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**Mass-Elite Dynamics in the Crises of the European Union: Public Opinion on
Immigration in Croatia and the Czech Republic Before and After the
Migration Crisis**

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Abstract

The European migration crisis of 2015 has served as a catalyst for pronounced contestation of the European Union (EU). Some member states' rejection of the EU migrant quotas was not merely a one-off decision, but can be viewed as part of broader action of national elites towards increasing the so-called transnational cleavage. Yet when wondering why certain political elites answered the crisis the way they did, the post-functionalist theory of European integration informs us that their choices should have been constrained by popular attitudes. The aim of the paper is therefore to explore how public opinion might have shaped elite responses to the migration crisis and to then explore the effect that these responses had on public opinion. To do so, it investigates two Central and Eastern European cases dissimilar in outcomes – Croatia and the Czech Republic. In order to research public opinion in these two countries, the paper utilizes two data points from the European Social Survey (ESS) covering the periods before (2008) and after (2018) the crisis. The results from 2008 show that Czechs were more apprehensive than Croats about allowing immigrants of different ethnic groups from the majority even before the crisis. Likewise, Czechs were much more likely to see immigrants as undermining the country's cultural life than Croats, who in fact leaned slightly more towards the idea of them enriching cultural life. Multiple regression analysis additionally reveals that support for further EU unification was considerably more tied to attitudes towards immigration in the Czech Republic than in Croatia even back in 2008. When comparing this with results from 2018, strong effects of politicization are observable. Perceiving immigrants as a cultural threat and reluctance towards accepting them have risen markedly in the Czech Republic. Public opinion in Croatia has, on the other hand, seemingly remained almost unchanged.

Keywords: European Union, public opinion, migration crisis, politicization

1. Introduction

“Together with the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and other V4 countries we stood up to the biggest players in the EU. Even when they tried to convince us, were relentlessly pushing us, appealed to emotions, or threatened us, we did not budge. NO. No means no. Simply no.

- Former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš (2021: 9)

The so-called European ‘migration crisis’ of 2015 has served as a catalyst for pronounced contestation of the European Union (EU). The gravitas of the situation did not only arise from the single act of some member states’ rejection of the proposal for mandatory EU-wide migrant quotas. The stability of the EU was weighted on more deeply because for certain national political elites, the ‘standing up to Brussels’ that occurred is interpretable as part of broader action towards increasing the divide between their country and the EU. As can be seen in the introductory quote, this divide sometimes took on the form of opposing “the biggest players in the EU” with the members who see themselves as less influential in the Union. When the Visegrad Group¹ (V4) rejected the proposal for migrant quotas, this act could have precisely been interpreted as the latter group asserting their position in the EU. Moreover, some have also interpreted it as a sign of a growing chasm between the ‘East’ and the ‘West’ in Europe (Kazharski, 2018). For the most outspoken advocate of this, the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the West has indeed “lost its attractiveness” (Bede, 2020) and is experimenting with “a godless cosmos, rainbow families, migration and open societies” (Komuves, 2020).

Such distancing is very well explained by the concept of a ‘transnational cleavage’ formulated within the post-functionalist approach to European integration. The term, whose salience seems to be growing in the recent years (Jackson & Jolly, 2021), denotes “the defence of national political, social, and economic ways of life against external actors who penetrate the state by migrating, exchanging goods, or exerting rule” (Hooghe and Marks, 2018: 2). In one possible variant of this view, the external actor seen as a threat may very well be the European Union. Yet when wondering why certain political elites answered the crisis the way they did, the post-functionalist approach informs us that their choices should have been constrained by popular attitudes (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). However, studies rarely

¹ Sub-regional alliance of Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia formed in 1991.

juxtapose elite positions and public attitudes in order to be able to test the post-functionalist tenant of the constraining effect of popular attitudes. The link between attitudes towards immigration and attitudes towards the EU likewise remains understudied.

The aim of the paper is therefore to explore the interplay between public opinion and elite responses to the migration crisis. To do so, it investigates two Central and Eastern European (CEE) cases highly dissimilar in outcomes. The first, Czech case demonstrates: (1) high politicization of the migration topic persisting up until the present; (2) rejection of EU migrant quotas as part of joint action of the Visegrad Group; (3) a negative attitude towards migrants, as part of the political mainstream; (4) the birth of a challenger party² whose program is heavily constructed on anti-immigration stances. None of this applies to the second, Croatian case, where there has been low politicization of the topic and where the other three characteristics of the case cannot be observed.

In order to research public opinion in the two countries, the paper utilizes two data points from the European Social Survey (ESS) covering the periods before (2008) and after (2018) the crisis. Following the post-functionalist presupposition about popular attitudes as a constraining element in how political elites position themselves towards the EU, the paper puts forwards the thesis that this effect should be observable in the Czech Republic, but not in Croatia.

The paper will proceed by first sketching a general overview of the effects the migration crisis has had on how the EU is perceived, and by showing how this may be linked to populism. We then highlight the key differences in the two cases the paper explores in order to show why they represent good material for a comparative study. After a plan for data selection and statistical analysis is laid out, the results are presented descriptively by showing changes in attitudes, and then by showing the results of the linear regressions.

2. What has the Migration Crisis Meant for the Perception of the European Union (and Migrants)?

The migration crisis of 2015 was not the only profound challenge the European Union has faced recently. In fact, the entire decade of 2010s can be marked as a decade of crises of the European Union (Matthijs, 2020). From the Eurozone crisis, the Russian annexation of Crimea, Brexit, COVID-19, up to the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, crises have presented opportunities for both further integration and for disintegration. When exploring how in particular the migration crisis has impacted how the EU is approached in national contexts, most crucially we may claim that it intensified the aforementioned transnational cleavage, which is now said to be “structuring political conflict on a generational time scale” (Hooghe &

² Freedom and Direct Democracy Party (SPD - Svoboda a přímá demokracie).

Marks, 2019: 1122). In general, existing literature notes that a growth of anti-migrant sentiments in the public can be observed, as well of the phenomenon of radical-right parties capitalizing on the crisis (Buonanno, 2017: 116-117). Such sentiments in public opinion have narrowed opportunities for politicians to support an EU-wide solution for the influx of migrants (Buonanno, 2017: 116-117; Hooghe & Marks, 2019: 1122). Research on attitudes towards migration tends to recognize three key concepts for explaining attitudes towards immigration: perceptions of economic threat, symbolic threat, and intergroup contact (European Social Survey, 2015: 4). Hungarian and Polish governments, who were most prominently critical about immigrants, stressed the symbolic aspect as they claimed the very identity of Europe and its nation states was under attack (Csehi & Zgut, 2021). Herein lies the importance of the fact that most migrants were Muslim; there are valuable points to be made when comparing general anti-immigrant attitudes and attitudes towards Muslims. Even prior to the migration crisis, some authors have argued that Islamophobia is becoming a more salient driver of radical right support than anti-immigrant sentiment (Betz & Meret, 2009; Williams, 2010; Ford & Goodwin, 2010; cf. European Social Survey, 2015: 5). Previous research also informs of higher levels of anti-Muslim attitudes than generalized anti-immigrant attitudes across Europe (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008; Bello, 2017; Gorodzeisky & Semyonov, 2019; cf. Bell, Valenta & Strabac, 2021: 5). As we will see in the data, the case of the Czech Republic researched in this paper fits into what has in a different context (Włoch, 2009) been dubbed 'phantom Islamophobia' – the paradox of high levels of anti-Muslim attitudes paired with an almost non-existent Muslim population in the country. Yet Bell, Valenta & Strabac (2021: 4) postulate a stronger importance of politicization of migration in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe precisely because there are not a lot of Muslims (meaning little to no intergroup contact). According to them, Eastern Europe has not only been witnessing growing negative attitudes towards Muslims and immigrants, but it also seems that the two categories have become synonymous. On the other hand, Western Europe is not exhibiting worsening of attitudes and Muslims are still perceived more negatively than immigrants are. The East-West divide is observable on a geopolitical level as well. Distancing of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries from the 'center' of the EU has been argued (Sus and Hadeed, 2021: 7; Tabosa, 2020: 5), as well as the claim that group's identification with the West has become „partial“ (Kazharski, 2018: 755). Yet the V4 is far from a homogenous entity (Fila, 2022) and recent developments³ seem to question the notion that a distinctly anti-Western path forward has been set.

The migration crisis also coincided with the growth of populism in Europe. Even though Euroscepticism and populism do not need to go hand in hand, in practice the two “can often be found in a symbiotic relationship” (Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019: 6). Although

³ The new Czech government elected in late 2021 has announced a 'return to the West' and Viktor Orbán's attitude towards Russia has at the time of writing this paper distanced him from other V4 governments.

disparities in defining populism exist, most agree that behind it is the idea that “‘virtuous people’ are exploited, neglected or betrayed by a ‘corrupt elite’” (Rooduijn & Van Kessel & Taggart, 2019: 3). Despite not being able to explore it to full extent empirically, this paper builds its conception of populism on the works of Mudde (2004) and Stanley (2008). Populism is seen as thin-centered ideology, which is made up of four elements: 1) The existence of two homogeneous units of analysis: “the people” and “the elite”; 2) The antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite; 3) The idea of popular sovereignty; 4) The positive valorization of “the people” and denigration of “the elite” (Stanley 2008: 102). The inkling for populist criticism of the EU comes from both the idea that the EU is a project of elites and that decision-making is obfuscated and far removed from the ‘will of the people’. In practice, it is known that the Hungarian and Polish governments approached the issue of migrant quotas by stressing that the corrupt ‘Bruxelles elite’ is working against the interest of people in sovereign nation states (Csehi & Zgut, 2021). Important to note, however, is that when researching *public opinion*, “thus far we know virtually nothing about the relationship between populist and Eurosceptic attitudes” (Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019: 21). Still, given the “symbiotic relationship” found on the level of political elites, the expectation set forward in this study is that the two will be linked on the level of citizens as well.

3. Backgrounding the Two Explored Cases

3.1. The Czech Republic

Even though the Czech Republic is not often pointed out as the most glaring example of a country with significant levels of Euroscepticism, surveys often show its citizens to be among the least Euroenthusiastic peoples in Europe. This is not a new development. Even though political elites strongly stressed a ‘return to Europe’ after the fall of communism (Hloušek, 2019: 251), Euroscepticism has gained foothold in the political mainstream as early as the mid-1990s (Havlík, Hloušek & Kaniok, 2017: 53; Hanley, 2004: 692). Comparatively, there was also a lower level of support for entering the EU than in other CEE countries (Hanley, 2004: 694; Guerra, 2013: 23-31). When looking at political parties at present times, it would appear that a pro-integration attitude prevails overall, but in practice, there are deviations from it (Hloušek, 2019: 264). We do know that the country rejected the idea of mandatory EU migrant quotas⁴. In recent years, according to Havlík (2019), there has been a mobilization of Eurosceptics and a decline in the positive image of the EU in the public. Havlík (2019: 10) likewise wagers that the negative Euro-attitudes of the citizens had an effect on the positions

⁴ Interestingly though, unlike Hungary and Poland, where Eurosceptic populist parties were in power, in the Czech Republic it was a mainstream, social-democrat-led government which rejected them.

of the political elite. Public Euroscepticism has been persistent and was even observed to be growing in the past (Havlík, Hloušek & Kaniok, 2017: 88). The recorded growth in dissatisfaction is said to be related to the crisis of the Eurozone and the migration crisis (Havlík, Hloušek & Kaniok, 2017: 80).

When investigating the link between attitudes towards migration and Euroscepticism, what is notable about the Czech case is the fact that the salience of the topic has not faded after the peak of the crisis in 2015. The rise of a distinctly anti-migrant and hard Eurosceptic challenger party SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy) (Hloušek, Kopeček i Vodová, 2020) proves that migration has become a fruitful ground for political contestation. Notable presence of immigration issues was found in the parliamentary elections of 2017 and in the presidential campaign the following year (Naxera, 2019). Most mainstream parties and actors espouse anti-immigration attitudes (Strapáčová & Hloušek, 2018: 4) and most politicians have securitized the topic (Hloušek, 2019: 265; Naxera & Krčál, 2018: 4). The securitization of migrations has served the purpose of strengthening the feeling of belongingness to a European civilization (Tamchynová, 2017), but at the same time, the migration politics of the EU were also seen as a threat to sovereignty and security (Tabosa, 2020).

As far the public is concerned, research shows strong anti-migrant attitudes and negative attitudes towards Muslims (Strapáčová & Hloušek, 2018: 2; Topinka, 2016: 242). Anti-migrant narratives are present among the population, not just the political elite (Naxera, 2019; Daniel, 2020). When looking at the European Parliament Eurobarometer survey (EB/EP 84.1) from September 2015, 69% of Czechs considered migration to the most important question in the EU, which placed them second in the whole Union. They also demonstrated unwillingness to implement the mandatory quota solution: 54% of them were in favor of this, but this comparatively ranked them 25th in the EU.

3.2. Croatia

Croatia represents the opposite case to the Czech one, entirely when considering the question of attitudes towards migration, and partly when observing Euroscepticism. Like in other CEE countries, there was strong initial enthusiasm for joining the EU in the early 1990s (Grubiša, 2012). The enthusiasm started waning dramatically during the accession process in the mid-2000s, when the breaking point was the extradition of war general Ante Gotovina to the Hague (Skoko, 2006: 356). Fluctuations in public opinion continued to follow the accession process (Blanuša, 2011). This, combined with low voter turnout to the accession referendum, has ultimately led some to consider the Croatian people as primarily Euro-indifferent rather than Eurosceptic (Jović, 2012). Where Croatia differs from the Czech Republic, however, are the political elites who have since 2000 generally been pro-EU (Blanuša, 2011; Kocijan i Kukec,

2016). Party Euroscepticism can primarily be found on the right side of the political spectrum, and is contingent in nature (Petsinis, 2019).

Unlike the Czech case, the migration crisis had little significance in the parliamentary elections of 2015 and 2016 (Vuksan-Ćusa, 2018). Prominent politicians mostly portrayed migrants as a humanitarian issue (Henjak, 2018: 4). This was likewise the angle the social-democrat led government took during the height of the crisis, when Croatia took on a strong transitory load (Tatalović & Jakešević, 2016: 185). Despite this, with time a more securitizing approach can be observed (Šelo-Šabić, 2017). More specifically, the presence of the securitization of immigrants was noted in the 2019 presidential elections (Džidić, 2020). When looking at public opinion, data from the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016 show that a slightly larger number of citizens who thought that Croatia should be closed off to immigrants than not (Henjak, 2018: 5). When looking at the same European Parliament Eurobarometer survey (EB/EP 84.1) presented for the Czech case, stark differences are observable. Only 28% of Croatians stated that immigration is the most important question for the EU, which placed them near the bottom of the EU. Conversely, 89% of the respondents agreed with the idea of mandatory migrant quotas, which placed them at the top of the Union.

4. Data and methods

In order to research public opinion in the two countries, the paper utilizes two data points from the European Social Survey (ESS) covering the periods before (2008) and after (2018) the crisis. The 10-year gap chosen between the waves is warranted by data availability⁵, but should still represent a satisfactory distance in time for observing differences. The ESS is a repeated cross-national survey which aims to research various questions on national probabilistic samples of citizens aged 15 and over. In this case, the dataset was reduced to only Croatia and the Czech Republic⁶.

The main dependent variable (DV) hits right at the crux of the concept of the transnational cleavage. The question “Do you think European unification has gone too far or it should go further” makes the respondent state whether more or less sovereignty is desired in the context of the European Union. This is related to the topic of migration because the EU migrant quota proposal can be seen as a supranational response to the crisis, whereas its rejection can be seen as the reassertion of the nation state. In that sense, for those critical of the EU, such a proposal should represent ‘unification going too far’.

⁵ Croatia did not participate in Rounds 6 (2012), 7 (2014) and 8 (2016), and the dependent variable was not present in Round 5 (2010).

⁶ Sample sizes: N (HR, 2008) = 1484 ; N (CZ, 2008) = 2018 ; N (HR, 2018) = 1810 ; N (CZ, 2018) = 2398.

Independent variables (IV) were divided into three blocks. The first, and most important one covered attitudes towards migration. Out of six available questions in the database, three were selected for further statistical analyses. Only one variable was chosen for respondents' permissiveness towards allowing immigrants – the one concerning those of a different race/ethnic group from majority. This question best targets the population of migrants from the 2015 wave. Out of questions pertaining to attitudes, two statements were chosen: "Immigration bad or good for country's economy" and "Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants". Including the other three migration-related questions would have led to the problem of multicollinearity in analyses⁷. Even though the three that remain are also correlated, multicollinearity diagnostics are satisfactory and due to theoretical reasons, it has been argued that the items should be kept separate (ESS, 2015; Callens, 2015; cf. Gregurović, 2021: 357). The second block encompasses anti-elite sentiments through the use of a proxy variable measuring trust in politicians. This was included in order to test the presupposed link between populism and Euroscepticism. Admittedly, this variable choice is far from ideal as it only indirectly covers only one aspect of populism. The third block represents a standard selection of socio-demographic control variables which were presupposed to be potentially linked to the dependent variable. The selection includes self-declared religiosity, highest level of education accomplished, age, and settlement type.

The main statistical technique used is hierarchical multiple regression, while t-tests and the Chi-Square test were used to compare differences in means and percentages between the two countries. Analysis was conducted in SPSS (version 26.)

5. Results

The results are divided into two sections. The first one presents crucial descriptive data, while the second one touches on the results of statistical analyses that serve to show the link between attitudes towards immigration and towards the EU.

5.1. Description of attitudes towards migrants

Statements covering three scenarios related to acceptance of immigrants seem to paint a picture of two different societies (Table 1). Statistically, Czechs and Croatians differed both in 2008 and 2018 on all three questions. Czechs were overall more negative towards migrants than positive in 2008, but the difference is particularly noticeable in 2018, when their attitudes turned even less permissive. Based on this survey data, allowing immigrants of a

⁷ All of the migration variables are highly inter-correlated. The six variables form a single-factor solution in both countries and data points, with the exception of Croatia in 2018. Moreover, in all of the cases the Cronbach alpha value is higher than 0.8.

different race or from poorer countries in Europe in particular became a highly unpopular idea in Czech society. The same cannot be said for Croatians, who on average show no signs of developing more unfavorable views between 2008 and 2018.

Table 1. Changes in attitudes towards accepting migrants

	Country & Year	N	M	SD	t (p)
<i>Allow many/few immigrants of same race/ethnic group as majority</i>	CZ 2008	1937	2.42	0.821	-11.788
	HR 2008	1394	2.85	0.970	(p < 0.001)
	CZ 2018	2368	2.27	0.871	-23.804
	HR 2018	1769	2.93	0.901	(p < 0.001)
<i>Allow many/few immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority</i>	CZ 2008	1939	2.20	0.835	-13.337
	HR 2008	1383	2.71	1.009	(p < 0.001)
	CZ 2018	2341	1.80	0.807	-32.134
	HR 2018	1759	2.70	0.947	(p < 0.001)
<i>Allow many/few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe</i>	CZ 2008	1949	2.18	0.838	-10.471
	HR 2008	1380	2.59	1.040	(p < 0.001)
	CZ 2018	2321	1.81	0.820	-32.117
	HR 2018	1753	2.71	0.935	(p < 0.001)

Note: higher means (M) indicate greater permissiveness

Sources: ESS 2008 and ESS 2018

When looking at general statements about immigration (Table 2), it is evident that in 2008 Czechs considered immigrants to be a somewhat greater threat for the economy, rather than seeing them as a cultural threat. What is more, there was no statistical difference between Czechs and Croats regarding the idea that immigration is good or bad for the country's economy. Ten years later, this changed dramatically as the perception of a cultural threat rose from a mean answer of 4.45 to 3.65, with the lower number indicating a more negative attitude. Likewise, Czechs also seem to show an overall more negative attitude towards immigrants when gauging if they make the country a worse or better place to live. Puzzlingly though, Croatia is the exact opposite case. Mean values indicate that the perception of immigration has turned almost somewhat more positive after the migration crisis.

Table 2. Changes in general attitudes towards migration

	Country & Year	N	M	SD	t (p)
<i>Immigration bad or good for country's economy</i>	CZ 2008	1887	4.21	2.323	-0.001
	HR 2008	1371	4.21	2.542	(p > 0.05)
	CZ 2018	2277	4.31	2.471	-4.834
	HR 2018	1730	4.72	2.832	(p < 0.001)

<i>Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants</i>	CZ 2008	1893	4.52	2.326	-6.205 (p < 0.001)
	HR 2008	1377	5.07	2.622	
	CZ 2018	2325	3.65	2.238	-21.139 (p < 0.001)
	HR 2018	1725	5.35	2.871	
<i>Immigrants make country worse or better place to live</i>	CZ 2008	1884	4.44	2.204	-3.022 (p < 0.001)
	HR 2008	1362	4.69	2.438	
	CZ 2018	2304	3.69	2.242	-17.003 (p < 0.001)
	HR 2018	1721	5.08	2.775	

Note: lower means (M) indicate a more negative attitude

Sources: ESS 2008 and ESS 2018

The descriptive data on migration topics point to two tentative conclusions. One, that the preconditions for a more critical attitude towards migrants was already present in the Czech Republic before the migration crisis. Second, that the changes in attitudes that happened in the Czech Republic point to the politicization of migration, which has then reflected on public opinion.

Delving deeper into the data, it is worthwhile to also take a look at attitudes towards Muslims. Using International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) data from 2018 shown in Table 3, a tremendous difference between the two countries can be noticed. There are barely any 'very positive' attitudes towards Muslims in the Czech Republic, while in Croatia there are very little 'very negative' attitudes. Coupled with the existing knowledge that there the CEE region has been witness to the obfuscation of the border between 'the migrant' and 'the Muslim', this is an important piece of the puzzle that explains different outcomes between the countries.

Table 3. Attitudes towards Muslims

	Country and year	f	%
<i>Very positive</i>	HR 2018	204	22.1%
	CZ 2018	25	1.9%
<i>Somewhat positive</i>	HR 2018	252	27.3%
	CZ 2018	94	7.1%
<i>Neither positive nor negative</i>	HR 2018	351	38.0%
	CZ 2018	411	30.8%
<i>Somewhat negative</i>	HR 2018	87	9.4%
	CZ 2018	376	28.2%
<i>Very negative</i>	HR 2018	30	3.2%
	CZ 2018	428	32.1%

Source: ISSP 2018

5.2 Attitudes towards the EU

Both in 2008 and in 2018 Czechs were less enthusiastic than Croatians about the prospect of European unification going further (Table 4). Moreover, for Czechs we can also notice a non-negligible decline from 2008, which may hint at the widening of the transnational cleavage. Interestingly enough, the same two observations cannot be made about the trust in the European Parliament, which has not only seen a rise in both of the countries over the years, but is higher in the Czech Republic. The question of emotional attachment towards Europe raises questions as well, given that that Czechs are significantly more attached to it⁸. At this point it is worthwhile to remember that feeling European and supporting the EU as one mode of European integration can be distinct matters. Clearly, in the Czech Republic the rift between the two is more pronounced than in some other countries.

Table 4. Changes in attitudes towards the European Union

	Country & Year	N	M	SD	t (p)
<i>European unification go further or gone too far</i>	CZ 2008	1832	5.07	2.612	-4.226 (p < 0.001)
	HR 2008	1297	5.48	2.706	
	CZ 2018	2258	4.49	2.598	-8.892 (p < 0.001)
	HR 2018	1625	5.27	2.803	
<i>Trust in European Parliament</i>	CZ 2008	1923	3.94	2.529	3.140 (p < 0.01)
	HR 2008	1314	3.65	2.516	
	CZ 2018	2287	4.16	2.589	3.220 (p ≤ 0.001)
	HR 2018	1713	3.89	2.593	
<i>How emotionally attached to Europe</i>	CZ 2018	2371	6.50	2.296	10.500 (p < 0.001)
	HR 2018	1773	5.63	2.879	

Note: lower means (M) indicate more negative attitude

Sources: ESS 2008 and ESS 2018

Completing the mosaic of descriptive data, shares of answers related to voting in a potential referendum about remaining or leaving in the EU (Table 5) further reveal that Czechs are flakier on the topic of the EU. While the majority of them (over 60%) stated that they would vote to remain, the contrast with Croatia reveals higher proportions of not just those who would vote to leave, but also of those who are uncertain or who would simply not vote.

Table 5. Voting for remaining in or leaving the EU

	Country & Year	Leave	Remain	Would not Vote	Don't know	Chi

⁸ As was also seen in International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) data from 2013 (Petrović, Mrakovčić & Fila, 2021).

<i>Would vote for [country] to remain member of European Union or leave</i>	CZ 2018	475 (19.8%)	1429 (61.6%)	200 (8.6%)	215 (9.3%)	116.086
	HR 2018	272 (15%)	1357 (76.4%)	62 (3.5%)	85 (4.8%)	p < 0.001 Cramer V = 0.168

Sources: ESS 2008 and ESS 2018

5.3 Influence of attitudes towards migration on EU attitudes

The most obvious finding from Table 6 that analyzed what might have shaped attitudes towards further European integration in 2008 is that the proposed model had poor explanatory power in Croatia. Even though both the economic and cultural aspects of immigration were statistically significantly linked with the dependent variable, the rather low R² value (6.2%) means that ultimately this might not have been decisive for forming an opinion. This is in contrast with the Czech case where there is a considerably larger percentage of variance explained (14.1%). Curiously, in both cases the statistical contribution of the variable measuring willingness to welcome immigrants into the country dwindled to a point of non-significance. In Croatia, cultural concerns seem to have been a stronger predictor, while in Czechia it was economic concerns. Naturally, the direction of the relationship is such that more negative attitudes towards immigration point to more negative attitudes towards further European unification. Moreover, it would seem that anti-elite sentiments were a very good predictor in Croatia - the lower the trust in politicians, the smaller the enthusiasm towards European unification. Yet in the Czech Republic, immigrant attitudes take precedence over this alternative explanation. In both cases, socio-demographic control variables only made a small contribution to the model. Out of the variables that did show a connection, linkage with religiosity and age was observed in Czechia - the same as in Croatia, with the addition of the significance of the educational level. The direction of the links is different, however. In Croatia, those more religious were more likely to say that European unification should go further, while the opposite is true for the second case. Perplexingly, this also happens with age. In the Czech Republic, older people tend to favor less EU unification than the younger ones, while the reverse is true for Croatia.

TABLE 6. Linear regression in 2008

<i>DV: European unification go further or gone too far</i>	I		II		III	
	β (CZ)	β (HR)	β (CZ)	β (HR)	β (CZ)	β (HR)
IMMIGRATION						

Allow immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority	.006	-.008	.007	-.002	.003	.010
Immigration bad or good for country's economy	.233***	.097*	.212***	.080*	.214***	.078*
Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants	.140***	.118**	.132***	.126**	.127***	.122**
ANTI-ELITE SENTIMENTS						
Trust in politicians			.176***	.116***	.150***	.118***
CONTROL VARIABLES						
How religious are you					-.050*	.061*
Highest level of education					.019	.070*
Age					-.060*	.094**
Urban-rural					-.022	-0.59
Adjusted R²						
Adjusted R ²	.115	.033	.135	.046	.141	.062
F change						
F change	70.782	13.438	38.241	15.244	3.824	5.885

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

When comparing results from 2008 with those from 2018 show in Table 7, we noticed a general rise in the predictive power of the model in both countries. It has now become rather successful in the Czech case, where the final model explains 27% of the variance. Croatia has also seen a rise in the explanatory power of the selected variables, but the figure is once more considerably smaller than in the Czech Republic (10.4%). In both of the cases, almost all of the variables are now statistically significant predictors, with the exception of settlement size, religiosity and educational level in Croatia. Compared to 2008, the change that happened in the Czech Republic is that the idea of cultural threat seems to have become a better predictor than that of an economic threat. Yet in Croatia this aspect does not seem to be as stressed. Anti-elite sentiments retain their relevance, but are now secondary to immigration attitudes in Croatia as well as in the Czech Republic. Regarding control variables, one interesting thing to note is the rise in the coefficient for age, with the direction of the coefficient once more pointing to differences between how Euroscepticism is structured in the two countries.

Table 7. Linear regression in 2018

<i>DV: European unification go further or gone too far</i>	I		II		III	
	β (CZ)	β (HR)	β (CZ)	β (HR)	β (CZ)	β (HR)
IMMIGRATION						
Allow immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority	.085***	.061*	.086***	.066*	.071**	.076**
Immigration bad or good for country's economy	.184***	.192***	.140***	.180***	.113***	.177***
Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants	.269**	.084**	.256***	.081*	.255***	.079*

ANTI-ELITE SENTIMENTS						
Trust in politicians			.160***	.098***	.177***	.096***
CONTROL VARIABLES						
How religious are you					-.066***	-.041
Highest level of education					.089***	-.002
Age					-.115***	.118***
Urban-rural					-.065***	.031
Adjusted R ²	.214	.082	.237	.091	.270	.104
F change	182.140	46.175	59.881	15.640	23.675	6.609

* p < 0.05 ** p < 0.01 *** p < 0.001

6. Discussion and conclusion

What can best explain the discrepancies observed in this research? Pursuing the hypothesis of the economic threat primarily influencing negative feelings towards migrants seems unfruitful in this case. If that type of threat were decisive, one would expect Croatians to be more critical towards migration and migrants. The unemployment rate in Croatia skyrocketed after the 2008 financial crisis, going from 8.53% in 2008, peaking at 17.25% in 2014, and only then starting to decline (Statista, 2022a). The Czech Republic had a milder rise; the unemployment rate went from 4.39% in 2008 to 7.28% in 2010 and started recovering from then out (Statista, 2022b). At present, the Czech Republic has the lowest unemployment rate in the Union (Statista, 2022c).

It is possible to speculate about historic reasons, however. The legacy of the Homeland War of the 1990s has sometimes been pointed out in public debates as a reason why Croatians are (and should be) sympathetic towards migrants. As part of the population were refugees themselves due to the war, it is hypothesized that this experience is reflected on a more favorable view of refugees from the 2015 wave. Regarding contact theory and the presupposition that contact may decrease negative attitudes, Croats have had more contact with Muslims throughout history and there is a Bosnian minority in the county. Interesting to note is also that Croatia was part of the Balkans migration route and has consequently seen a large number of migrants transiting through it during the height of the crisis, whereas the Czech Republic avoided this. The stark differences in attitudes towards Muslims serve to explain why the preconditions for a very negative view of migrants, most of which were Muslim, existed in the Czech Republic. What is more, if looking at public opinion, the Czech Republic also had more fruitful ground for further development of Euroscepticism and especially its linkage with anti-migrant attitudes.

It should also be noted that political developments in the 2010s differ between the countries. During this decade, the Czech Republic has seen a rise in popular distrust in politics

and consequently the success of populist parties at the expense of established parties. Despite the aforementioned populist radical right SPD party's relative success, the biggest winner of this period was the centrist populist ANO party. This party has not fundamentally challenged the EU and the country's membership in it, but has been critical in some matters, particularly migration. Its anti-elite criticism does translate from a national context to the European Union level (Petrović, Raos, Fila, 2022). Croatia, on the other hand, has not witnessed the downfall of established parties and it could also be argued that the transnational cleavage has not gained much ground because the existing cleavages are still 'functional'. Moreover, the ruling Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party is highly pro-EU. Ultimately, the strong change in attitudes (or lack thereof) prior and after the crisis can be linked to the (in)action of political actors. There was greater politicization in the Czech Republic both during the height of the crisis in 2015 and in the aftermath of it, which is according to the data, very well reflected in public opinion. In Croatia this has not been the case, and the slightly more favorable views of migrants in 2018 point to this.

Overall, the data paints a picture of two societies that differ crucially in how they view the EU and immigration. The results from 2008 show that Czechs were more apprehensive than Croats about allowing immigrants of different ethnic groups from the majority and from poorer countries outside Europe even before the crisis. Likewise, Czechs were much more likely to see immigrants as undermining the country's cultural life than Croats, who in fact leaned slightly more towards the idea of them enriching cultural life. Multiple regression analysis additionally reveals that support for further EU unification was considerably more tied to attitudes towards immigration in the Czech Republic than in Croatia even back in 2008. When comparing this with results from 2018, strong effects of politicization are observable. Perceiving immigrants as a cultural threat and reluctance towards accepting them have risen markedly in the Czech Republic. Even better evidence is the stark growth in variance of support for further EU unification explained by attitudes towards immigration. Public opinion in Croatia, on the other hand, has remained almost unchanged, with only a minor growth of the variance explained in the multiple regression.

The biggest limitation of the study is that it is impossible to confidently establish a causal link between public opinion and the positioning of the political elites. In that sense, even though the paper posits that preconditions for politicization of both European integration and migration existed in the Czech Republic prior to the migration crisis, without additional research we cannot know if and how politicians incorporated this into their narratives and actions. Claiming an after-effect of politicization also somewhat suffers from the same limitation, especially given that media portrayal could be another prominent shaping influence on public attitudes. In addition, a suggestion for further research would be to find a more recent data point to further test the after-effects of politicization. ESS Round 10 that is slated to be released at the end of 2022 represents good material for this.

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