

Left-right and the European Parliament vote in 2004

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Abstract (360 words):

The meaning and importance of the left-right divide is well established, both for legislative and European Parliament elections. However, the conditions under which the left-right cleavage becomes more or less important in explaining the vote are clearly understudied. This paper aims at determining under what conditions the left-right divide becomes more or less important in explaining voting choices, and if these conditions are at work both in established and consolidating democracies. Using the survey data from the European Election Study 2004 concerning the 21 EU member states, the present paper has two major goals. The first is to examine whether the ideological location of citizens – in terms of left-right self-placement — has a different impact on the vote in different types of democratic regime, defined in terms of the contrast between former communist countries and the remaining western democracies. Our second goal is to examine whether this contrast resists the introduction of controls for three other factors hypothesized to make a difference in the extent to which left-right orientations have a greater influence on the vote: the permissiveness of electoral system; the clarity of policy alternatives provided by the party system; and the particular type of party alignments along both the left-right and anti-pro integration scales that tend to characterize each country also affect the extent to which ideological orientations affect the vote. Our findings show that once all the contextual variables are included in the model, the impact of left-right self-placement becomes a stronger (rather than weaker) predictor of the vote in post-communist countries than in the group of established democracies.

Key words: left-right; electoral behaviour; European elections

Left-right and the European Parliament vote in 2004

The importance and meaning of the left-right divide in mass politics

Since the French Revolution, the idea of a left-right divide has gained great importance in modern mass politics, explaining why Lapouze (1981: 56) views it as a type of 'political Esperanto'. The left-right political cleavage has functioned as a schema to classify ideologies; as a device to categorize parties and candidates' political orientations and policy proposals; as a communication code between politicians, the mass media and citizens; and as an instrument helping electors cope with the complexities of the political realm and arrive at political decisions (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990: 205).

It is true that, from the 1950s onwards, various authors have argued that we are witnessing 'the end of ideology' (Bell, 1960; Lipset, 1981), or, more recently, 'the end of history' (Fukuyama, 1989), all pointing out the notion that, in recent times, the major differences between left and right have been overcome (Giddens, 1994; 2000). At an empirical level, Mair has shown a decline of ideological polarization between the major political parties in several Western European democracies during the 1980s and the 1990s (Mair, 1998: 131-6). However, it has also been argued that these theses are themselves ideological and, more importantly, have been (at least partly) falsified by the emergence of the 'new left' and 'new right' since the 1960s and, more recently, by the revival of fundamentalism and nationalism (Heywood, 2003: 319-23; Eatwell: 279-90; Tormey, 2004: especially 38-70). Bobbio (1994: 95-101), for example, has noted that social inequalities remain a very important political issue, although now more at a world level (separating the North and the South), thus providing a renewed base for the left-right cleavage to maintain its prominence. Also, empirical studies with a wider time perspective have shown that, in many countries, the decline in ideological polarization is far from a linear phenomenon (Budge and Klingemann, 2001: 19-50; Gunther and Diamond, 2003: 187, 191-3).

Ever since Inglehart and Klingemann's seminal paper (1976), there has been a consensus that (at least in Western Europe) individuals' self-placement on the left-right axis has had three major components: social, ideological and partisan. The social component refers to the connections between citizens' locations in the social

structure, plus the corresponding social identities, and their left-right orientations (1976: 245). The value, issue or ideological component refers to the link between an individual's left-right self-placement and her attitude towards the major value conflicts in Western democratic mass politics, be they socioeconomic, religious or 'new politics' (1976: 244; Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1995; 1997). Finally, the partisan component of left-right self-placement refers to the part of any individual's ideological orientations reflecting mainly partisan loyalties (1976: 244; Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1997; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990: 207). A similar picture was found for East Central Europe (Markowski, 1997; Kitschelt et al, 1999, pp. 223-308; for the level of diffusion of left-right orientations among post-communist electorates, see Barnes, 2002). Studies on electoral behaviour in legislative elections have shown that individuals' left-right self-placement is a major predictor of their voting choices, and that, in fact, its importance has been increasing in many countries over recent decades (Franklin et al, 1992; Gunther and Montero, 2001).

There is, therefore, considerable evidence to suggest that there is little empirical support for the 'end of ideology' thesis, and that, particularly at the individual level, the left-right divide is still a very important information economizing device enabling electors to cope with political complexities, mainly in Western Europe, and a similar picture has been found for East Central Europe (Markowski, 1997; Kitschelt et al, 1999). Thus, the meaning and importance (namely in explaining the vote) of the left-right divide is well established. Interestingly, European Parliament elections do not seem to be particularly different in this respect. As "second-order" elections, European elections tend to be dominated by considerations pertaining to the national political arena, where the role of left-right orientations is predominant. Thus, several studies have shown the importance of the left-right divide to explain voting choices in EP elections (Brug & Franklin, 2005; Brug & Eijk, 1999; Eijk, & Franklin & Oppenhuis, 1996; Eijk, Franklin, & Brug, 1999).

However, the conditions under which the left-right cleavage can become more or less important in explaining the vote in European elections remain somewhat understudied. This paper seeks to determine under what conditions the left-right divide is more or less important in explaining the vote in EP elections. We use European Elections as a "laboratory" to understand electoral behaviour in general, precisely because these electoral contests take place simultaneously under different

social, political and institutional conditions. Thus, using the survey data from the European Election Study 2004 the present paper has two major goals.

The first goal is to examine whether the ideological location of citizens – in terms of left-right self-placement — has a different impact on the vote in different types of democratic regime. Several studies have suggested that the most consequential difference is between the former communist democracies and the remaining cases. However, we will examine whether this particular difference between democratic systems is indeed consequential and, above all, if it resists the introduction of several other contextual variables not considered in previous research. Two of those variables are readily familiar. First, as research on national elections already suggests, countries whose electoral system are less permissive — i.e., with greater barriers to representation of smaller parties — tend to foster a lower influence of left-right orientations on the vote, by giving incentives to parties and party leaders to adopt centrist and catch-all strategies and appeals. We wish to examine whether this is also true in the case of EP elections.

Second, since this relationship between institutional features of the electoral system and the ideological distinctiveness and clarity of partisan alternatives is only a probabilistic one, we will also test the hypothesis that the actual (perceived) clarity of policy alternatives available to citizens also makes a difference in the extent to which voters resort to the left-right heuristics in order to make voting choices. Finally, we will test the hypothesis that the particular type of party alignments along **both** the left-right and anti-pro integration scales that tend to characterize each country also affect the extent to which ideological orientations affect the vote. More specifically, we will test whether left-right orientations become a more consequential explanation of the vote in EP elections when competition within the party system is based on reinforcing or congruent alignments in terms of both left-right and anti-pro integration stances on the part of political parties.

In the following (second) section, we specify our hypotheses (and the rationale behind each of them), the data used, and the methods employed. Then, in the third section, we describe the distribution of the independent variables in the 21 countries/political systems on which data are available. In the fourth section, our hypotheses are tested against empirical data. In the final section, we present some concluding remarks.

Hypotheses, Data, and Methods

Our initial hypothesis is that the impact of left-right orientations in voting choices in EP elections should be lower in the former communist countries. The post-communist consolidating democracies have been seen as particularly distinctive from others given the suppression of class and religious differences, the totalitarian or post-totalitarian nature of previous regimes, and the social structural conditions inherited from the communist past. These have arguably contributed to be a ‘flattening’ of the social landscape, with the consequence of weakening political and ideological attachments and rendering the left-right schema less useful for voters (Lawson, Rommele & Karasimeonov, 1999; White et al. 1997). Furthermore, as more recent democratic regimes, they are less likely to exhibit high levels of party system institutionalization — stable and legitimized organizations, regular patterns of party competition, and the existence of relatively strong attachments to existing parties on the part of voters. Where these elements are absent, party ideological placements and electoral choices tend to exhibit high levels of instability and fluidity (Mainwaring 1999; Mainwaring and Torcal 2005). This general hypothesis has found confirmation in the work of Brug and Franklin (2005). However, they have also shown that this difference between the former communist and the remaining countries is significantly reduced when other contextual factors are held constant. Thus, our first goal is to examine if this difference between democratic systems is indeed consequential in and of its own and, above all, if it resists the introduction of several other contextual variables not considered in previous research.

Thus, our second set of hypotheses concerns electoral institutions and the way party competition is structured along the left-right and anti-pro EU integration dimensions. Firstly, we know that, at least since the work of Anthony Downs (1957: 114-141), two-party systems are usually associated with a unimodal distribution of voters’ preferences over the left-right continuum, with most of the voters concentrated in the central positions of this political divide, and with political parties competing mainly for the median (centrist) voter. Thus, in two party systems there is a drive towards ideological moderation. On the contrary, multiparty systems are usually associated with multimodal distributions of voters’ preferences over the left-right continuum. Moreover, the different parties have more incentives to concentrate their appeals in specific segments of the electorate (socially, political, and ideologically defined). Thus, in the latter systems there is usually a drive towards ideological

polarization, and sometimes even to centrifugal competition. In a similar vein, see Sartori (1992) and Sani & Sartori (1983). In addition, it is well established in the literature about electoral and party systems that there is a strong association between the level of proportionality of the electoral system and the degree of fragmentation of the party system (see for example, Lijphart, 1994). Furthermore, even more to the point, Norris (2004) has shown that electoral behavior in systems with higher thresholds seems to be less determined by cleavage politics, including left-right ideology, given the incentives of parties in those systems to adopt cross-cutting and catch-all appeals.

Therefore, bearing in mind these theoretical contributions, we will determine if the more or less permissive character of the European Parliament electoral system (measured through the effective threshold) influences the strength of the impact of the left-right divide on the vote. Note that this variable is measured at a macro-level, i.e., as a constant for each country/political system. Our second hypothesis states that *the higher the permissiveness of the electoral system the higher the impact of the left-right orientations on the vote* (except if stated otherwise, we are always referring to the vote in EP elections). It might be argued that, although this is indeed expected, there are other plausible possibilities. Namely, that (especially in European Elections) the more permissive an electoral system is the higher the probability that it allows the entrance of new parties that do not compete (at least mainly) on the left-right axis. We acknowledge that is a real possibility. However, we also believe that it is mainly an empirical question for us to decide if a more permissive electoral system indeed increases (or depress) the importance of left-right self-placement on the vote.

Furthermore, we need to take into account the fact that the relationship between the electoral system and the extent to which the party system provides clear and distinct policy alternatives is merely probabilistic. To put it another way, we can find fragmented party systems both with high and with low levels of ideological polarization — remember Sartori's (1992) definition of “segmented pluralism” and “polarized pluralism” — because the permissiveness of the electoral system (or the party system format) only define conditions more or less propitious to the clarity of policy alternatives as they present themselves in the left-right spectrum. Consequently, we also need more direct measures of the construct.

One possible approach is to test if *party system polarization* influences the extent to which left-right self-placement influences the vote. Several studies have

documented the importance of ideological polarization at the systemic level to explain citizens' political attitudes and behavior (Nie & Andersen, 1974; Bartolini & Mair, 1990, pp. 193-211, 251-285; Knutsen & Kumlin, 2003; Berglund et al, 2003; Eijk et al, 2005; Freire, 2006). However, none of these studies used party system ideological polarization to explain the differential impact of left-right self-placement on the vote (in European or legislative elections), or they have done it for a very small set of countries (Eijk, Schmitt and Binder, 2005)¹. We expect that the more polarized are policy alternatives that the political parties present to the electorate, then the more easily the citizens can differentiate between parties on the left-right spectrum; the more prone they will be to think about left and right in terms of issues; and the greater is the likelihood that they will relate the left-right divide with social cleavages. Thus, in those conditions, the easier it will be for citizens to use the left-right as a short-cut to cope with the complexities of the political universe, and to decide in which parties to vote.

A second approach is to use the "measure of agreement" concerning parties' placements in the ideological scale. Several authors have used the level of "perceptual agreement" (the percentage of respondents in each survey/country that agrees in terms of parties' locations in the left-right scale) as a measure of the clarity of party positions (Brug, & Franklin, 2005; Eijk & Franklin & Oppenhuis, 1996; Eijk & Franklin & Brug, 1999). This measure has proved heuristic in previous studies, namely by interacting with the effects of left-right self-placement on the vote: the higher the "perceptual agreement", the higher the impact of that political cleavage. In this respect, we follow Eijk (2001) recommendation of the employment of "the measure of agreement". According to this author (2001: 325-326) "the specific case addressed (by that measure) involves the description of the degree of agreement amongst a group of individuals who express their preferences or perceptions in terms of a number of ordered categories. (...) To the extent that respondents express the same preference one may speak of *preferential agreement*. (...) The term *perceptual agreement* refers to the extent to which different people have the same perceptions." Thus, this article uses an alternative measure which is the "measure of agreement". In the present case, *it measures the respondents' agreement about the parties' locations*

¹ The only cases considered in the Eijk, Schmitt and Binder (2005) paper are Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

in the left/right scale in each system. All these measures, however, are alternatively used in this paper to test the same generic hypothesis: that *the higher the clarity of the policy alternatives provided by the party system, the higher the impact of left-right self-placement will be on the vote.*

Finally, we want to test the hypothesis that the relevance of citizens' left-right self-placement to predict EP vote should be contingent upon the particular structure of political contestation in each country, and particularly upon the way parties are positioned along the left-right and anti-pro EU integration political divides. There are four models of political conflict in the European Union (Steenbergen & Marks, 2004). The "international relations model" predicts that conflict in the European Union is structured around a single dimension: a continuum from "less integration (defend national sovereignty)" to "more integration (promote supranational governance)" (Steenbergen & Marks, 2004: 5-6). According to this model there is no relation between this conflict-axis and the historical left-right divide. The "regulation model" (Tsebelis & Garret, 2000) also predicts a single dimension of conflict over European integration, however it is completely subsumed under the left-right divide: the continuum goes from "left/high regulation at the EU level" to "right/ low regulation at the EU level", and the prominence of the left-right divide is explained by the second-order nature of EU politics vis-à-vis domestic politics. The other two models, the Hix-Lord model (Hix & Lord, 1997; Hix, 1999 and 2005) and the Hooghe-Marks model (Hooghe & Marks, 1999), predict two dimensions of conflict over European integration. However, while the Hix-Lord model predicts two orthogonal dimensions of competition (left vs. right and more vs. less integration), the Hooghe-Marks model predicts that the two dimensions (left vs. right and more vs. less integration) are neither completely orthogonal, neither fused. From the partial overlapping of this two dimensions results an opposition between "regulated capitalism" (on the left and more integration quadrant) vs. "neoliberalism" (on the right and less integration quadrant).

The evidence that resulted from testing these four models is rather mixed (Marks, 2004), but the major lesson is perhaps that the overlapping (or crosscutting) between the two dimensions of conflict varies across countries, issues, arenas, and actors (Marks, 2004; see also Bartolini, 2005; Ray, 2004; Taggart, 1998; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004; Hooghe & Marks & Wilson, 2002; Brinegar et al, 2004; Gabel & Hix, 2004). Our hypothesis is that such variation affects the extent to which left-right self-placements are consequential for voting decisions in EP elections. More

specifically, we know that the usefulness of the left-right scale for voters tends to increase when the nature of party competition within the party system involves a unidimensional alignments or reinforcing alignments (Kitschelt et al. 1999). Thus, according to our fourth hypothesis, *we should expect that in those countries where political parties' orientations towards European integration represents a political divide that is encapsulated by the left-right cleavage (i.e., where both dimensions of competition are congruent), citizens' left-right self-placement should also be a more relevant predictor of EP vote; the reverse should be true for those countries where the two dimensions of competition are not congruent.*

The independent variables mentioned above are all contextual variables measured at the macro-level. However, we also employ some independent variables measured at the individual-level namely: gender age; (a recoding of year of birth); education (age when respondent ended full-time education)²; subjective social class (a five-point scale ranging from working to upper class); religiosity (a recoding of the mass attendance variable); and unionization (a dichotomous variable with “0” not a member of a union and “1” self- or someone in the family is a member). The European Election Study (EES) 2004³ integrated database will be used in this paper. However, for several reasons it was not possible to include all 25 member states in the study. Firstly, it was not possible to field a survey in Malta. Also, Belgium, Lithuania and Sweden were removed from the database since their studies did not ask respondents certain key questions that are fundamental for our paper, namely q14_x and/or q22_x, i.e. those questions that ask respondents to place each party on a left-right scale, and on a pro- and anti- more European integration scale. Northern Ireland

² Those who were still studying were recoded using the year of birth variable. Also France, Poland and Slovakia had a different coding for the education variable and these were harmonized.

³ The data utilized in this publication were originally collected by the 2004 European Election Study research group. The group consisted of Stefano Bartolini (EUI Florence, Italy), Cees van der Eijk (now University of Nottingham, UK), Mark Franklin (Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, USA), Dieter Fuchs (University of Stuttgart, GFR), Michael Marsh (Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland), Hermann Schmitt (University of Mannheim, GFR), and Gabor Toka (Central European University, Budapest, Hungary). This study has been made possible by various grants. Neither the original collectors of the data nor their sponsors bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations published here. The data are still under embargo, except for the research directors referred above, and the national research directors in each country. The authors of the present paper are the national research directors of EES 2004 in Portugal.

was also excluded. Thus, the list of country cases included in our analysis are the following: Austria, Britain, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

Institutional and Political conditions for the impact of the left-right divide in each polity

This section presents the contextual data that, considering the hypotheses formulated above, is likely to condition the impact of the left-right divide in each country. The data can be divided into two types: political (parties' policy positions) and institutional (the effective thresholds of each electoral system for EP elections). We will first present the data for all countries in the EES. Finally, respondents' perceived congruence between parties positioning on the left-right scale and on the pro-anti European scale will be discussed in light of previous findings concerning the same measure (van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004).

Table 1 below presents the main characteristics of the electoral systems used in the countries being analyzed. All of the member-states use proportional electoral systems for the EP elections, even though formulas vary. The overwhelming majority of countries have single electoral districts, and average district magnitude is 24.8. Concerning the effective threshold, which is the contextual variable being used in the model below, it was computed as $75\% / (\text{Mean District Magnitude} + 1)$.⁴ The lower the effective threshold the more permissive in relation to the representation of smaller parties it is. Table 1 shows that, considering only the average values, there are no significant differences between post-communist countries and the others concerning this measure: the average thresholds for both sets of countries is 6.5%.

⁴ See Lijphart (1994; 1999).

Table 1: The Electoral Systems for EP Elections

Country	Electoral Formula	No MEPs	No of Districts	Mean M	Effective Threshold
Austria	Hare /d'Hondt	18	1	18	4.0
Britain	d'Hondt	75	11	6.8	9.6
Cyprus	PR.(n.a.)	6	1	6	10.7
Denmark	d'Hondt	14	1	14	5.0
Finland	d'Hondt	14	1	14	5.0
France	d'Hondt	78	8	9.8	6.9
Germany	Hare-Niemayer	99	1	99	5.0
Greece	Hagen-Bischoff	24	1	24	3.0
Ireland	STV	13	4	3.3	17.4
Italy	Hare	78	1	78	4.1^a
Luxembourg	Hagen-Bischoff	6	1	6	10.7
Netherlands	Hare /d'Hondt	27	1	27	2.7
Portugal	d'Hondt	24	1	24	3.0
Spain	d'Hondt	54	1	54	1.4
Average	-	37,9	2,4	27,4	6,5
Czech Rep	d'Hondt	24	1	24	3.0
Estonia	d'Hondt	6	1	6	10.7
Hungary	d'Hondt	24	1	24	5.0
Latvia	Sainte-Lague	9	1	9	7.5
Poland	d'Hondt	54	1	54	5.0
Slovakia	Hagen-Bischoff	14	1	14	5.0
Slovenia	d'Hondt	7	1	7	9.4
Average	-	19,7	1,0	19,7	6,5

Source: European Parliament, authors' own calculations.

^aIn the Italian case, we follow Farrell and Scully (2002) and take into account the allocation of seats on the basis of rankings on regional lists

Tables 2 and 3 presents indicators used to capture the extent to which voters perceive the policy positions of parties clearly and distinctively. As we can see in table 2, two alternative measures of party system polarization were computed. First, using voters' perceptions of parties' location in the left-right scale (left, 1; right, 10), we started by computing the ideological distance between the interpolated median⁵

⁵ The interpolated median is computed as follow:

First, define variables as follows:

M = the standard median of the responses;

nl = number of responses strictly less than M ;

ne = number of responses equal to M ;

ng = number of responses strictly greater than M ;

Second, the interpolated median IM is then computed as follows:

If ne is nonzero:

$$IM = M + (ng - nl) / (2ne)$$

If ne is zero:

positions in the left-right scale of the two extreme parties (one from the left, other from the right) with electoral representation in the European Parliament, and then the ideological distance between the interpolated median positions in the left-right scale of the two major parties (usually, these parties are one from the left, the other from the right; the only exceptions are: Ireland, Latvia, Estonia and Poland) in each polity.⁶ Then, we computed a first measure of party system polarization: *a weighted additive index of the two previous distances between the two pairs of parties*; the weighting factor is the proportion of the vote (in EP elections) for the two extreme and for the two major parties (see also van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004 for a different methodology). We also computed a second measure of party system polarization that also uses party positions in the left-right scale (according to voters' perceptions) as measured by the interpolated medians. After calculating the average value of all the interpolated medians in each system, we computed *the variance vis-à-vis the average value of the interpolated medians in each system*, which is our second indicator of party system polarization.⁷

$$IM = M.$$

⁶ According to Cees van der Eijk (in the spreadsheet used to calculate the "measure of agreement") "Ordered rating scales are often used to gauge respondents' opinions (i.e. "on a scale of 1 to x, how strongly do you agree with this statement?"), preferences (i.e. "where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to x, where 1 stands for <> and x stands for <>?") and perceptions (i.e. "where would you place this party/politician/etc. on a scale from 1 to x, where 1 stands for <> and x stands for <>?"). Traditionally, the arithmetic mean and the standard deviation (or some transformation of the latter) are used to describe such a frequency distribution in terms of central tendency and dispersion. In the case, of finite ordered rating scales these measures can be demonstrated to be biased (*by extreme values of the distribution*). With respect to the central tendency, see Huber and Powell (1994) and Herrera et al (1992), who recommended the interpolated median. With respect to dispersion, see Eijk (2001), who recommend the measure of agreement as an (inverse) of the standard deviation or measures based there upon."

⁷ Similar measures of ideological distances at the party system level were used in the following papers: Knutsen e Kumlin, 2005; Berglund et al, 2005; Freire, 2006. When using voters' perceptions of parties' location in the left-right divide, the major differences vis-à-vis the present article is that they used the "mean" for parties' locations and we used the "interpolated median" value. We believe that the latter value is more accurate because, first, it is less sensitive to extreme values of the distribution, and, second, it has got a more substantive meaning.

Table 2: Party Systems' Left-Right Polarization

Country	1st Polarization Indicator		2nd Polarization Indicator	
	Difference Median (IM) Two Major Parties	Difference Median (IM) Two Most Extreme Parties	Weighted Sum of Two Differences	L-R Variance Variance vis-à-vis mean value of interpolated medians
Austria	2.64	4.62	2.78	4.9
Britain	1.91	2.14	1.76	0.75
Denmark	3.00	6.42	2.76	6.75
Finland	2.17	6.57	3.72	5.23
France	3.92	8.14	3.39	8.36
Germany	2.91	5.77	2.82	4.73
Greece	2.77	7.28	3.23	9.84
Ireland	.27	3.97	1.80	3.97
Italy	5.72	8.00	5.00	5.88
Lux.	2.76	2.76	2.98	1.56
Netherlands	3.11	6.08	3.29	5.72
Portugal	2.96	5.70	4.36	7.41
Spain	4.96	6.32	6.40	5.6
Cyprus	7.66	7.66	8.13	14.73
Average	3.34	5.82	3.74	6.10
Czech Republic	7.76	7.76	7.78	10.88
Estonia	.78	3.06	1.51	1.83
Hungary	5.73	5.73	7.55	6.42
Latvia	.59	5.97	2.98	5.54
Slovakia	4.47	5.06	4.02	5.39
Slovenia	4.24	4.28	3.87	5.12
Poland	.84	6.44	2.58	5.5
Average Post- communist	3.49	5.47	4.33	5.81

The indicators do not all point exactly in the same direction. The ideological distance is smaller in post-communist countries between parties on the extremes of the party system, but higher if we take the two largest parties. However, due to weighting, the indicator which combines the previous two measures attributes a higher overall polarization on average to post-communist countries than to established democracies. The countries which are most polarized in this weighted index of polarization are Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary and Spain. The other indicator of party system polarization, i.e., the left-right variance indicator, provides a slightly different picture concerning the left-right polarization: the level of polarization is slightly lower, on average, in post-communist countries, than in the other group; and the countries with the largest polarization are Cyprus, Czech Republic, France and

Greece.⁸ Nevertheless, the correlation between the two measures of polarization employed here — weighted index and variance — is strong: .70. Besides, there is also a predictable correlation between the permissiveness of the electoral system and the extent to which the party system exhibits left-right integration polarization. The correlations, however, although they have the predicted signs (negative: higher threshold, less polarization) are not inordinately strong. The correlation between the weighted measure of left-right polarization and the effective threshold is -.19. Similarly, the correlation between the Left-Right variance indicator and the effective threshold for all countries is -.28.

Table 3 presents the average "measure of agreement" of respondents' positioning of the parties on the left-right scale. We applied the formula proposed by Eijk (2001) to obtain one "measure of agreement" for each party.⁹ Then we computed the mean "measure of agreement" for each country. On average, agreement of the positioning of parties is lower in post-communist party systems than in the rest of the countries in the sample. The countries where measure of agreement is largest are Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark and Spain. The correlation between this measure and the polarization measure shown above which combined the weighted polarization between the two main parties and the two extreme parties is strong, at .68 (significant at the .05 level), while its correlation with the electoral threshold is -.30 (significant at the .05 level).

⁸ However, it is important to note that this variance indicator is not a weighted indicator. We are working on a substitute weighted variance indicator which may yield results which are more congruent with the first polarization indicator shown above.

⁹ The Excel spreadsheet with the macro to calculate the "measure of agreement" was kindly furnished by Wouter van der Brug. For more explanations about how to compute the measure, etc., see Eijk, 2001.

Table 3: Average Measure of Agreement for each Country

Country	Measure of Agreement
Austria	.50
Britain	.34
Denmark	.56
Finland	.52
France	.45
Germany	.48
Greece	.43
Ireland	.36
Italy	.54
Luxemburg	.49
Netherlands	.54
Portugal	.42
Spain	.55
Cyprus	.76
Average	.49
Czech Republic	.63
Estonia	.36
Hungary	.45
Latvia	.47
Slovakia	.44
Slovenia	.33
Poland	.40
Average Post-communist	.44

The final contextual variable contained in our hypotheses is the extent to which left and right and a anti-pro Europe party stances exhibit congruence, i.e., the extent to which both orientations form a unidimensional map of political competition or not. Such congruence has been studied through the lens of voters' perceptions (van der Eijk, and Franklin, 2004), through Euromanifestos data (Gabel and Hix, 2004), through expert surveys (Hooghe, Marks, Wilson and Steenbergen and Scott, 2004), and MEP behavior (Thomassen, Noury, Voeten, 2004). We operationalized *congruence between the European integration issue and the left-right divide* in each country/political system in the following way. Using voters' perceptions of parties' location in left-right scale and in the European integration scale¹⁰ ("unification has already gone too far", 1; "unification should be pushed further", 10), we mapped for

¹⁰ The question (asked both for respondents' location and for parties' location) is stated in the following way: "Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a 10-point-scale. On this scale, 1 means unification 'has already gone too far' and 10 means it 'should be pushed further'. What number on this scale best describes your position?"

each country and each of the parties represented in the EP the interpolated median positions in each one of the above mentioned scales. In order to produce a summary measure of congruence, we simply computed the correlation of these interpolated median positions of all parties in each country, and used the absolute value of that correlation as an indicator of congruence. Thus, the exercise is identical to that performed by van der Eijk and Franklin in Ch. 2 of the Marks and Steenbergen book. However, it is not redundant for at least two reasons. Firstly, because the data used by the authors is from EES 1999, whereas we are using data from EES 2004. It is shown elsewhere that parties' positioning both on the left-right cleavage, and especially on the anti-pro integration stance has varied substantially over the years (Gabel, and Hix, 2004: 108-109). Secondly, due to the fact that for the first time seven post-communist countries plus Cyprus indicators on congruence are being presented.

**Table 4: Congruence between Left-Right and the European Issue
Correlation between Respondent's Median (IM) Placement of each Party on the
Left- Right Scale and the Anti-Pro European Scale (absolute values)**

Country	Congruence
Austria	.59
Britain	.47
Denmark	.32
Finland	.80
France	.01
Germany	.08
Greece	.45
Ireland	.94
Italy	.35
Luxembourg	.86
Netherlands	.59
Portugal	.71
Spain	.41
Cyprus	.95
Average	.54
Czech Republic	.39
Estonia	.91
Hungary	.50
Latvia	.99
Poland	.52
Slovakia	.96
Slovenia	.90
Average post-communist	.74
Average all countries	.60

Congruence between respondents' placement of parties on a left-right scale and on a pro-anti European scale *is substantially higher in the newer (post-communist) democracies*, independently of whether direction of the relationship is positive or negative. Also, the inverted U-curve is less present in these new members of the EU. Indeed, it is only found in the party placement of the Czech Republic, with all other post-communist countries exhibiting strong linear correlations, mostly positive.

Looking at all countries in the table (see also Graph 1 in Annex 1), average congruence is .60. Comparing with van der Eijk and Franklin's 2004 graphs, there seem to be no significant changes. In twelve countries, the correlation is positive, meaning that there is a tendency for right-wing parties to be viewed as more pro-integration than left-wing parties. This is especially true in Luxembourg, Ireland, Cyprus, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Latvia, cases where the correlations are particularly strong. In these countries, the correlation of the median (IM) perceptions of respondents concerning parties' positioning on the left-right scale and anti-pro European scale, is positive and equal to or higher than .86. In several other countries, where correlations are lower than in the cases mentioned above we can identify an inverted U-curve (see Annex 1). These are evident in the following cases: Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Portugal and the Netherlands. And in three countries, there is no discernable relationship between positioning of political parties on the left-right scale and on the anti-pro European scale, namely in France, Italy and Germany.

There are therefore three different patterns: an inverted u-curve; linear relationships or an orthogonal relationship. These patterns have been explained in two main ways. According to Brinegar, Jolly and Kitschelt (2004), the variation of party positioning regarding Europe is determined by the welfare state status quo in each country. Given that EU integration leads to policy harmonization, integration should be supported by right-wingers and opposed by left-wingers in leftist all encompassing social democratic states (Scandinavia). On the contrary, in residual, liberal welfare states (UK), the left should be more pro-european, since it expects national conditions to move from status quo to at least a conservative welfare state. In countries with conservative encompassing welfare states, (Germany, France, Italy) EU integration should not be significantly related to Left/Right ideology.

Another theory singles out extreme parties as the main determinants of the pattern of party positioning. Parties that are successful in the existing structure of

contestation have little incentive to politicize new issues, whereas parties at the margins of the political institutions try to change the structure of contestation. (Hooghe, et al, 2004). Whenever an inverted u-curve is not present this is due rather to the non-existence of extreme parties in the party system, or alternatively of the existence of only one extreme party, leading to a (positive or negative) linear association between the two variables (van der Eijk & Franklin 2004). Both theories may be explicative for our survey. The smaller incidence of the inverted u-curve in our graphs (Annex 1) may be a consequence of the fact that in our sample only parties who obtained representation in the 2004 EP elections were considered. These parties tend to be the more mainstream parties, considering the party system as a whole.

Testing the hypotheses

A preliminary question that needs to be addressed is whether voting decisions in the 2004 European Parliament elections can still be at all conceived as being affected by voters' left-right orientations. A large number of studies have suggested the "second-order" nature of EP elections, which implies, among other things, that they tend to be pervaded by concerns of the national political arena, where left-right orientations tend to predominate as guides to the vote. In this respect, the 2004 European elections still seems to follow this pattern.

Table 4 shows the results of two alternative regression analyses that test the effects of a series of conventional socio-demographic variables as well as individuals' left-right self-placement in two dependent variables. The first codes voting choices on the basis of mass perceptions of the chosen party's policy position. More specifically, each individual vote in a party that elected at least on MEP (Member of European Parliament) was coded as that party's location in the left-right axis, by use of the (interpolated) median perceptions of respondents concerning the ideological positioning of those parties (variables q14_1 to q14_4). However, we also cross-check the validity of this particular coding by running a second analysis where the dependent variable is coded with an externally imputed six-point ordinal scale based on the party families present in the EP, consistent with available expert surveys of the left-right policy positions of European party families (McElroy and Benoit 2005): Communist – GUE/NGL (1); Greens – EGP-EFA (2); Socialist/Social-democrat - PES (3); Liberal – ALDE (4); Christian Democrat/Conservative –EPP/ED (5); and

Nationalist – UEN and IND/DEM (6). Parties that could not be categorized reliably by the traditional left-right scale, or we not affiliated to any of the EP groups, were excluded from this second analysis.

Table 5: Individual-level explanations of voting choices

	Dependent variable: voted party's interpolated median in left-right scale	Dependent variable: 6-point scale from Communist (1) to Nationalist (6)
Gender	-.032**	-.033**
Age	.003	.051***
Education	.006	.003
Social class	.118***	.072***
Religiosity	.106***	.135***
Trade Union membership	-.080***	-.088***
Left-Right SP	.270***	.223***
N=	8179	7837
Adjusted R ²	.11	.09

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. Values are OLS beta coefficients. Data weighted in order to give each country sample the same size.

As table 5 shows, regardless of whether we measure the vote on the basis of the policy positions attributed by mass publics to each party in each country or on the basis of a left-right rank-ordering according to the affiliation of each party in the European parliamentary groups, the results are remarkably consistent: all variables have the same and predictable direction and (with the exception of age) reach the same level of statistical significance, and voter's left-right self-placement is, in both cases, the strongest predictor of the vote, even while a series socio-demographic controls are introduced.

Having established that voters' policy positions in a left-right scale have remained relevant as an explanatory factor in voting choices in the 2004 election regardless of the specific way in which we measure the dependent variable, we still need to ask a number of questions concerning the extent to which this impact is contingent upon contextual factors. Recall that our first hypothesis concerned a basic difference between types of democratic regimes — “former communist” democracies versus “established” democracies. Table 6 presents a model including an interaction term between former communist democracies and, again, left-right ideology. First, we should note that the model does not add much in terms of explained variance to that

presented in table 5, suggesting that the inclusion of the contextual variable of democracy-type and of the interaction term falls short of producing any large improvement over the model based exclusively on individual-level variables. Nevertheless, the former communist*LRSP interaction term is significant and does have the negative predicted direction in both cases. This provides initial support for the notion that the left-right schema is significantly — albeit slightly — more consequential in western European countries than in former communist ones, a conclusion already obtained with a different methodological approach by Brug and Franklin (2005).

Table 6: The impact of left-right contingent upon type of democracy

Dependent variable: vote as party median in left-right scale	
Gender	-.036**
Age	.000
Education	.005
Social class	.128***
Religiosity	.118***
Trade Union membership	-.068***
Left-Right SP	.301***
Former communist	.122***
Former communist*LRSP	-.076***
<hr/>	
N=	8179
Adjusted R ²	.12

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. Values are OLS beta coefficients. Data weighted in order to give each country sample the same size.

To what extent, however, does this difference between types of democratic regimes generically defined resist the introduction of controls for several other contextual features thought to be relevant in the explanation of the differential effect of left-right orientations in voting choices? Earlier on, we had suggested three additional hypotheses concerning the role of electoral system permissiveness, the clarity of the policy alternatives provided by parties, and party system congruence/unidimensionality in terms of left-right and anti-pro integration stances. Table 7 shows the results of the tests of all these hypotheses. Model 1 is the one

already presented in table 6, while models 2, 3 and 4 include alternative measurements of the clarity of policy alternatives provided by each party system.

Table 7: All hypothesis

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender	-.036**	-.032**	-.034**	-.033**
Age	.000	.018	.011	.027**
Education	.005	-.005	.000	-.004
Social class	.128***	.124***	.129***	.115***
Religiosity	.118***	.103***	.110***	.105***
Trade union membership	-.068***	-.070***	-.069***	-.067***
Left-right SP	.301***	.020	.171***	-.953***
Former communist	.122***	.000	.017	-.238***
Former communist *LRSP	-.076***	.111***	.085***	.517***
Effective threshold EP elections	-	.120***	.154***	.248***
Effective threshold EP elections*LRSP	-	-.286***	-.340***	-.554***
Party system LR polarization ^a	-	-.322***	-	-
Party system LR polarization ^a * LR SP	-	.702***	-	-
Variance in LR Parties Positioning	-	-	-.173***	-
Variance in LR Parties Positioning * LR SP	-	-	.378***	-
Perceptual Agreement in party placement	-	-	-	.351***
Perceptual Agreement in party placement* LR SP	-	-	-	1.646***
Party system congruence	-	.112***	.026	.095***
Party system congruence*LRSP	-	-.203***	.032	-.172***
N=	8179	8179	8179	8179
Adjusted R ²	.12	.19	.16	.22

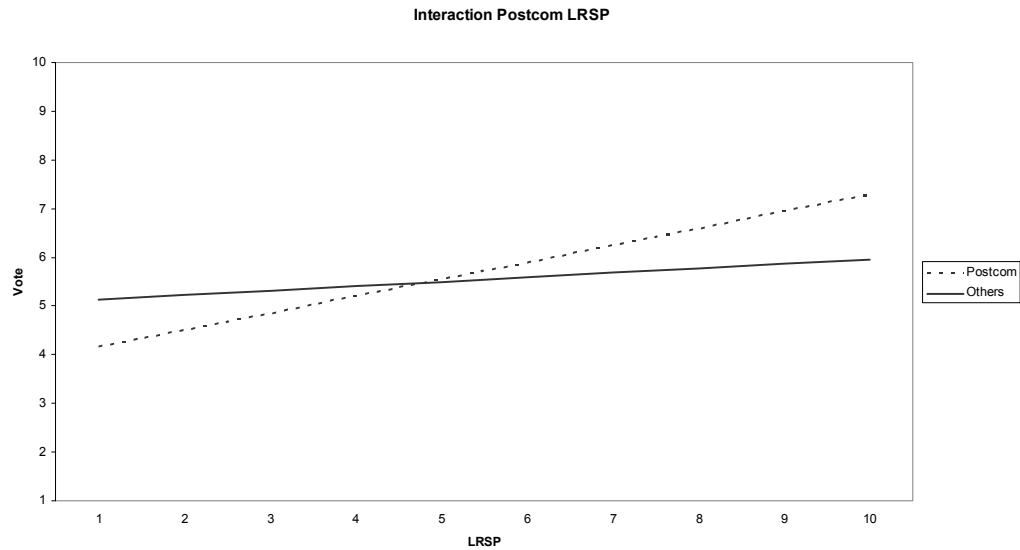
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001. Values are OLS beta coefficients. Data weighted in order to give each country sample the same size.

^a Index of weighted left-right distances between the two major parties and between the two extreme parties.

The results in table 7 are interesting in several respects. First, unlike what occurred with the inclusion of the “former communist” variable both as a main effect and part of an interaction term, there is a noticeable improvement in the overall fit of the model in relation to that tested in table 5 as the remaining contextual variables and interaction terms are added.

Second, in the full model, some rather important changes are visible in the coefficient for the “former communist”*LRSP interaction term, as we predicted and has been found in other studies. However, what is perhaps more unexpected is that, once all variables are added in the model, the sign of the coefficient becomes **positive**, i.e, with left-right ideology becoming a stronger predictor of the vote in post-communist countries than in established democracies. Particularly relevant in this respect seems to be the introduction of the variable “measure of agreement” and its interaction with left-right self-placement: analysis of regression coefficients after the introduction of the different blocks of contextual variables and interaction terms shows that it is the introduction of “measure of agreement” that produces the larger change in the coefficient associated with the former communist*LRSP interaction term. A more intuitive way of looking at how the effect of left-right self-placement is conditional upon the “former communist” variable is to plot individuals’ left-right self-placement (from 1 to 10) against the value of the dependent variables predicted by our “best” model (model 4), and doing so using “former communist” as a moderator variable. In figure 1, the solid line shows the variation in the predicted value of the dependent variable brought about by changes in the left-right self-placement as all the remaining variables (except “former communist”) are kept constant at their means and the “former communist” variable is kept constant at 0 (western countries), while the dotted line shows the same while “former communist” is kept at 1. As we can see, once cross-national variations in terms of EP electoral systems and party’s policy positions are taken into account, it seems safer to say that the impact of left-right self-placement in the vote is **larger in post-communist countries** than in other countries than to say the opposite.

Figure 1. Interaction between Former Communist and left-right self-placement



Third, the electoral threshold*LRSP interaction term and those between LRSP and the alternative measurements of clarity of policy alternatives have the predicted effects: negative in the former and positive in the latter. As figures 2 and 3 show, systems where the electoral threshold for EP elections is lower tend to be characterized by a stronger effect of the left-right schema on voters preferences, with the same occurring in systems where the clarity of policy alternatives is greater. In fact, at low levels of perceptual agreement about where parties stand, the effect of left-right positions on the part of voters in their voting choices is practically non-existent.

Figure 2. Interaction between Effective Threshold and left-right self-placement¹¹

¹¹ “High” threshold was computed by keeping the variable constant at the mean threshold *plus* one standard deviation, while “low” threshold was computed by keeping the variable constant at the mean *minus* one standard deviation. The same approach was used for the remaining moderator variables.

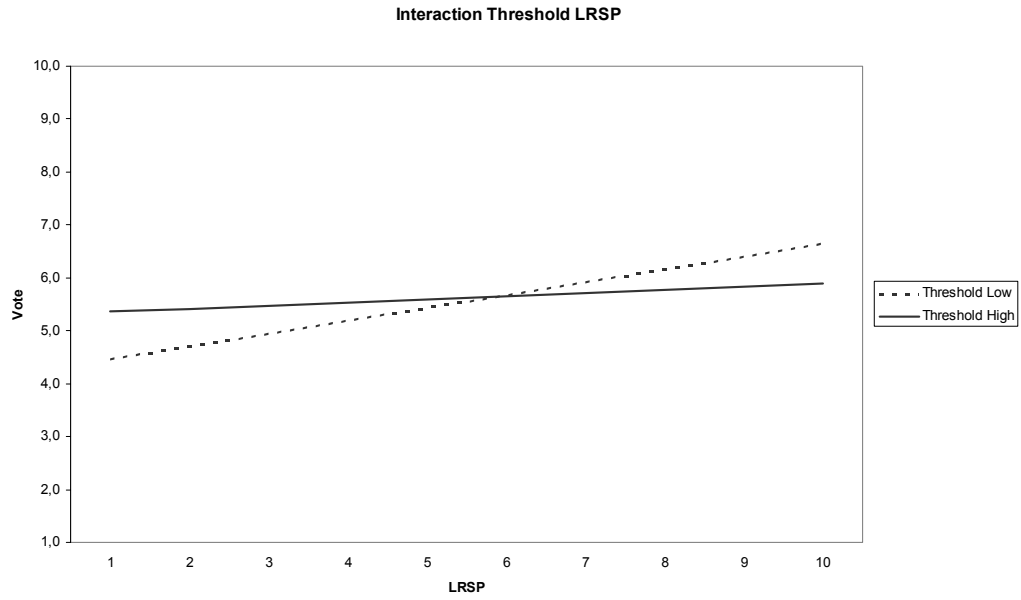
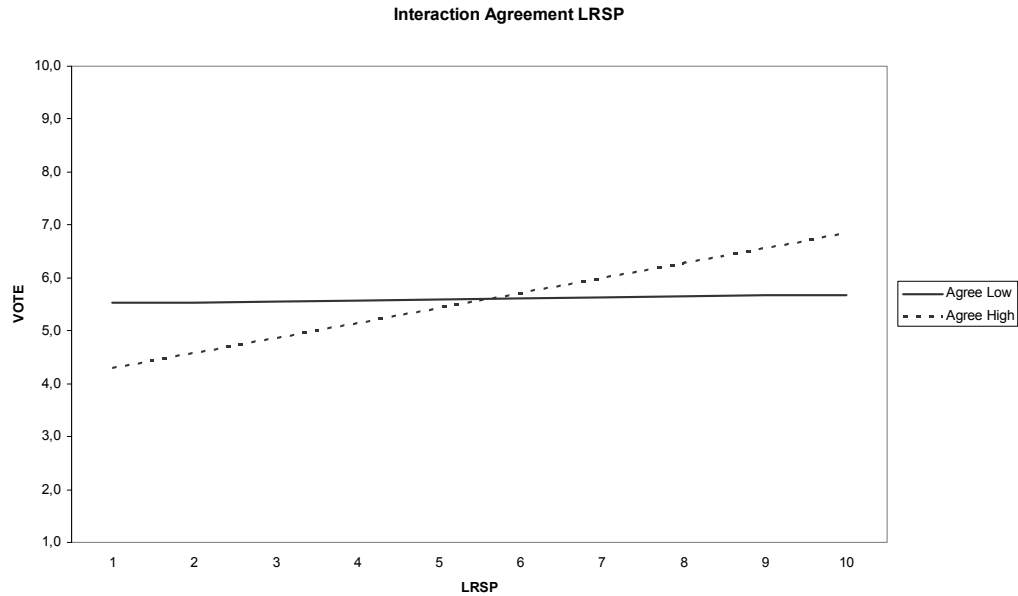
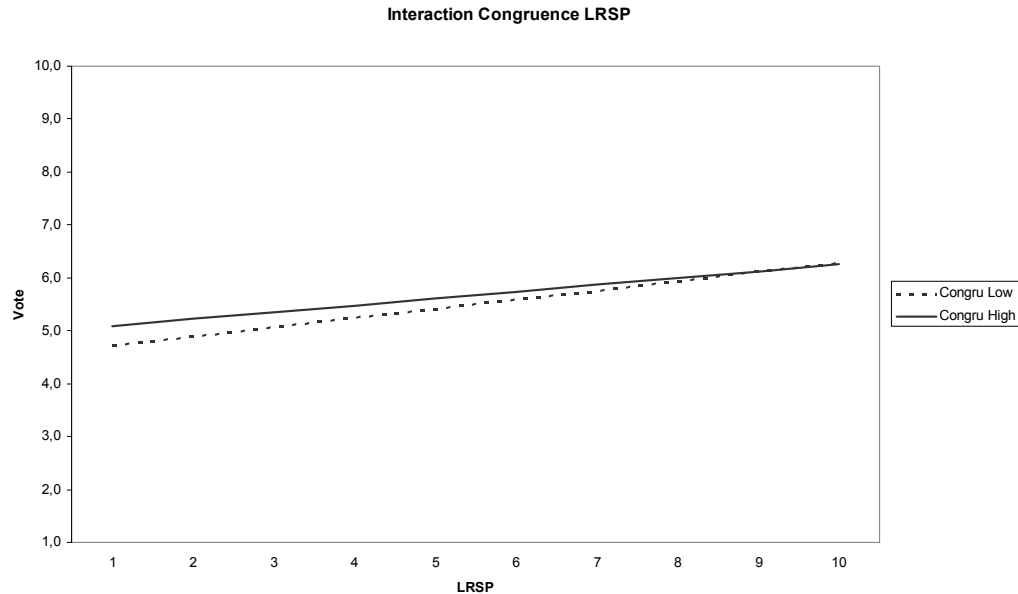


Figure 3. Interaction between Measure of Agreement and Left-Right Self-Placement



Finally, we had suggested earlier that the effect of left-right orientations on voting choices in EP elections should be greater in systems where parties were congruently aligned in terms of the left-right and anti-pro integration scales. In other words, the more unidimensional the structure of political competition, the more useful should the left-right heuristic for voters. As it happens, however, it is the exact opposite than tends to occur. The finding is not particularly robust, considering that it is absent in one of the models (that using variance in LR parties positioning as a measure of the clarity of policy alternatives) and, besides, as figure 4 more vividly illustrates, the effect is rather small even in model 4.

Figure 4. Interaction between Left-Right/Anti-Pro Integration Congruence and Left-Right Self-Placement



However, this result suggests that there might be something wrong with the assumption that, when among parties the left-right and anti-pro integration dimensions are more congruent, the conflict about European integration is one that will end up lacking salience, being “subsumed in” or “encapsulated by” a traditional and readily understandable left-right dimension. Instead, it may be the case that, in order to avoid the tensions and internal party conflicts that tend to emerge within traditional parties (Marks et al., 2004), it is precisely in those countries where the sources of support and opposition to European integration cross-cut the left-right positions that the dominant centrist parties have strong incentives to downplay the salience of the EU integration issue in party competition and electoral appeals, reducing EP elections to their purer second-order form, i.e, dominated by concerns related to the national arena where left-right orientations are clearly predominant. Conversely, where the dimensions of conflict along EU integration and left-right tend to overlap in the party system — as it tends to occur in Eastern Europe — parties can integrate European issues in their electoral appeals and platforms, giving voters cues that are alternative to the traditional left-right dimension of political competition and potentially reduce the importance of the latter in electoral choices.

Concluding remarks

As we stated before, the present paper had two major goals. First, to examine whether citizens' left-right self-placement has a different impact on the vote in different types of democratic regime, i.e., in terms of consolidating *versus* established democracies (defined as post-communist democracies *versus* all the others). Second, to examine whether the generic differences found between democracies in terms of their level of democratic "consolidation" or "establishment" resist the introduction of controls for three other factors hypothesized to make a difference in the extent to which left-right orientations have a greater (or lesser) influence on the vote: the more or less permissive character of the electoral system; the clarity of policy alternatives presented by political parties to the electorate in each polity (as measured by three alternative indicators; and the congruence (or lack of congruence) between the left-right and the pro-anti European dimensions of party competition. We used European Elections as a "laboratory" to understand electoral behavior in general, precisely because these electoral contests take place simultaneously under different social, political and institutional conditions. The survey data are from the European Election Study 2004: 21 member countries/political systems were analysed.

Thus, following prior studies about this subject, voting choices in the 2004 EP elections do seem to be indeed, and to a considerable extent, about choosing parties in terms of left-right orientations. Furthermore, we found that the usefulness of left-right orientations as cues to the vote seems to be contingent upon a series of contextual factors. The lower the "effective threshold" of the electoral system, i.e., the higher the permissiveness of the electoral rules in terms of access to parliamentary representation, the higher the importance of citizens' left-right orientation to structure their EP vote. Greater levels of clarity of the policy alternatives provided by the party system render citizens' left-right self-placement more consequential for their EP vote. In this respect, the indicator that measures perceptual agreement proved to be a stronger interactive effect with the impact of left-right self-placement on the vote than any of the two measures of party polarization, but all these results point in the same direction and the differences are in the relative strength of the relationships.

The last contextual variable measures party system congruence between left-right positioning and pro-anti European stance. This congruence variable was not significant in all the models tested above (insignificant in the "variance" model), and when it was significant, it added little to the overall equation. Nevertheless, it is the case that contrary to the original hypothesis, more unipolar Euroskepticism renders

left-right orientations *less* (rather than more) consequential for the vote. We suggest therefore that in those cases where there is a higher congruence in terms of party competition on the left-right and on the pro-anti European integration divides, the major parties (as the smaller ones) feel free to structure their electoral appeals around the European integration issue (because that won't disturb the major axis of domestic policy competition, i.e., the left-right divide), and so EP elections can function more as an arena for political contestation around European issues.

Finally, we found that left-right orientations ended up not being equally useful in former communist democracies and in the remaining established democracies. However, unlike previous studies — that found a strong reduction of the differences between the established democracies and the post-communist countries (when contextual variables are controlled for) — what we found was actually a reversal of the originally advanced empirical relationship. In other words, it seems that the differences initially detected between more established democracies and the post-communist countries, suggesting that the effect of left-right orientations on the vote was weaker in the latter — differences that were already, admittedly, rather small — disappear and are actually reversed once the systemic diversity among all European democracies — in terms of parties' policy positions and the electoral system — is taken into account.

Particularly relevant in this respect seems to be the differences between levels of perceptual agreement about parties' policy placements: it is after the introduction of this variable that the previously detected conditional effect of “former communism” is more clearly reversed. To some extent, this validates previous research which suggested that difference between types of democracy in this respect might be due, precisely, to the clarity of the party system and, even so, not particularly big (Brug and Franklin 2005). What is perhaps more surprising is that, after this is taken into account, left-right orientations end up being **more** consequential in post-communist countries than in others. We would like to suggest that this might be a consequence of the fact that, in all these countries, these were the very first elections for the European Parliament, leaving voters without many other credible cues in order to make voting decisions besides the conventional left-right dimension that characterizes first-order arenas and elections.

Finally, it is important to mention two issues that need to be addressed in the future in this research. The first issue is that of the dependent variable. Brug and

Franklin (2005) analyzed the impact on LRSP on EP elections, and created a dependent variable using voter probabilities (which correlate highly with vote) within a stacked data set. In a previous version of this paper we used a dichotomous dependent variable, and we have now adopted a rank-ordered dependent variable, with parties positioned across the left-right scale. Perhaps an alternative conceptualization of the dependent variable might be considered in the future. The second important issue to consider is the importance of the left-right as a structuring factor of party competition vis-à-vis other dimensions that might be more important in structuring that competition. In particular, recent work on central and Eastern Europe has argued that party competition in the European political space and/or in European elections occurs not so much along the left-right axis as it is along the GAL (Green/Alternative/Libertarian)/TAN (Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist) axis (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, 2004). Importantly, this GAL/TAN axis is not congruent with the left-right positions of the parties in those systems. However, the EES 2004 questionnaire does not allow us to locate the parties (and the voters) in the GAL/TAN axis. Moreover, to our best knowledge there is not yet available any expert survey (or data from party manifestos) that covers all the countries covered in this analysis. Whenever the available data allows for it, to test the impact of the contextual factors we used for the present paper in a framework of policy competition (and electors' self-placement) structured by the GAL/TAN axis is clearly a task for future research.

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ANNEX 1

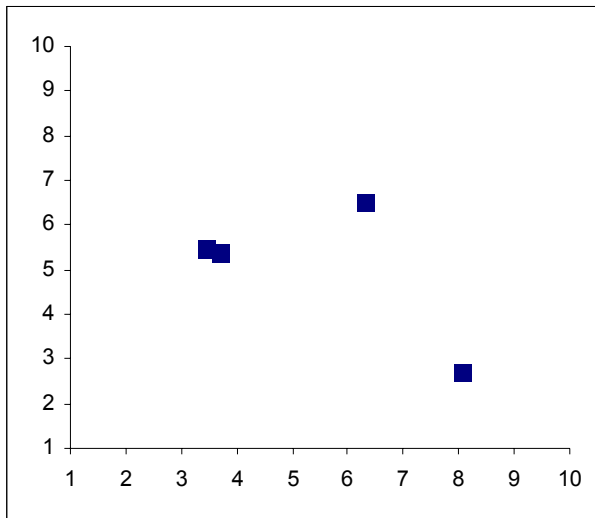
Graph 1: The Positioning of Political Parties on Left-Right and Pro-Anti EU integration Scales, according to Respondent's Perceptions, EES'2004

X-Axis- Left-Right Scale, from 0-10

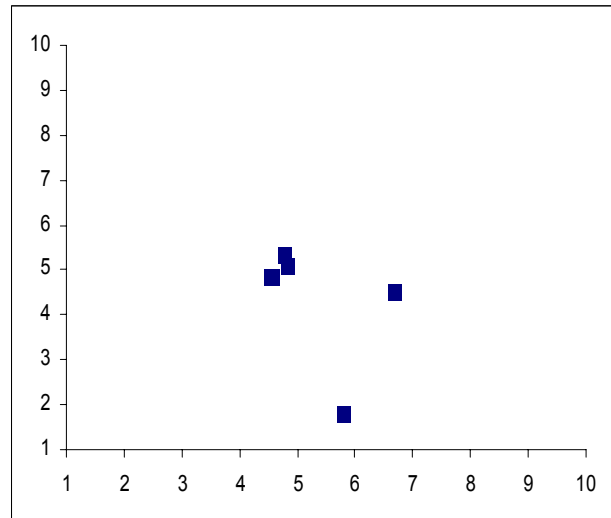
(0-5,5 = left-wing ; 5,6-10 = right-wing)

Y-Axis- Anti-Pro EU integration Scale, from 0-10

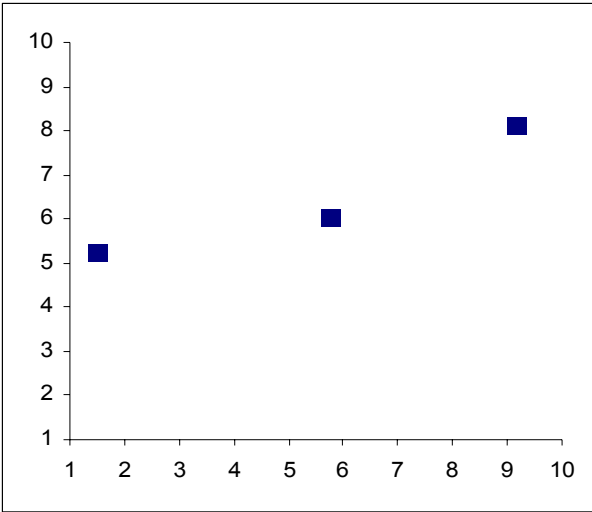
(0-5,5 = anti-european; 5,6 to 10 = pro-European).



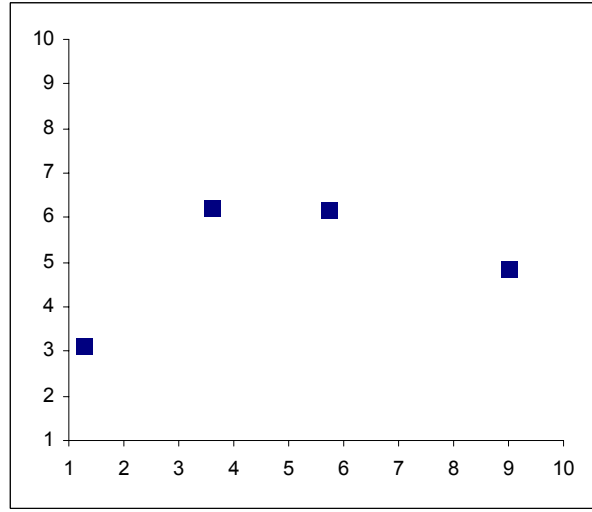
Austria



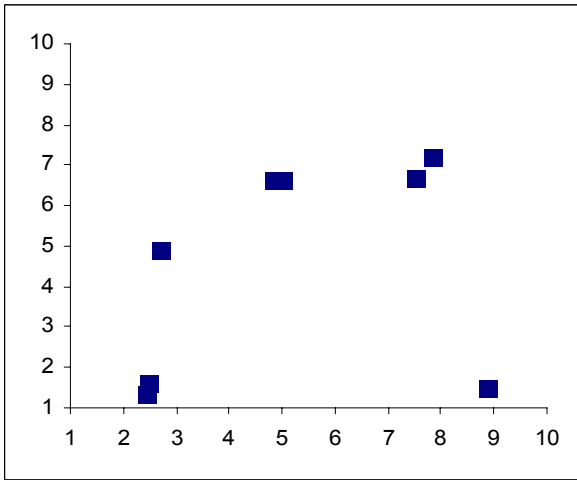
Britain



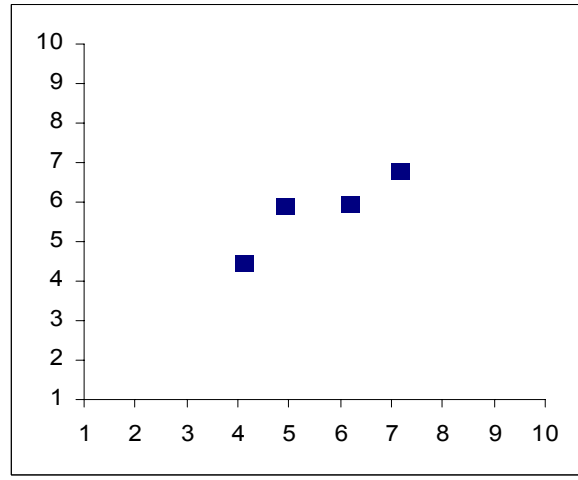
Cyprus



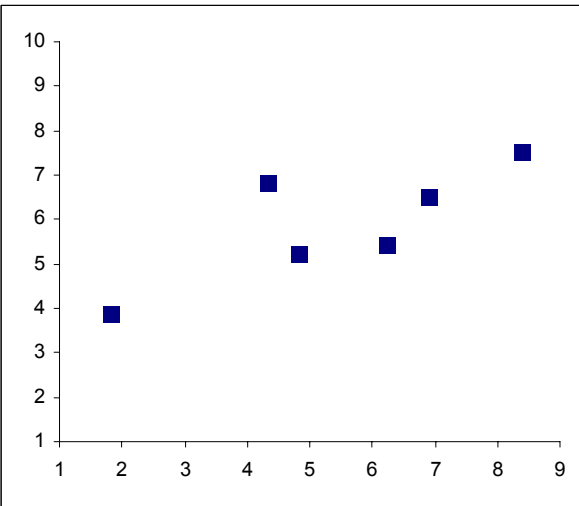
Czech Republic



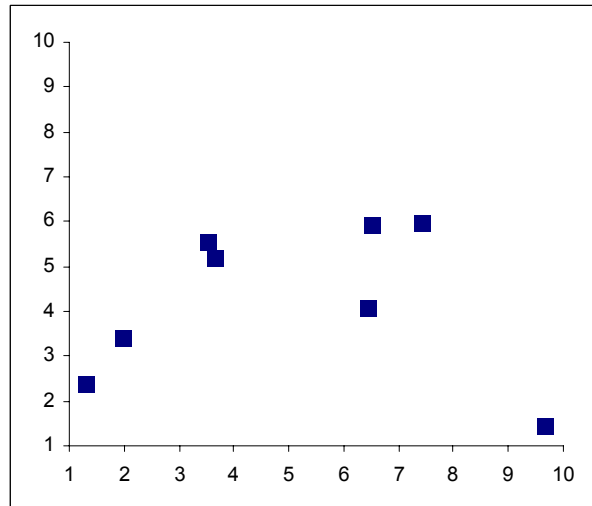
Denmark



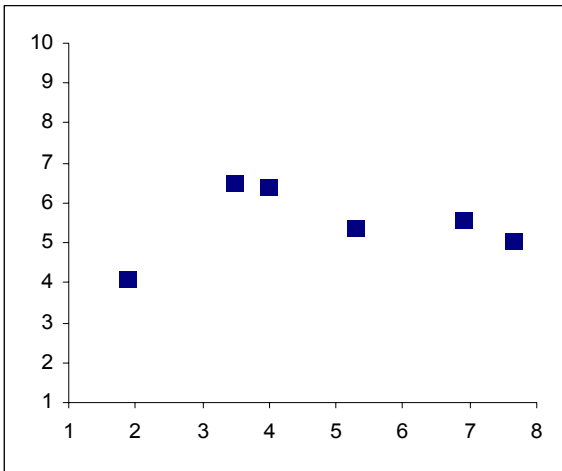
Estonia



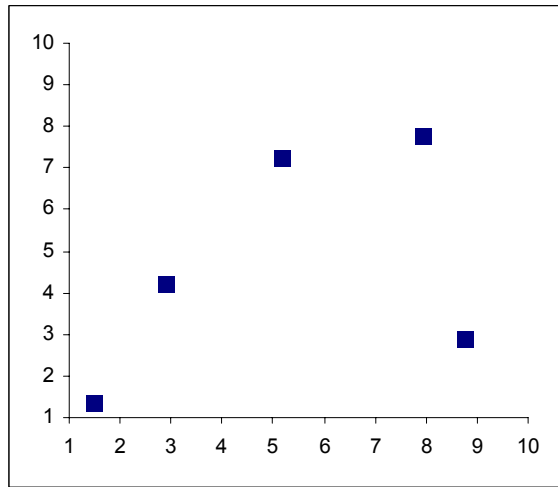
Finland



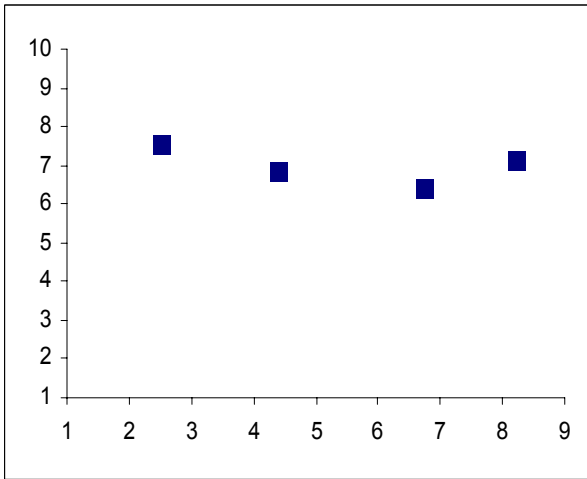
France



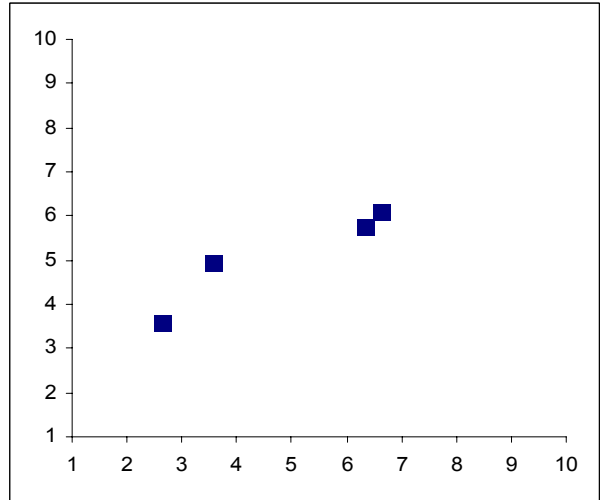
Germany



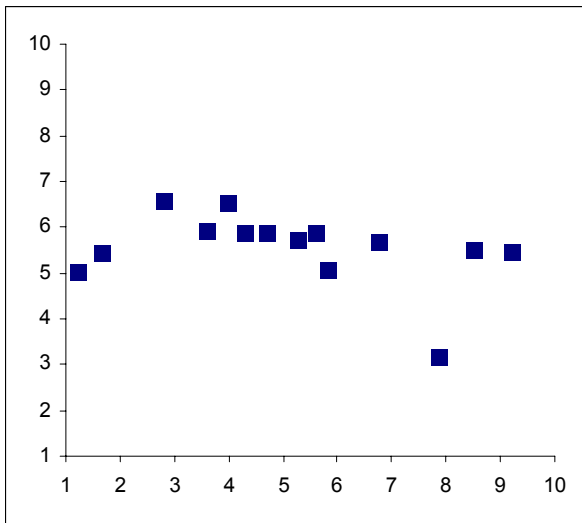
Greece



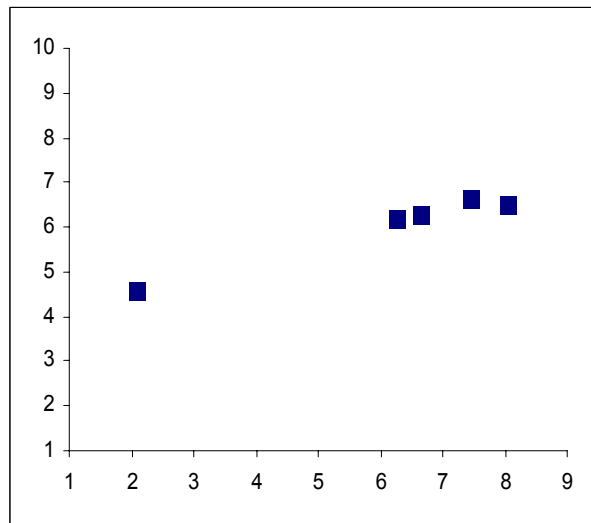
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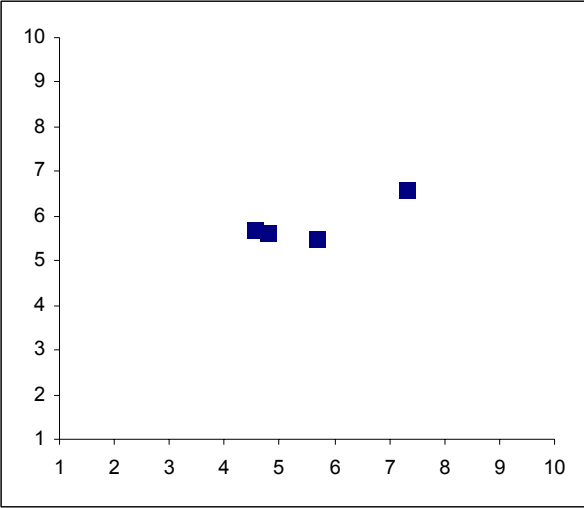
Ireland



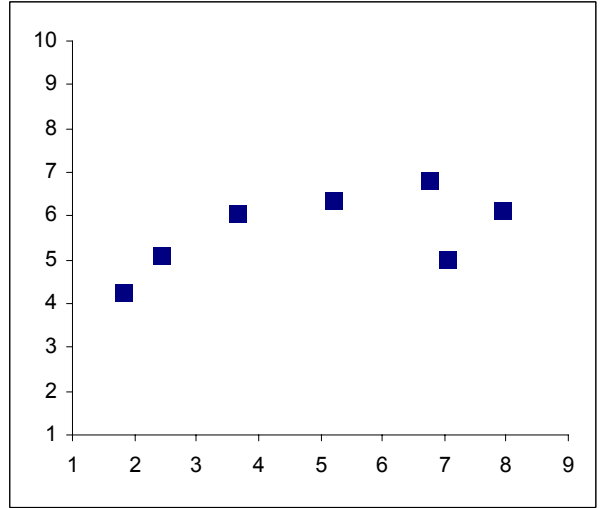
Italy



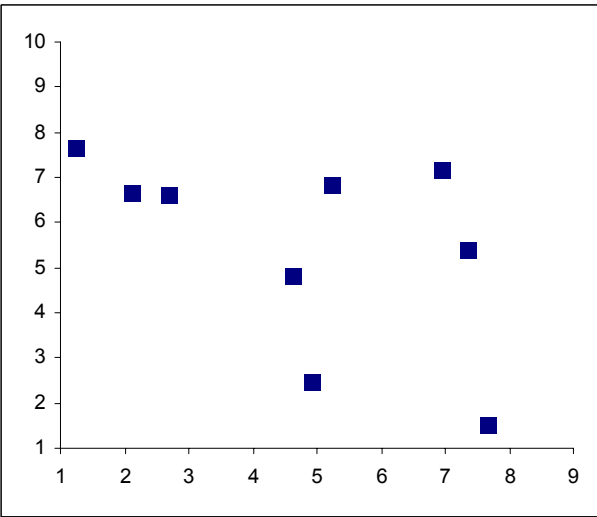
Latvia



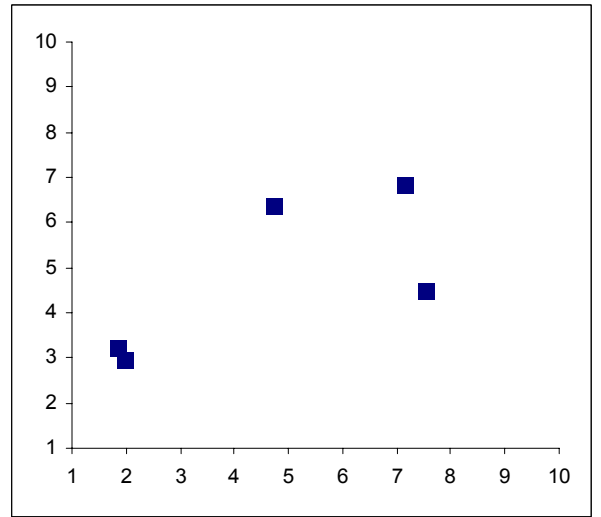
Luxembourg



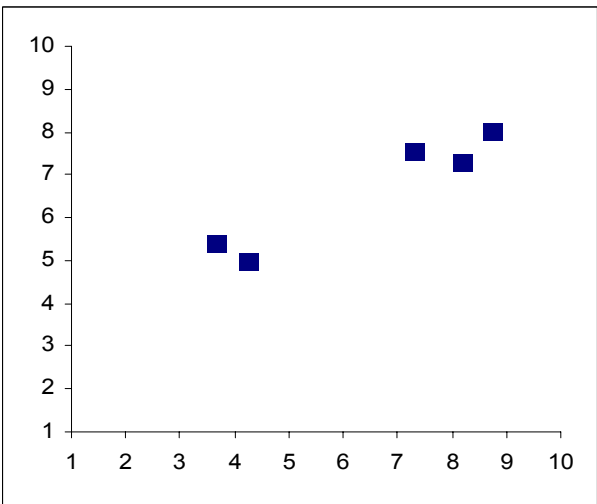
Netherlands



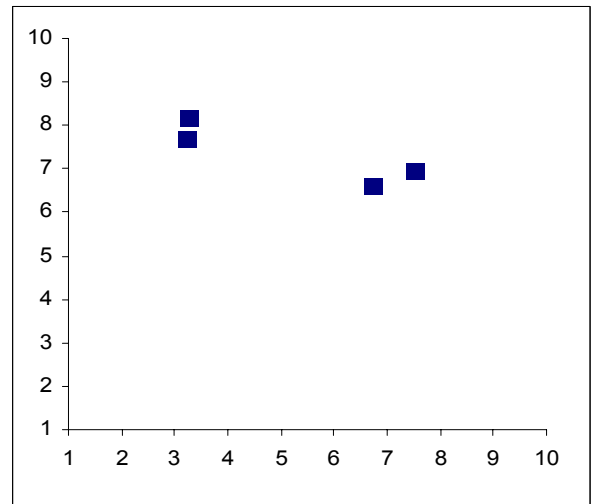
Poland



Portugal



Slovakia



Slovenia

