

**Why EU Attitudes Matter: A Contextualized Application of Current Behavioral Theories in Romania during its First Europe-Wide Elections for the European Parliament**

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Can Romania's voting behavior in the first Europe-wide elections for the European Parliament (EP) be explained strictly as an outcome of domestic factors or do European attitudes play a role as well? Mainstream research on EP elections forwards the second-order national elections (SOE) theory, as the dominant framework for analyzing the behavior in these elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Two assumptions of the SOE theory are important: first, EU member- states' citizens perceive the EP elections as elections of lesser importance than the ones for national offices, called first-order elections. Second, not issues in the European arena, but rather aspects of the national politics, such as evaluations of the governing parties' performance and the national economy, are the main drivers of individual behavior in EP elections. The SOE offers, thus, three broad aggregate level predictions that have been largely observed in all EP elections, since 1979 up to 2009: turnout in EP elections is lower than in national elections, government parties perform worse, are punished and lose votes in EP elections, and third, smaller, radical parties perform better.

Only very recently, work on both aggregate level regularities and the micro-foundations of EP elections added a European dimension to voting behavior (Hobolt et al., 2008; Clark and Rohrschneider, 2009; Hobolt and Witrock, 2010; de Vries et al., 2010). These recent studies suggest a 'Europe matters' alternative and posit that the main aggregate observable outcomes of lower turnout and governing parties' defections could be related to issues in the European arena. Specifically, recent work posits that voter evaluations of national parties' performance on the EU integration dimension matter when deciding to participate and to support or defect from a governing party. A complementary theory to the SOE model, a spatial approach to voting, has been developed and tested with data from the last 1999 and 2004 Europe-wide EP elections. The core assumption of the spatial model is that voters, using various cues, have the ability to accurately assess distances between one's preferred position on the left-right ideological and European integration dimensions and the parties' stances on ideology and EU integration (Hobolt et al., 2008). Two generalizations that explain individual vote choice in EP elections have been derived from the spatial voting theory: first, larger distances between voters and parties on the European integration dimension lead to abstention and defection from governing parties. Second, voters who are less supportive of the EU will be more likely to defect given that the governing parties are, overall, more supportive of the EU than other domestic mainstream parties.

This paper delves into the micro-dynamics of voting behavior at EP elections in a post-communist state, Romania. The study evaluates the electoral behavior theories, the SOE and the spatial voting model, in a context in which the core assumptions of both theories are less likely to hold. Specifically, the paper concentrates on Romania's first EP wide electoral participation and argues that this context poses particular challenges to the current explanations, the 'second order national election model' (SOE) and to the 'Europe matters' as a 'spatial model approach'. With respect to the SOE assumption, this paper argues that Romanians may not be aware of the view that 'the EP elections are elections with no power at stake' given that the 2009 EP elections are the first Europe-wide EP elections in which they participate. Second, Romania displays characteristics that may impede the functioning of the spatial voting model in the sense that anticipating and positioning mainstream parties along the

left-right ideological continuum and the EU dimension may prove to be a difficult task. Given the long negotiated EU accession process in which almost all governing parties since the early 1990s participated, voters may have difficulties in distinguishing *mainstream* parties' positions on EU integration, perceiving all of them as pro-EU, at least for the first years of EU membership<sup>1</sup>. In addition, one of the manifestations of the transitioning party system consists of a 'relativization' of the left-right ideological continuum for power/opposition alliances (Preda 2012). Thus, a spatial approach to voting in Romania may lead to erroneous conclusion that the EU dimension does not have an impact in the region. However, I argue, such a conclusion would be a methodological artifact, reflecting the problematic *measure* used to assess the impact of EU attitudes and not the actual dynamic at play.

At face value, the aggregate regularities of second order elections in general, namely lower turnout, governing parties' losses, and gains for radical extreme parties, were only partially confirmed in the 2009 Romanian context: turnout decreased in the 2009 EP elections, from a national average of 39.2% in the preceding parliamentary elections to 27.67% in the EP elections (*Biroul Electoral Central* 2008, 2009). Governing parties' losses were, however, minimal, around 2% for each governing party. Rather, the spectacular outcome that made the news in Europe consisted of a substantial gain for one extreme, nationalist party, the Greater Romania (PRM), with more than 5% increase jumping from 3.15% in the national election to 8.65% in the EP one (*ibid*). These aggregate results generate three research questions: what motivations, national or European, lie behind Romanians' decisions to participate and vote in EP election? To the extent that 'Europe matters', is the electoral outcome a vote 'against Europe', given that a radical party seems to be the biggest winner of these elections?

The answers to these questions contribute to two important debates related to the EP electoral behavior: first, understanding when and how 'Europe matters' proves that a European electoral link exists between voters and the EP, a link that has been largely said not to exist. Instead of maintaining that participation in EP elections has no direct effect on the EU policy-making process, this paper argues that voters attribute a broader EU-related meaning to their participation. Voters consciously take advantage of the opportunity to vote in a EU contest and associate a symbolic meaning to the act of voting, including notions of 'finally returning to Europe' and 'hoping for a better life' (Interviews in Romania, Summer 2009). Second, two characteristics that the ten post-communist member-states share, positive European attitudes and a volatile party system with weak party attachments, have been found irrelevant in previous studies addressing questions of behavior in EP elections (Wessels and Franklin 2010). These differences, it was argued, produce at most 'differences in degree but not of a fundamentally different character' (Clark and Rohrschneider 2010, 130). However, this paper suggests that voter positive attitudes toward Europe, at least in the early years of EU membership, negatively affect the probability of abstaining and have no impact on the probability of party switching. This statement is time-dependent and may hold only during the first-Europe wide elections for a new member state, when the party system has not polarized

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<sup>1</sup> I underscore mainstream here because I distinctively exclude nationalist parties from mainstream governing or opposition parties.

yet on the EU issue. Finally, the success of the far right nationalist party, the Greater Romania Party (PRM), can be attributed to voters' disenchantment with the political class as a whole, governing and opposition. In addition, PRM voters share negative attitudes toward EU membership.

The ensuing paper proceeds as follows: the first part is a review of main theories explaining individual behavior in EP elections: SOE and its alternative, 'Europe matters', mainly developed as a spatial voting model. Second, two characteristics are introduced, essential in the Romanian case and which weaken the assumptions of both theories. These Romanian particularities refer to: voters' evaluations of the importance of the EP results when compared to the national ones for the SOE model. For the spatial voting theory, important are positive European attitudes and blurred perceptions of mainstream parties' positions on the left-right and the European integration dimensions. Third, new hypotheses are developed. Finally, this paper proceeds to testing the extent to which Romanians' motivations to participate and vote in EP elections are mainly driven by national or/and EU issues. I use, in this empirical section, several methodologies: discourse analysis of mainstream newspapers to present how the EU issues were framed in the Romanian context; open-ended interviews with citizens participating in the first Europe-wide EP elections, and large-N analyses on a representative nationwide random sample of 1,000 participants. Finally, I conclude.

### ***Two perspectives on when and how Europe matters***

The second order theory (SOE) addresses two broad questions: first, why do people vote, and, second when they vote, why and how do they vote differently in EP elections than in the national 'first order' elections. In answering these questions, the common theme that unites different approaches working in the SOE framework, of case studies, large-n analyses, experimental or observational studies, is that 'Europe hardly matters'(Reif and Schmitt 1980; Schmitt and Mannheimer 1991; Franklin, Van der Eijk, and Openhuis 1996; Franklin 2007; Schmitt and Van der Eijk 2007; Hobolt and Wittrock 2011). Therefore, the main assumption of the SOE model is that the same issues-- mainly national--are relevant across both levels of electoral behavior, national and supranational, with the qualification that at EP elections there is an added perception on voters' side that these elections, and implicitly their results, do not matter much.

With respect to turnout, at the individual level people vote out of habit, or because of social norms, because they trust institutions in general, and because they feel attached and identify with a particular party (Franklin 2001; Wessels and Franklin 2010). If positive views on Europe are present among voters, such views do not merely predict voting in EP elections but also voting in national elections. Hence, European attitudes are interpreted as support for elected institutions in general rather than as linkage structures between voters and the EU on European issues (Marsh and Franklin 1996). For instance, a study on turnout at the 1999 EP elections and Euroscepticism concludes that abstentions in EP elections do not carry an anti-EU sentiment. The decision to abstain is allegedly based on 'other grounds than one's own evaluations of the EU' (Schmitt and Van der Eijk 2007, 162) (see Paper 1, Table 2 for a review on turnout and EU attitudes).

With respect to party choices, the main argument based on the SOE model, is that EP elections' results are used as markers in domestic politics. Given the EP elections' position in the electoral cycle, different motivations guide the voting behavior: sincere, in the first part of the national electoral cycle, since voters understand that parties do not pay attention to the outcome. Protest voting against governing parties in the second part of the electoral cycle, since voters know that parties start paying attention to the EP results as a new general election is approaching. Moreover, strategic voting mimics a first order election towards the end of the electoral cycle (Franklin, Van der Eijk, and Openhuius 1996). Regardless of these variations, all types of voting behavior are generated by domestic factors, reactions to governing parties' performance and national economy, and not by reactions to parties' positions on EU issues.

When investigating defection from governing parties, scholars point to the fact that negative attitudes towards Europe are significant predictors for party defections. Thus, parties that take a negative stance towards Europe benefit systematically from it (Marsh 2007; Van Egmond 2007; Hix and Marsh 2007). However, these findings are regarded either as 'tenuous' (Marsh 2007, 70) and 'minor' (Hix and Marsh 2007, 495) or are more directly challenged and declined any role (Schmitt and Van der Eijk 2007; Van der Brug, Van der Eijk, and Franklin 2007).

Somewhat in contrast with the SOE model, very recent research on the micro-level dynamics of EP electoral behavior advances the argument that European attitudes and EU-based performance indicators affect EP voting behavior (Hobolt et al. 2008, Clark and Rohrschneider 2009 (2010), Hobolt and Witrock 2011, de Vries et al. 2011). Given the increased relevance of the European Parliament in the policy decision-making process and the overall prominence of EU institutions, voters evaluate the EU on its own terms and evaluate parties based on their performance at the EU level (Clark and Rohrschneider 2009 (2010)). Hobolt et al. (2008) present one of the most systematic analyses of why and when 'Europe matters', developing and testing a theory on the 1999 and 2004 EP elections. The authors propose a spatial voting model which posits that distances between voters and governing parties on the left-right ideological and the European integration dimensions are essential in understanding the dynamics at play. The starting empirical observation is that voters are overwhelmingly less supportive of the EU integration project than the governing parties. Given this gap on EU integration between voters and their first choice in national elections, namely the governing parties, government party voters either abstain or switch at EP elections to a party that is closer to their preferred position on EU integration. Two major propositions related to European integration attitudes are tested: first, the larger these absolute distances the more likely will governing party voters abstain or defect. Second, voters who are less supportive of the EU project are more likely to defect or abstain. Thus, confirming previous 'tenuous' findings, negative attitudes towards EU integration are likely to matter in shaping behavior at EP elections. In addition, statements related to the campaign context are introduced. Specifically, given the relevance of the negative EU integration attitudes, campaigns with a more Eurosceptic tone will increase voters' defections from the governing parties. Hobolt and Spoon (2010) in a study on national voters (i.e. participants in previous national elections and possible participants in EP election) find that voters base their choice on both national and EU concerns,

and that these factors have similar magnitudes. In sum, what started as a debate of national over EU issues affecting behavior in EP elections, ended up in a synthesized approach of both types of factors playing a role.

I move next to the Romanian party system and the overall context, which I argue, challenge the core assumptions of voting behavior theories, the SOE and the spatial voting model.

### ***The mediating factor of the Romanian Context***

Previous research that considered the behavior in the last the 2004 EP elections yields inconclusive results with respect to the role that the post-communist context may play in these EP elections related dynamics. On the one hand, research that looks at aggregate level results and focuses mainly on the applicability of the SOE model in the post-communist context concludes that the nice orderly expectations of governing party losses in particular do not hold very well in a context characterized by weak party institutionalization, weak party attachment and high volatility (Schmitt 2005; Koepke and Ringe 2006; Hix and Marsh 2007). By contrast, research that works within the SOE framework but focuses on both micro-foundations and context related factors posits that citizens in both East and West region respond to the same institutional and contextual influences. Mainly, they all perceive that the 'outcome of the EP elections does not matter' (Wessels and Franklin 2010, 97). In addition, studies that consider the micro-foundations of vote choice and posit that 'Europe matters' argue that East-West differences are *insignificant* with respect to voter's voting behavior in EP elections (Clark and Rohrschneider 2010, 130). To the effect that some magnitude differences are detected, in the sense that positive EU democratic performance helped national governmental parties more in the West than in the East, they do not mean, argue the authors, that voters perceive EP and national elections differently across the two sub-regions. Rather, it was suggested, 'voters in the West had more time to connect performance evaluations to parties' status as a government or opposition party' (ibid). Finally, studies following the spatial voting approach conclude that the theory travels well across all Europe with the qualification that voters in the East are more likely to switch (not found significant) or abstain than voters in the West (Hobolt et al 2008, 110).

This paper continues this line of thought that the post-communist context may play a particular role in the EP electoral dynamics. Specifically, I argue that a few regional characteristics need to be closely considered: the perception of the first EP election as second order national election, the particular meaning of EU membership, and the party system characteristics. While I argue these factors may be relevant to the entire post-communist region I elaborate below on each factor by focusing specifically on the Romanian context. First, I posit that Romanian citizens, as part of a state that has recently joined the EU (in 2007), may be less aware of the perspective that EP elections are 'second order national elections'. Romania did not participate in other EU-wide EP electoral campaigns, such that the first exposure of its citizens to the second order concept may be happening only during this campaign. Moreover, as citizens of a new member state, Romanians are less likely to be familiar with the EU decision-making process, and thus less equipped to judge the relative position of the EP in the EU decision-making process. It may be possible that Romanian citizens consider the EP elections'

results just as important as the national elections' results. The EES 2009 survey results confirm this perspective. The EES 2009 survey allows us to tap into voters' associated importance to the EP results when compared to the national results (i.e., the relative importance associate to which parties are wining at EP and national elections). The EES 2009 survey in Romania yields that 67.33% of respondents consider both elections equally important, 18.26 % of respondents consider the EP electoral result as more important than the national one, and only 15.41% of respondents consider the national outcome as more important than the EU one (EES 2009, Voter Survey Data 2010)<sup>2</sup>. It seems therefore, that only 15% of respondents follow the SOE logic, which, as mentioned before, attributes less importance to the EP electoral outcome when compared to the national one.

In addition, citizens view the EU membership in a predominantly positive light with only 6% of the Romanian respondents answering that the 'EU membership is a bad thing' (ibid). This overwhelmingly positive view is linked to notions of 'hopes for a better life', 'expected reforms in the justice system', 'the opportunity of traveling and studying freely in the EU' (interviews 2009 Romania). As Cichowski (2000) explains, the post-communist citizens associate with the EU membership the fulfillment of two goals: one economic, in which the EU is perceived as the guarantor of a long-desired economic well-being, and one political, in which the EU is the guarantor of democracy itself via the institutionalization of democratic norms, values, and institutions. Given the high stakes that the EU membership has for citizens in these countries, one could expect that positive EU attitudes may play a positive effect on voting behavior at EP elections. This hypothesis would contradict some of the previous findings which emphasized the role of EU negative attitudes (Hix and Marsh 2007; Hobolt et al. 2008; Hobolt and Spoon 2010). Thus, based on these two characteristics, we can argue that citizens may perceive EP elections important. They represent a first opportunity to actively participate in the EU structures and may not be rapidly dismissed as not relevant, as the SOE assumption argues. Thus, post-communist citizens and Romanians in particular may not perceive the EP elections as *decisive* neither for national nor for EU related politics, but they may consider these elections as *important* for both political processes.

Third, the transitioning party system with weak party attachment and unstable electoral markets diminishes voter capabilities of differentiating among mainstream parties along the left-right ideological dimension. In the post-communist context, parties frequently split, dissolve, become extinct, and do not stand for clear identifiable values or programs, and do not permit clear choices (Birch 2003). These characteristics impede a smooth functioning of the SOE and spatial voting models in the following way. First, when we forward arguments of strategic or sincere voting across national and EP elections, we assume that the same supply of parties exists across the two elections. What the post-communist context may display though is a new

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<sup>2</sup> The EES survey does not include questions that would allow us to compare how citizens perceive the EP and the national legislature. However, the EES survey provides questions related to the importance that respondents attribute to which party wins the most mandates at each election. Therefore, the percentages reported in the paper are based on the difference between two EES 2009 survey questions: 'It is very important for you which political party wins the most votes in the EP election' and 'It's very important for you which party wins the most votes in the national election' (Voter Survey Data 2010).

party offering at EP election that did not exist at the national election, and vice-versa. Often times, a new preference at EP elections may mean that voters changed their preference (voter volatility) or that a preferred party does not exist anymore (party volatility) (see Bernhard and Karakoc 2010; Tavits 2007).

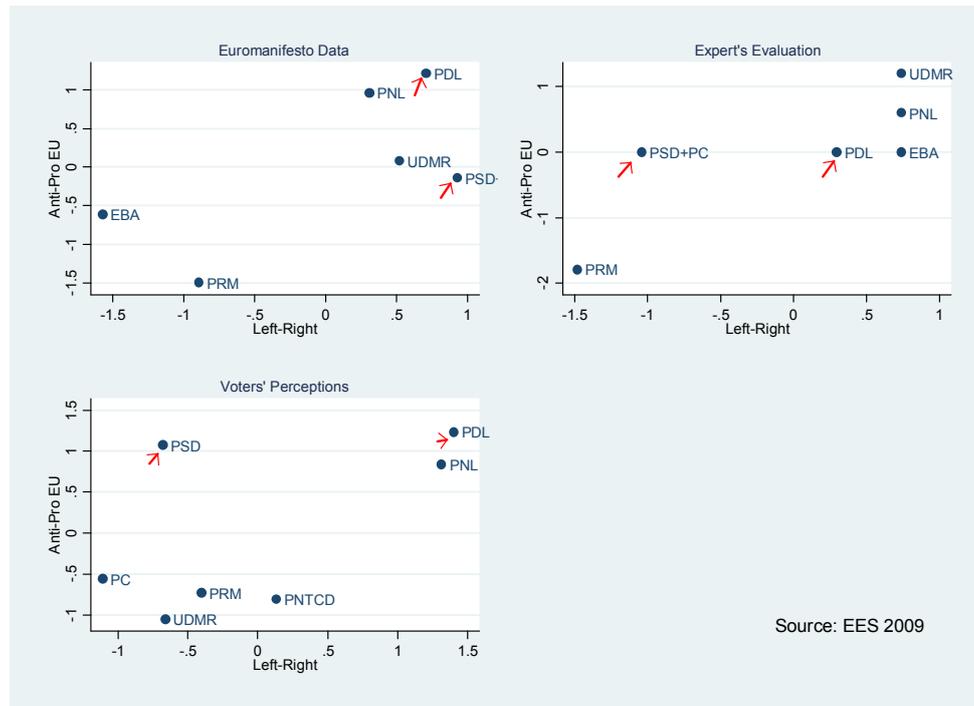
The Romanian party system does not display high levels of party volatility (O'Dwyer 2010), but has instead a particular *ideological elasticity* or 'ideological conversion' (Pop Eleches 2010) with respect to party's positions on the left-right dimension. This characteristic has been referred in the press as an 'irrelevance of ideological positions' when delineating the power and the opposition in the governing structures (Preda 2012). Since these ideological traits diminish the relevance of ideology in governing coalitions, we may speculate that they also diminish the potential impact that ideology may play in voting behavior. Parties in a transitioning system lack the structural element of ideology and easily switch alliances. Even though no new major parties entered the political scene over the past twenty years, voters followed this lack of structural factors and focused instead on more short term aspects when voting, such as personalities (Pop-Eleches 2010). This dynamic however disturbs the functioning of both SOE and spatial voting model, which assume clear identifiable positions on the left-right ideological continuum and clear and stable preferences from one type of election to another.

In addition to the issues mentioned on the left-right dimension, I argue that in the post-communist context voters have difficulties with the EU integration dimension, at least in the first Europe-wide participation. Given the long negotiation process of more than a decade in which almost all mainstream parties have been involved in and given that an open anti-EU party stance is mainly missing before the EU accession, voters will most likely have difficulties in differentiating mainstream parties' stances, governing and opposition, along the EU integration dimension. Once in the EU, parties have more freedom in developing a critical position toward some aspects of the EU integration, see Hungary or the Czech Republic today, but before the accession such an approach is highly unlikely. With respect to citizens' shift in attitudes, quite relevant are data from the 2009 Standard Eurobarometer which highlight that the most substantial negative shifts with respect to the EU image are registered in the post-communist states that joined the EU in 2004, Slovenia, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic. By contrast, in member states that joined the EU only in 2007, the EU has the best image, namely in Romania and Bulgaria (Eurobarometer 71, 130).

To graphically illustrate the difficulty of positioning the Romanian parties along the left-right ideological and the EU integration dimensions, I used three different sources of data on mainstream parties' stances in the EP elections and plotted their positions along the two dimensions based on: Euromanifesto data, expert's evaluations, and voter's perceptions (see Figure 1). The Euromanifesto data is based on party programs issued by political parties ahead of the 2009 election to the European Parliament with the goal of measuring issue emphases and policy positions of political parties that have representation in national parliaments (EES 2009, Manifesto Study Data). The expert's evaluation is a country expert assessment of mainstream parties' positions in EP elections based on party platforms, documented in the EES Manifesto Study Data. Voter's placements of mainstream parties' positions are based on

averages based on individuals' reported scores in the Voter Study Data (EES 2009), according to which voters place parties along the left-right and EU integration dimensions.

**Figure 1: Romanian Parties' Positions on the two Dimensions: Left-Right and EU Integration: Different Evaluations (standardized coefficients).**



Note: The three most important parties are the PSD (Social Democratic Party), the PD (Democratic Party) and the PNL (National Liberal Party). The PSD+PC represents the electoral alliance at the 2009 EP election, of the PSD and the PC (Conservative Party)—a party formed in 1991 with a conservative social ideology. The PD-L stands for the Democratic Liberal Party, formed in 2007, of the PD and a faction of the PNL. The PNTCD (Christian-Democratic Peasants' National Party) is one of the Romanian historical parties, in addition to PNL. EBA stands for Elena Basescu, the President's daughter who competed in the EP elections as an independent candidate, after leaving the PD-L. The PRM stands for the radical nationalist The Greater Romania Party. In the first two plots, based on party platforms, the PSD and the PC are considered as one competitor. In the third plot, based on voter's evaluations, separate questions were answered for each party. In addition, in the third plot, EBA's position was not gauged mainly because the survey focused on parties' and not on independent candidates' ideological positions.

With respect to the left-right dimension, we observe that experts disagree on how to place the main parties. Based on policies mentioned in the party platforms the PSD+PC alliance, an alliance between a center-left with a center-right party, falls to the right of the center-right party, the PD-L. In contrast, based on country experts, the alliance should be placed to the left of the PD-L, as the main competitor on the center-left. This perspective is confirmed by voters' perceptions, which view the PSD and the PC as main competitors on the left, while the PD-L and the PNL as main competitors on the center-right. In addition, the PNL is placed closer to the PD-L than to the PSD+PC or PSD and PC in all three plots.

With respect to the EU integration dimension, the EP electoral literature posits that governing parties are in general more pro-EU while other parties adopt more-anti EU stances (Hobolt et al. 2008). In the Romanian context, the three relevant parties, the PSD, the PD-L and the PNL display similar positions in two plots, experts and voters evaluations, while based on party platforms, one could argue that the PSD is less pro-EU than the other two parties. Important, however, is the fact that only PRM is perceived less pro-EU than mainstream parties, in at least two plots. Quite telling is also the UDMR position, which covers basically all possible situations, from the most pro-EU (experts) to the least pro-EU (voters). Therefore, the three sources of data reveal at least one thing: there is a lot of disagreement between voters' perceptions of parties' stances and the actual parties' positions on the two dimensions. In addition, the ideological left-right dimension does not seem to play an important role in Romanian politics given that parties that are rather more distant on the left-right dimension forge political alliances.

Of interest for this paper, in addition to mainstream parties, is the fringe nationalist party, PRM, which gained a 5% boost in the EP election. This party steadily declined in national 2008 elections to a 2-3% of the national vote after the outstanding performance in 2000. At the time, PRM received the second place in the legislative elections with 23% of the vote and its leader, Vadim Tudor, became the second-placed candidate in the presidential elections. Yet at the 2009 EP elections, it is its unexpected success that keeps international media's attention (The Economist, June 11, 2009.)<sup>3</sup>. PRM, in coalition with Gigi Becali, a compromised Romanian businessman and politician, received 8.65% of the vote. Since voters perceive PRM as less pro-EU than mainstream governing parties PSD and PD-L (see Figure 1) this party's success may be interpreted as an anti-EU stance if voters base their vote on EU attitudes. Therefore, understanding the particular dynamic that the PRM vote entails at EP elections becomes important for the overall argument of the paper.

In this context, it is relevant to mention that PRM advocates mostly domestic issues and identifies 'corruption of the political class', 'the Hungarians', 'the Gypsies', and 'the Jews' as 'Romania's enemies' (Hartleb 2009). The party claims to have at its core the defense of 'the Romanian interest' and focuses on (re)building 'The Greater Romania', which would include the unification of all Romanians within one unitary state. With respect to the EU, PRM departs from other fringe nationalist parties in Europe in that it endorses a 'positive orientation towards Europe' (ibid). The party's early manifestos 'barely mention the EU' (ibid, 8). By 2005 however, PRM shifted towards an instrumental value to the EU membership as a mechanism for achieving the party's core national interest, which is to build 'The Greater Romania' (ibid). PRM's ideological doctrine for instance speaks about a 'Euroregion' which would include 'the whole Romania plus areas in other states on the borders that are inhabited by Romanians' ('PRM Doctrina Nationala 2005', ibid, 9). The same instrumental approach to EU membership is

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<sup>3</sup> 'Scary Elections in Eastern Europe. Time to start fretting. Boring center-right parties did well-- but so did quite a few nasties', *The Economist*, June 11, 2009, <http://www.economist.com/node/13832627> (accessed January 4, 2012)

present during the 2009 campaign. As such, Vadim Tudor and Gigi Becali reinforced at press conference near Bucharest as their priority 'to build a stronger Romania in a united Europe' (Biroul de Presa al Partidului Romania Mare, 17 mai 2009, 16). Yet, in the same newspaper one could read that 'Romania is EU's slave in the 21 century and pays EU 1.5 billion euro as tribute' (ibid, 17). Such statements receive only minimal coverage and PRM's targets during the 2009 campaign are local institutions and national politicians and not the EU. In a nutshell, given these contradictory positions with respect to the EU and the fact that the EU issue is rarely put forward during the campaign, this paper posits that it is less likely that voters will base their vote on EU attitudes. Rather, issues coming from the domestic arena, such as dissatisfaction with politics and mainstream parties will explain its success at EP elections.

In sum, in this section I argued that the post-communist context displays particular characteristics that need to be considered when evaluating theories of voting behavior. First, there is a symbolic perception of EP elections as 'important' for country's membership in the EU. Second, the complex transformations of the party system coupled by the importance of the EU accession process, impede voters in formulating clear assessments of parties' stances on the two ideological and EU dimensions (see Table 1 for a summary of this section). In this post-communist context, therefore, the few testable propositions coming out of the two theories of voting behavior can be adapted to the Romanian context in the following way:

*An alternative to the SOE model:*

H1. In addition to national issues and domestic cleavages, such as governing party's performance and national economy, (positive) attitudes towards EU will increase turnout, all else equal.

H1a. Positive attitudes towards EU will decrease abstaining, all else equal.

*'Europe matters' as an alternative to the spatial voting approach:*

H2. Given the blurred positioning of parties along the left-right and EU dimensions, absolute distances between voters and parties on the EU and left-right ideological dimensions are less likely to affect abstaining and switching.

H3a&b. To the extent that mainstream parties did not develop clear positions on EU membership and did not polarize over EU integration, EU attitudes are less likely to affect:

- switching in general (H3a)
- switching from governing parties in particular (H3b)

H4. The success of the nationalist party reflects citizens' disenchantment with the political class as a whole rather than citizens' attitudes toward EU integration.

H5. The campaign context matters for the EU dimension

H5a. A campaign environment tilted toward EU news will increase the impact of the EU dimension for voting at EP elections.

H6. To the extent that both national and European dimensions matter, EU attitudes *may impact equally or more* voting behavior than national indicators.

For the remaining of the paper, I proceed to test these hypotheses using various methods: interviews and large-N analyses. However, as both theories on voting behavior underscore the important position of EP elections within the national cycle and the government and opposition parties' dynamic, I move next to outline the domestic context at the 2009 EP election. I assess the saliency of the EU issue for mainstream parties, media, and other relevant actors during the three-week campaign. Based on the overall characteristic of the Romanian campaigning environment, I reformulate H5 to reflect the relationship between EU attitudes and campaign exposure in the Romanian context, which does not focus on EU news.

### ***The context and campaign of the 2009 Europe-wide EP elections in Romania***

#### **The domestic context**

Romania's first Europe-wide participation in the EP elections took place on June 7, 2009<sup>4</sup>. Romania has 33 seats in the EP, allocated in a single nation-wide constituency. The electoral system was closed list PR, with an electoral threshold for political parties and electoral alliances of 5% of the total nationwide valid votes. The electoral law has two stipulations with respect to independent candidacies: first, the ballot access requires the support of 100.000 signatures. Second, the candidate's final share of votes needs to be larger or equal to the national electoral coefficient<sup>5</sup>.

Two observations about the context of the 2009 Romanian EP are in order, both essential for understanding the arguments of the second order national election theory. One refers to the political landscape and mainstream parties' positioning in the governing structure and the second one pertains to the economy. First, the EP elections took place in the middle of a national electoral cycle, formed by a preceding national parliamentary election (Nov 2008) and a follow up presidential election (Nov 2009)<sup>6</sup>. In 2008, the main contenders and rivals were the PSD-PC, on the center-left, and the PD-L on the center right. Also important was the PNL (National Liberal Party), whose leader was heading the minority government. At the 2008 national elections, turnout was low, of only 39.2% and it was interpreted as a sign of public disenchantment with national politics marred by party splits and conflicts between the

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<sup>4</sup> As Romania joined the EU in 2007, elections for a two-year EP mandate for 35 seats were held towards the end of that year. I chose to ignore the 2007 election mostly because of the limited EP mandate. It may be that parties paid little attention to the 2007 EP elections precisely because of the half-term mandate. Given this possible contamination of a shorter mandate and the fact that no other state is holding EP elections at the same time (Bulgaria, as another 2007 EU joiner, had EP elections a few months earlier than Romania) I chose to ignore these results as I argue they would not reflect the dynamic of a full EP mandate, with other simultaneously EP elections across all EU member states.

<sup>5</sup> The national electoral coefficient is obtained by dividing the nationwide valid votes by 33 (the total number of Romanian seats). *Lege privind organizarea si desfasurarea alegerilor pentru Parlamentul European*, January 2007, <http://www.alegeri.tv/files/legea-33-2007-privind-alegerile-europarlamentare.pdf> (accessed December 4, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> As a rule, a national electoral cycle is defined by two parliamentary elections. While such an approach is valid in a fused power system, with only minimal presidential powers, in the semi-presidential Romanian political system, the presidential elections are as important as the legislative ones given that their outcome can reshuffle the political leadership of the country. This is more the case since the incumbent president, Traian Basescu, has been in the midst of executive-legislative fissures, which led, in 2007, to a failed attempt of impeachment (Downs 2009).

president and the prime-minister or the president and the parliament over policies and electoral reforms (Muntean et al. 2010).

Overall, the 2008 national parliamentary elections resulted in a 'resurrection' of the 'former-communist left', the PSD, the decline of the governing party, the PNL, to a third position with only 18% of the vote. In addition, the support for the ultra-nationalist PRM (Greater Romania Party) declined such that the party failed to secure the 5% threshold for legislative representation (Downs 2009, 510). Most of all, the general 2008 election produced no clear winner, with a virtual tie between the two main old adversaries, PSD and PD-L (ibid). A grand, 'awkward' coalition of PD-L and PSD, which surprised political analysts given the traditional rivalry of the two, was engineered by the president and invested in December 2008 (ibid). As a justification, the President argued that political stability was at stake, given the economic instability that loomed around in the neighboring Europe (Vijulie 2009). However, despite the rhetoric of cooperation, the 2008 election proved that the weak party system did not produce 'alternatives with clear ideological positions' (Downs 2009, 513). Moreover, the electorate interpreted the fact that two rivals 'with nothing in common' agreed to share power as a pure demagogic act in which 'opportunism and self-interest trumped policy positions and campaign promises' (ibid). As expected, the grand coalition was short-lived and lasted only three months after the EP election, when the PSD ministers left the government, followed by a vote of no-confidence to the remaining government formed only by PD-L ministers<sup>7</sup>. The Nov 2009 presidential election took place in this conflictual political landscape, with debates focused mostly on the President's personalized leadership style rather than the actual policy platforms advanced by political parties (Muntean et al. 2010, 755). Against all odds, the incumbent President won the second round of the presidential contest with 50.3% of the votes.

The EP election scheduled on June 2009, six months before the presidential election, took place in this highly charged political landscape, with rivals sharing power in a government headed by a PD-L prime minister and backed up by more than 70% seats in the two-chamber legislature. Two characteristics emerged out of this political arrangement. First, the PSD, the center-left partner in the grand coalition, advanced a dual position during this entire period of simultaneously part of the government and the opposition. As one of the Romanian political analysts acknowledges, Mircea Geoana, the PSD leader, only confused the electorate with respect to the actual power structure, since for all government's projects, 'his reaction is to initially reject them, only to say yes in the end' (Preda 2009, IV). Second, the short-lived grand coalition showed its first fissures during the European campaign when the President, as the major architect of the grand coalition, started questioning the feasibility of the political project.

In this context the Romanian campaign for the first EP elections was shadowed by the internal fights for power (re)arrangements, mainly centered on the question: 'Will the incumbent president advance his candidacy for a possible second term? And if so, what

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<sup>7</sup> For over a month the Parliament came very close to rejecting two presidential nominations for Prime Minister and avoided to a minimum the dissolution of the legislature and new elections by postponing the second vote, as a 'procedural stretch' until after the presidential elections (Muntean et al 2010, 755)

strategic alliances need to be forged to fight this political move?’ (Palade 2009, 1). This question was essential for Romanian politics. On the one hand, the President gave contradictory statements about his intentions for a second candidacy. On the other hand, his participation in the presidential race was essential for the success of his party, the PD-L. As political analysts explained, PD-L is one of the most personalized Romanian parties, which would not survive without the president: ‘If the president goes away, the party disappears’ (Duca 2009, 4). This ambivalence played by the President and the high stakes of his candidacy explain why the news related to the EU campaign only rarely kept media’s attention.

The second aspect of the Romanian context that needs to be addressed is the economic situation, as it was argued that voters use the economy to punish the governing parties at EP elections. The implosion of the global financial markets in September 2008 definitely affected East Central Europe and Romania in particular (RSM International, Global Challenges 2009). The minority government faced major pressures from trade unions and labor organizations for salary increases in 2008 and the government pledged to take measures that would insulate the country from the international crisis (Downs 2009). During this time Romania suffered one of the region’s largest GDP contractions in 2009, of 8.5% (RSM International, Global Challenges 2009). However, by the second half of 2009, the economic activity had stabilized (The World Bank Report, “From Stabilization to Recovery”, October 2009). Moreover, political and economic elites argued that the economic contraction in the first part of 2009 did not have a Romanian origin, but it was rather due to the global market turmoil (Suciu 2009).

### **Framing Europe (the EU)<sup>8</sup> in the EP electoral campaign<sup>9</sup>**

In the context of domestic political infighting and of an economic crisis with international (non-EU) origins, coupled with Romanians’ positive EU attitudes, the EP campaign not only did not politicize the EU membership, but aspects related to the EU integration and membership were only rarely engaged in the press. For instance, Rodica Palade (May 2009), a Romanian journalist, complained that mainstream parties avoided both national and European agendas in this electoral campaign. Rather than taking advantage of this opportunity to educate the Romanian public and its candidates on issues pertaining to the EU and EP, its functions, competencies, structure and relation with the other EU institutions, explained Palade, the Romanian mainstream parties were neither preoccupied with European issues nor with national ones. Rather, the campaign theme that united the major political players and the media alike was the presidential election scheduled for November 2009 and the pivotal role

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<sup>8</sup> I am aware that using Europe and the EU as interchangeable terms is a questionable practice given that not all European countries are EU member-states, such as Norway and Switzerland. However, these two terms are considered synonyms in the Romanian political landscape and I follow, therefore, this contextual approach.

<sup>9</sup> I elaborate on the major themes and frames used in about fifteen newspaper articles that I could identify in four major Romanian newspapers and reviews, covering the three-week period of 2009 EP campaign. The newspapers were selected based on overall ratings as mainstream media: Romania Libera, Evenimentul Zilei, and Jurnalul National. In addition, I included the review of the Group for Social Dialog (GDS), Revista 22, the first post-communist Romanian civic association, founded in 1989, with the broad goal of pursuing democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Its members represent the Romanian dissidents and cultural and intellectual elite. Three GDS members were co-opted by the PD-L to run for the European Parliament Elections as representatives of this party.

that the incumbent president, Traian Basescu, could play in these future elections (Palade 2009).

In addition, the European Parliament elections offered a new maneuvering space for the extreme right, ultra-nationalist party, the Great Romania Party (PRM), which focused rather on anti-political system stances and anti-corruption (Vaida 2009). In addition, an opportunity was presented to the PRM by the arrest of one of its leaders under criminal accusations such that the candidate submitted his registration to the EP elections while behind bars from his prison cell. This 'victimization' favored the ultranationalist group as it created an electoral platform that boosted the candidates beyond the electoral threshold (ibid).

A close reading of mainstream Romanian newspapers reveals, however, a distinct European focus, highly reduced in importance and media coverage when compared to the national one. The European component can be subsumed into three main ideas: first, in contrast to what some of the journalists stated, there was a media concern with educating the public with respect to the EU power structure, the role of the EP, and the role of the MEPs in promoting the 'national interest'. Second, political parties portrayed the European component of their candidacies differently either by linking the quality of representation in the EP to a particular party, the PD-L, or by framing the national competition into a broader fight between the left and the right at the EU level, the PSD. Third, there was an overwhelming perception embraced by the president, the EP candidates, political analysts and journalists, that EP elections in Romania, as in other post-communist states that only recently joined the EU, have a *different* European nature than in Western states. It was argued that EP elections are crucial to the new member-states as an opportunity for these states to prove that they are fully committed to the European project. I elaborate on each argument below.

First, to the extent that media addressed issues related to the EP elections, the discussions were rather vague and mostly focused on general, informative questions about the role of EU institutions, the functions of the European Parliament, and the role that Romanian MEPs could play in 'defending the country's national interests' in the multilevel governance structure (view, for instance, the weekly editorials of Horia-Roman Patapievici in *Evenimentul Zilei*, 2009). The idea that the EU is 'the most complex political system' (Vas 2009, 7) dominated in the Romanian press, without, however, offering a clear position as to where the European Parliament fitted within the power structure of the EU. For some, the European Parliament was the most important EU institution (ibid), while for others, the European Parliament was not as important as the European Commission or as the Council of the EU (Ungureanu 2009; Lazescu 2009). Finally, news related to the EP elections allowed contributors to express frustrations vis-à-vis the misinformation that some media outlets and Romanian MEPs spread when positing that the EP was just like another national legislature or when arguing that the EP was the most important EU institution (Patapievici 2009).

Second, moving from political analysts and journalists to the MEP candidates and national parties, we can argue that there was a focus on explaining the role of the EP in the EU decision-making process and the role of the Romanian MEPs in promoting national interests. The two major competitors, for instance, the PD-L and the PSD, differed in how they framed the

European component of these elections. The PD-L, the center right governing party, advanced a list headed by some of the most important representatives of the Romanian civil society, namely Cristian Preda, Monica Macovei, and Traian Ungureanu. Notwithstanding the candidates' earlier political affiliations with the governing party<sup>10</sup>, both media and political analysts perceived the political debut of representatives from the civil society for a directly elected office on a PD-L platform as a novelty in the Romanian political scene. As Cristian Preda articulated, in Romania there is a broad understanding that the way to enter politics is from the business world, while their entry from the civil society represented rather 'an exception' (*Plus22* 2009, I-V). This exception, however, sought to counterbalance one of the Romanians' fundamental problems with politics, mainly 'the loss of trust in mainstream parties' (*ibid*) or the overall 'disenchantment with the political class' (*ibid*).

Yet, despite the perception that the symbolic PD-L nomination ensured quality representation in the EP, there was less of an agreement among the MEP candidates on the PD-L list with respect to the role of the EU and the stakes of the EP elections for Romania and its electorate. For instance, while Cristian Preda, a PD-L MEP candidate, suggested that the stakes consisted in the opportunity to 'modernize and Europeanize' national parties, Mihaela Miroiu, a political theorist, clearly doubted that this possibility existed (*ibid*). Moreover, Traian Ungureanu, a PD-L MEP candidate, interpreted these elections in a broader sense and linked them to Romania's membership in the EU. He confessed, 'I am myself a Eurosceptic, but I understand that Romania doesn't have other choice but to be part of the EU. I am aware of the limits and problems of the EU, and yet, I cannot but accept the European project as the only way for Romania' (*ibid*). However, if there was some disagreement with respect to the stakes and long term consequences of the Romanian representation in the EP, the PD-L MEP candidates shared a common view on what they could do if elected. Specifically, they would represent Romania's interests in the political groupings and bring back information on what the EP does and what its powers are. In addition, these MEPs committed to 'change the negative image that the EP had as the European institution where nothing happens because it has no power' (*ibid*).

If the PD-L candidates somewhat debated over their commitment to the European project and highlighted the fact that as a national delegation their goal was to advance Romanian interests in the EP, the PSD delegation had a more cohesive message and framed the EP contest as a broader competition between the European left and the European right. With a list of core PSD members headed by Adrian Severin, former foreign minister, the PSD delegation linked its success to the success of the Socialists in the EP. As such, Adrian Severin articulated, both governing parties, the PSD and the PD-L, promote similar Romanian interests in the EU: citizens' free circulation in Europe, accession to the labor market, agricultural subventions, and minimum wages and retirement funds comparable to the EU levels (Severin 2009). However, continued Adrian Severin, the two families to which the governing parties belonged, held different positions on these issues. The Socialists promoted 'solidarity and

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<sup>10</sup> Monica Macovei held a ministerial position as the Justice Minister, while Cristian Preda was Presidential Adviser for Education and Research.

integration', while the Right, represented by Germany, Italy, the UK, and the Netherlands, defended 'national protectionism and discrimination against Romanians' (ibid). Thus, the central message of the PSD campaign was that even though both governing parties had similar positions with respect to the Romanian interests in the EU, the PSD was better positioned in fulfilling the Romanian goals than the PD-L. It was definitely better positioned, the argument continued, than other competitors, such as the UDMR, the PRM, which would represent a wasted vote given their 'focus on nationalism and state secession' (ibid).

Therefore, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the European dimension may affect voting behavior with respect to party choices and switching, given that mainstream oppositional parties shared government and held similar positions in what concerns their delegations' role in the EP. All delegations posited that their main goal was to pursue national interests in EP's political groupings. We have seen that delegations had some disagreement with respect to how their members talked about the role of EU, the EP, and the role and powers of the MEPs, but there was no polarization between the two on the EU issue. In addition, all mainstream parties argued that EP elections were, not decisive for a member-state, but still very important (Patapievici, 2009). More important in the new-member states than in Western Europe, argued Alexandru Lazescu, a Romanian political analyst and contributor to several Romanian publications, given that Western Europe has 'other ways of pursuing national interests in the EU political structures' (Plus 22 2009, 8). With all these aspects of the EP election campaign, with no party polarization on the EU issue and with little EU information disseminated, it is more likely that EU attitudes will matter less for *party switching* from one election to another. This is mostly the case as voters are not presented during this campaign with the necessary tools to distinguish between parties' positions on the EU. In addition, because of this relative lack of focus on EU news and the lack of party polarization over EU, I reformulate H5 in the following way:

AH5. Given the lack of EU focus during the campaign, it is less likely that campaign exposure will condition the impact of EU attitudes on electoral behavior.

The European dimension became, however, essential for a different aspect of voting behavior, namely participation in EP elections. It was for turnout that the European nature of these elections mattered. This position was adopted by all political actors, from the president and party delegation leaders to media and political analysts. The overall message advanced was that EU leaders would interpret 'large numbers' as a confirmation of Romania's commitment to the EU (Vaida 2009). The president, for instance, attached a particular meaning to the Romanians' participation in the EP elections, 'as a sign of respect for what the EU has done for us and for what the EU committed to do in the future' (ibid). Similarly, Adrian Severin, the PSD delegation leader, declared that 'high turnout means that Romania is taking seriously its role in Europe (...) and higher turnout than its neighbors, such as Bulgaria or states as Italy and the Netherlands will improve Romania's image as a state seriously interested in the integration project' (Severin 2009). Therefore, all parties, political analysts and media insisted on a broad participation in EP elections as a symbolic confirmation of Romania's commitment to the EU project.

After mapping domestic and EU factors that may affect participation and vote choices at EP elections, I move next to investigate the reasons for which Romanians actually participated and voted. In doing so, I use qualitative interviews and large-N analyses of survey data.

### **Analyses**

I start the analyses on EP elections voting behavior with a summary of the main findings of an open-ended survey carried out on Election Day. A total of 200 face-to-face interviews were carried out in Bucharest, yielding about 150 completed surveys<sup>11</sup>. The open-ended question I summarize asked voters to list the main reasons for their participation and vote switching in the EP election and to elaborate on the meaning of this participation<sup>12</sup>. The summary of these responses shows that almost none of the voters interviewed mentioned that the two elections, national and EP, were substantially different. The two types of elections were perceived as *equally important* for different reasons: one assured representation at the national level, while the other one was concerned with the same issue at the EU level. Second, with respect to reasons for participation, the answers revealed both a European and a national civic component. Almost all respondents represented core party voters who confessed that neither did they switch parties from one type of election to another nor did they intend to do so at the following national election. The small proportion of voters considering changing their vote in the upcoming presidential elections argued that they were waiting for the presidential campaign to decide whether to switch parties or not. 'Civic duty' was almost always cited as the main reason for participation in EP elections. The older respondents referred often to the act of voting as 'a privilege gained with a lot of sacrifices in 1989'. For them, in particular, voting was a 'privilege and a duty to Romania', rather than a choice that citizens may make on a regular basis. Almost all respondents believed that the first party choice they made in national elections represented the best choice that 'Romania' could have at the EU level as well.

In addition to the national civic concern, there was a clear EU component associated with the act of participation. Almost two thirds of voters surveyed cited 'hopes for a change' toward a 'better life' as short or long term outcomes, for immediate or future generations. Sometimes, concrete examples were given on how EU membership could benefit Romania and its citizens. The EU issues highlighted referred to 'structural funds', 'help with the fight against corruption', and the 'possibility of traveling and studying freely in the EU'. In addition to concrete or broadly defined benefits accruing from EU membership, respondents also invoked opinions addressing the quality of the Romanian representation at the EU level. When 'making

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<sup>11</sup> The survey was implemented in 12 polling locations randomly chosen from the six administrative units of Bucharest. Six interviewers were trained to apply a survey instrument developed during the Romanian campaign. Each fifth voter was asked to participate in the survey. The non-response rate was quite large and it varied from 20-40% for different interviewers. This approach yielded a somewhat informative sample of voters participating at EP elections in Bucharest, a region in which mainstream parties controlled at least one administrative unit. The survey's main goal was to assess the extent to which attitudes towards the EU mattered for voting behavior: first for participation and second for party choices. In addition, the survey tested voters' knowledge on the EU and the national political systems and exposure to the electoral campaign. The overall goal of the survey was strictly informative in the sense of providing for a solid starting point when analyzing more representative data.

<sup>12</sup> A similar approach was used by Blondel et al. (1997, 1998) to investigate into the voluntary reasons of abstention.

sure we have a good representation at the EU level', these concerned voters were referring in fact to some MEPs candidates, such as Gigi Becali and Elena Basescu, described as 'very problematic' and 'embarrassing' representatives for Romania<sup>13</sup>. The following answer summarizes this protest vote the best: 'I came to vote to make sure I did my best to minimize the chances of winning of Becali or EBA (i.e., Elena Basescu)'.

Therefore, in addition to civic duty, voters cite two motivations for participation in EP elections. One belongs to a national arena, defined as party attachment. It seems therefore that core party voters participated, with minimal switching<sup>14</sup>. Also, other national factors such as government approval or the state of the economy do not seem to drive participation. To the extent that the economic situation is mentioned as a reason for voting, it has rather a prospective EU-related effect, of potential benefits accruing from EU membership rather than a retrospective one referring to the national economic evolution in the past twelve months. In addition, positive attitudes toward EU matter as EU was not criticized by a single interviewee. By contrast, voters link the act of voting in EP elections to EU via notions of a 'better life' in Romania and via the 'quality of the Romanian representation'.

As mentioned, the survey was meant to be informative with respect to assumptions and factors driving voting behavior based on the logic of the two dominant theories, the SOE and the spatial voting model. The findings summarized above follow some of the messages mentioned in the Romanian campaign. As highlighted in the previous sections, all political actors, parties, MEP candidates, and the Romanian president promoted the message that participation in EP elections was important for reasons coming from both national and European arenas. This message seem to have reached the voters since, based on the interviews, we can infer that positive attitudes toward EU membership are associated with higher turnout. Particularly with respect to Europe, voters underscore the quality of the Romanian representation and focus primarily on future benefits accruing from the EU membership. The interviewed voters and media rarely to never mention arguments theorized in the literature that EP elections are elections of 'less power at stake' or that the EP as a legislature is one of a different kind than the national one. However, considering the methodological problems associated with the biased sample and the fact that voters may not necessarily be aware of the actual reasons for participation, I move next to a more systematic investigation into the reasons for participating and voting at EP elections.

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, most of the candidate-centered media news focused exactly on pointing to embarrassing moments involving the two candidates: Gigi Becali on the PRM ticket and Elena Basescu, the president's daughter and former PDL member, running in EP election as independent.

<sup>14</sup> This voter typology corresponds to Romanian elites' expectations with respect to participants' profile in EP elections. See PSD members' interviews (Valeriu Zgonea, Mircea Geoana, Viorica Dancila, Ioan Mircea Pascu, Adrian Severin, Rovana Plumb, Corina Cretu) available on PSD official website (<http://www.psd.ro>), published March-June 2009 (accessed July 7, 2009).

## Statistical Analyses

The section consists of large-N analyses based on data from the Voter Survey of the 2009 European Election Study. A total of 1000 interviews (face-to face and phone interviews) were carried out in Romania a few weeks after the 2009 EP election. This is a nationally representative sample using non-response weighting. With these analyses I seek to answer the following questions related to participation, party switching, and the success of the radical right. To the extent that people participate in EP elections, do EU attitudes play a role in this participation? Second, do European attitudes play a role in the decision to abstain or switch parties at EP election when compared to behavior at the preceding national election? If yes, what is the relationship between European attitudes and abstaining or party switching?

The 2009 European Election Study contains several performance indicators needed to test the hypotheses mentioned in the study (see Appendix 1 for a complete formulation of the survey questions used). First, I include the two spatial indicators, on EU integration and ideology, as the absolute distance between voters and parties' preferences on the two aspects. As I argued, I do not expect these two indicators to have a significant impact on voting behavior (H2). As an alternative measurement, I added two EU indicators. One captures political attitudes ('EU membership is good') and a second one aims to capture economic attitudes towards EU ('EU decisions will be in the interest of my country'). I expect that positive evaluations of the EU will have positive effects on turnout (H1). In this sense, EU attitudes will motivate voters to participate at EP elections even when this participation is considered in comparison to the previous national behavior (H1a). A different formulation of the same outcome is that positive evaluations of EU will decrease party abstaining at EP elections (H1a).

With respect to party switching, I advanced the position that positive EU attitudes do not affect switching in general (H3a) or switching from government parties (H3b). This is mostly the case since mainstream parties did not develop clear and/or antithetical positions with respect to EU membership or EU integration. As for the far right PRM, the only less pro-EU party, I posited that voters disenchanted with Romanian politics will most likely vote for this party and that EU attitudes are less likely to play a role in this decision. This is due to the fact that PRM did not politicize the EU during the campaign, an issue on which it holds an ambiguous position given its 'Euroregion' approach. By contrast, PRM mainly carried out a presidential campaign, promoting an anti-political class message. Thus, disenchanted voters with Romanian politics will vote for this party (H4)<sup>15</sup>.

To capture the national component of voting behavior I include several indicators: public perceptions of the national economy, evaluations of how well democracy works, as well as evaluations of the performance of national government. It was stated in the theoretical

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<sup>15</sup> Note that in contrast to previous analysis, I am not assessing the extent to which voters switch from other parties at national elections to PRM at EP elections. Rather, the last analyses are concerned with a profile of the PRM voter at EP elections by completely ignoring the party choice at the previous national election. I decided to have this approach due to the insufficient number of observations—there are only 15 voters in the data set who switched from other parties to PRM.

section that positive assessments on these indicators will decrease party switching, for governing parties in particular, and will increase turnout. Of interest for this paper is not necessarily the assessment of the direct impact of national factors, but rather a comparative appreciation of national vs. EU indicators (H6). Given the lack of 'second order thinking' highlighted during the interviews and the fact that the majority of Romanians perceive EP elections just as important as national elections (EES survey), I posit that it is less likely that the voting dynamic will follow the strategic midterm aspect of EP elections, which means the opportunity to punish governments and governmental parties. To the extent that national indicators matter, it is more likely that they will reflect a sincere approach to voting, i.e. vote for the preferred national party. In a nutshell, this particular dynamic would translate into less strategic party switching and more sincere party choices at EP elections. Thus, when investigating turnout differences or party switching, it is more likely that party attachment will become relevant, an indicator that is mostly used as a control and not as a reflection of the SOE logic. Therefore, when comparing the effect of domestic versus EU factors, it may be that EU attitudes trump or have a similar impact as national indicators (H6).

Finally, previous studies suggest that campaign exposure plays an important role in elections in general and in EP elections in particular as elections of 'lesser importance'. To measure the positive impact of campaigning, I created a composite measure of individual's passive exposure to the EP campaign using the answers to two questions. The questions capture how often the respondent came across EP electoral news on TV and in newspapers. The theoretical expectation is that media exposure will increase turnout and the impact of EU attitudes in particular if the campaign entails a EU content. Given the lack of EU news during the Romanian campaign, I posit that it is less likely that campaign exposure will condition the effect of EU attitudes on voting behavior (AH5).

In addition, given the important role of socio-demographic factors on voting behavior, I include several control indicators: education, age, social class, and urban-rural divide. This study, however, is not concerned with theorizing over possible relationships between voting in EP elections and these control indicators. I proceed next to test these hypotheses.

## **Turnout**

The first analyses explain the micro-dynamics of turnout at the 2009 EP election, for which I created two types of dependent variables. The first approach captures the binary answer to the question 'did you participate in the 2009 EP election'. The second variable encompasses the binary answer to a two-by-two combination of turnout at EP elections and turnout at the preceding national election. Therefore, the four-category dependent variable represents: participation in the preceding general elections only, participation in both general and EP elections, participation in EP elections only, and non-participation in both EP and national elections.

Table 2 displays the coefficients of three models explaining turnout. Model 1 represents a close application of the spatial voting approach in which the dependent variable is the binary answer to the participation question. As expected the two spatial indicators measuring absolute

distances on EU and ideology between voters and parties voted for at the national election have no effect (part of H2). Based on this approach, one may conclude that participation in EP elections is driven mostly by domestic politics such as attitudes towards the political system and government performance: the better the evaluations on these indicators the more likely are voters to participate. In addition, the campaign exposure has a substantial positive effect on turnout. Such a conclusion, however, is not supported by the qualitative data which underscores the important role of party attachment for participation in EP elections. In Model 1 neither party attachment nor satisfaction with the economy attain significance. Thus, I argue such a conclusion would be an artifact of the problematic measures used to capture ideology and EU attitudes rather than a reflection of the actual dynamic at play.

Model 2 replaces the two spatial indicators with two measures capturing political and economic EU attitudes. These two new EU indicators were underscored as particularly important in the post-communist context (see the interviews) in which EU membership represents the fulfillment of two goals, one political and one economic (Cichowski 2000). Model 2 confirms the expectation that positive EU attitudes toward EU membership increase turnout, all else equal (H1). In addition, some of the national indicators matter: party attachment and satisfaction with democracy. The important effect of party attachment supports the argument that mostly sincere and not strategic voting takes place in this election. This finding is reinforced by the non-significant effect of government performance. As expected campaign exposure is also highly significant for participation, but campaign exposure does not condition the impact of EU attitudes (AH5). This hypothesis is confirmed by the lack of statistical significance of the interaction indicator of membership evaluation and campaign exposure (Model 3).

<Table 2 here>

To assess the relative impact of national and EU indicators, Table 3 presents the predicated probabilities of significant indicators on turnout (Model 2) at minimum and maximum values while holding all other indicators constant. In addition, to allow for a better comparison effect all categorical variables have been standardized. The absolute change, therefore, which is mainly positive since all indicators have a positive effect, reflects the actual impact of each indicator on the probability of voting while holding everything else at the mean. Table 3 shows that a voter's probability to participate in EP elections increases by as much as 15% for voters who think that the EU membership is a good thing as oppose to those who think otherwise. Some of the domestic indicators have a more significant effect given that moving from min to max values on satisfaction with how Romanian democracy works increases the probability of voting by 22%, while differences in party attachment increase the probability by as much as 40%. It is important to mention that the two domestic indicators found significant do not follow the SOE logic which underscores a dynamic of strategic voting in the sense of punishing governing parties. Table 3 also highlights the important role of campaign exposure, given that a change from no exposure to maximum implies an increase in the probability of voting of 42%.

<Table 3 here>

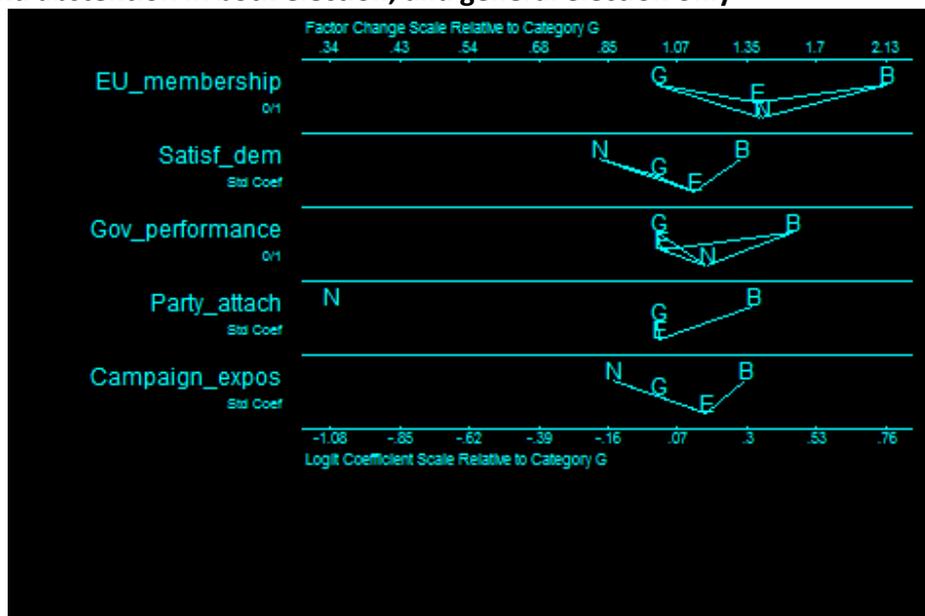
Model 4 (Table 1) presents the results of a multi-nominal logit analysis with four possible options for the dependent variable. I list, however, only the most interesting

comparison with voting in national elections as the reference category and voting in both elections as the other category. Thus, the coefficients in Model 3 illustrate the effect of each indicator for voters who decided to vote in the EP election given that they have voted in the national election relative to voters who voted only in the national election and abstain in the EP election. Overall, the same indicators as in the previous analysis on turnout in EP elections are statistically significant. Therefore, voters will decide to participate in EP elections, after having participated in national election, if they view EU membership positively, approve government's performance, and are satisfied with the way democracy works. In addition, partisanship and campaign exposure matter in this move towards participation in both elections relative to participation only in the general election.

To assess the relative impact of these factors on the probability of participating in both elections to participating only in the general election, I report the odds ratio based on Model 4 (Table 2). Therefore, we see that holding all other variables constant, the odds of voting in both elections to voting only in the general election are 2.13 times greater for people who think that EU membership is good than for voters who think otherwise. This is the largest effect from all EU and national indicators. The next important indicator is government performance: the odds of voting in both elections to voting only in the general election are 1.32 times greater for people who approve of government performance. In addition, we notice that the effect of campaign exposure diminished substantially for this type of turnout comparison. A one standard deviation increase in the level of campaign exposure leads to a change in the odds of voting in both elections relative to voting only in the general election by a factor of 1.34 times. Finally, a one standard deviation increase in satisfaction with Romanian democracy increases the odds of voting in both elections to voting only in the general election by a factor of 1.32 while a similar change in party attachment leads to an increase in the odds ratio by a factor of 1.34.

To ascertain the magnitude of these effects for all comparisons not reported in Table 2, Figure 2 reports the factor change in the odds of an outcome over another, effects plotted with significance levels. In Figure 2, G represents participation only in the general election, B means participation in both EP and national, E stands for participation only in the EP election, and N means non-participation in national and EP elections. As in Model 4, participation only in the general election (G) is the reference category. The distance between a pair of letters indicates the magnitude of the effect. Statistical significance is added by drawing a line between categories for which there is *not* a significant coefficient. Thus, the lack of significance is shown by the connecting line, suggesting that these two outcomes are 'tied together' (Long and Freese 2006, 265).

**Figure 2. Odds-ratio plot on four types of turnout: at national and EP elections, only at EP election, and abstention in both election, and general election only**



Note: Turnout in the general election only (G) is the reference category

The comparison of most interest for this paper is between participation in both national and EP elections relative to participation only in the general election, namely the pair of letters B and G. We can see, therefore, that all independent indicators plotted here have a significant impact on the odds of participating in both elections relative to participation only in the general one. In addition the effects are all in the same direction, positive. Finally, given the distances between the two letters, distances based on standardized coefficients, we see that support for EU membership has the largest effect on this odds ratio. Also, attitudes toward EU membership are not significant for other turnout comparisons, such as voting only in the EP election relative to only the general or abstaining in both elections relative to voting in the general election. This figure allows for a visual effect of different EU and national indicators on different turnout comparisons and underscores the significant impact of positive evaluations of EU membership for only one comparison. These findings confirm the expected relationship between turnout and positive EU attitudes (H1 and H1a). In addition, EU attitudes affect the most the decision to participate in EP election given that a voter has participated in the national election.

The findings with respect to turnout can be summarized as follows: first, the spatial model approach does not hold in this context of party's 'ideological elasticity' in which governing coalitions are not based on ideological affinities but rather on personality's antipathies as the broad coalition against the running president suggested. Second, voter participation in the EP election is driven by domestic indicators such as approval of the democratic political system. Also, 'party attachment' constitutes the most important domestic indicator and not other national indicators, such as 'government performance' or 'satisfaction with the economy', which would have suggested that strategic voting took place. This result confirms some aspects from the qualitative section in which respondents argued that they have

no interest in switching parties given that the EP election was viewed as important as the national election. The most important result addresses the role of European attitudes. Voters who view the EU membership in a positive way were more likely to participate in EP elections. Most importantly, the EU attitudinal indicator has the largest effect on the conditional decision to EP election participation. This finding from the large-N analyses corroborates the qualitative section in which interviewed voters expressed their confidence that EU membership has a positive effect on Romania's future. Finally, exposure to campaigning substantially increased participation, but, due to the relative minimum focus on EU news, exposure to campaign did not entail a mediating effect for European attitudes. Stated differently, European attitudes did not matter more for voters with more campaign exposure. I move next to investigate the role of EU attitudes and national indicators for party choices, represented as party switching and abstaining.

To tease out the interplay between EU attitudes and party choices at EP elections, I present below several approaches to party voting. First, I explore the relationship between EU attitudes and governing parties by limiting the sample to governing party voters only (H3b). The relationship between EU attitudes and governing parties was presented as the most robust relationship in the literature (Hobolt et al. 2008). Second, I identify three types of voters at EP elections: partisans (voters that keep the same party at both elections), switchers (voters that switch parties at EP elections), and abstainers (voters that abstain at EP elections after having voted at national elections) (H3a). In addition, all analyses assess first the applicability of the spatial voting approach in the Romanian context. As mentioned in the theoretical section, absolute distances on ideology and EU attitudes between voters and parties chosen at EP elections are less likely to represent useful measures in the Romanian context (H2). Finally, the last analysis explores the factors driving the PRM choice at EP election (H4). In this last section I include all party voters, in addition to non-voters. The overall goal in the last analysis is to assess the importance of EU attitudes when voting for PRM.

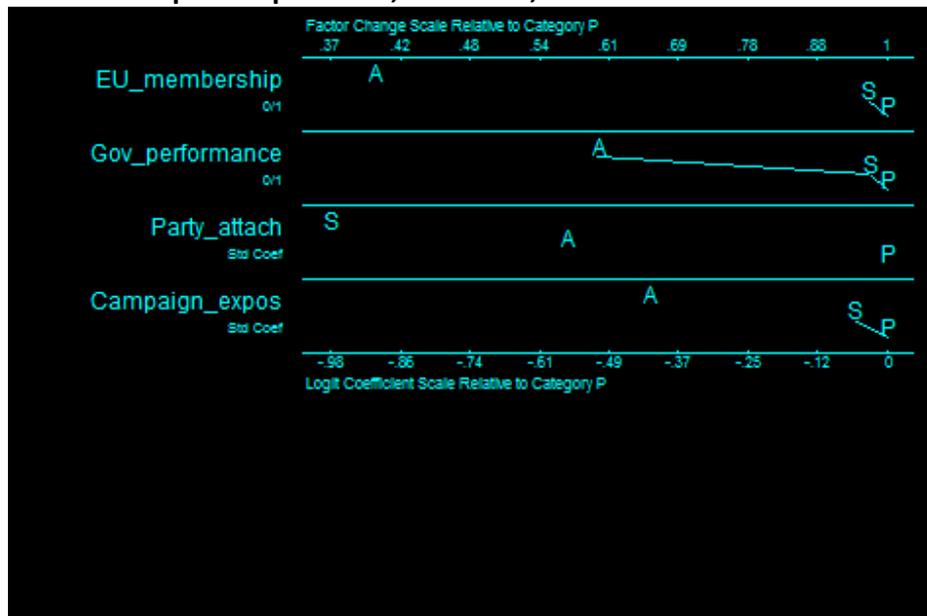
Table 4 illustrates the relationship between governing party voters and behavior at EP elections. The governing party voters have two options to change their choice at EP elections: switch to a different party or abstain. Model 1 represents a close application of the spatial voting approach in which ideological and EU attitudes are measured as absolute distances between governing parties and voters. As expected these two measures do not attain statistical significance neither for defection nor for abstaining. This finding represents a partial confirmation of H2, partial mostly because of the sample limitation to governing party voters only. The significance of some domestic indicators only in Model 1 – abstain highlights the lack of strategic voting in the Romanian context at EP elections. To the extent that voters are disappointed with the political class (the indicator measuring satisfaction with democracy) or with the governing class (the indicator measuring government performance) they are more likely to abstain but not to defect to other parties. Model 2 (Table 4) removes the two problematic measures and includes a new measure for attitudes toward EU membership. Model 2, defection, underscores partisanship as the only indicator that attains statistical significance. As argued before, positive EU attitudes are less likely to attain significance in the quest for alternative parties given that voters have difficulties in distinguishing mainstream

parties' positions on EU integration. In Model 2, abstain, the significant effect of EU membership confirms the important role of EU attitudes for decreasing abstention. This relationship between EU attitudes and participation in EP elections measured in different ways (as turnout differences in Model 3 Table 1, as governing party voters and abstention in Model 2 Table 4, or as abstainers relative to partisan voters in Model 2 Table 5) represents the most robust finding of this paper. In sum, this mini-section on governing party voters confirms the expected relationship between governing party voters and EU attitudes. As expected, the section shows that EU attitudes do not influence voters when switching from governing parties at EP elections (H3b). I move next to a broader approach to party switching in which I distinguish between three types of voting behaviors and voters: partisans, switchers, and abstainers.

<Table 4 here>

The entries in Table 5 represent the multi-nominal logit coefficients, with partisans as the reference category. Table 5 allows for two types of comparisons: one between switchers relative to partisans and one between abstainers relative to partisans. In addition, each model has two estimations: a first one aimed at closely following the spatial voting model and a second one which removes the problematic measures and introduces the indicator capturing EU attitudes. Model 1 (Table 5) presents an estimation with the spatial voting indicators. We see now that the left-right ideological dimension attains significance in the right direction: the larger the distances between voters and parties the more likely are voters to switch parties relative to voters who keep the same party. Model 2 (Table 5) removes the two distance measures and introduces instead the measures on EU integration. As expected, EU attitudes play no significant role in the decision to switch parties. Model 2 (Table 5) replicates the same analyses as in Model 1 for a different comparison: abstainers relative to partisans. Attitudes toward EU represent the most important coefficient for this comparison: the more people think that EU membership is good the less likely they are to abstain. Other domestic factors that attain significance are government performance, party attachment, and campaign exposure. All are in the expected direction given the comparison between abstainers relative to partisans. To ascertain the relative effect of national and EU indicators for Model 2, the last column in Table 5 reports the odds ratio of abstainers relative to switchers. The odds of abstaining relative to voting with the same party decrease by a factor of .40 if voters think positively of EU membership. As Figure 4 illustrates, EU attitudes represent the most important indicator that affects the comparison between partisans and abstainers.

Figure 3: Odds-ratio plot on partisans, switchers, and abstainers at EP election



Note: Partisanship (P) is the reference category

Figure 3 presents all comparisons, where A stands for abstainers, S stands for switchers, and P stands for partisans. As mentioned above, the larger the distance between a pair of letters the more important the larger the impact of the respective indicators. Statistical significance is added by drawing a line between categories for which the respective indicator is not significant. Therefore, Figure 4 illustrates that EU attitudes affect the most the decision to abstain relative to switching or voting for the same party. In addition, we notice that the most important comparison is the one between abstainers relative to switchers or partisans, given that different levels of government approval and campaign exposure do not produce significant differences in the behavior of the latter two categories. The only important indicator for differentiating between switchers relative to partisans is party attachment. The more attached voters are to a party the more likely they are to vote with the same party at EP elections. Therefore, Figure 4 represents a visual confirmation of H3a which posited that EU attitudes will have no impact on switching parties at EP elections. In addition, H6 which addressed the comparison of EU and national indicators is confirmed. To the extent that EU attitude matter, the effect of this EU indicator is larger than other domestic indicators. Different analyses presented thus far underscore the important role of EU attitudes for one type of electoral behavior, namely participation, but not for party switching at EP elections.

The only question left for this paper concerns the interplay between EU attitudes and domestic indicators for PRM voters. This party registered a substantial gain at the EP election, 5% difference, and it was perceived as the least pro-EU Romanian party (see Figure 1, where the PRM is on the lowest EU end in at least two of the graphs). However, as mentioned in the previous sections, this party has an ambivalent position on the EU, favoring EU integration in an instrumental way. The 'Euroregion' that the party is mentioning would allow PRM to fulfill its

most ardent goal, namely to build a 'region with all Romanians'. In addition, this party did not have an anti-EU message during the EP electoral campaign. It was rather focused on securing the presidential chair for its leader, Vadim Tudor, having as central message 'With Vadim at Cotroceni'. In that regard, PRM co-opted a former competitor during the previous national election, the populist leader Gigi Becali, to run on the same ticket. Yet, if Vadim Tudor is an established politician with an ideological nationalist position, Gigi Becali is an opportunist, a newcomer to politics described as a 'dubious' business man with presidential aspirations. Gigi Becali was at the time facing criminal charges and submitted its EP candidacy while 'under arrest'. In addition to this lack of EU concern, other mainstream parties did not perceive PRM candidates as real competitors and only rarely engaged in negative campaigning against PRM. As previously mentioned, only the PSD delegation emphasized that a PRM vote is a 'wasted vote' given the preponderance of the Socialist family in the EP. Therefore, due to all these factors, the ambivalent EU position, the alliance between two leaders that have in common only public's disenchantment with mainstream parties and politicians, and the lack of EU focus during the EP campaign, I hypothesized that the PRM vote will mostly be driven by domestic factors rather than EU attitudes. In the following analysis, I profile the PRM voter by assessing the role of European and national attitudes in comparison to these indicators' effects on mainstream party voters. In doing so, I employ a multivariate technique popular in ecological research named Canonical Correspondence Analysis (CCA) (Ter Braak 1986). This analysis allows also for a final assessment as to where PRM and mainstream parties stand on the EU integration dimension when generating votes during EP elections.

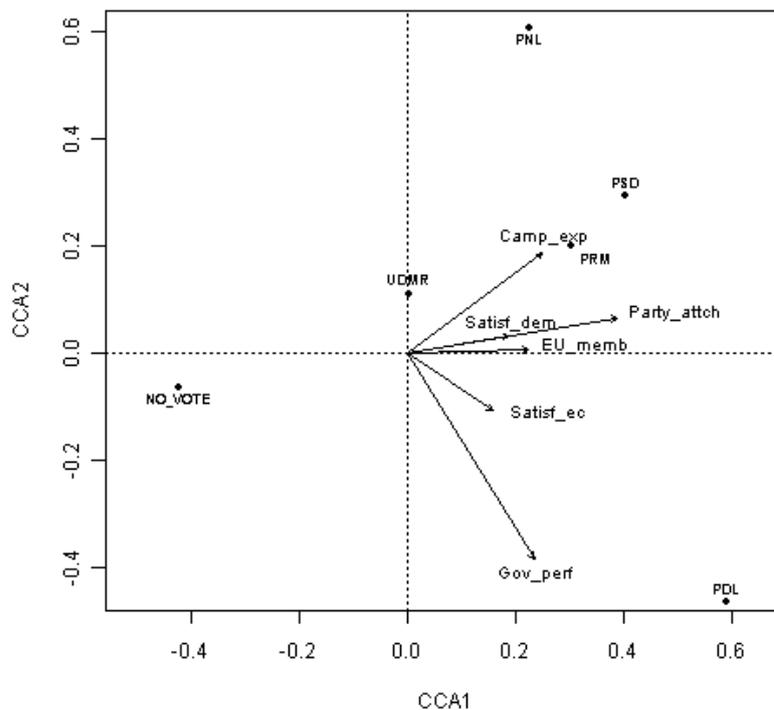
CCA represents a two-step approach, which extracts first the dominant pattern of variation in the data by an ordination technique, yielding ordination axes ('gradients'). In the second step, CCA attempts to relate this pattern of ordination axes to the independent indicators (*ibid*). The method generates a spatial map of important dimensions in the data and allows for a quick appraisal of how the dependent categories vary with the independent variables. In this paper, the CCA ordination diagrams (also known as biplots) (Figures 4 and 5) illustrate how political parties vary with the behavioral indicators. In the biplots, political parties are represented by points and behavioral indicators are represented by arrows. Such diagrams show the main pattern of variation in voting preferences as accounted for by the attitudinal variables. In addition, they also illustrate the distribution of political parties along each independent indicator. The relationships the biplots map out are interpreted based on the geometrical features of arrows, projections, and angles formed by the response and explanatory variables. As such, the length of an arrow measures how party distributions differ along that explanatory variable<sup>16</sup> and important variables are represented by longer arrows. Second, the degree of association between an independent variable and a voting preference in the context of the first two canonical axes is obtained by projecting the voting preference at right angle on the independent variable. The longer these projections the more important are the respective indicators for that particular voting preference. Third, different angles in the biplot formed either between the response and explanatory variables, or between the

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<sup>16</sup> More specifically, the length of an arrow is equal to the rate of change in the weighted average, where the weighted average indicates the 'center' of a party's distribution along the independent indicator (*ibid*, 1171).

explanatory variables themselves, or between the response variables themselves reflect the correlations. In this context, acute angles mean strong positive associations between variables in question and obtuse angles represent strong negative correlations. Right angles show that the two variables are orthogonal. This approach allows for a quick appraisal of which variables are important for which parties based on simultaneous comparisons. Figure 4<sup>17</sup> represents a distribution of political parties and non-voters in relation to independent variables at first EP elections. Figure 5 removes the non-voter category at EP elections and focuses only on the relationship between party choices and European and national explanatory indicators. In both biplots, the variance produced by the socio-demographic controls, such as education, class, age, urban, and ethnic has been already accounted for<sup>18</sup>.

**Figure 4. CCA for political behavior at EP elections in Romania**



<sup>17</sup> Data analysis for CCA is carried out in the R-statistical language and the R-package vegan is used to generate the biplots (Jari Oksanen 2011)

<sup>18</sup> CCA allows to partial out the effect of some variables and this is the approach I followed. First, I accounted for the variation produced by controls only. I do not show these biplots but they illustrate expected relationships in the Romanian context. Namely, non-participants and PRM voters are associated with younger, lower class voters who live in big cities. UDMR voters are mostly associated with the ethnic indicator, confirming that the base for this party comes from the Magyar population. PNL voters share higher levels of education, while PSD and PDL voters are older people who live in the rural areas. Second, I assess the impact of explanatory variables, after adjusting for the effect of the controls (Figures 4 and 5).

Thus, after adjusting for the control variables, we notice that non-voters are negatively associated with EU membership, which means that non-voters do not approve of EU membership. In addition, national variables such as party attachment and satisfaction with democracy are important, displaying a negative relationship with non-voters. The weaker party attachment is and the less satisfied with the way democracy works the less likely Romanians are to participate in EP elections. Given the obtuse angles formed by non-voters and the independent variables of government approval and the national economy, we infer that a strong negative association exists between non-voters and these variables. As such, the less Romanians approve of government and the economy, the less likely they are to participate in elections. Exposure to campaign is also important for participation, underscoring that less exposure leads to less participation. In addition to the non-voter profile, we notice that voting for governmental parties is driven by different explanatory variables. For PDL voters, government approval is the most important indicator, while for PSD voters, exposure to campaign and party attachment are more important. In addition, the European dimension represented by the EU membership indicator is positively associated with all parties: PDL, PSD, PRM, and PNL. Moreover, in this spatial map, the PRM voter is very close to the PSD one. This lack of relevance of EU membership for parties confirms previous findings which highlighted that positive attitudes toward EU integration are important for turnout but are less important for party choices. Given the distinct position of non-voters as substantially different than party voters, I remove next the non-voters category from the CCA analysis.

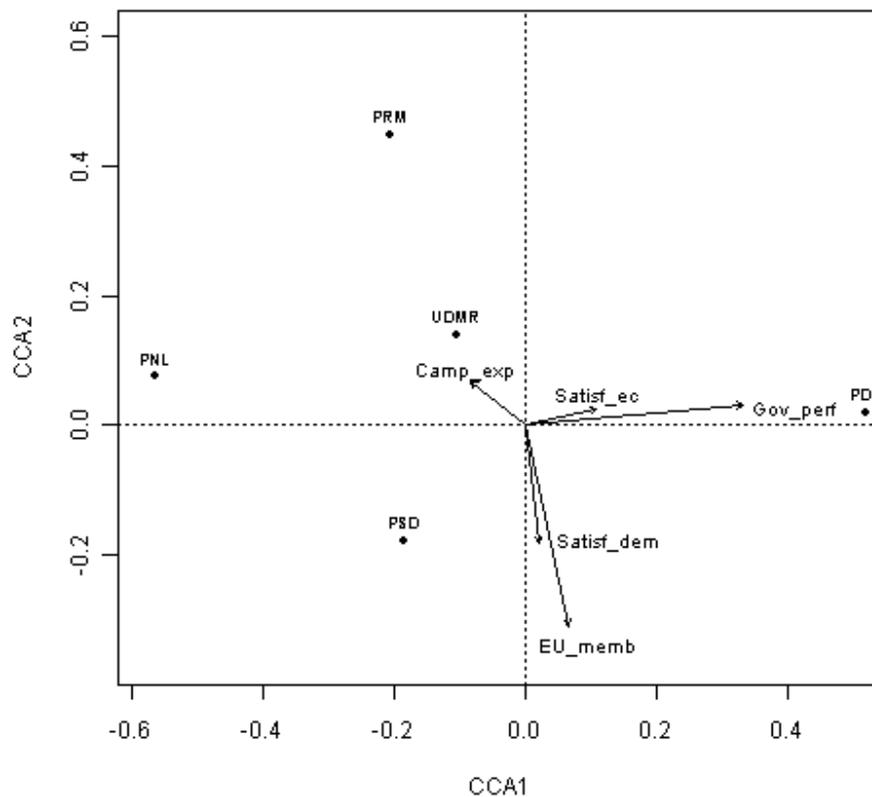
Figure 5 displays the new spatial map with only party choices at EP elections. Similarly to the previous display, all effects of the control variables have been accounted for. The new spatial map allows for a quick appraisal of associations between the explanatory variables and the response party categories. Thus, we notice now that PRM and UDMR (the ethnic Hungarian party) parties are strongly negatively associated with EU membership and democracy satisfaction. Given the length of the EU membership arrow, we infer that this variable is more important than the domestic indicator. We also notice that the two parties mentioned are strongly, positively associated with exposure to the electoral campaign. Therefore, based on this new graph, we infer that PRM voters are anti-EU voters, not satisfied with the way democracy work in Romania. The association between PRM and EU membership was not visible in the previous CCA analysis that included non-voters, mostly because of the very strong effect of EU membership for turnout. Once this relationship is removed, however, the important association between the two, PRM voters and EU attitudes becomes evident<sup>19</sup>. In addition,

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<sup>19</sup> For a robust check on the relationship between EU attitudes and PRM voting I performed also a logit analysis, with a binary dependent variable (did you vote for PRM: yes/no). In this logit analysis, the 'no' category represented participants who chose other parties. These results are not reported here but are available from the author. In the logit analysis, the coefficient for EU membership was negative and statistically significant at .05 level. This means that voters with anti-EU integration attitudes are more likely to vote with PRM. In addition, to assess the effect of EU attitudes comparatively across different party categories, I ran a multi-nominal logit analysis, with the PRM category as the reference category. These results are not reported in the paper, but are available from the author. Overall, the multi-nominal analysis confirms the important distinction between PRM and PSD voters on the EU dimension, visible with the CCA analysis. Given the positive statistical significant coefficient for EU membership, we infer that voters who approve of EU membership are more likely to vote for PSD than PRM. Other party comparisons (PRM relative to other parties) on the EU dimensions are not significant.

important information is offered by the position of the PSD, as very close to the EU membership variable. The acute angle formed by the two indicates that PSD voters approve of EU membership, and they do so more than other mainstream voters, such as PDL and PNL. The right angles formed between EU membership and the two party categories mentioned leads to an interpretation that for PDL and PNL voters EU membership is not an important explanatory variable. For these party voters more important are approval of government and the economy for PDL and the opposite for PNL. This relationship makes sense given that PDL was at the time in government, while PNL was in opposition.

**Figure 5. CCA for party choices at EP elections in Romania**



In contrast, PSD held an ambiguous position as ‘government party in opposition’ (see the previous section describing the context of the EP election). This ambiguous position with respect to domestic politics seems to have generated more room for the EU dimension, since this is the only party for which the EU dimension substantially affects voting behavior (relationship confirmed also with a multi-nominal analysis as PRM voting relative to PSD voting). The strong association between EU attitudes and PSD could also be explained by the campaign message. PSD was the only party with a cohesive pro-EU message, which underscored that as a party PSD is better positioned than other Romanian parties in defending

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Also, different party comparisons in which the PRM is not the reference category are not significant on the EU dimension (these comparisons are not reported in Appendix but are available from the author).

Romania's interest at the EU level<sup>20</sup>. In contrast, the PDL delegation of representatives from the civil society focused on debating EU membership and expressing personal positions rather than promoting a cohesive image. This interplay between mainstream parties' stances on EU and domestic positions produced two important results in the Romanian context: PRM voters share anti-EU attitudes and they are distinguishably different than PSD voters on the EU dimension. In a nutshell, different statistical approaches suggest that we can distinguish between PRM and PSD voters on the EU dimension, but other differences on the EU dimension between PRM on the one hand and PDL or PNL on the other, or among mainstream parties (PSD on the one side and PDL and PNL on the other), could not be detected. I move to wrap up the results of this paper.

## Conclusion

The goal of this paper was threefold: first, I sought to underscore some of the problematic aspects of core assumptions on which behavioral theories base their expectations with respect to EP elections. Second, in addressing these limitations, I developed alternative hypotheses that took into account the contextual characteristic of one case study, Romania. Third, while testing the new empirical propositions, I paid particular attention to the role that EU attitudes may play in different instances of voting behavior: participation, party switching, and voting for a radical-right fringe party. The paper, therefore, argues for a more contextualized application of broad general theories developed to travel across EU.

The starting point of the present paper was that the post-communist context displays a few characteristics that may not allow for a smooth application of two major behavioral approaches: the second order national theory and the spatial model approach to voting. These characteristics consist of the following: citizens in a new member state not exposed yet to arguments of 'second-orderness' may consider EP elections as important as national elections. Survey data and interviews support this perspective, which implies that the logic of the second order national elections theory, namely of midterm behavior that targets governing parties, may not hold. Second, the complicated party system of the region may create difficulties for the spatial voting approach, given that voters have difficulties in placing and conceptualizing ideological and EU distances between themselves and parties. In addition, voters display mostly positive attitudes toward EU and parties with negative stances on EU integration are represented by fringe radical parties and not by mainstream parties. These fringe parties however have a larger anti-systemic label attached to them in addition to the anti-EU one. Party switching as choosing a different party assumes thus a move from mainstream parties to radical right parties as the only anti-EU party offer. This paper illustrated that such strategic dynamic is missing in the region, even though PRM voting was based on anti-EU attitudes. PRM

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<sup>20</sup> Just as a small note that reinforces the perspective that mainstream parties do not have a settled position on the EU, in 2012 the PSD (the pro-EU party in 2009) puts forward anti-EU, ethnocentric and nationalistic electoral slogans, such as 'Stop selling our country' (see Dan Tapalaga, 24.04.2012, available @ <http://www.revista22.ro/articol.php?id=14536>, (accessed April 25, 2012). This slogan however is not new in Romanian politics—it was heavily used in the first years of democratization when the same party (PSD) was in power. This flip-flop from a nationalistic position to a pro-EU one only confirms the perspective that mainstream parties have not settled on the EU issue.

voters displayed negative sentiments toward EU as the most important driver for choosing this party, but switching at EP elections was not caused by anti-EU attitudes.

The analyses display therefore a more nuanced application of behavioral theories in one post-communist member-state, Romania. Using different methodologies of interviews and large-N analyses, this paper advances as its most robust finding the fact that EU attitudes matter for participation. Thus, positive evaluations of EU membership increase participation in EP elections. In addition, when assessed comparatively the EU attitudinal impact relative to domestic indicators, such as governmental approval and assessments of the economy, has the largest effect. EU membership entails a particular meaning for participants in EP elections. Romanians participate in EP elections and vote largely with the same party as during the previous national election because, they mention, of expectations and beliefs in a 'better life'. These voters appreciate EU membership for the economic benefits associated with 'membership in an exclusive club'. 'Higher standards of living' are often mentioned as future expectations now that Romania is part of the EU. And in consonance with the message advanced by the political class, citizens believe also that their vote represents a commitment to more EU reforms that will lead to improved living standards.

It is important to note here that the question that measures exactly these life expectations, namely that 'EU decisions will be in the interest of the country', does not attain significance in any of the analyses presented in this paper. This particular dynamic implies ambivalence that Romanian citizens may have for EU: they believe in a better life associated with EU membership but they do not think that EU decisions will be in the interest of the country. This particular relationship between the two indicators that are positively correlated in the data set could mean that citizens do not expect immediate improvements. For instance, during the interviews most of the respondents mentioned 'a better life for future generations'. On the other hand, this lack of significance could also reflect vague latent expectations of a 'better life' and skepticism towards more concrete measures. This duality however implies that developing a Eurosceptic stance to EU membership in only a few years after EU membership is not highly unthinkable. At least this has been the evolution in other post-communist states such as Hungary and the Czech Republic that joined the EU three years prior to Romania. This seems to be the trajectory that Romania is following, given that in 2012, two of the mainstream Romanian parties, the PSD and PNL, display heavily anti-EU/anti-globalization campaign messages. It seems therefore that anti-EU sentiments meshed with anti-globalization positions may become an important cleavage divide among mainstream parties.

## Tables

Table 1: Summary of two complementary voting theories and their critique in the post-communist Romanian context

<b>Present voting theories</b>	<b>Problematic Aspects in the Romanian Context</b>
<p><b>SOE Model: Second Order Factors Assumption</b>            EP election results perceived as less important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government Performance</li> <li>• Economy</li> <li>• Ideology</li> </ul>	<p><b>SOE Model: Second Order Factors Contextual characteristics</b>            EP election results considered as important as the national ones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All mainstream parties shared government positions within the past year</li> <li>• Global economic crisis</li> <li>• Does not structure party competition and voting</li> </ul>
<p><b>Spatial Voting Approach: European Factors Assumption</b>            Identifiable positions on the ideological left-right and EU dimensions of voters and parties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EU distance matters</li> <li>• Ideological distance matters as well (in fact a restatement of the SOE model but based on a spatial approach)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Spatial Voting Approach: European Factors Contextual characteristics</b>            Voters have a hard time placing parties along these two dimensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodological difficulty</li> <li>• Methodological difficulty</li> </ul>

Table 2: Turnout (2009 EP elections Romania)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 4
	EP Turnout	EP Turnout	EP Turnout	Turnout both elections	Turnout both elections
	log odds (s.e)	log odds (s.e)	log odds (s.e.)	log odds (s.e)	Odds ratio
<b>European integration</b>					
Membership evaluation		.62***(.22)	.62***(.22)	.75***(.25)	2.13***
Country interest (sd)		-.15 (.10)	-.15(.11)	-.05 (.11)	0.94
<b>Spatial Model</b>					
<b>Approach</b>					
EU dimension	-.05(.04)				
Left-right dimension	-.00(.05)				
<b>Domestic Issues</b>					
Satisfaction with the economy (sd)	-.03 (.17)	.11 (.11)	.11(.11)	.07 (.13)	1.07
Satisfaction with democracy (sd)	.26*(.15)	.28**(.10)	.28***(.10)	.28**(.11)	1.32**
Government performance	.79**(.36)	.34(.21)	.34(.21)	.45*(.25)	1.56*
Party attachment (sd)	.23(.19)	.52***(.10)	.52***(.10)	.32***(.12)	1.37***
<b>Campaign exposure</b>					
(sd)	.39**(.19)	.53***(.11)	.47***(.20)	.29**(.13)	1.34**
Campaign exposure (sd)* Membership evaluation			.10(.23)		
<b>Controls</b>					
Education	.04 (.06) .02**	.05 (.03)	.05(.03)	.09**(.04)	1.09**
Age	(.01)	.02**(.00)	.01**(.00)	.02**(.00)	1.01**
Social class	-.05 (.23)	.07 (.11)	.06(.11)	.07 (.14)	1.07
Urban	-.21 (.14)	-.30***(.08)	-.30***(.08)	-.24**(.09)	.79**
<b>Pseudo R</b>	0.09	0.18	0.18	0.16	
<b>N</b>	309	768	768	774	

Note: Entries in Model 3 are from a multi-nominal logit analysis. Voting in past national elections is the reference category.

Table 3: Predicted probabilities for turnout in Model 2

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Min value</b>	<b>Max value</b>	<b>Change</b>
<b><i>EU Factors</i></b>			
Membership evaluation	47.59	62.99	15.40
<b><i>National Factors</i></b>			
Satisfaction with democracy (stand)	50.91	73.44	22.53
Party attachment (stand)	43.35	79.33	35.98
<b>Campaign exposure (stand)</b>	42.00	82.12	40.12

Table 4: Governing Parties' Voters Vote Switching

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Governing parties		Governing parties	
	Defect	Abstain	Defect	Abstain
	log odds	log odds	log odds	log odds (s.e)
	(s.e)	(s.e)	(s.e)	
<b>European integration</b>				
Membership evaluation			-.66 (.55)	-1.13***(.34)
Country Interest			-.31(.30)	.06(.73)
<b>Spatial model approach</b>				
Distance left-right (abs)	.14(.11)	.06(.07)		
Distance EU integration (abs)	-.07(.11)	.01(.05)		
<b>Domestic Issues</b>				
Satisfaction with economy (sd)	.00(.32)	.12(.22)	.00(.27)	-.16(.19)
Satisfaction with democracy (sd)	-.49(.43)	-.52**(.22)	-.02(.26)	-.29*(.17)
Government performance	-.73(.61)	-1.05**(.41)	-.25(.46)	-.73**(.32)
Party Attachment (sd)	-.42(.30)	-.38**(.18)	-.48***(.17)	-.31**(.12)
<b>Campaign exposure</b>	.17(.37)	-.19(.19)	.21(.21)	-.31*(.16)
<b>Controls</b>				
Education	-.02(.07)	-.03(.06)	.06(.06)	-.06(.04)
Age	-.02(.01)	-.03**(.01)	-.02*(.01)	-.01(.01)
Social class	.15(.31)	.10(.28)	-.22(.26)	-.02(.19)
Urban	.45**(.21)	.28*(.16)	.30(.20)	.34***(.12)
Pseudo R	.15	.15	.13	.20
N	164	208	241	337

Table 5: Party switching and abstaining at EP elections relative to partisanship

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Switchers			Abstainers		
	Log odds (s.e)	Log odds (s.e)	Odds ratio	Log odds (s.e)	Log odds (s.e)	Odds ratio
<b>European integration</b>						
Membership evaluation		-.03(.43)	.96		-.90***(.29)	.40
Country Interest		-.30(.22)	.77		.03(.15)	1.02
<b>Spatial model approach</b>						
Distance left-right (abs)	.21**(.08)			.06(.07)		
Distance EU integration (abs)	.02(.07)			.04(.05)		
<b>Domestic Issues</b>						
Satisfaction with the economy (sd)	.35(.25)	.21(.19)	1.21	.17(.21)	-.15(.17)	.86
Satisfaction with democracy (sd)	.16(.55)	.29(.20)	1.29	-.28(.18)	-.18(.14)	.84
Government performance	-.51(.43)	-.03(.33)	.96	-1.04***(.39)	-.51*(.28)	.59
Party Attachment (sd)	-.72***(.21)	-.75***(.15)	.37	-.41**(.17)	-.43***(.11)	.56
<b>Campaign exposure</b>	-.22(.20)	-.05(.14)	.94	-.39**(.17)	-.36***(.13)	.65
<b>Controls</b>						
Education	.07(.06)	.07(.05)	1.07	-.02(.05)	-.08*(.04)	.91
Age	-.00(.01)	-.00(.01)	.99	-.02**(.01)	-.01**(.00)	.98
Social class	-.14(.26)	-.22(.19)	.79	.03(.25)	-.05(.16)	.95
Urban	.02(.18)	.03(.15)	1.04	.21(.15)	.35***(.11)	1.42
Pseudo R	0.14	0.15		0.14	0.15	
N	290	484		290	484	

Note: Entries are from a multi-nominal logit analysis in which partisans represent the reference category.

## **Appendix 1**

Source: EES (2009), *European Parliament Election Study 2009, Voter Study*, [Advance] Release, 23 June 2011, ([www.piredeu.eu](http://www.piredeu.eu)).

As a rule, I reversed the initial coding such that a positive beta coefficient will reflect a positive increase in the probability of the dependent variable happening. In addition, unless otherwise stated, I dropped all 'refuse' and 'don't know' from the analyses.

### **Campaign exposure:**

'How often did you do any of the following during the four weeks before the European election? How often did you:

- Watch a program about the election on television? (1 often, 3 never);
- Read about the election in a newspaper? (1 often, 3 never)'

### **EU Attitudes:**

'Generally speaking, do you think that Romania's membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad? (1 good thing, 3 neither)'. I created a dummy variable: 1 good, 0 otherwise.

How much confidence do you have that decisions of the EU will be in the interest of Romania? (1 a great deal of confidence, 4 no confidence at all). I reversed the coding.

'Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far.

- What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means unification 'has already gone too far' and 10 means it 'should be pushed further'. What number on this scale best describes your position?'
- 'And about where would you place the following parties on this scale?'

### **National indicators:**

'In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right".

- What is your position? Please indicate your views using any number on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "left" and 10 means "right". Which number best describes your position?'
- 'And about where would you place the following parties on this scale?'

'What do you think about the economy? Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in Romania is 1 a lot better, 5 a lot worse?'

'On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Romania? Are you 1 very satisfied, 4 not at all satisfied?'

'Do you approve or disapprove of the government's record to date? (1 approve, 2 disapprove, 8 don't know)'. I recoded 1 approve, 0 otherwise.

'Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to? Do you feel yourself to be very close to this party (1), fairly close, or merely a sympathiser (3)? Do you feel yourself a little closer to one of the political parties than others?' I used the newly released variable (v 301) called *Closeness to Party ordinal scale*, which is a combination of the above mentioned variables, ranging from 0 not feeling close at all to any party, 4 to feeling very close. I recoded 'don't know' and 'unavailable' answers as 'not feeling close'.

**Dependent variables:**

'A lot of people abstained in the European Parliament elections of June 4, while others voted. Did you cast your vote? (1yes, 2 no)'. I recoded 1 yes, 0 no.

'Which party did you vote for?'

'Which party did you vote for at the General Election of 2008?'

**Control variables:**

'What is the highest level of education you have completed in your education? 1 nothing, 15 master.'

'If you were asked to choose one of these five names for your social class, which would you say you belong to – 1 the working class, the lower middle class, the middle class, the upper middle class or 5 the upper class?'

'Would you say you live in a...1 rural area, 2 small or middle-sized town, 3 suburbs of large, 4 large town or city?'

'What year were you born?' I recoded it as age, calculated by subtracting the year when one was born from 2009.

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