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## **Economic efficiency or ideology?**

### **Social support for democracy in Central and Eastern Europe**

More than ten years ago the communist regimes have fallen down in Central and Eastern Europe. The general expectation was to replace the former communist regime with a democratic one all over Central and Eastern Europe. However, people from post-communist countries have different expectations from the new political regimes and are willing to support 'different versions' of democracy, depending on their economic situation, on their history or on their cultural background. Accordingly, the level of social support for democracy varies from one country to another depending on several factors.

This paper tries to find out which are the main determinants for the level of social support for democracy in post-communist countries. Starting from the theory of lifetime learning model, the paper aims to investigate what factor comes first in supporting democracy: the economic efficiency, the evaluation of government performances, the negative evaluation of the communist regime or the ideological orientation? In addition, the article searches to compare the determinants and the level of support for democracy in Western European countries and Central and Eastern countries. The analysis uses data from European Values Survey, carried out in 1999 – 2000 in 32 European countries, which allow cross-sectional comparisons among European countries.

The first part of the article is dedicated to a review of the theories about social support for democracy and attempts to draw some hypotheses. The second part describes the indicators used in the analysis and the methodology employed in the data analysis, while the third part presents the results. The last section is devoted to conclusions and to discussing the implications.

#### **Diffuse support and specific support for democracy**

Easton (1965) formulates a broad accepted definition of social support. According to this definition, "we can say that A supports B either when A acts on behalf of B or when he orients himself favorably toward B. B may be a person or a group; it may be a goal, idea or institution" (p. 159).

Social support and legitimacy are different concepts. While social support points out if a political object is considered good or bad by a population, the legitimacy told us why it is evaluated in this way (Lillbacka, 1999). In fact, the social support indicates the peoples' orientation towards a political object, whereas the legitimacy justifies this orientation. The relation between legitimacy and social support is similar to that between value and attitude. The core of legitimacy consists of values, while support consists of attitudes, which can be more superficial and open to changes.

Easton (1965, 1968) formulates the distinction between *overt support*, which consists in supportive actions, like individual's behavior, and *covert support*, composed by sentiments and attitudes towards political object. While the overt support can be easily observed, investigating the covert support needs deeper research about individual's attitudes.

Another distinction refers to *specific support* versus *diffuse support*. According to Easton (1965, 1968), the specific support is related to the actions of political actors and to the output of the political system. The specific support is dynamic, varying with the actions of political actors. If the requests of the political system's members are satisfied and people are contented with the output system then, one can expect an increase in specific support. If the output is not perceived as adequately, the specific support decreased.

The diffuse support is independent by the actions of political actors and by the specific material rewards (Easton, 1968). The diffuse support represents a reservoir of favorable attitudes which helps the members to tolerate outputs opposed to their wishes. The diffuse support provides a 'reservoir' on which the system can rely on in the context of lack of effectiveness and which sustain the legitimacy when the political system is perceived as inefficient by its members. Compared to the specific support, the diffused support is less dynamic and is more inertial. However, if the output is dissatisfactory on the long run, the reservoir of support is spent and the legitimacy of the regime decreased.

A series of studies have tried to explain the way in which the social support is acquired by the individual and the reasons for the variation in social support at the individual level. The theory of socialization supported by Inglehart (1990) states that the social support depends on the formative experiences passed by the individual especially during the primary socialization. This support built during the childhood and the teenage is quite resistant and is hardly changing under the impact of external factors. The theory of performances, sustained by Lipset (1960), points out that the social support depends on the recent individual experiences, especially depends on the performances of the political object. Therefore, the social support decreased when the effectiveness is decreasing and increased when the political object is effective.

Rose, Mishler (2000) and Rose, Mishler, Haepfer (1998) indicate that the two theories, of socialization and of efficiency are rather complementary than antagonist and both of them can be integrated in the *lifetime learning model*. According to this model, the support for the political regime is influenced by the early socialization, but it is steadily modified by the experiences of adult life. If the political regime is effective, the output strengthening the experiences accumulated during the primary socialization and the support for the regime increases. If the output is not satisfactory on the long run, than the support is eroding and is decreasing.

On the short run, the lack of efficiency of a political regime determines negative attitudes on the population side and the decreased in specific support. If the regime has a reservoir of diffuse support, built during the political socialization in the formative years, the legitimacy of regime would not be affected by this lack of efficiency. If the dissatisfaction

towards the output is for a long time, not only the specific support will be affected, but also the diffuse support will suffer and the regime will be de-legitimated.

Many studies have pointed out that the efficiency plays an important role especially for social support in favor of new political regimes (Mishler & Rose, 1998, 2000, 2000b; Munro, 2001; Tóka, 1995; Lillbacka, 1999; Eckstein, 1979; Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, Limongi, 2004). New political regimes does not benefit of a reservoir of diffuse support, like the stable democracy does. The individuals have internalized another system of values from primary socialization, different from the core values of democracy. This fact has two implications for the legitimacy of the new political regime. On the one hand, the legitimation of the regime manly relay on the regime's output, namely on its efficiency. If the regime is not efficient the specific support decreased and the population reorients towards other alternatives. On the other hand, the individuals were socialized during the communist regime and have an experience with other type of political regime. Different from the citizens of stable democracies, those of new democratic states know an alternative to democracy and can made comparisons between democracy and the older political system. The dissatisfaction with actual political regime could easily engender the rejection of the present regime and the willingness to reinstall the older political system.

The studies carried out in ex-communist countries during '90 underline the role played by efficiency, especially by the economic efficiency, in producing social support for the new political regime (Tóka, 1995; Munro, 2001; Mishler, Rose, 2000). At the beginning of the transition, the population given a strong unconditioned support to democracy, but it was like *anticipatory reformism*, an unconditioned favorable attitude towards reforms (Sandu, 1996; Mărginean, 1999). This positive attitude was generated by the rejection of the older economic and political order in the context of lack of information about what the transition and the reform mean. After few years this attitude was replaced by what Sandu (1996) named *reaction reformism*, a rationale favorable attitude toward economic and political reforms, but this attitude is typical just for some social groups. The author underlines the association between this attitude and the level of individual's economic resources.

One can says that the new political regimes from Central and Eastern Europe do not have a reservoir of diffuse support, which can represent a solid core the legitimacy of the democratic rule. From this reason, the efficiency of government and, especially the economic efficiency, play a very important role in building the social support. On the other hand, ex-communist countries differ with the respect to the economic reforms and to the economic efficiency of the new government. Some countries prove to be more efficient in what it concerns the economic reform, then others. Therefore, in the context of social support theory one can expect that:

*(H1) The level of support for democracy varies from country to country depending on the level of economic efficiency of the government during the transition. Countries with a higher level of economic efficiency show higher level of support for democracy, while countries in which the government proved to be less efficient in the economic area have an*

*lower level of social support for the democratic regime.*

As I have pointed out before, people from ex-communist countries have an experience with another type of political regime, with the communist one. Some studies have indicated the impact of the evaluation of the former regime on the support for democracy in ex-communist countries (Mishler, Rose, 1998, 2000, 2000a; Gunther, Montero, 2000; Mărginean, Precupețu I., Precupețu M., 2004). The former regime offers for the populations of ex-communist countries a reference point in evaluating democracy and an alternative for the democratic system. In this context, support for democracy is dependent to the evaluation of the communist regime.

*(H2) The negative evaluation of the former communist regime increases the social support for democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.*

On the other side, the social support for democracy does not depend only on the rationale evaluation of the political regime, from the point of view of its efficiency. Weber (1965) indicates that the legitimacy of an order will be guaranteed in two main ways: by pure selfless reasons, which can be pure affective, can derive from the rational believe in the absolute validity of the order or it can originate in the religious attitudes or in self interest. On the other words, the legitimacy of an order can be originated in the ideological orientation or in the rational evaluation of the output, taking into account the individual interest. According to Munro (2001) the ideological orientation toward collectivism decreases the social support for democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. One can expect that:

*(H3) The ideological orientation has an influence on the level of social support. The preference for left collectivist ideologies reduces the support for democracy, while the inclination for right ideologies is positively associated with the support for democracy.*

## **Data and methods**

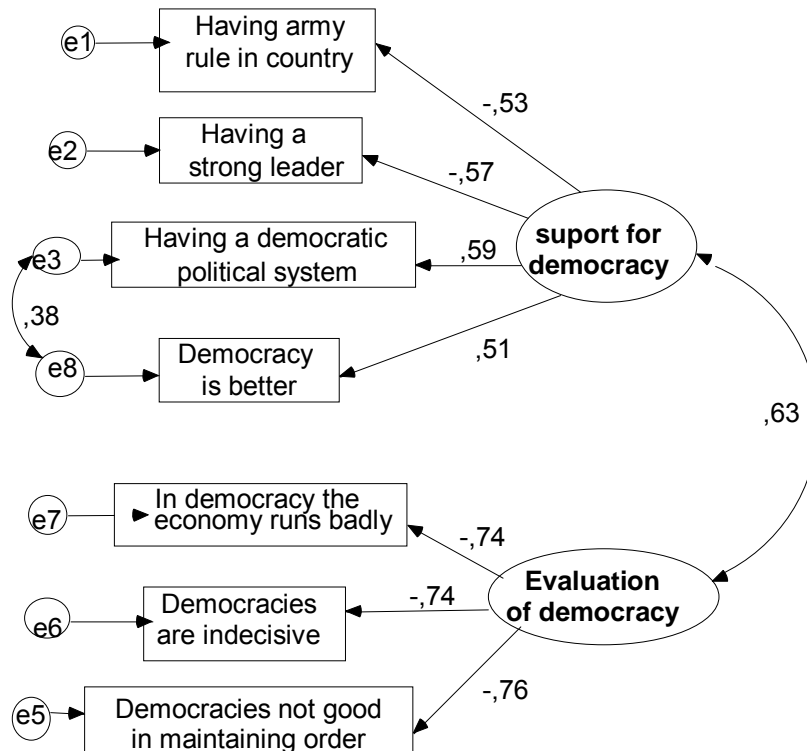
In order to test the hypotheses data from European Values Survey (EVS), the third wave, have been used. The research was carried out in 1999 – 2000 in 32 European countries and allowed cross-cultural comparisons among European countries.

The indicator for the **social support for democracy** was build as a factorial score, using the loadings which have resulted from a confirmatory factor analysis. Figure 1 indicates the factorial structure with the loading resulted from running the factor analysis on the base including all the European countries from the data set. The factorial model was run for each European countries with the loadings resulted from the entire data set, in order to test the fitting for each countries. The indexes for fit by countries are included into the annex. The model fits the data from the most of the European countries, excepting The Netherlands and Iceland. These countries have been excluded from the analysis.

Figure 1 indicates a dual factorial structure for the attitudes towards democracy. The first dimension is **support for democracy** and is related with idea that democracy is the best way to govern a country, compared to a dictatorship or to an army rule. The second dimension

refers to **the evaluation of democracy**, namely is indicating if the democracy is considered to be effective in economic area, in political area and in maintaining order. While the present paper refers to the support for democracy and the two dimensions are highly correlates (Figure 1), the analysis is focused on factor social support for democracy as indicator for diffuse support for democracy.

**Figure 1 Latent structure of attitudes towards democracy**



$\Delta 2$  IFI=0,978 ; CFI=0,978 ; RMSEA=0,053  
P test for close fit = 0,037

Other indicators used in the analysis are the dominant individual ideological orientation, the evaluation of the former communist regime, or the evaluation of the political regime ten years ago for the Western European countries, the evaluation of the present government and the GDP growth between 1990 and 2000. All the analysis have been carried out at the country level, therefore all the indicators measured at the individual level have been aggregated at country level.

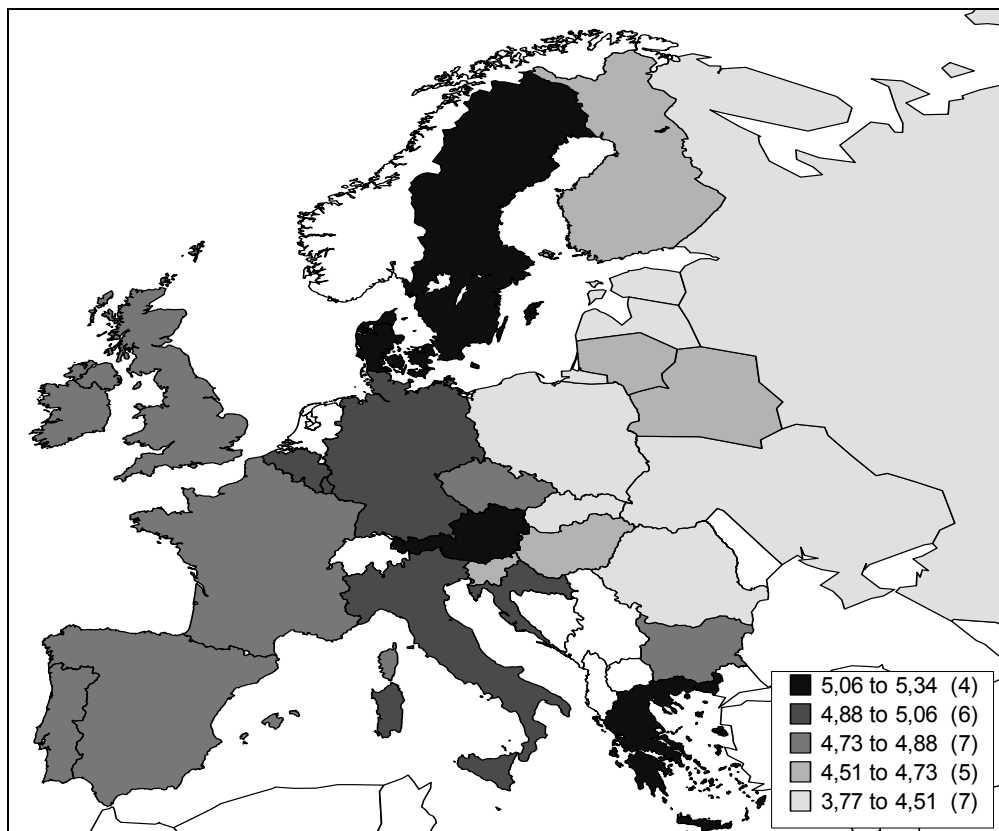
The **ideological orientation** measures the individual preference for leftist versus rightist ideology on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means full support for leftist ideology and 10 mean full support for rightist ideology. The **support for political regime ten years ago** is measured on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 indicate totally lack of support for the communist regime or for the political regime ten years ago and 10 means full support for that regime. The

**evaluation of the present government** is measured on a 10 points scale, 1 indicating the worst evaluation, while 10 indicating the best evaluation for the government. GDP growth between 1990 and 2000 is used as indicator for the economic efficiency of the government in the last decade<sup>1</sup>.

## Results

A first sight on EVS data indicates that the level of support for democracy decrease from Western Europe to Eastern Europe. Western countries with stable democratic regime have higher level of social support for democracy then the ex-communist countries have. Moreover, the level of social support for democracy differs among ex-communist countries, decreasing from West to East, too (Map 1). Population of the Central European countries like Czech Republic, Slovakian and Hungary sustain in a great extent the democracy, compared to inhabitants of the other post-communist countries. The present analysis will try to see which factors determine the differences in social support for democracy between stable democracies and ex-communist countries on one hand, and among post-communist countries on the other hand.

**Map 1 Level of social support for democracy in Europe**



<sup>1</sup> The source of data is CIA - The World Factbook 2001

In order to check the effect of independent variables on the social support for democracy, a linear regression analysis was carried out at the aggregate / country level (each case representing a European country). The independent variables included in the analysis are: ideological orientation (left / right), satisfaction with the political regime 10 years ago, satisfaction with present government, GDP growth and country with stable democracy versus ex-communist country<sup>2</sup>. In the first turn, the analysis has employed all the European countries for which the factor analysis model fits the data. The goal of this analysis was to identify the main factors which determine variation in the social support among the European countries. On the second step, I have tried to see which factor have an influence on the variation of social support for democracy among ex-communist countries, on one hand, and among Western stable democracy, on the other hand. The small number of cases did not allowed to run a regression analysis for the two clusters of countries, Western countries and ex-communist countries. Therefore, I have investigated the effect on each variable on the support of democracy at the country level, with the disadvantage of not controlling the cumulative effect of all the independent variables on the support for democracy.

**Table 1 Regression coefficients – Dependent variable: Support for democracy in European countries**

	Unstandardized coefficients <b>B</b>	Standardized coefficients <b>β</b>
(Constant)	2,185	
Ideological orientation (left / right)	0,024	0,023
Satisfaction with political regime 10 years ago	-0,088	-0,160
Satisfaction with present government	0,083	0,227
Stable democracy (dummy)	0,309	0,451
GDP growth 1990 - 2000	0,023	0,210
Durbin-Watson = 1,924		$R^2 = 0,535$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0,430$

The data from the Table 1 indicates that economic efficiency of the government and the satisfaction with present government has a strong impact on the support for democracy at the country level. The dissatisfaction with political regime 10 years ago and being a citizen of a Western country also has a significant impact on the level of support for democracy. At the European level, the ideological orientation does not play a role in influencing the support for democracy, when controlling for real and perceived efficiency of government.

Comparing the effect of the predictors on the level of support for democracy in Europe, one can say that being a stable democracy has the stronger effect on the level of support. That is to say that the level of support for democracy is much higher in Western

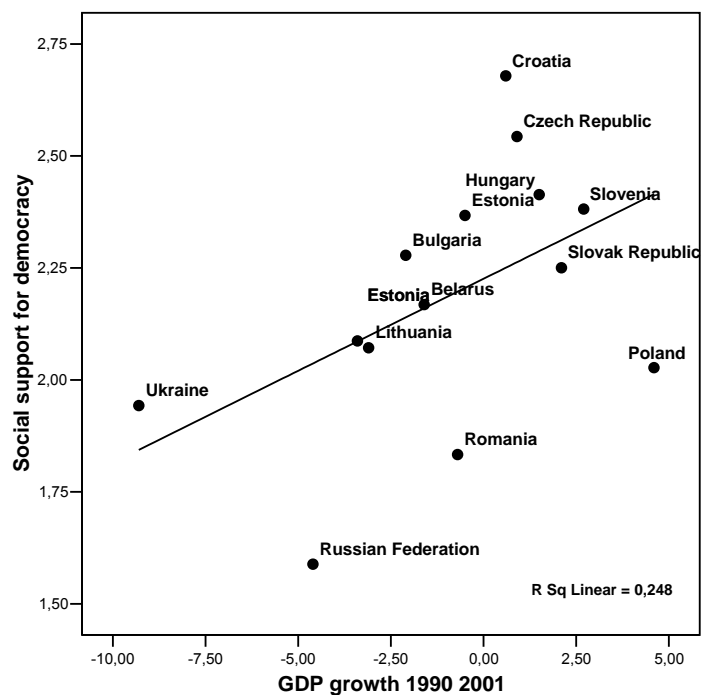
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<sup>2</sup> The label stable democracy refers to Western European countries which have a democratic political system for more than 20 years.

countries then in ex-communist countries when controlling for the other predictors. On the other hand, at the European level the economic efficiency of the government plays an important role with the respect to the support for democracy. In addition, the satisfaction with present government and the dissatisfaction with the former political system influence the level of support for democracy. The data invalidates the hypothesis of the impact of the ideological orientation on the support for democracy, and validates the hypothesis of the impact of efficiency of government on the support for democracy.

As I have mentioned before, the reduced number of cases does not allowed running different regression analyses for ex-communist countries and for Western stable democracy. However, some distinctions should be done between the two clusters of countries, as long as post-communist countries have experienced a political regime changing in the last decade<sup>3</sup>. Thus, I have analyzed the effect of each independent variable on the level of social support for democracy for the Western and Central an Eastern countries.

**Figure 2 Social support for democracy by GDP growth 1990 – 2000 in ex-communist countries**



Data from Figure 1 indicates that the growth in GDP has a strong positive impact on the level of social support for democracy in Eastern Europe. The data sustain the hypothesis of the association between level of social support and economic efficiency of a democratic government. The level of social support is higher in ex-communist countries which have experienced an increasing of GDP per capita during the transition, compared to those that

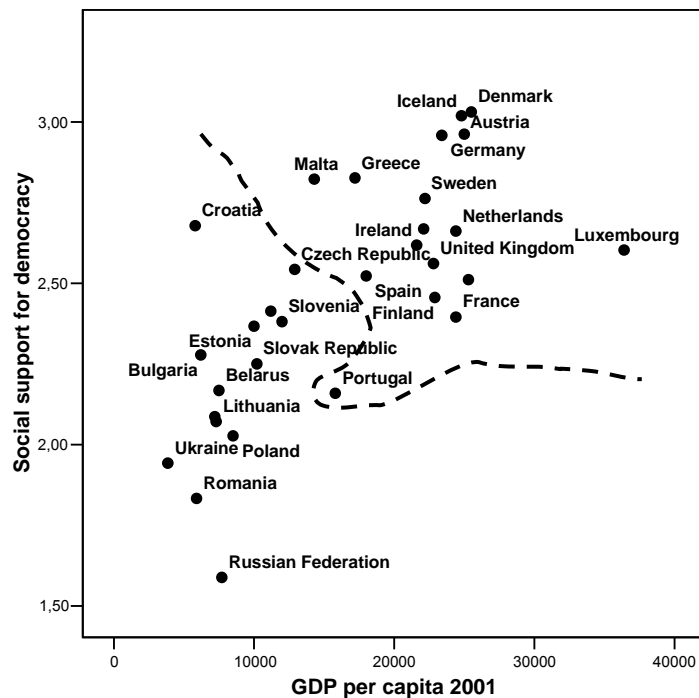
<sup>3</sup> The data were collected in 1999 – 2000, 10 years after the falling of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe.



have has a lower level of economic development. The transition from the command economy to the market economy was difficult and painful for most of the post-communist societies, but countries which have managed to obtain an increase in GDP after ten years of social and economic transformations have strengthen not only the economic system, but also the politic one.

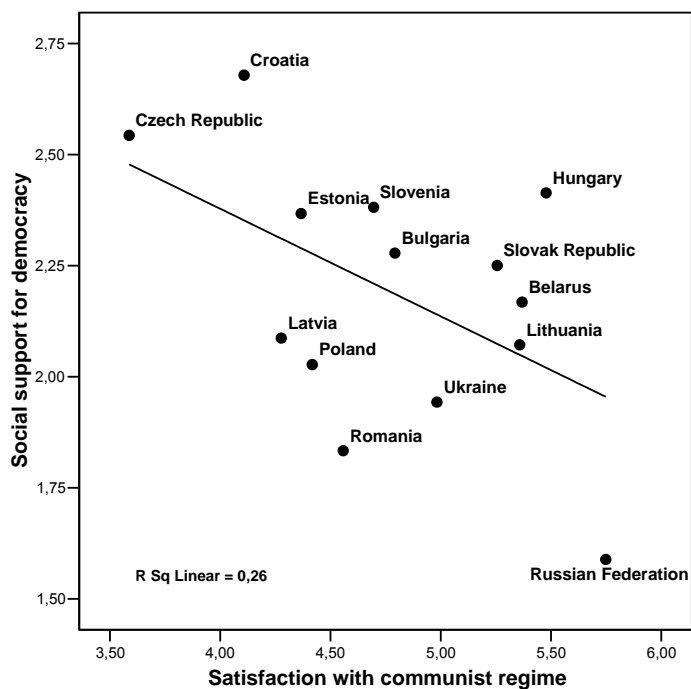
Not the same conclusion can be draw if we are looking to the Western countries (Figure A-1, from the annex). In the Western states the impact of economic growth on the level of social support for democracy is not the same like in post-communist countries. The graph indicates that there is no association between the support for democracy and economic growth. Ireland is an outlier, due to it atypical economic growth during the '90, but is not affecting the general pattern. If we exclude Ireland from the analysis the shape of the distribution is the same.

**Figure 3 Support for democracy by GDP (2001) in Europe**



However, the support for democracy varies among the Western countries by level of economic prosperity, not by level of economic growth. The Figure 3 shows that countries in Europe cluster in two groups depending on the level of support for democracy and on the level of GDP. The first cluster is composed by countries from Western Europe which have higher level of economic development and higher level of support for the democratic order. The second cluster comprises ex-communist countries with lower level of support for new democratic regime and lower level of economic prosperity. One should mention that Spain, which have experienced totalitarian regimes until 20 years ago, is much closer to the ex-communist countries then the other Western countries, while Portugal cluster together with ex-communist countries.

Figure 4 Support for democracy by satisfaction with communist regime in ex-communist countries



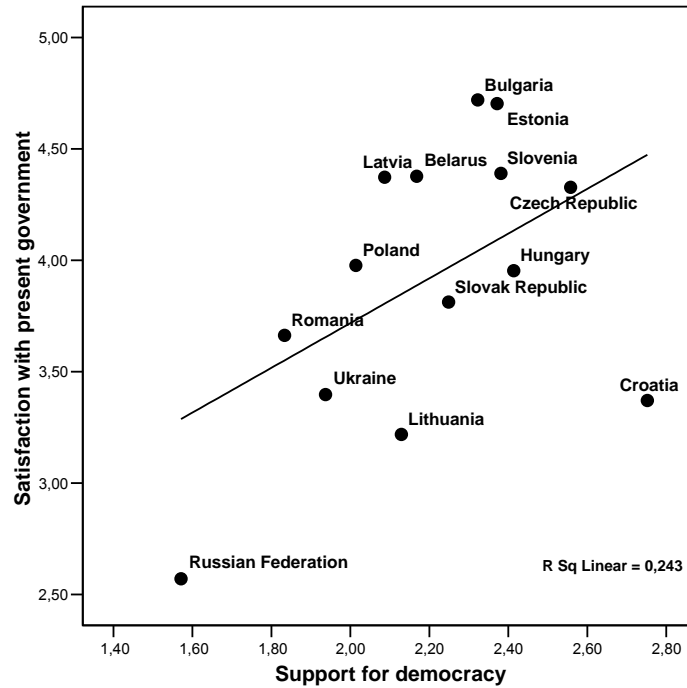
On the other hand, data from Figure 4 indicates that in ex-communist countries support for democracy is highly associated with satisfaction with the communist régime. In other words, in those countries in which the positive evaluation of the former regime is prevalent, like in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine the support for democracy is lower. Thus, in countries with higher level of rejection for the communist regime, like in Croatia or Czech Republic, the support for democracy has a high level. Therefore the data sustain the hypothesis of the negative impact of satisfaction with communist regime on the level of support for democracy.

If one looks to the relation between support for democracy and evaluation of the political regime 10 years ago in Western consolidated democracies can be observed the existence of a positive association between the two variables (see data from the Annex Figure A-2). Taking into account that in these countries the political regime was a democratic one ten years ago, one can say that the satisfaction with democratic system on the long run straightens the social support for democracy. However, the evaluation of the present government activity in Western European countries is not associated with the level of social support for democracy (see Figure A-3 in Annex). In consolidated democracies, the support for the democratic order depends on the satisfaction on the long run with the political order, not on the present evaluation of the political life. This fact sustains the idea that these countries have a reservoir of diffuse support, built in a long period of time, and the present evaluation of the government does not play an important role in legitimating of the political order. In these countries the government is allowed to be inefficient for a short period of time without any risk for the democratic order.

Different from Western Europe, in post-communist countries the evaluation of the present government is highly associated with the support for democracy (Figure 5). These

countries does not have a reservoir of diffuse support for democracy and the legitimation of the political order is done mainly on the evaluation of the present government and on the efficiency of the actual political actors. In this case the activity of the government is more important than in case of consolidated democracies and each error of the governmental actors could threaten the support for the new political order.

**Figure 5 Support for democracy by satisfaction with present government in ex-communist countries**



The post-communist countries differ from the Western consolidated democracies with respect to the impact of ideological orientation on the support for democracy too. While in countries from Central and Eastern Europe the ideological factor does not play an important role in influencing the support for democracy, in Western countries the ideological orientation (left / right) has a stronger impact (see Figures A-4 and A-5 in Annex). In the first group of countries the social support for the democratic order mainly relies on the peoples' evaluation of the government efficiency, whilst in consolidated democracies the support is largely based on the value orientations. Therefore, people from post-communist countries are inclined to support or reject a democratic regime depending on the activity of the actual government; in this case, a decrease in GDP can strongly affect the popular support. In consolidated democracies, people judge the political order on the basis of their value orientation not on the policies measures taken by a specific government. In this context, the democratic order has many chances to be sustained in Western countries in a specific moment of time than it has in ex-communist countries.

## **Conclusions**

The level of social support for democracy is different across the European countries. It decreases from West to East. The Western countries, which have experienced democracy for a long time, have higher level of social support for democracy than post-communist countries have. Among the ex-countries the level of support for democracy varies from West to East too. Countries from Central Europe like Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary have higher level of support than those located on the Eastern Europe.

According to the EVS data the level of social support for democracy in Europe depends on the economic performances in the last ten years, on the evaluation of the political regime ten years ago, on the evaluation of the actual government. However, to be a Western stable democratic regime has the strongest impact on the level of support for democracy. On the other side, the countries from Western Europe and from Central and Eastern Europe differ with the respect to economic performances. As the data points out, the countries with a higher GDP per capita have an upper level of support for democracy too. A positive economic output in Western countries has generated on the long run a quite high and stable support for democracy. The economic efficiency has strengthened the support for the democratic order and permitted the formation and the consolidation of the diffuse support based on core values.

In post-communist countries the determinants of social support for democracy are different from those from Western countries. The economic performance has a stronger impact, like the negative evaluation of the communist regime and the positive evaluation of the actual government have too. Thus, countries with better economic performances after a decade of transition have a higher level of social support than those in which the economy is in decline. The dissatisfaction with the communist regime plays also an important role in influencing the country's level of social support for the democratic order. Different from the Western democracy in the new European democratic countries the left / right ideological orientation has no impact on the support for democracy. In this case the economic efficiency is more important for the evaluation of democracy than the value orientation, since the democratic order cannot rely on the diffuse support.

Even the social support for democracy relies on different factors in Western countries and in Central and Eastern ones, the data have pointed out that there is a common pattern of values with the respect to support for democracy in Europe. This pattern consists in a bi-dimensional space of value orientation and it rests in two value orientations: support for democracy and the evaluation of democracy. On the other hand, one can expect that the differences in level of support for the democratic order will reduce due to the increases in economic performances in the post-communist countries. On the long run, the positive evaluation of the economy and of the governmental activity can help in creating a reservoir of diffuse support in Central and Eastern Europe and in changing the pattern of support for democracy in this part of Europe.

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## Appendix

Table A-1 Goodness- of – fit indexes

	$\Delta 2$ IFI	CFI	RMSEA
France	0.925	0.924	0.076
United Kingdom	0.839	0.838	0.126
Germany	0.858	0.857	0.095
Austria	0.897	0.897	0.084
Italy	0.914	0.914	0.081
Spain	0.794	0.792	0.103
Portugal	0.779	0.777	0.107
Netherlands	0.538	0.533	0.144
Belgium	0.959	0.959	0.052
Denmark	0.705	0.703	0.124
Sweden	0.833	0.832	0.103
Finland	0.895	0.895	0.087
Iceland	0.592	0.587	0.142
North Ireland	0.945	0.944	0.067
Ireland	0.847	0.846	0.095
Estonia	0.883	0.882	0.080
Latvia	0.838	0.836	0.090
Lithuania	0.909	0.908	0.075
Poland	0.942	0.942	0.067
Czech Republic	0.861	0.860	0.098
Slovakia	0.913	0.913	0.091
Hungary	0.912	0.911	0.079
Romania	0.902	0.902	0.075
Bulgaria	0.920	0.920	0.091
Croatia	0.855	0.854	0.108
Greece	0.777	0.775	0.109
Russia	0.930	0.930	0.082
Malta	0.835	0.834	0.111
Luxembourg	0.926	0.925	0.063
Slovenia	0.956	0.956	0.055
Ukraine	0.953	0.953	0.061
Belarus	0.961	0.960	0.053
Entire sample	0.949	0.949	0.078

Figure A-1 Support for democracy by GDP growth 1990 – 2000 in western countries

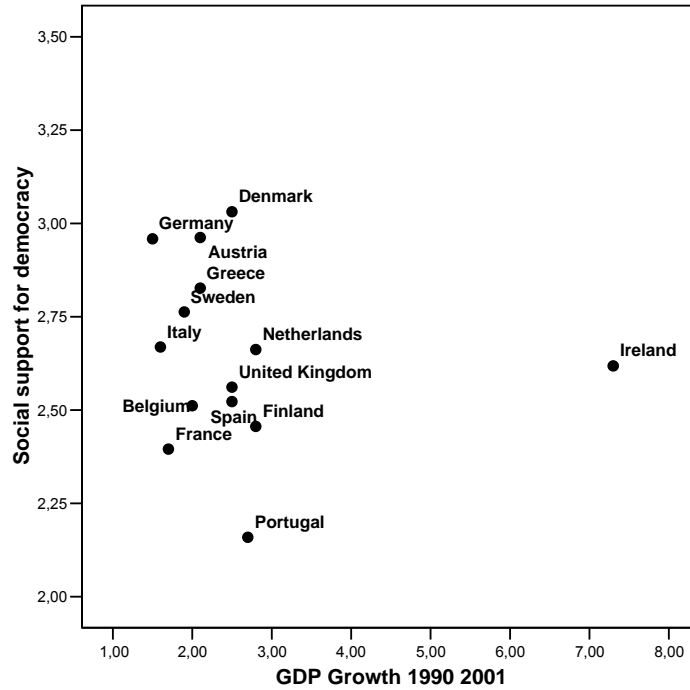


Figure A-2 Support for democracy by satisfaction with political regime 10 years ago in Western Europe

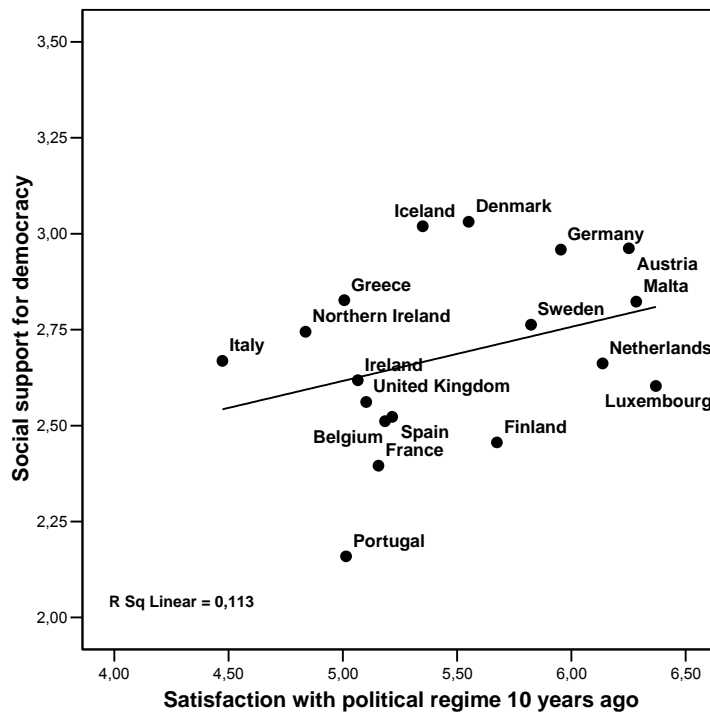


Figure A-3 Support for democracy by satisfaction with present government in western countries

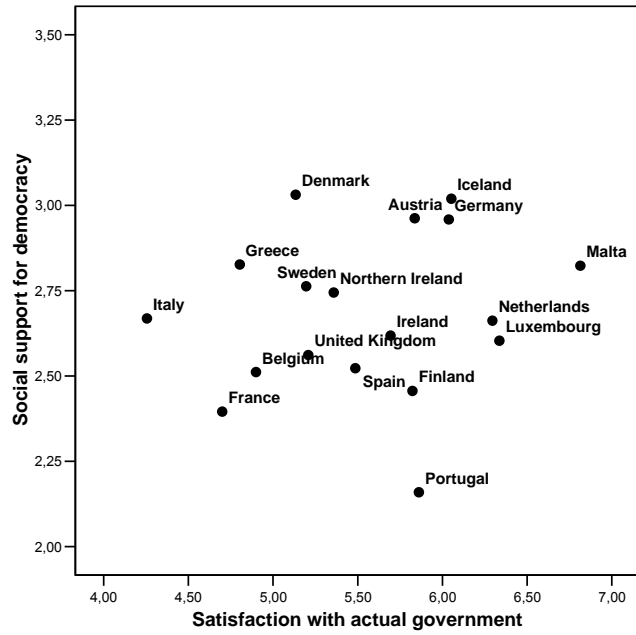


Figure A-4 Support for democracy by ideological orientation in ex-communist countries

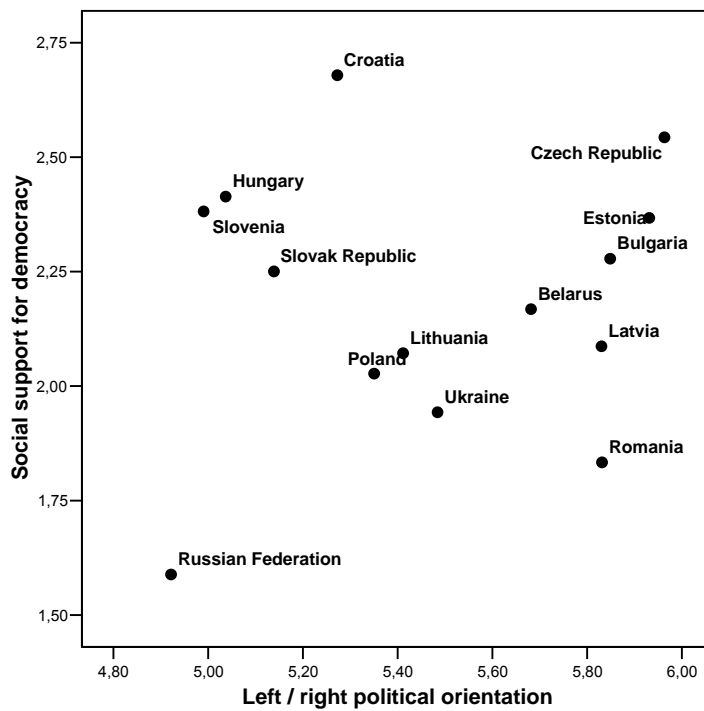




Figure A-5 Support for democracy by ideological orientation in Western countries

