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EUROSCEPTICISM AS A FUNCTIONAL PRETEXT FOR POPULISM IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES: THE EUROZONE, MIGRATION AND UKRAINIAN CRISES

Abstract. *The article investigates the Eurosceptic political stance as a driver of populism in Central and Eastern European states after they joined the European Union. First, populism as a strategy of domestic political parties is conceptually linked with Euroscepticism as a foreign policy stance and, second, local populist and Eurosceptic parties' success at national elections since 2004 is mapped out in detail. The article's main contribution is the empirical investigation of factors that contributed to the national election results with respect to three examples of the populist framing of EU affairs; namely, the economic and financial crisis, the Ukrainian crisis, and the migration crisis. We add to understanding of the internal and external dimensions of populist interests and their functional pretext for Euroscepticism, including the responses of non-populist parties.*

Key words: *Central and Eastern Europe, EU, foreign policy, populism, Euroscepticism, political parties*

Introduction – Euroscepticism as phenomenon in Central and Eastern European countries

Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries that are also European Union (EU) members share a long geopolitical and historical reality of living within multi-ethnic empires and each fighting for their statehood as a people. After World War I, when the Slavic peoples – the Czech, Slovak, Slovenian and Polish – and the Hungarians left the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some

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continued to survive within multinational states – and all in non-democratic communist regimes. It was only after the Cold War ended that they gained individual sovereign status and started their democratic political transition. Their common feature was the foreign policy priority to join the EU. By mainly referring to the benefits and rarely the costs of EU membership in public discussions, the CEE governments managed to gain public support for this foreign policy goal (via public opinion polls or accession referenda). This one-sided 'debate' also fuelled CEE citizens' extremely high and irrational expectations concerning EU accession. Slovenians expected EU membership to bring about a stable democracy, freedom of movement and economic opportunities, with the dream of becoming a 'second Switzerland' (Bojinović Fenko and Svetličič, 2016). In Hungary, the benchmark for prosperity was Austria's level of economic development (Ugrozdy, 2016: 107). Hungary aspired to "firmly anchor itself alongside its traditional allies" (ibid.), similarly to Poland, which defined its Euro-Atlantic integration as its "return to Europe". Poland largely sought to escape communism and Russia's sphere of influence, but also to establish a geopolitical balance with the neighbouring Germany and to generally economically catch up with the biggest EU members (Germany, UK, France) (Stormowska and Dufour, 2016: 169). All Czech governments agreed that EU membership was important, with the Czech President being most reluctant to accept the accession conditions (Bartovic, 2016: 50); a small instance of soft Euroscepticism.

At first, such unrealistic expectations and absence of more rational national debates in CEE suppressed the Eurosceptic political stances. However, a couple of years into their EU membership the inability of the CEE governments to effectively integrate into EU decision-making structures and make the said irrational expectations for economic prosperity come true, led to acknowledgment of the fact that the gains were at best "suboptimal". It seems that discussion of the EU in CEE states was and remains reserved for the national political elites. In Slovakia, "discussing Europe is mostly confined to the circle of political and business elites" whereas, in the public sphere, the EU is at best discussed as an income source for the state's finances (Benje, 2016: 196). Researchers note the 'Slovak paradox' (ibid.); high enthusiasm for the EU on one side, and citizens being disconnected from domestic political actors on the other, resulting for example in just 13.05% turnout at elections for the European Parliament in 2013. A similar outcome is visible in the Czech Republic that reflects the citizens' extremely low knowledge of EU affairs; e.g. alarmingly, a national opinion poll in 2014 showed that 68% of Czechs cannot recall the name of even one Czech MEP (Bartovic, 2016: 51–52).

Two preliminary findings can be drawn from this. First, EU affairs entered the local political debate in CEE states in somewhat ideal conditions for

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populism by opening up the political space against the previous usurpation of EU affairs by the national political elite. Second, a foreign policy-related effect of this was the emergence of a populist discourse on EU affairs that claimed the EU is a project run by European political elites (the big member states) to the detriment of smaller/less powerful member state(s). This article's main goal is thus to offer an understanding of the link between domestic politics and foreign policy domains with reference to post-EU accession Euroscepticism in CEE states.

The structure of the article is as follows. We initially provide a short conceptual contribution that links populism with Euroscepticism. We refer here to the source of 'framing' the populism argument conceptualised as "internal government interests" or "external state interests". The first is associated with the domestic struggle for power and the second with the foreign policy *raison d'état*. We also examine three substantive dimensions of such interests; namely, political, economic and ideological. In the empirical part, we map out the populist and Eurosceptic political parties found in CEE EU member states on the left and right continuum. Through content analysis and interpretation of secondary sources, we then assess the five CEE EU member states' domestic political parties and government standpoints via three case studies of recent EU crises: the economic and financial crisis, the Ukrainian crisis, and the migration crisis. We consider the following research questions: How was the given EU crisis used for framing populist parties' standpoints? Which differences exist in this framing among CEE states? Does the Euroscepticism of the populist parties arise from a critique of the local elite (internal interest) or the EU elite (external interest)? Finally, which substantive interest as a source of Euroscepticism in the standpoints of the populist parties has enjoyed greatest success at domestic elections – political, economic or ideological?

The link between populism and Euroscepticism

Populism may be considered as a political strategy, an ideology or a discourse. One finds in the scientific literature a consensus on the core analytical elements of its definition. Mudde (2004: 543) defines this phenomenon as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people". The four elements characterising populism are thus: criticism of the elites and the establishment in general; importance of the popular sovereignty; immanent tensions between the elites and the people, and misrepresentation of the popular will in politics (Pirro and Taggart, 2018: 255–256). When it appears or gains momentum,

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populism impacts the entire domestic political scene, including the government, which must position itself vis-à-vis this political strategy. Building on the model proposed by Pirro and Taggart (2018: 259), mainstream political parties can opt to either (1) engage or (2) disengage from competition with their populist competitors (Table 1). They can apply (a) an active approach, directly addressing the competition, or can take (b) a passive approach, not addressing the competitors directly. In case of engagement, they can either (1a) actively collaborate or (1b) passively co-opt while in case of disengagement they can (2a) actively isolate or (2b) passively ignore the populists on European issues.

Table 1: POSSIBLE REACTIONS OF MAINSTREAM PARTIES TO POPULIST PARTIES

	Active	Passive
Engage with	Collaboration	Co-optation
Disengage	Isolation	Ignorance

Source: Pirro and Taggart (2018: 255–256).

Populism is thus a phenomenon of domestic politics. Nevertheless, researchers have considered the recent EU crises as a key driver of the populism seen today in Europe. In the case of CEE EU member states, populist parties have thrived in these conditions as well (see the next section). Although the crisis-populism link is under-theorised (Minkenberg, 2002; Moffit, 2015), we use the EU crises as an important political context in which political parties have been required to present the public with clear, substantive arguments. A crisis in domestic politics refers to the moment of choice between "stark alternatives" that demand action and a significant change that produces "distinct legacies" (Pirro and Taggart, 2018: 257–258). In foreign policymaking, an external crisis due to a fear of catastrophe often leads to deliberate attempts to build consensus and spread the responsibility for decision-making around a wider group than usual (Hill, 2016: 63). This may point to the engagement responses of the mainstream parties listed above (1a and 1b) to populist stances (active collaboration, or passive co-option).

Euroscepticism refers to "the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" (Taggart, 1998: 366). Most scholars differentiate 'hard' and 'soft' Euroscepticism, where 'hard' Euroscepticism implies the "outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration" and 'soft' merely means "contingent or qualified opposition to European integration" (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004: 3–4; Pirro and Taggart, 2018: 256). In this article, populism is thus referred to as a political strategy in domestic parties' struggle for power by applying a Eurosceptic policy programme.

We intend to investigate the link between Euroscepticism and populism via the conceptual framework of the domestic and external construction of states' national interests. Alons (2007) defines states' interests as a construct made up of political, economic and ideological subsets with two dimensions, external and internal. The external dimension refers to the nature and quality of the state's relations in world politics and its power position in the international system – in our case, the European system. The internal dimension refers to the government's direct political, economic and ideological interests that support its positive public perception and assure its domestic position of remaining in power (Alons, 2007: 2015); we use this dimension to encompass all domestic parties' struggle for power. Our own application of this conceptual scheme to the Eurosceptic standpoints held by domestic political parties and government is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: EUROSCEPTICISM APPLIED VIA POPULISM AS AN ELEMENT OF THE DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT INTEREST IN CEE EU MEMBER STATES

EXTERNAL		INTERNAL (DOMESTIC)
critique of weak position and low influence of the (un-privileged) CEE state within EU decision-making	Political interest	fight for power (to remain in office)
bypassing the EU as authority in international trade to gain national/ government profit	Economic interest	improving national economic performance/conditions for the masses (jobs, prosperity)
exposing the CEE member state's role as being exploited by the EU elite/big member states – no double standards	Ideological interest	scapegoating the EU for domestic unpopular reforms or unsuccessful policy; a two-level game, nationalism

Source: own adaption of Alons (2007: 215).

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The internal dimension of populist Euroscepticism is populism for domestic purposes. This appears in the form of either the fight for power of the masses against the national elite (political interest), to show that national economic performance must improve, or the EU's impediment of economic interests. It can also mean that Euroscepticism is an instrumental reference point for the EU's failure in crises so as to raise the national government's ideological value (scapegoating). The external dimension of populism derives from the state's foreign policy performance. Populism for state interest is the application of Euroscepticism by domestic political parties and the national government. It can be used to criticise the state's weak position and influence within EU decision-making processes (political interest) or, more generally, the state's unsatisfactory power status within the EU compared to the expectations that were nourished before EU membership (e.g. Poland should be in balance with the big powers, Hungary should be

equally powerful as Austria). The external economic interest refers to the argument that the state would be better off alone in the international economy or that the EU as an authority in international trade should be bypassed by a CEE state to realise a higher national/government gains compared to what can be negotiated by the EU as a whole. An external ideological interest refers to the CEE EU member states as being not only disadvantaged but also even exploited by the EU elite/big members due to the double standards of common EU policies.

Populism in Central and Eastern European States

Many new-born populist local political parties in CEE EU member states have chosen Euroscepticism as a substantive issue. In this chapter, we support this argument with qualitative and quantitative empirical analysis. As stated in the problem definition, in all five CEE EU member states politics with respect to the EU was not part of an open domestic political discussion but a predetermined identity-related foreign policy goal. As shown in Table 3 and Chart 1 below, populism in CEE has been rising since they joined the EU, especially in the period 2009–2010, in 2012 and after 2014.

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However, populist parties differ in their nature and success. In Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic, Eurosceptic populist parties from the extreme to the centre right have come to power to lead national governments, whereas in Slovakia the leading Eurosceptic party has a left populist political orientation. In Slovenia, however, Euroscepticism is neither a feature of the local political parties nor has it been prominent at elections. The only successful Eurosceptic party comes from the extreme left and managed to make it into parliament by a small margin at the 2014 elections. Therefore, different manifestations of Euroscepticism of right and left populist parties and their impact on local politics will be explored in the case studies below.

Another populist argument is found in the external dimension; the EU is a project run by the European political elite (the big member states) to the detriment of the smaller/weaker members. This position stresses the unequal distribution of influence at the EU level, even though small member states are positively (institutionally) discriminated against. This argument was raised by the Eurosceptic Czech President who claimed the EU political elite had overrun Czech politicians during the accession negotiations. As a result, scapegoating ("Brussels wants, Brussels demands") is a tool commonly used by CEE governments to justify unpopular national reforms (Benje, 2016; Ugrozdy, 2016; Havlík and Havlík 2018). Poland as a much bigger state in terms of its capabilities prioritised its goal of joining the big EU members in terms of its influence over EU politics. The state aimed to act "as a bridge between the EU and the Eurozone /.../ to ensure the inclusiveness of

Table 3: PARLIAMENTARY POPULIST AND EUROSCEPTIC PARTIES IN CEE STATES (SHARE OF VOTES); 2004–2018

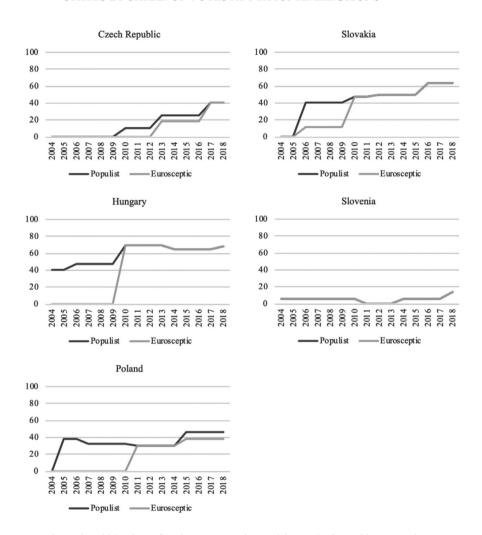|	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Czech Republic							10.88% (VV)			**18.65% (ANO)** € 6.88% (Dawn)				**29.64% (ANO)** € 10.64% (SPD) €	
Hungary	41.07% (MDF, FIDESZ)		**42.03% (FIDESZ+KDNP)** 5.04% (MDF)				**52.73% (FIDESZ+KDNP)** 16.67% (JOBBIK) €				**44.87% (FIDESZ+KDNP)** 20.22% (JOBBIK) €				**49.27% (FIDESZ+KDNP)** € 19.06% (JOBBIK) €
Poland		**27% (PiS)** 11.4% (SRP)		**32.11% (PiS)**				**29.89% (PiS)** €				**37.85% (PiS)** € 8.81% (Kukiz15)			
Slovakia			**29.14% (SSD)** **11.73% (SNS)** €				**34.79% (SSD)** **12.14% (SAS)** € 5.07% (SNS) €		**44.41% (SSD)** 5.88% (SAS) €				**28.3% (SSD)** € 12.1% (SAS) € 8.64% (SNS) € 8.04% (ĽSNS) € 6.6% Wearefamily €		
Slovenia	6.27% (SNS) €				5.4% (SNS) €						5.97% (ZL) €				9.33% (ZL)* € 4.17% (SNS) €

Bold = government coalition member € = Eurosceptic * Support for minority government.
Source: Lovec (ed.) (2019)

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all projects of integration" (Stormowska and Dufour, 2016: 169). However, this did not give Poland the political power it had expected to achieve at the EU level. Scapegoating is a well-known and a common, two-level game strategy used by member states' governments when 'selling tough common agreements'. This happened in older EU member states like the Netherlands, Italy, Austria and France where Eurosceptic parties were very successful, as well as in new EU members. Yet, the particular political, economic and historical context makes the CEE states a different case. In Hungary, for example, the "political right and the widely EU-sceptic far-right are keen to point out the – perceived or real – double standards Member States have to face in their European pursuits. This makes for a general understanding that the EU is not a level playing field" (Ugrozdy, 2016: 107).

Such a stance was highly exacerbated during the EU crises (economic and financial crisis, Ukrainian crisis, migration crisis). In Slovakia, references to double standards in managing the Greek bailout were reported. They stated that "fiscally responsible Slovakia was being pressured into reallocating resources to an "irresponsible" member state (Greece) whose citizens' incomes are much higher than that of the average Slovak", resulting in the perception of "a breach into Slovak sovereignty and a direct intrusion into the Slovak taxpayer's wallet" (Benje, 2016: 195–197). Preaching for the necessary solidarity but by no means double standards, Slovenia intensified this stance in the cases of Luxleaks and the pre-Brexit vote demands of the UK with the argument the EU should not have an elitist preference for certain member states over others (Bojinović Fenko, 2016: 205). A drop in trust in the EU was soon seen among Polish citizens in 2014 as an effect of the economic and financial crisis (Stormowska and Dufour, 2016: 170), showing that perpetuation of "challenging times" will continue to weaken support in Poland for the EU (Cichocki, 2011: 274).

Euroscepticism practically did not exist before 2009 (Hungarian Jobbik being the only exception), but has since been on the rise. Populism emerged before Euroscepticism in all CEE EU member states. However, Euroscepticism was used as the main frame for populist strategies in Visegrad 4 states from 2009/2010 onwards. For Slovenia, the trend for populist and Eurosceptic parties is identical (see Chart 1 below). The first wave of populism (2004–2009) may be linked to the weakening of the conditionality mechanisms following EU accession but, since the gains related with EU membership were still high, Eurosceptic success at the elections was only marginal. Conversely, the second wave of populism (2009–2011) revealed strong Eurosceptic success in all CEE states, except Slovenia. One can link this result to the global and European financial and economic crisis, along with the internal Eurosceptic dimension that saw the local political debate being redirected to the negative effects of EU membership.

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Chart 1: PARLIAMENTARY POPULIST AND EUROSCEPTIC PARTIES IN CEE STATES BY SHARE OF VOTES AT NATIONAL ELECTIONS

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Note: The red and blue lines for Slovenia are identical, but only the red lines are shown in the graph
Source: Lovec, 2019.

In this second wave, Eurosceptic standpoints increased proportionally more than the success of populist parties. This means populist parties were using Eurosceptic arguments. This was followed by a third wave of populism characterised by an increased share of populist and Eurosceptic parties (2013–2014 and thereafter). A series of challenges in the EU explain this: the specific Eurozone and banking crisis and the secondary recession, the Ukraine crisis, the Brexit referendum, and the migrant and refugee crisis. In

the next section, we analyse the concrete nature of Eurosceptic arguments, their internal and external dimensions and the three substantive claims (political, economic and ideological) relied on by populist parties in CEE EU member states.

Case studies

In order to answer our research questions, we analyse three case studies of Eurosceptic arguments being used during EU crises (eurozone, Ukraine, and migration) using comparable data (Tables 4, 5 and 6). We measure the following elements: 1) relevance of the EU crisis for domestic affairs (on a scale of 1-no impact to 5-high impact); 2) presence of populist framing of the EU crisis (Yes/No); 3) dimension of populist parties interest when applying Euroscepticism (internal/external); 4) a functional pretext or a substantive source of Euroscepticism (political, economic or ideological); and 5) domestic impact of the populist framing (the engagement of mainstream parties with respect to populist parties' Eurosceptic standpoints).

Eurozone crisis

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Slovenia was the first CEE EU member state to become a eurozone member (in 2007) and was strongly affected by the eurozone crisis. In 2011, the crisis led to the collapse of the centre-left government, followed by parliamentary elections. While some parties such as the newly emerged Positive Slovenia (*Pozitivna Slovenija* – PS) were critical of the EU's austerity programme and argued for a new economic policy (a new deal) that would create jobs for the people, most parties blamed those who went before them and were committed to implementing the structural reforms devised in Brussels. PS won the elections but was unable to form a government. Apart from this, more overt populists and Eurosceptics, such as the Slovenian National Party (*Slovenska nacionalna stranka* – SNS), actually failed to pass the parliamentary threshold for entry in 2011. Things changed at the 2014 elections when United Left (*Združena levica* – ZL), a party similar to Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain entered Parliament. However, the views of ZL kept it isolated. By 2014, Slovenia was able to stabilise its public finances through painful fiscal measures and the new centre-left coalition adopted a strong pro-EU approach. The new Finance Minister Dušan Mramor was very much in line with the eurozone policy and was specifically tough on his Syriza colleague from Greece, arguing "they should follow the Slovenian example".

In *Slovakia* – another eurozone member of CEE (since 2009), the bailout programme to help Greece resulted in early elections in 2010. The

government led by Robert Fico from Direction-Social Democracy (*Smer–sociálna demokracia* – SSD) supported the Slovak participation in the programme for strategic reasons (stability of the eurozone being considered crucial for Slovakia), while the right-wing partner Slovak National Party (*Slovenská národná strana* – SNS) withdrew its support. The subsequent election was won by SSD but the coalition was formed by right-wing parties that rejected Slovak participation in the programme (Slovakia was the sole eurozone member not to take part). The new Prime Minister Iveta Radičová explained this by saying that "the more responsible, poor countries should not be raising for less responsible, richer ones" and that the burden was taken on by taxpayers, not by creditors (Goliaš and Jurzyca, 2013). Simultaneously, the parliament agreed on the contribution to the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) but in 2011 refused to approve the expansion with Slovakia once again being the only eurozone country in opposition. This time, Radičova supported the proposal and tied the matter to a vote of confidence. Yet, MPs from the coalition liberal party Freedom and Solidarity (*Sloboda a Solidarita* – SaS) voted against using similar arguments as Radičová had done in 2010, resulting in the fall of the government. Later on, Fico's SSD provided the necessary votes to support the EFSF extension. During the election campaign, SNS built on the eurozone crisis and proposed leaving the EU (Pirro and van Kessel, 2017: 415). Nevertheless, the election was won by SSD which supported the deepening of the eurozone, including the transfer of additional powers to the EU (Euractiv, 2013: 2). The eurozone issue which led to a split among the right-wing parties (Pirro, 2015: 88) damaged their election outcome: SaS halved its result from 2010 and SNS fell short of the parliamentary threshold.

Of the non-eurozone CEE EU member states, *Hungary* has been affected the most by the global financial and eurozone crises. The 2010 election brought FIDESZ (Fidesz Magyar Polgári Szövetség – *Civic Alliance*) led by Victor Orban to power and the populist radical right Jobbik (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom – *Movement for a Better Hungary*) into opposition. In the foreign policy strategy published in 2011, the FIDESZ government stated its ambition to enter the eurozone "when ready", also stressing the need for support in the parliament and social acceptability. Starting from 2012, Jobbik engaged in fierce anti-EU rhetoric which, as noted by Pirro (2015: 84) and Pirro and van Kessel (2017: 412), did not specifically target monetary policy but was broad-based and oriented to the EU's interference in Hungary's own domestic affairs (e.g. economic policy, changing the constitution). The Orbán Government, already facing growing tensions with Brussels over domestic reforms, voiced some further reservations about entering the eurozone, such as the need to first reach convergence (90% of eurozone GDP), also referring to the issue of linking accountability

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with democratically elected authorities (Orbán, 2013 in Euractiv, 2013: 4–5). In 2013, Jobbik softened its position on Hungary's EU membership and started to blame globalisation in general and the Orban government (Pirro and van Kessel, 2017: 412).

The *Czech Republic* experienced political instability during the eurozone crisis whereas its economy was relatively stable. Havlik and Havlik (2018: 17–18) say the crisis "only exacerbated the tensions" regarding EMU membership. The government coalition in place between 2010 and 2012 was somewhat reserved regarding deeper integration, with the Czech Republic being one of the two countries that did not sign the Fiscal Compact in 2012. Yet, in the pre-election period, discussions concerning adopting the euro were mostly avoided by the parties (Havlik and Havlik, 2018: 27). ANO (Yes), a movement launched by the tycoon Andrej Babiš who won the subsequent election, did not hold any clear position on this issue (Euractiv, 2013: 2).

Poland was affected the least by the crisis. Its liberal government supported EMU membership and was worried about the practice of exclusive eurozone summits, trying to get a say by being recognised with the status of 'pre-in'. Moreover, the Polish government supported a more decisive inter-governmental approach and offered support by 'the East' to Germany in the new North-South split. This was famously pinpointed by Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski in his 2011 Berlin speech when he said "I fear German power less than I am beginning to fear German inactivity" (Handl and Paterson, 2013).

Table 4: FINDINGS OF POPULIST FRAMING, FUNCTIONAL PRETEXT AND PARTIES' RESPONSE TO THE EUROSCEPTIC STANCE OF POPULIST PARTIES IN CEE EU MEMBER STATES (CASE OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS)

	Domestic impact of the crisis (1–5)*	Populist framing	Dimension of populism	Functional pretext/ source of Euroscepticism	Domestic impact of the populist framing
Slovenia	5	Yes	external	Economic, political, ideological	Limited: Isolation
Slovakia	3	Yes	internal	Political, ideological	Temporary/ limited: Collaboration/ Ignorance
Hungary	4	Yes	external	Economic, political	Limited: Co-optation
Czech Republic	3	Yes	external	Ideological	None: Ignorance
Poland	2	No	/	/	/

(5 – strong impact ... 1 – no impact)
Source: own analysis.

To summarise, in Slovenia the economic crisis gave birth to the radical left that used a populist and Eurosceptic framing of the eurozone and entered parliament in 2014 but was effectively isolated by the mainstream parties. In Slovakia, the question of support for the eurozone solidarity mechanisms brought two subsequent coalitions down. At first, right-wing parties opposed to the EU policy were able to take over the government but became divided on the issue afterwards, finally losing the elections over SSD supporting the eurozone policy. In Hungary, the considerable effects of the crisis were largely used as a pretext for the growing state interference (in the economy), creating tensions with the EU. FIDESZ strengthened the Euroscepticism in the period in which Jobbik reacted by refocusing its populist rhetoric on globalisation and the government. In the Czech Republic, the eurozone crisis did not add much to the existing Euroscepticism and was largely avoided as a topic by political actors. In Poland, the eurozone crisis did not figure in populist framing.

The Ukrainian crisis

After the crisis in Ukraine broke out, *Slovenia* strongly supported Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). On his own initiative, Slovenian Foreign Minister Erjavec (from the coalition party DeSUS) offered the possibility of Slovenia mediating between Russia and the EU. Yet this was heavily criticised by the opposition as biased, undiplomatic and harmful for Slovenia (Delo, 2014). During early elections in July 2014, the Slovenian Democratic Party (Slovenska demokratska stranka – SDS) explicitly pointed to the Ukraine crisis as one of the most evident *faux pas* of Slovenian diplomacy (SDS, 2014). However, the newly appointed Slovenian government under Prime Minister Cerar's Modern Centre Party (Stranka modernega centra – SMC) and Foreign Minister Erjavec maintained political dialogue with Russia stressing, at several meetings with their Russian counterparts, their support for boosting cultural and economic cooperation between the countries (Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2015).

Although Slovenia's general trade exposure towards Russia is not high – in 2016 and 2017 exports accounted 3% of total Slovenian exports (SURS, 2017), the Chamber of Commerce and Industry kept voicing its discontent with the sanctions against Russia and called on the government to better articulate the interests of Slovenian business in foreign affairs. Further, some entrepreneurs openly claimed that Slovenia should actively strive to eliminate the sanctions (Malinovič, 2017). Some members of the Slovenian public and political opposition were also very critical when Russian President Putin visited Slovenia in July 2017. A survey by the Delo newspaper in March

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2017 revealed this polarisation – one-third of voters (mainly supporters of the opposition party SDS) was in favour of the sanctions, one-third of voters was against them, and one-third was unable to decide (Delo, 2016).

Similarly, a certain ambivalence in relations with Russia can be seen in *Slovakia*. The EU's economic sanctions were pointed out as being harmful to the Slovak economy (Benje, 2016: 197). Compared with other CEE countries, Slovak (and Hungarian) exports decreased the most between 2013 and 2015, i.e. by around 40% (Giumelli, 2017). Nevertheless, Slovak exports to Russia represented just 4% of Slovakia's total exports in 2013 (Duleba, 2015: 169). Slovakia backed the official EU response, joined the sanctions regime, and politically supported Ukraine. Moreover, it practically enabled Ukraine to import gas from Central Europe by providing a reverse flow (Mesežnikov and Gyárfášová, 2015: 146). However, Prime Minister Fico and his SSD party were critical of Ukraine by voicing their opposition to the sanctions and noting their negative impact on the Slovak economy (April 2012–March 2018). On the contrary, his successor, Andrej Kiska, elected as an independent candidate in June 2014, frequently spoke in favour of promoting common European decision-making and the need to maintain the sanctions against Russia (Zgut, Šimkovic, Kokoszczynski and Hendrych, 2017). Ambivalent reactions to the Russia–Ukraine crisis were also produced by Slovak media, NGOs and opinion leaders. Finally, in a survey performed already in 2011 Slovaks declared greater affinity for Russians than for Americans, thus being more trustful of them than the Czechs, Poles and Hungarians (Mesežnikov and Gyárfášová, 2015: 156).

Compared to other CEE states, *Hungary* has been amongst the most strongly affected by sanctions (along with Slovakia) (Giumelli, 2017); still, Russia's relevance for the Hungarian economy is quite limited. In 2013, it accounted for 3.1% of Hungary's total exports. Save for some agricultural producers, companies have not asked for government aid which, on the contrary, have been loud in criticising the sanctions and sought compensation from the EU (Ámon and Deák, 2016: 83–88).

Viktor Orbán, one of the most anti-Russian politicians in Hungary and Europe between 1988 and 2009, started to develop his policy on Russia in stark contrast to the previous criticism after taking office as prime minister in 2010. The Ukraine crisis touched on all three key foreign policy issues for his Fidesz party, i.e. Hungarian energy policy, trade policy (so-called Eastern Opening policy) and Hungarian minorities abroad. In March 2014, Prime Minister Orbán stressed the safety of all Hungarians, i.e. in Hungary and abroad in Transcarpathia (Ukraine), and declared that the abolition of the language law was unacceptable, a perspective that enjoyed significant domestic support (Feledy, 2016: 72, 75). As the crisis evolved, Orbán condemned the sanctions against Russia as Europe 'shooting itself in the foot'

and as being against Hungary's national interests (Győri, Hunyadi, Juhász and Krekó, 2016: 57). He has also been repeatedly meeting with Russian President Putin and broke the diplomatic isolation by inviting him to Budapest after the 2014 annexation of Crimea (DW, 2018). Nevertheless, the Hungarian government stopped short of vetoing the prolongation of the sanctions against Russia in Brussels.

Similarly, Jobbik, the party with initially the toughest anti-communist agenda upon its foundation in 2003, gradually turned pro-Russian. As the crisis in Ukraine unfolded, Jobbik initiated a clearly pro-Russian campaign and openly supported Russia and discredited Ukraine (Győri, Hunyadi, Juhász and Krekó, 2016: 60). Like Fidesz, the party MSZP, in power between 2002 and 2010, also based its policy towards Russia on pragmatism, although the party's stance changed in the course of the Ukrainian crisis. Initially, MSZP criticised the government for being inactive but, after Russia's annexation of Crimea, MSZP condemned Russia's actions, called for a united EU response, and supported the sanctions against Russia. It accused Orbán for remaining silent due to the Paks II deal that allegedly bound him to Putin (Győri, Hunyadi, Juhász and Krekó, 2016: 57–59).

The crisis in Ukraine has also been a politicised and salient issue in the *Czech Republic* despite the fact that in 2014 only 1.9% of Czech exports went to Russia. Further, most of the traditionally traded goods, except for the automobile industry, between the two countries have not been targeted by the sanctions (Kratochvil and Riháčková, 2016, 14).

The crisis in Ukraine began during a change in governments and, after initial hesitation, the new Czech government under the party ČSSD supported the imposing of sanctions on Russia. However, the new Foreign Minister Zaorálek and Prime Minister Sobotka occasionally revealed ambiguous views on Ukraine and Russia, e.g. on sanctions as not being "a solution" and of reconsidering the Eastern Partnership. As the then junior party, ANO, considered foreign policy issues as secondary, the third coalition member KDU-ČSL usually acted as a balancing force in foreign policy (Riháčková, 2016). Nevertheless, the process of forming the foreign policy stance on the Ukraine crisis was heavily disrupted by Czech President Miloš Zeman. He repeatedly opposed the sanctions and stressed they would damage Czech agriculture and industry (Zgut, Šimkovic, Kokoszczynski and Hendrych, 2017). After the government's initial ineffectiveness, the coalition parties gradually started to publicly attack and reject the president's statements and the Czech Republic eventually stabilised and came back to the EU mainstream. Later on, former Prime Minister Sobotka (ČSSD) and his successor Babiš (ANO) started to criticise the sanctions for being costly and failing to improve the situation in Ukraine: Nevertheless, Czech Republic continues to support the Minsk agreements and the prolongation of sanctions against Russia.

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Finally, *Poland*, having the strongest trade relations with Russia amongst the CEE states, recorded more than 5% of its total exports to Russia in 2013 and the Russian ban on EU food products hit the Polish agricultural sector severely. The Polish government, having already faced Russian embargos on Polish meat and vegetables in 2005 and 2011, swiftly reacted to the Russian countermeasures by launching intensive domestic and foreign promotional campaigns, thereby managing to partially mitigate the negative consequences (Wenerski and Speiser, 2016).

Polish politicians were actively engaged during Euromaidan from the very beginning and participated in demonstrations on Kyiv's Independence Square (Łada and Wenerski, 2016). Despite the consensus of the main political parties as well as in the media and society that Russia was responsible for escalating the crisis in Ukraine, the two biggest Polish parties, the then ruling Civic Platform (PO) and the opposition party Law and Justice (PiS), adopted diverging positions. The party PO tried to play an active, pro-Ukrainian role in resolving the crisis at the EU level, rejected giving any military support to Ukraine, and adopted a more "multilateralist" approach, while the then opposition party PiS adopted a more hawkish tone and consistently criticised PO for its insufficient response, the earlier reset policy with Russia between 2007 and 2010, and for following the mainstream Eastern policy of the EU. Some politicians, including President Duda, even suggested that PiS could have stopped the Russian annexation of Crimea. Finally, Polish society broadly supported a strong sanctions policy on Russia, namely only 6% of Poles supported any easing of the sanctions (Wenerski and Speiser, 2016: 132).

To sum up, in Slovenia the opposition party SDS criticised the conduct of an allegedly unbalanced foreign policy in order to attract public support, however the then ruling parties (SMC, DeSUS and SD) partially isolated and even ignored such a populist framing. No tangible results were achieved by SDS at the 2014 elections. In Slovakia, where public opinion reveals greater trust in Russia than in the other V4 countries, the government officially supported the EU's sanctions against Russia, although Slovak Prime Minister Fico (Smer-SD) expressed his doubts and criticised the sanctions. On the contrary, the current Slovak President Kiska argued in favour of common EU decision-making and the need for sanctions. Similarly, in Hungary, Prime Minister Orbán and his party Fidesz expressed their strong dissatisfaction with the sanctions. Yet, the opposition party MSZP, that had also conducted a pragmatic policy vis-à-vis Russia when leading the government (2002–2010), supported the sanctions and accused Orbán of being pro-Russian due to the energy deals. In the Czech Republic, the Ukrainian crisis was initially used as a pretext for setting internal power relations between the government and the office of president. Subsequently, prime ministers

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Sobotka (ČSSD) and later on Babiš (ANO) publicly expressed their dissatisfaction with the sanctions and their negative impact on the Czech economy. In Poland, the main political parties consensually agreed that Russia was responsible for having escalated the crisis in Ukraine. While the ruling PO party adopted a more multilateral approach, the opposition party PiS hawkishly criticised PO for its insufficient response to the crisis in Ukraine.

Table 5: FINDINGS OF POPULIST FRAMING, FUNCTIONAL PRETEXT AND PARTIES' RESPONSE TO THE EUROSCEPTIC STANCE OF POPULIST PARTIES IN CEE EU MEMBER STATES (CASE OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS)

	Domestic impact of the crisis (1–5)*	Populist framing	Dimension of populism	Functional pretext/ source of Euroscepticism	Domestic impact of the populist framing
Slovenia	2	Yes	Internal	Political Economic	Limited: Active isolation
Slovakia	4	Yes	External	Economic	None: ignorance
Hungary	4	Yes	External	Economic	Strong: Active collaboration
Czech Republic	3	Yes	Internal External	Political Economic	Strong: Active isolation Moderate: Active collaboration
Poland	4	Yes	Internal External	Political	Strong: Active collaboration

(5 – strong impact ... 1 – no impact)
Source: own analysis.

Migration crisis

From the beginning of the crisis in October 2015 until the Balkan route was closed in March 2016, *Slovenia* was required to register nearly half a million migrants (Vlada Republike Slovenije, 2016). At first, Hungary's decision to close the border and build a fence along the Slovenian border was heavily criticised by both the general public and the pro-EU centre-left government of Miro Cerar. But the government soon started to build technical barriers on its external borders with Croatia as well. Although the government coalition (SMC, Social Democrats and Desus) did not oppose the EU's relocation quotas and the decision by Germany and Austria to suspend the Dublin regulation, the chaotic transit of migrants from Croatia to Austria has strongly impacted public opinion to oppose immigration (Malešič, 2016: 960).

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Framing migration as a top security issue and a foremost failure of the government has been an opportunistic strategy used by opposition parties (mainly SDS and New Slovenia) in order to win more popular support. Despite being pro-European, they raised concerns over the consequences of the EU's temporary relocation scheme and proposed holding a referendum on limiting the settlement capacities. Its anti-immigration and anti-Muslim rhetoric can be considered as a broad introvert type of populism that was predominantly directed against the government and not the EU. The anti-migrant discourse within SDS radicalised after 2016 and became a central issue in the 2018 general election campaign. SDS won the most seats but fell short of a majority and was unable to form a ruling coalition. The only parties reaping any political benefit from the crisis were the populist, anti-migrant and Eurosceptic SNS that was able to return to parliament for the first since 2011; and the far-left ZL which openly opposed the EU's approach to migration. Although politically side-lined and isolated, ZL's anti-EU migration policy was one of the factors that contributed to its relative success at the 2018 elections.

Although *Slovakia* was relatively untouched by the migration wave (Dubeci, 2016), all political parties have been fiercely opposed to the EU's migration policy and echoed the populist-minded approaches of other Visegrad states by being anti-Muslim and opposing EU-imposed limitations on national sovereignty (Euractiv, 2018). Despite being pro-European, the SSD led-government vehemently rejected the mandatory quotas and filed a lawsuit (supported by Hungary and the Czech Republic) against the EU. This "double-edged strategy" (Juhasz, Molnar and Zgut, 2017: 26) of swinging between compliance with and outright opposition to the EU's migration policy dominated the 2016 general elections discourse and reflected the Slovak public's negative attitude to migration (Szomolanyi and Gal, 2016: 71). It was directed at raising more votes for the ruling SSD and a possible third term for Fico (Kral, 2016). Imitating the populist-nationalist and anti-migrant rhetoric of radical parties was perceived as the only viable strategy for remaining in power. Immediately after the elections, such harsh political rhetoric was downplayed. One reason was the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council during which the SSD-led government tried to be more constructive regarding the refugee quota issue (Juhasz, Molnar and Zgut, 2017: 26). It proposed a "flexible/effective solidarity" scheme allowing member states to choose their approach to solidarity and accepted several refugees in order to avoid the infringement procedure.

The political gains of such a populist-nationalist (anti-refugee) election campaign of the mainstream parties remain questionable. SSD mainly profited from the divisions between the opposition parties of the centre and centre-right – it won the elections, but lost more than 16% of votes. However,

such a campaign ultimately strengthened the Slovak radical parties and anti-immigration hardliners – the SNS, the populist right-wing extremist Our People's Party (*Naše Slovensko* – ĽSNS) and the populist party We are family (*Sme rodina*). Whereas after entering the government SNS abandoned its Islamophobic and anti-migrant populist language, L'SNS and We are family strengthened their anti-establishment profiles.

In *Hungary*, the ruling party FIDESZ of Viktor Orban has been on the defensive since 2014 due to several corruption scandals and government failures but managed to take advantage of the migration crisis as a political pretext to regain political control and eliminate all other issues from the public discourse (Euractiv, 2017a). By launching a radical anti-refugee communication campaign early in 2015, FIDESZ substantially increased its public support and effectively limited the manoeuvring room for other political parties, even the far-right Jobbik party. Using radical rhetoric, FIDESZ pursued the same strategy domestically (presenting itself "as the protector of the Hungarian nation") and internationally (acting as the "defender of European nations" against immigrants and the Brussels-elite) (Juhasz, Molnar and Zgut, 2015: 6–7). In October 2016, it even held a referendum against relocation quotas – although invalid for not reaching the threshold turnout, 98% of the votes cast were against refugee quotas (Karolewski and Benedikter, 2018: 48). FIDESZ's approach to the crisis has been motivated by both domestic political goals of increasing power, as well as by the ideology of Orbanism, i.e. by preferring an authoritarian state and order over liberal democracy and freedom. At the level of foreign policy, the strategy was to continuously reject cooperation both with and within the EU and to portray EU institutions as the main 'enemy' (together with George Soros and Soros-funded NGOs) (Juhasz, Molnar and Zgut, 2017: 20). At parliamentary elections held in 2018, such an approach paid off – FIDESZ won more than 49% of the votes and an absolute majority in parliament.

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On the contrary, the opposition on the left and also the far-right was forced into an unpopular, reactive role. All parties on the left opposed and condemned the government's anti-refugee and migration policy, pointing to its strategy of securitisation, by inflicting fear and hatred (Juhasz, Molnar and Zgut, 2015: 27). Only JOBBIK, the far-right populist party, held a similar position to FIDESZ. However, with little space to radicalise the government's approach, JOBBIK was unable to capitalise on the crisis at the 2018 elections.

Although the migration crisis brought almost no migrants to the *Czech Republic*, both mainstream and populist parties were opposed to the EU's approach to migration. Prior to 2017 elections, the loudest critics were Czech President Zeman and the leader of the ANO party Babiš. Both used xenophobic statements and stressed the economic burdens of unregulated

mass migration (Smolenova, 2017). Regarding the EU, Babiš has adopted a pragmatic 'cherry-picking approach' by opposing the quota system but stressing the importance of EU money (Frum, 2017). In addition, Czech far-right populist parties Dawn of direct democracy (*Úsvit přímé demokracie* – UDP) and then Liberty and Direct Democracy (*Svoboda a přímá demokracie* – SPD) have expressed the most extreme Islamophobic and anti-migration sentiments including nationalistic and fascist tendencies, focused heavily on an anti-EU narrative (Globsec, 2016).

The 2017 election confirmed the rise of anti-establishment and populist-right parties – ANO won with 29.6% of the vote and SPD finished fourth by taking almost 11% (Euractiv, 2017b). As the newly appointed prime minister, Babiš reaffirmed that the Czech Republic would not accept any refugees despite a legal case and possible sanctions by the European Commission (ibid.).

Prior to the crisis peaking at the end of 2015, *Poland* experienced a conservative revolution in its parliamentary elections where the nationalist, right-wing PiS succeeded the pro-European PO and formed a one-party government. PO's Prime Minister Kopacz's acceptance of the EU relocation quota scheme in September 2015 and the perceived obligingness of PO to the EU-elite were some of the primary causes of PO losing the election and allowed PiS to capitalise alone on the growing popular discontent about the increasing arrival of migrants across Europe (Bachman, 2016: 8). In 2016, PiS withdrew its support for the quota scheme and started to radicalise its anti-immigration, anti-refugee and anti-EU rhetoric (Karolewski and Benedikter, 2018: 49). It used the crisis as a pretext for many of the popular concerns over the EU (free market failures and sovereignty concerns) and the former government's inability to deal with the crisis by stressing the possible social and cultural 'harms' of migrants. PiS also supported the Slovak lawsuit against the EU. After the crisis, the attitude of opposition parties (PO and the Polish People's Party) also changed towards opposing the "EU mandated top-down allocation of refugees" (Cienski, 2017). This anti-refugee discourse also strengthened other right-wing parties such as Kukiz'15, which also entered parliament in 2015 by winning almost 9% of the votes.

To summarise, in Slovenia the migration crisis was used by the opposition parties as a pretext for gaining domestic political power, albeit with varying success – it mostly benefited the populist-nationalist SNS (able to re-enter parliament) and the populist far-left ZL (increasing representation), but was not enough to allow the populist centre-right SDS to form a government. In Slovakia, the crisis strengthened the radical parties but allowed the pro-EU SSD to remain in power. While populist-nationalist, anti-migrant and anti-EU rhetoric was perceived to be the only viable strategy for political survival, this was downplayed after the 2016 elections and during and

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after the Slovak EU Council Presidency. In Hungary, the radical anti-refugee and anti-EU rhetoric of FIDESZ was used both domestically and internationally to gain power and openly oppose the EU's top-down regulation. In the Czech Republic, the migration crisis added to the existing anti-migration sentiments of all political parties, but did not reinforce Euroscepticism. In Poland, the migration crisis was chiefly used as a pretext for domestic political and ideological battles. Once in power, the nationalist, right-wing PiS also radicalised its anti-EU rhetoric.

Table 6: FINDINGS OF POPULIST FRAMING, FUNCTIONAL PRETEXT AND PARTIES' RESPONSE TO THE EUROSCEPTIC STANCE OF POPULIST PARTIES IN CEE EU MEMBER STATES (CASE OF MIGRATION CRISIS):

	Domestic impact of the crisis (1–5)*	Populist framing	Dimension of populism	Functional pretext/ source of Euroscepticism	Domestic impact of the populist framing
Slovenia	4	Yes	internal	political	Limited: Ignorance
Czech Republic	2	Yes	external, internal	political, economic	Strong: Co-optation?
Slovakia	2	Yes	external	political	Moderate: Co-optation
Hungary	5	Yes	external, internal	ideological, economic, political	Limited: Co-optation
Poland	2	Yes	internal, external	political, ideological	Strong: Isolation

(5 – strong impact ... 1 – no impact)
Source: own analysis.

Conclusion

Our study shows that multiple contexts have contributed to the rise of populism, including Eurosceptic standpoints in the CEE EU member states. The internal dimension of Euroscepticism in the CEE states grew after joining the EU mainly due to the opening up of the domestic politics discourse beyond only the positive expectations towards a more balanced discussion of EU membership effects. Framing the discourse as the national political elite against the general public was a common feature of populist parties and their election success. The external dimension of Euroscepticism succeeded due to the international and particularly the EU order facing several crises, which de-legitimised the praised European project. As the latter was a source of CEE states' ideological self-identification, the EU's failure to act

effectively in times of crises showed the possible asymmetrical effects on individual member states, creating an even stronger perception of the contrast between the elitist, big EU powers and the smaller, second-class CEE member states.

We finally compare the results of the three EU crises case studies. The eurozone crisis was particularly relevant domestically in Slovenia and Hungary but had a slightly to significantly lower impact in the other three states. In this respect, populist responses were present in all states, except Poland. In Slovenia and Hungary, where the crisis was very influential, the interest dimension of populism was external (critique of EU elite) and the prevailing areas of interest were economic and political – unlike in other states where the crisis did not have a large impact. No populist-framing-applying party was able to significantly improve its power position due to the efficient use of a variety of active and passive responses by other political parties.

The Ukrainian crisis was extremely relevant in the Visegrad states but achieved relatively low resonance in Slovenia. All states experienced a populist framing of the crisis. Two common patterns are: the parties in the Visegrad 4 states applied an external populist dimension whereas Slovenian parties did not, and all four small CEE states used the economic pretext for stoking Euroscepticism, while in Poland the political pretext prevailed. The domestic impact of populist framing shows that parties in all states but Slovakia applied an active strategy at both extremes: isolation (strongly in Slovenia and Czech Republic) and collaboration (moderately in Czech Republic and strongly in Poland). Yet, none of these strategies led to any success at elections.

In the migration crisis, the same two states as in the eurozone crisis stand out as being strongly affected (Hungary and Slovenia). The populist framing, however, was present in all states (unlike in the eurozone case). In all Visegrad 4 countries, the external dimension of populist Euroscepticism was present, and the internal dimension prevailed only in Slovenia. The political pretext for Euroscepticism prevails, but over both internal and external dimensions. Concerning the domestic impact of populist parties in the context of other parties' response strategies, no common pattern was established but the opposition parties were more successful than the parties in power (e.g. Slovakia). In this regard, Hungary serves as somewhat of an exception.

Overall, based on the three case studies we may conclude that the external dimension of populism (11 examples shown in Tables 4, 5 and 6) prevailed over the internal dimension (8), which shows the general discontent of CEE EU member states with their weak power position within the EU. Moreover, within the external dimension of populism, the economic pretext

of Euroscepticism (5) is balanced with the political (4) and the ideological is less present (2). With respect to the internal dimension, the political pretext is the strongest (7) with the economic and ideological being relatively disregarded (examples 1 and 2, respectively). A critical reflection on the application of the Pirro and Taggart (2018) typology of (mainstream) parties' responses to populist parties in CEE EU member states shows the limited usefulness of this model. The limitation stems from two facts; first, at the time of studying the effect of EU crises on Eurosceptic positioning, populist parties were already in power – leading the government and, second, many populist parties co-exist in the domestic political space.

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