THE EUROPEAN UNION'S (IN)ABILITY TO ADDRESS TROUBLED PAST(S): VOICES FROM EIGHT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the evolution of the European Community/European Union's (EU) ability to assist eight European countries in their attempts to address their internal historical conflicts and analyses the perceptions of people of the EU's historical successes and eventual future role in this regard. The study applies a mixed-method approach; it employs statistical analysis of a representative survey conducted in six EU- and two non-EU member states (Germany, Ireland, Spain, Greece, Poland, Cyprus, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo; N= 6564), and combines it with the analysis of secondary and primary sources. The results indicate that several demographic characteristics of respondents (age; religion; educational level; personal experience with the events of troubled past) correlate with the assessment regarding the EU's role in addressing troubled past in respective countries to date, as well as with the potential role the EU could have in this regard in the future.

Keywords: conflict, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ireland, Cyprus, Kosovo, Germany, Poland, Greece, Spain, European Union

LA (IN)CAPACITÀ DELL'UNIONE EUROPEA DI AFFRONTARE PASSATI TORMENTATI: VOCI DA OTTO PAESI EUROPEI

SINTESI

Il contributo indaga sull'evoluzione della capacità della Comunità/Unione europea (UE) di assistere otto Paesi europei nei loro tentativi di far fronte ai propri conflitti interni storici e analizza come vengono percepiti i successi storici dell'UE e il suo eventuale ruolo futuro in questo senso. Lo studio si avvale dell'approccio metodologico misto, utilizzando l'analisi statistica di un'indagine rappresentativa condotta in sei stati membri dell'UE e due stati non-membri dell'UE (Germania, Irlanda, Spagna, Grecia, Polonia, Cipro, Bosnia-Erzegovina e Cossovo; N= 6564) integrandola con un'analisi di fonti secondarie e primarie. I risultati indicano che diverse caratteristiche demografiche degli intervistati (età; religione, grado di istruzione; esperienza personale con gli eventi del passato travagliato) sono correlate con la loro valutazione del ruolo che l'UE ha svolto nell'affrontare i passati tormentati nei rispettivi Paesi fino a oggi, nonché con il potenziale ruolo che l'UE potrebbe avere in questo senso in futuro.

Parole chiave: conflitto, Bosnia-Erzegovina, Irlanda, Cipro, Cossovo, Germania, Polonia, Spagna, Grecia, Unione europea

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INTRODUCTION: EUROPEAN UNION AS AN INTERNALLY- AND EXTERNALLY-ORIENTED PEACE PROJECT FOR OVERCOMING TROUBLED PAST

The European integration process launched after the World War II was, at the very beginning, primarily oriented inwards: its aim was to reconcile the former adversaries, Germany and France in particular. The idea was to build a European order that would reduce or even neutralize the possibility of European states ever again resorting to the use of armed force to resolve their disputes. The founding fathers of European integration intended to achieve this goal by intertwining the two countries economically and politically to the greatest possible extent. This logic of functional cooperation was later supposed to spread to other European states. However, a precondition to integrate European continent in a meaningful way went far beyond achieving mere functional (economic, political etc.) cooperation between countries. It was also linked to adding the so called "European dimension" to otherwise predominantly "localized hearts and minds" and so transforming peoples' identities in the merger of "European" and "national" (Parsons, 2002; Serrier, 2018).

During the Cold War, the European Community's (EC) political leaders often emphasised that European integration is fundamentally "a peace project" and that, therefore, the integration of Europe should continue, both geographically (including other countries in the Community) and substantially (also intertwining also other layers of integration: military, social, cultural etc.) This narrative remained attractive for years; it led to the first wave of enlargement in 1973, when Ireland, Denmark and United Kingdom joined the EC, followed by the enlargements in 1981 and 1986 (Greece, Spain and Portugal entering the EC). However, the majority of these countries were unable to resolve the issues emerging from their troubled past, but were nevertheless admitted in the EC without having resolved their internal historical rifts. The hope that the European integration itself would be a panacea for healing the countries' historical scars thus remained unfulfilled (Mearsheimer, 1990; Eilstrup-Sangiovanni & Verdier, 2005).

The end of the Cold War did not bring peace. On the contrary, several armed conflicts erupted in the 1990s. Thus, the EC's political leaders thought that equipping the Community with means for a successful prevention of armed conflicts and addressing troubled pasts of European countries would be an important trump card for increasing the legitimacy of this institution. Despite this goal, in the early 1990s, the EC seemed to be far from a successful actor in conflict transformation as violence ravaged parts of central Europe. Not only did the EC – evolving into the EU in 1993 with the Maastricht Treaty – seek to develop new policies and means due to its limited response during the Yugoslav wars, but it also tried to establish new narratives to legitimize its *raison d'être* in terms of conflict prevention and conflict resolution (Wouters & Naert, 2004).

The EU continued to be perceived as a domain of liberty and opportunities in the countries of the former Eastern and Non-Aligned blocs at the turn of the millennium. This led to further enlargement waves, most notably in 2004, when 10 countries joined the EU. Many of newly joined countries – much alike the old members – suffered from the legacy of armed conflicts (Burgess, 2011). However, unresolved and continuously *unaddressed* historical issues did everything but contribute to greater social cohesion despite the hopes of many that this is precisely what the EU would do.

The EU's inability to live up to expectations in terms of resolving the troubled pasts of European countries contributed, among other factors, to the loss of EU's credibility. A few recently published surveys paint a rather alarming picture of declining levels of public confidence in the EU; a majority of citizens of Germany, France, Spain and Italy see the European project as "broken" (Banks, 2021). On the other hand, a few positive sentiments towards the EU continue. A majority of respondents in 11 of the 12 surveyed member states in the study conducted in 2021 believed that EU membership was a "good thing" for their country (ibid.); many of them still consider the institution as an important actor that can assist in resolving the countries' own problems.

The above mentioned study – similarly to the majority of other studies available (e.g. Balkan Barometer, 2021; Dennison & Puglierin, 2021) – provides aggregate data only. In other words, these studies do provide information on what, for example, people in these countries in general think about the role of the EU when it comes to addressing the troubled past. Although such studies are important for understanding the prevailing opinion in the countries about these issues, the questions about how members of *different* social strata (social groups) in various European states perceive the EU's historical role, as well as about the future role the EU should play in assisting the countries to overcome their troubled past remain unanswered. This is the gap this paper aims to fill; thus, the objective of this paper is to determine how different social groups in European countries with a troubled past – both EU member and non-member states – perceive the role of the EU in addressing the relevant troublesome historical legacies.

To achieve the research objective we used a new dataset containing representative data on citizens' views and attitudes regarding past conflicts and EU policies to mitigate their adverse effects from eight countries on the European continent (the dataset

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description is provided below). The first part of the analysis is descriptive and outlines the varying views on EU policies in the sample countries. Next, we attempt to examine whether different demographic characteristics and political attitudes affect citizens' view of EU policies on overcoming the troubled past. This is done by applying country fixed-effects models to account for the specific characteristics of each sample country.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This paper seeks answers to two overarching research questions:

(1) how do citizens of European countries evaluate *the historical* and *the possible future* role of the EU when it comes to addressing the troubled past in their countries?
(2) what are the differences between various strata (social groups) in these societies when it comes to their perception of the EU and its role in addressing troubled past?

To provide answers, we focus on six EU member states (Germany, Ireland, Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Poland) and two non-member countries (Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina). Each of the countries is burdened by its own different troubled past, which echoes to date and nowadays resurfaces in many forms and manifestations. Namely, some of the countries have been disproportionately suffering from the unresolved issue of the Holocaust (Germany, Poland, Greece, Bosnia-Herzegovina); others have been seriously impacted by the burden of communism (Poland, (East) Germany, Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina), which continues to resurface time and again to this day. Another issue that has left an imprint on current day-to-day life in many countries are colonial (Cyprus, Ireland) or authoritarian right-wing legacies (Spain, Greece). This demonstrates that the troubled past(s) of Europe cannot be explained in simple terms as "us-versus-them"; on the contrary, different rifts (lines of conflict) occasionally clash, but at the same time even fertilize each other (one such example are alliances of far right-wing parties that form trans-European ties, although they in essence mutually contradict).

Last but not least, it has to be noted that this article does not aim to provide an exhaustive list of contemporary societies where troubled pasts persist, resurface or appear to this day. Certain other European countries could have been scrutinized as well, but had to be omitted in this study due to the scope of the project and financial constraints.[1] This is perhaps the most important limitation of our paper. However, focusing on these eight countries with different troubled pasts is thought to offer illustrative rather than conclusive results, which – due to the large number of respondents – also shed light on the question whether differing opinions by different social groups can be explained by demographics (age, gender, education level etc.) or should the answer be sought elsewhere (e.g. left-right political affiliation; Euroscepticism; knowledge of historical issues etc.).

In this study, we apply a multi-method approach. To analyse the contours of the EU approach to resolving troubled past in eight countries of inquiry at different time points, we rely on the analysis of secondary and primary sources and until now unpublished data collected in the H2020 *RePAST – Revisiting the Past, Anticipating the Future* research project in 2021.[2] These sources are used to set the context needed to get to the cornerstone of our research, which is the statistical analysis of the survey.[3]

This study focuses on citizens' assessments of the EU's contribution to date to overcome the negative consequences of the troubled past. Then, using representative survey data, we examine citizens' views on future EU assistance to those affected by the consequences of the troubled past. In essence, the two dependent variables and subjects under examination concern the EU's involvement in resolving the negative consequences and whether this assistance should be stepped up to help citizens directly impacted by the past conflicts. The analysis seeks to explore how these views and evaluations differ between the eight countries in the survey sample (N = 6564), and how demographic characteristics and other political and social factors influence citizens' attitudes towards the EU's contribution to resolving the troubled past. Last but not least, all surveys, including this one, are limited in their explanatory potential and, thus, should not be interpreted as an instrument that can fully explain the difficulties in overcoming troubled pasts. The authors of this paper are aware of this limitation and suggest that the future studies combine the results by adding observations from, for example, in-depth interviews or focus groups, which would make pure statistical data more meaningful.

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1 In practice, it is not easy to find a European society where troubled past has been successfully addressed and thus does not present an important part and parcel in everyday political fights (Austria, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Northern Macedonia, Ukraine, Russian Federation etc.).

2 More information on the research project is available at www.repast.eu. The dataset is available on request.

3 The representative survey has been conducted in the aforementioned countries in 2021 for the purpose of the project and has used a similar set of questions related to the historical conflicts in these countries. The survey has been conducted by the Kantar public opinion poll agency.

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THEORETICAL DEBATES ON THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A MEANS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The establishment of the EC during the 1950s was itself at least in part a means of conflict prevention in Europe (Rummel, 2004). This is further traceable in the preamble of the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty, where the famous Schuman Declaration phrase that "world peace can be safeguarded only by creative efforts commensurate with the dangers that threaten it" was referred to (Wouters & Naert, 2004, 33). Yet, systematic conflict prevention by the EU is a rather modern phenomenon. It was conceived in 1992/1993 with the Maastricht Treaty on European Union, when the EU brought the European Political Cooperation (EPC)[4] into the institutional framework of the EU, renaming it the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The main objective of the CFSP was to "preserve peace and strengthen international security" (Devroe & Wouters, 1996, 546). However, the conflict prevention part of the CFSP did not initially become a priority for the EU in its own right (Niño-Pérez, 2004). Instead, it rather became an aspect of the EU's policy *vis-à-vis* certain regions or an effect of specific but limited horizontal measures or of broader general measures that did not have conflict prevention as their primary goal (Wouters & Naert, 2004). One important dimension was thus the *regional* one, where in light of the attempts to overcome the division of Europe, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and Southeastern Europe (SEE) became one of the main EU priorities. In this respect, the most important means to assure "lasting peace and stability" in both regions was the tangible perspective of an eventual membership (Betlehem & Weller, 1997).

The most important initiative within broader efforts to assure both peace and stability was the Conference/Pact on Stability,[5] alongside with the Stabilisation and Association Process[6] for SEE (Wouters & Naert, 2004, 40). This initiative was aimed at preventing further conflicts such as the one in the former Yugoslavia, and was described by the European Council as 'the Union's first exercise in preventive diplomacy' (ibid.). This came as no surprise, as the EU at that time was (relatively) safe internally, the *zeitgeist* of the post-cold war era brought a new kind of a democratisation-oriented enthusiasm, which propelled the idea of the old member states to turn their ambitions of creating the EC as a "force for good". However, the reality was far from encouraging – the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), established in 1999 with an aim to strengthen the CFSP – was of an intergovernmental character. In other words, any external action of the EU in this regard was dependent on the consensus among the member states. The stalemate regarding the nature of EU's conflict prevention actions was brought to an end in 2001, when the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts was adopted by the European Council in Gothenburg (Zupančič & Pejič, 2018).

A series of concrete actions followed this political commitment, the most important one being the Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM). The RRM did, however, ensure the continuation of the development of the EU capacities in conflict prevention and conflict resolution. Alongside the new European Security Strategy (2003), the European Commission (EC) reorganised its assistance and cooperation programmes and proposed the Instrument for Stability. The latter was perceived as an important improvement over the RRM, as the EU gained better control over the budget, the question regarding the short and long-term conflict prevention was improved, and projects became more flexible in duration (ibid.), including those that could positively mitigate the detrimental effects of troubled past.

But one has to note that such conflict prevention and peace-building efforts, which were further developed with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 (e.g. Petersberg tasks), did not solely encompass the SEE, which is to date subject to various EU-driven incentives in order to ensure stability. The latter relies on the idea that the transformation of conflicts is possible due to the EU's ability to act as "a force for good" (Manners, 2002); this presupposes European integration in order to create a common space without antagonisms and by extension also the possibility to overcome the troubled past. However – even though that we cannot deny that the EU has emerged as a genuine peacebuilding actor (see Gross & Juncos, 2011) –, the question that has to be addressed is how do people in various European states perceive the EU's role in assisting the countries to overcome their troubled past. The starting point is to reflect upon how the aforementioned evolution of EU's capabilities affected the idea of the EU as a means of conflict resolution in "old members", "new members" and "non-members".

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4 The European Political Cooperation was introduced in 1970 and was understood as the synonym for EU's external relations coordination until it was superseded by the CFSP in 1992/1993.

5 The Pact on Stability in Europe was proposed by French prime minister Édouard Balladur in 1993 as an attempt to help stabilise relations among, and promote cooperation between, the newly established countries of CEE after the fall of the Berlin wall.

6 Stabilisation and Association Process was launched in 1999 and is understood as the EU's policy towards SEE, even though it is similar in principle to the Europe Agreements signed with CEE countries.

ATTEMPTS TO ADDRESS TROUBLED PAST(S): A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE EU'S ENDEAVOURS OVER TIME

This section is divided into three parts. We demonstrate how the EC's/EU's role – and a desired attempt to address troubled past of European countries – changed over time. This section also examines the limits of engagement of the EC/EU in these respects.

Reserved attempts to address troubled past in 'old members': Germany, Ireland, Greece and Spain

Even though Germany, Ireland, Greece and Spain are considered "old members" of the EU, we should emphasize that they differ greatly according to the EU's approach to overcome their troubled pasts (Gounaris & Antoniou, 2020; Siapera, Kirk & Farrell, 2020; Martín, Paradés & Dacosta, 2020; Fiedler, 2020). For example, the case of Ireland shows how the EU's approach in this regard developed according to the progressing capabilities of the EU through years. If the initial EU's approach to address The Northern Ireland Troubles (late 1960s–1998) was to stay "politically neutral" and treat the conflict as "UK's internal issue" (Siapera, Kirk & Farrell, 2020, 3), then the EU's approach since the Good Friday Agreement (1998) became more proactive. From 1998 until 2016, the EU funded a range of special projects within the so-called Peace Programme[7] to ensure stability and promote good neighbourly relations between Ireland and Northern Ireland (ibid.). Here, it has to be pointed out that the Peace Programme did not finance projects aimed at addressing justice, truth and accountability at a state level or in terms of legacy of the Troubles – factors which have been a focal point of the conflict and still to a large extent continue to determine the socio-political landscape of both Ireland and Northern Ireland to this day (Siapera, Kirk & Farrell, 2020). In this respect, one could argue that the EU's efforts to address the troubled past of Ireland/Great Britain was primarily targeted towards the economic dimension of stability, which would then (presumably) lead to positive results in Northern Ireland.

Here, we should not overlook the case of Greece, which entails both bottom-up and top-down efforts to internally promote and externally project the European integration as means of overcoming the troubled past. For instance, the period from 1989 onwards could be understood as a period where the EU was comprehended as a reference point for the domestic political elite. This means that there was a general consensus – at least until 2009 – about the positive role of the European integration for Greece and its troubled past despite the attempts of the political elites to reinterpret the Greek past along (at least) two axes, namely: i) socialist – anti-Europeanism; ii) conservative/anti-communist – pro-European (Gounaris & Antoniou, 2020). The 'top-down' approach, which coincides with the core challenges of the Greek troubled past – Holocaust, the Civil War (1943–1949),[8] the post-Civil War anti-Communist regime (1949–1967) and Greek junta (1967–1974) – could be traced within both Greek's internal and external challenges. If the former refers to the 1997 decision of Thessaloniki becoming the European cultural capital in an attempt to accept and restore the Jewish and Holocaust past of the country,[9] the latter refers to the name dispute between Athens and Skopje, which ended in 2018 when (the former Yugoslav republic of) Macedonia changed its name to North Macedonia (Gounaris & Antoniou, 2020, 12).

Contrary to the EU's efforts in Ireland and Greece, the cases of Spain and Germany somewhat reflect the EU's inability (or disinterest) to act proactively when it comes to troubled past. While Germany is a founding member of the EC, it is still noteworthy that the unification of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) with the Federal Republic of Germany took place literally overnight (Fiedler, 2020, 8). The EU's approach, which at the time was mostly postulated on the transition of the East German economic structures, led to a rapid detachment of the East German population from Europe. As Fiedler (2020, 9) points out, Euro-enthusiasm has subsided through the years, and the "new EC citizens are now in the group of Euro-sceptics, in comparison with the West Germans, who supported the EU both economically and politically". One of the possible explanations for such detachment was offered by Winkler (2018, 147), who argued that the East Germans "had no chance of developing a post-national self-confidence", and that they "remained German in a conventional way".

Finally, we examine the case of Spain, which had an (authoritarian) political past similar to Greece – dictatorship under Francisco Franco from 1936 until 1975 – but the EU's approach to their troubled past differed. The most evident difference lies in the orientation of the approach, as there are no noteworthy proactive actions made by the EU (Martín, Paradés & Dacosta, 2020, 5). In other words, the EU was not interested in resolving Spanish historical internal disputes. This does change slightly – but

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7 Those are: i) 1995–2004 (Peace I); ii) 2004–2007 (Peace II); iii) 2007–2013 (Peace III); iv) 2014–2020 (Peace IV); v) 2021–2027 (Peace Plus).

8 The Civil War had three phases: i) first phase (1943–1944); ii) second phase (1944–1945); iii) third phase (1946–1949).

9 As shown by Gounaris & Antoniou (2021), the decision to make Thessaloniki the European cultural capital led to the establishment of a monument on commemorating the Holocaust and opening of a Jewish museum.

not significantly – over time. We can only highlight the bottom-up approach, as in 2006, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the *coup d'état* that led to the Spanish civil war, 200 MEPs requested from the Commission and the Council a debate on condemning the Franco regime, which culminated in April's 2009 resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism (ibid.). In this resolution, Spain is explicitly mentioned as one of the countries that suffered from a "long-lasting fascist regime" (Martín, Paradés & Dacosta, 2020, 6).

Moderate endeavours for resolving historical legacy in 'new members': Cyprus and Poland

The cases of Cyprus and Poland offer a unique insight into broader EU efforts to address the troubled past on the European continent via European integration. In the case of Poland, the initial attempts of the EU strived to 'Europeanise' the Polish past (Rawski & Bojarska, 2020). Such approach entailed addressing the Communist past and Holocaust,[10] as the main trend in Poland at the time was to engage in what Karge (2010, 139) describes as "the new cleansing of the past". The latter referred to the attempts at reinterpreting the national martyrdom while shying away from more challenging issues such as the role of Poles in the Holocaust and their collaboration in the installation of communism (Rawski & Bojarska, 2020).

The period after Poland became a EU member can be described as a mixture of broader bottom-up pressures by the political elites in CEE and top-down initiatives of the EU in order to complement the European historical narrative with the experience of the CEE (ibid.). As Malksoo (2009, 662) showed, the idea of equating the crimes of Nazism and Communism has found its place in the Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism (2008) and European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (2008/2009), aiming at incorporating the Polish – and other CEE countries – perspective into broader European mnemonical framework. However, the Holocaust perspective promoted at the EU level was always troubling for the Polish officials as they believed that such narratives could potentially spark an internal conflict over the Polish nation's complicity in the Holocaust (Rawski & Bojarska, 2020).

Contrary to the EU's approach to Poland, the troubled past of Cyprus proved to be structurally different from any other post-conflict European country. This (in part) stems from the fact that the Cyprus problem remains unresolved despite the attempts of several actors, including the United Nations. For example, in the period between 1974 and 1997 – after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, following the Cypriot *coup d'état* –, the EU did not interfere. However, the membership of Greece in the EC (1981) marked a new era for the Cyprus problem as the Turkish Cypriot community started to distrust the EC.[11] From 1990 onwards, when Cyprus applied for membership in the EU, a new kind of reality occurred (Triga & Ioannidis, 2020). As showed by Müftüler-Bac & Güney (2005), the accession of Cyprus was considered by the political elites on 'both sides' as an effective instrument to create new perspectives regarding the Cyprus problem.

The idea of united Cyprus being a full member of the EU was also attractive for the Turkish Cypriot political elite, as the solution of the Cyprus problem would translate into the integration of the Turkish Cypriot community into the EU (Yakinthou, 2009). The broader context was encouraging, as the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan[12] in Turkey (2002) brought new impetus to the Cyprus problem. When the EU accession process was finalised in 2003, the context was favourable enough for Turkish Cypriots, who voted in favour of parties supporting a federal solution to the problem. This led the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, to propose holding a referendum on whether or not to adopt a reunification plan based on a bi-communal federation. The so-called Annan's plan was rejected in 2004, which prolonged the Cyprus problem until this day (the Cypriot Greeks predominantly voted against the reunification of the island). The EU did, however, from 2004 onwards implement a number of policies to integrate the Turkish Cypriot community, focusing primarily on maintaining the Green Line Regulation and sending financial aid to prepare the Turkish Cypriot community for a potential solution, leaving the impression that the Cyprus problem should be resolved by domestic political elites (Triga & Ioannidis, 2020).

Active EU efforts to overcome historical issues: Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina

Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), once Yugoslav political entities, set joining the EU as one of the most important foreign policy goals. However, both countries are still suffering from unresolved historical issues that hinder both their social cohesion and their eventual EU membership. In the last decades, they

10 Rawski & Bojarska (2020, 7) used the case of the *Jedwabne pogrom* – a massacre of Polish Jews by the local inhabitants of the town of Jedwabne on 10 July 1941 – to reflect on polarisation of the domestic political landscape.

11 This distrust was propelled by the European Court of Justice's decision to practically impose an embargo on Turkish Cypriots exports to the EC due to property rights by Greek Cypriots (Triga & Ioannidis, 2020).

12 Erdogan was then considered as a 'pro-EU' politician with a 'flexible stance' towards Cyprus.

have been recipients of significant stabilization efforts of the Union, including those related to their troubled pasts.

The EC/EU diplomatic engagement in BiH began in the early 1990s, when armed conflict broke out in the country. Back then, the efforts targeted at halting violence were primarily diplomatic; no attempts to address troubled past were made. The role of the EC/EU in stopping the war was everything but meaningful – the fact not forgotten by Bosnian-Herzegovinians to this day. It was the United States, under the flag of NATO, which in 1994 and 1995 effectively brought the war to an end by military airstrikes targeting Bosnian Serb positions. The EU stepped in significantly only after signing the Dayton Peace Accords in late 1995. It became, alongside with the Office of the High Representative, the main external actor, focused on constitutional reforms, police reform and bringing war-crime indictees to court (Zupančič, Kočan & Ivaniš, 2021). The EU efforts had clear institutional, human rights and security dimensions, but did not involve any major attempts to resolve the country's troubled past. Even when few direct (although small) steps in the direction of addressing troubled past and reconciliation were made at last,[13] it seemed that such moves only entrenched the positions of ethno-political parties and deepened the divide between BiH peoples.

We can observe that the EU's approach in dealing with troubled past in both Southeast European countries has been indirect and limited. In neither of the two countries EU attempted to deal directly with resolving historical injustices; it rather approached this issue through the so-called Europeanisation – the concept which became "an umbrella" for resolving disputes (including those linked to troubled past). Since the Thessaloniki Summit (2003), when the countries were promised EU membership if they fulfil certain criteria, the EU efforts in BiH and Kosovo continue to revolve around issues such as democratization, improvement of the rule of law, security sector reform etc. There were few positive developments that raised expectations that the EU can become an actor that would help address the troubled past in a meaningful way (e.g. the signing of the Brussels Agreement between Serbia and Kosovo in 2013). However, with years passing – and continuous dominance of populist politicians on both sides – hopes for improving relations are fading away (Dragojlov, 2020).

On the other hand, the issues that remain tangible, understandable and of a practical importance for the citizens of these two countries remain largely unaddressed (e.g. exact date of joining the EU; visa liberalization in the case of Kosovo). In such circumstances of, as people tend to say, *undelivered promises*, it comes as no surprise that Euroscepticism is rising. This does not happen only in Republika Srpska (one of the two political entities of BiH), where the EU is regarded as an instrument of Western liberal agenda by many, but also in Kosovo, where a fierce critical stance towards the EU became a trump card enabling a Kosovo Albanian politician Albin Kurti to become one of the strongest politicians in the country (Eralp, 2012; Troncotă, 2018).

PERCEIVING THE EU AS AN AGENT FOR OVERCOMING TROUBLED PAST IN EIGHT EUROPEAN COUNTRIES: SURVEY RESULTS

The aim of this section is to present the results of a representative survey conducted in eight European countries (*Group 1 – Old Members*: Ireland, Germany, Greece, Spain; *Group 2: Big 2004 Enlargement Members*: Cyprus, Poland; *Group 3 – Non-Members*: Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo). In each of the eight countries, we analysed the respondents' perceptions regarding the EU approach to troubled past in respective countries. More precisely, survey participants were first asked to assess the EU's contribution *to date* in regard to overcoming troubled past, followed by whether they think that the EU should do more *in the future* to help those who have suffered from the troubled past. Both questions were recorded on a 5-level scale (*1 – completely disagree; 5 – completely agree*). At the end, the respondents were asked a series of questions on demographics.

Based on the above brief overview of the EU's contribution to the eight countries reeling from the effects of their troubled past, it is expected that people from different countries will have significantly different assessments of the EU's efforts to mitigate the adverse effects of the past. In addition to the varying level and importance of the EU's contribution in each country in the sample, there are essential differences between the countries. Moreover, each country is at a different level of coping with and mitigating the negative effects of its troubled past. Similarly, their peoples have developed significantly different relationships with the EU and perceive its impact on their lives in a non-homogeneous way. Therefore, based on the specific circumstances of each country, we assume that the view on whether the EU has already done a lot to help overcome the troubled past and whether it should further assist those affected by past conflicts directly depends on the conditions in the sample countries.

Table 1 presents the results of the questionnaire's two questions, which are the dependent variables of this study. In the first question, where participants were asked to assess the EU's contribution to date in addressing the troubled past, very few participants from the two

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13 E.g. the European Parliament Declaration Srebrenica in 2009; the High Representative's decision change of BiH's criminal law in 2021, which introduced prison sentences for genocide deniers and those who glorify war criminals.

Table 1: Variation of dependent variables across country groups.

The EU has helped to overcome the troubled past	Old members	Big 2004 enlargement members	Non-members
Completely disagree	371 (11%)	173 (13%)	28 (2%)
Disagree	667 (19%)	287 (22%)	386 (32%)
Neither agree nor disagree	1298 (38%)	349 (26%)	326 (27%)
Agree	848 (25%)	393 (29%)	252 (21%)
Completely agree	252 (7%)	132 (10%)	231 (18%)
The EU should help those who have suffered from the troubled past	Old members	Big 2004 enlargement members	Non-members
Completely disagree	172 (5%)	76 (6%)	22 (2%)
Disagree	413 (12%)	136 (10%)	66 (5%)
Neither agree nor disagree	1154 (34%)	347 (26%)	118 (10%)
Agree	1201 (35%)	439 (33%)	466 (38%)
Completely agree	496 (14%)	336 (25%)	551 (45%)

non-member states stated that they disagreed with this statement. More specifically, only 2.3% of participants from Kosovo and BiH stated that they "completely disagree", which is comparatively lower than in the other two groups of sample countries. This demonstrates that the EU's contribution to Kosovo and BiH with respect to troubled past is *not* perceived by citizens of the two countries as unimportant or negligible. On the other hand, views on the EU's contribution in the old Member States and the 2004 enlargement Member States seem to be more varied. More specifically, around 4 out of 10 people in the old Member States state that they "Neither agree nor disagree", indicating that the EU's contribution in the explored realm is assessed as rather moderate.

Table 1 also contains the percentages of responses on whether the EU should provide further assistance to those who have been negatively affected by the events of a troubled past. Firstly, across all three groups, a majority of citizens state that they "agree" or "completely agree" with the need for the EU to further assist those who have experienced adverse effects of past conflicts. Once again, citizens from non-member countries view this proposal in a more positive light, with 83% of respondents saying they "agree" or "completely agree". The implications are twofold: people in Kosovo and BiH may feel that the victims have not received adequate help and/or believe that EU assistance can be beneficial to them. Citizens in the old Member States are the

most sceptical about further EU assistance, with fewer respondents in favour of such measures than the other two groups.

The mean values for the two dependent variables in each sample country are presented in Figure 1. People in Kosovo are the most positive towards the EU's contribution to overcoming the troubled past and its negative consequences. They also seek further EU assistance to victims of past conflicts. The two may be linked, as the positive assessment of the EU's contribution so far as constructive and valuable may prompt Kosovars to seek an extension of EU aid to victims. It appears that despite the rise of various Eurosceptic political formations in Kosovo (Eralp, 2012; Troncotă, 2018), citizens view the EU's efforts to overcome the troubled past as positive – unlike the EU's contribution in many other areas, as the literature suggests (e.g. rule of law).

Another interesting case is Cyprus, where the mean values in the two questions differ significantly. The difference between the two mean values suggests that Greek Cypriots tend to be more disappointed with the EU's contribution to solving the Cyprus problem and, at the same time, believe that the EU should do more to help those who suffered from past events. These views emerge from a widespread disillusionment among the Greek Cypriot community towards the EU[14]. The Greek Cypriot community perceives the EU's lack of decisive engagement at the negotiating table for the resolution of the Cyprus problem as the EU's avoidance of getting involved in a complex issue that is likely to put a strain

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14 Due to methodological difficulties arising from the *status quo* on Cyprus, the survey has been conducted only among citizens residing on the government-controlled areas in the south part of the island. Therefore, the overwhelmingly majority of the participants were Greek Cypriots. Unfortunately, Turkish Cypriots were not included on the survey sample.

Table 2: Country fixed-effects models.

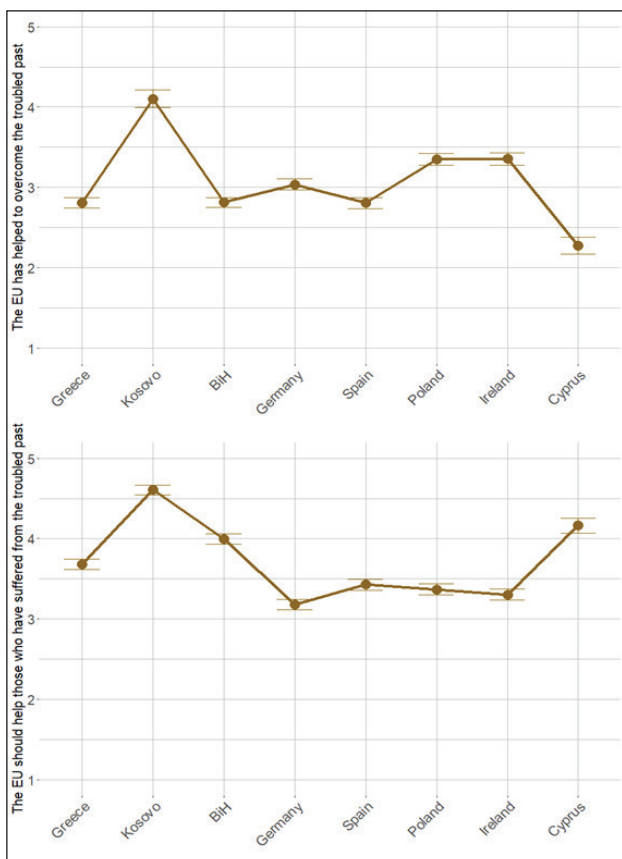|	Dependent variable:			
	EU contribution		EU should help victims	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Age	-0.003**	-0.007**	-0.004**	-0.005**
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Sex (Male=1)	-0.033	-0.059	0.017	0.017
	(0.028)	(0.033)	(0.027)	(0.035)
Education	-0.012	-0.055**	-0.067**	-0.076**
	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.014)	(0.019)
Size of community	-0.001	-0.009	-0.014**	-0.016**
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Religiosity	0.034**	0.028*	0.046**	0.051**
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.012)
Personal Experience	0.012	0.032	0.264**	0.265**
	(0.031)	(0.034)	(0.029)	(0.036)
Left-Right self-placement		-0.040**		-0.088**
		(0.012)		(0.013)
EU membership evaluation		-0.284**		0.003
		(0.030)		(0.032)
National Pride		-0.0004		0.040*
		(0.018)		(0.019)
Trust in national institutions		0.110**		0.097**
		(0.029)		(0.030)
Trust in the EU		0.327**		-0.143**
		(0.042)		(0.044)
Attachment to Europe		0.306**		0.077**
		(0.023)		(0.024)
Traditional Media		0.050**		0.041*
		(0.019)		(0.020)
Online Media		-0.023		-0.027
		(0.014)		(0.015)
Social Media		0.027*		0.036**
		(0.012)		(0.012)
Knowledge about the conflict		-0.022**		-0.004
		(0.006)		(0.006)
Observations	5,723	3,574	5,812	3,598
R2	0.004	0.230	0.027	0.058
Adjusted R2	0.002	0.226	0.025	0.052
F Statistic	4.290** (df = 6; 5709)	66.473** (df = 16; 3551)	26.949** (df = 6; 5798)	13.790** (df = 16; 3575)

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01

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Figure 1: Dependent variables mean values for each country (1: "Completely disagree" 5: "Completely agree").

Figure 2: Marginal effects for trust in the EU.

on European-Turkish relations (Triga & Ioannidis, 2020). Greek Cypriot belief that the EU has not done enough to safeguard their interests and that it should further assist the victims of past conflicts comes at no surprise, as they are European citizens who do not have access to their properties in the Turkish occupied lands in the northern part of the island.

Also noteworthy are the mean values for the old Member States (Greece, Spain, Germany, Ireland). In the old Member States, the mean values tend to be closer to the centre of the scale. This may be due to time elapsed since the conclusion of past conflicts (Greece, Spain and Germany) and better management of adverse effects of these conflicts in terms of designing and executing special projects (Ireland). After all, in old Member States, the troubled past and its consequences may not be considered as detrimental as in Cyprus, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alternative explanation could be that citizens of old Member States do not consider the EU to be an actor that can or should act, when it comes to troubled pasts of individual countries. In any case, citizens in the old Member States do not consider EU assistance in this respect as necessary.
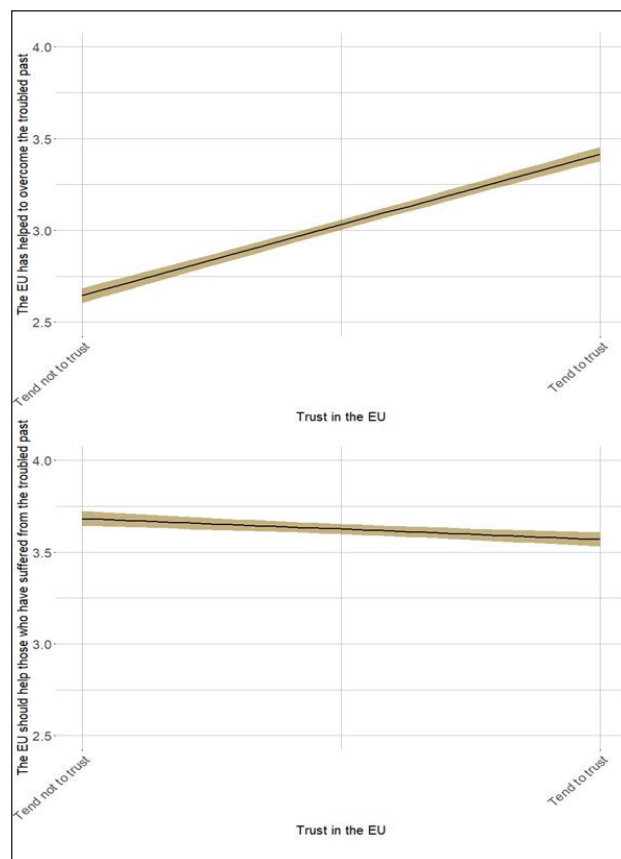
The descriptive results confirmed our initial hypothesis that expected significantly different assessments of the EU's contribution across sample countries due to the particular characteristics of each case. In addition to the variation in views between countries, the analysis also focuses on how different demographic groups and socio-political factors influence the perception of the EU's contribution. The research seeks to clarify how different factors influence citizens' views of the EU's contribution to overcoming troubled pasts. To statistically examine the effects of demographic and socio-political factors on the variation in the assessment of the EU's contribution, we ran country fixed-effects models. The important specificities in each country resulting from different forms of conflict and unrest imply that the regression models should take into account the distinct circumstances in each country. Therefore, the inclusion of country fixed-effects allows for the examination of the influence of each demographic and socio-political factor regardless of the unique conditions prevailing in each country of the sample.

The results of the country fixed-effects models are presented in Table 2. Model 1 examines the effect of citizens' demographic characteristics on the evaluation of the EU's contribution. Statistically significant relationships are found between the dependent variable and age

and religiousness. Age and the evaluation of the EU's contribution exhibit a negative correlation, indicating that the older citizens are, the more negatively they assess the EU's contribution in dealing with the troubled past. In contrast, religiousness has a positive correlation to the evaluation of the EU's contribution in addressing troubled past. That is, the more religious citizens are, the stronger they evaluate the EU's contribution as positive. Other demographic variables in Model 1 are not statistically significant, and the magnitude of age's coefficient is relatively minor. Finally, the R^2 of Model 1 is 0.004 (less than 0.01), indicating that demographic characteristics alone fail to explain a significant fraction of the variance of the dependent variable.

In Model 2, where the dependent variable remains the same, factors related to citizens' views on socio-political issues were added alongside demographic characteristics. Age and religiosity remain statistically significant. The educational level turns statistically significant and has a negative correlation with the dependent variable. Therefore, people with lower or no education tend to see the EU's contributions in more positive terms.

In addition, most socio-political variables are statistically significant. Self-positioning on the left-right axis exhibits negative correlation with the evaluation of the EU's contribution, indicating that individuals positioned closer to the left pole tend to view the EU's contribution in more positive light. The three variables concerning citizens' views and attitudes towards the EU, in general, are statistically significant and point towards a consistent pattern. Citizens with generally favourable attitudes towards the EU tend to assess its contribution as more positive. Based on Model 2, citizens who trust the EU rate their country's EU membership (or potential membership) as positive and consider themselves as Europeans, view the EU's efforts in overcoming a troubled past as satisfactory. Also, citizens who trust national institutions and keep themselves regularly informed via traditional and social media are more optimistic about the EU's contribution. In conclusion, views and attitudes towards the EU are the most important factors in assessing its contribution. They carry more weight in explaining the variance of the dependent variable than demographic characteristics.

Demographic characteristics appear to have a greater influence on whether the EU should further provide assistance to those affected by past conflicts. Indicatively, in addition to age, religion and education level that remain statistically significant, in Model 3, the size of the community in which people reside and whether they have personal experience with the troubled past are also statistically significant. Individuals who reside in smaller communities and have been affected by the events of the troubled past (either personally or such effects were felt by their families) tend to favour future EU assistance to victims. Demographic characteristics carry more weight than in the previous two models, with R^2 being comparatively higher than in Model 1.
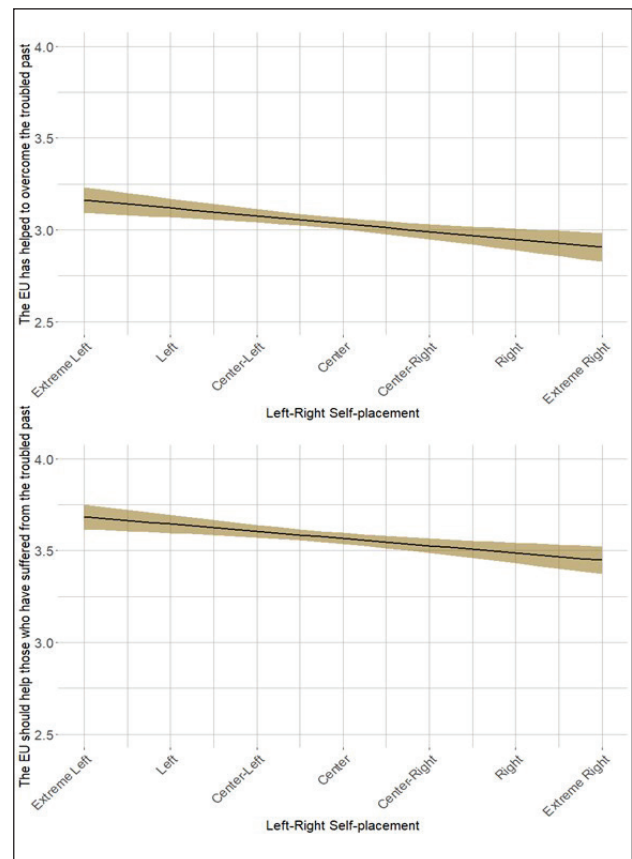

Figure 3: Marginal effects for Left-Right Self-Placement.

When socio-political variables are included in Model 4, significant changes can be observed compared to Model 2. First, the effect of self-positioning on the left-right axis becomes stronger, indicating that left-wing citizens seek greater support from the EU for victims of troubled past. The variables concerning the general attitude of citizens towards the EU differ substantially. The evaluation of the country's EU membership ceases to have a significant effect on the dependent variable. The evaluation of EU membership has a major effect in Model 2. Furthermore, the coefficient of attachment to Europe decreases significantly, while trust in the EU turns from a positive to a negative correlation. Therefore, individuals who tend to distrust the EU are more likely to believe that the EU should increase its support to the victims of the troubled past. National pride is also statistically significant and exhibits a positive correlation. Citizens who are prouder of their national origin are more strongly in favour of further EU assistance. It should also be noted that knowledge about the past conflict has a weak influence or is not statistically significant in relation to the variance of the two dependent variables, making it an irrelevant factor. More generally, it appears from Model 4 that further help from the EU is desired by those directly affected by the troubled past and those who do not trust the EU.

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Possibly, the factor linking both is that many citizens are not happy with the help the EU has provided to victims so far and therefore trust the EU to a comparatively lesser degree than other citizens.

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the marginal effects of two independent variables, trust in the EU and self-positioning on the left-right axis. First, the significant effect of trust in the EU on people's assessment of the EU's contribution to overcoming the troubled past is evident. Individuals who tend to trust the EU are about one level higher on the 5-level scale of assessing the EU's contribution than those with tendencies of distrust. It is noteworthy that this significant and positive relationship is in contrast to correlation with the second dependent variable. Although considerably weaker, the relationship between trust in the EU and seeking further EU assistance is negative. Regarding self-positioning on the left-right axis, the relationship is negative in both graphs. However, the relationship between self-positioning on the left-right axis is slightly stronger in terms of seeking further aid from the EU.

CONCLUSION

This study has shed light on the EU's ability to contribute to overcoming the countries' troubled past. More specifically, it examined the EU's efforts to assist eight European countries in remedying the damaging consequences of past conflicts. The study attempted to examine the EU's contribution in addressing troubled past in different countries over time and to explain how the evolutionary trajectory of European conflict resolution mechanisms enhanced national efforts to heal past grievances. Then, analysing data from a cross-national public opinion survey, the study examined citizens' perceptions and evaluations of the EU's contribution to the efforts to overcome the adverse effects of the troubled past.

The overview of the EU's attempt to evolve into a major actor with the capacity to contain national crises in European states has demonstrated that the EU has so far lacked significant capabilities to prevent or resolve issues that stem from troubled past. Although the EU started as a project aspiring to bring peace to the continent, it has not been able to engage decisively in national initiatives to reduce the negative effects of the troubled past. The EU's efforts are mainly characterised by respondents as lacking in determination.

Despite the EU's lack of decisive involvement in resolving the negative consequences of the past, citizens in most countries under research rate the EU's contribution as at least moderate. Very few citizens rate the EU's contribution in completely negative terms, demonstrating that even a minimal EU's contribution is rated as at least moderate or sufficient. In the old Member States, citizens rate the EU's contribution as moderate, while in Kosovo and Poland, the majority of citizens consider the EU's contribution regarding the troubled past to date as positive. In Cyprus, on the other hand, the EU's contribution is assessed as relatively negative, with the mean being much lower than in other countries. These results demonstrate a clear pattern. In the old Member States, citizens do not consider the EU as the first in line responsible for solving problems that date back to the troubled past, making the assessment of the EU's contribution as moderate unsurprising. In contrast, in Kosovo, citizens evaluate the EU's contribution as positive, as they may perceive it as substantial for a non-member country. In Cyprus, citizens consider that the EU bears a share of the responsibility for the lack of solution to the Cyprus problem, so the assessment is negative.

The study has also shown that different variables can adequately explain the variation of the two independent variables. For assessing the EU's contribution *to date* with regard the troubled past, the most critical factors – those with the highest explanatory potential – were those related to attitudes and opinions about the EU in general. This suggests that the more citizens trust the EU, the more positive and successful EU efforts to overcome the troubled past will be. Of course, this may be due to endogeneity, as it is likely that individuals who are already positively predisposed towards the EU also positively evaluate its contribution to overcoming problems stemming from the troubled past.

However, in terms of seeking *further help* from the EU with regard to addressing troubled past in different countries, which was the next topic explored by our study, the variation of views is better explained by demographic characteristics. In particular, personal experience with the events of the troubled past appears to be the most robust factor (those who have personal experience with traumatic historical events tend to seek an extension of EU assistance). In addition to this, age, religion and education level are also statistically significant when it comes to the assessment of the EU's role in addressing troubled past. The latter finding appears as important for devising future EU policies towards its members and non-members, in particular because, as our study shows, different social groups have relatively diverging views on the EU and its historical and potential future role in addressing troubled past. However, to make this finding more conclusive, similar analyses should be conducted in other European countries.

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POVZETEK

Članek analizira vlogo in zmožnost Evropske skupnosti/Evropske unije (EU) pri zagotavljanju pomoči osmim evropskim državam ob njihovih poskusih (raz)reševanja konfliktne preteklosti; analiza zajema šest članic EU (Grčija, Poljska, Španija, Ciper, Irska, Nemčija) ter dve nečlanici (Bosna in Hercegovina, Kosovo). Avtorji analizirajo stališča prebivalstva glede dosedanjih zgodovinskih (ne)uspehov EU ter morebitno prihodnjo vlogo EU na področju naslavljanja konfliktne preteklosti. Članek proučuje, ali demografske spremenljivke (npr. starost, spol, izobrazba) morda vplivajo na razliko v razumevanju vloge EU pri naslavljanju konfliktne preteklosti, ali pa to bolje pojasnjujejo nekatere druge spremenljivke (npr. samouvrščanje na političnem spektru levica–desnica, splošen odnos do evropske integracije (proevropskost–evroskepticizem), poznavanje zgodovine). Raziskava temelji na statistični analizi reprezentativne javnomnenjske ankete v omenjenih državah (N = 6564), dodatno dimenzijo pa ji daje analiza in interpretacija primarnih in sekundarnih virov, ki poglablja razumevanje stališč ljudi glede konfliktne preteklosti. Analiza je pokazala, da tisti, ki imajo o EU na splošno pozitivno stališče, višje vrednotijo dosedanji prispevek EU na področju konfliktne preteklosti (in obratno); torej, bolj kot nekdo zaupa (v) EU, višje vrednoti prispevek EU na področju spopadanja s konfliktno preteklostjo. Glede prihodnje (potencialne) vloge EU na področju naslavljanja konfliktne preteklosti pa je analiza pokazala, da v obravnavanih državah na ta stališča najbolj vpliva osebna izkušnja konflikta (tisti, ki imajo osebno izkušnjo konflikta, pričakujejo večjo vlogo EU na tem področju). Za pojasnjevanje teh stališč so se kot statistično značilne izkazale tudi nekatere druge demografske spremenljivke, in sicer starost, vero-izpoved in izobrazba.

Ključne besede: konflikt, Bosna in Hercegovina, Irska, Ciper, Kosovo, Nemčija, Poljska, Grčija, Španija, Evropska unija

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