

# **WHAT DRIVES PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE EU?**

**Reputation of the EU institutions**

**Workshop E3**

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# PUBLIC OPINION ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

- Research on the **media** and attitudes toward European integration is the most recent field of analysis across all the theoretical frameworks - and a good explanatory model.
- Political psychology factors such as **cognitive mobilization** (attentiveness to politics)
- **Government proxy**
- **Mass-parties** linkage (Elite discussion of the European Union)
- **Rational utilitarianism** (cost/benefit ratio)
- Concerns about the loss of **national identity**

# INFORMATION ON THE EU

- Analyses on the 2004 EP elections found that information plays a fundamental role in citizens' choices, in particular visibility 'matters'.
- Focus groups carried out in Central and Eastern Europe confirm information matters.

# EP ELECTIONS

- In 2004 the EP elections brought citizens of 27 EU countries out to vote, highlighting a wide 'Eurogap' between the old member states, plus Malta and Cyprus, and the eight post-Communist member states.
- 55.63% voted in the 'old Europe' and Malta and Cyprus, compared with only 31.19% who casted their vote in the new EU member states.
- When Bulgaria voted in May 2007 turnout was at 29.22% and in November 2007 in Romania it halted at 29.47%.
- In 2009 the general average decreasing trend, registered since the first EP elections took place, and the 'Eurogap' did not alter (54.01% in Western Europe and 22.93% in the post-Communist region). Turnout was at a record low (20.84%) at the first European Parliament elections in Croatia in April 2013.



# CITIZENS AND THE EU

- Before the first EP election (2004), in Poland, limited knowledge of the elections was also revealed, at the assertion that 'the next EP elections will take place in 2005', a large majority of respondents said they did not know or did not answer (49%), while only 25% said it was true and 26% that it was false (CCEB 2004.1, 2004, pp. 36-37).
- In a survey conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs of Warsaw and the CBOS two months *after* the EP elections, respondents were asked 'Who voted for the elections of the MEPs at the European Parliament?', 52% of respondents did not know (32% thought 'by senators or the president) and only 48% answered that they were elected through general elections.

# CONCLUSION

- Information matters – but the quality of information does not seem to respond to citizens' interest, when they feel interested.
- In their words, 'I do not trust politicians... because they talk about the EU as the EU is perfect... it's ideal, it's something without problems, with no discussions, no debatable questions'. 'Ministers avoid detailed answers'.
- Further elections and referendums can engage with debates and 'basic' information ('simplicity is not race to the bottom', Jane Morris at the Plenary opening session), provided by the government and civic society; capillary information can enhance the possibility of sharing it and reaching people.