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THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE PERCEPTION OF THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY IN SLOVAKIA

Ľubica Šebeňová*

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses whether the change of European identity perception among citizens of the EU member state Slovakia has emerged in relation to the onset of the economic crisis in Europe. We assume that the economic crisis has a negative impact on the perception of collective identity. Has the rising discussion about the future of EU and normative and institutional changes in EU as a reaction to crisis weakened the feeling of belonging to Europe among citizens in pro-European Slovakia? The aim of this paper is to explain the impact of the debt crisis on the construction of European identity of Slovak citizens. The data from the Eurobarometer survey are analysed with the use of correlation and binary logistic regression. By this quantitative analysis, it we examine whether the cumulative hypothesis of Wessels' theory of political support used for the case of European identity in times of crisis is valid also for the case of Slovakia. The basic research question is defined as: Does the debt crisis negatively affect the Slovak's perception of European identity?

Key words: European identity, economic crisis, Eurozone, Slovakia, citizens

Introduction

The Slovak Republic is the country that tries to implement the EU structures, and actively engages into the integration process since it became a member of the EU. In public opinion researches, Slovaks seem to be inclined in favour of deepening and widening of the EU integration and it can be said that their perception of European identity is stronger than the EU average. European issues significantly affect the course of events in Slovakia, and not only since the country joined the EU. There are not only hundreds of laws, norms and standards that Slovakia adopted, but also the political events that changed the country's direction.

The economic crisis is for sure one of the biggest challenges to the so-called

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European model of social capitalism. The main features of this model are national democratic institutions, extensive welfare provision and high level of citizenship rights. EMU countries renounced a great deal of economic sovereignty and rights to gain benefits from the common currency. However, in times of the economic recession, they lack the monetary instruments to combat it. As argued by many political scientists, democracies can work properly only when supported by public. There is evidence showing that citizens' individual experiences with economic strain can also reduce the support and satisfaction with performance of political institutions in the republic. If there is the opinion that the institutions are powerless to combat the economic problems of their country, the dissatisfaction spreads among the public (Polavieja, 2013, 2-3). Was this also the case of Slovakia?

The Great Recession has not avoided Slovakia either. The economic situation and higher unemployment was reflected also in the attitude of the Slovaks towards the EU. At the end of 2010, the most important issues Slovakia faced according to Slovak citizens were unemployment and the economic situation. There is also evidence that citizens evaluate Economic and Monetary Union according to its likely impact on personal standards of living (Eichenberg, 2007, 131). During the times of crisis, unemployment in Slovakia raised to its peak in 2013 that was the highest number since 2005. Due to the economic crisis, many people lost their jobs, or their economic situation got worse, which might also reflect on their feeling as the Europeans. On the one side, economic and employment situation in Slovakia worsened, and people perceived the situation of other European countries to be a better one; on the other side, the EU was dealing with the cases of PIIGS countries, implementing European Financial Stability Facility involving the contribution also from the Slovak Republic. The economic benefits of common market have been unequally distributed among the EU countries, therefore uneducated and long-term unemployed people might perceive European integration as a threat rather than an opportunity (Öner, 2006, 5).

After the financial crisis emerged, the EU countries were trying to find a solution from this plight. The Eurozone decided to introduce anti-crisis measures in the form of *European Financial Stability Facility*. The ratification of its extension was one of the reasons of the fall of Slovak government. It ended on a European theme, which in Slovak history has never happened before. One can say that the European theme got into awareness of Slovaks and could make "Europe" more real also for the ordinary people. However, as the

participation in the last European elections showed, “Europe” is still not interesting enough for Slovaks. Although the low voter turnout in the European elections does not necessarily mean that Slovak perception of European identity is low. Vice versa, Slovakia presents itself as a nation that evaluates the EU more positively than the EU average. The low participation in European elections could be caused on the one hand by a lack of connection with the political integration among European countries due to lack of attachment and identity, or, on the other hand, it implies a disagreement with the direction the EU is heading in, which foreshadows just the contrary. After all, demonstrating dissatisfaction with the EU can also be considered as a sign of attachment. Attachment, however, is not the same as identity. At best, it is a proxy for an affective component of identity (Bruter 2008). Slovakia is not the case. People do not feel the need to vote because mostly they do not think the European affairs have an impact on their daily life.

The main presumption in this research is the fact that people, whose opinion is that the EU is combating a crisis well, and who trust the EU institutions and consider EU integration as a good thing, will have a feeling of belonging to the EU. They will think about themselves as European citizens. The selected data are analysed with the use of the binary logistic regression. By these quantitative analyses, we examine whether the cumulative hypothesis of **Wessels’** theory of political support used for the case of European identity in times of crisis is valid also for the case of Slovakia.

The aim of this paper is to explain the impact of the debt crisis on the construction of European identity of Slovak citizens. The basic research question is defined as: **Does the debt crisis negatively affect the Slovak’s perception of European identity?** We assume that an individual identifies against a larger number of levels of identity, and hence national and European identities are not mutually exclusive.

The first part introduces the theoretical basis of this research. The basic terms such as identity, collective identity, different types of identities and multiple identities are presented. We explain when and under what conditions identity may change. The paper also focuses on the relationship between the identity and the crisis. The second part of the paper presents the **Wessels’** theory of political support. **Wessels** creates two hypotheses, the “cumulation” hypothesis and the “buffer” hypothesis. Our research paper analyses the cumulation hypothesis applied for EU in times of crisis, namely the impact of the increase of Euroscepticism linked with the Eurozone crisis on the transformation

of the perception of European identity between the Slovak citizens. The third part of the paper is an empirical testing of Wessels' theory on the case of Slovakia and presents the Slovak attitude towards the EU. It is a discussion about the possible reasons, which could amend the attitude of Slovaks towards the integration process except of economic crisis.

1 Theoretical Background

The concept of identity is a subject of interest of various theoretical approaches, and therefore there are plenty of different definitions of this concept. This study is based on a social constructive perspective, which assumes that social identities are not given, but they can be constructed during a process by which individuals self-identify who they are and what they want (Risse, 2010, 20). Identity cannot be constructed immediately; it is an evolution process (Öner, 2006, 1).

In principle, one can speak of two interrelated meanings. Identity is either the mutual similarity or mutual difference. It is the way to define yourself and to differentiate yourself from the others. Identity is not stable and it can be defined in different ways and in different contexts (Öner, 2006, p. 1). All identities have their constitutive others, which are based upon the difference between 'Us' and the 'Others'. You are a male because you are not a female, and vice versa. (Neumann, 2006, 8) For the identity construction, it is also important, how it is understood by the "Others" (Öner, 2006, p. 1). Groups of individuals perceive that they have something in common on the basis of which they form an "imagined community". Members of one group usually tend to view the group with which they identify in a more positive way than the "out-group." Nevertheless, this difference is not based on value judgements and the "insiders" do not look at the "Others" from above (Risse, 2002, p. 82).

Collective identity is about forging an acting 'we'. Groups are the key to human life. They consist of norms and rules that define the group, their goals, social purposes and collective worldviews (Risse, 2010, p. 25). Collective identity can be defined as a feeling of belonging to some group, connected with the difference towards surrounding. As **Neumann** argues: "Collective identity is a relation between two human collectives, it always resides in the nexus between the collective self and its others" (Neumann, 1998, p. 399). With the adoption of specific identity, the individual becomes part of the environment with defined structure and boundaries.

The political identities can be understood in two different ways: the “civic” and the “cultural”. The “cultural” identity is defined as the sense of belonging towards a particular group. By the “civic” identity, the citizens identify with a political structure, which consist of institutions, rights, and rules (Risse, 2010, 50-51; Öner, 2006, 2).

It is no longer controversial among scholars that individuals can hold multiple identities. These identities are not in conflict but depend on the context in which people find themselves (Risse, 2010, p. 23). We can feel as Europeans when dealing with Americans, while perceiving a strong relation to our nation while dealing with other Europeans. Due to the self-categorisation and context-boundness, many authors conclude that social identities are fluid and subject to frequent changes (Risse, 1999, 155). Some scholars also claim that the more gradually perception of belonging to some group changes, the more this categorisations are included into institutions, myths, symbols, and culture. This is most applicable for nation-states identities, which take some time to construct and incorporate to the institutions and cultural understanding; they can change only gradually. However, there are also cases when the identity can be reconstructed rapidly. Such cases happen at ‘critical junctures’ when the new perceived information which is in contrast with the original, is suddenly unbearable. The collective identity can be then amended, if there are new ideas, beliefs or knowledge, which can be implemented into the new identity. The more the new identity resonates with given norms and identities implemented into the system and cultural understanding (Risse, 1999, p. 156), the more likely it can be accepted.

Neumann also assumes that identities show not only significant change across time and space, but they are also bound by context. This implies that in times of crisis the common values and cultural heritage, which previously brought the member states together, are replaced by economic indicators. It changed the way the Self is defined in its relations with Other(s). European identity has reached a new turn and became the subject of rapid change. The idea of splitting the Eurozone between the “core” countries, the periphery or pressure for further austerity measures or the new institutional mechanisms raised the question who are we and who are the others, and divided the European identity constructions into two parts. The argument that “the European” is defined according to geopolitical location is no longer valid. The members of the EU are nowadays also considered as “outsiders” as the new hierarchical power relations in the EU were created. The “core” is now

represented by the states that are actively engaged in resolving the crisis and whose economic situation is stable.

Political communities should be based not only on material benefits, which flow from the membership in the group, but also on sentiment, loyalty and solidarity towards it. European identity was conditional mostly upon the benefits arising from the EU membership. One should admit that if the integration process sways in trouble, the perception of being “European” will also weaken (Öner, 2006, 5). Therefore, if a political community is to be established within the EU, the emotional elements also have to be used. Still, one should not confuse feelings of European identity with support for EU membership (Risse, 2002, 80).

According to **Bruter**, European integration evolved from “...an international cooperation project in the 1950s, to a policy making project in the 1960s, an institutionally consolidated system in the 1970s and a system trying to foster its own identity and citizenship in the 1980s and 1990s” (Öner, 2006, p.3). The EU is an elite-driven project; therefore, also the support for the European integration process is highest among the elites. The reason can be seen in the “realness” of the EU for citizens. Even nowadays, the EU is still more distant community than the nation-state (Risse, 2002, 3).

1.1 European Identity and Eurocrisis

The introduction of a single currency is without a doubt the most significant move toward European integration so far. At the onset of European debt crisis, the reliance in the future of EU has been weakened and the member states started to focus mostly on their own problems. One of the most important challenges the EU is facing nowadays is to rebuild the general public support towards the integration process. The fact is that money is also about nation-building and state identity. Euro is, therefore, one of the most important symbols of common European fate. “By using euros instead of national currencies, we feel a bit more European than before” (Risse, 2002, 1). Common European currency brought the “Europe” to people’s life and made it more real.

Due to the economic and debt crisis in Eurozone, not only the weaknesses of economic governance came to the surface but the lack of stability of the idea of a common European identity became visible as well. **Thomas Risse** in his article “The Euro between national and European identity” argues that the introduction of Euro had already increased the collective identification of the

Europeans with the EU (Risse 2003, 493). It is assumed that the economic situation and economic crisis may affect the construction and transformation of identities. During the times of crisis, the institutions and norms usually change and it comes to redefinition of the EU. The integration process was launched after one of the biggest crises of the whole time: the Second World War. The history shows us that the integration process develops and redefines mainly in problematic periods. Will people still support the main symbol of their European identity also during this problematic period?

“Citizens are at the core of the European construction: the Union has the imperative to respond concretely to their needs and concerns”(European Council, 1996). The EU was from the very beginning understood as an economic block and the elites presented this opinion as well. Historically, the European Union had been primarily an economic enterprise, justified by its founders in terms of the welfare gains from trade and by subsequent reformers in terms of its role in producing price stability. Macroeconomic performance and trade integration are since today strongly linked to citizens' support for integration process. In addition, not only the economic conditions such as inflation, unemployment, and growth are important, but also the citizens' perceptions of these economic conditions (Eichenberg, 2007, 130).

1.2 Wessels' theory of political support

Risse (2001) ascribes three components to identities: cognitive, affective and evaluative. The cognitive part presents the knowledge people have of their membership in some social group. Each person should be aware of the fact that he is a member and understand what does it encompasses to be a member of the particular social group. Mainly a lack of knowledge and information about the EU is the reason for apathetic attitude of people (Eurobarometer 2007). The affective element presents the emotional attachment Europeans might feel to the EU. Consequently, feeling an attachment towards the EU is only one part of the identity. The evaluative component refers to how people evaluate the EU itself and how they evaluate what membership brings them. In general, European identity reflects how Europeans see themselves, how they perceive the EU and how they see its future development.

In the work focusing on different types of Euroscepticism, **Bernhard Wessels** presents 3 levels of political objects: authorities, regimes, and communities, and 2 modes of orientation: specific and diffuse. On the one side,

the specific mode of orientation is linked with authorities, on the other side, the diffuse mode of orientation is connected with regimes and communities (Wessels, 2007, 289). According to this, **Wessels** creates two hypotheses, the “cumulation” hypothesis and the “buffer” hypothesis. The buffer hypothesis presumes that people with strong perception of European identity used to be more supportive towards the European integration at the level of political regime (Wessels 2007, 290-291). The cumulation hypothesis is the opposite relationship, namely the impact of the increase of Euroscepticism linked with the Eurozone crisis on the transformation of the perception of European identity between the Slovak citizens. For answering our research question, the cumulation hypothesis seems to be more applicable. It suggests that the discontent on more specific levels spills over to more general levels of political support (Wessels 2007, 290-291). In this context, the belief about the inability of EU institutions to resolve the crisis tends to lower the trust in EU institutions and EU itself and, in the end, leads to the decreased perception of the European identity.

2 Statistical testing of Wessels’ theory: the case of Slovakia

As mentioned, the main presumption in this research is the fact that people, whose opinion is that EU is dealing effectively with the crisis and who trust the EU institutions and consider EU integration as a good thing, will also have a feeling of belonging to the EU. They will think of themselves as European citizens and have a stronger perception of European identity. To prove the **Wessels’** theory also in the case of Slovak Republic in times of Eurozone crisis, four independent variables were selected: “effectivity of the EU in combating the crisis”; “trust in the European Commission”; “trust in the EU”; and “the support for the membership in the EU”. The first 3 variables should measure the orientation of public to the EU institutions; the fourth represents the supports for the regime. The perception of “feeling European” can be analysed by different indicators. The only one applicable in this case is the one included into the Eurobarometer survey. i.e. “the citizenship of the EU”, which is used also by **Wessels**. For some researches, however, this indicator does not seem to be applicable. But **Wessels** also uses this indicator in his work and as mentioned, it is the only applicable indicator in this case. It is obvious that not every independent variable has the same impact on the examined issue. For that reason, different weights of regression coefficients corresponding to

independent variables are set up using the maximum-likelihood estimation. The relationships between independent variables are proven by the method of cross tabulation.

The data from the Eurobarometer survey changes each year. Some data do not occur in each one of the examined years. The only time where all variables were available is the Eurobarometer survey from spring 2011 and, therefore, these are the only data applicable for this research. Using the hard analysis of existing data from Eurobarometer surveys, we are able to predict the tendencies of the attitude of Slovak citizens towards the EU.

From the **Wessels'** theory the hypotheses can be stated as follows:

- Perception that the EU is unable to deal with the effects of the economic crisis (measure of effectiveness of the EU authorities) decrease the trust of Slovaks in the European Commission.
- Perception that the EU is unable to deal with the effects of the economic crisis (measure of effectiveness of the EU authorities) tends to lower the trust in the European Union itself (measure of responsiveness).
- Decrease in the trust of Slovaks in the European Commission leads to lower support of the membership in the EU.
- Lower trust in the EU itself causes lower support of the EU membership.
- Lower support of the membership in the Union (measure of support for regime) tends to lower the feeling of being the European.

To conclude: Perception that the EU is unable to deal with the effects of the crisis (measure of effectiveness of the EU authorities) decreases the trust in the European Commission and the EU itself (measures of responsiveness of the EU authorities). This, in turn, transforms into the lower support of the membership in the Union (measure of support for regime) and result in lower attachment with the EU. These hypotheses will be operationalised below.

In our research, the period just before the financial crisis is being examined and it is investigating whether this crisis and the anti-crisis measures, which were implemented by the EU, have had some impact in the citizens' perception of the European identity.

The individual research questions are tested using the method of correlation, which represents an approach showing the relationship between the dependent

and independent variable. In this case, there are 5 different correlations made and put into one table:

1. The relationship between the effectivity in combating the crisis (independent variable) and trust in the European Commission (dependent variable).
2. The relationship between the effectivity in combating the crisis (independent variable) and trust in the EU itself (dependent variable).
3. The relationship between the trust in the EC (independent variable) and support for membership in the EU (dependent variable).
4. The relationship between the trust in the EU (independent variable) and support for membership in the EU (dependent variable).
5. The relationship between the support for EU membership (independent variable) and EU citizenship (dependent variable).

1. Correlations (effectivity X trust in EC)

		Effectivity	Trust in EC
Effectivity	Pearson Correlation	1	,643**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	100	100
Trust in EC	Pearson Correlation	,643**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	100	100

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

2. Correlations (effectivity X trust in EU)

		Effectivity	Trust in EU
Effectivity	Pearson Correlation	1	,898**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	100	100
Trust in EU	Pearson Correlation	,898**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	100	100

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

3. Correlations (trust in EC X support for membership)

		Trust in EC	Support
Trust in EC	Pearson Correlation	1	,476**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	100	100
Support	Pearson Correlation	,476**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	100	100

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

4. Correlations (trust in EU X support for membership)

		Support	Trust in EU
Support	Pearson Correlation	1	,766**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	100	100
Trust in EU	Pearson Correlation	,766**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	100	100

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

5. Correlations (support for membership X EU citizenship)

		Support	Citizenship
Support	Pearson Correlation	1	,378**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	100	100
Citizenship	Pearson Correlation	,378**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	100	100

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

Correlation is a measure how well the variables are related. The monitored variable is in this case Pearson's product moment that is used to see the linear dependence of two variables. The hypotheses can be confirmed when there is visible any significant relationship among the variables. The strongest linear relationship can be seen between the variable effectivity in combating crisis that explains almost 90% of the variable trust in the EU. The weakest linear relationship is between the support for EU membership and citizenship in the

EU (only 38%) which means that there are other variables which affects the change of the dependent variable.

As per correlation, there is evidence that the perception that the EU authorities are unable to deal with the effects of the economic crisis (measure of effectiveness) tends to lower the trust in the European Union (measure of support for regime) and also that lower trust in the EU causes lower support of the EU membership. However, the citizens' support of the membership does not seem to have any impact on the commitment to the Union. Therefore, the cumulation hypothesis in general, saying that the discontent on more specific levels spills over to more general levels of political support cannot be completely confirmed by this regression model.

The binary regression, constructed in the way mentioned above, can be considered as statistically significant. It improves significantly upon chance in predicting category membership that follows from the omnibus test of model coefficients. The p-value of this test is less than 0,001.

1. Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	24,301	4	,000
	Block	21,599	4	,000
	Model	21,599	4	,000

Nagelkerke R-square is measured with the value of 0,427 in the model summary and therefore one can see that the model explains almost 43% of the variance of the dependent variable – citizenship of the EU, which is a large effect.

2. Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	40,954 ^a	,215	,427

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 1 because maximum iteration has been reached. Final solution cannot be found.

As per **Hosmer** and **Lemeshow** test – the test of goodness of fit of the binary regression model, the systemic variance is explained with the p-value 0,002.

3. Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Step	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	9,784	1	,002

It is obvious that not every independent variable has the same explanatory impact on the examined issue. For that reason, different weights of regression coefficients corresponding to independent variables are set up using the maximum-likelihood estimation. From the 3rd table, it is obvious that the strongest explanatory variable in this case is the one of support for the membership in the EU which is almost 10 times higher than other variables. The feeling to be European citizen is 10 times higher when Slovaks support the EU membership. From the binary regression follows that the decrease of the value of the dependent variable – European citizenship – is impacted by the perception of effectivity of the EU to resolve the crisis. However, the dependent variable impacted by the feeling to be an EU member which represents the more specific level of political support is much stronger, which is also in line with the **Wessels'** buffer hypothesis.

4. Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a effectivity	,266	1,341	,039	1	,843	1,305
trustinEC	-,620	1,680	,136	1	,712	,538
trustinEU	,354	1,875	,036	1	,850	1,425
support	2,316	1,057	4,807	1	,028	10,140
Constant	-,316	,501	,400	1	,527	,729

Using the cross tabulation, it can be said that there is a strong mutual relationship among the independent variables. The most related variables are the effectivity of EU in combating the crisis and trust in European Commission with the Phi and Cramer's values both to 0,886, and the trust in the EU to 0,857, and the relationship between trust in the EC and the EU with the Phi and Cramer's values to 0,899. In general, all mutual relationships between the variables seem to be strong. It can be said that the discontent on more specific levels (EU effectivity in combating the economic regression) spills over to more general levels of political support (trust in EU, support for the membership in the

EU). The cumulation hypothesis can be confirmed by the method of binary regression.

5. Correlation Matrix

		Constant	effectivity	trustinEC	trustinEU
Step 1	Constant	1,000	,066	-,165	,101
	effectivity	,066	1,000	-,398	-,289
	trustinEC	-,165	-,398	1,000	-,611
	trustinEU	,101	-,289	-,611	1,000
	support	-,474	-,031	,078	-,485

Symmetric Measures (effectivity x trust in EC)

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,886	,000
	Cramer's V	,886	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	,663	,000
N of Valid Cases		89	

Symmetric Measures (effectivity x trust in EU)

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,857	,000
	Cramer's V	,857	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	,651	,000
N of Valid Cases		95	

Symmetric Measures (effectivity x support)

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,642	,000
	Cramer's V	,642	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	,540	,000
N of Valid Cases		94	

Symmetric Measures (trust in EU x trust in EC)

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,899	,000
	Cramer's V	,899	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	,669	,000
N of Valid Cases		89	

Symmetric Measures (trust in EC x support)

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,621	,000
	Cramer's V	,621	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	,528	,000
N of Valid Cases		89	

Symmetric Measures (trust in EU x support)

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	,752	,000
	Cramer's V	,752	,000
	Contingency Coefficient	,601	,000
N of Valid Cases		94	

Conclusion

There is a need to realise that Slovak citizens react to the EU only when the EU affects them on national or personal level. European elections in 2014 proved that Slovaks citizens are not interested in the EU affairs. Lack of information and feeling powerless are the two main reasons for people not to cast a vote. In addition, of course, not enough interest. The bad economic situation in the country caused by Euro crisis was constantly mentioned in the Slovak media; there were questions appearing increasingly why Slovakia should pay for the countries, which have lived for many years above their limit like Greece, Spain or Portugal, and withal when their economic situation is not rosy as well.

However, the low turnout in the EP elections is a long-term feature, which appeared also before the crisis. The reason could be political discontent or indifference, and it does not matter whether it relates to the EU or politics as such. The European elections are manifested as an amplifier of voter discontent

and known by the greater achievements of marginal and extremist parties. European elections are often referred to as the second-order elections. Since its foundation, the EU has been basically undemocratic. Voters have no direct influence on its decision-making process, and therefore the Union established democratic elections to the European Parliament in order to satisfy the critics and give the opportunity to people to participate in its functioning. Nevertheless, since the European Parliament had no real competencies, the voters had no real impact on the EU direction, which led to the low election turnout and people's frustration from voting uselessness. One can think that the strengthening of the EP powers could lead to higher participation, but last year election showed that it does not seem to be the case.

Even more than the enhanced powers of members of EP, the current crisis of the EU could increase the election turnout and interest in the EU issues. During the critical time, the European Union has made a number of poor decisions and it chose the wrong path in some areas. After five years, the voters had finally the opportunity to express their opinion on whether the EU is moving in the right direction. Moreover, because of this, the turnout in European elections might rise. Again, it has not been so in reality.

One of the key reasons of the missing interest of Slovak citizens towards EU is also fact that media do not devote sufficient time to the European topics. They are interested and inform the citizens only about negative issues, so people see only one side of the integration process. For example, before the European elections state television provided only 8 minutes time at 2 p.m. for the discussion between the candidates.

During the discussion within the National Convent, there was an idea to merge European and presidential election to increase the participation. But besides administrative difficulties, bonding those elections would probably not lead to higher turnout since Slovaks seem not to be interested in politics in general, which is also reflected in lower turnout not only in European election but elections on national level as well. The lack of trust in politics on national level is reflected in negative attitudes, which are very hard to change and influence relationship of Slovaks towards the EU. They are convinced that their participation will not have any effect and will not change anything.

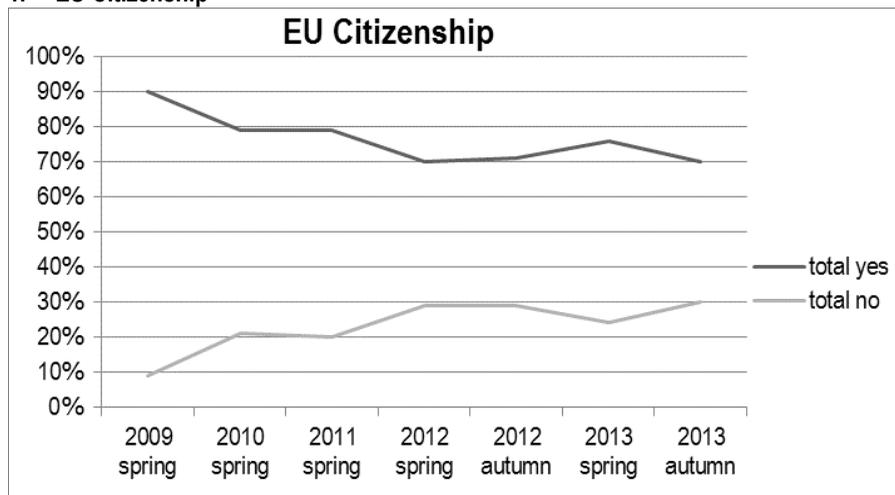
To conclude, we may state that with the available data it is not possible to confirm **Wessels'** cumulation hypothesis. All the examined variables lead to the conclusion that the Eurozone crisis decreased the commitment of Slovaks towards the EU, which also means an increasing amount of Euroscepticism

among the citizens. This change is most significantly visible on the level of political support, mostly in trust in the EU and its institutions. We suppose that the remarkable decrease is present also in the support for EU membership, but this statement cannot be proved since there is no such evidence in the Eurobarometer after 2011. Still, the values of the studied variables are higher than the EU average, so one can say that Slovaks still have a strong perception of European identity even if the European crisis has visibly undermined it.

It can be predicted that with the improving economic and mainly employment situation in the country, relationship of Slovak citizens towards the integration process and EU itself will stabilise and can improve as well. Of course, it depends on the future development in the EU and on the actions the EU will undertake.

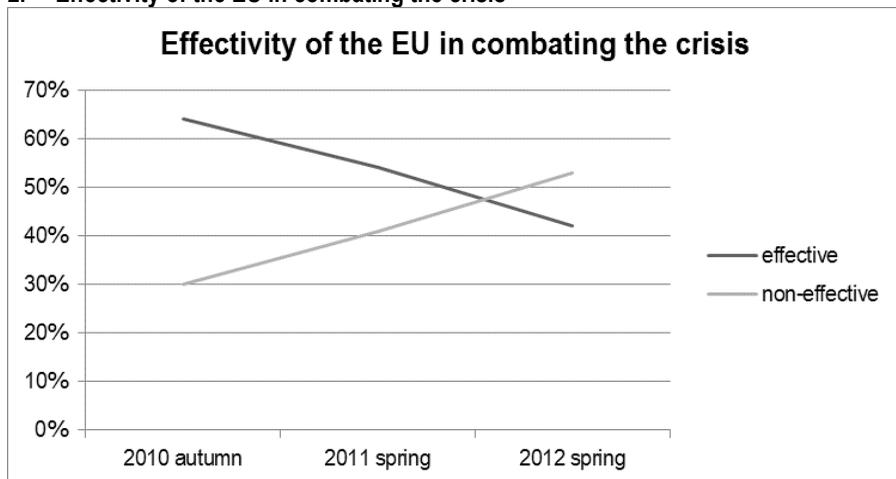
Graphs

1. EU Citizenship



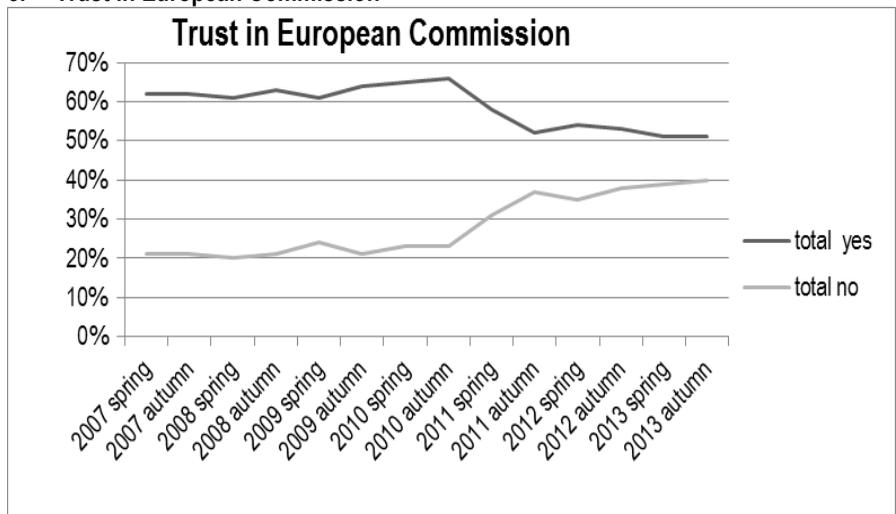
Source: Own processing

2. Effectivity of the EU in combating the crisis



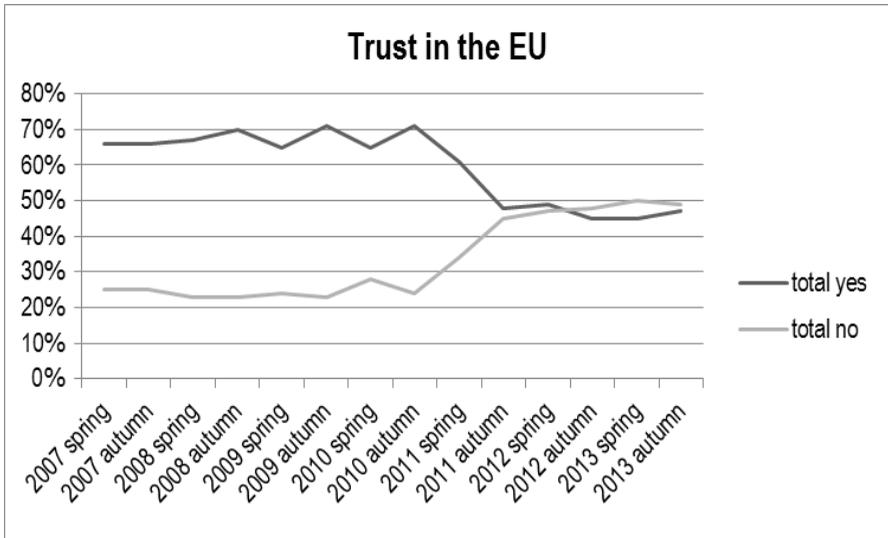
Source: Own processing

3. Trust in European Commission



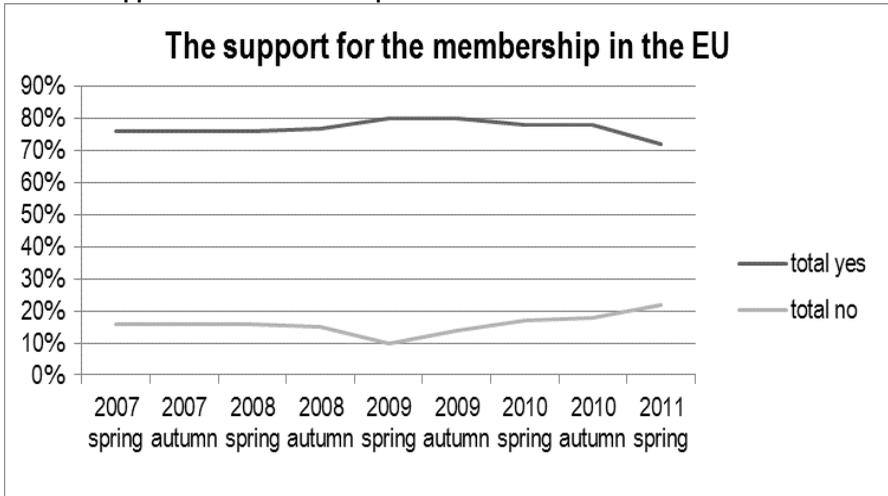
Source: Own processing

4. Trust in the EU



Source: Own processing

5. The support for the membership in the EU



Source: Own processing

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