be the perfect tool for measuring people's levels of support (provided that the most suitable question is asked). They are widely recognised by scholars and Schmitt (2003) even claims that: *"no other cross-national survey programme is as widely used as Eurobarometers"*. Standard Eurobarometer polls have repeatedly analysed the way European citizens perceive the integration process. For the purpose of this study the question on support for EU membership as a measure of general support for the EU will be used – "Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership in the European Union is (1) a good thing, (2) a bad thing or (3) neither good, nor bad?" As the measure for Euroscepticism I would use the percentage of people replying with "a bad thing" showing the proportion of citizens with a negative attitude towards the EU in the particular member-state. The Standard Eurobarometer

polls regarding public opinion in the EU takes place twice a year – around May and then later during the winter, around November. This would have left to a certain limitation, having to use the data from last winter in regard to the 2014 elections, which would not be that recent and accurate, but due to the elections in 2014, a special survey was conducted and the results were available to the public shortly before them taking place in May. Therefore, the figures and data used are from the latest Eurobarometer survey (*Europeans in 2014*)[14] conducted among EU citizens in May 2014.

4.2.3 Operationalizing Utilitarian Perceptions

Based on Gabel's (1998) study of opinions among the population of the EU member states and Mattila's (2003) article, a more specific assumption based on the utilitarian dimension of Euroscpeticism was formulated in the previous chapter. What they have found is not surprising at all, especially in the aftermath of the Eurocrisis – EU citizens tend to base their support for the institutions mostly on economic concerns. If we are to summarize their main arguments, we can safely claim that it is expected from people living in countries that benefit from EU membership to a greater extent to be more inclined to show their support of the Union by voting at EP elections. The more visible the benefits, the better, as we should take into consideration the fact that not all citizens are informed well enough on EU matters. On the other hand, potential voters may be of the opinion that their homeland's expenditures stemming from EU membership exceed the benefits at hand. As a consequence, they are more likely to show scepticism based on purely utilitarian perceptions by simply refusing to go to the polls in the event of European Parliament elections.

It is a great challenge to measure net-contributors vs. net-beneficiaries of the EU budget due to the concepts themselves as well as simply for practical reasons[15]. Moreover, from the data available we can spot that most of the countries are rather equally balanced between contributions and benefits received, with few clearly standing out (Mattila, 2003). For the purposes of this thesis, however, public opinion and the way people perceive their country's contribution to the European budget matters the most as it is a determinant of whether to vote or not to a higher degree compared to the actual statistics (as many people may not be

[14] The question asked in the 2014 Special Survey was: "In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?" with the total percentage of negative answers used to operationalize Euroscepticism in the last elections.

[15] In fact, the European Commission even discourages making such calculations and distinctions for political reasons. The argument behind it is that these calculations are always imprecise and that cohesion among the regions and redistribution of wealth between richer and poorer ones is among the objectives of the Union.

accurately informed of the real facts). Therefore, the Eurobarometer database would be used as a source, the Interactive tool with frequently asked questions in surveys in particular. The question posed among EU citizens is "Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (your country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Community (Common Market)?" with "Benefitted", "Not benefitted" and "Do not know" as possible answers. In this way we can guarantee that in the frames of this research the measurement of the variable is feasible, reliable and valid. It has to be noted that regarding the first two hypotheses in this thesis which are based on public opinion variables, a certain assumption is made – voters have sufficient knowledge on the EU and the stemming obligations and opportunities from being a citizen of the EU.

4.2.4 Operationalizing Concomitant national elections

To begin with, the term should be elaborated upon in order to ensure the conceptual clarity. In some countries, several elections can be held at the same time due to various reasons, either in an attempt to cut expenditures for separate election days, or due to the certain government's effort to increase people's interest in what is on the agenda on the political scene and thus raise the turnout rates. Two reasons have been identified up to now for the effect of concurrent national elections on voter participation levels. Authors investigating this topic have pointed out that the likelihood of people going to the polls increases in the event of more elections held on the same day because the media pays attention and observes closely at least one of these elections. What is more, according to the rational theory discussed above (see paragraph 3.2), the cost of going to vote for the individual remains the same, but if more elections take place simultaneously, then the probability of this person to find motivation to cast a ballot surges.

Following suit with previous research conducted on this topic, my intention is to use a dummy variable in the regression model. Most studies in the academic literature that estimate the effect of concurrent elections do so by including one or more dummy variables (Geys, 2006). In this research not only first-order national elections (such as parliamentary or presidential ones) would be taken into consideration. They might be of greater importance to the public and the probability to attract people's attention would presumably be higher but referenda, regional and local elections should not be excluded because in my opinion certain citizens attribute great significance and weight to the local authorities, the ones that make decisions and implement them as close as possible to the voters. Therefore, I consider that these views

of common European citizens should not be neglected, thus including the abovementioned elections in the model as well. If we take Luxembourg, for instance, according to Mattila (2003) elections to the National Parliament are always held with EP elections. In other member states this happens occasionally. As far as coding the variable is concerned, it will take the value 1 in the event of concomitant elections and the value 0 in case only EP elections take place. The data is obtained from the European election database website[16] and the Election Resources website[17] mainly, but in order to be sure, an additional desk study regarding all EP elections held in the separate countries between 1994 and 2014 is conducted.

4.2.5 Operationalizing Weekend voting

For the greater convenience of the voting population in the majority of the EU member states elections are usually held at the weekend. This is usually done with the objective to increase the probability of people going to the polls and eventually affect the turnout rates. There are of course exceptions to the rule such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland and the UK where polling typically takes place during working days (Mattila, 2003).

Once again, a dummy variable has to be implemented in the quantitative design of this thesis to measure the effect of weekend voting. This independent variable will be operationalized via a simple yes/no question – "Are the elections held in the weekend?". To make it clearer, if the elections to the European Parliament take place during the weekend (on a Saturday or Sunday), the answer would be "yes" and therefore, the variable will take the value 1. In all other cases (if EP elections are held from Monday to Friday), the respective response to the question posed above would be "no" and as a consequence, it will take the value 0. An interesting case that stands out is the Czech Republic, where in two instances in the selected time period (2004 and 2014) EP elections were held on two days – Friday and Saturday. This led to certain confusion – Should this be measured as weekend or weekday voting? In my opinion, this decision of the government was aiming to increase turnout rates by providing an additional, more convenient opportunity for its citizens to go to the polls if they were not able on Friday. Based on this argument, I have decided that in the regression analysis the country will take the value 1 as a weekend voting one.

[16] European election database website - http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/election_types/eu_related_referendums.html
[17] Election Resources website - http://www.electionresources.org/

4.2.6 Operationalizing Mandatory voting

In the existing academic literature it is often argued that the obligation to vote is likely to increase the expected costs of not voting to the individual citizen due to the possibility of getting caught and fined (Geys, 2006). As a result, fewer voters would dare to disobey the law, the majority of the eligible population would go to the polls and thus turnout rates in the particular member state would increase. In the EU, only a few countries enforce a law which is binding for citizens to take part in elections and these states are: Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece and Cyprus. Italy would be included in this list as well, but voting there was compulsory only until 1993, which is just out of the time frame selected for this research. Following suit with Franklin's (2001) article, it will be coded as a dummy variable that takes the value 1 for Belgium, Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg in the specified time period and for all other member states it will take the value 0.

5. Analysis of Voter Turnout in Old Member States(1994-2014)

With the theoretical part of the thesis provided, the purpose of this chapter would be to present an overview of the most important steps undertaken in the process of working with the statistical computing package SPSS. In order to establish which ones actually turned out to be significant factors for the EP elections, all the variables will be thoroughly examined first with a descriptive, followed by an explanatory analysis and a model summary to conclude the chapter. All arguments and interpretations are backed with tables and graphs.

5.1 Descriptive analysis

The most felicitous way to begin this part of my study is by presenting the sample data gathered in the process of writing. It is a crucial step to be aware of their maximum, means and minimum values, as well as the standard deviations in order to provide a solid foundation before we proceed with the actual explanatory analysis. Each of the following scale variables is based on 75 cases (no cases are missing and for that reason none are excluded). The summarized numbers of the descriptive statistics performed in SPSS is presented in the table below[18] with the values rounded to 2 decimals to make the presentation of the data clearer. While it may be quite obvious what the other columns present, the last one perhaps needs

[18] The complete data set is available in the Appendices Section.

further clarifying. It displays the standard deviation of the values which is an indicator of how well the means represent the data.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Scale Variables

	N	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*
Voter turnout	75	24.00	91.35	53.64	17.99
Euroscepticism levels	75	3.00	48.00	17.29	9.75
People perceiving their country benefits from the EU	75	19.00	86.00	55.36	15.26
Valid N (listwise)	75				

For the three nominal independent variables in this research, on the other hand, frequency tables are provided[19] because they could not be explored as the ratio variables above. As they are all dummy variables, the only values they can take are 1 and 0 (no missing or not applicable cases to confuse the final outcomes).

Table 3

Frequency table Weekend voting

	Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*
Elections during the week	17	22.7	22.7
Weekend elections	58	77.3	77.3
Total	75	100.0	100.0

[19] All the other tables and graphs generated in the process of analysis are available at request of the reader.

Table 4

Frequency table Concurrent national elections

	Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*
No other elections	54	72.0	72.0
Concurrent elections	21	28.0	28.0
Total	75	100.0	100.0

Table 5

Frequency table Mandatory voting

	Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*
No mandatory voting	60	80.0	80.0
Mandatory voting	15	20.0	20.0
Total	75	100.0	100.0

Reading the tables above, we can conclude that the frequency of the occurrence of Weekend voting is the highest (58 out of 75 or around 77% of the cases). Concurrent national elections were observed in only 21 cases in this timeframe and Compulsory voting in even less – 15 out of 75 (exactly 20%). However, based on these figures we cannot determine what would their effect be on the dependent variable and will our hypotheses turn out to be correct. That is why further explanatory analysis is required and would be provided in the next section.

5.2 Explanatory analysis

As Field (2009) points out, correlational designs are applied when our aim is to measure simultaneously a lot of variables, but unlike in an experiment, none of them are manipulated as there is no deliberate action on behalf of the researcher. And even if correlation is observed between the dependent and any of the independent variables, we still cannot say that there certainly is a cause-effect relation between them, which definitely may be a limitation. Therefore, by adding more independent variables in the model, we increase the probability of establishing which one exactly is an important factor in this research. In the following

paragraphs several assumptions will be discussed and in case they are not met, the outcomes of our analysis cannot be generalized to a wider array of cases (countries) and population, respectively.

5.2.1 Assumptions for multiple regression analysis

Measurement level

The first one states that all variables under exploration should be quantitative, either on the interval or the ratio level of measurement (Kellstedt & Whitten, 2009). In this case the dependent and the first two independent variables (Euroscepticism levels and benefits from EU membership according to citizens) are measured on the ratio level, as percentages of the population. As far as the independent variables are concerned, however, they can also be categorical provided that they contain only two categories. This condition is met with our three dummy variables – weekend voting, concurrent national elections and compulsory voting, therefore we can state that the first assumption is met without a doubt.

Theoretical causal relation

The next assumption states that in the existing theory there should be a causal relation between the independent variables and the dependent one. As already discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, a significant body of literature has already dealt with the phenomenon of determinants of turnout rates at a European elections level. Our purpose with this research is to find out whether these particular factors are still significant predictors of our Y-variable. Therefore, a theoretical causal relation certainly is present in this study.

Normal distribution

Going a step further into the analysis, the next assumption stating that at each value of the dependent variable there is normal distribution has to be discussed (Osborne & Waters, 2002). In order to be more precise, we need to make sure the standard errors are normally distributed. To make the presentation of the arguments clearer to the reader, in the figure below is shown the histogram of the standardized residual[20]. An advantage of working with residuals is that in this case the plot is not limited to only one X variable. On the contrary, it includes all the independent ones. The histogram below displays almost symmetrically distributed scores,

[20] Standardized residuals are residuals divided by their estimated standard deviation (Field, 2009).

which means that there is no positive or negative skew; no outliers are spotted as well. Furthermore, the distribution is neither too flat, nor too peaked, leading to the conclusion that the other feature of the histogram to analyse – the kurtosis, is not high. Having said that, we can claim that the standard error is normally distributed and the assumption is met.

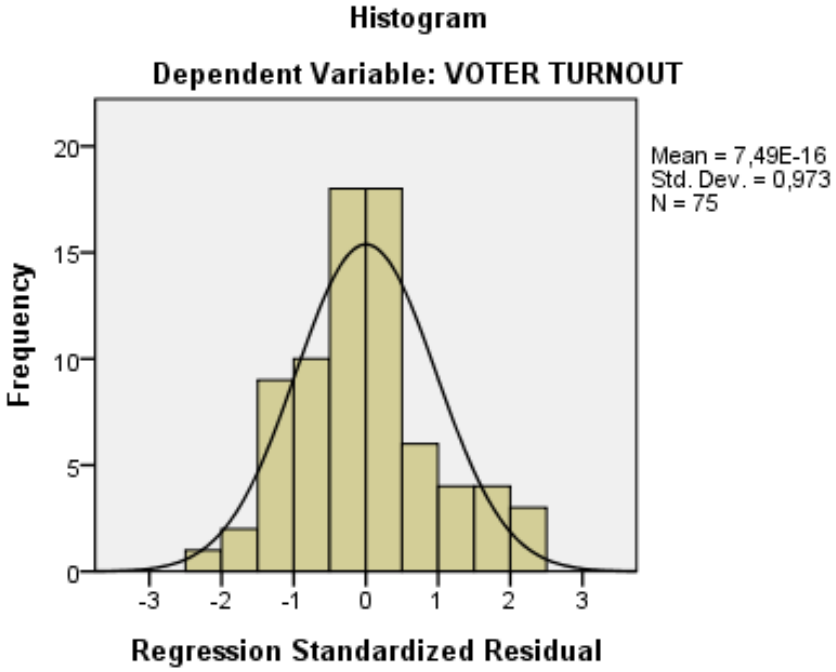

Figure 1. Histogram standardized residual

In order to be sure, however, a second test is conducted, with the results graphically provided in the next figure – the normal probability plot of the standardized residuals. If the points are approximately situated on a straight line, or as Field (2009) describes it – "*hugging the line"*, the residuals are normally distributed, which is what we observe in the figure below.

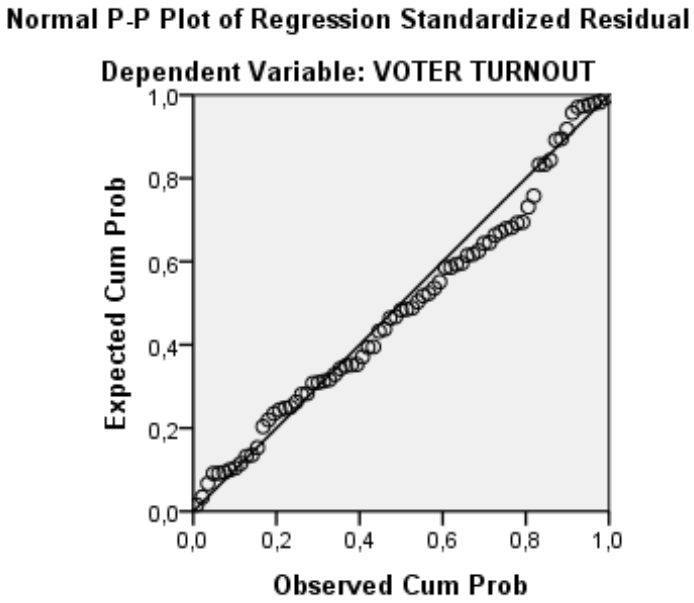

Figure 2 Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

Linearity

The fourth assumption to be explored is if the residuals display a linear relation. In other words, it is expected that the residuals are equal to zero for each value of the dependent variable. Researchers Osborne and Waters (2002) recommend checking this by constructing a scatterplot of the residuals. Should the residuals do not follow a certain pattern (for instance forming a parabola), then we can claim our regression model is linear. What is more, all the residuals should be situated in a balanced way on the scatterplot, not forming clusters or dense groups of cases. What we see in Figure 3 is no solid pattern, which is a comparatively strong piece of evidence to conclude that there is linearity and the assumption is met.

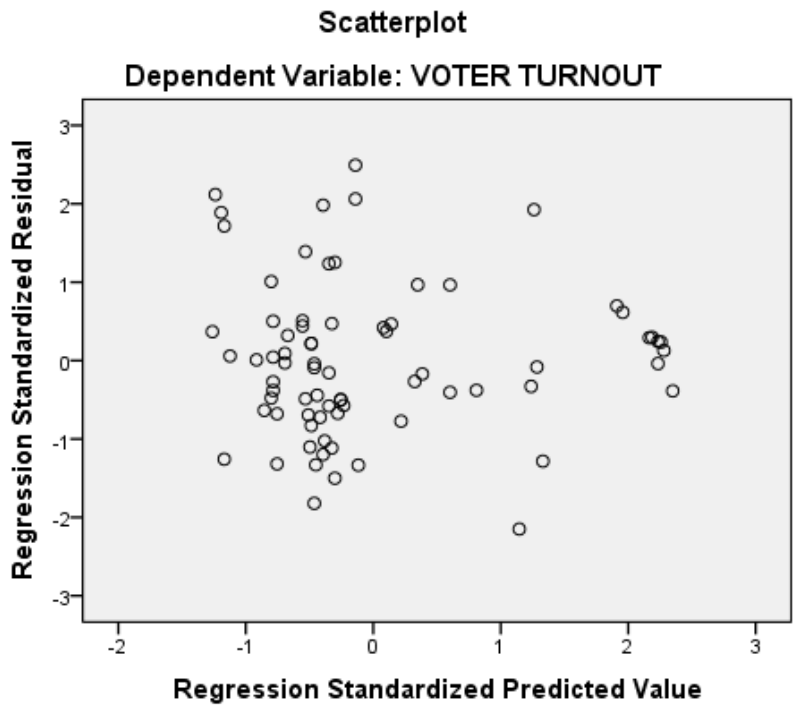

Figure 3 Scatterplot Standardized Residual

Homoscedasticity

According to the next assumption, homoscedasticity should be present. To put it in a nutshell, the variance of the residual terms should be constant for all independent variables in the analysis (ibid.). The difference between heteroscedasticity and homoscedasticity can be visually observed in a scatterplot (see Figure 3). If all values are distributed around the horizontal zero-line in a balanced way, then we can claim that there is homoscedasticity. Otherwise, with very unequal variances there could have been heteroscedasticity. What we observe in the figure is that there is no clear shape, no clustering of the values in either end. The residuals are spread randomly enough, so that provides certainty that this assumption is met as well.

No multicollinearity

The last condition to examine is that of no multicollinearity, meaning that there is no overlapping and the independent variables in the model do not measure the same things. There are two known methods in the literature to test the presence/absence of multicollinearity and to increase the certainty in our research, both will be applied. The first one is by calculating the bivariate correlation coefficient for every two of the X variables. In this case there should be no perfect correlation between each pair which means that the

correlation among these independent variables should be lower and not equal or higher to 0.9 (the perfect one). To make it clearer and easier to interpret findings for the reader, in the following lines the abbreviations of the variables used in Table 6 (as well as further in the analysis chapters of the thesis) will be defined:

VT stands for the observed voter turnout rates in each country,

EUROSC is the levels of Euroscepticism in each member state,

BEN is the proportion of people perceiving their country benefits from EU membership,

WV is weekend voting,

CE stands for concomitant national elections and

MV is mandatory voting.

Table 6

Correlations between independent variables

	EUROSC	*BEN*	*WV*	*CE*	*MV*
EUROSC		-0.479	-0.003	-0.126	-0.222
BEN	-0.479		-0.162	0.140	0.289
WV	-0.003	-0.162		-0.088	0.271
CE	-0.126	0.140	-0.088		0.356
MV	-0.222	0.289	0.271	0.356	

What we can see in the table above is that the highest existing correlation is between the People's perception of benefits from the EU and Euroscepticism levels variables with a value of -0.479. This comes as no surprise as they are both public opinion variables and the first is a dimension of the latter. However, the value is not even close to the 0.9 perfect correlation level[21], therefore the test supports our assumption of no multicollinearity observed between the independent variables.

[21] Perfect collinearity exists when at least one predictor is a linear combination of the others (Field, 2009).

The second (control) method that we are going to use in this analysis is suggested by various researchers and tutorials – simply make the most of SPSS by running a regression in which one of the independent variables takes place of the dependent one. Then the software provides a table in the output – in this case this is Table 7. What we have to analyse in it is the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) value. Usually, a score of 3.00 is accepted as a threshold for probability of multicollinearity, with variances above 5.00 hinting that there is great likelihood of multicollinearity and in the event of values around 10.00 there is definitely multicollinearity among the independent variables. As expected based on the results from the previous test, the VIFs we observe in this research are not even close to the threshold with values around 1. These scores point to the overall conclusion that the last assumption is met as well.

Table 7

Collinearity diagnostics

Variables	*Collinearity statistics*	
	Tolerance	*VIF*
People perceiving their country benefits from the EU	.854	1.171
Weekend voting	.829	1.206
Concurrent national elections	.836	1.196
Mandatory voting	.696	1.436

Based on all of the figures and arguments above, we can say that the specific requirements are met and the regression analysis can be carried out. What is more, we have made sure that the outcomes of the sample could be generalized to the wider public.

5.3 Model Summary

Usually, the multiple regression output provides at least 3 sources of vital information at our disposal: the model summary, the ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) and the coefficients tables. The forced entry of data was used when carrying out the regression because this method is highly appreciated among researchers for theory testing. The argument pointed out against the

implementation of the stepwise technique is that random variation in the data seldom leads to replicable results in the event of a re-test (Field, 2009). Some of the scores in Tables 8 and 9 are rounded up to two decimals to make the presentation of data clearer.

Table 8

Multiple regression analysis – model summary

Model	*R*	*R square*	*Adjusted R square*	*Std. Error of the Estimate*
1	.878[a]	.770	.754	8.93

Bearing in mind that R is a measure of the multiple correlation between the predictors and the final outcome and the fact that as a rule, R square lies within the interval of 0 and 1, we shall interpret Table 8. A value of 0.878 for R means that there is a relatively high correlation between the variables. The larger the value of R square, the more liable the results because it represents the variance of the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent ones. In this case, if we turn 0.770 into a percentage, we can see that our model explains 77% of the variability, which is an excellent attestation of the regression analysis. The adjusted R square, which is a reduced measure of R square, adjusted to the number of predictors in the particular research, on the other hand, is a measure of how well the model generalizes to the population (Field, 2009). In other words, the observed decrease of 0.016 means that if the model was derived from the entire population rather than the sample, then it would account for about 1.6% less variance in the outcome, namely 75.4%.

Table 9

Multiple regression analysis – ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Regression	18452.72	5	3690.54	46.24	.000[b]
Residual	5506.63	69	79.80		
Total	23959.36	74			

Second, for the purpose of this study we shall take a look at the ANOVA table (which displays the variance analysis) and the last column in particular. It contains the significance value of the R square, in other words - the significance of the entire model. In general, the ANOVA tests whether the regression model is better at predicting the final outcome than using the mean value, for example (Field, 2009). According to Table 9, the level of significance in our regression analysis is 0.000 and because this score is smaller than 0.05, we may conclude the model as a whole is statistically significant.

Last, but not least, Table 10 below provides an overview of the coefficients in the regression analysis. In order to highlight the variables of significance and their values, some lines are presented in bold, 4 out of 5 in this case. To begin with the interpretation of the terms, the *constant* presents what would the value of voter turnout be, if we considered that all X-variables have a value of 0. The unstandardized B displays how much the dependent variable changes when the particular independent variable increases with 1 measurement unit, whilst the influence of the others is held at a constant level.

Table 10

Multiple regression analysis – coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		*Standardized Coefficients*	*t*	*Sig.*
	B	*Std. Error*	*Beta*		
(Constant)	47.012	6.639		7.081	.000*
EUROSC	**-.396**	**.122**	**-.215**	**-3.238**	**.002***
BEN	-.048	.082	-.041	-.586	.560
WV	**9.278**	**2.714**	**.217**	**3.419**	**.001***
CE	**14.571**	**2.516**	**.366**	**5.792**	**.000***
MV	**24.426**	**3.094**	**.547**	**7.895**	**.000***

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

Another feature of the regression that is worth our attention is the standardized Beta coefficient, which displays the direction of the relation. However, we cannot miss to mention a certain weakness – the strength of the relationship cannot be presumed based on this because the variables have different measures, making it more difficult to make comparisons and conclusions which one is more influential than the others. Therefore, the B coefficients

are standardized in the Beta, which measures the relative importance of a predictor in the model. A more detailed discussion of the data presented in this table is to be provided below.

5.4 Observations from Model 1

In order to begin with the interpretation of the regression model, we should bear in mind that it is the size of the coefficient of every independent variable that indicates the extent of the effect it has over the Y-variable and that the mathematical sign (either positive or negative) of the respective coefficient shows the direction of the effect (see Table 10). For instance, when testing which variable contributes to the model, if it is a positive coefficient, then we should expect the dependent variable to increase when the independent one rises by one measurement unit. Otherwise, in case the predictor shows a negative coefficient, the dependent variable would consequently decrease its score.

As we have already established in Chapters 2 and 3, there are theoretical relations between our Y and X-variables in the academic literature. A lot of researchers have dedicated both time and effort to find out which are the most important and influential factors of voter turnout rates in European Parliament elections. The attribution of this thesis would be to determine to what extent the statistical evidence provided corresponds with the aforementioned relations, whether it supports or disproves them. In the following pages each hypothesis and correlation between pairs of independent – dependent variables will be discussed.

Hypothesis 1

The coefficients table 10 from the regression analysis output displays a value of the unstandardized B equal to -0.396 for Euroscepticism levels. This means that a change of one per cent of levels of Euroscepticism in a certain MS will lead to an alteration of -0.396 of the voter turnout rates. The negative sign implies a negative relation – lower levels of Euroscepticism in a certain MS would lead to higher turnout rates (provided that the effects of the other independent variables are held as constants) which is in accordance with the hypothesis we have formulated in paragraph 3.1. Moreover, the regression coefficient proves to be statistically significant with a level of 0.002, which means that the probability of having come to this result by chance is really low. To put it in a nutshell, what we have estimated in this model regarding Euroscepticism levels can be labelled as representative of a greater

fraction of the population and should be considered as a certain predictor for turnout rates at EP elections.

Hypothesis 2

The next independent variable to be analysed is the specific utilitarian dimension of Euroscepticism – namely, whether people perceive their country benefits from being a member of the European Union. Its influence over turnout rates is presented in the coefficients table in paragraph 5.3 with a score of the unstandardized B of -0.048, presuming a negative relation once again. We may then interpret the causal effect as the lower percentage of people perceiving their country benefits from the EU, the higher the turnout rates (in case the influence of the rest of the X-variables is held constant, of course). Even though this contradicts with the second hypothesis in this study, we should not take into consideration the effect of this particular variable in the regression model, judging from the significance level of 0.560 and the high probability of this result occurring by chance. In this model this is the only variable that does not show significant results.

Hypothesis 3

We shall continue this discussion of findings with the first categorical independent variable – concurrent national elections. Looking at the coefficients table, it becomes clear that with a standardized Beta of 0.366, it is among the most influential factors in the regression model. This means that once controlled for the other independent variables and their respective measurement units, concurrent national elections turns out to be one of the most important predictors in this analysis. In addition, the significance level of 0.000 disproves any probability of achieving this result randomly and the model can be considered as representative of the real population value.

Hypothesis 4

The next causal relation we are going to elaborate upon is the one between weekend voting and turnout rates. As it is a dummy variable, we shall focus on the standardized coefficients column in Table 10. The observed value of the standardized Beta of 0.217, backed with a significance level of 0.001 presumes a positive relation in complete accordance with our third hypothesis – holding elections during the weekend is likely to lead to a higher ratio of the legible population of casting a ballot and therefore, increased turnout rates. As a result, we can identify weekend voting as a determinant of participation at EP elections.

Hypothesis 5

To finish this section, we are going to explore the last factor in the regression model – the third dummy variable Mandatory voting. As of the what it seem obvious outcomes of its implementation, it was included in this study as a kind of control. It came as no surprise that enforcing laws which make electoral participation compulsory turned out to be the strongest predictor of higher turnout rates with a value of the standardized Beta of 0.547. Furthermore, the statistical significance of the result was achieved at a 0.000 level, which confirms the existing theory on mandatory voting, described in detail in paragraph 3.3.

6. Analysis of Voter Turnout in All Member States (2004-2014)

The structure of this chapter follows suit with the previous one with the deliberate difference in the timeframe and the cases selected for the analysis. While in the first data-set only the Old member states of the EU were examined in the entire period, the second one concentrates on the three most recent elections by including all MS after the Eastern Enlargement. The reason why there are two analysis chapters in this research is to achieve reliable and valid outcomes by comparing two regression models with overlapping cases. Moreover, a large enough number of cases for each model are necessary to make sure statistically significant results are produced.

6.1 Descriptive Analysis

This first paragraph will provide the necessary tables and figures in order to organise and summarize the data in a most presentable way. What we observe in the table below are the minimum, maximum, means and standard deviation of the scale variables in the second data-set of our analysis. Each of the aforementioned ratio variables are based on 81 cases (N=81) which reflects on the number of EU member states under exploration in the specific timeframe. As explained in Chapter 4, Croatia is not included in this model on purpose due to its recent accession to the Union in July 2013 and the inability to make comparisons with previous results.

Table 11

Descriptive statistics of scale variables (2)

	N	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*
Voter turnout	81	13.00	91.35	45.53	19.16
Euroscepticism levels	81	3.00	48.00	16.85	9.59
People perceiving their country benefits from the EU	81	27.00	82.00	59.58	12.45
Valid N (listwise)	81				

An important detail that should be mentioned in the very beginning of the analysis is that unlike in the previous data-set, when first explored, the error term did not show normal distribution. Therefore, as academics and researchers recommend, the dependent variable in question – voter turnout – had to undergo certain arithmetic transformations in order to make sure the available data is suitable for the regression analysis described further in this study. However, the values in Table 11 represent the actual figures from official statistics before the logarithmic transformations[22].

As far as the nominal variables in this study are concerned, Weekend voting, Concomitant national elections and Mandatory voting namely, they cannot be examined in the same way as the scale ones. For this reason, frequency tables for each one are provided below. As already mentioned in their operationalization in Chapter 4, they are all dummy variables and as a consequence can take only the values 0 and 1 (there are no missing or not applicable cases included in the data-set; the number of cases is 81).

[22] The tables of the voter turnout variable (after transformation) are available at request.

Table 12

Frequency table Weekend voting (2)

	Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*
Elections during the week	10	12.3	12.3
Weekend voting	71	87.7	87.7
Total	81	100.0	100.0

Table 13

Frequency table Concurrent national elections (2)

	Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*
No other elections	63	77.8	77.8
Concurrent elections	18	22.2	22.2
Total	81	100.0	100.0

Table 14

Frequency table Mandatory voting (2)

	Frequency	*Percent*	*Valid Percent*
No mandatory voting	69	85.2	85.2
Mandatory voting	12	14.8	14.8
Total	81	100.0	100.0

An observation that can be made is that once again (just like in the analysis conducted in Chapter 5) the frequency of the occurrence of the Weekend voting variable is the highest (this particular predictor is observed in 71 out of 81 cases or nearly 88%). At the other end are Mandatory voting and Concurrent elections with about 15% and 22% respectively. Based solely on these descriptive statistics, however, we are not able to draw any solid arguments about the influence of these independent variables on our Y-variable. Therefore, this chapter will continue with an in-depth and reliable for the purposes of this thesis explanatory analysis.

6.2 Explanatory Analysis

As the importance of the explanatory analysis has already been discussed in the previous chapter, the following overview of the assumptions for a multiple regression analysis will be rather brief and concise so that no basic statements are repeated. More attention will be paid to the last 4 requirements that have to be met in order to make sure that the final outcomes can be generalized to a wider population and a higher number of cases. In addition, several figures and tables will depict the graphical representation of the data, thus assisting the reader's apprehension of the arguments made.

6.2.1 Assumptions for Multiple Regression Analysis

Measurement level

All variables to be explored in this study should be quantitative (no matter whether it is on the interval or ratio level of measurement). An exception can be made for the independent variables – they can also be categorical, on condition they contain only two categories. The descriptive statistics in the previous section can serve as a proof that this assumption is met – in this research the dependent and two of the independent variables are measured on the ratio level, while the rest of the X variables are nominal with only two values measured.

Theoretical causal relation

It has already been mentioned in Chapter 5 – a theoretical causal relation between voter turnout and the independent variables selected is present in this thesis with a wide array of examples provided in the Literature review and Theoretical framework chapters. Therefore this assumption is considered to be met as well.

Normal distribution

In order to fulfil the criterion of normal distribution of the standard errors, however, certain steps had to be undertaken. As stated in the descriptive analysis (see paragraph 6.1) when first explored with the normality tests in SPSS, the values did not show normal distribution. This can also be seen in Figure 4, provided to make the difference with the transformed voter turnout in Figure 5 visible and clear. After the logarithmic transformation, however, the

positive skew issue was overcome and even though the second histogram is not quite perfect and seems a little more peaked than the average ones, the kurtosis is not too high.

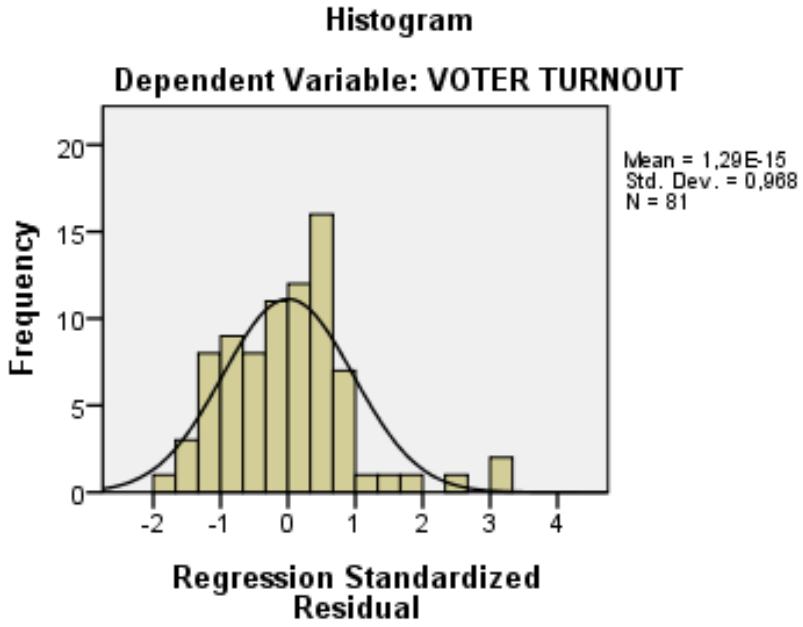

Figure 4. Histogram standardized residual before transformation

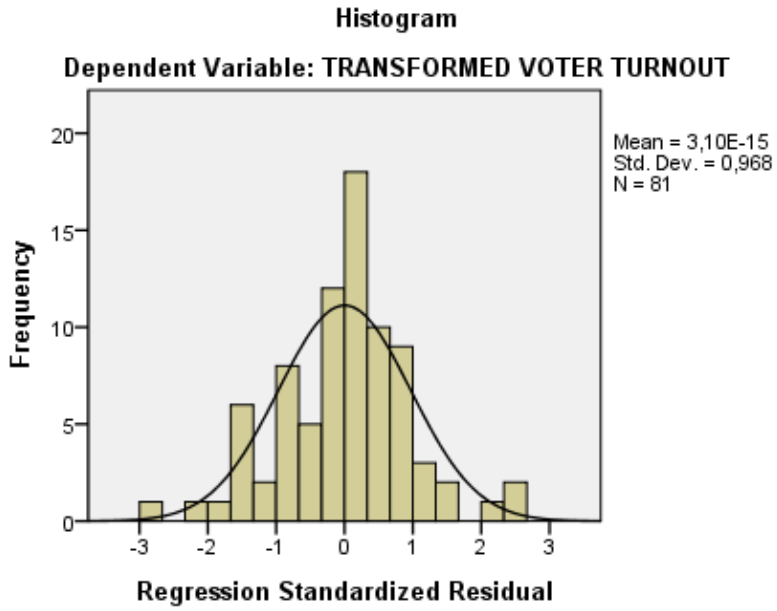

Figure 5. Histogram standardized residual after transformation

In order to be sure, however, a second test is conducted – the normal probability plot of the standardized residuals (see Figure 6). The points on the graph should be approximately

situated on a straight line, not forming significant curves or deviations, which is exactly what we observe in this case. Having made this 'control' test for normal distribution, we can be certain that the third assumption is met, too.

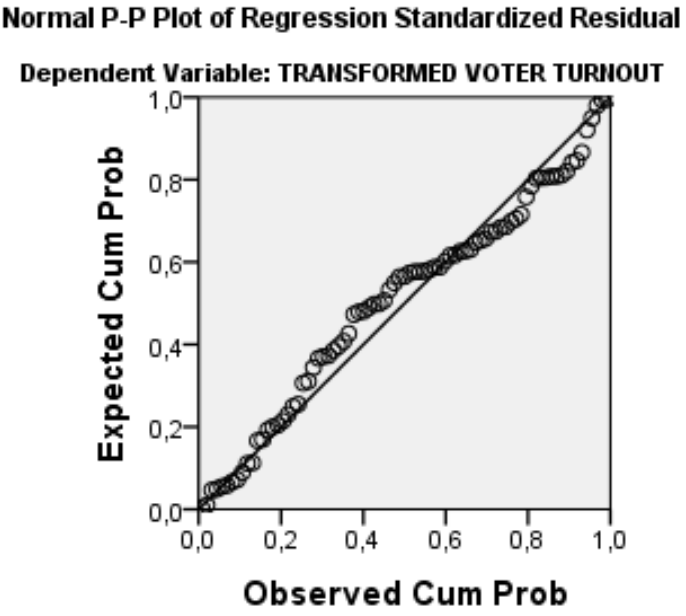

Figure 6. Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual (transformed dependent variable)

Linearity

The scatterplot below serves as a test for the linearity assumption, according to which the residuals explored should display a linear relation, meaning they should not be forming dense clusters or figures. Although there are certain groupings visible in the graph below, the residuals definitely do not follow a pattern and are situated in a comparatively balanced way, balanced enough to conclude there is linearity in the regression model and the assumption is met.

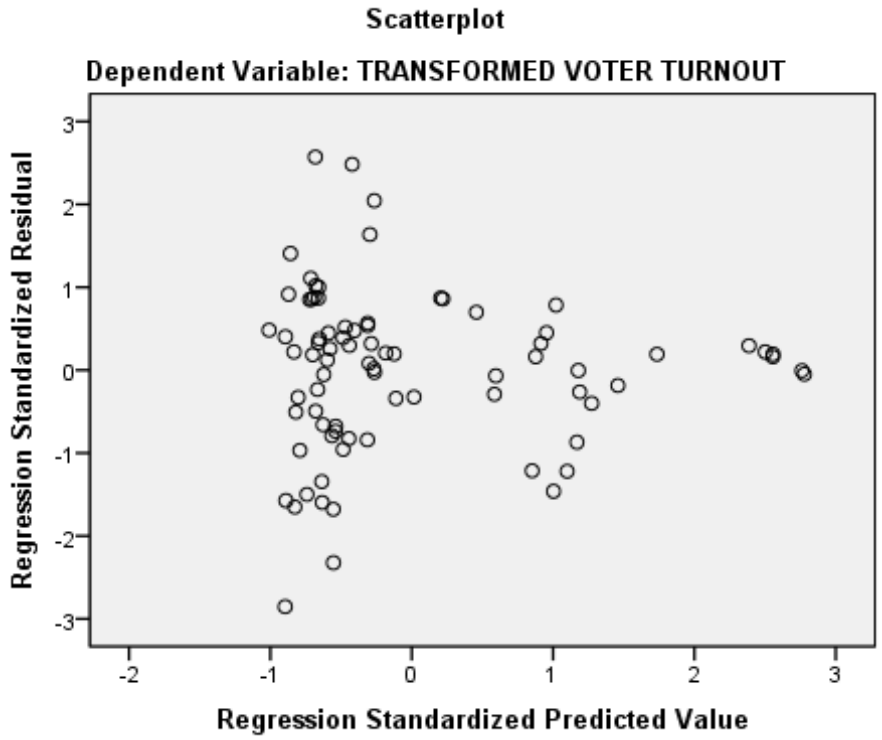

Figure 7. Scatterplot Standardized Residual (2)

Homoscedasticity

The concept of homoscedasticity has already been defined in Chapter 5 (paragraph 5.2) so here we will only say that the balanced distribution of residuals around the horizontal zero-line is achieved (see Figure 7 above). It displays no clear shape and comparatively equal variances of the residual which leads to the presumption there is homoscedasticity in this case. In addition, a square root transformation of the dependent variable was also applied in the process of conducting the research to check whether it would provide a more homoscedastic scatterplot, but as it did not, the log one is kept and the analysis is based on it.

No multicollinearity

In order to make sure two X variables do not measure the same thing, two tests for multicollinearity among the independent variables are run, both of which lead to the same conclusions. First, the bivariate correlations (see Table 12) show a highest score of -0.444 between the variables Euroscepticism levels and People perceiving their country benefits from the EU, an expected effect observed in the previous model (see paragraph 5.2.1), as well.

Even this value, however, is way under the perfect correlation level of 0.9, which supports our prediction of no multicollinearity in the model.

Table 15

Correlations between independent variables (2)

	EUROSC	*BEN*	*WV*	*CE*	*MV*
EUROSC		-0.444	-0.104	0.018	0.083
BEN	-0.444		0.045	-0.008	0.118
WV	-0.104	0.045		-0.251	0.157
CE	0.018	-0.008	-0.251		0.279
MV	0.083	0.118	0.157	0.279	

Table 16

Collinearity diagnostics (2)

Variables	*Collinearity statistics*	
	Tolerance	*VIF*
People perceiving their country benefits from the EU	.984	1.016
Weekend voting	.881	1.135
Concurrent national elections	.832	1.201
Mandatory voting	.856	1.169

To test the reliability of the results, we take a look at the collinearity statistics in the output (see Table 16), the VIF value to be more precise. All scores displayed are around 1, which is not even close enough to the threshold of raising doubts. Therefore, on the basis of a double check, we can be sure the last assumption for the multiple regression analysis is met as well.

With the outcomes of both the descriptive and the explanatory analysis being presented, we can be confident that the regression can be carried out with the possibility of generalizing the final results to a wider population.

6.3 Model Summary

The tables that are about to be discussed in the next paragraphs provide an overview of the model summary, the ANOVA and the coefficients and following suit with the previous chapter, the forced entry method is used once again so that everything is as similar as possible.

Table 17

Multiple regression analysis – model summary (2)

Model	*R*	*R square*	*Adjusted R square*	*Std. Error of the Estimate*
1	.671[a]	.451	.414	.13942

As the name implies, the forced entry of data method relies on forcing all the predictors in the model simultaneously (Field, 2009). The researcher then is certainly unbiased about the order in which the selected variables are entered, which makes it suitable for theory and hypothesis testing. We already know that R square is a measure of how much of the variability in the outcome is accounted for by the predictors (ibid.). With a score of 0.451, we can draw the conclusion that approximately 45% of the variance can be explained by the X-variables selected in this thesis, a very good result of the model, indeed. As expected, the adjusted R square (a reduced measure of R square, used to estimate its value in the total population) is very close to the value of R square. By interpreting its score of 0.414, we can say that around 41% of the variance of voter turnout is determined by the selected 5 independent variables.

Table 18

Multiple regression analysis – ANOVA (2)

	Sum of Squares	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Regression	1.196	5	.239	12.309	.000[b]
Residual	1.458	75	.019		
Total	2.654	80			

As far as the ANOVA table above is concerned, we shall only deal with the value in the last column on display. The purpose of this test is to estimate whether our model is better at making a prediction of the final outcome than using a means value as a form of a "*best guess"* instead (Field, 2009). We may regard our complete model as significant based on the level of significance of 0.000 in the regression analysis (a value lower than the threshold of 0.05).

Table 19

Multiple regression analysis – coefficients (2)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		*Standardized Coefficients*	*t*	*Sig.*
	B	*Std. Error*	*Beta*		
(Constant)	1.684	.116		14.462	.000*
EUROSC	-.001	.002	-.034	-.350	.727
BEN	-.002	.001	-.168	-1.728	.088
WV	.027	.051	.048	.527	.600
CE	**.164**	**.041**	**.377**	**4.005**	**.000***
MV	**.233**	**.048**	**.457**	**4.859**	**.000***

**correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

After establishing the fit of the model in the paragraphs above, what is left to discuss before finishing the model summary is the coefficients table. Just like in the previous chapter, in order to put the emphasis on the variables of significance, they are presented in bold. However, in this case with the most recent elections under exploration, it turns out that only

the last two are significant in the model (Concurrent national elections and Mandatory voting) and support the hypotheses formulated in the Theoretical framework.

In addition to the definitions presented in Chapter 5, the concept of the unstandardized B is provided here. It displays the coefficients for the constant term and for each independent variable, altered for the effect of the other X - variables. To put it in a nutshell, it indicates how much our dependent variable – voter turnout – changes in case the particular independent variable increases its score with 1 unit (this unit depends on the measurement of each variable) while the rest of the independent variables are taken as constants.

6.3 Observations from Model 2

In contrast to paragraph 5.4, here it is more complicated to interpret the figures in the coefficients table because of the logarithmic transformation of the dependent variable. According to prof. Galit Shmueli (2009) in case the dependent variable is log-transformed in a linear regression, the interpretation of the B coefficient goes as follows: *"a unit increase in X is associated with an average of 100% B increase in Y."* It will be applied in the event of significant results only (see Table 19).

Hypothesis 1

Starting with the coefficient of the first independent variable in question – Euroscepticism levels, its value is -0.001, inferring a negative effect over voter turnout. Before we make any estimation, however, we should take a look at the significance column to make sure the result has not occurred by chance. There we encounter a score of 0.727, way above the necessary to establish a valid and reliable degree of influence over turnout rates. As a consequence, we may only say that the expected negative relation is present, indeed, but the outcomes cannot be labelled as statistically significant, leading to a disproval of our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2

The second potential predictor of turnout rates at EP elections – people's perception whether their country benefits from being a member of the EU, shows a very similar unstandardized B coefficient of –0.002. Based on this result only, we may presume that contrary to the hypothesis we have formulated in paragraph 3.1, the lower percentage of people sceptic about their country's membership in the Union would lead to higher levels of voter participation

among the population. Taking into consideration the significance of 0.088 (although not much, but yet higher than 0.05), we must highlight that a stepwise run regression excludes it as an important and reliable factor in this model. In accordance with what we have already observed in Model 1, this turns out to be the only hypothesis rejected in both regressions.

Hypothesis 3

Having finished with discussing the outcomes of the scale variables, the next in line are the categorical dummy variables we have selected earlier in this research. So far Model 2 did not provide outcomes that would support any of our hypotheses. The following factor – concurrent national elections is expected to be an exception to the trend in this case. With an unstandardized B coefficient of 0.164 the implication of a positive relation between holding national elections on the same day as EP elections and the turnout rates observed in the particular member state prove true (should the effect of the other independent variables is held constant, of course). What is more, the significance level observed is 0.000, a result that certainly has not occurred by chance. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that holding national elections (either regional, parliamentary or referenda) simultaneously with EP elections may shift the focus and attention of voters, but still the probability of them going to the polls increases without a doubt. Applying the interpretation method mentioned above, we can conclude that a unit increase in concomitant national elections leads to 16.4% increase in voter turnout rates.

Hypothesis 4

The next potential predictor we are going to explore is weekend voting (no matter if the elections took place either on a Saturday, or a Sunday). The unstandardized B coefficient of weekend voting in Table 19 is a positive one: 0.027 corresponding with and affirming the third hypothesis – holding elections during the weekend is likely to lead to higher turnout rates. On the other hand, the significance level we observe in the same table is 0.600, which is not acceptable should we want to include the predictor in the regression model. The probability of witnessing an incidental effect is too high to affirm our assumption.

Hypothesis 5

The last X – variable we are about to discuss – compulsory voting – was added with a control purpose when testing the other abovementioned hypotheses. No wonder its unstandardized B coefficient shows the highest scores in the presented model in Chapter 6 – a positive value of

0.233, affirming the influence of adopting laws and turning the right to vote into an obligation over the percentages of people voting on in the event of EP elections. The reasons may not be that clear but certainly people would prefer avoiding any kind of fine or punishment to the risk of simply staying inactively at home. Moreover, it is not a random outcome we observe as the significance of mandatory voting is at the 0.000 level. Therefore, based on these figures we can claim that a unit increase in mandatory voting causes a 23.3% increase in voter turnout. To conclude, what we have estimated in Model 2 regarding compulsory voting can be considered as representative of the true population value and as a result should definitely be present in the regression model among the most influential predictors of voter turnout rates.

7. Discussion of Findings

After interpreting the five hypotheses (see paragraphs 5.4 and 6.4), which were formulated in the theoretical framework, the analysis made it clear which ones can be accepted or have to be rejected. Based on the observations made, the objective of this chapter is to present general trends, similarities and differences observed in the two models. They are to be elaborated upon, as well as what should be highlighted for the purpose of defining the policy implications of this study.

The main and most striking difference in the outcomes of the two models is the number of hypotheses confirmed by the empirical data. While the first analysis conducted with the old, established member states (EU – 15) in the whole time frame provided evidence for the validity of 4 out of the 5 formulated assumptions, the second one confirmed just 2. In order to be more specific, we should say that the significant determinants from Model 1 are: Euroscepticism levels, Weekend voting, Concomitant national elections and Mandatory voting, while in Model 2 only the last two proved to be important. The results presented from the regression of the second data set (composed of all MS from the three most recent elections that took place in the last decade) excluded three independent variables as influential from the model (the two scale variables as well as weekend voting) when a stepwise method was carried out.

It came as no surprise that the X-variable with strongest and most significant effect over the dependent one in both models was mandatory voting. For one reason or another, either avoiding fines or keeping up social prestige, lawful obligations to participate in elections are

still regarded as a decisive motivating factor by citizens, a factor that increases turnout rates. Even though very few EU countries enforce such regulations at present day, their effect seems imminent. Another common trend is the very high influence of domestic elections held simultaneously with elections to the European Parliament. Both models recognised the significance of concomitant national elections as second-best, which would be strong evidence in support of the *'second-order'* elections theory by Reif and Schmitt (1980), if we did not take into consideration local elections. Since in most countries they are also viewed as second-order, we can't provide undoubted empirical evidence to this theory. It seems that political parties and actors still tend to shift the focus from issues at EU to member-state level, public opinion is much more easily stirred by national than European policies. What is more, regarding the issue whether we have observed a country- or a time-effect, in my opinion with the separate MS being the units of analysis in this study, the country-specifics are the ones to induce the outcomes we have seen. And although time may play an important role, further and more detailed research needs to be conducted in order to provide a definite answer.

8. Conclusion

The last chapter of this thesis discusses the answer to the main research question, based on all the previous chapters and arguments provided. Then certain limitations of the study are presented, followed by recommendations for future research on this topic.

Realising the significance of a political affair such as citizen participation in elections and the growing role of the EP in the institutional structure as well as the decision making process in the EU, the question posed in this thesis is **"What determines the voter turnout rates at European Parliament elections?"** From what we have witnessed up to now, it seems that to a great extent turnout at EP elections is affected by national level factors. Whether it is laws turning the right to vote into an obligation or the dominance of the domestic political scene in the event of elections, they influence voter participation at EP elections as well. EU-specific predictors such as Euroscepticism also proved to have impact over the observed turnout rates. However, not only is its effect smaller, it turns out to be salient in the established MS only. What is more, both of the regression models excluded the probability of a specific dimension of Euroscepticism, the utilitarian one namely, to have any influence over voter participation at EP elections. A possible interpretation of these findings is that perhaps European citizens do not base their perceptions of the EU solely on the utilitarian, cost-benefit side of membership,

they take into consideration other aspects of the Union when making the decision whether or not to vote. Although a lot of the rising Eurosceptic parties across Europe (an event we observed in the 2014 elections) very often speculate about a sensitive topic such as contributions and benefits from the EU, voters do not seem to take it into consideration when making the crucial decision whether or not to go to the polls. The role of the EU as a redistributor of funds and resources as a factor affecting turnout is obviously diminishing, if not vanishing.

As far as the limitations of this study are concerned, some of them that should be mentioned are the lack of individual level factors, the modest number of independent variables as a whole (limited for the feasibility of the research) and perhaps including the latest EP elections from 2014 in the design. Although this increased the relevance of the thesis by concentrating on such a topical issue during the time of writing, the amount of time for data collection was restricted. Another approach of researching the underlying reasons for voter turnout could have been a qualitative co-variational one in which two EU countries could have been picked as units of analysis. In this case perhaps surveys conducted among the population of each MS (taken from national or European statistical resources or even carried out by the researcher himself/herself) would provide the empirical data, based on which the variables selected would be analysed.

To conclude, a few recommendations for future research on this topic will be provided. As it turned out, the utilitarian dimension of Euroscepticism in particular does not seem to have any significant effect on voter turnout rates. Therefore, perhaps some of the rest of the aspects such as the democratic or the sovereignty dimensions should be taken into consideration. In my opinion, a greater body of research from now on should be dedicated not on predictors of voter turnout mainly but on potential ways to increase these percentages in the separate member states which would consequently lead to higher EU average levels and greater legitimacy of the elected members of the EP. Perhaps behaviour of the EU leaders at pivotal moments such as the one we have witnessed after the official results of the 2014 elections were announced is one more crucial factor. The negotiations over the next Commission President, lasting for more than a month now, have their impact as well and political actors should be reminded they are close under the public eye and every action of theirs has brings its consequences, either in the short- or long-term.

In relation to a limitation mentioned above regarding the lack of personal level independent variables, a recommendation for studies to come would be to take into consideration factors such as knowledge about the EU, education degrees or gender to come up with a more detailed and complete picture of the determinants of turnout rates. For instance, in this thesis it was assumed that citizens are well aware of the impact their vote has, how the EU works and consequently make an informed choice at elections. What is more, due to the close proximity in time of the 2014 elections, they are clearly under-researched and we can expect more analysis of their predictors and outcomes.

If people still perceive EP elections as "second-order" then measures at EU level have to be undertaken to overcome that. Should the sole objective be to increase turnout rates in member states, then certainly holding EP elections together with national ones would definitely be a sensible solution. However, this would probably lead to shifting the focus and attention in political parties' campaigns from EU to entirely national issues. My opinion on this matter is that EU institutions need to work on promoting a European agenda during the pre-elections period. We have already seen steps undertaken in this direction in the 2014 elections which led to a very slight, but still a surge in the EU average turnout rate from 43% to 43.09%[23]. In addition, in order to increase the levels of voter participation in EP elections, national governments should take into consideration that there is higher probability that citizens would find time to go to the polls on Saturday or Sunday because usually at weekends they are not busy with activities such as going to school, university or work. However, in the aftermath European leaders do not seem to stick to their intentions of making elections closer to people by appointing one of the so called *Spitzenkandidaten* for the post of European Commission President. All these arguments and separations between heads of state or government we have witnessed during the last month do not seem to increase citizens' trust in the institutions, let alone in the way decisions of higher salience are made. It is quite understandable that people are left with the impression that their will can be neglected by the authorities, contrary to the slogan of this year's elections raised by them precisely. Therefore, should the EU institutions want to overcome this long-lasting perception of EP elections as second-order to national ones, adequate measures must be undertaken as soon as possible.

[23] Data obtained from the European Parliament website.

References:

Aldrich, J.H. (1993). Rational Choice and Turnout. *American Journal of Political Science 37*: 246-278

Armstrong, J. Scott (2012). Illusions in Regression Analysis. *International Journal of Forecasting* 28 (3): 689.

As it happened: first-ever live debate between EU presidential candidates, Euronews, 14 April 2014, http://www.euronews.com/2014/04/14/what-will-you-ask-the-potential-future-president-of-the-european-commission/

Banducci, S. (2005). Media Exposure, Media Content and Voter Mobilization: Implications for the Lijphart Thesis, Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC

Bhatti, Y & Hansen, K. M. (2011). The effect of generation and age on turnout to the European Parliament – How turnout will continue to decline in the future. *Electoral Studies*, 1-11 doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2011.11.004

Bilska, M. (2012). Voter Turnout in the 2009 European Elections: Media Coverage and Media Exposure as Explanatory Factors. Paper prepared for presentation at the EPOP 2012 Conference, "European Integration" panel, University of Oxford, 7-9 September 2012.

Blondel, J., Sinnott. R. & Svensson, P (1997). Representation and Voter Participation. *European Journal of Political Research* 32: 243–272

Buttolph Johnson, J., Reynolds, H. & Mycoff, J. (2008) *Political Science Research Methods*, Washington, D.C., CQ Press

Clark, N. & Rohrschneider, R. (2009). Second-Order Elections versus First-Order Thinking: How Voters Perceive the Representation Process in a Multi-Layered System of Governance, *Journal of European Integration, 31:5*, 645-664

Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2008), *O.J. C 115/47*, available at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT

Costello, R., Thomassen, J. & Rosema, M. (2012). European Parliament Elections and Political Representation: Policy Congruence between Voters and Parties, *West European Politics, 35:6*, 1226-1248

De Vreese, C. H. (2007). A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media's Fault? *Acta Politica*, 42, 271 – 286

Election Resources website (2014) - http://www.electionresources.org/

Eurobarometer Interactive Search System website (2014) - http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/index.cfm?lang=en

European Commission (1994). *Standard Eurobarometer 41. Public Opinion in the European Union*. Brussels, Belgium

European Commission (1999). *Standard Eurobarometer 51. Public Opinion in the European Union*. Brussels, Belgium

European Commission (2004). *Standard Eurobarometer 61. Public Opinion in the European Union*. Brussels, Belgium

European Commission (2009). *Standard Eurobarometer 71. Public Opinion in the European Union*. Brussels, Belgium

European Commission (2013). *Standard Eurobarometer 80. Public Opinion in the European Union*. Brussels, Belgium

European Commission (2014). *Special Eurobarometer 415. Europeans in 2014*, Brussels, Belgium

European Election Database website (2014) - http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/election_types/eu_related_referendums.html

European Parliament (2009). *New EP: More Power, More Responsibility*. Available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/0042423726/Parliament-and-the-Lisbon-Treaty.html

European Parliament website (2014) - http://www.elections2014.eu/en/press-kit/content/20131112PKH24411/html/Overview-of-Parliament-and-the-2014-elections

European Parliament website (2014) - http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/turnout.html

Feddersen, T. J. (2004). Rational Choice Theory and the Paradox of Not Voting, *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol.18 (1), 99-112

Field, A. P. (2009). *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS.* London, England : SAGE

Flickinger, R. S. & Studlar, D. T. (2007). One Europe, Many Electorates? Models of Turnout in European Parliament Elections after 2004, *Comparative Political Studies*, 40:4, 383-404

Flood, C. (2002). *The Challenge of Euroscepticism*, in The European Handbook by Gower, J., Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, Illinois

Flood, C. & Usherwood, S. (2005). *Positions, Disposition, Transitions: A model of Group Alignment on EU integration*, Paper presented at the 55th Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association, University of Leeds, April 2005

Franklin, M. N. (2001). How Structural Factors Cause Turnout Variations at European Parliament Elections, *European Union Politics*, volume 2(3): 309-328

Freedman, D. A. (2005). *Statistical Models: Theory and Practice*, Cambridge University Press

Gabel, M. (1998). Public Support for European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories, *The Journal of Politics*, 60:2, 333-354

George, S. (2000). Britain: Anatomy of a Eurosceptic State, *Journal of European Integration* 22:1

Geys, B. (2006). Explaining Voter Turnout: A Review of Aggregate-level Research, *Electoral Studies 25*, 637-663

Gschwend, T. & Schimmelfennig, F. (2007) Introduction: Designing Research in Political Science - A Dialogue between Theory and Data. In *Research Design in Political Science* pp. 1-14.

Hansen, H. S. (2008). *Euroscepticism - A Multidimensional Understanding of the concept and a comparative analysis of public scepticism in Britain and Denmark*. Master thesis, Aalborg University, Denmark

Harmsen, R. & Spiering, M. (2005). *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration*. Editions Rodopi B.V., Amsterdam – New York, NY 2004. Printed in the Netherlands.

Hix, S. & Marsh, M. (2008). Punishment or Protest? Understanding European Parliament Elections, *The Journal of Politics, 69:2,* 495-510

Interpreting log-transformed variables in linear regression, Business Analytics, Statistics, Technology, 15 September 2009

Kellstedt, P. & Whitten, G. (2009) *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research,* Cambridge University Press

Lehnert, M., Miller, B., & Wonka, A. (2007). Increasing the Relevance of Research Questions: Considerations on Theoretical and Social Relevance in Political Science. In *Research Design in Political Science*: How to Practice What They Preach: 21-33.

Marsh, M. & Mikhaylov, S. (2010). European Parliament Elections and EU governance. *Living Reviews in European Governance,* Vol. 5, No. 4

Matsusaka, J. G. (1995). Explaining voter turnout patterns: an information theory, *Public Choice* 84: 91-117

Mattila, M. (2003). Why bother? Determinants of turnout in the European elections, *Electoral Studies 22*, 449–468

McCormick, J. (2005). *Understanding the European Union – a concise introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York

Mellows-Facer, A., Cracknell, R. & Lightbrown, S. (2009). *European Parliament Elections 2009*, House of Commons Library. London, UK.

Müllerleile, A. (2013). *The Europeanisation of Euroscepticism.* Available at http://uacesoneurope.ideasoneurope.eu/2013/09/16/the-europeanisation-of-euroscepticism/

Nardis, Y. (2013). "News Exposure, Trust in the EU and European Parliament Election Turnout: How Determinants of Voting Differ Between Citizens of Established and New Member States" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication

Association, Hilton Metropole Hotel, London, England Online <APPLICATION/PDF>. 2014-01-07 from http://citation.allacademic.com/meta/p632565_index.html

Osborne, J. & Waters, E. (2002). Four assumptions of multiple regression that researchers should always test. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 8(2). Available at http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=8&n=2

Oxford English dictionary: http://www.oed.com

Reif, K. & Schmitt, H. (1980). Nine second-order national elections: A conceptual framework for the analysis of European election results, *European Journal of Political Research, 8*, 3-44

R. Dennis Cook and Sanford Weisberg (1982). Criticism and Influence Analysis in Regression, *Sociological Methodology*, Vol. 13. pp. 313–361

Schmitt, H. (2003). The Eurobarometers, *European Union Politics*, vol. 4

Steinbrecher, M & Rattinger, H. (2012). Explaining Turnout in European Parliament Elections In *The Europeanization of National Polities: Citizenship and Support in a Post-Enlargement Union*. Oxford University Press Inc., New York. Published in the United States

Stockemer, D. (2011). Citizens' support for the European Union and Participation in European Parliament Elections, *European Union Politics, 13:1*, 26-46

Sykes, A. O. (1986). *An Introduction to Regression Analysis*, Chicago Working Paper in Law & Economics

Usherwood, S. (2012). *"They couldn't hit an elephant from that dist-": what can the EU learn from the Eurosceptics?* Available at http://esharp.eu/essay/5-they-couldn-t-hit-an-elephant-from-that-dist-what-can-the-eu-learn-from-the-eurosceptics/

Weiler, J. et all. (1995). *European democracy and its critique – five uneasy pieces*, EUI Working Paper no. 95/11

Wrap-up: EU 'Spitzenkandidaten' debate in Brussels, Euractiv, 15 May 2014, http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014/wrap-eu-spitzenkandidaten-debate-brussels-301779

Appendix A: Data Set Sample – Model 1

Member states	VT	EUROSC	BEN	WV	CE	MV
Belgium 94	90.66	10.00	49.00	1	0	1
Denmark 94	52.92	26.00	64.00	0	0	0
Germany 94	60.02	12.00	41.00	1	0	0
Ireland 94	49.98	7.00	80.00	0	0	0
France 94	52.71	13.00	38.00	1	0	0
Italy 94	73.60	5.00	55.00	1	0	0
Luxembourg 94	88.55	8.00	67.00	1	1	1
Netherlands 94	35.69	5.00	71.00	0	0	0
UK 94	36.43	21.00	40.00	0	0	0
Greece 94	73.18	9.00	69.00	1	0	1
Spain 94	59.14	14.00	38.00	1	0	0
Portugal 94	35.54	12.00	70.00	1	0	0
Sweden 94	41.63	33.00	19.00	1	0	0
Austria 94	67.73	24.00	37.00	1	1	0
Finland 94	57.60	22.00	36.00	1	0	0
Belgium 99	91.05	8.00	44.00	1	1	1
Denmark 99	50.46	23.00	62.00	0	0	0
Germany 99	45.19	10.00	35.00	1	0	0
Ireland 99	50.21	3.00	86.00	0	1	0
France 99	46.76	14.00	44.00	1	0	0
Italy 99	69.76	5.00	51.00	1	0	0
Luxembourg 99	87.27	3.00	65.00	1	1	1
Netherlands 99	30.02	5.00	66.00	0	0	0
UK 99	24.00	23.00	31.00	0	0	0
Greece 99	70.25	11.00	67.00	1	0	1
Spain 99	63.05	4.00	48.00	1	1	0
Portugal 99	39.93	4.00	71.00	1	0	0
Sweden 99	38.84	33.00	21.00	1	0	0
Austria 99	49.40	23.00	37.00	1	0	0
Finland 99	30.14	19.00	42.00	1	0	0
Belgium 04	90.81	10.00	58.00	1	1	1
Denmark 04	47.89	20.00	64.00	1	0	0
Germany 04	43.00	14.00	39.00	1	0	0
Ireland 04	58.58	8.00	80.00	0	1	0
France 04	42.76	18.00	46.00	1	0	0
Italy 04	71.72	13.00	49.00	1	1	0
Luxembourg 04	91.35	7.00	69.00	1	1	1
Netherlands 04	39.26	12.00	55.00	0	0	0
UK 04	38.52	29.00	30.00	0	1	0
Greece 04	63.22	7.00	82.00	1	0	1

Spain 04	45.14	10.00	69.00	1	0	0
Portugal 04	38.60	13.00	66.00	1	0	0
Sweden 04	37.85	33.00	27.00	1	0	0
Austria 04	42.43	29.00	38.00	1	0	0
Finland 04	39.43	21.00	46.00	1	0	0
Belgium 09	90.39	11.00	68.00	1	1	1
Denmark 09	59.54	13.00	77.00	1	1	0
Germany 09	43.27	11.00	57.00	1	0	0
Ireland 09	58.64	9.00	79.00	0	1	0
France 09	40.63	17.00	54.00	1	0	0
Italy 09	65.05	16.00	47.00	1	0	0
Luxembourg 09	90.76	6.00	72.00	1	1	1
Netherlands 09	36.75	7.00	74.00	0	0	0
UK 09	34.70	32.00	34.00	0	1	0
Greece 09	52.61	15.00	64.00	1	0	1
Spain 09	44.87	9.00	70.00	1	0	0
Portugal 09	36.77	16.00	62.00	1	0	0
Sweden 09	45.53	19.00	47.00	1	0	0
Austria 09	45.97	19.00	47.00	1	0	0
Finland 09	38.60	20.00	60.00	1	0	0
Belgium 14	90.00	22.00	54.00	1	1	1
Denmark 14	56.40	25.00	53.00	1	1	0
Germany 14	47.90	20.00	65.00	1	0	0
Ireland 14	51.60	24.00	62.00	0	0	0
France 14	43.50	29.00	49.00	1	0	0
Italy 14	60.00	33.00	49.00	1	1	0
Luxembourg 14	90.00	20.00	74.00	1	1	1
Netherlands 14	37.00	27.00	63.00	0	0	0
UK 14	36.00	34.00	41.00	0	1	0
Greece 14	58.20	48.00	60.00	1	0	1
Spain 14	45.90	28.00	62.00	1	0	0
Portugal 14	34.50	36.00	58.00	1	0	0
Sweden 14	48.80	23.00	66.00	1	0	0
Austria 14	45.70	33.00	62.00	1	0	0
Finland 14	40.90	22.00	60.00	1	0	0

Appendix B: Data Set Sample – Model 2

Member States	VT	EUROSC	BEN	WV	CE	MV
Belgium 04	90.81	10.00	58.00	1	1	1
Denmark 04	47.89	20.00	64.00	1	0	0
Germany 04	43.00	14.00	39.00	1	0	0
Ireland 04	58.58	8.00	80.00	0	1	0
France 04	42.76	18.00	46.00	1	0	0
Italy 04	71.72	13.00	49.00	1	1	0
Luxembourg 04	91.35	7.00	69.00	1	1	1
Netherlands 04	39.26	12.00	55.00	0	0	0
UK 04	38.52	29.00	30.00	0	1	0
Greece 04	63.22	7.00	82.00	1	0	1
Spain 04	45.14	10.00	69.00	1	0	0
Portugal 04	38.60	13.00	66.00	1	0	0
Sweden 04	37.85	33.00	27.00	1	0	0
Austria 04	42.43	29.00	38.00	1	0	0
Finland 04	39.43	21.00	46.00	1	0	0
Czech Republic04	28.30	10.00	56.00	1	0	0
Estonia 04	26.83	10.00	58.00	1	0	0
Cyprus 04	72.50	15.00	41.00	1	0	1
Lithuania 04	48.38	6.00	72.00	1	1	0
Latvia 04	41.34	14.00	57.00	1	0	0
Hungary 04	38.50	10.00	47.00	1	0	0
Malta 04	82.39	17.00	53.00	1	0	0
Poland 04	20.87	8.00	62.00	1	0	0
Slovenia 04	28.35	5.00	62.00	1	0	0
Slovakia 04	16.97	4.00	63.00	1	0	0
Bulgaria 04	29.22	8.00	50.00	1	0	0
Romania 04	29.47	5.00	69.00	1	0	0
Belgium 09	90.39	11.00	68.00	1	1	1
Denmark 09	59.54	13.00	77.00	1	1	0
Germany 09	43.27	11.00	57.00	1	0	0
Ireland 09	58.64	9.00	79.00	0	1	0
France 09	40.63	17.00	54.00	1	0	0
Italy 09	65.05	16.00	47.00	1	0	0
Luxembourg 09	90.76	6.00	72.00	1	1	1
Netherlands 09	36.75	7.00	74.00	0	0	0
UK 09	34.70	32.00	34.00	0	1	0
Greece 09	52.61	15.00	64.00	1	0	1
Spain 09	44.87	9.00	70.00	1	0	0
Portugal 09	36.77	16.00	62.00	1	0	0
Sweden 09	45.53	19.00	47.00	1	0	0
Austria 09	45.97	19.00	47.00	1	0	0
Finland 09	38.60	20.00	60.00	1	0	0

Czech Republic09	28.22	13.00	63.00	0	0	0
Estonia 09	43.90	7.00	78.00	1	0	0
Cyprus 09	59.40	18.00	54.00	1	0	1
Lithuania 09	20.98	9.00	71.00	1	0	0
Latvia 09	53.70	23.00	38.00	1	1	0
Hungary 09	36.31	23.00	36.00	1	0	0
Malta 09	78.79	13.00	67.00	1	0	0
Poland 09	24.53	7.00	74.00	1	0	0
Slovenia 09	28.37	14.00	64.00	1	0	0
Slovakia 09	19.64	3.00	80.00	1	0	0
Bulgaria 09	38.99	7.00	48.00	1	0	0
Romania 09	27.67	6.00	63.00	1	0	0
Belgium 14	90.00	22.00	54.00	1	1	1
Denmark 14	56.40	25.00	53.00	1	1	0
Germany 14	47.90	20.00	65.00	1	0	0
Ireland 14	51.60	24.00	62.00	0	0	0
France 14	43.50	29.00	49.00	1	0	0
Italy 14	60.00	33.00	49.00	1	1	0
Luxembourg 14	90.00	20.00	74.00	1	1	1
Netherlands 14	37.00	27.00	63.00	0	0	0
UK 14	36.00	34.00	41.00	0	1	0
Greece 14	58.20	48.00	60.00	1	0	1
Spain 14	45.90	28.00	62.00	1	0	0
Portugal 14	34.50	36.00	58.00	1	0	0
Sweden 14	48.80	23.00	66.00	1	0	0
Austria 14	45.70	33.00	62.00	1	0	0
Finland 14	40.90	22.00	60.00	1	0	0
Czech Republic14	19.50	29.00	70.00	1	0	0
Estonia 14	36.44	9.00	69.00	1	0	0
Cyprus 14	43.97	46.00	61.00	1	0	1
Lithuania 14	44.91	8.00	72.00	1	1	0
Latvia 14	30.00	17.00	72.00	1	0	0
Hungary 14	28.92	20.00	58.00	1	0	0
Malta 14	74.81	14.00	46.00	1	0	0
Poland 14	22.70	12.00	65.00	1	0	0
Slovenia 14	20.96	19.00	63.00	1	0	0
Slovakia 14	13.00	23.00	75.00	1	0	0
Bulgaria 14	35.50	15.00	74.00	1	0	0
Romania 14	32.16	10.00	67.00	1	0	0

Appendix C: List of Variables

VT – Voter turnout rates, in %

EUROSC – Euroscepticism levels in each member state, in %

BEN – Proportion of people perceiving their country benefits from EU membership, in %

WV – Weekend voting, dummy variable

CE – Concurrent national elections, dummy variable

MV – Mandatory voting, dummy variable