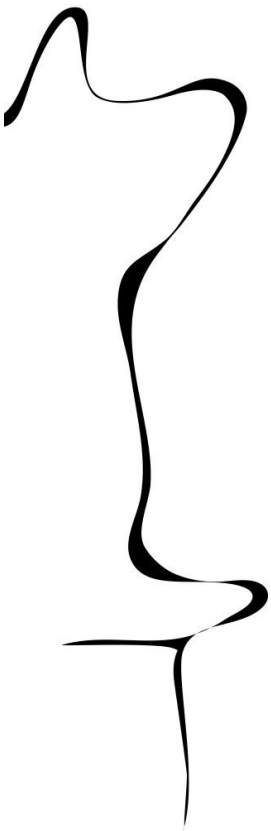


## **Bachelor Thesis**

### **The Link Between Europeanization and Democratization in the Visegrád Group:**

### **Young Europeans and the National Context of Euroscepticism**



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## **Abstract**

Since their accession to the European Union 15 years ago, several countries of Central and Eastern Europe have faced democratic backsliding and Euroscepticism among the population. In this bachelor thesis, I seek to investigate the implications of the national context for the level of Euroscepticism. Specifically, I look at the young generation in the countries of the Visegrád Group, of which Poland and Hungary are found to show the most serious signs of democratic backsliding. I perform a cross-sectional analysis on the public opinion in 2018, using quantitative data from the Special Eurobarometer 90.1. I investigate the effects of the evaluation of national democracy in terms of satisfaction and perception of responsiveness, as well as the effect of the perception of national benefits, on the level of Euroscepticism in the four countries. The empirical analysis shows that all three independent variables have some explanatory power, with more positive perceptions leading to a lower level of Euroscepticism. In the countries that are facing democratic backsliding, the satisfaction with national democracy does not explain the level of Euroscepticism, implying that the public opinion in these countries follows a different logic.

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## List of Abbreviations

CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEEC	Central and Eastern European Countries
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
ČSSD	Czech Social Democratic Party (Czech Republic)
EU	European Union
HZDS	People's Party - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Slovakia)
KDNP	Christian Democratic People's Party (Hungary)
KDU-ČSL	Christian and Democratic Union (Czech Republic)
MP	Member of Parliament
MSZP	Hungarian Socialist Party (Hungary)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ODS	Civic Democratic Party (Czech Republic)
OLS	Ordinary Least Squares (Method of Linear Regression)
PHARE	Poland and Hungary: Aid for Restructuring of the Economies
PiS	Law and Justice (Poland)
PSL	Polish People's Party (Poland)
PO	Civic Platform (Poland)
SDKÚ-DS	Slovak Democratic and Christian Union - Democratic Party (Slovakia)
Smer-SD	Direction - Social Democracy (Slovakia)
SNS	Slovak National Party (Slovakia)
SZDSZ	Alliance of Free Democrats – Hungarian Liberal Party (Hungary)
UK	United Kingdom
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
V-Dem	Varieties of Democracy

## 1. Introduction

With the collapse of the communist regimes in the 1990s, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) embarked on a remarkable journey of democratization and, simultaneously, Europeanization. The adoption of reforms to be able to join the European Union (EU) and “return to Europe”, encompassed transformations to build administrative capacity, establish democratic institutions and values, and build a working market economy. The four Visegrád countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) were considered to be frontrunners in the Europeanization process as they were the first ones out of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) to sign association agreements with the EU in 1991 and implement reforms (European Commission, 1992). Eventually, the majority of the CEEC joined the EU in the two waves of eastern enlargement in 2004 and 2007, becoming known as success stories of democratization and Europeanization and showing the victory over the totalitarian legacy (Bugarič, 2015: 220).

Today, both democratization and Europeanization processes have come to a halt in the Visegrád Four. On one hand, rising polarization and Eurosceptic tendencies can be observed in the domestic politics and within the population of the CEE countries, just like in many other EU member states (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2010; Usherwood & Startin, 2013). This reflects the issues of legitimacy and the democratic deficit of the EU, which have been at the center of more recent public and scientific debates. While the EU emerged as an elite project, the increasing integration and the development from intergovernmental to supranational EU institutions gradually brought into focus the role of the citizens in shaping and evaluating the EU’s democracy (Fuchs, 2011). On the other hand, some of the Visegrád countries are also experiencing a recession in democratic quality on the national level, initiated by their domestic governments and political elites. While the cases of Hungary and Poland are most ominous in this regard, with the dismantling of checks and balances and the abolishment of the rule of law through the use of democratic instruments, characteristics of democratic backsliding are also identified in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Cianetti, Dawson, & Hanley, 2018; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018) as well as in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Greskovits, 2015) at varying levels.

These developments give rise to questions about the legitimacy and sustainability of democratic and administrative reforms in Central and Eastern European countries, facing the EU with the task to ensure the compliance with European values within the member states. With the democratic deficit of the EU on one side and national democratic backsliding on the other, the

citizens stand at the heart of the political debate. As Abraham Lincoln asserted in his Gettysburg Address, democracy is the “government of the people, by the people, for the people” – making the public the crucial element in defining political developments today and in the future (cf. Schmidt, 2013). Public attitudes highly influence the process of European integration and EU politics (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & De Vreese, 2011; Gabel, 1998), therefore also playing an important part in determining the sustainability of political and administrative reforms in Central and Eastern Europe.

Due to the deep connection of Europeanization and democratization processes, the losses of democratic quality in the Visegrád countries could have severe consequences on the European level, from small conflicts between member states to the dismantling of European integration processes and reduction of the number of EU member states. Therefore, it is important to define to what extent such national developments influence public opinion towards the European Union. However, the scientific literature has focused mainly on individual level explanations for Euroscepticism, disregarding to what extent the national context accounts for differences in the support for the European Union (cf. Hobolt & De Vries, 2016).

By focusing on the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, it is ensured that specific characteristics of these cases, for instance of cultural or historical nature, are considered. The young generation under 30 has grown up in democratic regimes within the EU, which is why their values and their appreciation for democracy should be deeply influenced by the principles of the EU, rather than communist principles. However, declining political participation and polarization can be identified among the youth, challenging the persistence of democratic and European values in the new member states. By putting an emphasis on the young generation, the prospective sustainability of democratization and Europeanization within the Visegrád countries can be assessed.

Thus, in this thesis, I seek to analyze the role of the national context in shaping the public opinion towards the European Union in the countries of the Visegrád Group. I focus on the young generation that has only lived in a democratic system because their values and experiences are assumed to be most similar. Against the background of recent losses of democratic quality in the new member states of Central and Eastern Europe, I examine the public opinion towards national democracy on one side, and the perception of national benefits from EU membership on the other. In doing so, I seek to establish whether democratic backsliding will pose a threat to European integration in the future.



## **1.1. Context of the Research**

### *Accession of the Central and Eastern European Countries to the European Union*

On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004, eight former Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe joined the European Union, concluding long-lasting accession processes. Within the fifteen years since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the CEEC had adopted several administrative and political reforms in order to establish a democratic political system and successfully integrate into the European Union. Behind the desire to become EU members stood mainly historical as well as geopolitical reasons, and the public debate in the countries of CEE was focused on the inevitability of EU integration. However, the return “back to Europe” did not bring democracy, economic prosperity or freedom on a silver platter, it required the Central and Eastern European countries to actively build administrative, political, and economic capacity to implement EU regulations.

The EU and the Visegrád countries (back then Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia) established their diplomatic relations in 1988, following the opening process in the majority of the Communist bloc. While the European Union was hesitant to guarantee membership to the CEEC at first, it did offer practical and financial assistance for the reform processes and strived to normalize trade relations with the countries (Gower, 2005). In February 1991, the Visegrád declaration was signed by Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, agreeing on cooperation between the three countries due to similar goals and values.

Consequently, in December 1991 the three countries of the Visegrád Group were the first ones to sign Europe Agreements with the EU, which set the legal framework for the accession process to the European Union. These association agreements were conditional on economic as well as political transition and the respect for European values and were set to come into force in 1994 (Gower, 2005). After Czechoslovakia split into the two sovereign states in 1993, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic signed new Europe Agreements that came into force in 1995. An important milestone in the accession of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was the Copenhagen European Council meeting in June 1993, in which the representatives of the EU member states agreed on the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries (European Council, 1993). The Council provided a detailed framework for reform policy and defined the membership criteria.

Thereafter, the first countries of Central and Eastern Europe submitted their applications to join the EU in 1994, with Hungary and Poland being two of the first countries to do so. Based on the assessment of reform processes and the functioning of democracy in the CEEC, the EU opened accession negotiations with five Central and Eastern European countries in 1997,

namely the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia. However, the countries of Slovakia, Latvia, and Lithuania were able to catch up on the reforms and were admitted to the EU alongside the other five countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 2004.

Thus, the support of the EU and the prospect of membership was a crucial element of democratization in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe resulting in the successful installation of a democratic government and a free, social market. In the PHARE program, set up in 1989 to support the reforms in Central and Eastern Europe financially, €2.4billion were allocated to the Visegrád countries until 1995 alone (European Commission, n.d.). In total, the EU spent around €14billion on pre-accession assistance in the Central and Eastern European countries, followed by post-accession payments to the new member states.

While integration into the EU was accompanied by widespread public support and lively public debate in the Visegrád countries, the erosion of democratic and European values in some new member states puts to question the legitimacy and sustainability of democratization and Europeanization processes. Therefore, the support for democratic transitions could imply that the extensive democratic reforms and EU accession, although initially supported by the citizens, did not meet the expectations the citizens had of the benefits from EU membership. While the civil society and especially the youth have the “ability and willingness to constrain and possibly forestall further progress toward a unified Europe” (Anderson, 1998, p. 570), decreasing political participation and rising Euroscepticism seem to challenge the concept of European integration.

### *Benefits from EU Membership in the Visegrád Countries*

Although the impact of EU assistance in the democratization of the Ex-Communist countries is undoubtful, measuring the overall benefits of EU membership in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is a more difficult task due to its wide impacts on many different areas in the administrative, political, economic, but also social and judicial sphere.

Some key drivers of integration into the EU were geopolitical and security considerations, especially for the countries which feared a strong influence by Russia. Therefore, EU membership was an important step towards the orientation towards the West. In addition, security aspects deriving from membership in an international community and integration into EU programs such as the Common Framework of Security and Foreign Policy (CFSP) offered additional protection.

Another important aspect of EU membership is economic benefits. Apart from the financial aid offered to the Central and Eastern European countries before accession, the inclusion of the Visegrád countries in the Schengen area enables the free movement of money, goods, people, and services. Connected to this, the access to the single market allows for easier access to consumers and suppliers for businesses and lower prices and more security for the citizens, overall contributing to a growth of the national economy. While Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic are still in the process of joining the European Monetary Union and adopting the Euro, the Slovak Republic already adopted the common currency in 2009, enabling an even stronger integration into the common market and increasing economic stability and growth.

Regarding the allocation of the EU budget, the four countries of the Visegrád Group are some of the countries that receive the biggest proportions of money from the budget while contributing a significantly smaller amount. In 2016<sup>1</sup>, they received €21.5 billion in total, which equaled to about 19% of the total EU budget (€111.6 billion), while contributing around €5.7 billion to the EU budget (5% of the total EU budget) (European Parliament, 2017). Poland, as one of the biggest countries of the EU, received €12 billion while contributing €3 billion to the EU budget. In all four countries, most of the money is being used for regional policy (cohesion and structural funds), followed by agriculture. Small fractions of the money are also being used for research and development or the area of citizenship, freedom, security, and justice (European Parliament, 2017).

Lastly, the EU rule transfer and the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*, the body of European Union law, have led to numerous benefits for the citizens of the Central and Eastern European countries in areas such as environmental protection, consumer rights, and especially labor rights. The guarantee of fundamental rights and promotion of democratic values, although not exclusively a product of EU membership, is also an important benefit of reforms in CEE.

## **1.2. Research Question**

This thesis seeks to analyze to what extent the national context shapes the opinion towards the European Union in the four Visegrád countries. Since the countries are expected to show varying levels of losses in democratic quality that might influence public support for the European Union, variables on the assessment of national democracy and their relationship with the level of Euroscepticism are investigated. Furthermore, it is analyzed to what extent the

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, more recent official data providing such a detailed breakdown for countries and policy fields was not available.

perception of national benefits is related to the level of Euroscepticism among the population. To allow for meaningful comparisons between the countries, this thesis is focused on the young generation that is between 15 and 29 years old because their opinions are least shaped by the historical context of their respective country and they should have the deepest connection to the values of the European Union.

Thus, this thesis addresses the following descriptive-explanatory main research question:

*In what ways are the evaluation of national democracy and country benefits from the EU associated with the level of Euroscepticism among the youth in the countries of the Visegrád Group in 2018?*

In order to do answer the main question, three sub-questions are addressed:

- 1) To what extent can the evaluation of national democracy and benefits from EU membership be defined as sources of Euroscepticism?*
- 2) What are the predominant perceptions regarding satisfaction with and responsiveness of national democracy among the youth in the countries of the Visegrád Group?*
- 3) What are the predominant perceptions regarding benefits the country has drawn from membership to the EU among young people in the countries of the Visegrád Group?*

These descriptive sub-questions will help organize the thesis and empirical analysis. The first question will be answered within the theoretical framework, discussing previous findings by scholars. The second and the third question will be answered within the first part of the analysis using quantitative data from the Eurobarometer 90.1, and the theoretical knowledge will then be applied in order to describe the associations and answer the main research question.

### **1.3. Societal Relevance**

The legitimacy of the European Union as a democratic entity exerting political and administrative power over its member states relies on the three dimensions of input, output, and throughput (Scharpf, 1999; Schmidt, 2013). The political participation by the people (input dimension), their demands and support for the European Union, is a crucial element of political legitimization of the EU, shaping both the EU as well as the national democracies. Thus, by studying the sources of public opinion towards the EU, insights into the state of democracy within the EU as well as prospects of EU integration can be gained. In recent years, integration processes in the European Union have slowed down, and events such as the Brexit referendum in the UK as well as rising polarization in the EU member states have led to debates on the

future of the European Union. The citizen's support for the European Union and membership is one of the central indicators of how much integration can be expected in the coming years.

In CEE, the public opinion towards the EU gives an idea of how sustainable the reforms within the “new” member states will be in the long run. Due to the high interconnectedness of democratization and Europeanization in CEE, the issue of democratic backsliding in some countries can even pose a threat to European democracy. Therefore, the consequences of backsliding need to be carefully examined in order to find adequate measures to address this issue and ensure the sustainability of democratic and administrative reforms in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the unique historical, political, and cultural backgrounds among the Visegrád countries can tell us more about what different national contexts might imply for EU politics and integration.

#### **1.4. Scientific Relevance**

Generally, Euroscepticism is often studied in regard to party politics, while the public opinion seems to be only of secondary interest (cf. Usherwood & Startin, 2013: 4). Although there are some studies on the sources of Euroscepticism in the domestic party systems or national elites of the CEE countries (Hughes, Sasse, & Gordon, 2002; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002; Taggart & Szczesbiak, 2004; Vachudova & Hooghe, 2009), only very few studies focus on explaining Euroscepticism in the population with the help of the national level (Anderson, 1998; Kritzinger, 2003; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). In studies that investigated national, for instance, government support (Anderson, 1998; Gabel, 1998; Hobolt, 2012) or national trust (e.g. Hartevelde, van der Meer, & De Vries, 2013), heterogeneous results on the direction of the relationship were found. By analyzing the relationship between national variables and the level of Euroscepticism, I seek to fill this literature gap.

Furthermore, there is only a limited amount of scientific literature that deals with Euroscepticism in the Central and Eastern European countries. However, the special characteristics of CEE are often disregarded. Therefore, I seek to expand the existing scientific literature by focusing on the specific cases of four countries of Central and Eastern Europe. By further focusing on a specific age group, namely the young generation under 30, insights into the prospects of European integration can be gained.

## **1.5. Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is structured as follows: First, I discuss the existing theory on the two key concepts of this thesis, democratic backsliding, and Euroscepticism. By discussing previous research on democratic backsliding (section 2.1.), I establish a theoretical framework for assessing the state of democratic backsliding in the four Visegrád countries. Subsequently, I briefly examine relevant conceptualizations of Euroscepticism (section 2.2.), which will provide the basis for the operationalization of the level of Euroscepticism. Afterward, existing theoretical findings on sources of Euroscepticism (section 2.3.) are reviewed. After discussing the applicability of the theories to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, testable hypotheses will be formulated.

Next, I present the methodological background (section 3) of this thesis in order to allow for its replicability. Then, the analysis is conducted. First, I assess the state of democratic backsliding in the Visegrád countries (section 4.1.) and discuss similarities and differences among the countries. Second, I perform statistical analyses of the quantitative data from Eurobarometer 90.1. After describing the univariate distributions of the variables (section 4.2.), I examine the bivariate correlations between the three independent variables and the level of Euroscepticism (section 4.3.). Subsequently, I use multivariate statistical analyses (section 4.4.) to model and interpret the relationships between the variables, also controlling for the effects of control variables. Finally, I discuss the empirical results and their implications for the Central and Eastern European countries, providing an answer to the main research question.

## 2. Theory and Conceptualization

In the following section, the existing state of research on the two main concepts is discussed. First, the theory on the conceptualization of democratic backsliding will be presented, which will be used in the analysis to examine the state of democratic backsliding within the four Visegrád countries. Next, the concept of Euroscepticism and literature on its sources is reviewed, with special attention being paid to the national context. Thereby, the first theoretical sub-question: *To what extent can public opinion towards national democracy and benefits from EU membership be defined as sources of Euroscepticism?* is answered. Lastly, testable hypotheses for the analysis are formulated.

### 2.1. Democratic Backsliding

Democratic backsliding is just one of many terms used by scholars to describe the loss of democratic quality in a political system. Democratic backsliding can concern many different democratic features and take place in many different settings, under many different circumstances, and, most importantly, to very different degrees. While there is vast literature on the potential reasons for democratic backsliding (cf. Waldner & Lust, 2018), this thesis focuses on the perception of democratic backsliding and its effects.

A noteworthy typology of democratic backsliding is put forward by Bermeo (2016). She defines democratic backsliding as the “state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy” (Bermeo, 2016: 5), focusing on the decline of democracy through formal, institutional changes by elected officials. Depending on the extent of backsliding, the results of democratic backsliding can include weakening of democratic institutions or the establishment of hybrid political systems, but also democratic breakdown and autocracy. Bermeo (2016) identifies six types of democratic backsliding and regime change, of which three are decreasing in importance, namely coups d’état, executive coups by elected leaders, and election day vote fraud. The three types of backsliding playing a more important role today are promissory coups, executive aggrandizement, and the strategic manipulation of elections (Bermeo, 2016: 8).

Promissory coups describe the removal of an elected government and the installation of a non-legitimized government that is supposed to stay in power temporarily until elections are held, and democracy is restored (Bermeo, 2016: 9). However, these promissory coups seldom lead to a deepening of democratic values because the initiators or profiteers of the coup are often favored in the following elections. In contrast, executive aggrandizement is characterized by using a democratic mandate to initiate slow change in the form of the weakening of checks and

balances or institutional changes that limit the influence of the opposition. Usually, executive aggrandizement takes place without replacement of the executive and with the help of legal instruments (Bermeo, 2016: 11). Lastly, the strategic manipulation of elections concerns “a range of actions aimed at tilting the electoral playing field in favor of incumbents” (Bermeo, 2016: 13), for instance, targeted at other candidates, the media, or the changing of electoral rules. The manipulation is often discrete and occurs in connection with executive aggrandizement.

While Bermeo (2016) gives a very broad conceptualization of the term, she only considers formal changes initiated by elected officials and does not pay attention to informal changes that might also influence the quality of democracy (Dimitrova, 2018). Since this thesis seeks to analyze the youth’s perception regarding national democracy in the Visegrád Group, in the analysis I assess both formal and informal changes leading to a loss of democratic quality in the four countries of the Visegrád Group, and discuss whether these changes fit to one of the three types of modern-day democratic backsliding proposed by Bermeo (2016).

## **2.2. Euroscepticism**

There is a vast amount of literature on public support for the EU and Euroscepticism, resulting in a wide range of definitions and conceptualizations of the term. Generally, Grimm, Pollock, and Ellison (2018) summarize this broad spectrum of approaches as either referring “[...] to skepticism about the idea of Europe, the process of European integration [...] or the unsettled and contested character of the EU“ (Grimm et al., 2018: 216). In the following, several conceptualizations utilizing these three kinds of Euroscepticism are discussed.

One of the most influential conceptualizations of Euroscepticism is proposed by Taggart (1998), who defines Euroscepticism in a broad sense as “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (Taggart, 1998: 366). He argues that Euroscepticism can take on three different forms: People or parties can be completely against European integration and the EU, they can be in favor of integration but still skeptical because they find the EU to be too inclusive, or they can be in favor of European integration but argue that the EU is too exclusive in geographical or social terms. However, Taggart does not make a distinction between these types in his operationalization but rather sees the opposition towards the Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, as an indicator for all three of them.



Since this conceptualization and, more importantly, operationalization cannot be used for the study of Euroscepticism in Central and Eastern Europe, Taggart and Szeczerbiak (2004) propose a new conceptualization of Euroscepticism based on a “[...] high degree of consensus among political elites about the positive nature of European integration and specifically of their respective state’s need to join [...]” (Taggart & Szeczerbiak, 2004: 3) in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In order to include a wide range of positions, they divide Euroscepticism into a “hard” and a “soft” category. On one hand, “hard” Euroscepticism covers the disagreement with the above-mentioned consensus in CEE, describing the rejection of European integration and membership to the EU. On the other hand, “soft” Euroscepticism is a more qualified opposition to substantial matters of European integration, which might be the opposition to certain policies (“policy Euroscepticism”) as well as the opposition to defend national interests (“national-interest Euroscepticism”) (Taggart & Szeczerbiak, 2004: 4).

However, Kopecký and Mudde (2002) criticize this approach, arguing that “soft” Euroscepticism is too inclusive since it covers any type of opposition towards any policy (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002: 300). Instead, they conceptualize Eurosceptic opinion as only one of four opinions towards the European Union which are distinguished using the dimensions of 1) support for European integration and 2) support for the European Union. “Euroenthusiasts” are supportive of both the EU and European integration, whereas “Eurorejects” are opposed to both the EU and European integration (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002: 303). In between these two categories, “Europragmatists” are supportive of the EU, but skeptical of European integration, and “Eurosceptics” are supportive of European integration, but skeptical towards the EU because they are opposed to the specific way the ideas and values are being used and implemented (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002: 302). Therefore, Kopecký and Mudde (2002) define Euroscepticism as only one of three types of opposition towards the EU and European integration.

Looking specifically at political support among the citizens rather than Euroscepticism in party positions, Weßels (2007) offers a more differentiated conceptualization based on three dimensions of Euroscepticism. He measures different levels of Euroscepticism using the dimensions of the perception of a) effectiveness, the specific support for the authorities and institutions, b) responsiveness, the generalized support for the authorities, and c) membership support, as the general support for the political regime (Weßels, 2007: 291). Building on the concept of political support by Easton (1975), he argues that general discontent with authorities and regime are likely to be stable and less affected by specific actions, although there can also be spillover effects from specific discontent (ineffectiveness), as the lowest level of

Euroscepticism, to more general discontent with authorities (irresponsiveness) and even to the highest level of Euroscepticism, general discontent with the regime (membership opposition) (Weßels, 2007: 295).

For the topic of this thesis, I argue that it is necessary to apply a broad conceptualization of Euroscepticism measuring multiple dimensions of the concept. By doing so, different kinds of individual opposition will be covered, and a detailed description of the level of Euroscepticism within the youth will be given. Although the framework by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) provides such an inclusive definition, the criticism voiced by Kopecký and Mudde (2002) cannot be disregarded. Their own conceptualization, however, uses a very narrow definition that does not differentiate between different types of Euroscepticism but rather sees Euroscepticism as only one type of opposition towards the EU and European integration.

Therefore, the conceptualization by Weßels (2007) provides a satisfactory framework for measuring the *level* of Euroscepticism, covering different kinds of opposition in regard to the dimensions of effectiveness, responsiveness, and membership support. In this thesis, I seek to measure the level of Euroscepticism in order to determine the sustainability of Europeanization and democratization. Hence, the focus should be laid on the two more general dimensions of irresponsiveness and opposition to membership. While I lose information on the specific evaluation of individual authorities and particular policies by disregarding the dimension of effectiveness, I ensure that the level of Euroscepticism is not affected by the negative evaluation of secondary elements of the European Union. The measurement of the two general dimensions of the concept allows for more detailed insight into the type of Euroscepticism prevailing among the youth in the Visegrád countries.

### **2.3. Sources of Euroscepticism**

With the establishment of the European Community, an entire research field concerned with the investigation of sources of public support for European integration or, conversely, Euroscepticism, started to emerge, and some prominent theories were developed over the years (Gabel, 1998). First, the theory of cognitive mobilization initially put forward by Inglehart (1970), states that a greater interest in the European Union, and therefore a greater knowledge about it, leads to higher support for the EU and European integration. Nevertheless, there has been mixed empirical evidence for this relationship (Anderson, 1998; Gabel, 1998; Kritzinger, 2003). Another influential theory which has received a lot of scientific attention (cf. Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000) is the utilitarian approach. According to this perspective, the individual's opinion towards the European Union is shaped by an assessment of costs and benefits from EU

membership, which is generally confirmed by empirical evidence (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Hobolt, 2012; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). Furthermore, several scholars have investigated the theory of class partisanship, which suggests that the citizens' support for European integration is largely influenced by the opinion of their favored party towards European integration and the EU in general (Anderson, 1998; Gabel, 1998). Connected to this, the impact of the political ideology of a person on their attitude towards the EU has also been investigated in different contexts (Hix, 2007; Loveless & Rohrschneider, 2011; Nelsen & Guth, 2000). Lastly, the effect of the support for the national government on public support has been studied extensively, arguing that citizens employ national proxies because they lack knowledge of the system of the EU. In many studies, this has proven to be one of the strongest predictors of support for European integration (Gabel, 1998; Harteveld et al., 2013; Hix, 2007; Hobolt, 2012; Rohrschneider, 2002).

Other scholars have also concentrated their research on the effect of political values, for instance, the role of postmaterialist values (e.g. Gabel, 1998) or the opinion of immigration (e.g. De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005), and the effect of sociodemographic variables, such as gender (e.g. Nelsen & Guth, 2000) or religion (Nelsen, Guth, & Fraser, 2001; Schlipphak & Isani, 2019). In recent years, the relationship between national or European identity and Euroscepticism (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Harteveld et al., 2013; McLaren, 2007; Weßels, 2007) and the evaluation of performance of European institutions and Euroscepticism (e.g. Harteveld et al., 2013) have also received a lot of attention. However, only a few studies have concentrated their analysis solely on variables measuring the perception of the national dimension (Anderson, 1998; Kritzinger, 2003; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). In this thesis, I argue that national variables are crucial in explaining the level of Euroscepticism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and especially the Visegrád Group, because of the high interconnectedness of democratization and Europeanization processes. In the following, I will briefly examine and re-assess existing theory on the impact of the national variables on support for the EU or, conversely, Euroscepticism and formulate testable hypotheses for the empirical analysis.

### *Evaluation of National Democracy*

As mentioned above, the government support hypothesis is one of the theories with the highest explanatory power for the level of Euroscepticism. Based on Anderson (1998), it assumes that the transfer of support from the domestic political dimension accounts for the level of support for European integration because the citizens do not have sufficient information about the EU and consequently “[...] employ proxies rooted in domestic political considerations (government, party, and system support) when responding to questions about the integration process” (Anderson, 1998: 571). The work of Anderson (1998) often serves as a basis for investigating the effects of public opinion towards the national dimension on support for the EU.

However, scholars have produced conflicting findings on the relationship between the opinion towards (or trust in) national democracy and Euroscepticism. A considerable amount of literature has found evidence for a negative evaluation of national politics leading to higher support for the EU and the other way round (Kritzinger, 2003; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). Therefore, support for integration is higher in countries “[...] that have little to lose from transferring sovereignty to Europe” (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000: 151). In contrast, a number of scholars have found evidence for the opposite hypothesis, stating that there is a positive relationship between the satisfaction with (or trust in) national democracy and the support for European integration (Anderson, 1998; Hobolt, 2012; Rohrschneider, 2002). In both of these theoretical approaches, it is confirmed that “the nation-state is a main actor in increasing or decreasing support for the EU” (Kritzinger, 2003: 236).

In the countries of the Visegrád Group, the quality of national democracy is a direct product of Europeanization processes, which is why the satisfaction with the working of national democracy and the support for the European Union should be deeply connected with each other. Therefore, following the hypothesis put forward by Anderson (1998), higher satisfaction with national democracy should lead to a lower level of Euroscepticism. Notwithstanding, I assume that there are differences in the quality of democracy in the Visegrád Group due to trends of democratic backsliding. In the Visegrád countries, the democratic political systems are largely built on the support by the EU and the promotion of European democratic values. In countries that are facing democratic backsliding, young people attached to democratic values should be less satisfied with the way democracy works in their country because key democratic values are undermined, and this negative evaluation should positively influence the support for the EU (Kritzinger, 2003: 234).

This leads to the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1a:* In a country that is facing democratic backsliding, higher satisfaction with national democracy leads to a higher level of Euroscepticism.

*Hypothesis 1b:* In a country without democratic backsliding, higher satisfaction with national democracy leads to a lower level of Euroscepticism.

In recent years, the evaluation of performance has also been identified as a potential source of Euroscepticism (Harteveld et al., 2013; Hobolt, 2012; Kritzinger, 2003). Although previous research has mainly focused on the performance of the EU (e.g. Harteveld et al., 2013), the performance of national democracy is expected to be deeply connected to the opinion towards the EU in the Visegrád Group. The evidence presented above suggests that the better the evaluation of national democracy, also regarding its performance, the higher the support for the European Union. While some scholars use indicators for satisfaction and performance interchangeably, I argue that satisfaction with national democracy measures a different level of national democracy that is dependent on a more subjective evaluation. Thus, the performance of national democracy, specifically its responsiveness, should provide a less value-driven measurement of the quality of democracy within the countries of the Visegrád Group. It is therefore likely that the quality of democracy does not have an impact on the relationship between the perception of responsiveness of national democracy and the level of Euroscepticism. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* A higher perception of responsiveness of national democracy leads to a lower level of Euroscepticism.

#### *Perception of National Benefits from EU Membership*

Because the European Union started out as an economic project, the utilitarian perspective was one of the first explanations of support towards the EU. Initially, the theory focused on the positive impact of individual economic benefits, derived from a cost-benefit analysis, on the support for European integration. Nevertheless, the same relationship has been identified on the national level: The higher the national benefits associated with the EU (in relation to the costs), the higher the support for integration (Kritzinger, 2003; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). In the four Visegrád countries, the economic benefits from EU membership and the share of EU money assigned to the countries outweigh the contributions to the EU budget by a large percentage (see Context of the Research), which should therefore lead to a lower level of Euroscepticism among the citizens (Hobolt, 2012: 95). With increasing integration, the competencies of the EU

expanded also to political fields such as security or social policy, and the promotion of European values, such as the rule of law and democracy, became one of the central tasks of the Union. The youth in the four countries has grown up in the democratic system, which is why these values should be deeply anchored within the young generation, and both economic as well as political benefits their country has received from EU membership should lead to a more positive perception of the EU in general. This can be summarized in the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3:* The perceived presence of national benefits from EU membership contributes to a lower level of Euroscepticism in the four Visegrád countries.

### **3. Methodology**

The following chapter provides an overview of the methodological instruments used to answer the main research question as well as the second and the third sub-question. Therefore, I pay attention to the design of the research and its context, the case selection and operationalization of the variables under investigation.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This bachelor thesis uses a descriptive-explanatory approach, seeking to explore the association between Euroscepticism and the youth's perception regarding the evaluation of national democracy and national benefits from EU membership. To provide an answer to the research question, a cross-sectional analysis of the public opinion of the youth in the four Visegrád countries is carried out and the cases are compared. Due to data availability, this study focuses on public opinion as of late 2018. Thus, the young generation (between 15 and 29 years old) serves as units of analyses and the Visegrád Group in 2018 serve as the context of the research. By looking at one point of time, the analysis is concentrated on the actual outcomes of changes in the national democratic landscape. A disadvantage of this static perspective, which should be kept in mind in the discussion of results, is that it is not possible to understand causal processes that take place over time (Babbie, 2009: 106; Weßels, 2007: 291).

Before turning to the quantitative analysis, I perform a qualitative analysis of the state of democratic backsliding in the Visegrád countries. In order to answer the main research question, I use quantitative data from the Special Eurobarometer 90.1, a survey conducted in September 2018 via face-to-face interviews in all 28 EU member states ( $N = 27,474$ ). This survey wave of the Eurobarometer was chosen because it is the latest one available where the relevant questions on the perception of the national context were asked in the four countries. As the developments in democratic quality are an ongoing process, this study uses the latest data in order to assess the current challenges to the European democratic landscape in regard to backsliding and Euroscepticism.

One of the disadvantages of quantitative data is that more differentiated and detailed analyses are not possible, for example examining specific reasons for thinking that a country has benefited from EU membership. Furthermore, quantitative measurements often use pre-defined answer categories which might not be applicable to the entire population of a country, for instance, minority groups (Flick, 2009: 220). In contrast, an advantage of working with quantitative data is that the findings will be representative of the young generation under 30 in the Visegrád countries. With qualitative approaches, only a small number of cases can be

covered, while in large-N quantitative surveys, data from many respondents with different characteristics can be obtained. Another advantage of quantitative data is that it is easier to aggregate and compare, which is why I am able to apply statistical methods and mathematical analyses to investigate the relationships between the variables (Babbie, 2009: 24).

While a disadvantage of secondary data is that its quality and reliability cannot be influenced (Flick, 2009: 219), Eurobarometer data is generally considered to be a very trustworthy official source of data on the opinions of EU citizens and well-recognized among scholars in the field of social sciences (cf. Boomgaarden et al., 2011: 242). Some weaknesses of the Eurobarometer data might include the fact that not all items are being asked regularly and repeatedly over the years, or that the translation of the questionnaires can produce language effects deriving, for instance, from slightly different question formulation. However, Special Eurobarometer 90.1 provides secondary data for the four Visegrád countries, which is sufficient to answer the main research question.

The respondents of the Special Eurobarometer 90.1 (about  $n = 1,000$  for each country), who are 15 years and older, were selected using probability-based sampling. Through probability-based sampling instead of careful case selection, the generalizability of the data beyond the survey population can be ensured (Flick, 2009: 274). I work with data for the young generation aged 15 to 29, which are about 100 respondents per country (for precise numbers, see Case Selection), missing cases will be excluded in the analysis. Since the case numbers are not proportionate to real population sizes<sup>2</sup>, a population weight<sup>3</sup> reflecting the actual proportion of the youth within and across the countries will be applied. By weighting the data, the known characteristics of the population are reproduced, and the results are made representative. However, a disadvantage of working with population weights is that the data might be distorted in such a way that single cases become very influential.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Eurostat data on the population sizes as of 1 January 2018, the overall population sizes vary from 5.44 million in Slovakia to 37.98 million in Poland, and the proportion of the youth within the national populations varies from 15.69% (Czech Republic) to 17.94% (Slovakia) in the four countries. In the Eurobarometer survey, approx. 1,000 respondents were chosen per country, with the proportion of young people varying from 10.90% (Hungary) to 17.09% (Czech Republic), hence not reflecting the proportions of the youth in the populations of the countries. See Appendix A for detailed numbers.

<sup>3</sup> In the Eurobarometer dataset, a number of population weights for different country groups are provided. After checking the results using different weights, I have decided to apply the population weight for the ten new member states of 2004 (NMS10) because of the focus of my thesis. This weight does not extrapolate the data to real population sizes, but rather fits the sample sizes to reflect proportions across countries and within countries in regard to relevant socio-demographic characteristics.



### 3.2. Case Selection

For the topic of this thesis, I have selected the group of the Visegrád Four, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, as similar cases in regard to Europeanization and democratization. Therefore, biases regarding values should be ruled out. In addition, due to their “frontrunner” status, the developments within their populations and national democracies might give a first hint on how the quality of democracy will develop in the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, concerning the state of democratic backsliding, two countries of the Visegrád Group are presumed to be different from the other two countries: The European Union has threatened and/or launched formal procedures against Hungary and Poland because of their breaches of democratic and European values (European Commission, 2017; European Parliament, 2018), while there have been no such procedures against the Czech Republic or Slovakia. Thus, provided that the analysis of democratic backsliding in the four countries can confirm this assumption, this case selection produces results that allow for meaningful analyses regarding the consequences of democratic backsliding by comparing the countries with each other.

Furthermore, I have decided to focus on the young generation that is between 15 and 29 years old, because “they are least likely to be attached to traditional materialist values” (Grimm et al., 2018: 216) and thus, their opinions should be the most similar (compared to other generations) across the four countries. A wide definition of “youth” is applied, including all respondents up to the age of 29, because they have all grown up within a democratic framework and have fully experienced the benefits the European Union has brought their country. This definition results in absolute case numbers of  $n > 100$  per country, which will allow for superficial cross-country comparisons. Table 1 gives an overview of the selected cases and the absolute (unweighted) sample sizes in the Special Eurobarometer 90.1.

Country	Size of National Sample	Respondents aged 15-29
Czech Republic	n = 1012	n = 173
Hungary	n = 1018	n = 111
Poland	n = 1034	n = 123
Slovakia	n = 1042	n = 158

*Table 1. Summary of the Sample*

### 3.3. Operationalization

To be able to perform the empirical analysis and test the hypotheses proposed in the Theory section, the state of democratic backsliding in the Visegrád Four must be described first. Following the Varieties of Democracy Annual Democracy Report published in May 2019 (Lührmann et al., 2019), the quality of democracy is measured using the Liberal Democracy Index from the V-Dem Dataset v9. The assessment of the changes in the Liberal Democracy Index and its sub-indexes in the period from 2008 to 2018 serves as the basis for an in-depth analysis of political developments in the Visegrád countries from 2008 to 2018, and, thus, the state of democratic backsliding within the four countries.

For the empirical analysis, the Special Eurobarometer 90.1 provides indicators for the dependent variable (Level of Euroscepticism) as well as the three independent variables. Following the conceptualization discussed above, the Level of Euroscepticism is measured using two dimensions, the opposition to EU membership and the perceived irresponsiveness of the EU. These two variables are aggregated into a composite index ranging from 0 to 1 which measures the *level* of Euroscepticism. The independent variables are operationalized using one indicator for each variable. Furthermore, several political and socio-demographic control variables are included in the analysis. At the end of this chapter, Table 2 provides a detailed overview of the variables and their indicators from the Special Eurobarometer 90.1 dataset.

#### *Democratic Backsliding*

The Liberal Democracy Index is one of the key indicators included in the Varieties of Democracy Dataset. It is based on the electoral democracy index, which is composed of indicators on 1) Freedom of expression and alternative sources of information 2) Freedom of association 3) Share of population with suffrage, 4) Clean elections, and 5) Elected officials, and the liberal component index, which includes indicators on 1) Equality before the law and individual liberty, 2) Judicial constraints on the executive, 3) Legislative constraints on the executive (Coppedge et al., 2019a). Thus, liberal democracies build onto the characteristics of electoral democracies.

Hence, I focus my analysis on the Liberal Democracy Index and its sub-indices in order to give a first impression of the changes of democratic quality in the four countries. A time period of ten years, from 2008 to 2018, was chosen because it allows for the investigation of general trends rather than short-term developments, limiting the potential impact of subjective coding. In 2008, the Visegrád countries were relatively new members of the European Union, with

stable democratic systems in place. By looking at the trend until 2018, the most recent developments that might impact the public opinion of the youth are taken into account.

*Dependent Variable: Level of Euroscepticism*

The variable “Level of Euroscepticism” is measured using the broad conceptualization of Weßels (2007), specifically the dimensions of the general evaluation of the regime (opposition to EU membership) and the general evaluation of authorities (irresponsiveness). By measuring these two dimensions, a detailed index for the Level of Euroscepticism can be constructed. To avoid the influence of the opinion towards specific, potentially minor EU policies or European politicians, the specific evaluation of authorities (ineffectiveness) is disregarded in this bachelor thesis. Consequently, the role of the national context in assessing the European Union might be underestimated because this thesis focuses on more general Euroscepticism towards membership and general performance of the EU, while the role of particular authorities is overlooked.

Both dimensions of Euroscepticism are measured using two indicators. The irresponsiveness of the EU is operationalized by the disagreement to the statements “My voice counts in the EU” and “My country’s voice counts in the EU”. The scales of the two indicators were recoded to a scale from 0 to 1 and the values were reversed so that the highest value would reflect the highest level of Euroscepticism<sup>4</sup>. The indicators had three different kinds of missing data: a) Respondents who did not want to be asked any sensitive question, b) the answer “Don’t know” and c) spontaneous refusal to answer the question. While there are many approaches to treating missing data, there is no single approach that is always right. Including missing cases can affect the nature of the data and the results, while excluding it can produce bias and limit the representativeness of the findings (Babbie, 2009: 173).

As a compromise, I decided to include the answer “Don’t know” as the middle value (0.5), while cases where no answer was given (no consent to being asked sensitive questions given and spontaneous refusal) were excluded. A disadvantage of this is that by including missing data (Don’t know), I run the risk of assigning meaningful values for respondents that did not know what the question was referring to. In addition, the exclusion of missing data means that I exclude the share of people that are indifferent towards the question, which is also a valid opinion. Nonetheless, the compromise I apply here ensures that I still have case numbers that allow me to perform the analysis, while people that were not asked for their opinion or refused

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<sup>4</sup> The recoded scales for all variables can be found in Appendix A.

to answer (which does not mean that they were indifferent towards the question) were excluded. After testing for the internal validity of the two indicators<sup>5</sup>, the values were added up to create the sub-index for irresponsiveness of the EU.

The opposition to EU membership uses the questions “If a referendum was held tomorrow regarding your country’s membership of the EU, how would you vote?” and “Generally speaking, do you think that your country’s membership of the EU is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither a good nor a bad thing?”. Again, the values were recoded to a scale of 0 to 1, with the value 1 indicating the most Eurosceptic opinion. The values “Neither”, “Not sure” and “Don’t know” were coded with the value 0.5. Missing cases (no consent to being asked sensitive questions given and spontaneous refusal) were excluded. After testing for the internal reliability of the two indicators<sup>6</sup>, the values were added up to create the sub-index for opposition to membership of the EU. The overall index for Level of Euroscepticism was obtained by adding up the two dimensions of Euroscepticism and normalizing the values to a range from 0 to 1, creating an interval variable.

### *Independent Variables*

Three independent variables aimed at the public opinion toward the national dimension are included in the analysis, each of them measured using one indicator. All independent variables were recoded to a scale between 0 and 1, coding “Don’t know” with the value 0.5. Missing cases were excluded from recoding. Again, this can affect the nature of the data and the results or produce bias and limit the representativeness of the findings (Babbie, 2009: 173).

Satisfaction with national democracy is operationalized by the question “On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in your country?”. The scale was recoded so that the value 1 would translate to the highest satisfaction with national democracy. Responsiveness of national democracy is measured using the agreement to the statement “My voice counts in my country”. The value 1 resembles the highest perception of responsiveness of the national democracy. Lastly, the Perception of national benefits from the EU is operationalized by the question “Taking everything into account, would you say that your country has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the EU?”. The value 1 corresponds to the perception that the respondent’s country has benefited from EU membership.

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<sup>5</sup> Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.79 (acceptable)

<sup>6</sup> Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.73 (acceptable)

### *Control Variables*

Several control variables are included in the multivariate analysis to check for the impact of socio-demographic and political factors on the relationship between the three independent variables and the level of Euroscepticism. In the following, I will briefly describe which variables I included and why they are expected to influence the level of Euroscepticism<sup>7</sup>.

The socio-demographic variables I am controlling for are age, gender, the type of living community, as well as questions on difficulties to pay bills and the employment status. Age is included because several scholars have found older people to be less Eurosceptic than younger people (e.g. Boomgaarden et al., 2011). While I focus my analysis on the youth, age can still account for differences in the level of Euroscepticism because younger people might have different levels of knowledge in politics. I also control for gender because it is recognized that men and women differ in regard to their opinion of the European Union. Females are usually found to be more supportive of the EU (e.g. Boomgaarden et al., 2011), whereas there is also empirical evidence for the opposite direction (Nelsen & Guth, 2000).

The type of living community is included to control for differing opinions in rural and urban areas. Generally, the urban population is supposed to be less Eurosceptic than the rural population. This was confirmed in an analysis of Euroscepticism in Poland by Surwillo, Henderson, and Lazaridis (2010), and is expected to be the same in the other three countries of the Visegrád Group. Furthermore, measures for the individual economic situation and the employment status are included to control for the effect of the socio-economic situation on the level of Euroscepticism. Due to utilitarian considerations (as mentioned above), a higher socio-economic situation might lead to a lower level of Euroscepticism.

The political control variables included in the analysis are the political orientation on a left-right scale, the interest in national and EU politics, and the engagement in national and European democracy (importance of voting). First, the political orientation is included to control for the effect of ideology and extremism. While this is commonly used as a control variable in the analysis of public opinion, there are conflicting theories on the direction of the effect on Euroscepticism. On one hand, people that identify with the left of the political spectrum are often theorized to be more friendly towards the EU, while people on the right are more likely to be Eurosceptic (e.g. Nelsen & Guth, 2000). On the other hand, some scholars have found evidence for the theory that the more people identify with either side of the extreme,

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<sup>7</sup> A summary of the control variables is reported in Appendix A.

the more likely they are opposed to the European Union (Hix, 2007). Both effects are tested in the analysis. Furthermore, I control for the interest in EU politics because of the theory of cognitive mobilization, which states that higher interest in the EU leads to a lower level of Euroscepticism (Anderson, 1998). Following the research of Hobolt (2012), a measure for the participation in European elections is also included, which is expected to be negatively associated with the level of Euroscepticism. In addition, I control for the interest in national politics and the engagement in national democracy because of the focus of my independent variables.

Variable	Indicator		Range
	Item	Question text	
<i>Dependent variable</i>			
Euroscpticism: irresponsiveness	D72_1	Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. My voice counts in the EU.	1 – 4
	D72_3	Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (OUR COUNTRY)'s voice counts in the EU.	1 – 4
Euroscpticism: opposition to membership	QA3	If a referendum was held tomorrow regarding (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the EU, how would you vote?	1 – 3
	QA15	Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the EU is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither a good nor a bad thing?	1 – 3
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Satisfaction with national democracy	D80a	On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in (OUR COUNTRY)?	1 – 4
Responsiveness of national democracy	D72_2	Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. My voice counts in (OUR COUNTRY).	1 – 4
Perception of benefits from EU	QA16	Taking everything into account, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefitted or not from being a member of the EU?	1 / 2
<i>Control variables</i>			
Gender	D10		1 / 2
Type of community	D25	Would you say you live in a...?	1 – 3
Difficulties to pay bills	D60	During the last twelve months, would you say you had difficulties to pay your bills at the end of the month...?	1 – 3
Social class	D63	Do you see yourself and your household belonging to...?	1 – 5
Employment status	D15a	What is your current occupation?	1 – 18
Political orientation	D1	In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". How would you place your views on this scale?	1 – 10
Interest in national politics	D71_1	When you get together with friends or relatives, would you say you discuss frequently, occasionally or never about...? National political matters	1 – 3
Interest in European politics	D71_2	When you get together with friends or relatives, would you say you discuss frequently, occasionally or never about...? European political matters	1 – 3
Engagement in European democracy	QA11a	Please tell me how important or not it is for you personally to vote IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS?	1 – 10
Engagement in national democracy	QA11b	And how important or not is it for you to vote in THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN (OUR COUNTRY)?	1 – 10

Table 2. Operationalization of the Variables included in the Analysis

### **3.4. Method of Data Analysis**

The analysis is executed in two parts. Before examining the quantitative data, I perform a qualitative analysis of the state of democratic backsliding. For this, the changes in the Liberal Democracy Index for the four Visegrád countries for the period of 2008-2018 are examined. Then, political developments in that time period are described, and it is assessed to what extent the processes fit into the pattern of democratic backsliding. Afterward, the four cases are compared, and expectations for the quantitative analysis are formulated.

Then, I will turn to the second part, the analysis of the quantitative data, which I perform for the whole sample as well as for each country (subgroup analyses). In a first step, I provide univariate statistics for both the dependent and independent variables, specifically average values as well as frequency distributions. Second, bivariate analyses between the three independent variables and the level of Euroscepticism are performed. To examine the strength of the relationships between the variables, I use the ordinal correlation measure Somer's d. Lastly, I run several linear regression models to analyze the overall impact of the three independent variables on the level of Euroscepticism. Since the bivariate analyses cannot analyze the effects of third variables, the multivariate analysis also takes into account several control variables (see Operationalization). When describing and interpreting the results, I use the measure of statistical significance to identify variables that are correlated with the level of Euroscepticism. Thereby, I make sure that I do not interpret random relationships in the data. The commonly used level of statistical significance of  $p > .05$  is a rather arbitrary cut-off point that has to be regarded in its context. Therefore, I also report significant effects with  $p > .10$  but concentrate the interpretation on the relationships that are significant at  $p > .05$ .

When performing quantitative analyses, it is important to keep in mind that statistical data also leaves room for subjective definition, for example in regard to the measurement of variables (Babbie, 2009: 444). However, by basing my operationalization and analysis on theories and concepts established by other scholars, I can ensure objectivity in my research (Flick, 2009: 164). Additionally, by running linear regression models, I assume that there is a linear relationship between the variables included in the model. A disadvantage of this method is that the relationships might be more complex and non-linear, which I am not able to account for in my analysis.



## 4. Analysis

The following chapter seeks to answer the main research question *In what ways are the perception of national democracy and country benefits from the EU associated with the level of Euroscepticism among the youth in the countries of the Visegrád Group in 2018?* Before discussing the empirical results of the quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis of the state of democratic backsliding in the Visegrád countries is performed. Next, descriptive statistics for the variables included in the analysis are given. Thereby, the second and third sub-question are answered. Afterwards, bivariate and multivariate statistical methods are applied to analyze the association between the variables, and the empirical results and their implications are discussed.

### 4.1. Democratic Backsliding in the Visegrád Group

In order to analyze the impact of democratic backsliding on Euroscepticism, the state of democratic backsliding within the countries of the Visegrád Group has to be analyzed first to define which of the four countries are experiencing democratic backsliding.

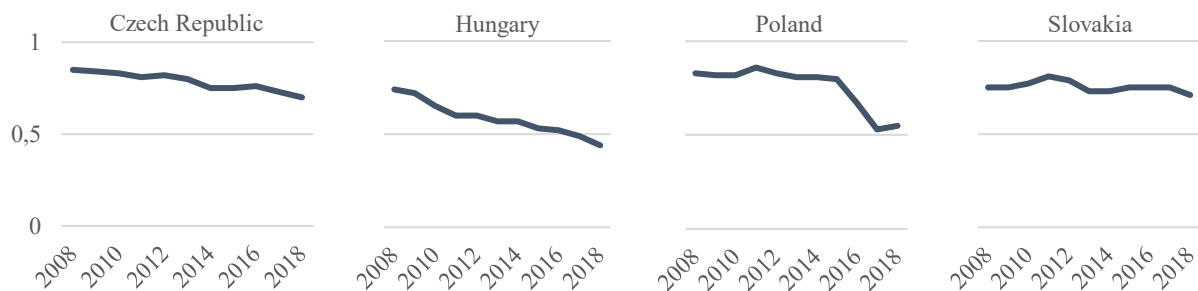


Figure 1. Liberal Democracy Index of the Visegrád Countries (2008 - 2018)

The V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index gives a first overview of the developments in regard to democratic quality among the Visegrád Four within the past ten years (Figure 1), in which all four countries have faced declines. Hungary (.74 in 2008, .44 in 2018) and Poland (.83 in 2008 and .55 in 2018) show the most drastic declines over the past ten years, and are running the risk of slipping into autocracy, alongside other Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria or Serbia (Lührmann et al., 2019: 22). In the Czech Republic, the quality of democracy also declined (.85 in 2008 and .70 in 2018), although not as drastically as in Poland and Hungary.

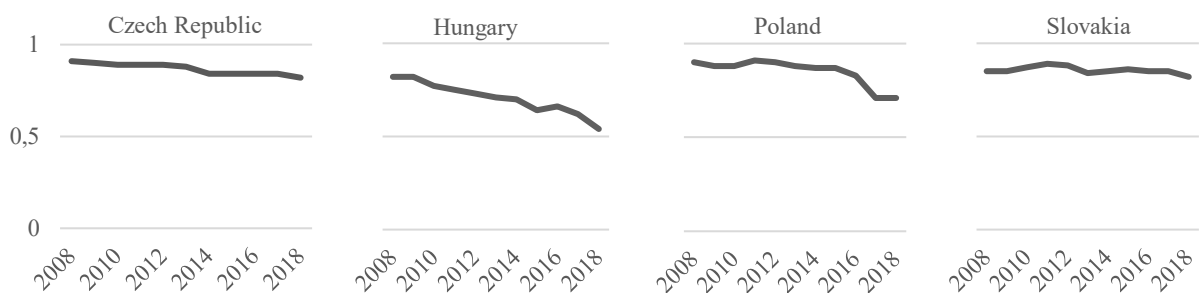


Figure 2. Electoral Democracy Index of the Visegrád Countries (2008 - 2018)

Slovakia, in contrast, has shown the most stable level on the Liberal Democracy Index, with only slight fluctuations (.75 in 2008 and .71 in 2018).

The decline in the Liberal Democracy Index in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in the last ten years are mainly based on changes in the Electoral Democracy Index (Figure 2). The only similarities among the three countries concern a significant decline in the indicator Freedom of Expression (Electoral Democracy Index) (Lührmann et al., 2019: 22). Poland faces declines in the Liberal Democracy indicators for equality before the law and judicial constraints on the executive (Lührmann et al., 2019: 21). Hungary, in contrast, shows declines in the indicator for clean elections (Electoral Democracy Index).

Potential reasons for the loss of democratic quality in Central and Eastern Europe have been studied by several scholars. Bugarič (2015), for instance, argues that the rule-of-law institutions are not as robust in CEEC because they do not have such a well-developed “tradition of independence and professionalism” and require more time and public support (Bugarič, 2015: 244). Cianetti et al. (2018) identify a number of causal factors in CEE, such as the decreased importance of EU accession criteria now that the countries have become members, the lack of liberal-democratic values within the countries, or the inability and unwillingness of the EU to sanction members that disregard European values. In the following, I will briefly examine the political developments in the four Visegrád countries in the period from 2008 to 2018 to assess whether their declines in the Liberal Democracy Index can be interpreted as democratic backsliding as defined by Bermeo (2016).

### *Czech Republic*

In 2008, the Eurosceptic, liberal-conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS) ruled the Czech Republic in a coalition with the Christian and Democratic Union (KDU-ČSL) and the Greens. In the presidential elections early that year, Václav Klaus, former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic (1993 – 1998) and co-founder of the ODS, was re-elected as President of the Czech Republic. During his presidency, Klaus used his veto power quite frequently, for instance on an Anti-Discrimination Law in 2008 or the implementation of EU policies. Furthermore, he refused to sign the Treaty of Lisbon until late 2009. In 2009, the ODS-led government lost a vote of confidence in the Parliament, causing Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek to resign from office. Subsequently, the independent candidate Jan Fischer formed an interim government until parliamentary elections were held in mid-2010.

Although the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) won the 2010 parliamentary elections with 22% of the votes, they failed to reach a coalition deal with other parties, and the second-placed ODS eventually formed a center-right government with the TOP 09 and the Public Affairs party, with ODS leader Petr Nečas being appointed as the new Prime Minister of the Czech Republic. Following criticism of the 2008 presidential elections, the new government initiated a constitutional amendment that would allow for a direct election of the Czech president instead of an election in the parliament. The bill, which was eventually approved and signed by the Czech President in 2012 is considered to have “posed perhaps [one of] the most serious challenge[s] to Czech democracy since 1989” (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018: 280).

In the first direct presidential elections at the beginning of 2013, former Prime Minister and nationalist-populist politician Miloš Zeman was elected President of the Czech Republic. When the government led by Prime Minister Nečas was forced to resign later that year following a corruption scandal, Zeman tried to strengthen his role as a president by appointing his ally Jiri Rusnok as new Prime Minister, entrusted with the task to form a technocratic interim government. Nevertheless, the caretaker government only remained in office until a month later, when the parliament passed a vote of no confidence against the government and the political parties agreed on dissolving the parliament and holding early elections.

In the subsequent parliamentary elections, held in late 2013, the Social Democrats could again secure the most votes. This time, they could form a coalition with the KDU-ČSL and the second-placed ANO 2011 (18.65%), a newly established populist anti-corruption movement led by businessman Andrej Babiš. ČSSD leader Bohuslav Sobotka became the new Prime Minister of the Czech Republic. In contrast to previous governments, this coalition proved to be relatively stable, although there were irregularities in the finances of Andrej Babiš which provoked a small government crisis in 2017. In general, Babiš remains a very controversial political figure, facing multiple allegations of fraud, bribery, conflicts of interest, and illegal cooperation against him, which has led to several police investigations.

Nevertheless, in the 2017 parliamentary elections, ANO 2011 won the most votes (29.6%) and Andrej Babiš became Prime Minister of the Czech Republic. Because of difficulties in finding a coalition partner, ANO 2011 was forced to form a minority government, which lost a vote of confidence at the beginning of 2018. After long negotiations, an ANO- ČSSD minority government was formed in mid-2018, with informal support by the Communist party. In early 2018, Zeman was also confirmed in the presidential office.

While the political landscape has been very unstable in the last ten years, with two interim governments in place, no promissory coup was attempted by the non-legitimized governments, and none of the provisional government members could maintain political power in the democratic elections. The only major threat to democratic quality was the attempt of President Zeman to expand his power when naming an interim government, which could have led to executive aggrandizement. However, this was quickly stopped by the Czech parliament, showing that “the Czech presidency had no real executive powers to be aggrandized” (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018: 281)

Although ANO 2011 shows populist tendencies, it is missing “a powerful narrative of Czech nationalism” (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018: 278) and a clear ideology, which is why it is often identified as a more technocratic, anti-corruption populist movement with a rather liberal centrist political ideology. Still, the election of ANO 2011 has led to some losses in democratic quality, illustrated by the slow decline in the Liberal Democracy Index from .80 in 2013 (first election of ANO 2011) to .70 in 2018. Illiberal shifts can be observed in regard to the manipulation of the state administration in order to undermine existing power distributions, or the accumulation of economic and media power (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018). Nevertheless, the system of checks and balances in the Czech Republic has proven to be very stable, preventing the country from backsliding into an electoral democracy. Until now, there have not been any drastic, formal changes inducing a regime change and prompting serious democratic backsliding.

### *Hungary*

In 2008, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) ruled Hungary in a coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), under the leadership of Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány. The conservative Fidesz, led by former Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, was the biggest opposition party. In early 2008, SZDSZ left the government coalition, forcing the MSZP to form a minority government. When Gyurcsány resigned as a Prime Minister in 2009, Gordon Bajnai of the MSZP became the new Prime Minister. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, the Fidesz party won an absolute majority of seats, with the additional support by the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP). For the second time, Viktor Orbán became Prime Minister of Hungary. In the presidential elections later that year, Fidesz politician Pál Schmitt was elected as the President of the Hungary.

Subsequently, the Fidesz party did not face many obstacles in the implementation of reforms to transform the democratic political system. In 2011, several controversial policies were adopted,

for instance an amendment to the media law, which expanded the political control over the media, limiting its freedom and independence, a law giving the government more control over monetary issues, as well as a new election law, favoring the Fidesz party by reducing the number of MPs and introducing a new voting procedure. Furthermore, the new Hungarian constitution, which was approved in 2011 and came into force in 2012, undermined the rule of law and directly abolished important checks and balances by putting too much power into the hands of the centralized executive and weakening the independence of important institutional bodies. Fundamental rights to all citizens are not guaranteed within the Constitution, and minorities are being discriminated (Bugarič, 2015). The adoption of the constitution led to mass protests by the citizens as well as a number of raised concerns by institutions of the European Union (European Parliament, 2018).

After the resignation of President Schmitt. Fidesz politician János Áder was elected as the new President of Hungary in 2012. In 2013, several amendments to the new constitution were passed, which dealt with topics such as the Constitutional Court, the freedom of religion, and political advertising, generating further criticism and threats of legal action from institutions of the European Union.

Before the parliamentary elections of 2014, several electoral reforms had to be dropped in reaction to rulings of the Hungarian Constitutional Court that found them to be unconstitutional. However, the Fidesz party, in coalition with the KDNP, could again obtain an absolute majority in Parliament. Following the elections, concerns were voiced by election monitors that media coverage and strict campaign rules had favored the Fidesz party. Among others, Hungary's rejection of EU plans for the redistribution of migrants, confirmed by a public referendum, as well as plans to close down the Central European University in Budapest sparked additional international criticism and threats by the EU. In 2017, Áder was re-elected as the President of Hungary. In the 2018 parliamentary elections, Fidesz won an absolute majority for the third time. International election monitors again criticized the unfair advantage of Fidesz in the conduct of campaigns and media coverage.

Members of the Fidesz party have publicly voiced their desire to form an illiberal democracy with Christian values plenty of times, which they have been following in their policies: Apart from the illiberal features of the constitution, the Fidesz party and Orbán also limited the academic freedom, weakened the independence of the judiciary, and changed the legal framework for elections in their own favor, giving them more control over the national election commission as well as the media. Overall, an electoral authoritarian regime was established

(Kelemen, 2017: 220), reflected in a steady decline in the Liberal Democracy Index, which dropped from .65 in 2010 to .44 in 2018. Legal instruments were used in order to weaken checks and balances and abolish the independence of democratic institutions and establish a hybrid political system that works in the party's favor. The case of Hungary resembles democratic backsliding in the form of executive aggrandizement, paired with election manipulation by changing electoral and media rules. The Venice Commission and several bodies of the European Union have recognized this threat to liberal democracy and have raised concerns about breaches of European values in several reports. In 2018, the European Parliament called on the Council to determine the risk and launch a formal procedure against Hungary (European Parliament, 2018).

### *Poland*

In 2008, the Civic Platform (PO), a liberal-conservative party under the leadership of Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, formed the Polish government in a coalition with the Polish People's Party (PSL). The former conservative-nationalist ruling party PiS (Law and Justice), whose previous government coalition had fallen apart following corruption accusations towards its coalition partner, served as opposition leader. During its time as the leading government party, the Civic Platform overall pursued a moderate, conservative course. Since the Polish President, Lech Kaczyński, made great use of its veto power by blocking legislation proposed by the PO government, Donald Tusk proposed extensive reforms of the constitution that would limit the power of the President, reduce the number of seats in Sejm (the national parliament) and Senate, and expand the power of the Prime Minister. However, these reforms were not implemented due to criticism by the other political parties. After the Polish President died in a plane crash, the Civic Platform candidate Bronisław Komorowski beat Jarosław Kaczyński, the PiS politician and former Prime Minister, in the subsequent presidential elections, establishing dominance of the Civic Platform in the Polish political landscape.

In the 2011 parliamentary elections, Donald Tusk and his cabinet were confirmed in office and the Civic Platform became the first party to be re-elected in a democratic election in Poland. After narrowly passing a vote of confidence in 2014, Prime Minister Tusk resigned his post to become President of the European Council, and Ewa Kopacz followed him as the new Prime Minister. In the presidential elections in early 2015, the PiS candidate Andrzej Duda defeated the former President and PO candidate Komorowski. Before the parliamentary elections in 2015, the government adopted a new law that would allow them to appoint new Constitutional

Tribunal judges for the judges whose terms would end after the elections in order to secure the influence of the Civic Platform. However, the law was later found partly unconstitutional.

In the parliamentary elections, the PiS party became the first party to gain an absolute majority in democratic elections in Poland. Although the party leader Jarosław Kaczyński was favored as the new Prime Minister, PiS politician Beata Szydło became the new Prime Minister of Poland. After they had won the absolute majority, the PiS immediately started to implement highly-criticized reforms threatening the independence of the Polish Constitutional Tribunal by changing the nomination procedure and trying to appoint party-affine judges, and attacking media freedom by bringing the state media under political control (Kelemen, 2017). While the PiS party was lacking the two-thirds majority to change the constitution, the control over the Constitutional Tribunal enabled them to effectively enforce laws limiting the freedom of speech and the freedom of assembly, extending their power over the judiciary, and changing civil service and electoral laws (Tworzecki, 2019).

In 2017, a controversial law on the Polish Supreme Court was passed, abolishing the independence of the highest judiciary body in Poland by forcing judges to retire and enabling the Polish Parliament to elect the new judges. Although President Duda vetoed the law following mass protests by the citizens, a modified version eventually came into force in June 2018. At the end of 2017, Beata Szydło resigned and Mateusz Morawiecki took over as the new Prime Minister of Poland.

Thus, the reforms implemented by the PiS party weakened the rule of law and abolished constitutional checks and balances and the dispersion of power within the political system by the use of legal means. Both the role of the president and the prime minister were weakened in this process, with the chairman of the PiS party, Jarosław Kaczyński, being the actual head behind the reshaping of the democratic system. The extreme loss of democratic quality within a time span of only three years is reflected in the drastic decrease of the Liberal Democracy Index, which dropped from .80 in 2015, when the PiS party was re-elected, to a value of .55 in 2018. Following reports of the Venice Commission and institutions of the European Union, the European Commission launched a formal procedure against Poland in December 2017 for its breaches of the rule of law as a central value of the European Union (European Commission, 2017). Thus, while no signs of promissory coups or strategic election manipulation can be identified in Poland, the developments since the election of the PiS party can be characterized as a form of executive aggrandizement where a hybrid political system disrespecting democratic and European values was installed.

## *Slovakia*

In 2008, the Slovak Republic was ruled by the Direction – Social Democracy (Smer-SD) party under Prime Minister Robert Fico in a coalition with the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) and the national-conservative People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). The Smer-SD was heavily criticized for entering a coalition with the SNS, leading even to its temporary exclusion from the Party of European Socialists in the European Parliament. In early 2009, the independent candidate Ivan Gašparovič was re-elected as the Slovak President by popular vote. Mid-2009, the Slovak parliament passed a law imposing fines for using a minority language in government buildings. Following an amendment to the Hungarian constitution that allows citizens with Hungarian roots to apply for Hungarian citizenship, a motion was passed in Slovakia to withdraw Slovak citizenship of anyone who is applying for another country's citizenship. Consequently, people applying for Hungarian citizenship would be blocked from voting in any Slovak elections.

Shortly before the parliamentary elections of 2010, a scandal broke out following the publication of a voice recording in which someone that sounded like Prime Minister Fico bragged about raising undeclared funds for the 2002 parliamentary elections. Still, the Smer-SD could again secure the highest share of votes (with an absolute gain of seats), while its coalition partners lost a significant number of votes. Since no other political party was willing to compose a government with the Smer-SD, the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKÚ-DS) formed a coalition with three other opposition parties. Iveta Radičová was appointed as the first female Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic in June 2010.

In late 2011, disputes over the expansion of the European Financial Stability Fund led to a vote of confidence in the Slovak Parliament, which the governing coalition lost. In return for the Smer-SD's support of the Eurozone measure, it was determined that new parliamentary elections would be held in early 2012. Leading up to these elections, several scandals about political corruption dominated the election campaigns. It was also criticized that former Slovak citizens who had been granted Hungarian citizenship were blocked from voting. In the parliamentary elections, the Smer-SD won an absolute majority of seats (44% of the votes). Consequently, the Smer-SD formed the first Slovak one-party government since 1993, with Robert Fico as the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic.

In the 2014 presidential election, Fico was defeated by the independent candidate Andrej Kiska in the second round of voting. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the Smer-SD lost its absolute majority but remained the strongest party in the Slovak parliament. It formed a coalition with



the SNS, the Most-Híd, and the Network party. In early 2018, the investigative journalist Ján Kuciak was killed, leading to mass protests all over the Slovak Republic. As a consequence, Robert Fico resigned as the Slovak Prime Minister, and Peter Pellegrini of the Smer-SD was appointed as his successor.

Therefore, the democratic political system has been quite stable over the last ten years, with only one unplanned election and relatively few political scandals, reflected in the steady Liberal Democracy Index of .73 in 2008 and .71 in 2018. The Smer-SD, as a center-left party controlling the Slovak political landscape for the majority of the time, and former Prime Minister Fico have not implemented any controversial policies apart from the language and citizenship laws targeted at minority groups. Furthermore, no legal steps were taken to initiate any institutional and political changes. Thus, no signs of promissory coups, executive aggrandizement, or election manipulation as forms of democratic backsliding can be identified in the Slovak Republic.

### *Key Findings*

As the previous qualitative analysis has shown, the countries of the Visegrád Group are facing democratic backsliding at varying levels. In Hungary and Poland, democratic backsliding in the form of executive aggrandizement, especially in Hungary also in connection with election manipulation, can be identified. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, however, no institutional changes have been initiated that threaten the system of checks and balances. While the Czech Republic had the least stable political system out of the Visegrád countries, with six different governments in ten years, the political systems of the Czech Republic and Slovakia have not yet been challenged by serious democratic backsliding (Greskovits, 2015: 31).

Differences in the four Visegrád countries derive from the ideological positions of the respective governments. In Poland and Hungary, the institutional and legal changes were initiated by nationalist-conservative, right parties that held an absolute majority in the legislative body of their country. Both parties also take a Eurosceptic, anti-migration standpoint. In addition, the parties follow a Christian conservative ideology that appeals to the majority of the citizens, with 56% of the Hungarian population and 87% of the Polish population identifying with the Christian Catholic faith (Pew Research Center, 2017).

The Fidesz and the PiS party, which had both ruled their respective country at one point or another in the past, were able to get an absolute majority of votes after having spent some years in the opposition. While the constitutional and legal changes in the two countries sparked mass

protests by the citizens, the Fidesz party was able to confirm its absolute majority in the parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2018, while the PiS party is predicted to do the same in the 2019 Polish parliamentary elections in several election polls (Politico, 2019b).

However, differences can be observed between the two backsliding countries of Hungary and Poland. Generally, the Hungarian Fidesz was the first party in the Visegrád countries to reform the domestic democratic system, starting in 2010. The Polish PiS only started to reform the political system in 2015, although at a much faster pace. While the Fidesz-led Hungarian government implemented a new Hungarian constitution with illiberal aspects and more widespread reforms, covering, for instance, academic freedom and election law, the PiS in Poland targeted specific features of the democratic political system, especially the Polish judiciary and the rule of law. In Hungary, party leader and Prime Minister Orbán poses as the dominant figure of the reforms, whereas in Poland, the PiS party leader Kaczyński, who does not hold an office, seems to be pulling the strings behind the scenes, with different PiS politicians instated as Prime Ministers of Poland.

It is also interesting to note that the European Union reacted much faster to the threats to the democratic order in Poland than to the illiberal turn in Hungary. After several warnings towards both countries, the European Union first initiated legal procedures on the breaches of the rule of law in Poland in 2017 (European Commission, 2017). In 2018, a proposal on the disregard of European values in Hungary followed (European Parliament, 2018).

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, no nationalist-conservative party could secure similar majorities in Parliament as Fidesz and PiS. In the Czech Republic, the ruling ANO movement, which is considered to be a rather liberal party, is reliant on a coalition partner. Out of the four Visegrád countries, the Czech Republic was the only one that ran any risk of democratic backsliding through promissory coups, with two interim governments in the last ten years. However, the first of these interim governments was composed of independent politicians that did not stand as candidates in the subsequent elections. The second interim government was instated by the Czech President as an attempt to further expand his political powers, but it was dismissed by the Czech Parliament through a vote of confidence and the politicians who formed that government did not stand a chance in the next elections. For both interim governments, the parliament was not dissolved without setting a date for new elections, which means that the democratic order was not threatened after all.

In Slovakia, the ruling Smer-SD, while having formed a coalition with right-nationalist parties in the past, follows a center-left ideology. Although it held an absolute majority in the Slovak

parliament, it did not attempt to implement any institutional or legal changes that would reduce the democratic quality in Slovakia. Out of the four Visegrád countries, the Slovak Republic seems to be least threatened by losses of democratic quality.

The political developments in the Visegrád Group, and especially the Hungarian and Polish cases, fit into a general trend of polarization, rising nationalism and a shift to the right in the European Union. In fact, among the EU member states, Hungary and Poland have faced the most drastic anti-democratic developments, while founding member states such as France, the Netherlands, or Germany have also been challenged by the rise of illiberal parties and the polarization of the civil society. Therefore, the EU is confronted with the task to ensure compliance with its values and legal rules in the member states. However, as mentioned above, the EU institutions have been quite hesitant to make use of legal procedures because they rely on the support of the member states because without it, the supranational powers assigned to the EU could be limited by non-compliance of the member states.

The state of democratic backsliding in the Visegrád Group can have serious consequences for the sustainability of democratic reforms in the four countries because the values of the European Union are not as deeply embedded among the population as they are in other member states. For the empirical analysis of the role of the national context for the level of Euroscepticism, it is therefore expected that there will be differences between Poland and Hungary on one side, and the Czech Republic and Slovakia on the other. In the former two countries, the youth, which is most committed to European values, should be more dissatisfied with the national democracies than in the others, with a higher dissatisfaction leading to a lower level of Euroscepticism, while the young people of the Czech Republic and Slovakia should be less critical of national democracy as well as the EU.

## 4.2. Univariate Analysis

In the following part, I turn to the empirical analysis of Eurobarometer data in order to determine the associations between the evaluation of democracy and the perception of national benefits with the level of Euroscepticism. First, the descriptive statistics of the dependent variable (and its two dimensions) and the independent variables are examined, and the means and standard deviations of all included variables are reported. In doing so, the characteristics of the sample in regard to the dependent variable, the independent variables, and the control variables are described. Hence, the second sub-question *What are the predominant perceptions regarding satisfaction with and responsiveness of national democracy among the youth in the countries of the Visegrád Group?* and the third sub-question *What are the predominant perceptions regarding benefits the country has drawn from membership to the EU among young people in the countries of the Visegrád Group?* are answered.

### *Level of Euroscepticism*

Variable	N	Range	Mean	Standard deviation
Level of Euroscepticism	1438	0 – 1	.36	.24
Euroscepticism: Irresponsiveness	1488	0 – 1	.48	.29
Euroscepticism: Opposition to membership	1449	0 – 1	.24	.30

*Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Dependent Variable and its Dimensions*

Looking at the dependent variable Level of Euroscepticism (Table 3), which is measured in values ranged from 0 (Low level of Euroscepticism) to 1 (High level of Euroscepticism), the younger generation between 15 and 29 in the Visegrád countries shows a medium level of Euroscepticism (.36). While the dimension of opposition to EU membership is quite low (.24), there is a medium level of perceived irresponsiveness of the European Union (.48). Thus, the youth in the Visegrád Group is more skeptic of the democratic features and responsiveness of the EU than opposed to the general regime and their country's membership to the EU.

Country	Level of Euroscepticism	Euroscepticism: Irresponsiveness	Euroscepticism: Opposition to membership
Czech Republic	.49	.59	.38
Hungary	.38	.54	.23
Poland	.32	.44	.19
Slovakia	.39	.48	.29

*Table 4. Country Differences in Means of the Dependent Variable and its Dimensions*

Comparing the four individual countries of the Visegrád Group (Table 4), the overall level of Euroscepticism in the youth varies from a low value of .32 (Poland) to a medium value of .49 (Czech Republic). The youth in Hungary (.38) and Slovakia (.39) show very similar, medium levels of Euroscepticism. The highest differences can be found in the dimension of opposition to EU membership, with the youth in the Czech Republic showing a medium opposition to the general regime (.38) that is double the size of the opposition among the youth in Poland (.19). The Slovak youth is also quite opposed to membership in the EU (.29). Furthermore, the young generation in the Czech Republic is the most sceptic of the responsiveness and the democratic features of the EU (.59).

Therefore, there seems to be no evidence of a higher level of Euroscepticism in the two countries that are facing democratic backsliding under the rule of nationalist-conservative, rather Eurosceptic parties. In fact, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which have been identified as having a very stable system of checks and balances and respect for the rule of law, are confronted with the highest levels of Euroscepticism among the youth in the Visegrád countries.

#### *Independent Variables*

Variable	N	Range	Mean	Standard deviation
Satisfaction with national democracy	1686	0 – 1	.54	.29
Perception of responsiveness of national democracy	1454	0 – 1	.58	.34
Perception of national benefits from EU membership	1497	0 – 1	.84	.34

*Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of the Independent Variables*

Looking at the independent variables (Table 5), we find that the youth tends to have a positive opinion towards all three of them (>.50). More than half of the young people in the four Visegrád countries are satisfied with their national democracies, while 28% show some dissatisfaction and only 9% show a very low level of satisfaction<sup>8</sup>. Although there is a medium level of satisfaction (.54), which is the lowest mean value of the three independent variables, missing country differences provide no evidence of the youth identifying some loss of democratic quality in their respective country that is reflected in their opinion of the national democracy.

<sup>8</sup> Frequency distributions for the three independent variables are reported in Appendix A.

The youth perceives the responsiveness of national democracy to be at a medium-high level (.58), with slightly over 60% stating that they believe their voices count in their country. Compared to the two indicators included for the responsiveness of the EU, the young generation feels like their voice counts more in the national democracy than in the European one.

Lastly, the perception of national benefits from EU membership is very high among the young generation in the Visegrád Group (.84), with only 12% of young people thinking that their respective country has not benefited from membership. This shows that the youth is considered to be more positive towards the European Union because they have only lived in a democratic system and experienced the benefits of EU membership.

Country	Satisfaction with national democracy	Perception of responsiveness of national democracy	Perception of national benefits from EU membership
Czech Republic	.55	.51	.71
Hungary	.50	.48	.83
Poland	.56	.62	.90
Slovakia	.45	.59	.73

*Table 6. Country Differences in Means of the Independent Variables*

There are also country differences regarding the independent variables (Table 6). In Poland, democracy satisfaction is the highest (.56), with 58,8% of young people being satisfied, closely followed by the Czech Republic (.55). In Hungary, 6,4% of the youth are very satisfied with the way democracy works in their country, which is the highest value among the four countries. The Slovak youth is the least satisfied with national democracy, with only 45,4% being fairly satisfied or very satisfied. Thus, democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland is not reflected in lower satisfaction with national democracy, with the young generation in the Czech Republic and Slovakia showing very similar, medium levels of satisfaction.

As stated above, the perception of responsiveness of national democracy is generally higher than the perception of responsiveness of European democracy. In Poland, where the perception of national responsiveness is the highest (.62) out of the four countries, 67,6% of the young generation agree that their voice counts in their country. In contrast, only 51,2% of the Hungarian youth (.48) have a positive opinion on the responsiveness and the democratic features of their country's political system. Again, no clear divide between the countries facing democratic backsliding and the countries not facing democratic backsliding can be identified.

To provide an answer to the second sub-question of this thesis, it can be summarized that the majority of the youth in the Visegrád countries is satisfied with their national democracies and has a positive perception of its performance. However, some country differences can be identified for both variables. In Slovakia, a higher share of young people is dissatisfied with the national democracy, whereas the youth in the three other countries is more satisfied with democracy. The young generation in Poland and Slovakia have a rather positive perception of responsiveness of national democracy, while roughly half of the youth in Hungary and the Czech Republic evaluates the responsiveness of national democracy in a negative way.

In regard to the third independent variable, there is a strong positive perception of national benefits from EU membership in all four countries, although a quarter of the young generation (25%) in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is of the opinion that their respective country has not benefited from EU membership. In Hungary, 13,7% of the youth think that their country has not benefited, while only 6,1% of the youth in Poland share this perception. Therefore, at least twice as many young people in the Czech Republic and Slovakia have a negative perception of national benefits from EU membership compared to the youth in the backsliding countries of Poland and Hungary.

Hence, the third sub-question can be answered as follows: In all countries of the Visegrád Group, there is a strong positive perception of national benefits from EU membership, with at least three-quarters of the young population sharing that perception in each of the countries.

### *Control Variables*

Notwithstanding, the country differences might to some extent derive from differences in the control variables that will be included in the multivariate analyses. In terms of the socio-demographic variables, there are differences in the distributions of age groups, the type of living community, the economic situation, and the employment status within the young generations of the four countries. However, the differences in political variables are even more severe. In regard to the political orientation, there are only very few young people that identify themselves with the extreme left, showing the lacking attachment with Communist values among the youth in Central and Eastern Europe. In general, the Czech Republic has the highest share of young people identifying with a left ideology, while in Slovakia there is a balance between left and right people. The youth in the backsliding countries of Hungary and Poland has a higher share of the right people. In Poland, about 40% of the young people put themselves on the right side of the spectrum. In Hungary, more than half of the young generation identify with the right position, with 24% sympathizing with extreme right positions. This comes as only a little

surprise, given the fact that in both of these countries, right-nationalist parties are in power. Regarding the interest and engagement in national and European politics, there is also a clear divide between the youth in the Czech Republic and Slovakia on the one hand, and the youth in Hungary and Poland on the other. In the latter two countries, the interest in national politics and the importance of voting in both national and European elections are higher than in the former two. The interest in EU politics is highest in Hungary while in the Czech Republic, less than half of the youth are interested in the European Union. These differences might derive from the fact that in Hungary and Poland, the governments have voiced criticism against the European Union on several occasions, which might have led to increased public debate and media discourse on EU politics. In Slovakia, membership to the Eurozone could be a factor that strengthens interest in the European Union. Generally, the interest and engagement in national politics are higher than interest and engagement in European politics, which shows that the youth in the Visegrád countries is more concerned with the national dimension of politics rather than the European one. This indicates that the young generation identifies more with their respective nation-state and sees the national dimension as more important than the European one.

### 4.3. Bivariate Analyses

Before turning to the multivariate analysis, which also takes the effects of the included control variables into account, the bivariate relationships between the three independent variables and the Level of Euroscepticism are analyzed to get a first impression of the association between the variables. For this, cross tables between each of the independent and the dependent variables and the ordinal correlation measure Somer's  $d^9$ , which describes the correlation strength, are investigated. A table for the interpretation of correlation coefficients (Diaz-Bone, 2006: 91) is used to classify the strength of the bivariate relationships<sup>10</sup>.

Country	Democracy satisfaction	Responsiveness of democracy	Benefits from EU membership
All countries	-.107	-.476	-.682
Czech Republic	-.431	-.445	-.679
Hungary	-.049	-.422	-.680
Poland	.029	-.475	-.641
Slovakia	-.508	-.608	-.603

*Table 7. Strength of Correlation (Somer's d) Between the Three Independent Variables and the Level of Euroscepticism*

<sup>9</sup> Although recoded to a scale from 0 to 1, the independent variables are still measured on an ordinal scale, which is why an ordinal correlation measure has to be applied. Somer's  $d$  was chosen because it is suitable for ordinal variables with a limited number of values and because it allows for the analysis of a directional relationship.

<sup>10</sup> The interpretation table is reported in Appendix A.



Looking at the correlation between independent and dependent variables for all four countries (Table 7), all three variables are somewhat negatively correlated with the level of Euroscepticism (reversely coded), which generally reflects the direction of the impact proposed in the hypotheses. The Satisfaction with national democracy has the lowest correlation among the three independent variables (-.107, weak correlation), while there is a medium correlation between the responsiveness of democracy and the level of Euroscepticism (-.476), and a high correlation between the national benefits from EU membership and the level of Euroscepticism (-.682). Examining the two dimensions of Euroscepticism separately<sup>11</sup>, the independent variables measuring the national level of the irresponsiveness and membership opposition have the biggest impact on the respective dimension.

The strongest country differences can be observed for the independent variable of Satisfaction with national democracy: In Poland and Hungary, there is no correlation between democracy satisfaction and Euroscepticism, while in the Czech Republic, satisfaction with national democracy has a medium negative impact on the Level of Euroscepticism (-.431), and in Slovakia, satisfaction has strong impact on the Level of Euroscepticism (-.508). This means that in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, a more positive opinion towards the national democracy leads to less skepticism towards the European Union, confirming Hypothesis 1a. In Poland and Hungary, however, there seems to be no impact of democracy satisfaction on the level of Euroscepticism in the young generation at all ( $< \pm .05$ ). Regarding the responsiveness of national democracy, there is a medium negative correlation with the level of Euroscepticism in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (-.422 to -.475), and a strong negative correlation between the perception of responsiveness of national democracy and Euroscepticism in Slovakia (-.608). Thus, a more positive opinion of the responsiveness of national democracy leads to a lower level of Euroscepticism in all four countries. Lastly, the perceived national benefits from EU membership has a strong negative impact in each of the four countries, which means that the higher the perception of benefits from EU membership, the lower the level of Euroscepticism.

#### **4.4. Multivariate Analyses**

To test the influence of these three independent variables and the control variables on the level of Euroscepticism, several OLS regressions are performed to assess and compare the explanatory power of the independent variables and the control variables. The level of

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<sup>11</sup> Somer's d for the independent variables and the two dimensions of Euroscepticism is reported in Appendix A.

Euroscepticism serves as the dependent variable for all models. In addition to the regressions for the whole Visegrád Group, regression models are also performed for each of the countries. Thus, I cannot only compare the explanatory value of the different regression models, but also the regression models for each of the countries<sup>12</sup>. The results of the full regression models are reported in Table 8. In the following, the models are compared, and the significant results are discussed.

Without controlling for socio-demographic or political variables, the impact of the three independent variables on the level of Euroscepticism resembles the correlations found in the bivariate analysis. In the Czech Republic, the perception of national benefits is the variable with the highest explanatory power for the level of Euroscepticism, whereas, in the other three countries, the perception of responsiveness has the highest explanatory power<sup>13</sup>. The effects of the independent variables generally follow the directions proposed in the hypotheses.

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<sup>12</sup> Before interpreting the results, the five assumptions of linear regression (normal distribution, linearity, independence of errors, constant error variance, multicollinearity) were tested. All assumptions were met for the five linear regression models.

<sup>13</sup> Effect sizes are compared using the standardized beta coefficient.

Independent Variable	Visegrád Four	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
Satisfaction with national democracy	.001 (.018)	-.223*** (.048)	.079* (.042)	.027 (.025)	-.111** (.052)
Responsiveness of national democracy	-.296*** (.016)	-.202*** (.042)	-.256*** (.042)	-.336*** (.022)	-.331*** (.059)
Perception of national benefits from EU membership	-.319*** (.014)	-.261*** .028	-.243*** (.034)	-.355*** (.025)	-.166*** (.035)
Age	.000 (.002)	.006* (.004)	-.001 (.004)	-.003 (.003)	.002 (.004)
Gender (Female)	-.033*** (.010)	.014 (.025)	.065** (.028)	-.058*** (.013)	-.064** (.029)
Type of community	-.008 (.006)	.026 (.017)	.033** (.016)	-.010 (.007)	-.036* (.020)
Difficulties to pay bills	.028*** (.010)	.059*** (.021)	.014 (.020)	-.011 (.016)	-.017 (.028)
Employment status					
Unemployed	.054** (.025)	.079 (.068)	.123* (.069)	.047 (.034)	.047 (.084)
Student	.029 (.025)	.164** (.071)	.118* (.070)	-.029 (.031)	-.018 (.089)
Employed	.022 (.024)	.140** (.063)	.134** (.061)	-.034 (.032)	.037 (.081)
Political orientation:					
Extreme Left	.010** (.005)	.015 (.013)	.026* (.015)	.006 (.006)	.013 (.013)
Political orientation:	.016*** (.003)	.019** (.008)	.021*** (.008)	.017*** (.004)	-.005 (.009)
Extreme Right					
Interest in national politics	-.008 (.011)	.003 (.025)	-.038 (.036)	-.009 (.015)	.007 (.044)
Interest in EU politics	.000 (.011)	-.040 (.030)	.013 (.032)	.013 (.014)	.033 (.044)
Engagement in national democracy	.008*** (.003)	.001 (.006)	.004 (.008)	.008 (.004)	-.005 (.008)
Engagement in EU democracy	-.018*** (.002)	-.024*** (.006)	-.005 (.008)	-.017*** (.003)	-.011 (.007)
Constant	.816*** (.050)	.764*** (.119)	.541*** (.114)	.954*** (.075)	.851*** (.121)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.505	.625	.444	.468	.662
SEE	.171	.164	.166	.163	.141
N	1335	223	212	782	118

Note: Standard Errors are reported in Parentheses.

\*Unstandardized regression coefficients significant at  $p < 0.1$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$

Table 8. Ordinary Least Squares Estimates of the Effects of Democracy Satisfaction, Responsiveness of National Democracy, Perception of National Benefits from EU Membership and Control Variables on the Level of Euroscepticism

In all four countries, perceptions of higher responsiveness and higher national benefits are associated with a lower level of Euroscepticism. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, higher satisfaction with national democracy among the youth implies a less Eurosceptic opinion. In the young generation of Hungary, however, higher satisfaction with national democracy leads to a higher level of Euroscepticism, following Hypothesis 1a. In Poland, there is no significant effect of national democracy satisfaction. Including political or socio-demographic control variables as independent variables, the effect sizes of three independent variables slightly vary across the models, but there are no changes in the directions of effects.

The best explanation of variance in the level of Euroscepticism is achieved when including both socio-demographic and political control variables. In all models, the three independent variables have the highest effects on the level of Euroscepticism. The regression model has the highest explanatory power in Slovakia, where it accounts for 66% of the variance in the level of Euroscepticism. In the Czech Republic, the regression model accounts for 63% of the variance in the dependent variable. In Poland and Hungary, however, only 47% (Poland) and 44% (Hungary) of the variance in the level of Euroscepticism is explained by the independent variables. This implies that there are additional factors influencing the level of Euroscepticism in Hungary and Poland compared to the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

#### *Satisfaction with National Democracy*

First, I examine the satisfaction with national democracy (H1a and H1b), which has the weakest explanatory power of the three independent variables. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the youth that is more satisfied with national democracy is found to show significantly lower levels of Euroscepticism (-.111 in Slovakia and -.223 in the Czech Republic), confirming Hypothesis 1b. In Hungary and Poland, there was no significant effect of different levels of satisfaction with national democracy among the youth on the level of Euroscepticism. Thus, Hypothesis 1a cannot be confirmed. Interestingly, while the effects are not significant for all countries, the data reflects the differentiation between countries that are facing democratic backsliding and countries that are not, indicating that the loss of democratic quality affects the opinion towards the European Union. In Hungary and Poland, the youth is therefore not likely to project their (dis-)satisfaction with the working of national democracy onto their opinion towards the European Union. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there is a strong link between the opinion towards the national democracy and the opinion towards the European Union, demonstrating that the youth in the Czech Republic and Slovakia draws a connection between the two.

### *Perception of Responsiveness of National Democracy*

The evaluation of the performance of national democracy, measured in the perceived responsiveness, has the highest explanatory power in Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia even after including the control variables in the model. In all four countries, a positive perception of responsiveness of the national democracy is associated with a lower level of Euroscepticism among the youth (between  $-.202$  in the Czech Republic and  $-.336$  in Poland). In accordance with Hypothesis 2, this means that a higher perception of the performance of the domestic political system results in more positive opinions towards the European Union. Comparing these results with the results on the satisfaction with democracy, differences can be observed for Poland and Hungary. Thus, as argued above, satisfaction and evaluation of the performance of national democracy measure two different dimensions of the national context that cannot be used interchangeably. In the Visegrád countries, a better evaluation of the national democratic performance is negatively associated with the level of Euroscepticism. Again, this provides evidence for the fact that the evaluation of national democracy is translated onto the European level.

### *Perception of National Benefits from EU Membership*

Moving onto the last independent variable, the perception of national benefits from EU membership is also found to have a negative effect on the level of Euroscepticism in the four countries, confirming Hypothesis 3. As expected, the opinion that the country has benefited from EU membership provides a good explanation for a lower level of Euroscepticism. Thus, the youth in the Visegrád countries takes into account utilitarian considerations for the national level when forming their opinion towards the European Union. In Slovakia, this effect is the lowest among the Visegrád countries ( $-.166$ ), whereas it is highest in Poland ( $-.355$ )

### *Control Variables*

In the regression table, it can be seen that surprisingly few control variables achieve significance in the models. There is no effect of age on the level of Euroscepticism, which can derive from the fact that only a specific age group is investigated. Hence, the 15- to 29-year-olds do not tend to form opinions towards the EU based on different experiences and knowledge that derive from differences in age. Additionally, the data provide mixed evidence for the effect of gender differences on the level of Euroscepticism. Contrary to the theoretical findings discussed above, in most cases, the type of living community does not have a significant effect. Therefore, it cannot be confirmed that the urban population is less likely to be Eurosceptic than the rural

population. Lastly, the employment status is found to be of significance for unemployed young people in the overall model, with unemployment leading to a higher level of Euroscepticism. Hence, it cannot be confirmed that a higher socio-economic status generally leads to a lower level of Euroscepticism because of individual utilitarian considerations.

Furthermore, there are mixed results for the effect of political control variables. To control for two different theories on the effect of the political orientation on a left-right axis, two control variables were included. In the overall model, the extreme left (.010) and the extreme right (.016) show a significant positive association with the level of Euroscepticism. However, when comparing the countries, the extreme left position does not have a clear impact, while identification with the extreme right accounts for a higher level of Euroscepticism in all countries except for Slovakia. Hence, if the youth identifies more with the right side of the ideological spectrum, they are more likely to be Eurosceptic, while an extreme left position has no impact on the level of Euroscepticism. Contrary to the formulated expectation, the interest in national politics and the interest in EU politics are not significant predictors for the level of Euroscepticism among the youth in the Visegrád Group, providing no evidence for the theory of cognitive mobilization. Finally, the importance of voting in national elections and in European elections have a significant impact in the overall model, with higher engagement in national politics leading to a higher level of Euroscepticism, while a higher engagement in European politics leads to a lower level in Euroscepticism. Looking at the country models, the negative impact of the engagement in EU democracy on the opinion towards the European Union can be confirmed in the Czech Republic (-.024) and Poland (-.017).

## 5. Conclusion

In this section, I seek to answer the main research question *In what ways are the evaluation of national democracy and country benefits from the EU associated with the level of Euroscepticism among the youth in the countries of the Visegrád Group in 2018?* by summarizing key findings of this thesis and discussing their practical implications. Furthermore, I will touch on limitations of this research and provide some recommendations for future research.

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the link between the national context and the level of Euroscepticism within the young population of the Visegrád Group in order to assess the prospective sustainability and legitimacy of Europeanization processes within Central and Eastern Europe. For this, I examined the state of democratic backsliding in the four countries in order to evaluate the current challenges the national context poses for the European Union. The conceptualization by Bermeo (2016) provided a valuable theoretical framework for the evaluation of formal changes. In Hungary and Poland, democratic backsliding in the form of executive aggrandizement can be identified, with the right-nationalist ruling parties in each of the two countries holding an absolute majority in parliament that allows them to induce slow changes in the national institutions and laws by the use of legal means. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, although some illiberal movements can be observed, no serious threats to the democratic order can be identified, with the two countries having very stable systems of checks and balances. Thus, the youth in the former two countries should be less satisfied with national democracy, which would also be reflected in a less Eurosceptic opinion, whereas the youth in the latter two countries should be less Eurosceptic when showing a high satisfaction with national democracy.

Generally speaking, the empirical analysis shows that the national context plays a key role in defining how the youth evaluates the European Union. In the regression models for the four countries, the three independent variables of satisfaction with national democracy, perception of responsiveness of national democracy, and perception of national benefits show significant effects on the level of Euroscepticism for the majority of the countries. When looking at each country separately, slightly varying results can be found: In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the independent variables remain significant explanatory variables for the level of Euroscepticism. In Hungary and Poland, in contrast, satisfaction with national democracy cannot account for differences in the level of Euroscepticism. Although the descriptive statistics show no evidence of a higher level of Euroscepticism or a lower satisfaction with democracy, the data can thus confirm that there is a differentiation between the countries that are facing

democratic backsliding and those that are not, although not in the expected shape. This is also reflected in the lower Adjusted  $R^2$  for the two country models (.444 for Hungary and .468 for Poland), indicating that there might be different variables for the national level that describe the youth's opinion towards the European Union better.

The main research question of this thesis *In what ways are the evaluation of national democracy and country benefits from the EU associated with the level of Euroscepticism among the youth in the countries of the Visegrád Group in 2018?* can hence be answered as follows: The evaluation of national democracy, which was measured using the two variables of satisfaction with and perception of responsiveness, as well as the perception of national benefits, are negatively correlated with the level of Euroscepticism. Among the youth in Czech Republic and Slovakia, higher satisfaction with national democracy, higher perception of responsiveness, and higher perception of national benefits from EU membership are associated with a lower level of Euroscepticism. In Hungary and Poland, a higher perception of responsiveness and a higher perception of national benefits from EU membership are associated with a lower level of Euroscepticism, while the satisfaction with national democracy has no explanatory power for the level of Euroscepticism.

Therefore, the theoretical considerations by Anderson (1998) seem to offer the best framework in order to explain the link between the evaluation of national democracy and the level of Euroscepticism in the Central and Eastern European countries that are not facing democratic backsliding, while the theory of utilitarian considerations can be applied also for the national level, as suggested by Kritzinger (2003) and Sánchez-Cuenca (2000). Still, the literature has not yet investigated implications of national political changes for the opinion towards the EU, which is why more scientific work is required that explores the logic between the quality of national democracy and the level of Euroscepticism.

As previously mentioned, there are some methodological as well as practical limitations of this research. In general, the analysis of quantitative data does not offer any detailed insights into the reasons for having a specific opinion towards the European Union or national democracy, which does not allow conclusions on the roots of support with the political systems on national and EU level. Furthermore, while the case selection of the Visegrád countries allows for the formulation of assumptions for other Central and Eastern European countries, no generalizations beyond the four cases can be made. In addition, the young generation is not representative of the entire populations of the Visegrád Group. Lastly, the empirical results show that the satisfaction with national democracy cannot explain the level of Euroscepticism in the backsliding countries of Hungary and Poland. While this thesis investigates the



implications of democratic backsliding, it seems like the satisfaction with national democracy does not adequately capture the citizen's evaluation of losses in democratic quality. Therefore, another indicator might provide a better measurement for the perception of democratic quality.

### **5.1. Practical Implications**

The results obtained in this thesis have practical implications for the countries of the Visegrád Group and the European Union. On national level, the sustainability of democratic and administrative reforms seems to be threatened by the rising polarization and sympathy with right-nationalist parties and politicians. While this cannot only be observed in the CEEC, the Visegrád countries and other former Eastern countries (such as Eastern Germany) have faced the gravest changes within the last few years. In Hungary and Poland, this has led to the concentration of power in the hands of anti-democratic forces and parties that do not attempt to conceal their goals of establishing autocratic political systems in CEE. Looking at the youth, the majority of young people in the four countries has a positive opinion of the European Union. If they are somewhat opposed of the EU, there are usually more skeptical of the specific democratic features than they are opposed to their country's membership of the EU. Therefore, the support of the young people indicates a willingness to remain member states of the European Union. However, the satisfaction with and perception of responsiveness of national democracy are rather low among the youth, which puts into question the sustainability of democratic reforms in the Visegrád countries.

Therefore, the European Union should take the threats to its values very seriously in order to prevent the erosion of democracy in the states of Central and Eastern Europe. While it runs the risk of exacerbating the situations in the member states and sparking additional opposition, its cautious attitude towards illiberal changes in Hungary has only triggered further losses in democratic quality. In order to prevent the expansion of democratic backsliding towards other member states, the European Union should show clear opposition to the developments in the countries of Hungary and Poland. Since the youth has a strong perception of benefits from EU membership, the EU should use its financial power to ensure compliance with the rule of law and the commitment to liberal democracy. The analysis of the youth in the Visegrád Group shows that in the Central and Eastern European countries, the national context shapes the public support of the European Union. Thus, it is in the hands of the European Union to define its own fate and use its authority to deepen the commitment to the project of European integration.

## **5.2. Recommendations for Future Research**

While this thesis provided a first impression of the role of the national context in shaping the opinions towards the European Union, the cases of Hungary and Poland have shown that additional research is required to determine the association between losses of democratic quality and support for the European Union. As mentioned above, future research could focus on other indicators for the perception of changes in democratic quality among the population of the backsliding countries. Furthermore, other dimensions of democratic backsliding and its impact on Euroscepticism could also be investigated. For instance, it was discovered in the analysis that in both cases, democratic backsliding was induced by parties with a right-nationalist ideology, even though the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are connected through their history with communist, left-wing ideology. Thus, future research could be focused on the role of party ideology in explaining democratic backsliding and opposition to the European Union in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, further differentiation between the evaluation of EU performance should be examined, for instance through the assessment of the political performance of the EU as an explanation for the opinion towards the EU.

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## Appendix A. Additional Tables and Figures

### 3.2. Case Selection: Population Sizes vs. Sample Sizes

Country	Total Population (absolute)	Young Population (relative to total population))	Sample Population (absolute)	Young Sample Population (relative to sample)
Czech Republic	10,610,055	1,664,962 (15.69%)	1,012	173 (17.09%)
Hungary	9,778,371	1,693,559 (17.32%)	1,018	111 (10.90%)
Poland	37,976,687	6,709,637 (17.67%)	1,034	123 (11.90%)
Slovakia	5,443,120	976,640 (17.94%)	1,042	158 (15.16%)

*Population Sizes vs. Sample Sizes (Source: Eurostat)*

### 3.3 Operationalization: Dependent variable

Label	Value
Totally agree	0
Tend to agree	0.25
Don't know	0.5
Tend to disagree	0.75
Totally disagree	1

*Recoded Scale for Items D72\_1 and D72\_3 (Irresponsiveness of the EU)*

Label	Value
Remain in the EU / Membership is a good thing	0
Neither / Not sure // Don't know	0.5
Leave the EU / Membership is a bad thing	1

*Recoded Scale for Items QA3 and QA15 (Opposition to EU membership)*

### 3.3 Operationalization: Independent Variables

Label	Value
Not at all satisfied	0
Not very satisfied	0.25
Don't know	0.5
Fairly satisfied	0.75
Very satisfied	1

*Recoded Scale for Item D80a (Satisfaction with national democracy)*

Label	Value
Totally disagree	0
Tend to disagree	0.25
Don't know	0.5
Tend to agree	0.75
Totally agree	1

*Recoded Scale for Item D72\_2 (Responsiveness of national democracy)*



Label	Value
Not benefited	0
Don't know	0.5
Benefited	1

*Recoded Scale for Item QA16 (Perception of national benefits from EU membership)*

### 3.3. Operationalization: Control Variables

Control Variable	Expectation	Theoretical justification
Age	-	e.g. Boomgarden et al. (2011)
Gender (Female)	+/-	Boomgarden et al. (2011) Nelsen and Guth (2000)
Type of living community		Surwillo et al. (2010)
Rural area / Village	+	
Small / middle town	+/-	
Large town	-	
Difficulties to pay bills	+	e.g. Kritzingen (2003)
Employment status		e.g. Gabel (1998)
Unemployed	+	
Student	+/-	
Employed	+/-	
Self-employed	+/-	
Political orientation		e.g. Nelsen and Guth (2000), Hix (2007)
Extreme Left	+/-	
Extreme Right	+	
Interest in national politics	+/-	
Interest in EU politics	-	Anderson (1998)
Engagement in national democracy	+/-	
Engagement in EU democracy	-	Hobolt (2012)

*Expectations and Theoretical Basis for Including the Control Variables*

## 4.2 Descriptive Statistics - Independent Variables

### Democracy satisfaction - COUNTRY (recoded)

COUNTRY/SAMPLE ID (SERIES STANDARD)			Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente
CZ - Czech Republic	Gültig	Not at all satisfied	13	4,5	4,5
		Not very satisfied	96	33,5	33,5
		Not sure	16	5,6	5,6
		Fairly satisfied	149	51,7	51,7
		Very satisfied	14	4,8	4,8
		Gesamt	288	100,0	100,0
HU - Hungary	Gültig	Not at all satisfied	47	18,9	18,9
		Not very satisfied	58	23,3	23,3
		Not sure	10	3,8	3,8
		Fairly satisfied	119	47,6	47,6
		Very satisfied	16	6,4	6,4
		Gesamt	250	100,0	100,0
PL - Poland	Gültig	Not at all satisfied	65	6,5	6,5
		Not very satisfied	262	26,3	26,3
		Not sure	83	8,4	8,4
		Fairly satisfied	542	54,6	54,6
		Very satisfied	42	4,2	4,2
		Gesamt	993	100,0	100,0
SK - Slovakia	Gültig	Not at all satisfied	27	17,6	17,6
		Not very satisfied	51	33,1	33,1
		Not sure	6	3,9	3,9
		Fairly satisfied	66	42,6	42,6
		Very satisfied	4	2,8	2,8
		Gesamt	154	100,0	100,0

### My voice counts in (OUR COUNTRY) (recoded)

COUNTRY/SAMPLE ID (SERIES STANDARD)			Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente
CZ - Czech Republic	Gültig	Totally disagree	41	14,1	16,7
		Tend to disagree	63	22,1	26,2
		Not sure	12	4,3	5,1
		Tend to agree	94	32,8	38,9
		Totally agree	32	11,1	13,2
		Gesamt	243	84,4	100,0
	Fehlend	System	45	15,6	
	Gesamt		288	100,0	
HU - Hungary	Gültig	Totally disagree	52	20,9	23,1
		Tend to disagree	53	21,3	23,5
		Not sure	5	2,0	2,2
		Tend to agree	96	38,3	42,3
		Totally agree	20	8,1	8,9
		Gesamt	226	90,5	100,0
	Fehlend	System	24	9,5	
	Gesamt		250	100,0	
PL - Poland	Gültig	Totally disagree	96	9,7	11,3
		Tend to disagree	148	14,9	17,5
		Not sure	22	2,3	2,6
		Tend to agree	414	41,7	48,8
		Totally agree	168	16,9	19,8
		Gesamt	849	85,5	100,0
	Fehlend	System	144	14,5	
	Gesamt		993	100,0	
SK - Slovakia	Gültig	Totally disagree	15	9,8	11,2
		Tend to disagree	29	18,8	21,4
		Not sure	6	3,7	4,2
		Tend to agree	61	39,2	44,7
		Totally agree	25	16,2	18,4
		Gesamt	136	87,7	100,0
	Fehlend	System	19	12,3	
	Gesamt		154	100,0	

### EU membership - benefit (recoded)

COUNTRY/SAMPLE ID (SERIES STANDARD)			Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente
CZ - Czech Republic	Gültig	Not benefited	62	21,7	25,0
		Not sure	18	6,4	7,4
		Benefited	169	58,6	67,6
		Gesamt	250	86,7	100,0
	Fehlend	System	38	13,3	
	Gesamt		288	100,0	
HU - Hungary	Gültig	Not benefited	31	12,6	13,7
		Not sure	16	6,6	7,2
		Benefited	182	73,0	79,2
		Gesamt	230	92,2	100,0
	Fehlend	System	20	7,8	
	Gesamt		250	100,0	
PL - Poland	Gültig	Not benefited	53	5,3	6,1
		Not sure	62	6,3	7,1
		Benefited	761	76,6	86,8
		Gesamt	876	88,2	100,0
	Fehlend	System	117	11,8	
	Gesamt		993	100,0	
SK - Slovakia	Gültig	Not benefited	35	22,8	25,0
		Not sure	5	3,4	3,8
		Benefited	100	65,0	71,3
		Gesamt	141	91,2	100,0
	Fehlend	System	14	8,8	
	Gesamt		154	100,0	

### 4.3 Bivariate Analysis

Value	Interpretation
$0.00 \leq x \leq 0.05$	No correlation
$0.05 \leq x < 0.20$	Weak correlation
$0.20 \leq x < 0.50$	Medium correlation
$0.50 \leq x < 0.70$	Strong correlation
$0.70 \leq x \leq 1$	Very strong correlation

*Interpretation Table for the Correlation Coefficients (own Table based on Diaz-Bone (2006))*

Country	Democracy satisfaction	Responsiveness of democracy	Benefits from EU membership
All countries	-0.118	-0.639	-0.343
Czech Republic	-0.145	-0.648	- 0.390
Hungary	-0.153	-0.577	-0.428
Poland	-0.015	-0.613	-0.248
Slovakia	-0.353	-0.814	-0.211

*Somer's d for the Independent Variables and Euroscepticism: Irresponsiveness*

Country	Democracy satisfaction	Responsiveness of democracy	Benefits from EU membership
All countries	-0.033	-0.113	-0.746
Czech Republic	-0.432	-0.146	-0.705
Hungary	0.167	-0.088	-0.688
Poland	0.082	-0.072	-0.777
Slovakia	-0.353	-0.148	-0.692

*Somer's d for the Independent Variables and Euroscepticism: Membership Opposition*