

Non-technical summary

Grant # RRC VI-017

Determinants of support for European integration: The case of Bulgaria
Cosmina Tanasoiu and Constantin Colonescu

The difficulty to ratify the EU Constitutional Treaty is probably the strongest signal yet in the European Union's history that the survival and success of the European project depends upon the approval of the public at large. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the motivations that the average citizen might have to support European integration becomes as important as never before.

The purpose of this study is to determine the factors that significantly contribute to the formation of Bulgarian public attitudes toward their country's membership in the European Union. Dissatisfied with existing data, this research project has designed and undertaken a random, stratified public opinion survey in Bulgaria in June 2006, based on direct interviews with more than 1000 citizens.

Using statistical and qualitative methods, the study examines the most significant motives Bulgarians may have for favoring or opposing their country's European integration. It was found that, apart from forming their options upon costs-benefits considerations or assessment of performance of national politicians, individuals are also motivated by factors not necessarily connected to their economic well being.

The paper suggests that a person who believes that Bulgarian economy performs well is likely to support EU membership. However, since only about 20 percent of Bulgarians believe that the economy is doing well, trust in national economy accounts for a small part of the overall rate of approval of membership. Moreover, a person's employment status is not a significant factor determining support for European accession. Support for integration appears to be motivated by distrust in the country's politicians. By contrast, trust in EU officials turns out to influence positively the public's attitude towards integration. An important finding of the project is that many Bulgarians tend to have opinions that are consistent with those of their friends, extended family, or acquaintances. Beliefs in democracy and free market, knowledge of EU institutions, and expectations of financial aids from the EU are also important factors that impact upon the formation of public opinion.

The findings of this research raise the larger question as to what extent EU citizens have internalized the broader objectives of the European Union such as peace and freedom, as opposed to individual or national expectations of direct economic gains from EU membership.