



# HOW MUCH EU DO HUNGARIANS WANT? PRO-EU AND EUROSCEPTIC ATTITUDES IN HUNGARY

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As a think-tank committed to Hungary's European integration, Policy Solutions has always considered research on the relationship between Hungary and the European Union a priority. The steadily high support for EU membership in Hungary is well known, but we aim to go beyond the question of "remain or leave" and provide a more nuanced picture of how Hungarians see the country's place and future in the European Union. Compared to previous Hungarian studies, this publication explores Hungarian attitudes toward the EU in more depth and incorporates more aspects.

We used a survey conducted with the help of our partner, Závecz Research, between 8-19 August 2021 as the basis for our analysis. The survey was based on personal interviews with 1,000 Hungarians who made up a representative sample of Hungarian society based on age, gender, educational attainment and the type of municipality they live in. This study was produced with the generous support of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest.

## **Citizens' associations with the European Union in Hungary: EU funds, less sovereignty, community, free movement**

We first asked respondents to tell us the first three things that come to mind when they think of the European Union. For nearly a third of respondents (32%), EU subsidies and their positive impact on Hungary's economy are the most common association when they think of the European Union. The financial benefits of EU membership have consistently ranked first recently: EU funds were the most frequent answer in our 2019 survey as well.



In second place was the overall positive perception of the impact of EU membership (31%). Such positive associations include power, freedom, happiness, a wide range of opportunities, common goals or trust. However, general negative associations are also common. For 21% of respondents, the image that emerges is of a European Union that restricts the Member States, imposes oppressive social, economic and legal regulations on countries and exerts ideological pressure on European citizens.

The European Union as a community also features prominently in the spontaneous responses. For one in five respondents (20%), the European Union represents community and alliance: a sense of belonging, assistance, cooperation and unity. Freedom of movement is also a priority for Hungarians: the possibility of working and studying abroad more easily (17%) and the possibility of free travel under the Schengen agreement (16%).

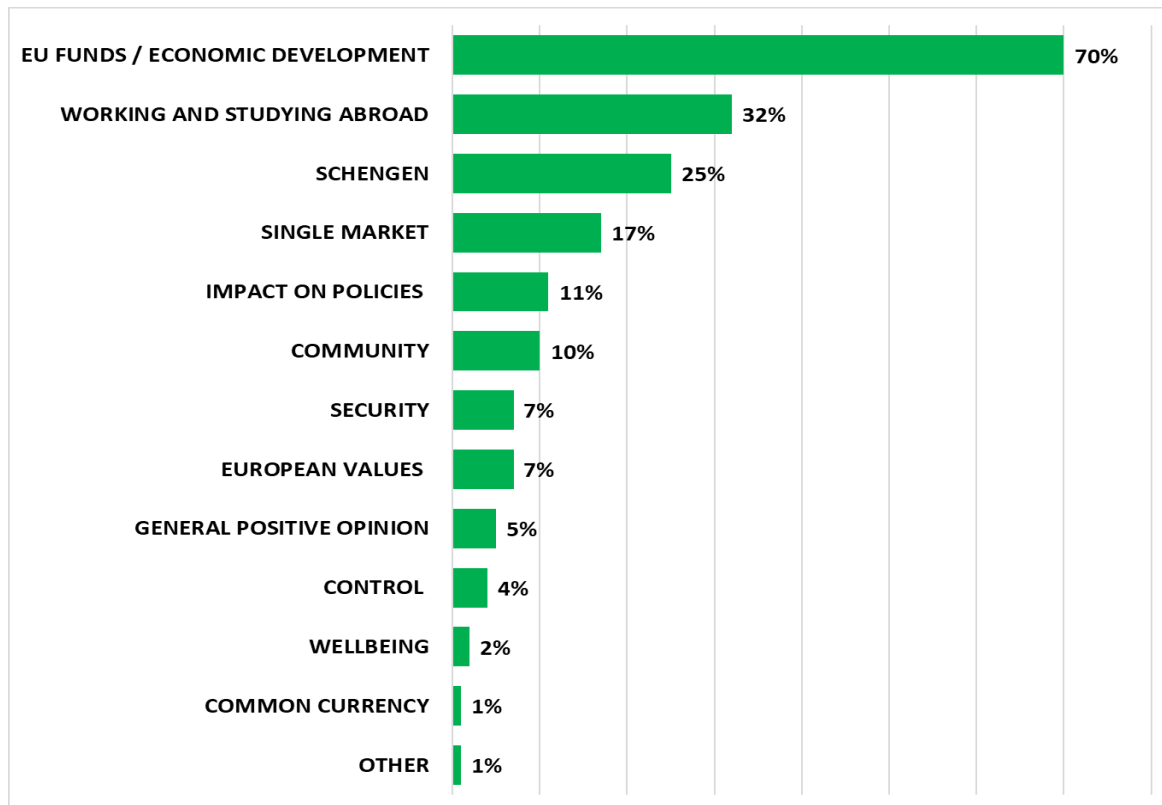
Overall, it can be seen that Hungarians continue to have a mainly positive view of the European Union. For Hungarian society, the essential benefits of EU membership are economic development through EU funding, the idea of a "Europe without borders", the benefits of free movement, and a sense of belonging to the community and the assurance of European values. Only comments inspired by ideological, economic and legal "pressures from Brussels" and migration were the two negative issues among the top ten most frequent associations. The decline in the importance of migration is shown by the fact that, while in 2019 it was the second most frequent association with the EU in Hungary, in the present survey it was only the seventh most frequent response.

### **Hungarians see EU membership as beneficial mainly for financial reasons**

There is almost unanimous agreement that the most significant benefit of Hungary's EU membership is the funding and economic development opportunities provided by the European Union (Figure 1). When we asked respondents to name the three most essential advantages of EU membership, more than two thirds (70%) of respondents chose the positive effects on economic development.

A distant second was the possibility of working and studying abroad (32%), followed by the Schengen Agreement, which abolishes physical borders and allows international mobility – this was highlighted by a quarter of respondents (25%). In addition, the benefits provided by the single market (efficient trade, access to a wide range of products, customs union, etc.) were also rated as one of the most important positive aspects by 17% of Hungarians.

Figure 1. What do you think are the biggest advantages of Hungary's EU membership? (Among all respondents, N=863,%)



### **Main disadvantages of EU membership: excessive regulation, migration, weakening of national sovereignty, second-tier economic position**

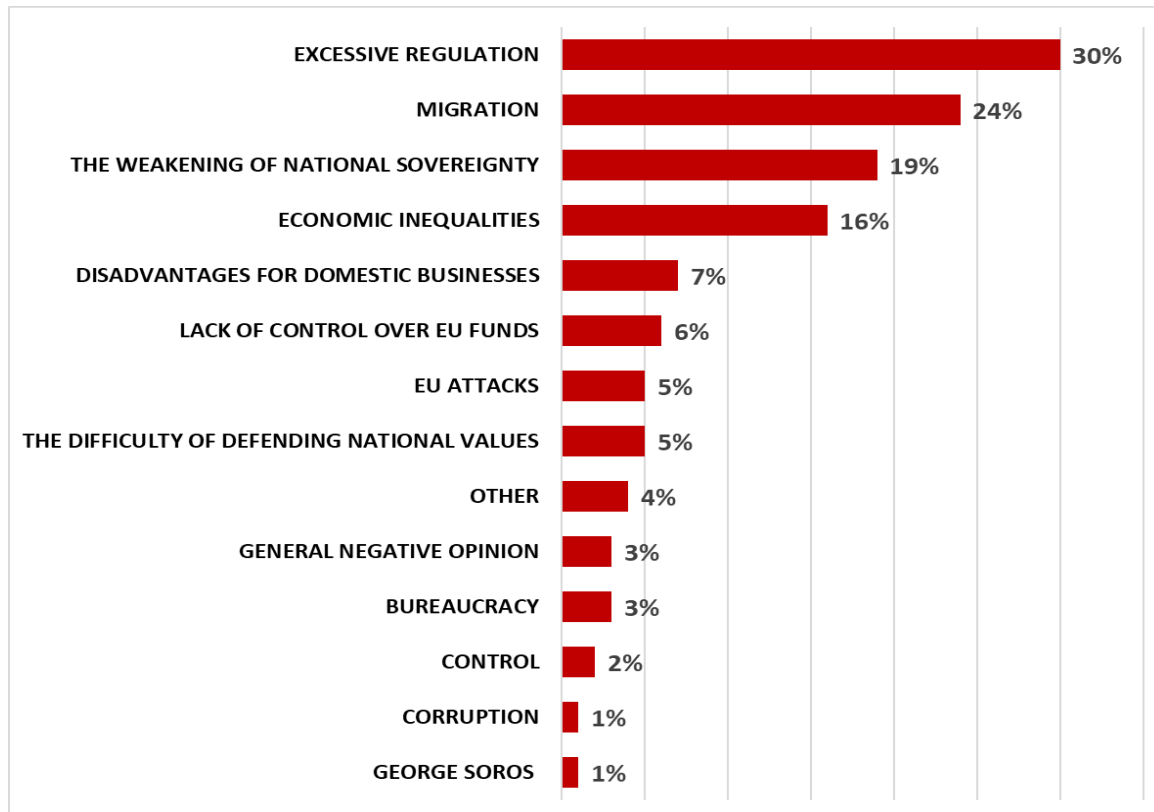
We also looked at which aspects Hungarians consider to be the main disadvantages. 30% of respondents highlighted excessive regulation as one of the most significant disadvantages (Figure 2). While in 2019, Hungarians thought migration to be the most important disadvantage of EU membership, today far fewer Hungarians see it as a severe problem (24%), and it has dropped to second place. And a fifth of respondents (19%) perceive that Hungary's national sovereignty is diminished by EU membership (and rank it as one of the main disadvantages).

Another recurring element in spontaneous answers is that the desired economic development and achieving a European standard of living have not yet materialised. Hence, economic inequality (16%) between the individual member states is still noticeable in everyday life. In this context, many are also concerned about the disadvantage domestic businesses face vis-à-vis multinational companies.

A separate question examined the popularity of the frequent statement in government communications according to which "Brussels bureaucrats want to impose their will on the Hungarian people". Half of Hungarians (50%) agree with this statement, while 42% of respondents disagree that Brussels bureaucrats are trying to impose their will on Hungarians. Unsurprisingly, this opinion is more widespread among Fidesz-KDNP voters: more than two-

thirds (70%) agree with this statement, but nearly half of non-party voters (47%) and one in three (33%) of opposition voters also identify with the Fidesz narrative.

Figure 2. What do you think are the biggest disadvantages of Hungary's EU membership? (Among all respondents, N=827, %)



### The impact of the European Union on Hungary's development: a decline in positive assessments

In recent years, the proportion of people who consider the EU's impact positive has declined somewhat in all the areas covered by our research (access to Western products, living standards, economy, agriculture, environment). The majority of Hungarians (52%) think that, of all the aspects surveyed, access to Western goods and services has improved the most since Hungary joined the EU. This is six percentage points lower than three years ago, and a similar increase in the number of people who hold negative views.

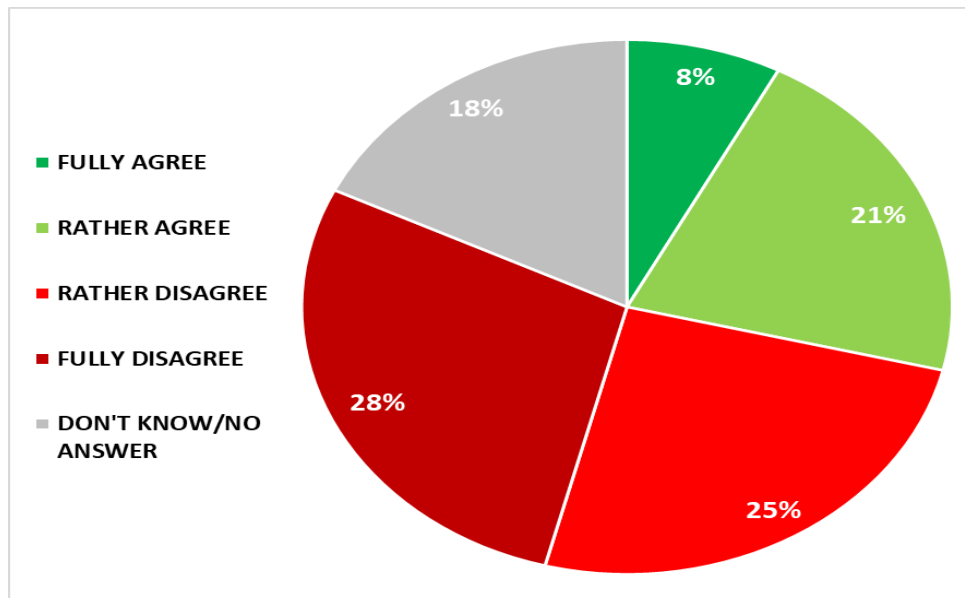
In terms of the impact on living standards, three broadly similar groups emerge: a third of Hungarians think that general living standards have improved (32%), a third think that EU accession has brought about a deterioration (31%), while 37% think that the situation has neither improved nor worsened. While 42% of respondents in 2019 believed that the quality of life in Hungary had improved due to EU membership, in the current survey, this opinion was ten percentage points lower. In addition, the number of people who were dissatisfied increased by 15 percentage points.

### Half of Hungarians think Hungary is a net beneficiary of the EU budget

A majority of Hungarians (53%) believe that Hungary does not pay more into the EU budget than it receives, while 29% think that Hungary is a net contributor to the EU budget (Figure 3). When asked a differently worded question in 2019, 22% believed that Hungary receives less money from the EU than it pays in.

Political affiliation is a key factor in how a respondent views the financial balance of Hungary's membership in the EU. While 42% of Fidesz voters think Hungary pays more into the EU budget than it gets out of it, only half as many opposition voters (20%) and 24% of those with no party affiliation think this way.

Figure 3. Hungary contributes more money to the European Union budget than it receives. (All respondents, %)



### National or EU powers: balanced public policy preferences

Our survey also asked respondents to indicate for 19 policy areas what they think would be ideal: should it be a national competence (and the EU should only have supporting competence), should the EU have exclusive competence, or should it be shared competence? There are eight policy areas where an absolute majority of Hungarians favour national sovereignty (i.e. they want the Member States to have exclusive competence). In comparison, for nine policy areas, there is an absolute majority of pro-integrationists (i.e. those who want the policy to be shared or EU-only). In the case of immigration policy, the proportion of those who want the EU to have some say in immigration policy (47%) is almost equal to those who oppose it (49%). The proportion of sovereignists and integrationists is similarly balanced for health care as well (49% vs 48%).

An absolute majority of respondents believe that housing (64%), land and water management (64%), financial regulation (58%), education (58%), employment (54%), social policy (51%) and agriculture (50%) should be exclusively within the competence of the member states.

Pro-integrationists are in absolute majority in the policy areas of environment (67%), technology development (63%), energy policy (62%), foreign trade (61%), security policy (60%), transport policy (54%), justice and law enforcement (53%) and civil rights (51%). In other words, Hungarians mainly want EU cooperation in areas where national rules are likely to lead to less effective action on the international scene. This is the case in areas such as climate change, energy, defence and security challenges, as well as the development of transport infrastructure or innovation and technology development.

It is important to add that most pro-integration respondents would like to see shared competences. In contrast, only a tiny fraction of Hungarians (2-8%) would like to see exclusive EU competences for specific policies. The share of respondents who want exclusive EU competence does not exceed 10% in any cases.

### **The relative majority of Hungarians are pro-EU, but one in four respondents support the concept of a "Europe of Nations"**

We considered it essential to categorise respondents not only by their support for EU membership but also by their attitudes towards national and EU competences.

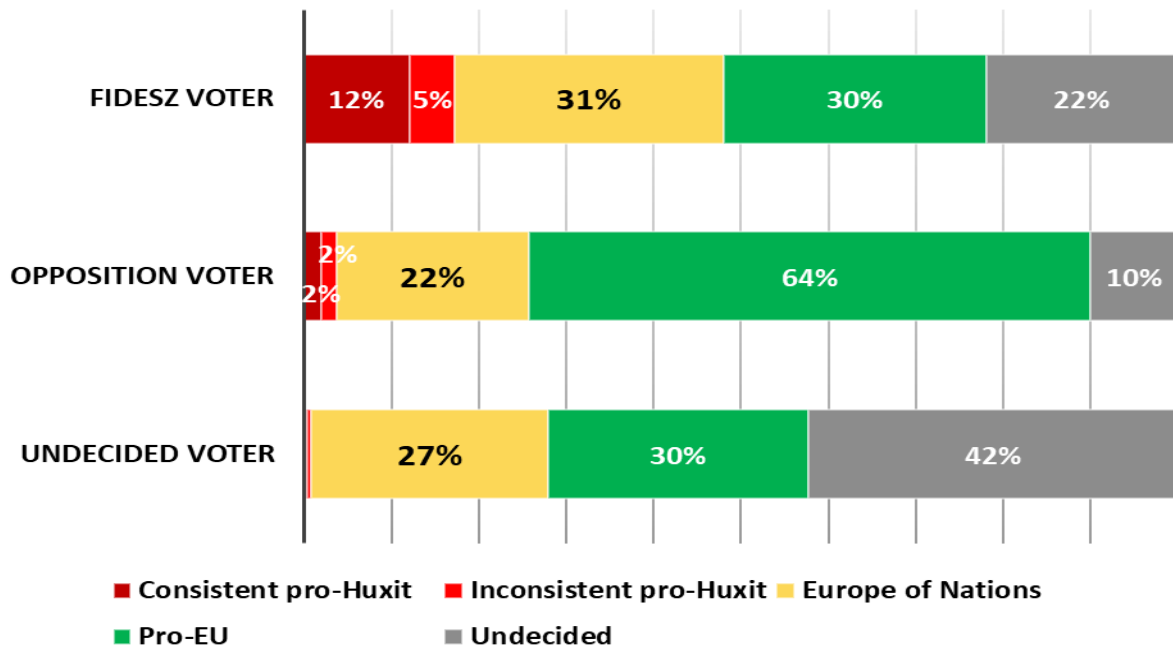
Within Hungarian society, there is a relative majority of pro-European respondents (44%), i.e. those who favour remaining in the EU and support EU institutions having a say in managing most policy areas. However, it is also striking that a significant proportion of respondents who support Hungary's membership in the EU are opposed to giving powers to the EU institutions. Based on our typology, more than a quarter of Hungarians (27%) support the concept of a "Europe of Nations", i.e. EU membership without a significant loss of sovereignty.

The majority of pro-Huxit respondents are „consistent” (5%), i.e. they do not want the EU to have a say in most policies. However, the proportion of „inconsistent leavers” is not negligible (3%) either. A fifth of Hungarians are neutral or have no firm position (21%).

Among Fidesz voters, the proportion of both consistent (12%) and inconsistent (5%) Huxit supporters is high. Almost one in five Fidesz voters would vote to leave the EU. Among government supporters, the "Europe of Nations" concept has many supporters (31%), almost as many as pro-European Fidesz voters (30%, see Figure 4). Among opposition voters, the proportion of consistent and inconsistent exit supporters is only 2-2%. It is important to point out that there are almost three times as many pro-EU opposition voters (64%) as there are "Europe of Nations" opposition supporters (22%).



Figure 4. Categories of support for EU membership and support for national/EU competences in Hungary (by party preference, %)



### Hungarians have more trust in EU institutions than in the Hungarian institutions

Half of those polled trust the Court of Justice of the European Union (50%), and slightly fewer trust the European Parliament (46%), and both figures are much higher than those who think it is worth trusting the Hungarian courts (37%) or the Hungarian parliament (35%). In the case of the Hungarian judiciary, the same number of people trust the judiciary as distrust it (37%), while in the case of the Hungarian Parliament, the proportion of people who distrust the institution is seven percentage points higher (42%-35%). Interestingly, trust in both European and Hungarian institutions is not as strong as in scientists (63% trust scientists, and only 11% distrust them).

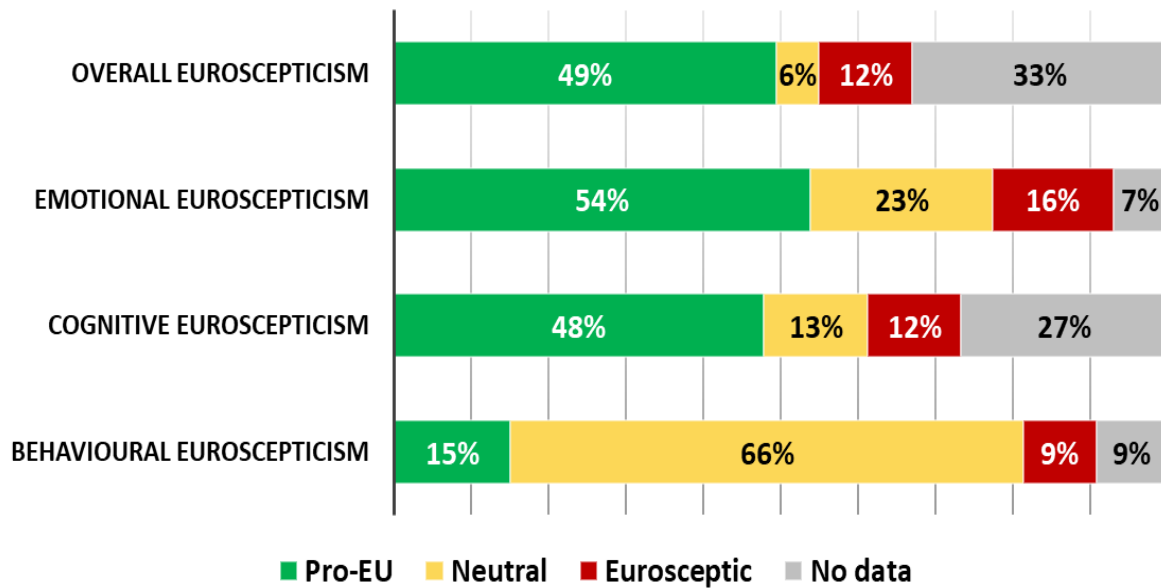
### Euroskepticism index: half of Hungarians can be considered pro-EU

Our research shows in detail which social groups are the most Eurosceptic and which factors make individuals more prone to negative attitudes towards the EU. To this end, we developed a new method to measure the complex relationship of individuals to the EU.

The Emotional Euroscepticism Index indicates how individuals feel about the EU. The Cognitive Euroscepticism Index measures how Hungarians assess Hungary's membership in the EU. The Behavioural Euroscepticism Index shows how much respondents would be willing to express their support/criticism of the EU. From the three component indices, we have created an overall Euroscepticism Index (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Euroscepticism Index and breakdown by component index categories



Based on our overall Euroscepticism index, almost half of Hungarians (49%) are pro-EU. The proportion of neutral respondents (6%) and Eurosceptics (12%) is much lower. However, it was not possible to calculate our measure covering all three dimensions of EU attitudes for a third of respondents.

In contrast, there was very little missing data for the Emotional Euroscepticism Index (7%). The absolute majority of Hungarians (54%) have pro-EU attitudes at an emotional level. Almost a quarter of respondents are neutral (23%), with a lower proportion of Eurosceptics on an emotional basis (16%).

Also, on our Cognitive Euroscepticism Index, almost half of Hungarians can be described as pro-EU (48%). More than a tenth of Hungarians are neutral about Hungary's membership of the EU (13%). A similar proportion of respondents are Eurosceptic on the cognitive measure (12%). The missing index scores are particularly high for this index (27%), indicating that many people do not have a mature opinion about how EU membership affects Hungary or their personal lives.

The Behavioural Euroscepticism Index shows a clear picture. Two-thirds of Hungarians (66%) are completely neutral, meaning they would not take a public stance for or against the EU - whether it's a Facebook comment, conversation with a friend, or street demonstration. Nearly a tenth of Hungarians can be said to be willing to take political action, i.e. easily mobilised Eurosceptics (9%). The proportion of potentially active pro-EU activists is a notch higher (15%).

Multivariate regression analyses were also used to examine the relationship between specific sociodemographic characteristics and different measures of Euroscepticism. Only gender had a significant effect on the overall Euroscepticism index. Women are somewhat less Eurosceptic due to lower levels of emotional Euroscepticism. Age and place of residence also affect emotional Euroscepticism. Compared to those under 30, those aged 30-39 and 60+ associate significantly more negative sentiments towards the EU. Compared to people living in Budapest,





people living in rural areas are considerably less likely to be emotionally Eurosceptic. However, cognitive Euroscepticism is more prevalent in this group: people living in villages have a more negative perception of Hungary's membership in the EU.

The above shows that, based on the detailed attitudinal analysis, substantially fewer people are considered to be genuinely pro-EU (49%) than the share of those who support EU membership (70% in our survey).

In terms of a potential referendum, a significant majority across all social and political groups would vote to remain in a referendum on EU membership. Among Fidesz voters, only 61% favour EU membership, while the percentage of those in favour of leaving is extremely high at 17% and 22% are undecided. However, among opposition voters, there is a large majority of pro-EU voters (86%), very few Huxit voters (4%) and only one in ten opposition voters are undecided on the issue (10%).

A striking pattern emerges between age groups, with the proportion of those aged 60+ being 12-13 points lower in favour of Remain (62%) than in younger age groups (74%-75%). A similar trend is seen in the education categories. Those with primary education are the least likely to vote to remain (63%), 8-13 percentage points lower than those with higher education (71-76%).

### **The roots of Euroscepticism in Hungary**

Multivariate regression analyses were used to investigate the factors affecting the Euroscepticism indices, as well as a simpler (albeit imperfect) measure of Euroscepticism, the probability of support to leave the EU. Our analyses were used to test our previously formulated hypotheses. We were able to accept half of our 12 hypotheses.

All three of our hypotheses on the political roots of Euroscepticism were accepted. In line with our hypotheses, pro-government attitudes, a socio-cultural right-wing orientation, and a left-wing economic orientation increase Euroscepticism. On average, Euroscepticism increases toward the socio-cultural right, while it decreases toward the economic right. Among the socio-cultural issues, anti-multiculturalism and pro-sovereignty were associated with increased Euroscepticism. Among economic issues, two left-wing positions, support for redistribution and anti-market positions, increase the level of Euroscepticism.

Our hypotheses about „populist Euroscepticism” could not be accepted. Fear of losing social status did not significantly affect individual levels of Euroscepticism. The effect of anti-establishment attitudes was significant but opposite to our hypotheses. The more critical a respondent was of political elites, the less Eurosceptic they were (since being critical of the elite in Hungary currently means being critical of Fidesz).

However, authoritarianism (as measured by parenting preferences) had a significant effect. Only 4 per cent of respondents who were not at all authoritarian would support Hungary's exit from the EU, compared to 13 per cent of respondents who were fully authoritarian. The support for EU membership is 80% among non-authoritarian respondents and only 63% among authoritarian respondents. One possible explanation for these results could be that



Hungarians susceptible to populism do not identify Brussels with elites who threaten their economic and social status but see it as an enemy that threatens the socio-cultural order.

Among our hypotheses about social psychological factors, we could confirm that social isolation increases Euroscepticism, a fundamentally negative attitude based on "denial". However, our other hypothesis was not confirmed: psychological well-being had no significant effect on the Euroscepticism index.

The literature places great emphasis on the relationship between internationalism, foreign experiences and friends, and European identity. We were able to confirm two of our hypotheses in this regard. Indeed, cosmopolitan attitudes and Euroscepticism are inversely related. Having a network of contacts abroad reduced Euroscepticism – this was especially true for people deeply embedded internationally. We, therefore, accepted our hypothesis in this respect. Support for EU membership is exceptionally high among respondents who have active contacts abroad (80%-85%). Those who favour remaining in the EU are lower among those who do not have contacts abroad (68%) and those who have contacts abroad but do not keep in touch (59%).

Surprisingly, language proficiency did not significantly affect either the level of Euroscepticism or the likelihood of being pro-leave. However, contrary to our hypotheses, there was a significant increase in the level of Euroscepticism for both being a regular visitor abroad and having lived in another EU Member State. These experiences abroad also significantly increased the likelihood of supporting Huxit. A possible explanation for this is that they may be the ones who were disappointed with their foreign experiences and therefore returned to Hungary. Similarly, many who regularly go abroad may be seasonal workers who return home with a less than positive experience. Consistent with this is that most respondents who regularly go abroad have experienced some economic hardship in the past. More than a third of these respondents do not speak a foreign language.

Finally, it is worth noting that we see a striking relationship between knowledge about the EU and support for EU membership: the proportion of pro-EU respondents increases sharply with the level of knowledge about the EU. In our three-question knowledge test, among those who could not answer any question correctly, the proportion of those who were pro-EU was 46%, while among those who got all three answers correct, this ratio was 82%. The highest number of Huxit supporters was among those with low EU knowledge (17%).