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Voter Turnout in the 2019 European Parliament Elections:

A case study analysis of Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia

Bachelor's project in European Studies

Supervisor: Anna Brigevich

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Abstract

This thesis has a purpose of explaining the increased voter turnout of the 2019 EP election, and to portray some explanation for this change, particularly in the cases Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. To understand this change I have formulated four hypotheses based of Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) theories, as well as the theory of cost-benefit analysis and voter apathy. These hypotheses assume that there is a correlation between voter turnout and citizen's opinions of the national government and the EU. I have also looked into how voter turnout is affected by the trust in political institutions as well as the citizen's feelings of being heard by the EU.

To answer these questions, I have conducted a case study analysis of the cases Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia to understand their satisfaction with their national government and the EU. The analysis is based on the hypotheses as well as data elected from Eurobarometer's from 2014 and 2019 to see how the publics opinion changed between the last two elections. This analysis showed that both Hungary and Poland has a voter turnout according to their citizens positive opinions towards their national government and the EU and that they fit into the 3rd hypothesis. Slovakia fit into the 4th hypothesis with a bad relationship towards their national government and the EU and with their low voter turnout. At last, this thesis show how voter apathy is not a good theory to explain the three cases voter turnout in the EP elections.

Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven har som formål å forklare den økte valgdeltakelsen i 2019 valget i Europaparlamentet, samt å legge fram noen forklaringer på denne endringen. Oppgaven legger vekt på situasjonen i Ungarn, Polen og Slovakia og ser på deres økte valgoppslutning. For å forstå denne endringen har jeg formulert fire hypoteser basert på Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) teorier, teorien om nytte-kostnadsanalyse og velgerapati. Disse hypotesene antar at det er en sammenheng mellom valgdeltakelse og innbyggernes meninger om den nasjonale regjeringen og EU. Jeg har også sett på hvordan valgdeltakelse påvirkes av tilliten til politiske institusjoner og innbyggernes følelse av at deres meninger blir hørt i EU.

For å svare på disse spørsmålene har jeg gjennomført en case-analyse av landene Ungarn, Polen og Slovakia for å forstå deres tilfredshet med deres nasjonale regjering og EU. Analysen er basert på hypotesene, samt utvalgt data fra Eurobarometer spørreundersøkelser fra 2014 og 2019 for å se hvordan folkets offentlige meningene har endret seg i løpet av de to siste valgene. Analysen viste at både Ungarn og Polen har valgdeltakelse i henhold til innbyggernes positive meninger overfor sin nasjonale regjering og EU og passer derfor inn i den tredje hypotesen. Slovakia som har en veldig lav valgoppslutning, passer inn i den fjerde hypotesen på grunn av deres dårlig forhold til sin nasjonale regjering og EU. Til slutt viser denne oppgaven også hvordan velgerapati ikke er en god teori for å forklare valgdeltakelsen i Europaparlamentet i situasjonen med Ungarn, Polen og Slovakia.

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List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
EP	European Parliament
MEPs	Members of European Parliament
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
OLP	Ordinary Legislative Procedure
PiS	Law and Justice party
Smer-SD	Smer-Social and Democracy party

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1.0 Introduction

Voter turnout for the European Parliament (EP) elections has declined since the first outset. In the 2019 election, this changed when the results showed an increase in voter turnout to over 50 % for the first time since 1994 (European Parliament (b), 2019). As the only direct elected institution of the European Union (EU) the EP stands out in the way that they represent the citizens of the EU. But what is interesting is how the only directed institution in the EU throughout the times has had such low voter turnout, when this is the only place where the citizens have the possibility to participate in changes. But again, what happened during the 2019 election when there was a change in this declining trend and specifically in the Eastern European countries that has had some of the lowest turnouts since they joined in the Eastern Enlargement in 2004.

This thesis will therefore try to *explain the increased voter turnout in the 2019 EP election and look specifically on the three cases of Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.*

My research questions are as follows:

1. What is the reason for the change in the voting turnout in the 2019 election? Especially in the Eastern European countries of the EU.
2. Does a member state's relationship with the EU and the national government affect voter turnout in the EP elections?

In this thesis I argue that voter turnout is affected by the citizen's opinions towards the national government and the EU. I argue that the citizens increased trust towards the EU, and the increased feeling that their voice counts in the EU, are some of the explanations for the increased voter turnout. I also look into how the theory of Sánchez-Cuenca (2000), the cost-benefit analysis, and voter apathy helps to explain the voter turnout of the three cases Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, and reason for the increased turnout in the 2019 election.

To evaluate my research questions, I will conduct a case study analysis, using my four hypotheses that are based on the Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) theory, in the three cases of Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. In this analysis I will use data from Eurobarometer surveys to understand the citizens public opinions of their national governments and the EU. I use two different variables to measure the citizens opinions towards their national government and the EU. The results from this showed that there is a correlation between voter turnout, citizen's opinions towards the EU and their national government, as well as general trust in the political institutions. It also showed how voter apathy does not explain voter turnout in these cases.

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter one explains the history of the EP and the EP elections over time. The chapter examined change in the voter turnout in the 2019 EP elections and proposes an explanation of the sudden increase in voter turnout. Chapter two outlines my hypotheses, which are based on Sánchez-Cuenca's (2000) theory of national trust and support for the EU, along with the theory of cost-benefit analysis, and voter apathy. In the third chapter, I conduct case study analysis where I look deeper into the three cases of Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia using Eurobarometer survey data. Thereafter the three countries are analysed one at the time, first with an introduction of the political situation and then empirical evidence from the Eurobarometer to understand the public's opinion. The last chapter is the conclusion that consist of a summary of the thesis, the contributions this thesis has made to the field, and the limitations of the thesis.

2.0 History of the EP and elections over time

2.1 European Parliament: history, structure, and powers

The first Parliamentary Assembly was held September 10th, 1952 and consisted of 78 members. In 1962 the Assembly changed their name to the European Parliament (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton , 2011, p. 8). Since the first treaty, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) treaty, the EU had a vision of a directly elected European Assembly (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton , 2011, p. 12). Since 1979 the EP elections have been direct elections and they are the only institution in the EU that elect their members this way (Shackleton, 2017, p. 138).

The European Parliament therefore has a different structure than many of the other EU institutions in the way it its members are elected from different political parties from the different member states. Since the first direct election the number of seats in the Parliament has increased from 198 members of Parliament (MEPs), elected from nine states, to 751 elected from 28 states by 2014. These 751 members are elected from over 200 different national parties (Shackleton, 2017, p. 146). (These numbers are from prior to Brexit when the number of seats were reduced when Britain left the EU).

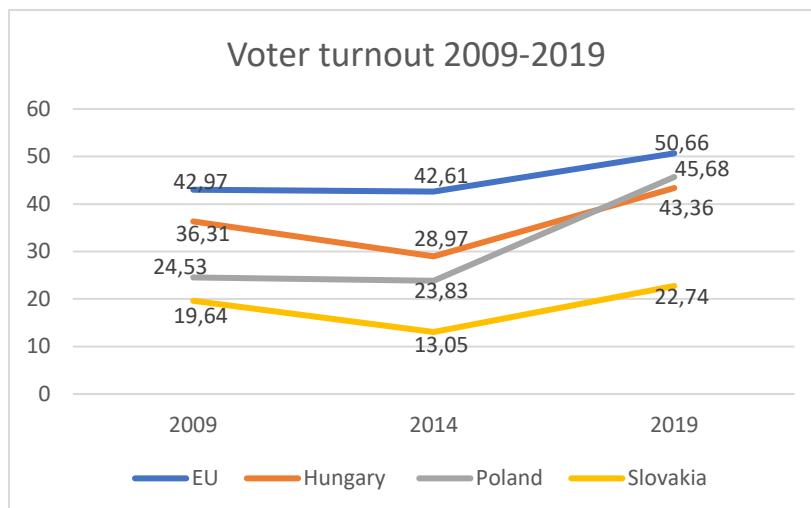
Since the creation of the EU, the EP has slowly gained more power trough different treaties. At the beginning, the EP had no legislative powers and was only consulted by the Council on some issues (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton , 2011, p. 232). In 1970 the EP got certain budgetary powers, in 1975 they got further budgetary powers, and in 1979 the EP rejected the budged for the first time (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton , 2011, p. 8). The Maastricht Treaty introduced co-decision, where the EP and the Council make legislative decisions together, but this was restricted to 15 treaty articles. In the subsequent Amsterdam, Nice and Lisbon treaties, the EP acquired a genuine role as co-legislator with the Council that applies to all the articles and this procedure is called the Ordinary Legislature procedure (OLP) (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton , 2011, pp. 132-233). This show that the EP started with almost no powers but has slowly become one of the most powerful institutions in the EU.

2.2 EP elections over time

One way to describe the European elections is that they are a set of different national elections instead of a coordinated European-wide campaign (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton , 2011, p. 31). The issues with the elections therefore tend to be primarily national. The EP elections are often used by the citizens of EU member states to express their opinions towards their national government and towards their national parties (Hix & Marsh, 2007, p. 495).

Since the first direct election in 1979 there has been a decline in the voter turnout and the turnout also varies a lot from country to country. As Figure 1 demonstrates, one can see how the turnout had an all-time low in 2014 before it went up again in 2019 (European Parliament (b), 2019). During the 2009 election the turnout was below 30% in 6 out of 10 countries, but the turnout also went up in 6 out of 10 (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton , 2011, p. 31). This shows that there is no direct correlation between the overall EU turnout and the turnout in each individual member state.

Figure 1: Voter turnout in EP election 2009-2019



(European Parliament (b), 2019)

The reason for the declining voter rate might be the fact that EP elections are seen as less important in the way that no government is at stake. (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton, 2011, p. 32). The EP holds a lot of legislative powers, but they have no executive powers. The highest voter turnout was in 1979 where it was at 61.99 % (European Parliament (b), 2019). Since then, the turnout has slowly declined, and the 1994 election was the last with a turnout over 50 %, that is until the 2019 election where the turnout was 50.66 % (European Parliament (b), 2019). This shows that the overall turnout in the EU has generally been very low and this relates to EP elections being perceived as second-order elections. The model of second-order elections contains three broad predictions about aggregate-level outcomes from the elections in the EP. The predictions are that the turnout in EP elections is lower than in national elections, that parties in national governments are punished, and that smaller parties perform better (Wittrock & Hobolt, 2011, p. 29).

2.3 The change in 2019

As previously stated, the 2019 voter turnout was the highest since the 1994 election and the declining trend was broken. Particularly many Eastern European countries in the EU had a better turnout than earlier (see Figure 1). In Hungary, the rate in the 2014 election was 28.97 % and in the 2019 election it was 43.36%. In Poland 23.83 % of the citizens voted in 2014 and 45.68 % in 2019. Slovakia is the country with the lowest turnout in the entire EU and in 2014 there was a 13.05 % turnout compared to a 22.74 % in 2019 (European Parliament (b), 2019).

According to the 2019 post-election Eurobarometer survey there were some changes in peoples support and trust towards the EU. 56 % responders in the survey said that they believed 'their voice counts in the EU' and this is a 7% increase since 2002 when the question was first asked (European Parliament (c), n.d.). Because of this, one can say that the feeling that one's voice counts in the EU will lead to a bigger interest in participation in the EP election. If you feel you are being heard, you will not be apathetic towards the EP election and vice versa. The support towards the EU has also increased to the highest level since 1983 with 68% of the respondents saying that their country has benefitted from its EU membership.

Something changed in the EU during the 2019 election. We see that the younger generation is more involved in the 2019 election, that trust in the EU has increased, and we also see an increase in the turnout in the Eastern European countries that have a history of very low turnout in EP elections. According to Grönlunda and Setälä (2007, p. 410) there is a clear association between trust to the Parliament and voter turnout. Their analysis shows that people that trust the Parliament will be more willing to turn up at elections (Grönlund & Setälä, 2007, p. 415). This is why the increased trust in the parliament is important for the increased voter turnout in the EP election.

3.0 Hypotheses and theories

This chapter will look at three different hypotheses and theories, the institutional hypothesis by Sánchez-Cuenca (2000), the theory of cost-benefit analysis and voter apathy. Based on these three theories I have developed 4 different hypothesis that will be used as a basis for the case study analysis of this thesis.

The hypothesis from Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) is used to measure integration, but in this case, I use it to describe voter turnout in the EP elections in the way that greater support will lead to higher voter turnout. From the Sánchez-Cuenca's hypothesis I also demonstrate the idea of cost-benefit analysis and how this is an important factor in explaining voter turnout. Countries with a low cost of transferring sovereignty from the national institutions to a supranational institution will be more positive towards European integration and then also more likely to turn up at the EP elections. Furthermore, I demonstrate how voter apathy might affect voter turnout. The reason for including voter apathy is how this concept is one of the problems relating to Sánchez-Cuenca's hypotheses.

3.1 Sánchez-Cuenca's hypothesis

One of the hypotheses that might explain increased voter turnout in the 2019 EP elections is the institutional hypothesis presented by Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca in the paper "The political Basis of Support for European Integration" (2000, p. 152). This hypothesis states that citizens support for European integration is stronger when they have a better opinion of the European institutions, and that the support for European integration is lower when the citizens have a better opinion of national institutions (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 152). If you combine these two statements one can form two predictions:

- 1. Maximum support for the EU will be found among those citizens that have a good opinion of European institutions and a poor one of their national political systems (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 152).*
- 2. Minimum support for the EU will be found among those citizens that have a poor opinion of European institutions and a good one of their national systems (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 152).*

Then again when the support for the EU and the nation is the same, there are two different possibilities:

- 3. If citizens have a good opinion of both European and national institutions, they will support integration, but less than in case 1 (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 152).*
- 4. If citizens have a poor opinion both of European and national institutions, their support will be low, but nonetheless higher than in case 2 (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 152).*

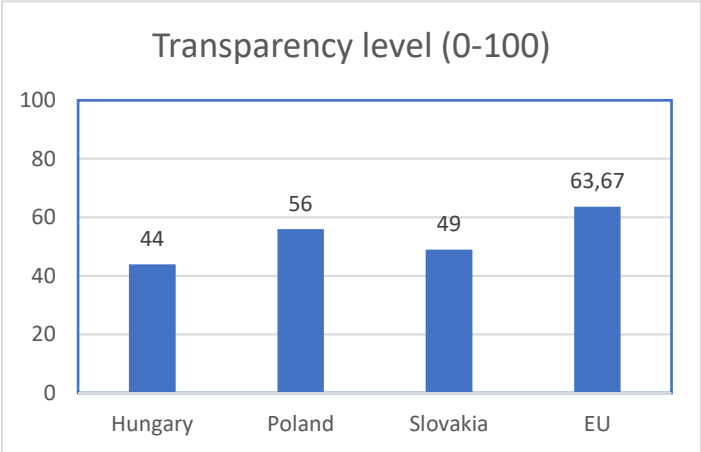
All of these predictions points back to a person’s support for integration as being affected by their view on both the EU and also their national governments.

3.2 Cost-benefit analysis

Another theory that to some extent explains support for integration is about benefits and cost of transferring sovereignty from the national government to the European institutions (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 151). This theory states that the support for integration will increase when the benefits associated with the EU are greater than the costs (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 151). This means that when the support for the national political system is high and the support of the supranational system in the EU is low, the cost of transferring sovereignty from the national government to the EU will be too high (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 151). Because of this the support for integration will be higher in those countries where the cost of transferring the sovereignty to a supranational system are low. This relates to countries that suffer from severe problems such as corruption, low responsiveness of political parties, high structural unemployment, poor performance of the state, etc. (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 151). These countries therefore might find the solution in the EU when they cannot longer trust their own government, and therefore the support for integration in the EU will be higher.

The cost-benefit analysis regarding the three cases Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia can be measured with some different elements. One can look at issues such as corruption level and unemployment rates. These are issues that can make the cost of transferring sovereignty to a supranational system low. According to the numbers on the Transparency International website all of the three countries have a higher level of corruption than the average number in the EU (2020). These numbers are measured on a scale from 0-100 where the higher the score, the less corrupt a country is. As shown in Figure 2 below Hungary has a number of 44, Poland has a number of 56, Slovakia 49, and the average EU score is 63.67 (Tranparency International, 2020). This show that all of these countries have some amount of corruption present in their nations, and this will lower the cost of them transferring powers to a supranational institution like the EU.

Figure 2: Transparency level across the EU and Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia

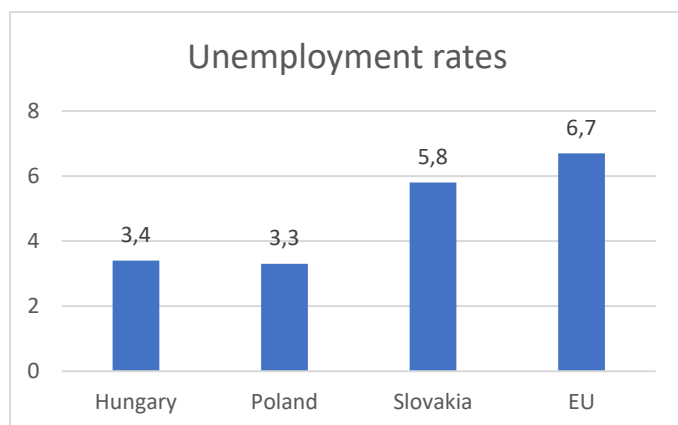


(Transparency International 2020. Lower values indicate more corruption.)

One can also look at unemployment rates to measure the costs and benefits. While looking at unemployment rates in Figure 3 below we see that Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia have a lower percentage that the EU average (Eurostat, 2020). These numbers are measured from the age group 15-74 and are collected from the Eurostat website. The EU average is 6.7 %, Hungary is 3.4 %, in Poland it is 3.3 % and in Slovakia there is a

5.8 % unemployment (Eurostat, 2020). This show that unemployment is probably not a pressing issue in these countries and that this will not lead to a lower cost of transferring power from national institutions to supranational institutions.

Figure 3: Unemployment rates across the EU and Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia



(Eurostat 2020)

According to the article "How trust in EU institutions is linked to trust in national institutions" by Thomas Persson, Charles F. Parker and, Sten Widmalm, trust from the national government can be transferred to trust to the EU (2019, p. 632-633). This transference logic applies when the citizens have a lot of knowledge about national politics, but not about the EU, and how they use their attitudes towards the national government as a proxy while forming attitudes towards EU institutions (Persson, Parker, & Widmalm, 2019, p. 633). However, on the other side we also see another hypothesis that states that if citizens feel distrustful to their national governments, they will look for solutions elsewhere (Persson, Parker, & Widmalm, 2019, p. 633). A lack of national institutional trust will lead to a greater trust for the EU because of the small cost of transferring sovereignty (Persson, Parker, & Widmalm, 2019, p. 633).

3.3 Voter apathy

Voter apathy might also be a reason for why people do not vote in elections. Political apathy is a contested concept and can be said to be multifaceted but the one thing everyone can agree upon is that apathy shows that there is something fundamentally wrong within democratic discourses (DeLuca, 1995, pp. 10-11). Peter Bachrach describes political apathy as classes and groups of people that are subordinate to disempowering political systems (DeLuca, 1995, p. 11). He explains how someone can experience apathy due to outside forces, institutions, structure, or elite manipulation in areas where the individual has no control (DeLuca, 1995, p. 11).

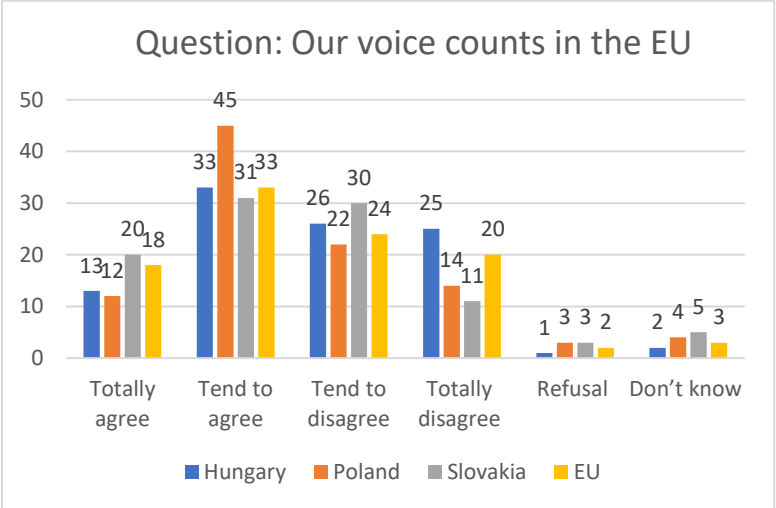
One problem with the Sánchez-Cuenca hypothesis is related to how the lack of satisfaction might lead to a distrust in the political system which leads to people not participating in the elections (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 153). This can be connected to voter apathy, where people lose interest in participating either because of personal choices or because of pressure from institutions. We have seen that people that mistrust political institutions are less likely to show up at elections (Grönlund & Setälä, 2007, p. 415).

To measure apathy one can look at the question "our voice counts in the EU" in the Eurobarometer to see if the people of the EU feel like they are being heard or not. If the people feel like their voices do not count in the EU, they might lose interests and will

start feeling apathetic towards the Union and the EP elections. In the 2019 Eurobarometer survey about the EP, an average of 55 % of respondents state that they agree that their voice matters and, in contrast, 44 % state that their voice do not matters, as demonstrated in Figure 4 below (European Parliament (d), 2019). 44 % is quite a high number and the feeling of not being heard might lead to the people losing their interest in the EU and then also losing their interest of participating in the election when they think it will not make any difference.

My three cases, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, all show different answers to this question. As shown in Figure 4, in Hungary 46 % agree that their voice counts in the EU and 51 % think that their voice does not matter (European Parliament (d), 2019). In Poland 57 % state that their voice counts and 36 that it does not. In Slovakia 51 % agree that their voice counts, and 41 % disagrees. This show that Hungary is below the EU average. Poland is above the EU average, and Slovakia is on the EU average.

Figure 4: Our voice counts in the EU.



(Source: EB 91.1)

3.4 Hypotheses for the analysis

Based on these theories I formulate four hypotheses for my thesis. All of the four hypotheses are related to citizens’ relationship with their national government and the EU. The hypotheses are:

1. First, if citizens are happy with their national government and unhappy with the EU, there will be low voter turnout in the EP elections. Here one can see how the theory of second order elections applies as the EP election is not as important as the national elections. In this hypothesis the cost of transferring sovereignty from the national government to a supranational institution is also high because of the satisfaction with the national government. This is a country such as Grate Britain where people have historically always been more satisfied with their national government than with the EU.
2. Second, if citizens are unhappy with their national government and happy with the EU there will be high turnout in the EP election. This hypothesis has the best possibility of a high voter turnout. In this hypothesis the cost of transferring sovereignty to a supranational institution will be very low as the citizens are not satisfied with their government and will therefore look to the EU for help. This

relates to a country such as Italy where they have faced many national issues and where the EU has been the solution.

3. Third, if citizens are happy with their national government and the EU there will be high voter turnout in the EP election, but not as high as in the second hypothesis. Here the cost of transferring sovereignty will be higher than in the second hypothesis because you are already satisfied with the national government. An example country that fit into this hypothesis is Germany that has a history of a good relationship both towards their national government and the EU.
4. Fourth, if citizens are unhappy with their national government and the EU there will be a very low voter turnout. This is the hypothesis with the worst turnout because of high voter apathy. When the citizens does not have trust in their national government or the EU there is a high chance that they will not turn up at these elections. This hypothesis fits to a country such as Greece that has faced many crises and that has been disappointed by their national government and the EU several times.

These four hypotheses will be the basis for the case study analysis in this paper and I will use these to see where the cases Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia will fit in. To do this I will look into the three countries and look at the situation of the governments, as well as the citizens relationships towards their individual national governments, and the citizens opinions towards the EU and the EP.

4.0 Case study analysis

The reason I chose these three specific countries is because Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia had some of the biggest increases in voter turnout in the 2019 EP election (European Parliament (b), 2019). All of these three countries are also post-communist, and they all joined the EU in the Eastern enlargement in 2004 (europa.eu, n.d.). They are also similar in the way that they all have below average unemployment rates in the EU, but they also differ from each other in terms of apathy. Poland is the country that is the least apathetic, Hungary is the most and Slovakia is in the middle. If the theory of apathy is to be valid, this means that out of the three cases Poland is supposed to have the best voter turnout, Slovakia the next highest and Hungary the lowest.

To conduct this analysis, I will use Eurobarometer's from 2014 and 2019 to look into public opinions and how they have changed between the last two elections. The Eurobarometer's I have chosen is number 91.1 from 2019, number 82 from 2014, and EB/EP 82.4 from 2014. To understand the citizens relationship towards the EU, and the national government I will use two different variables to measure satisfaction with the national government and satisfaction with the EU:

1. The first variable is the question "At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in...? (OUR COUNTRY)" and this will be used to measure *the countries satisfaction with their national governments*. These answers will be presented in graphs that show the amount of people stating things are going in the "right direction", "neither", and "wrong direction" from the years 2014 and 2019.
2. The other variable is the question "Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the EU is...? (%)" and this is used to describe *the citizens satisfaction with the EU*. Here as well the results will be presented in a graph that show the answers of the people. Here the respondents have answered

that the EU membership of their country is “good thing”, “bad thing” or “neither” of the two first answers. Here as well it is included data from 2014 and 2019 to detect the change between the two last elections.

4.1 Hungary

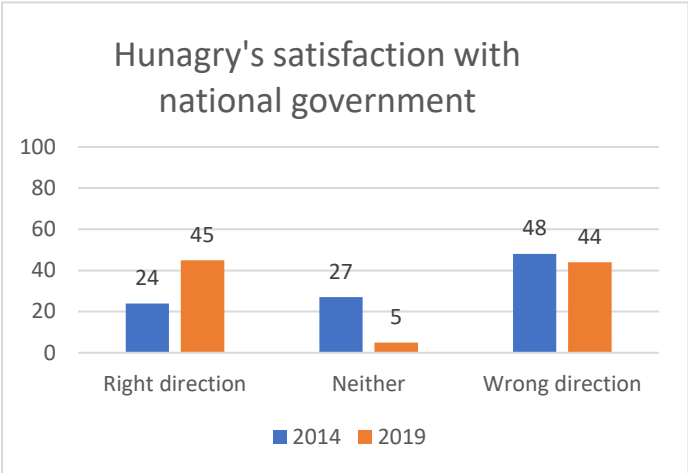
Hungary is a country that has had great achievements in the late 1980s and 1990s of transitioning from a communist regime to a democratic one, but all of this progress is now at risk (Kornai, 2015, p. 34). Since Victor Orbán’s coalition with the Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Alliance, and the Christian Democratic People’s party won 68 % of the seats in the unicameral Parliament in 2010, they started to systematically change the democratic institutions (Kornai, 2015, pp. 34-35).

Orbán has also made it almost impossible for his rivals and opposition parties to be elected in the way that they are always crushed by a carefully planned “bomb” that destroys their reputation right before the election (Kornai, 2015, p. 36). People close to Fidesz are often excused from investigations regarding public scandals and corruption where materials are leaked while investigation is in progress so that they never make it to trial. The opposition rivals on the other hand will often experience a leak, court hearing, or bringing of changes planned by Orbán’s coalition right before an election. In this way their reputation is damaged, and they thus have no chance of winning the election. The ruling party has tried to take control over the courts as well. They have done this by dismissing the president of the Supreme Court before his mandate expired, they have created a new institution called the National Judicial Office, and they have forced many judges out of the courts by lowering the retirement age from 70 to 62 (Kornai, 2015, p. 36).

With all of these situations one can see that the democracy and the rule of law in Hungary are clearly under threat. Orbán already has the power of the executive and the legislative branch, as well as the coalition also has gained a lot of power over the legislative branch. This has put Orbán in a position where he is above the law and where he alone can make decision on the behalf of the entire government. This goes against the principles of democracy when there is no separation of powers and checks and balances. Although the abolition of rule of law was protested upon, the ruling coalition still passed the new Constitution, called the Fundamental Law, and this was signed by the President in April 2011 (Kornai, 2015, p. 35). This shows that, despite protest from the people, Orbán and his coalition do as they please and this might lead to the people becoming distrustful towards the government.

To measure citizen’s satisfaction with their national government I will use the first variable. As shown below in Figure 5, from 2014 to 2019, there was a 21 % increase in people stating that things are going in the right direction and a 3 % decrease of those stating that things are going in the wrong direction (European Commission, 2014, p. 84). This shows that the satisfaction with the national government has improved a lot over those 5 years. Another thing these numbers show is that the citizens of Hungary in 2019 are very polarized in this question where 45 % stated that things were going in the right direction and 44% stated that things are going in the wrong direction.

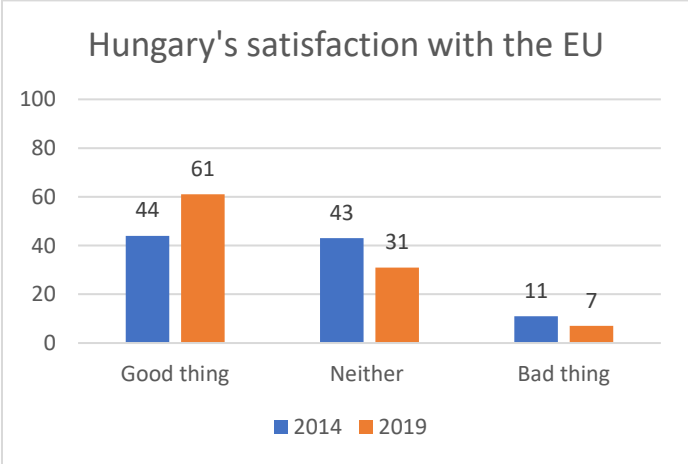
Figure 5: Hungary's satisfaction with national government



(EB 91.1 and EB 82)

When measuring the citizens of Hungary’s satisfaction with the EU I will use the second variable as explained at the beginning of this chapter. As presented in Figure 6 below we see that there as an 18 % increase of people stating that Hungary’s EU membership is a good thing, and a 4 % decrease in the participants stating that it is a bad thing between 2014 to 2019 (European Parliament (a), 2015). The number of people stating that it is neither a god nor a bad thing has also gone down since 2014 and it seem like a majority of those change to the good thing alternative in 2019. This show that there is also a positive change of the citizens of Hungary’s satisfaction towards the EU.

Figure 6: Hungary's satisfaction with the EU



(EB 91.1 and EB/EP 82.4)

Hungary is the country out of the three with the highest level of corruption and they are also the country where the democracy is the most at threat. In the question relating to the public’s opinions, towards the Hungarian government, and how things are going in the country, the citizens are very polarized. There was a very big increase of 21 % in people stating that things are going in the right direction, from 2014 to 2019, but 44 % is still a big number of people stating that things are going in the wrong direction (European Parliament (d), 2019). Nonetheless Hungary’s satisfaction with the government has grown a lot and they are therefore characterized as a country where the citizens are happy with the national government. This show that despite Orbán’s

supremacy of the government, and threat against democracy, the citizens of Hungary still seem to be satisfied with the government.

The satisfaction with the EU has also improved a lot in Hungary over the 5 years between 2014 and 2019. An 18 % increase in people stating that the EU membership is a good thing show that the citizens of Hungary are satisfied with the EU despite the governments more sceptical opinions. The Hungarian government has never suggested that they want to leave the EU, but regime representatives often support Eurosceptic declarations, and several diplomats also tries to make business deals with autocracies and dictatorships in Asia (Kornai, 2015, p. 44).

Based on these results we see that the citizens of Hungary are happy with their national government, and the EU, and therefore they fit into the 3rd hypothesis. This hypothesis states that the turnout will be high, but not the highest, and this is in accordance with the voter turnout in Hungary with a turnout of 43.36 % in 2019. This also agrees well with Sánchez-Cuenca's hypotheses where support for integration will be high, but not the highest in those countries with a good opinion towards the EU and their national political system (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 152). One thing that is important to point out is how the theory of voter apathy is not valid in explaining the voter turnout of Hungary in the EP elections. Out of the three cases Hungary is the country that show most apathetic tendencies, but they are not the case with the lowest voter turnout. Therefore, we see that there is no correlation between the level of voter apathy in Hungary and the turnout in the 2019 election.

4.2 Poland

Poland has a history of low turnout for EP elections, with a turnout of around 20-25% since their first election in 2004 (European Parliament (b), 2019). In the 2019 election they had an increased turnout of 21,85 % since the 2014 election and this was the biggest increase of voter turnout out of all the member states that year (European Parliament (b), 2019).

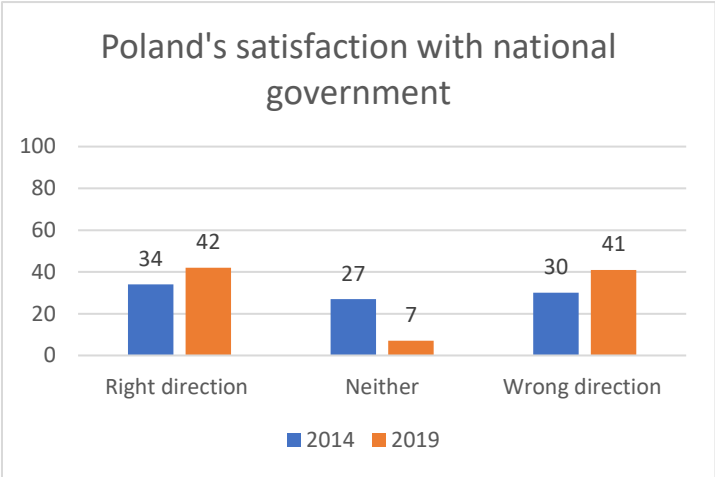
In 2014, Poland was viewed as an exemplar in Central and Eastern Europe in relations to their functioning democracy but by 2018 this has drastically changed (Przybylski, 2018, p. 52). Since the domination of the Law and Justice (PiS) party, that started in 2015, a lot of legislative and institutional changes has been made that are a threat to democracy (Przybylski, 2018, p. 52). In 2016 they introduced a law that weakened the freedom of assembly and this was done by letting authorities give preference to some specific groups and gatherings. PiS also made major changes in the education system in 2017 by reversing the 1999 reforms (Przybylski, 2018, p. 58).

The PiS government also often use the narrative of "sovereign democracy" when they are questioned by the EU or the opposition about the legislative initiatives (Przybylski, 2018, p. 59). This concept of "Sovereign democracy" was introduced by Vladislav Surkov and has also been used by the Hungarian government under Victor Orbán who has erected an "illiberal democracy" since 2010. Poland has looked up to this Hungarian model since 2015 by benefitting from bigger anxieties involving Russia and conspiracy theories (Przybylski, 2018, p. 59). But there are still some significant differences between Poland and Hungary as Poland is believed to be less corrupt (Przybylski, 2018, p. 61). This we also saw earlier from the Transparency International website where Poland had a score of 56 out of 100 compared to Hungary's 44 (Tranparency International, 2020). Poland is still a democratic country, but they are at risk for destroying their democratic

institutions. This has led to a weakened trust in the liberal institutional framework (Przybylski, 2018, p. 62).

To measure Poland's satisfaction with the national government I will use the first variable and use the results that are presented in Figure 7 below. This shows an 8 % increase of people answering that things are going in the right direction and a 11 % increase of people answering that things are going in the wrong direction from 2014 to 2019. Here as well the people are polarized in their opinions towards the national government but there is still a majority stating that things are going in the right direction.

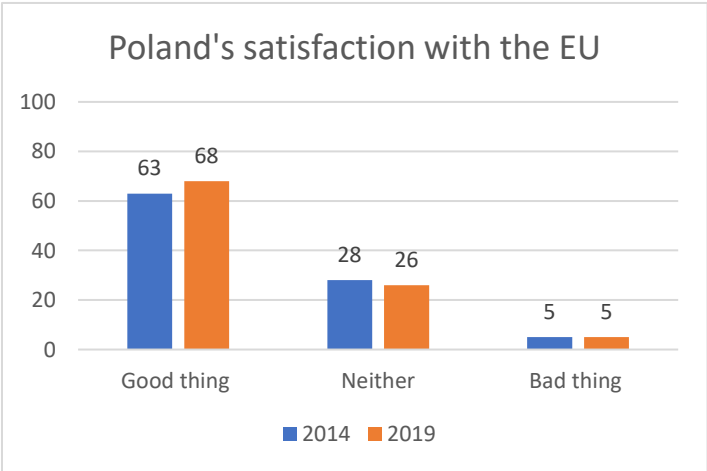
Figure 7: Poland's satisfaction with national government



(EB 91.1 and EB 82)

Again, I will use the second variable to explain Poland's satisfaction with the EU. In Figure 8 below we see that there was a 5 % increase of people stating that the membership is a good thing and a 2 % decrease of people stating that it is a bad thing between 2014 to 2019 (European Parliament (a), 2015). This change is not as big as in Hungary, but there is still a positive change showing that more people are positive towards Poland's membership in the EU.

Figure 8: Poland's satisfaction with the EU



(EB 91.1 and EB/EP 82.4)

Out of the three countries Poland is the one with the lowest level of corruption and unemployment rate, they have the highest percentage of people stating that their voice counts in the EU, and the highest percentage of people stating that the EU membership is

a good thing. The citizens of Poland therefore has very positive attitudes towards the EU, but they also seem to have a somewhat good attitude towards their national government. At least they have had a positive attitude towards their government in the past years, but we can also see an increase of negative attitudes after PiS won the election in 2015 (Przybylski, 2018, p. 52). Overall, the perception of Poland is that the citizens are happy with the national government and the EU. Despite the governments negative attitude towards the EU and using the concept of "sovereign democracy" when they are questioned on their legislative initiatives, the citizens of Poland are satisfied with the EU.

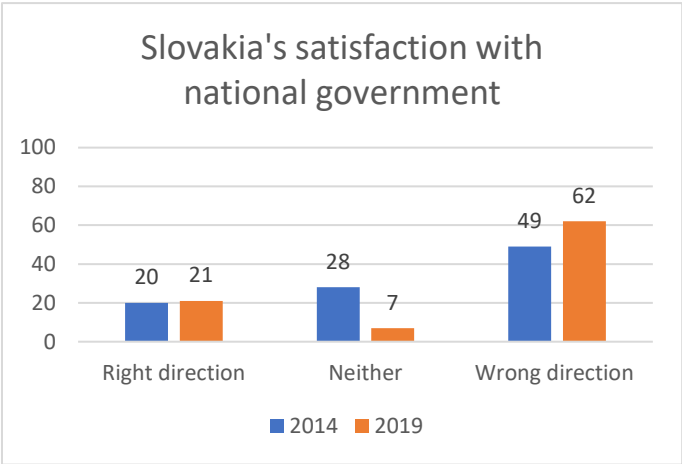
Poland, as it is now, fits into the 3rd hypothesis with a good relationship towards the national government, and the EU. Even though the citizens of Poland are very polarized in the question regarding how things are going in their country, there is still very small majority of people stating that things are going in the right direction. But again, we also see an increase in people stating that things are going in the wrong direction and this might be an effect the people losing trust in the national institution because of the changes the Polish government has made since PiS won the election. Here as well there is a good agreement with the Sánchez-Cuenca's hypotheses of support for integration. The citizens of Poland show a very low voter apathy and they are above the EU average. But regardless of this they still had a voter turnout of 45.68 % in the 2019 election that was below the EU average of 50.66 % (European Parliament (b), 2019). This show that there is no correlation between voter apathy and the voter turnout of the Polish citizens in the EP elections.

4.3 Slovakia

Slovakia, as well as Hungary and Poland, experienced the end of communism at the beginning of the 1990s and started the transition towards the democracy (Harris, 2018). During the 2016 Parliament election in Slovakia a lot of changes happened to the composition of the Parliament (Rybár & Spác, 2017, p. 153). The leftist party Smer-Social and Democracy (Smer-SD) gained a big majority in the 2012 election, but they did not receive the same number of votes in the 2016 election (Rybár & Spác, 2017, pp. 153-154). In the 2016 election they produced a four-party coalition government for the first time with the parties Smer-SD as the winning party, the Slovak National Party, the Most-Híd, and Siet (Rybár & Spác, 2017, p. 156). 2016 is the first years since 2002 that the government has consisted of a coalition of such divergent economic orientations (Rybár & Spác, 2017, p. 156). Because of this diversity in the parties, they also claim that they can provide stability in different situations such as corruption, extremism, radicalism, and international political situations (Rybár & Spác, 2017, p. 156)

Slovakia is the case out of the three countries that had the most negative change of the satisfaction with the national government. As shown in Figure 9 below there is a 1 % increase of the people thinking that things are going in the right direction and a 13 % increase of people stating that things are going in the wrong direction. Already in 2014, the majority of the people answered that situations in the country went in the wrong direction and this situation did not change to the better like in the other two countries, Hungary and Poland, but to the worse.

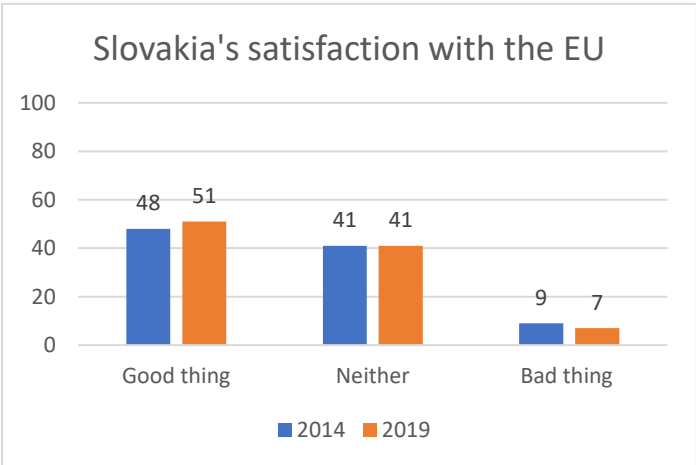
Figure 9: Slovakia's satisfaction with national government



(EB 91.1 and EB 82)

Likewise in the two other cases we look at Slovakia’s citizens satisfaction with the EU by using the second variable and the results are shown in Figure 10 below. Here there is only a 3 % increase in people stating that the membership is a good thing and a 2 % decrease in the bad thing category. This shows a very low majority of satisfaction with the EU. The neither good or bad thing category is the same in both the surveys and might be because people do not have enough information to have an opinion, or because they do not care to obtain the information because of a lack of interest and voter apathy.

Figure 10: Slovakia's satisfaction with the EU



(EB 91.1 and EB/EP 82.4)

Slovakia is the country out of the three with the most negative public opinion toward their country. They also had a 13 % increase, from 2014 to 2019, of people stating that things are going in the wrong direction. This increased negativity might indicate an increased distrust in their national government. A result of this is therefore that more people look to the EU for help when their national government is failing them, and this helps explain the 9.69 % increase in voter turnout in the EP election. Slovakia’s score of 49 out of 100 in corruption level show that they have a higher corruption level than the EU average (Transparency International, 2020). This level of corruption will also lower the cost of transferring sovereignty from the Slovakian government to the EU institutions.

Out of the three, Slovakia is the country with the lowest number of people stating that the EU membership is a good thing, but also the highest number of people stating that the membership is neither a good nor a bad thing. Regardless of this there still is a majority of the people that are positive towards Slovakia membership in the EU, but it is not as positive as in the two other cases. There was a 3 % increase of people stating it is a good thing and a decrease of 2 % stating it is a bad thing. Even though this change is small, it still shows that the citizens opinion toward the EU is becoming more positive and that their opinions towards their national government is becoming more negative.

Based on all of these findings it is still hard to identify Slovakia with one of the four hypotheses. Slovakia fit into the 4th hypothesis where a bad relationship with both the national government and the EU will lead to a very low voter turnout such as Slovakia's turnout has been in the previous elections where it has always been below 20 % with the exception of the 2019 election (European Parliament (b), 2019). But their relationship with the EU has also improved the last years, and this indicate that they can be identified with the 2nd hypothesis where a good relationship with the EU and a bad with the national government will lead to a high voter turnout. But after all the voter turnout of Slovakia is very low still even with the 9.69 % increased voter turnout and that is why they still fit into the 4th hypothesis. In this case the Sánchez-Cuenca hypotheses does not correlate as well as in the two other cases. Slovakia is the country in the EU that has had the lowest voter turnout in history, and according to Sánchez-Cuenca, the support will be at its lowest when the citizens have a good opinion towards their national government, and poor opinions towards the EU (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000, p. 152).

With Slovakia being in the middle of the three cases in terms of voter apathy they are still the country with the lowest voter turnout. Slovakia is on the EU average with 51 % stating that their voice counts in the EU, but they still have a turnout of 22.74 % compared to the EU average of 50.66. Thus, in this case as well, voter apathy does not explain Slovakia's voter turnout in the EP elections.

5.0 Conclusion

This paper has addressed the change in the voter turnout in the 2019 EP election, specifically in the Eastern countries Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, and some possible reasons for this change. We have seen how both an increased trust in political institutions and how the feeling of people's voices being heard in the EU has led to an increased voter turnout.

The hypotheses I have used in this thesis, to conduct the case study analysis, are based on Sánchez-Cuenca's theories. One thing that is clear is how satisfaction with the national government will lead to an increased satisfaction with the EU and that trust in political institutions will lead to a better voter turnout. We have also seen how trust in national institutions can be transferred to supranational institution such as the EP. This is also proved in this thesis where both Hungary and Poland who are satisfied with their national government also are satisfied with the EU and they fit into the 3rd hypothesis. Slovakia on the other hand has very low satisfaction with their national government and this is reflected in their satisfaction for the EU that is lower than in the two other cases and thus they fit into the 4th hypothesis. This shows that Sánchez-Cuenca's theories explains well the voter turnout of Hungary and Poland, but it does not explain Slovakia having the lowest turnout in the history of EP election while the citizens have a bad relationship with their national government and the EU.

This thesis has contributed with research that shows how voter apathy cannot be used as an explanation for the voter turnout in these three cases. In all of the cases there was no correlation between how apathetic the voters feel, in terms of their voices being heard in the EU, and the voter turnout in the EP elections. Slovakia is the case out of the three that is the least apathetic, but they are still the case with the lowest turnout. Hungary that is the case with the most apathetic citizens has a voter turnout almost as high as Poland who are in the middle of the three cases. This show that voter apathy is not a good explanation for the increased voter turnout in the 2019 EP election.

Another contribution that has come from this thesis is that the people of Hungary and Poland is not as opposed to the EU as their government is. Over the last years both Hungary and Poland has been painted as countries that has a very bad relationship with the EU and as countries where democracy is at risk of being destroyed. But the reality seems to be different when results show that the citizens are satisfied with the EU and the national government despite democracy being at risk for destruction.

One thing that is important to point out is how this paper and the results is restricted to the questions and sources that has been elected. The citizens satisfaction with the EU and their national government is measured from the two variables elected for this thesis and they are also restricted to these. This means that the outcome of this paper might have been completely different if I had included other variables. The variables I have used are also restricted in the way that they might not represent the entire population of the countries as a whole. The answers are limited to the respondents of the survey and therefore the results might not be a representative sample of the population.

We see an increase threat of democracy in EU countries such as Hungary and Poland and this is a rising problem. Democracy is an important requirement of the EU to gain membership and countries, such as Turkey, has not been granted a membership based on their lack of democracy. The EU therefore faces a big problem when some of their member states has made institutional changes which are contrary to democratic principles. It can therefore be interesting to see how this situation develops in the future and how far these countries are allowed to go before the EU will interfere.

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