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PUBLIC OPINION AND MACEDONIA`S ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION (2004-2014)

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Содржина:

1. Introduction

Even though the public support for the European Union (EU) and the process of accession of Republic of Macedonia (RM) into the EU has been a subject of public opinion research from the very beginning of this process, nevertheless this phenomenon has not been investigated thoroughly. The lack of specific and systematic analyses of public attitudes on the process of European integration in Macedonia results with numerous unanswered questions referring to the dynamics of the support for this process and its basic determinants. This fact is even more intriguing since analyses of public opinion in the candidate countries for EU membership can have three key implications for domestic policy: from the outcome for referendum for membership, through the impact of the European integration process on the domestic political debate and electoral rhetoric, up to the impact of the European integration process on the democratic consolidation in the post-communist context[1].

Therefore, this research intends to fill in this gap through a preliminary analyses of the public support for the European integration process in Macedonia in the period 2004-2014. In this context, this analyses pursues two particular goals. The first one is to define the general trends of the public support for Macedonian membership in the EU and to de-construct its dynamics. The second goal is to define the most important determinants of the support for the process of European integration, i.e. to detect the key factors that affect the formation of public attitudes related to this issue.

1 Slomczynski, Kazimierz and Shabad, Goldie, "Dynamics of support for European integration in postcommunist Poland", European Journal of Political Research, vol. 42, 2003, p. 504.

Accordingly, this study detects a correlation between the dynamics of the support for EU membership and the development of the Macedonian EU accession process that is manifested in two indicative periods: the period from 2004 to 2009 as a period of consistent and particularly high levels of support; and the period from 2010 to 2014 as a period that marks an incremental fall of the public support for the European integration process.

On the other hand, the determinants of support have been analyzed through the prism of three factors of creation of public attitudes: rational-utilitarian, identity based and cues from political elites. Moreover, this study ascertains that the dynamics of the public support for EU integration in Macedonia is a result of an unequal but complementary influence of all three factors.

From a methodological point of view, this study relies on the empirical findings that arise from several datasets. Primarily we have used the dataset of the Institute for Democracy 'Societas Civilis' - Skopje (IDSCS) that consists of two series of longitudinal studies of public opinion on the process of European integration, based on unified methodology. The first period encompassed in this research is the period from the year 2003 to 2009. The second period covers public opinion research conducted in the years of 2011, 2013 and 2014. Finally, for the needs of this research, IDSCS with support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation conducted a separate national survey on a representative sample of 1002 respondents in September 2014. As such, it is the most exploited data source for this study.

Moreover, this study also uses several controlling datasets: the Eurobarometer surveys in the period from 2007-2014, the surveys of the International Republican Institute in the period from 2002 to 2014 and the studies of the Gallup Balkan Monitor in the period from 2006 to 2010. Because of

the different research methodology specific for each of these data sets, while analyzing them this study has in no instance made any comparison of specific results among the research outputs of the different agencies, but rather it indulges into trends comparison.

To conclude, this study has been structured as follows: it begins with a brief chronological overview of the relations between RM and EU, followed by a discussion of the parameters influencing the creation of public opinion on the process of European integration and analyses of public opinion on the accession of Republic of Macedonia into the EU for the period from 2004 to 2014 so as to finish with several concluding remarks.

2. Republic of Macedonia and the process of EU integration

The relations between Republic of Macedonia and the European Union as well as the dynamics of the process of integration and socialization of the Macedonian corpus of political, economic and social values with the European standards is based on a decades long process of establishment of parameters of communication and implementation of a strategy for conditionality. This trajectory of international and inter-institutional communication has been manifested through several important stages of institutionalization, progress and stagnation of the EU accession process. Thereby, these historical conjunctures have had serious impact on the dynamics of support of the public opinion in Macedonia vis a vis the process of European integration and the possible membership of Macedonia in the EU.

The development of the relations between the Republic of Macedonia and the European Union dates back to the first years of independence, when in 1992 Macedonia appointed

its representative in the EU. Towards the end of 1995 this relationship became official with the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two parties and the opening of the diplomatic mission of RM to the EU. The established cooperation in 1996 became normatively framed by the signing of the "Cooperation Agreement" and the "Transport Agreement between Republic of Macedonia and the European Communities". The same year Macedonia was allowed access to the EU instrument for financial aid to the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe (PHARE).

In 1999, with the establishment of the Stability Pact, a new era of cooperation between the EU and Macedonia started through the new European Commission pre-accession strategy for the countries of South East Europe (SEE) that has been mainly based on the previously determined framework for cooperation and accession established with the candidate countries from Central and Eastern Europe. This new approach towards integration of the SEE countries has been inaugurated by the Stabilization and Association Process as framework for their closer cooperation with the EU and their promotion to potential candidates for membership. This cooperation has been normatively confirmed by the Stabilization and Association Agreement which was signed by Macedonia in 2001. The progress of the countries from the Stabilization and Association Process has been additionally framed with the adoption of the "Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans" in 2003 by the European Council. This document additionally defined the framework and instruments for EU accession and at the same time significantly strengthened the credibility of the enlargement process by confirming the perspective for membership of the Western Balkans countries.

The period from 2004 to date is especially important for any analysis of public opinion on the European integration process of Macedonia for two main reasons. First, this particular period reflects the dynamics of the progress in the accession process,

which in turn manifests itself in several specific time points that have a decisive influence on the distribution of public attitudes in the last ten years. On the other hand, this time frame coincides with a significant increase in the intensity of surveys analyzing the process of European integration and support for EU membership. In early 2004 the Government of Republic of Macedonia applied for membership in the EU in accordance with the already adopted parliamentary "Declaration on the submission of an application for membership of the Republic of Macedonia in the European Union". Based on the evaluation of the responses to the questionnaire for the preparation of the European Commission`s opinion on the application for membership, the European Commission at the end of 2005 adopted a positive opinion on Macedonia's application for membership and recommended Macedonia to receive status of a candidate country. The same recommendation was adopted by the European Council at its Brussels summit in December 2005, with which Macedonia officially became a candidate country for EU membership. This qualification is a key determinant of the qualitative leap in the relations between Macedonia and the EU. The candidate status has finally paved the path towards the various stages of the accession process and it further framed the policy of conditionality and significantly strengthened the membership prospects of Macedonia. In this context, the instrument "Accession partnership for the Republic of Macedonia" has been established. It identifies specific priorities and benchmarks whose compliance conditions Macedonia's progress in the accession process. Consequently, this new equilibrium in the interaction between these two actors will impose itself as a fundamental parameter in the dynamics of public support for the process of European integration in Macedonia.

The period from 2009 onwards marks another key historical milestone that will have a significant impact on the distribution of public attitudes toward Macedonia's aspirations to join the EU. Based on the positive evaluation of the successfulness of

the process of implementation of several key political criteria benchmarks set by the EU, the European Commission in 2009 gave a recommendation to start accession negotiations with Macedonia. However, this positive valuation of Macedonia's progress in the accession process wouldn't result in a concrete materialization of this recommendation. The unfavorable constellation of relations and the impact of veto players inside the European Union over a period of five years resulted in a de facto blockade of the accession of Macedonia to the EU, which in turn ironically has been manifested through the prism of several successive recommendations of the European Commission to start accession negotiations that will be ignored by the European Council.

The negative effects of this deadlock of the Macedonian accession process will instigate new initiatives for stimulation of domestic reform. Thus, in 2012, in order to initiate reforms aimed at more intensive normative and structural alignment with European benchmarks, the European Commission promoted the High Level Accession Dialogue. At the same time, the High Level Accession Dialogue is the last instrument aimed at improving the quality of the accession process and maintaining the credibility of the enlargement policy.

3. Public opinion and the process of European integration

The growing literature dedicated to the analyses of public support for the European integration process and EU enlargement has been mainly supported by several already affirmed and widely discussed models of voting behavior in political psychology. Hereby, the trends of support for the process of European integration and EU membership have been predominantly analyzed through the definition of the basic determinants of that support, i.e. the reasons why the individuals are supporting or opposing the process of European integration.

Most of the analyses of the public support for the European integration process of the new member states and the aspirant countries are based on at least three established theoretical frameworks that are widely used and that have been able to establish a significant degree of empirical validity in determining public support for EU membership in the already established EU member states. The first framework explains the support of the process of European integration through a utilitarian-economic prism, thus linking the process of opinion formation regarding European integration with the individual evaluation of the economic benefit of this process. The second framework refers to the importance of identity and values in the formation of attitudes on the process of European integration. Finally, the third theoretical concept highlights the influence of cues from domestic political actors on the formation of public opinion on EU membership and the integration process.

Table 1: Theoretical concepts of formation of public attitudes for support of the process of European integration		
Model	Factors of impact	Forms/variables
Rationalist-utilitarian	Economic/material interest; calculations of costs and benefits	Socio-tropic /egoistic
Identity-based	Identity affiliation, values, group interest	Inclusive /exclusive identity, cultural threat
Cues from political elites	Political elites, political parties	Consensus/conflict between political elites

3. 1. Rationalist-utilitarian explanations

Generally speaking, the rationalist-utilitarian model is a rational choice model that uses a realist instrumental approach based on the calculation of interest as a key determinant in shaping individual attitudes. This approach starts from the assumption that people are rational actors who shape their behavior based on their own (usually material) interests. As rational beings, individuals make decisions based on their own calculation of costs and benefits that would arise from the effects of that decision. These costs and benefits can be of different nature, but when the decision-making process is concerned, the most important calculations are those of material interests. The application of this model in the context of European integration support starts from the assumption that individuals have created their own position on European integration based on their own perceptions of the costs and benefits of this process[2]. Consequently, they support the process of European integration and the (possible)

2 Gabel, Matthew, and Palmer, Harvey. "Understanding variation in support for European integration. European Journal of Political Research, Vol. 27, 1995, p. 3-19; Anderson, Christopher J., and Reichert, Shawn. "Economic benefits and support for membership in the EU.: A cross-national analysis". Journal of Public Policy Vol. 15 No. 3, 1996, p. 231-49

membership of their country in the EU because they have or because they anticipate adequate financial benefits from the process. On the other hand, those social groups that are perceived as economic losers from the process constitute the main eurosceptic driving force in society.

The utilitarian - economic prism is manifested through two levels of calculations: micro, i.e. egocentric level and macro, i.e. sociotropic level[3]. The sociotropic concept points to the importance of the national and the overall macroeconomic picture as a determinant of the individuals` behavior. This means that individuals do not base their support for the process of European integration strictly on their personal experiences, but more on the general perception about the effect of the process of European integration on the economic output and the main economic parameters of the state, such as economic growth, average income and unemployment rate. If the state is perceived as an economic loser from the process of European integration, the support would be lower and vice versa. For example, certain studies show that relatively stronger support for European integration in some poorer countries is due to expectations that EU membership increases the material wealth of the country[4].

3 Garry, John and Tilley, James. "Public support for integration in the newly enlarged EU", in Marsh, Michael, Mikhaylov, Slava and Schmitt, Hermann (eds) "European elections after Eastern Enlargement". Mannheim: CONNEX., 2007, p. 183-184; Ebru Ş. Canan-Sokullu, "Italian public opinion on Turkey's EU accession: utilitarian calculations, identitarian evaluations or perceived threats?", Perceptions, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2011, p. 51

4 Christin, Thomas. "Economic and political basis of attitudes towards the EU in Central and East European countries in the 1990s", European Union Politics Vol. 6 No. 1, 2005, p. 29–57; Sánchez-Cuenca, Ignacio. "The political basis of support for European integration", European Union Politics Vol. 1 No. 2, 2000, p. 147–171

On the other hand, the egoistic utilitarian framework binds the decision to support the process of European integration with personal experience[5]. In other words, the individual supports this process if he/she has a personal economic (financial) benefit from its effects. Or, the higher the personal material benefits from the process of European integration are, the higher the probability that the individual will have a positive opinion about it. The intensity of support is conditioned by the social capital of the individual. Hence, a number of studies suggest a variation of support through demographic categories associated with the corresponding position of the individual in society. Thus, those individuals with higher levels of education, with good income and a higher position in the labor market, deal with the challenges of the European integration process much easier and hence appear to be its supporters. On the other hand, those individuals who are positioned lower in the labor market or are unemployed or have low education and low income tend to oppose the process of European integration[6].

However, some studies of the determinants of support for EU membership in the candidate countries detect unequal manifestations of utilitarian behavior. Elgun and Tillman point

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5 Gabel, Matthew. "Economic integration and mass politics: market liberalization and public attitudes in the European Union", American Journal of Political Science, Vol. 42, No. 3, 1998, p. 936-953; Gabel, Matthew, "Public support for European integration: An empirical test of five theories", Journal of Politics, Vol. 60, No. 2, 1998, p. 333- 354; Hooghe, Liesbet and Marks, Gary. "Does identity or economic rationality drive public opinion on European integration?". Political Science & Politics, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2004, p. 415-420

6 Ehin, Piret. "Determinants of public support for EU membership: Data from the Baltic countries", European Journal of Political Research Vol. 40, 2001, p. 31-56; John, Garry and Tilley, James, "The macroeconomic factors conditioning the impact of identity on attitudes towards the EU," European Union Politics, Vol.10 No.3, p. 361-379.; Hakhverdian, Armen (et al.). ''Euroscepticism and education: a longitudinal study of 12 EU member states, 1973-2010''. European Union Politics, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2013, p. 522-541; Vliegenthart, Rens, Schuck, Andreas. Boomgarden, Hajo G. and De Vreese, Claes. "News coverage and support for European integration, 1990 - 2006", International Journal of Public Opinion Research Vol.20 No.4, 2008, p. 415-439.; McLaren, Lauren. "Explaining mass-level euroscepticism: identity, interests, and institutional distrust". Acta Politica Vol.42 No.2-3, 2007, p. 233-251; Jones, Erik. and van der Bijl, Niels. "Public opinion and enlargement: A gravity approach", European Union Politics Vol. 5 No.3, 2004, p. 331-351

at the inability of individuals from the candidate countries that are at the beginning of the accession process to create authoritative opinion (pro or against EU membership) based on economic calculations because of their lack of exposure to the effects of economic integration[7]. In this context, the balanced or inverse support of the process of European integration in some candidate countries indicates the importance of the perception of future material benefits from the process of European integration despite the current economic situation at the micro and macro level[8].

3. 2. Identity and value based factors

The theoretical concepts that call upon the role of identity based and value attributes in attitude formation criticize the views of the utilitarian approach on the material nature of preferences in regards to European integration support and claim that the public to a large extent takes decisions based on identity affiliation and group interests, whilst its actions are influenced by ideas and values that define the individual`s worldview. These explanations are social-constructivist in their nature; taking into consideration that they start from the assumption that the behavior of individuals is conditioned by the social norms and cultural values of the group they belong to. Therefore, support for EU membership gets an alternative explanation which emphasises the importance of national and social identities as its determinants. In this context, the support

7 Elgün, Özlem and Tillman, Erik. "Exposure to European Union policies and support for membership in the candidate countries"Political Research Quarterly, Vol. 60, No. 3, 2007, f-q.. 392-394

8 Çarkoğlu, Ali and Cigdem, Kentmen. "Diagnosing trends and determinants in public support for Turkey's EU membership" South European Society & Politics, Vol.16 No.3, 2011, f-q.. 365-379.; Tanasoiu, Cosmina and Colonescu, Constantin. "Determinants of support for European integration: The Case of Bulgaria" European Union Politics Vol. 9 No.3, 2008, f-q.. 363–377

of the European integration process is explained through at least two perspectives: national identity and cultural threats.

A vast number of studies deal with the impact of national identity on the formation of public attitudes. Bearing in mind the cosmopolitan and supranational character of the process of European integration, it is often perceived as a direct threat to national identity and state sovereignty. Hence, it is assumed that there is a positive correlation between Eurosceptic attitudes and the sense of national belonging. But this relationship is not always straightforward. The degree of euroscepticism largely depends on the exclusivity of identity affiliation. In other words, those individuals who have an inclusive identity, i.e. sense of belonging to a national identity, but also a sense of European or other regional identity appear to be greater supporters of EU membership compared to those individuals who declare an exclusive affiliation with a single (usually national) identity[9].

This explication is closely related to another identity based variable which is assumed to influence public behavior, i.e. the perception of the process of European integration as a cultural threat. Namely, according to this explanation, people manifest their attachment to a particular social identity through belonging to a group of like-minded counterparts. They confirm that attachment by emphasizing the differences with other external groups to the extent that these differences are considered a direct threat to the wellbeing of their own group.

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9 Hooghe, Liesbet and Marks Gary. "Calculation, community and cues: public opinion on European integration", European Union Politics,Vol. 6 No.4, 2005 p.437; John, Garry and Tilley, James, "The macroeconomic factors conditioning the impact of identity on attitudes towards the EU," European Union Politics, Vol.10 No.3, p. 361-379; Carey, Sean. "Undivided loyalties: Is national identity an obstacle to European integration?" European Union Politics Vol.3 No. 4, 2002, p. 387–413; Kaltenthaler, K. C. and Anderson, C. J. "Europeans and their money: explaining public support for the common European currency", European Journal of Political Research, Vol. 40, 2001, p. 139–170; Štulhofer, Aleksandar. "Euroscepticism in Croatia: on the far side of rationality?" in Ott, K. (ed.) "Croatian accession to the European union: the challenges of participation", Zagreb: Institute of Public Finance, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2006, p. 141-161

Given that the process of European integration means inevitable societal Europeanisation, enhancement of the multicultural nature of society and opening the domestic market and society to various external influences, EU membership is seen as a process of penetration of external values in the domestic cultural space and an attack on the cultural autonomy of their own group. Consequently, numerous studies indicate the correlation between public eurosceptic energy and appropriate anti-immigrant, xenophobic and generally speaking, hostile sentiments towards other cultures[10].

On the other hand, there are also attempts to interpret support for the process of European integration through demographic variables that are usually considered as influential markers of identity affiliation, such as religiosity or ethnicity[11].

Public opinion surveys in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe also point to the importance of values for the creation of public attitudes. In certain case studies they proved to be even more influential determinants of support for the process of European integration than the anticipated economic benefits[12].

Finally, identity and value connotations may occur as factors

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10 McLaren, Lauren. "Public support for the European Union: Cost/Benefit analysis or perceived cultural threat?", The Journal of Politics Vol. 64 No. 2, 2002, p. 551-566. McLaren, Lauren. "Explaining mass-level Euroscepticism: identity, interests, and institutional distrust", Acta Politica Vol.42 No.2-3, 2007, p. 233-251. De Vreese, Claes and Boomgarden, Hajo. "Projecting EU referendums: fear of immigration and support for European integration", European Union Politics Vol. 6 No.1, 2005, p. 59-82; Boomgaarden, H. G., Schuck, a. R. T., Elenbaas, M. and de Vreese, C. H. "Mapping EU attitudes: Conceptual and empirical dimensions of Euroscepticism and EU support", European Union Politics Vol.12 No.2, 2011, p. 241-266

11 Boomgaarden, Hajo. G. and André, Freire. "Religion and Euroscepticism: Direct, Indirect or No Effects?" West European Politics, Vol. 32 No.6, 2009, p. 1240-1265

12 For example see: Vetik, R., Nimmerfelt, G. and Taru, M. "Reactive identity versus EU integration", Journal of Common Market Studies, Vol. 44 No.5, 2006, p. 1079–1102.; Rohrschneider, R. and Whitefield, S. "Political parties, public opinion and European integration in post-Communist countries", European Union Politics, Vol. 7 No.1, 2006, p. 141–160.

for increased support for the process of European integration. This correlation derives from the perception of the European Union as a normative community of values relating to liberal democracy and respect for human rights. Moreover, these values are seen as a marker of an adequate supranational, European identity. Thus, several studies that analyze the public support of European integration through the prism of support for EU enlargement, come to the conclusion that this support is higher among those individuals who have a sense of European identity and uphold the values that bind the European Union[13].

3.3. Cues from political elites and political parties

The third line of explanation of the factors that influence the creation of public attitudes on the process of European integration emphasizes the power of cues from domestic political actors. This discourse is based on the findings of some general patterns of behavior analysis of public opinion which argue that citizens formulate their opinions about important social issues under strong influence from the political elites and political parties that they support[14]. Because citizens do not have enough information and do not fully understand the complex and abstract international processes, they form their opinions through the adoption of already established positions on those issues by the political elites which represent them.

13 Azrout, R., Van Spanje, J. and De Vreese, C. "When news matters: media effects on public support for European Union enlargement in 21 countries", Journal of Common Market Studies Vol. 50 No. 5, 2012, p 691-708; Di Mauro, Danilo and Fraile, Marta. "Who wants more? Attitudes towards EU enlargement in time of crisis" EUDO Spotlight, 2012

14 Zaller, John. "The nature and origins of mass opinion". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992

Hence, the more homogeneous the view of the political elites vis a vis a particular question, the greater will be the support for that issue by their supporters. Conversely, when the views of party elites within the party or within the party system is divergent, this situation will result in a fragmented public opinion. This model has also been widely applied in public opinion research on the process of European integration. These studies pinpoint the important role of political parties in the creation of public opinion on the European integration process.

Considering the complexity and the intricacy of the European integration process, citizens often are not able to develop an independent and objective picture of this phenomenon, so their opinion is based on the positions served by the political parties that they support. Consequently, the supporters of a certain political party create their support for the process of European integration following the party's positions on the matter[15]. Moreover, these cues become even more powerful when there is a disagreement among the political elites about the support of European integration[16]. Thus, the greater the consensus among political elites and political parties in a certain state on the support of EU membership, the higher will be the support of public opinion vis a vis this issue. On the other hand, the more political parties and political elites are divided on the issue, the greater will be the likelihood of citizens to develop a negative opinion about the

15 Steenbergen, M. R., Edwards, E. E. and de Vries, C. E. "Who's cueing whom?: Mass-Elite linkages and the future of European Integration", European Union Politics Vol.8 No.1, 2007, f-q.. 13-35.Steenbergen, Marco and Bradford S. Jones "Modeling multilevel data structures", American Journal of Political Science Vol. 46, 2002, f-q.. 218–37; Anderson, Christopher J. "When in doubt use proxies: attitudes toward domestic politics and support for European integration", Comparative Political Studies Vol.31 No.5, 1998, f-q.. 569–601

16 Steenbergen, Marco and David J. Scott "Contesting Europe? The Salience of European Integration as a Party Issue", in Gary Marks and Marco Steenbergen (eds.) "European Integration and Political Conflict". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, f-q.. 165–192

process of European integration[17].

The use of these premises in the analysis of the support for the process of European integration results in divergent findings. While in the case of Western European countries we have more consistency[18], surveys of public attitudes in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe provide more heterogeneous results.[19].

Finally, some studies have analyzed the relationship between the public support for the European integration process and the degree of satisfaction with and positive perception of the domestic political system. There is a presumption that citizens evaluate European integration through the prism of their domestic political environment which is correspondingly responsible for the implementation of this process. Therefore, if they have confidence in the political system, there is a high probability that they would have confidence in the process of European integration. This positive correlation in some cases appears to be valid[20], but in other cases it proves to be

17 Hooghe, Liesbet and Marks Gary. "Calculation, community and cues: public opinion on European integration". European Union Politics Vol. 6 No.4, 2005 p. 425-426

18 For example see Anderson, Christopher J. "When in doubt use proxies: attitudes toward domestic politics and support for European integration", Comparative Political Studies Vol.31 No.5, 1998, p. 569–601

19 For example, cues from political elites are evident in Hungary, but not in Poland and Estonia, where the party pro-integration consensus did not generate appropriate enthusiasm within the public. For more see: Fölsz, Attila and Tóka, Gábor Guerra, S. "Determinants of support for EU membership in Hungary" in: Rohrschneider, R., and S. Whitefield.(eds.) "Public opinion, party competition, and the European Union in post-communist Europe" New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 145-164 ,Guerra, Simona. "Does familiarity breed contempt? Determinants of public support for European integration and Opposition to It before and after accession", Journal of Common Market Studies Vol. 51 No.1, 2012, p. 38-50; Vetik, R. "Elite vs . People ? Eurosceptic public opinion in Estonia", Cambridge Review of International Affairs Vol. 16 No. 2, 2003, p. 257-272

20 Ehin, Piret. "Determinants of public support for EU membership: Data from the Baltic countries", European Journal of Political Research Vol. 40, 2001, p. 31-56; McLaren, Lauren. "Public support for the European Union: Cost/Benefit analysis or perceived cultural threat?", The Journal of Politics Vol. 64 No. 2, 2002, p. 551-566

either irrelevant or reverse, i.e. the lack of confidence in the political system results in increased support for the process of European integration[21].

4. Analyses of public attitudes towards the Macedonian EU accession process in the period 2004-2014

4. 1. General trends

Since the first half of the last decade when systematic research on public opinion about the process of European integration has started, the support for Macedonia's eventual membership in the European Union has always been significantly high. It has been characterized with a consistent trajectory and a logical and predictable transition of frequencies that proportionally follows the dynamics of Macedonia's progress in the accession process.

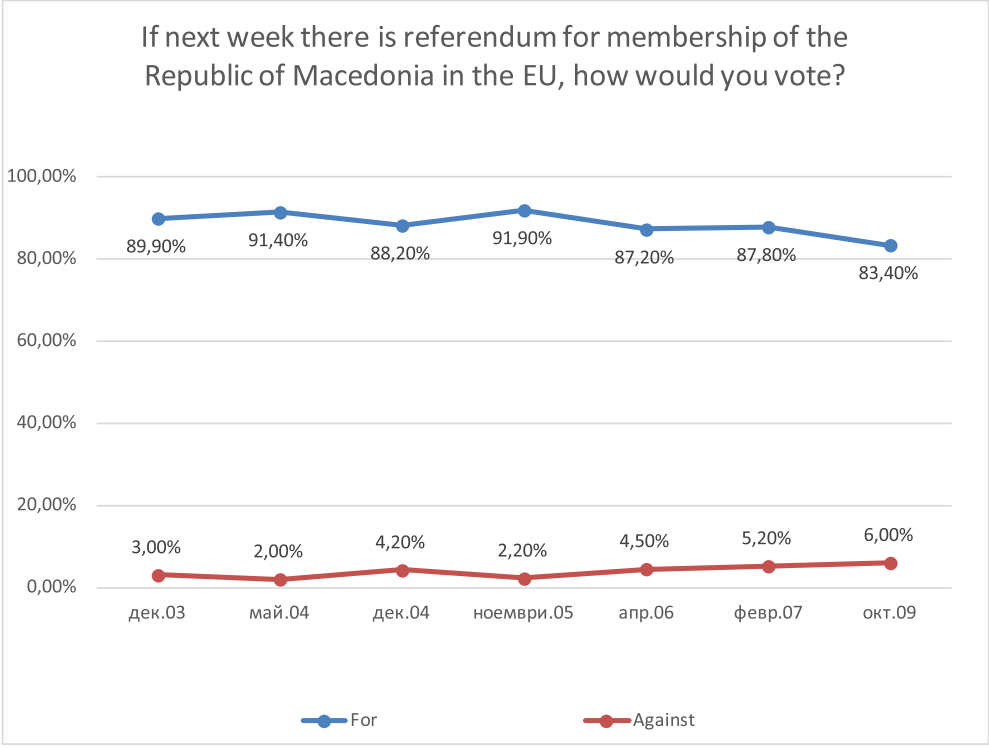
If we take a look at the distribution of attitudes for support of the process of European integration in the last decade, we will notice an evident presence of two general tendencies. The first tendency is manifested in the period 2004-2009. In these first five years the support of the process is characterized by extremely high rates of positive perception. Hereby, it is evident that there is a clear consistency of these trends of high support across all time intervals and almost without any

21 Gabel, Matthew, "Public support for European integration: An empirical test of five theories", Journal of Politics, Vol. 60, No. 2, 1998, p. 333- 354 Sánchez-Cuenca, Ignacio. "The political basis of support for European integration", European Union Politics Vol. 1 No. 2, 2000, p. 147–171; Christin, Thomas. "Economic and political basis of attitudes towards the EU in Central and East European countries in the 1990s", European Union Politics Vol. 6 No. 1, 2005, p. 29–57; Tanasoiu, Cosmina and Colonescu, Constantin. "Determinants of support for European integration: The case of Bulgaria" European Union Politics Vol. 9 No.3, 2008, p. 363–37

significant percentage discrepancies. On the other hand, over the last five years (as of 2009) there is an obvious change in the levels of support which tend to go downwards. The enormous support characteristic of the previous period, as of 2009 slowly and continuously started to fall. This declining trend is somewhat depreciated by the (still) relatively high percentage of distribution of positive attitudes, but it still should not be ignored especially if analyzed in comparison to the previous reference points that have been extremely high. The validity of this argument can hardly be doubted, since these trends are visible through all available datasets of public opinion on the process of European integration in Macedonia.

Thus, the previous high support of the perspective for membership of Macedonia in the EU is clearly shown in the results of a series of surveys of public opinion by IDSCS that have been conducted in the defined period from 2004 to 2009 (Figure 1). This dataset includes regular annual surveys of EU membership support in Macedonia that is measured by the question "If next week there is referendum for membership of the Republic of Macedonia in the EU, how would you vote?" The distribution of answers is consistent and it constantly shifts in intervals close to 90% of consent. The support is highest in November 2005 when it reaches almost 92%. However, already at the end of 2009, there is a significant fall of the support that goes down to 83%. The latest survey conducted by IDSCS in September 2014 shows an even lower degree of support of EU membership at 80%, at the same time resulting in a higher percentage of negative attitudes that go up to 14%.

Figure 1: Distribution of attitudes – "If next week there is referendum for membership of the Republic of Macedonia in the EU, how would you vote? (December 2003-October 2009)

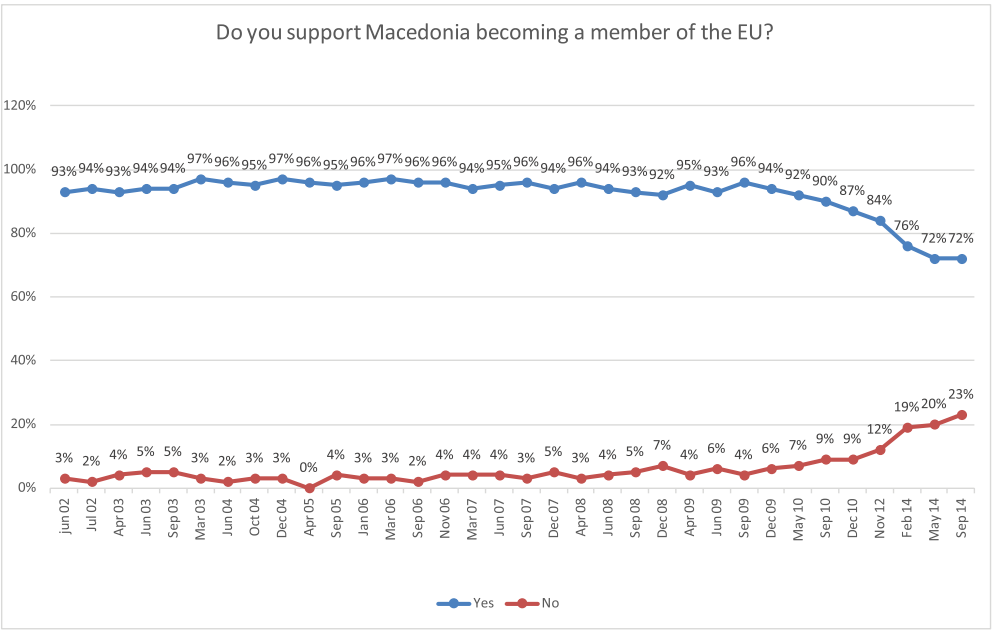


Source: IDSCS

These trends of initial high support of the Macedonian membership in the EU and its later incremental declination are further confirmed by the surveys of the International Republican Institute. When it comes to the support for EU membership in Macedonia, this dataset has the most extensive and consistent line of measurement of this support, with bi-annual surveys of public opinion that have been constantly implemented as of 2002 (with the exception of years 2011 and 2013). If we look at the distribution of attitudes in the last ten years regarding the question "Do you support Macedonia becoming a member of the EU?" the two above mentioned tendencies are clearly visible (Figure 2). The period from 2004 to 2009 is characterized with extremely high support for the Macedonian membership in the EU, which has been constantly

overpassing the barrier of 90%. This support in certain periods reaches maximum percentages of 96% and 97%. On the other hand, as of 2010 there has been a downward trend of support for EU membership that in a period of less than five years has been reduced by 20%. Inversely, there is a complementary constant rise of Eurosceptic perceptions, which from 4% in 2009 have exponentially grown to 23% in 2014.

Figure 2: Distribution of attitudes – "Do you support Macedonia becoming a member of the EU?" (June 2002-May 2014)

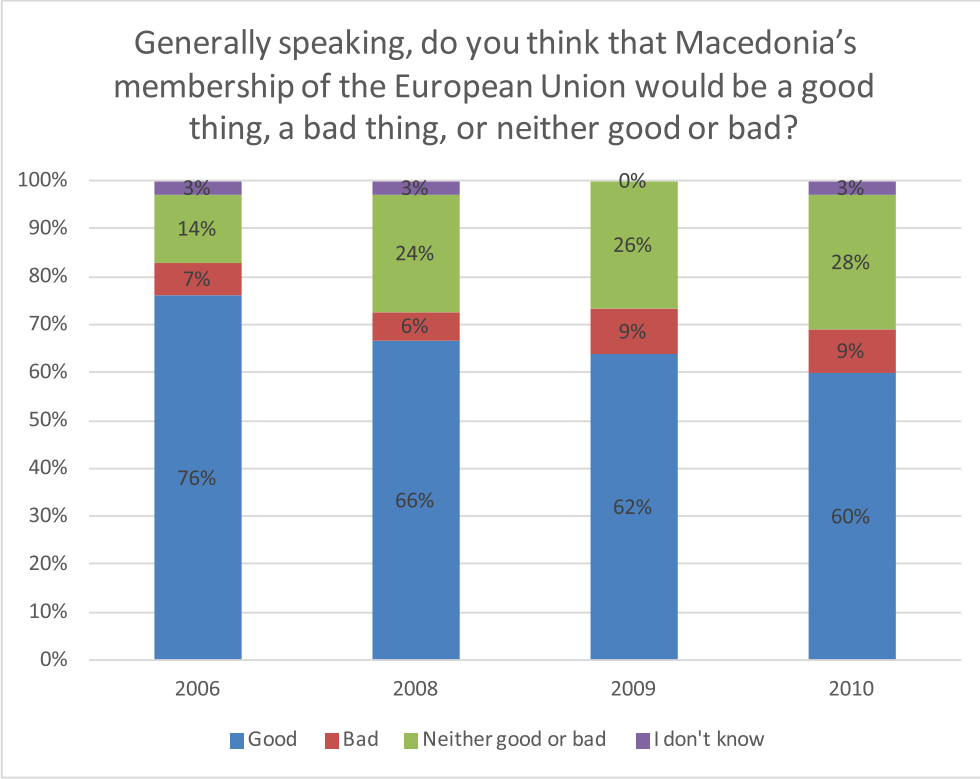


Source: International Republican Institute

This downward trend in the support for the process of European integration is indicative in the findings of two other datasets that use slightly different but somewhat complementary methodology in measuring public attitudes towards the European Union. Thus, Gallup Balkan Monitor uses the standard Eurobarometer question which introduces a degree of valuation of EU membership (Figure 3). Although these data are limited to the period from 2006 to 2010, they clearly reflect the downward trend in the evaluation of Macedonia's membership in the EU. Whilst in the year 2006, 76% of the

population in Macedonia considered EU membership a good thing, that number in less than four years fell to 60%.

Figure 3: Distribution of attitudes – "Generally speaking, do you think that Macedonia's membership of the European Union would be a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good or bad? " (2006, 2008, 2009, 2010).



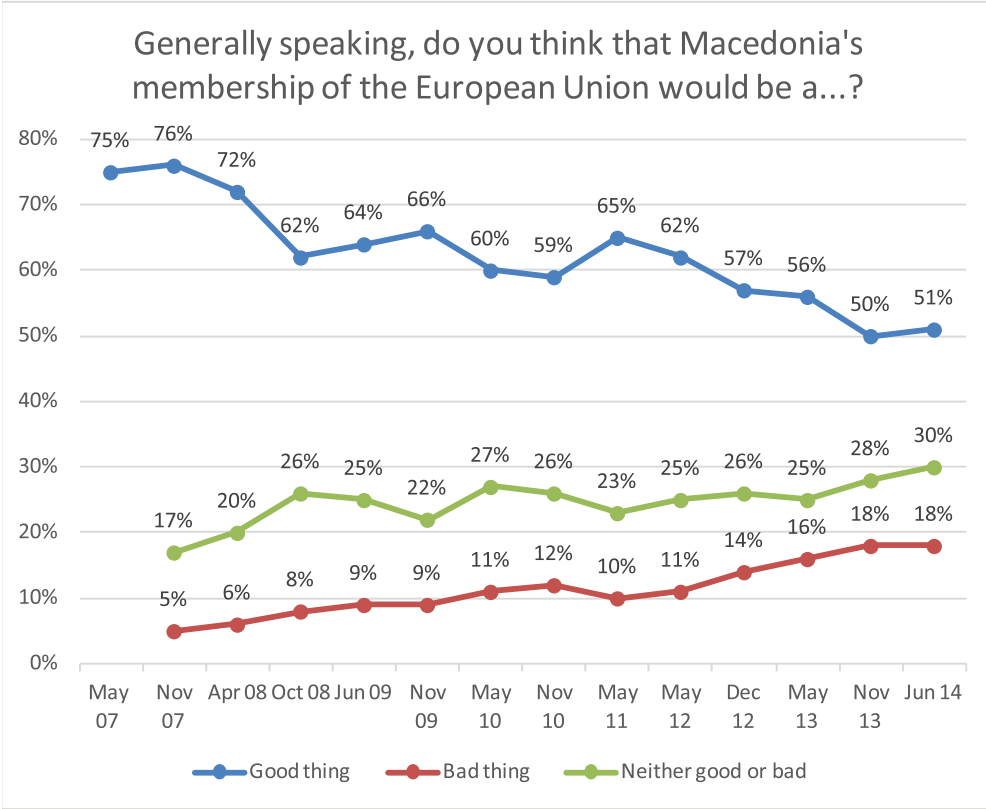
Source: Gallup Balkan Monitor

In this context, the Eurobarometer dataset gives a final confirmation of the fall of support for the European integration process. This research component of the European Commission measures support for membership through two standardized questions which for the first time have been implemented in polls in Macedonia in 2007[22]. Unlike other databases, in this case the progression of the downward trend of support for

22 Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the European Union would be a good thing, a bad thing or neither good or bad?; Taking everything into account, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has/would on balance benefited/benefit or not from being a member of the European Union?

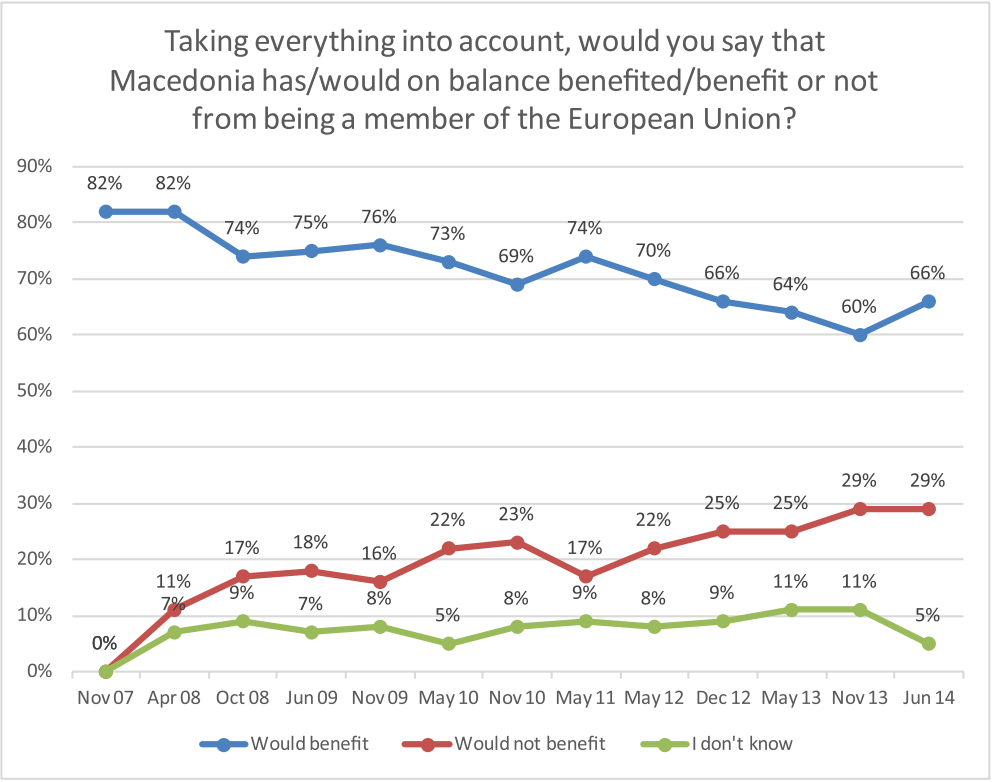
EU membership in particular time sequences is not entirely straightforward. However, if we analyse the long term distribution of frequencies, the declining support cannot be doubted. Thus, if in 2007 75% of Macedonians believed that Macedonia's membership in the EU is a good thing, in 2014 these percentages have been drastically reduced to 51% (Figure 4). Similar trends can be perceived in regards to the anticipated benefits from EU membership. Consequently, if in 2007 82% of the population expected Macedonia to benefit from EU membership , by the end of the first half of 2014 66% of the population believe that the country would benefit from being a member of the EU (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Distribution of attitudes – "Generally speaking, do you think that Macedonia's membership of the European Union would be a ..? " (May 2007 – June 2014)



Source: Eurobarometar

Figure 5: Distribution of attitudes – "Taking everything into account, would you say that Macedonia has/would on balance benefited/benefit or not from being a member of the European Union?" (November 2007 – June 2014)



Source: Eurobarometar

A comparative overview of the above data indicates a rather high degree of consistency of public opinion research and strong validity of the general trends of support for Macedonia's EU membership in the last decade. Despite the obvious methodological reservations arising from the different design of the consulted datasets, their complementarity is confirmed by the high degree of overlap of the trends within the same time sequences. They clearly differentiate the two stages in the development of public support for the European integration process, i.e. consistent high level of support in the period from 2004 to 2009 and its incremental decline in the period 2010-2014.

Such distribution of public attitudes is not surprising and it follows a logical dynamic. It accurately tracks the dynamics of the Macedonian accession process to the EU as it is transformed in relation to several historical points of reference in the development of relations between Macedonia and the EU. The high levels of support in the period up to 2010 reflects the impact of two key developments in the accession process in that period, the candidate status in 2005 and the recommendation to start accession negotiations in 2009. It was during these two time periods that the support for Macedonia's membership in the EU has been at its highest level. On the other hand, the constant decline in the support for the process of European integration is proportional to the decline of the credibility of the enlargement policy in Macedonia and the Macedonian stalled accession process which is reflected in the blockade of the accession negotiations. This decline began in 2010 and coincides with the beginning of the period of stagnation of the EU accession process. The downward trend ultimately shows that the attempts to introduce new tools for facilitating the improvement of the accession process, such as the High Level Accession Dialogue, have had no effect on public opinion in Macedonia.

4. 2. Determinants of support for the European integration process

As previously explained, the factors affecting public support for the process of European integration can be grouped into three general categories: utilitarian, identity-based and cues from political elites. In this context, the Macedonian case is interesting insofar as the analysis of the determinants of support for the process of European integration points to a correlation between the dynamics of support and all three explanatory models. Despite some differences in the

intensity of their impact, the Macedonian case detects valid complementarity of the three groups of factors in explaining the trends of support for European integration.

Previous comparative studies of Western, Central and Eastern Europe have confirmed the importance of the rationalist-utilitarian model in explaining support for the European integration process. The Macedonian case is no exception since the economic interest of the public in determining the support for EU membership appears to be a major factor for the high levels of support. Economic factors are dominant in the explanation of the decision to support Macedonia's membership in the EU. In this context, data from the latest public opinion survey conducted by the IDSCS in September 2014 is a good indicator of this argument (Table 2 and 3). Out of the 80% of the general population that supports Macedonia's future membership in the EU, a majority of public attitudes suggest that economic parameters are determinants of their decision to support the membership perspective. Thus, 29% of respondents identify improvement in living standards as the main reason for their support of EU membership, while further 26% associate their support with a decrease in unemployment. If we look at the other antipode, i.e. the decision against EU membership, we have again the dominant position of economic factors. Consequently, out of the 14% of the general population that oppose Macedonia's membership in the EU, one third base their decision on their own perception of the expected deterioration in living standards as a result of EU membership, and a further 13% do not support the process because they are afraid that EU membership will jeopardize the Macedonian economy.

Table 2: Distribution of attitudes – "What is your reason for deciding to vote FOR membership of Macedonia in the EU"(September 2014)	
What is your reason for deciding to vote FOR membership of Macedonia in the EU	%
Improvement of the standard of living	29
Decrease of unemployment	26
Improvement of democracy	10
Employee mobility/ easier access to jobs abroad	3
Belonging to the "European family of states"	2
Improved security and stability of the country	27
I don't know/No answer	2
Total	100

Source: IDSCS

Table 3: Distribution of attitudes – "What is your reason for deciding to vote AGAINST membership of Macedonia in the EU "(September 2014)	
What is your reason for deciding to vote AGAINST membership of Macedonia in the EU	%
Worsening standard of living	33
Threats to the Macedonian economy	13
Attempts to change the constitutional name	11
Loss of national identity	13
We will became dependent on Brussels	11
Loss of sovereignty and independence of the country	7
EU does not like us	6
I don`t know/no answer	6

Source: IDSCS

The utilitarian nature of public attitudes doesn't seem to be a subject to significant fluctuations and has been constant throughout the time period that is the subject of this study. Thus, the available data from IDSCS that measured the

anticipated positive effect of EU membership on several social categories in the period 2003-2007 again point to the influence of economic factors in how the public perceives the process of European integration. As shown in Table 4, also in this case the variable 'economic development' dominates the distribution of perceptions. The somewhat weaker frequency of percentages for this variable in 2007 is replaced with the support of two new categories that are also influenced by economic issues (unemployment and quality of life in general).

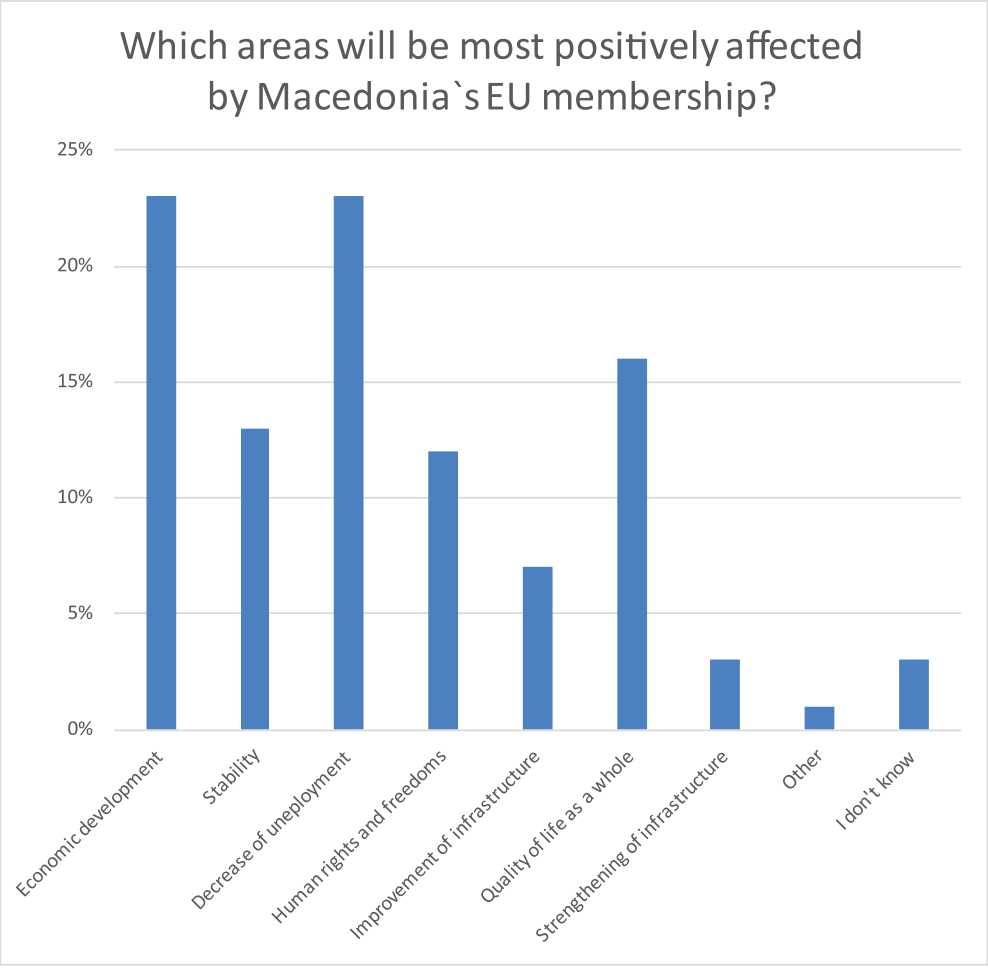
Table 4: Distribution of attitudes – "What will be the most positive outcome of Macedonia`s membership in the EU?" (2003-2007)						
What will be the most positive outcome of Macedonia`s membership in the EU	December 03	May 04	December 04	November 05	April 06	February 07
Economic development	51.30%	51.80%	48.50%	59.80%	55.90%	34.60%
Foreign investments	9.70%	16.40%	10.70%	6.90%	8.60%	7.80%
Domestic policy	7.60%	4.70%	4.80%	2.60%	3.40%	3.70%
Stability	15.90%	7.10%	12.70%	7.40%	9%	5%
Opening of the EU market	4.90%	3.80%	2.60%	4.70%	2.60%	0.70%
Cultural traditions	0.70%	0.20%	0.20%	0.30%		
Human rights	7.20%	3%	5%	2.60%	3%	1%
Technical assistance	0.30%	0.80%		0.40%	0.30%	
Decrease of unemployment						14.10%
Decrease of corruption						2.20%
Agriculture						0.40%
Quality of life as a whole						12.40%
Visa liberalization		6%	6.60%	8.60%	12.60%	5.60%
Education						0.80%
Other						2.10%
I don't know	2.40%	6.30%	8.90%	6.70%	4.60%	9.10%

Source: IDSCS

If we take a look at the distribution of attitudes in regards to the same question in 2014 (Figure 6), it is obvious that the Macedonian public perceives the benefits from the

process of European integration through economic lenses. Here, the cumulative percentage of economic performance (economic development, reducing unemployment, improving the infrastructure and quality of life in general) significantly exceeds the value of the other categories.

Figure 6: Distribution of attitudes – "Which areas will be most positively affected by Macedonia`s EU membership?" (September 2014)



Source: IDSCS

The data above confirm the validity of the material interests as a determinant of the support for the process of European integration in Macedonia. In the Macedonian case it is evident that the support is much more manifested through sociotropic

rather than through egoistic calculation of costs and benefits of future EU membership. When analyzing the distribution of positive attitudes vis a vis EU membership through the demographic categories of education and occupation, we see that in the Macedonian case there is no corresponding variation of support. Rather, it is consistent across all demographic categories, with almost no fluctuations in the support among those respondents with relatively high or low social capital[23]. This validates the argument that the support for the European integration process in Macedonia is not based on current economic effects of the European integration process, but on the anticipation of future economic benefits from that process. It is to a large extent a function of a process of internalization of the perception of the EU as a club of rich and developed countries, and much less a result of a perception of current benefits from the accession process.

However, despite the high degree of explanatory power of the rationalist-utilitarian model when it comes to the long-term determinants of support for the process of European integration, this model cannot fully explain the decline of support in the last 5 years, even though the influence of the material and economic interests have proved to be consistent throughout the entire period of observation, including the period of the declining support for EU membership. Hence, the trend of support for Macedonia's membership in the EU in the last five years is more a result of the impact of identity based factors and value parameters.

Namely, as previously mentioned, the downward trend of support for EU membership is a reflection of the blockade of Macedonia's progress in the accession process. The primary reason for this slowdown is the name dispute between

23 Thus in the IDSCS research of September 2014, the support for Macedonia`s membership in the EU in all categories of education ranges in intervals of + - 2% from the average of 80%. It is similar in the categories of profession, where the support ranges from 75% to 86%.

Macedonia and Greece, whose resolution was imposed by Greece (that took the role of a veto actor) as a condition to deblock the accession process. Moreover, this issue touches deeply upon very sensitive issues of identity and statehood and democratic values in Macedonia that substantially affect the public perceptions on EU`s conditionality policy that arises from this dispute. However, the downward trend of the public support for Macedonia's membership in the EU is to a much lesser extent a result of an emergence of an authentic Eurosceptic energy, but it is rather a more complementary response to the consequences arising from the name dispute. Thus, one of the most important identity factors that determine the level of support in a number of European countries, the distribution of exclusive and inclusive identity, in the Macedonian case has an extremely marginal role.

The results shown in Table 5 indicate that in Macedonia a large majority of the citizens manifest exclusive identity. Despite that, this distribution of attitudes does not have a negative impact on the degree of support for EU membership since 76% of the respondents that manifest exclusive identity at the same time support the Macedonian membership in the EU. Hereby, only 13% of the opponents of Macedonia's membership in the EU has based its position on the fear of loss of national identity (see Table 3).

Table 5: Distribution of attitides – "Above all, do you feel like?" (September 2014)	
Above all, do you feel like?	%
Only Macedonian / Albanian / other	69
Macedonian/Albanian/other and European	20
European and Macedonian/Albanian /Other	6
Only European	3
I don't know	2
Total	100

Source: IDSCS

However, the impact of identity issues become much more obvious if we insert the effects of the name dispute. Thus, if conditioned with changing of the constitutional name of the state, the support for Macedonia's membership in the EU falls to only 26%. On the other hand, additional 63% support Macedonia`s EU membership however without any concessions in regards to the constitutional name (Table 6). The role of the identity based issues in the support for EU membership becomes even more indicative if analyzed through the prism of one of the key demographic markers of identity i.e. ethnicity.

The name dispute has been incrementally disrupting the interethnic cohesion on the prospects for Macedonia's membership in the EU. Namely, in the last few years there has been a significant gap and increased discrepancies in the support for EU membership between the ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in Macedonia. Thus, in the first half of 2014, only about 6% of ethnic Macedonians support the idea of Macedonia to join the EU with a changed name, compared to 75% of ethnic Albanians for whom EU membership has priority over the name. Conversely, when it comes to Macedonia`s EU membership under its constitutional name, this idea is supported by 78% of the ethnic Macedonians versus 13% of ethnic Albanians. Moreover, as it is seen from the data presented in Table 7, with relative oscillations in 2014, this ethnic gap in support for European integration has been significantly increased in the last four years.

Table 6 : Distribution of attitudes – "Would you like/support Macedonia to become a member of the EU?" (2014)						
Attitude	May 2014			September 2014		
	General results	Ethnic Macedonians	Ethnic Albanians	General results	Ethnic Macedonians	Ethnic Albanians
Yes, even if the name is changed	25,2%	5,6%	75,1%	26%	15%	61%
Yes, with keeping the name	59,3%	77,8%	13,4%	63%	74%	28%
No	11,8%	13,8%	5,1%	6%	7%	2%
I don't know	3,1%	2,1%	5,7%	4%	3%	8%
No answer	0,6%	0,7%	8%	1%	1%	

Source: IDSCS

Table 7: Distribution of attitudes – "NATO/EU or keeping the name of Republic of Macedonia" (2011 and 2013)						
Attitude	2011			2013		
	General results	Ethnic Macedonians	Ethnic Albanians	General results	Ethnic Macedonians	Ethnic Albanians
Keeping the name even if it stalls Euro-Atlantic integration	39,6	43,6	31,1	49,9	64,9	14,8
Euro Atlantic integration is more important even if it means a compromise	40,5	35	53,2	29,4	12,7	68
I do not agree with neither of these two statements	16,1	17,6	11,6	17	19,4	12,1
I don't know/no answer	3,9	3,9	4,1	3,7	3	5,1

Source: MCMS/IDSCS

However, these data ultimately do not imply the existence of identity induced negative odium towards the process of European integration per se. If the name issue is extracted from the equation, than the cumulative percentages of support for Macedonia's membership in the EU in both ethnic communities are approaching the barrier of 90%. If we add the degree of how personally important the Macedonian EU integration is to the respondents (Table 8), which currently exceeds 80%, then ultimately it can be concluded that the opposition to EU integration in Macedonia is minimal.

Table 8: Distribution of attitudes – "How important is for you Macedonia to become a member of the EU" (2014)

How important is for you Macedonia to become a member of the EU?	May 2014	September 2014
It is very important	41,4	48
Fairly important	33,4	36
Fairly irrelevant	8,5	5
Not important at all	14	10
I don't know	2,2	1
No answer	0,4	0
Total	100	100

Source: IDSCS

Finally, the Macedonian example is interesting also in terms of measuring the impact of cues from political elites and political parties on the public perception of the European integration process . The Macedonian case seems to resonate very well with the basic assumption of this model that the strong support of public opinion for the process of European integration depends on the degree of consensus among the political elites on EU membership. If one looks at the party system in Macedonia, it can be noticed that there are no openly Eurosceptic parties. This deficit of organized political and social elites that promote Eurosceptic agendas undoubtedly reflects the strong support

for Macedonia's membership in the EU eventhough the process is in a deadlock. When virtually there is no relevant political party or civic association that openly opposes the accession process and eventual EU membership and when there is a clear lack of Eurosceptic opinion makers, the likelihood of development of Eurosceptic energy is very small.

However, the fact that in Macedonia there are no divergent party views on the general interest for EU membership, does not mean that there is no conflict between the political elites about the management of the accession process and the degree of priority of the process of European integration in the government's agenda. Consequently, in recent years there is an evident cleavage between political elites (primarily between the two major political parties) about the government's commitment to the process of European integration. Hence, in many occasions the opposition parties have criticized the ruling VMRO DPMNE for the slowdown of the accession process, the spread of non-European sentiments and lack of will to change its policy on the name dispute at the expense of progress in the accession process. Hence, this inter-party conflict arises as a complementary determinant of the fall of the public support for EU membership. On the other hand, VMRO DPMNEs firm policy of intransigency in the negotiations over the name dispute, should result in reduced support of the European integration process among its supporters. At the same time, the decline of support would be reflected by the views of the citizens who are not supporters of political parties and which therefore are not exposed to cues from political parties. This thesis is partially confirmed if we analyze the results of the IDSCS survey conducted in September 2014. (Table 9) If we compare the attitudes of the biggest supporters of the four political parties we will see that supporters of VMRO DPMNE in lowest percentage support Macedonia's membership in the EU if it is conditioned by changing of the name of the state, i.e. 10% versus 39.5% among supporters of the Social Democratic Union and 70% or more among

supporters of the Democratic Union for Integration and the Democratic Party of the Albanians. If the name dispute is removed as a factor, then support within the supporters of VMRO-DPMNE significantly increases to 83%, whilst the support among supporters of the Social Democratic Union is 59%, and in the case of the Democratic Party of the Albanians and the Democratic Union for Integration the support is 30 % or less. On the other hand, the highest percentage of negative attitudes towards EU membership of 11% are associated with exactly those respondents who would not vote for any party. 7% of the supporters of VMRO-DPMNE also do not support EU membership, versus 2% of the supporters of the Social Democrats. However, these findings point towards a relative correlation since they derive from a single opinion poll. They could become more relevant if they show consistency across multiple methodologicaly compatible datasets obtained through an extended period of time.

Table 9: Cross tabulation– Support for EU membership (with or without compromise for the constitutional name) with voting orientation at the next elections (2014)

Would you like/support Macedonia to become EU member state?	VMRO - DPMNE	SDSM	DUI	DPA	None	I would not like to say	I don't know
Yes, even if the entrance in the EU is conditioned by the change of the constitutional name	9.8%	39.4%	75.9%	69.2%	43.3%	19.9%	16.4%
Yes, but with no concessions regarding the constitutional name	83.3%	58.6%	22.2%	30.8%	45.3%	73.6%	78.8%
No	6.9%	2.0%	1.9%		11.3%	6.5%	4.8%

Source: IDSCS

5. Conclusion and future perspectives

The Macedonian public opinion on the process of European integration in the last 10 years has been characterized with particularly high support for Macedonia`s membership in the EU. In spite of the downwards trend in the last 5 years, the positive attitude of the public towards this issue is still rather high, whereby the number of opponents to the process of European integration is quite small. The findings of this study show that the dynamics of the support for Macedonia`s membership in the EU are influenced by the development, the velocity and the successfulness of the accession process.

The trends of particularly high support correspond to the time intervals of the greatest achievements in the accession process, while the fall of the support for EU membership is a reflection of the stagnation of the EU integration agenda in Macedonia. These dynamics of public attitudes have been analyzed through the prism of three factors of public opinion formation that appear to be key determinants of the support of the European integration process in Macedonia: utilitarian, identity based and cues from political elites.

The high support of EU membership is mostly a consequence of the utilitarian calculations of costs and benefits. The Macedonian public perceives the European integration process through the utilitarian-economic lenses. Public attitudes in regards to this issue are conceived primarily through the prism of material benefits that result from the EU integration process. However, the findings of this study show a much higher relevance of sociotropic over individual aspects of public attitude formation.

Taking into consideration the lack of information within

the public on the characteristics and implications of the European integration process, as well as the poor exposure to supranational economic pressures that arise from the integration process, the probability for individuals to base their support for EU membership on their personal experience is much lower. On the contrary, the findings of this study reveal the sociotropic nature of the Macedonian public opinion, since the high support for EU membership has been based on calculations of and believes in the expected future material benefits from the process of EU integration. Consequently, for most citizens, EU membership means realization of the hopes for better standard of living and achievement of the stereotypical picture of the EU as a club of rich and highly developed countries.

In addition, the high support and the lack of significant Eurosceptic energy to a certain extent is a result of the social and political consensus on the importance of the accession process and EU membership. Cues from political elites have been confirmed as a factor of high support for the EU integration process. It is additionally strengthened by the lack of a genuine public debate regarding the long-term implications of the integration process.

On the other hand, the findings of this study show that identity based factors play a crucial role in the explanation of the gradual downfall of the support for EU membership in the last five years. As we have previously confirmed, this downward trend is a direct consequence of the name dispute that at the same time is the main reason for the deadlock of the accession process. The analyses of the public attitudes shows that this dispute has a great symbolic value for the ethnic Macedonians, since it implies a sense of identity and cultural threat and, as such, it increasingly determines the manner of public opinion formation on the process of European integration. In addition, this relation between the name dispute and the accession process causes cleavages along ethnic lines. While ethnic

Macedonians prioritize identity cohesion with the preference not to change the name of the country even with the risk of a blockade of the accession process, in the ethnic Albanian camp this problem does not affect the support for EU membership.

These conjuctures of the accession process have at least two implications for the near future. The longer the waiting period for accession lasts, the bigger the probability that the support for that process will continue to decrease. If the deadlock of the accession process in Macedonia continues on a mid or long term basis, we can realistically expect the support for this process to go further down.

This tendency may have even more serious implications on the interethnic cohesion in Macedonia, since there is a high possibility that in such conditions the ethnic divisions could grow. On the other hand, as previously argued, the name dispute is not manifested as a significant generator of Eurosceptic energy. If we remove the dispute as an intervening variable, than the support for Macedonia`s membership in the EU reaches the 90% mark without any significant discrepancies along ethnic lines. This eventually proves that in Macedonia the myth of the attractive power of the European Union didn't lose its potency and that EU membership remains a priority for the Macedonian public.

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