

# Exploring Cognitive Mobilisation: The Slovak 2003 EU Accession Referendum

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**Abstract:** *The literature which explores public opinion formation processes in Central and Eastern Europe is divided into competing schools of thought; one, which presumes that inexperienced electorates in newly democratised states adopt the views of their preferred political elites, and another, which argues that voters employ individual cognitive resources when making political choices. This paper wishes to contribute to this field of research by testing Zaller's (1992) model of opinion formation, which poses that the message environment will trigger voters to either rely on their awareness of the issue or political predispositions when they form opinions, depending on whether they are being exposed to one or two competing messages. This paper will apply a deduction of his model for one-way message environments, which assumes that level of awareness will determine whether voters support the dominant message, to see whether the model can explain attitudes to the EU in Slovakia during the 2003 accession referendum. The paper concludes that Slovak voters relied on partisanship as well as factors of awareness in the opinion formation process, and that Zaller's hypotheses for opinion formation in mainstream message environments cannot be verified by the Slovak case.*

**Keywords:** *Public opinion formation, support for EU membership, cognitive mobilisation, Slovakia, John Zaller*

## Introduction

The referendums which preceded the accession of eight former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) to the EU in 2004, were largely regarded as predictable competitions. Given the high consensus in the former Communist states that they were ready to leave authoritarian legacies behind and return to Europe, where most CEE electorates felt they historically belonged, the high endorsements of EU membership came by no means as surprises. This paper investigates the 2003 accession referendum in Slovakia by applying a deduction of Zaller's model of opinion formation (Zaller 1992), in order to explore whether voters relied on elite cues or endogenous factors when they made up their minds on how to vote. An application of this model will help to shed light on voter proxies in the Slovak Republic, which still are to be thoroughly explored, moreover, it addresses the popular assumption that European integration was an elite-led process with only passive consensus from the public, and explores whether voters actively applied cognitive skills in the opinion formation process. The paper uses data from the Candidate Countries' Eurobarometers merged with the Comparative Manifesto Project II data set to test the validity of Zaller's hypotheses. An account of the theory, elite positions on European integration, methodology, results and discussion will follow.

### 1 Zaller's model of opinion formation

Zaller's model of opinion formation reasons that public responses to a political issue will primarily depend on whether elites convey one unified recommendation or two (or more) competing messages to the public, and distinguishes between two scenarios; the one- or the two-way message environment. The former case occurs when elites are unified on the issue and voters will be exposed to only one policy recommendation, which will generate a mainstream effect, since there is a lack of opposing messages. The argument sounds that if this is the case, acceptance of this political communication will depend on the voters' awareness, since only politically aware voters will be able to receive and understand the conveyed message. The logic is that the more informed and politically aware the voter is, the more likely s/he is to embrace the opinion communicated. However, a different scenario takes place when elites do not reach consensus, and communicate two (or more) mutually excluding messages to the public. The presence of competing flows of communication will create a polarisation effect, and will enable the voter to be 'reminded' that there are two (or more) policy alternatives, which can be chosen, and most importantly, they will be made aware that the dominant message may not be compatible with her/his political predispositions. This, in turn, will generate a different cognitive process

than when elites are in agreement. In cases of elite division, the acceptance of the dominant message — normally the (official) position of the government — may fail, either because it is not received due to insufficient political awareness, or because it is rejected due to incompatibility with political predispositions. Applying this logic to the accession referendums in Central and Eastern Europe, it will follow that support for the government position — a ‘yes’ vote — is expected to be high if the message environment is uniformly one which expresses endorsement of the official position, and the level of awareness will determine whether voters support this message or not. On the other hand, if elite messages are polarised, political predispositions will determine whether voters support EU accession.

Zaller’s model has not been subject to extensive tests and has not at all been applied to case studies in the new member states. It was proved by Marquis and Sciarini to be a consistent predictor of opinion formation in Swiss foreign policy referendums (Marquis and Sciarini 1999), by Kriesi and Sciarini (2003) on a selection of issues of foreign policy in Switzerland,<sup>1</sup> by Saglie (2000) in the case of the Norwegian 1994 EU referendum, and by Gabel and Scheve (2007) on the EU15. The main reason that the model is interesting is that it studies the difference in message environments and whether and how and it matters if people are being exposed to one or two (or more) recommendations from elites. The theoretical reasoning behind the model addresses a relevant question; one whether elites’ communications have such strong effects that agreement with the conveyed message will simply depend on whether people understand the matter, or, to put it differently, are sufficiently aware to respond to the message. This excludes the possibility that people can cognitively mobilise themselves on grounds of, e.g., political orientations and/or values, and critically examine the matter unless there is a competing message which ‘reminds’ them to filter the message, which they only will do if messages are competing for acceptance. Such a claim can certainly be criticised on a theoretical and empirical basis, given that there is an abundance of public opinion literature which argues that values and political orientations influence the public opinion formation process. However, it is still an interesting model to test for case studies in new democracies, given people’s short experience as political actors. Following the claim of among others, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004a), who argue that the strongest determinant of voters’ choices in the Central and Eastern European referendums on EU membership was the direction, strength and clarity of elite cues, next to mass attitudes (with the former having the strongest effect), Zaller’s model may be able to illustrate whether this is was the case or not. Before the paper moves on to test the model, a short account of elite positions on European integration in Slovakia will be provided.

## 2 Elites and Europe in Slovakia

Intellectually, Slovak associations with Europe are more ambiguous than, e.g., those in the neighbouring Czech Republic; whereas the Czech intellectual discourse early emphasised its natural position in Europe, Slovakia's definition was more unasserted. While support for membership was already very high among Slovaks during the separation from Czechoslovakia, given the slow pace of economic and political reform post-1992, the critical issue for policy-makers was always whether the EU wanted Slovakia. However, after the 2002 elections, the question changed to whether Slovakia would get what it desired from the EU (Haughton 2003: 85). Previously, inter-party battles and domestic issues had taken precedence over the question of European integration (Grabbe and Hughes 1999: 192), even if the EU's warnings from Brussels that Slovakia would not be able to begin accession negotiations along with the other Visegrad countries was one of the mobilising factors which brought voters to the polls in 1998 and 2002 to vote for reformist parties to enter government and change the course of Slovak democracy. Hence, the pressing issue of unseating the (semi)-authoritarian Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar contributed to slowing the entry of an actual debate at elite level on what EU membership would entail, and such a discourse only commenced a year before the referendum. Due to the delayed process of Europeanisation of Slovak politics, the EU issue had a strong impact on the party system and forged clear responses from the political parties when it entered the arena.

The reformist elites which displaced Mečiar in 1998 all declared support for EU membership, with the left-of-centre parties being slightly more reserved than the right-of-centre, however, the Eurosceptic rhetoric from forces on the left gradually softened as events unfolded. The political discourse was characterised with high consensus and no organised opposition, with the main inter-party competition being based around the question of which party was most capable of securing EU membership. All parties campaigned for a yes-vote in the months preceding the accession referendum, and opposition to Europe was widely regarded as being politically extremist (Henderson 2005: 2). However, only a few months after accession, more parties began to reveal more ambiguous positions on European integration, which reflected internal party disagreements and lack of party cohesion (Fisher et al.: 990). An account of the respective party positions will follow.

### **The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)**

Being the party which the opposition blamed for not prioritising meeting the criteria for EU accession and for being responsible for Slovakia's demotion from the

first groups of countries to negotiate accession (Riishøj 2007: 512), the HZDS had still early declared its commitment to European integration, even if this view was seen more as an instrumental than a political given the perceived economic advantages of EU membership (Pridham 2002a: 211). The HZDS showed more interest in Moscow as an 'alternative' address than Brussels, even if these priorities were more disguised under economic policies than being the official rhetoric (Pridham 2002b: 21). The HZDS had ensured to keep any Europhobic inclinations in check due to the urgency of working towards EU membership, but as the party had gained opposition status, Mečiar found himself free to stir up anti-EU sentiments among his supporters (Henderson 2001: 20). However, the 'reform path' the party embarked upon in 2000 stated that the party was an unambiguous supporter of EU membership (Pridham 2002b: 22).

### **The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ)**

The SDKÚ has always been a staunch supporter of EU membership. One of the party's main arguments in its anti-Mečiar rhetoric was the criticism that it was the HZDS which was responsible for the country being demoted from the first wave of accession candidates, and in the 2002 election campaign, party leader and Prime Minister Mikulaš Dzurinda ran on a platform which held that the SDKÚ as the 'pillar of continuity' was the only party which could guarantee accession (Harris 2003: 85). Since then, its stance has remained unchanged; it has been the only party to offer unconditional support for EU membership post-2002 (Haughton 2003: 85).

### **The Christian Democrats (KDH)**

The party has always supported EU entry, but with a soft tone of scepticism; it stated early that it did not just want Slovakia to join 'for the sake of joining' (Haughton 2003: 85). Soft Euroscepticism has dominated the party programme since 2000, though its reservations towards EU membership cannot not be classified as anti-European; its main concern has been related to certain elements of EU accession and not membership itself, such as worries whether EU legislation will intrude on Slovak family and immigration legislation (Rybář 2006: 700). However, the party set meeting the criteria for membership as its main priority while leading the 1998–2002 governing coalition, as well as to mend the country's relations with Brussels (Pridham 2002a: 215). Still, its antipathy to Western liberalism and devotion to Catholic confessional values culminated into a soft Eurosceptic rhetoric (Pridham 2002b: 23), often with a nationalistic flavour (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004ab: 14).

### *Smer* — (*Direction*)

Although the 'Blairist' Social Democrats never explicitly have been against EU membership, the party had since its inception taken on characteristics as a soft Euro-sceptic party (Henderson 2005: 20). Party leader and post-2006 Prime Minister Robert Fico frequently used the issue to criticise his opponents for their uncritical approaches to Slovak accession, and argued on several occasions that the previous government had been too quick to close the accession negotiations. One of the party's billboards during the 2002 campaign showed a row of naked posteriors over the slogan 'The EU but not with bare bottoms' (Haughton 2004: 81). Fico has later become notorious for his EU-sceptic rhetoric, for example his infamous statement that if Slovakia was Norway, Iceland or Switzerland, "I would definitely shout out with pleasure 'no' to the EU" (Haughton 2003: 85). However, as the party began negotiations with the Socialist International and Party of European Socialists in 2003, the party changed its rhetoric on the EU and adopted a more positive view, at least officially (Henderson 2005: 13).

### **The Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)**

The unreformed Communists had also expressed support for membership in principle, but suffered from internal divisions on the issue. The party advocated that accession to the EU was desirable, with the reservation that the country had to be ready. However, these uncertainties culminated into the party being the only in Parliament which voted against the Accession Treaty after the referendum, which was regarded as a strategic vote which enabled the party to attempt to rally support under the claim of being the 'sole defenders of Slovak national interests from the bureaucrats in Brussels,' while they knew that the Treaty would be ratified anyway (Haughton 2004, p. 81). Arguing that the country was not ready for membership when it joined, the party has later built a soft Euro-sceptic rhetoric on a concern whether 'socialism can be built in Slovakia inside the EU' (Beichelt 2004: 41).

### **The Slovak national party (SNS)**

Despite having voted for accession negotiations in 2000 and being a formal supporter of EU integration, the party emphasised the 'need to look East as well as West' due to 'our undoubted relation with the Slavic nation.' The party's former chairperson, Anna Malikova, stated that the party clearly opposed European federalism, which revealed that the party contains elements of soft to hard Euro-scepticism (Pridham 2002b: 22). The party's grass-root is split on the issue, with just under half of the voters supporting membership, and the other being either indifferent or opposed (Henderson 2005: 8).

### **The Party of the Democratic Left (SDL)**

The post-communist SDL also officially supported EU membership, but, as most other Slovak marginal parties, experienced internal splits on the matter. Its backward-looking grass-root which regards the post-communist reform process with scepticism remained unconvinced about the advantages of integration into a free market. Perceiving the integration project as one which is likely to benefit only the 'winners' of the transition process, internal forces have continued to voice scepticism to membership (Henderson 2001: 21).

### **The party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK)**

Due to the feeling that the interests of the ethnic Hungarians are being better protected under an international umbrella than within an isolated Slovakia, the SMK has traditionally regarded European integration positively (Pridham 2002b: 14). Having been suffering under Mečiar's outright hostility to Slovakia's largest ethnic group, EU membership early presented itself as a promising solution, especially given that one of the reasons that Slovakia was initially excluded from accession negotiations was the treatment of minorities (Pridham 2002: 218).

## **3 The campaign**

Due to the delayed entry of the EU question on the political agenda, the emerging consensus among elites was reflected in civil disengagement from the issue; the common understanding that the EU would be good for the country prevented any constructive debate to emerge among citizens, and the situation was described as a 'consensus without a discourse' (Henderson 2005: 14). Following the political parties, the majority of voters largely expressed that they were strongly in favour of membership. The only exceptions were voters who supported the HZDS and the SNS, of which only half of the electorates supported accession, as opposed to supporters of the post-1998 reformist government, who reported more positive views. Another divide between supporters and opponents of European integration was demographic; those who could be classified as transitional 'winners,' such as young people, the higher educated and urban populations, were more likely to vote in favour than the elderly, lower educated and rurally based (Henderson 2003: 3).

Given the fact that none of the previously held referendums in Slovakia had managed to attract the 50 percent turnout which is necessary for the referendum to be valid, concerns were present that the final outcome would be a yes-vote, which could not be recognised. Fears were present that the no-camp would use this legal

technicality to invalidate the result. However, given the high anticipation of a yes, the campaign ended up being uncontested, and the yes-camp concentrated more on getting the vote out than convincing people that the right thing to do was to vote yes (Henderson 2003: 5). The result from the 16–17 May referendum reported the highest yes-vote in an accession referendum ever; 93.71 percent had voted for EU membership. The turnout achieved the required level only marginally; 51.46 valid votes were cast, which fuelled the suspicions that opponents of accession had done as expected and stayed home to invalidate the vote.

## 4 Testing Zaller's model

Following the descriptions of the positions taken by political parties in the Slovakia and the direction of the campaign, it is evident that there was little or no elite division on the issue. Therefore, according to the Zallerian dichotomy between message environments, different the Slovak case will therefore be treated as a one-way message scenario. The assumption that the message environment was a mainstream case should imply, according to Zaller's logic, that political predispositions should display weaker effects than factors of awareness given the fact that people were not 'cognitively mobilised' to filter two competing messages through a schemata of predispositions, but subjected to one message only. To repeat, Zaller proposes that in such a scenario, awareness will determine whether the respondents understand the message and support it. Hence, three hypotheses can be suggested for analysis:

1. Factors of awareness should have higher impact on attitudes towards accession than political predispositions.
2. The higher awareness voters report, the more likely they will be to support European integration.
3. The positive effect of awareness should remain unchanged when political predispositions are controlled for.

### 4.1 Data and methodology

This analysis uses survey data from the Candidate Countries Eurobarometers 2003.2 merged with the Comparative Manifesto Project II Data Set. The reasons for using two data sets is that the Eurobarometers measure political predispositions as a function of party choice, which for technical reasons cannot be used as a measure of political predispositions. Since some of the smaller parties have too few supporters, parties cannot be used as dummy variables in the analysis since the standard errors would be biased. Therefore, the Eurobarometers data set was merged with the Comparative Manifesto Project II Data which contains information on party positions

on the left-right scale. This allowed for respondents' party choice to be transformed into values on left-right placement. Given the rank-ordered nature of the dependent variable, this analysis employs ordinal logistic regression. The question and labels for the dependent variable after recoding are as follows:

*Generally speaking, do you think that (our country's) membership in the European Union would be/will be: 1) A bad thing 2) Neither good nor bad 3) A good thing.*

## 4.2 Independent variables

The predictors which have been chosen to measure awareness represent four different typologies of cognitive involvement. The first group of predictors employs questions which measure the individual's political participation and consists of two variables; one which asked the respondents to place themselves on a scale on how often they discuss politics and one question which asks how often they try to persuade others of their opinion. The second group of predictors investigates the degree to which the individuals pay attention to media; the first question asked how often the respondents watch news about the EU; and the second asked how often the individuals watched news on television. The third set of questions controls for knowledge about the EU, and is divided into one scaled question on whether the respondents personally feels informed: whilst the second variable tests the actual knowledge of the respondent based on a set of questions which asked the respondents to inform whether a set of statements about the EU were true or false. The fourth group measures level of education, the fifth tests for the effect of political predispositions, i.e., left-right orientation, which is complemented by a test for curvilinearity using a squared term of the left-right variable in order to pick up possible effects of Euroscepticism on the left (KSS), and on the right (SNS). Finally, age, rural-urban location and male/female have been added to the model as control variables in order to avoid biased results due to omitted variables. Following this division of predictors into categories, the tests will be carried out as a sequence of models, which gradually increase the number of clustered variables.

Table 4.1: Testing Zaller's model, Slovakia, May 2003. Odds ratios, standard errors in parentheses.<sup>2</sup>

Predictor	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V	Model VI
<b>McFadden's R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.0170	0.0599	0.0960	0.1028	0.1494	0.1561
<b>Often discuss politics</b>	1.20* (.090)	1.01 (.083)	.96 (.081)	.94 (.081)	.92 (.113)	.96 (.120)
<b>Persuading others of opinion</b>	1.16** (.064)	1.13* (.065)	1.12 (.067)	1.11 (.067)	1.09 (.092)	1.09 (.094)
<b>Watching EU news</b>		2.07** (.193)	1.68** (.170)	1.62** (.166)	1.78** (.268)	1.72** (.884)
<b>Watching TV news</b>		.97 (.069)	.90 (.067)	.91 (.068)	.83 (.087)	.88 (.096)
<b>Knowledge (self-reported)</b>			1.57** (.127)	1.50** (.127)	1.46** (.168)	1.47** (.170)
<b>Actual knowledge</b>			1.19** (.078)	1.15* (.076)	1.16 (.119)	1.17 (.121)
<b>Education</b>				1.30** (.107)	1.20 (.140)	1.14 (.137)
<b>Left-right position</b>					1.05** (.014)	1.04** (.014)
<b>Left-right position<sup>2</sup></b>					.99 (.0005)	.99 (.0005)
<b>Age</b>						.81* (.074)
<b>Rural-urban</b>						1.11 (.172)
<b>Female</b>						1.19 (.248)

N = 594

\*\* Significant at the 0.01 level

\* Significant at the 0.05 level

The CCEB survey was carried out in May, the very same month of the referendum, and even if it would be logical to assume that the mobilisation of proxies should have been strong since this would be the time when voters had to make up their minds, few predictors are significant. The effects of discussing politics and persuading others are only present in the first models, and neither is watching TV news significant, which may not be surprising; the term 'TV news' can also refer to less relevant broadcasts, such as entertainment news and other non-related TV shows. However, watching EU news is a strong determinant of positive attitudes towards EU membership, but the effect decreases when more variables are introduced. Self-reported

knowledge also made a crucial difference; the more the voter felt s/he was informed, the more likely s/he was to support integration, as opposed to actual knowledge which is not significant. Education does not produce a stable effect when left-right position is controlled for. Left-right-position produces a linear positive effect, and given the large span on the variable from  $-16.024$  to  $33.638$  with 10 observations, the odds ratios, despite being only 1.05, strongly suggests that moving from left to right on the scale predicts more positive attitudes towards membership. Finally, the squared term of left-right position is not significant, and the only control variable which is significant is age, which produces a negative effect.

### 4.3 Awareness and political predispositions combined

As described in the previous section, the left-right variable created large intervals between the political parties, and given these clear gaps, it is a relatively easy task to distinguish between voter groups. Parties with values lower than  $-10$  were set as left, parties with values between  $-10$  or  $+10$  constituted the centre category, and parties with values over  $10$  were denoted as right. By setting the values of the predictors of awareness to low, medium or high, three groups of voters could be created, and were then sorted by their level of awareness.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 4.2: Predicted probabilities for saying that EU membership would be a ‘good thing,’ by left-right orientation and awareness<sup>4</sup>**

<b>Left-right position</b>	<i>Left</i>	<i>Centre</i>	<i>Right</i>
<b>Awareness</b>			
<i>Low</i>	0.379	0.286	0.044
<i>Middle</i>	0.486	0.696	0.558
<i>High</i>	0.387	0.867	0.950

The most noticeable information which can be taken from the tables is that as awareness increased, so did the probabilities of believing that EU membership would be a ‘good thing.’ The exception to the rule was left-voters, who never produced probabilities which exceeded the .5 threshold, not even among the highly aware: in fact, the higher aware were just marginally more positive than the low aware. In addition, the mediumaware were the most positive respondents on the left. Centre- and right-voters became positive when the level of awareness reached the medium categories, but despite the unambiguous support from the SKDÚ, low aware right-wing

voters were the least convinced, while highly aware rightists were the most positive respondents in the sample. The largest probability intervals are to be found between low and medium aware voters, especially on the right.

## 5 Discussion

The findings from the regression model and the table of predicted probabilities for the voter groups fail to fully meet the three hypotheses which were formulated from the assumptions of Zaller's model. To begin with the first hypothesis which assumes that awareness should have higher impact on attitudes than political predispositions, the results here suggest the contrary; predispositions were strong predictors of attitudes towards membership. In the regression table, predictors of awareness partially produce significant coefficients in the positive direction. The predicted probabilities in table 4.2 confirm the findings from the regression model; support for EU membership increases when moving from left to right on the scale, and awareness has a positive effect on attitudes on respondents on the centre and the right. However, leftists were consistently negative, even those who scored high on awareness. These findings suggest that awareness and left-right position seem to work alongside each other, with left-right position moderating the effects of awareness. Therefore, the first hypothesis must be dismissed. The second hypothesis, which assumes that level of awareness increases the likelihood of believing that EU membership would be 'a good thing,' is also contradicted by the findings. As mentioned before, the effect of awareness was not linear among leftists which contradicts this assumption: the highly aware were *less* positive than the medium aware and almost as negative as the low aware. Hence, even if centre- and right-partisans became more positive to EU membership when awareness increased, also the second hypothesis must be rejected. The third hypothesis which assumes that the effects of awareness will not change when predispositions are added to the equation is also naturally not confirmed; the differences between left-, centre-, and right-voters are too apparent. Hence, also the third hypothesis meets no criteria for verification.

These overall findings make it difficult to provide support for Zaller's propositions about the dynamics of public opinion formation in a one-way message environment. Even if elites could not provide an equally appealing counter-message to the government's recommendation of a yes-vote, it still appears that voters employed other proxies than awareness only in the process of forming opinions. The clear differences between left, centre and right partisans largely reflect the positions taken by the parties elites; the fact that the majority of the respondents who are located on the left in this sample are Communist-voters, and that this party expressed negative

views towards integration, makes a call for investigations on ideological differences between pro-and anti-integrationists. The fact that awareness does not uniformly increase the probability of voting yes suggests that Zaller's model does not adequately explain the public opinion formation process in this case study, and despite the success in applying the model to other cases, it cannot be transferred to the case of the Slovak EU referendum. This knowledge poses several questions for future research; first of all, which proxies Slovaks employ when making political decisions, and another methodological question on whether 'old' models of opinion formation which have proved to hold explanatory effects from applications to case studies in the old member states can be equally applied to case studies in the new member states and/or post-communist electorates.

## Conclusion

To summarise, Zaller's hypothesis does not achieve sufficient support from the Slovak 2003 data to conclude that the criteria for verification are met. While respondents' choices mostly were, at least partially, in line with their parties' recommendations, and awareness seemed to be moderated by political predispositions — or vice versa — it appears that Zaller's assumption that a one-way message environment will create a mainstream effect where awareness alone predicts support for the government position overlooked the effect of ideology and party choice. The fact that partisanship and cognitive resources interacted points in the direction that Slovaks applied a complex mixture of proxies when they formed opinions on EU membership, despite the dominance of the government position and the lack of alternatives to their recommendation. Therefore, the theoretical underpinning of Zaller's model which creates a dichotomy of proxies depending on message environment appears flawed in this case study; a modification of Zaller's model which includes the features of both the one- and two-way message scenarios, would have been better suited for an application to the Slovak case.

Still, the knowledge that Slovaks make up a young electorate and that opinion formation never is a static phenomenon makes it important to keep conducting studies, which monitor how respondents use proxies over time. Studies using time-series or panel data studies would be able to provide reliable information on how Slovaks form attitudes to the EU, particularly since such methods allow for making generalisations for the whole population. Moreover, studies over time are necessary to more fully encompass the specificities of Slovak public opinion, such as low party affiliation and low political trust, which makes partisanship a non-static variable to operationalise. Therefore, the abilities of parties to create consensus or division are

difficult to fully describe in single case studies, which is one of the limitations of this very study. Therefore, the conclusions made in this paper must not be read as an attempt to fully describe the features of the elite-citizen dynamic in Slovakia; they must be interpreted within the framework of a test of Zaller's model for mainstream message environments, and for the EU issue only.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> One of these was EU membership.
- <sup>2</sup> Distribution on the dependent variable: 'A bad thing' 5.44 %, 'Neither good nor bad' 30.15 %, 'A good thing' 64.41 %.
- <sup>3</sup> The *pvalue* command in STATA was used to set the values for the awareness predictors to low, medium, and high.
- <sup>4</sup> Left-wing voters were voters who supported the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) or the Democratic Party (DS). Centre-voters were defined as voters who would vote for the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK), The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), or *Smer* (Direction). Right-voters were defined as voters who supported either the Slovak National Party (SNS), The Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH), Alliance for the New Citizen (ANO), or the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SKDÚ).

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