

*Borbála Göncz*

## DELIBERATED OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES ON THE EU

### INTRODUCTION

A general lack of information and lack of interest about the EU is often mentioned both in public discourse and in scientific research<sup>1</sup>. This raises the question of a democratic deficit and the legitimacy of the EU amongst EU citizens.

The concept of “rational ignorance” (Downs, 1956) is particularly interesting regarding public opinion on the EU, as the EU is often perceived as a distant and complex bureaucratic entity accessible only through very abstract information which can be understood only by those with special cognitive skills (Inglehart, 1970). Being too distant and complex, people are less eager to make an effort to gather the necessary information in order to form elaborate opinions. Due to this fact, measured public opinion about the EU is more likely to be only superficial, liable to be unstable over time and be inconsistent with public opinion on other political issues related to the domestic political arena (Fishkin-Laslett, 2003).

The use of the deliberative polling method is thus a unique opportunity to see how opinions change after providing people with information and expert insight and making them discuss issues with other people. Through this procedure people are driven to rethink their prior judgments and form more grounded opinions.

Several deliberative polls have been conducted so far on the EU, including one held in Great Britain in 1995, an EU-wide one during the fall of 2007 and a national one in Hungary at the same time.

The first EU-wide deliberative poll (“Tomorrow’s Europe”<sup>2</sup>) also faced the technical challenges of multi-national deliberation in gathering 362 EU citizens from all over the EU in Brussels for a weekend. The main themes of this project were economic and social welfare in a global world and the role the EU should play. The main results of the weekend were that the level of knowledge of participants increased mainly due to the deliberation rather than the briefing material sent out prior to it. Opinions changed, especially amongst participants from the new member states. This suggests that the topic is still relatively new in the public sphere of these countries and people are less keen on expressing elaborate opinions, thus opinions may be more unstable and liable to change. Regarding the direction of opinion change it can be said that the respondents became more open to making compromises about social issues and became more aware of the importance of economic competitiveness.

<sup>1</sup> See for example Anderson, 1998

<sup>2</sup> Further details on the Tomorrow’s Europe project can be found at: <http://www.tomorrowseurope.eu/>

The Hungarian national deliberative poll<sup>3</sup> held on the subject of Hungary being an equivalent member state of the EU, and the scope of EU funds (such as investment in human resources or infrastructure) revealed that Hungarian attitudes towards the EU are quite ambivalent. After the deliberation process, attitudes were more positive and feelings of inferiority, or of Hungary being a member state of second order, diminished somewhat.

Thus the deliberative poll in Kaposvár and its area provided the opportunity to see how opinions change when people are exposed to information and are driven to discuss the theme of the EU. According to previous research, exploratory interviews and focus group discussions with inhabitants as well as local decision-makers and representatives of civil society in the region of Kaposvár, it was made clear that the problem generating the most public interest was the question of unemployment, a lack of workplaces and a lack of job security. The concept of the EU was rather distant to people; they were not very well informed about it despite the fact that several development projects and investments (of differing scales) financed by the EU had taken place recently in the area. However, EU issues related to funding and the role it can play in job creation (e.g. learning best practices, projects, aid and investments) was predicted to generate some interest.

In the present paper the questions of opinion and attitude changes about the EU, their consistency and the factors affecting them are addressed through a quantitative analysis of pre- and post-deliberation survey data. Several studies have been done where the different logics of support of the EU and general attitudes towards the integration process together with corresponding factors of influence have been analyzed. A contribution to these findings is not the primary aim of this article; instead, the opportunity to do research provided by this special methodology will be followed up.

In order to place the findings in their correct context, a qualitative content analysis of the small group discussions will be described prior to presentation of the quantitative part with the aim of presenting only a descriptive overview. Analysis of what was said during small group discussions is not a normal procedure while dealing with the results of a deliberative poll; however, from a sociological point of view it could be of interest, especially when dealing with the theme of the EU, which generates low public interest and for which the level of information is low. This way one can get a fuller picture of what people might have understood when answering survey questions on the EU.

Regarding the quantitative part of this paper, one specialty of the survey should be mentioned; namely that the data was collected through a self-administered process which makes the results more difficult to compare with other findings based on interviewer-administered survey data. This data collection method may also introduce another factor of uncertainty when it comes to analyzing non-crystallized opinions – which is probably the case when it comes to the theme of the EU.

## MAIN QUESTIONS AND APPROACH USED

As mentioned, the current article consists of two main approaches: a qualitative and a quantitative section. The qualitative part aims to provide a content analysis of the small group discussions which took place during the deliberative weekend on the theme of the EU and its employment policy, in order to place the more substantive quantitative part of the analysis in context.

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<sup>3</sup> Further details on “Európai Eszme-csere” can be found at: [http://ec.europa.eu/magyarorszag/news/20071018\\_europai\\_eszme\\_csere\\_oktober13\\_bu.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/magyarorszag/news/20071018_europai_eszme_csere_oktober13_bu.htm) (downloaded: 29/12/2008)

After a description of the changes which occurred in opinions and attitudes towards the EU, the main questions addressed in the second, quantitative part of the analysis are: (1) whether the direction of the opinion change is consistent through the measured dimensions; and, (2) what are the factors affecting the opinion changes? Regarding the first question it is supposed that if any changes occurred in opinions and attitudes they should be consistent over the different elements of the EU measured in our survey. In regard to the second question, analysis is based on a model suggested by Luskin-Fishkin-Iyengar (2004) aimed at testing the effect of knowledge gain and small group discussions on opinion and attitude changes.

There are two main approaches to analyzing deliberative poll results: as a first step it is interesting to see how representative the sample which attended the deliberative weekend – the participants of the event – was (in terms of demographics, opinions and attitudes) when compared to non-participants. In a second step, the opinion changes among the participants of the deliberative weekend can be analyzed. The focus of the current paper is on opinion and attitude changes, thus only the pre- and post-deliberation survey answers of the participants of the deliberative weekend (n=108) will be taken into account and the majority of the initial representative survey (n=1514) will not be dealt with. However, initial differences between participants and non-participants regarding attitudes towards the EU can be seen. It is worth noting that, on the one hand, participants claimed to be more attached to Europe and were also more likely to delegate unemployment issues to the EU level than non-participants. On the other hand, this will was not manifested in a material way as they indicated that they would allocate less tax money at the EU level than those who did not participate at the event.

## THE EU AND ITS DIFFERENT ASPECTS DISCUSSED

This part of the article will present which aspects of the EU were dealt with during the small group discussions at the Kaposvár deliberative poll. These small group discussions were one and a half hours long during the second day of the weekend event and led to questions designed to be answered by experts during the plenary session which followed. There were 15 groups with 6-9 participants each, from which 9 are analyzed in the following sections for technical reasons<sup>4</sup>.

It is important to note that the role of small group discussions during a deliberative poll is different from an ordinary focus group discussion<sup>5</sup> both in terms of the aim of the discussion and the form and rules of the moderation. In the current case there was no guideline that all moderators had to follow – participants could discuss any aspects of the question which meant that comparison of groups is problematic. Thus, in the following, only a description of the topics discussed will be presented.

Participants mainly referred to the EU as “them” rather than “us”. The EU was rather perceived to be a wealthier, richer and more developed entity with no differentiation according to country. The term ‘EU’ was mainly used as a synonym of wealth and economic development although in some cases it came up that the EU itself is currently facing economic problems. Differentiation by country was rarely done – Germany and Ireland were the most often mentioned countries; the former came up when talking about personal work experience and the latter because of the results of the recent referendum on the EU constitution and because of their success story in terms of their use of EU financial support. Differences by countries were mainly mentioned with regard to the new member states of Eastern and Central Europe – in this case more countries

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<sup>4</sup> Eight of these groups were audio-recorded and one of them was video-taped.

<sup>5</sup> Focus group discussion is a widely-used research technique in sociology and other social sciences.

were mentioned separately (especially Slovakia and Poland) due to direct comparisons in terms of economic performance. During discussions respondents sometimes compared the EU to the Habsburg Monarchy or the Soviet Union. In the former case foreign policy, financial policy and the army were centralized; other policies were dealt with at country level.

There was a general dissatisfaction with information or education on the EU. Some participants admitted that they did not feel informed enough about EU-related issues; however, most participants blamed decision-makers for failing in their duty to inform the public. In nearly all of the groups there were participants who were more knowledgeable about the topic than others. Some participants knew the exact date of Hungary's accession to the EU, the date of the launch of the Euro or about the Irish referendum. However, in all of the groups they used the briefing material provided during discussions, especially those sections where the aims of the Lisbon treaty were mentioned and there were details on Hungarian-specific items, such as terms of employment and on EU financial support spent so far.

The aspect of the EU most discussed during small group discussions was EU funding. All of the groups said that people cannot really see the results of these investments, which generates general discontentment and a "where did all the money disappear?" attitude. Participants also mentioned that these funds were misdirected; investments should have been used for different purposes – participants usually preferred investments in infrastructure rather than investments in human resources, but they also mentioned that concrete investments were of a secondary order, especially those aimed at increasing quality of life in towns (e.g. construction of fountains or restoration works). Regarding the usage of EU funds, concerns of corruption came up several times, together with desire for increased control, as the following quote shows:

*"...the distribution of EU funding, at our level it is not transparent. Things are done in secret" (group 3)*

Beside corruption, difficulties in accessing funds was also mentioned, referring to the very complex and bureaucratic rules for application and the need for proper resources which both make the process of application very difficult, or even impossible for some settlements or enterprises. In some of the groups it was suggested that these funds be assigned based on need. In general, the effects of these EU projects were perceived to be too slow – participants were quite dissatisfied with the speed that Hungary is catching up with the EU in terms of economic development and standard of living.

The difference between wages was also a widely-discussed topic – especially in reference to the differences between the most developed countries of the EU vs. Hungary. Some expressed the wish that this should be regulated to become more equal, while some mentioned that in those (richer) countries the costs of living are also higher. On the other hand, some mentioned that prices sometimes are even lower than in Hungary. The differences in wages in two cases came up in a gender context where the differences between the wages of men and women were mentioned as a problem to be resolved. In this context the EU appeared as the entity able to initiate solutions to the problem.

Hungary's EU membership was in general perceived to be a positive thing, or at least something that was necessary. According to a macro-level approach it was mentioned that the ability to take advantage of being a member depended on a country's preparedness. Where Hungary was not performing well, at the individual level it was mentioned that membership is rather advantageous for a selected few (younger generations, the more highly-educated and those who can work abroad). In several groups there were no illusions about the purpose of Hungary's EU membership:

*"...the EU didn't need our membership to help us, but because they needed new markets" (group 2)*

Negative attitudes concerning increased prices after the accession were present only in some groups.

In terms of EU regulation and the level of integration, both a federal and an intergovernmental conception of the EU were present. Leaving power in the hands of the member states was the preferred general attitude. The reasoning given was the economic (and other) differences between countries, and the fact that policy issues should be dealt with at the level where there is most knowledge on the issue – individual state level. The following quote illustrates this:

*“...beautiful is the EU, beautiful is the Euro, but they shouldn't decide above our heads in Brussels – we are not children” (group 5)*

On the other hand, the central role the EU should play in globalization came up. It was understood that this issue couldn't be faced by individual countries - collaboration is needed. The importance of the EU as a central actor was mentioned regarding the need to set up a framework for employment policy and sanctions – and interestingly this view was also expressed using the child-family metaphor, just as in the previous case:

*“...the EU should decide on these things; after all, the final word is from the head of the family and it is not the children who decide” (group 5)*

The question of regulation had specific application to agriculture. In this special policy issue EU regulation and the quotas and standards it has established were clearly perceived as being disadvantageous to Hungary. Participants saw contradictions between the principles of the free market and EU rules in this respect. A lot of discussion took place about Hungarian agriculture and the closing-down of agricultural co-operatives after the regime change.

Besides the problems which were directly linked to the EU, several other issues came up which were rather rooted in the domestic political arena. Mistrust of the current Hungarian political elite was articulated in all of the groups, and in some cases came up together with the feeling that Hungary's interests were being ill-represented in the EU by Hungarian politicians. Besides these attitudes of “external control” – blaming the government and politicians and waiting for solutions from above or outside – there was another attitude taken about “internal control”; participants mentioned that there was a change needed in people's attitudes in Hungary. Hungarian people should change their habits in order to be able to take advantage of Hungary's EU membership, and there should be collaboration and cooperation between them rather than division along political lines. Attitudes towards greater individual responsibility to find oneself a job can be included here.

The question of migration appeared to be more linked to the main theme of the EU and its employment policy than the issues mentioned so far. Besides very positive attitudes about working abroad for higher salaries, gaining new experience and learning new languages, there were other more realistic voices present which mentioned that workers are often illegally employed in the more developed member states. The EU and the Schengen area were perceived very positively as being helpful to migration; however, migration itself on the one hand was seen as an opportunity for better living but on the other it was mentioned that it was harmful for the family - migrating people tend to have less children who then live a more hectic life themselves. Thus some suggested that unemployment problems should be solved locally by creating jobs at the local level so as people do not have to move – or at least they have the opportunity to choose where to work, so migration does not become the only option. This attitude is very interesting considering the fact that the rate of migration of Hungarian people is one of the lowest among new member states. The other negative aspect of migration mentioned was that good and experienced national experts were leaving the country, creating a shortage.

According to the topics discussed during the small group discussions, most of the questions for the plenary session (9 out of 15) were about EU funds (on what they have been spent and on

the correct control of their usage). The other questions concerned the availability of information, the equality of wages, the effect of the Irish referendum on the integration process and on the increasing role of nations and better representation of their interests.

Four experts were invited to the plenary session to answer these questions; a local expert on EU projects, the vice-director of the National Development Agency in charge of the application and implementation of the EU projects, an EU expert from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and a researcher on the subject of labor migration. This way the experts were well-chosen to provide adequate and professional answers to the questions asked.

Regarding the answers given on the subject of providing information, experts drew the attention to the very technical language used in the EU just as the huge quantity of information for which only the internet could offer enough space. The internet as the main source of information was mentioned several times, which led each time to either public laughter or applause, which was not necessarily negative but rather ironically meant. As for financial support and the complicated tendering process, it was said that all that is needed is that the process should be learned in order to be able to take advantage of this opportunity. It was also mentioned that these funds are not aid but rather financial support assigned based on efficacy, competitiveness and economic return (although there is some aid designated for the least-advantaged regions). As for the issue of transparency and control, it was explained that these checks already exist based on very bureaucratic and accurate processes – but they are mainly designed to monitor the correct implementation of funds rather than the real necessity of funding and the long-term results of a project. As for the assignment of funding, the responsibility of the local government was emphasized by experts who mentioned that it is at this level where the economic development strategy for the settlements is decided.

Experts also highlighted the fact that equal wages across the EU are not possible due to different levels of efficiency and performance of manpower, and that wages are established through the market. The principle of equal wages for equal work should be understood as meaning equal wages within the same work environment. On the other hand, the EU plays a major role when it comes to the acceptance of qualifications and cooperation between the welfare systems of the member states (e.g. health and pension issues).

As for disillusionment with the accession of Hungary to the EU, experts mentioned that prior expectations were maybe not realistic and that it was up to Hungary to take advantage of the accession.

Relating to later parts of this article where attitudes and opinions towards the EU are analyzed through answers given to survey questions, it can be said that nearly all of the survey questions used in the analysis came up in some way during the discussions. Only the topics of tax redistribution and the European unification weren't addressed. This indicates that these small group sessions generated relevant deliberation of the themes addressed in the questionnaire. Thus these discussions could have made participants reconsider or elaborate their opinions on the matter.

## OPINION AND ATTITUDE CHANGES REGARDING THE EU AND EUROPE

The main purpose of a deliberative poll is to produce informed public opinion. Knowledge regarding the EU increased somewhat according to the survey results – the initial 22% of people who knew the correct unemployment rate at the EU level rose to 28% after the deliberation. When taking into account the subjective feeling of being better informed, nearly half of the people (44%) expressed (by answering 10 on a 0-10 scale) that their factual knowledge on the EU had improved a lot.

Regarding changes in opinion and attitudes towards the EU, two main tendencies can be noticed – one of them a positive change in several aspects, the other a growing uncertainty in other aspects.

*Table 1 – Opinions on European unification*

0-10 scale %	Unification has gone too far (0-4)	Exactly in the middle (5)	Unification should be pushed further (6-10)	No opinion	Avg* (0-10)
Before deliberation	22,2	31,5	35,2	11,1	5,6
After deliberation	8,3	46,3	35,2	10,2	6,4

\* significant change in average ( $t=-2,673$ ,  $p<0,01$ )

A positive change occurred in terms of the perception of the unification process taking place within the EU - as significantly fewer people claimed that it had gone too far after the deliberation than before (*see table 1*) and rather placed themselves right in the center of the two opinions.

A positive change was also experienced regarding taxes allocated to the EU level. Before the deliberation, 9 HUF from 100 HUF of taxes paid would have been allocated by the participants to the EU level, a number which rose to 21 HUF after the event. Although both numbers well exceed the actual rate of tax money delegated to the EU level, the tendency suggests a growth in trust in the EU in terms of efficiency and competence.

*Table 2 – Main goals of the EU*

0-10 scale %		Not important (0-4)	Exactly in the middle (5)	Extremely important (6-10)	No opinion	Avg* (0-10)
Making the European economy more competitive in world markets	Before deliberation	8,3	18,5	67,6	5,6	7,8
	After deliberation	1,9	9,3	79,6	9,3	8,9
Provide better social security for everyone	Before deliberation	6,5	5,6	86,1	1,9	8,7
	After deliberation	0,9	6,5	90,7	1,9	9,3

\* significant change in average ( $t=-3,683$ ,  $p<0,01$ ) and ( $t=-1,914$ ,  $p<0,1$ )

As for the main goals of the EU, there was growing enthusiasm regarding both aspects tested. Interestingly, both the economic competitiveness dimension and the solidarity option appeared to be more attractive to people after the deliberation (*see table 2*). In these results we can see the same parallel tendencies as at the overall level of the results of the deliberative poll, namely that attitudes favoring economic openness and competitiveness both in general terms and related to the labor market co-exist with a growing solidarity towards people in difficult social situations.

This parallel phenomenon at the overall level can be explained by the growing level of information and expert insight which might have had a positive effect towards favoring the free market, whilst small group discussions and direct contact with people in difficult situations might have fed the feeling of solidarity. This explanation might apply to the EU too. On the other hand it has to be noted that no change occurred when it came to the concrete question of at what level unemployment issues should be dealt with – the rate of people preferring to delegate this issue to the EU remained unchanged, whilst there was a slight positive change towards the local level. However, as previously stated, participants of the event already rated the EU level as being more important than non-participants.

A positive change occurred in terms of the perception of Hungary's EU-membership – the rate of people thinking Hungary had benefited overall rose from one third to a half with just a small number of people moving in the other direction (5.6%) (see table 3).

Table 3 – Perception of Hungary's membership

„Taking everything into consideration, would you say that Hungary has, on balance, benefited or not from being a member of the EU?“ (%)		Before deliberation			
		Has benefited	Has not benefited	No opinion	Total
After deliberation	Has benefited	25,9	18,5	9,3	53,7
	Has not benefited	5,6	22,2	3,7	31,5
	No opinion	1,9	7,4	5,6	14,8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>33,3</b>	<b>48,1</b>	<b>18,5</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Besides the above-mentioned positive changes a growing uncertainty was also experienced. The feeling that the EU has direct consequences on participant's lives decreased: 48% mentioned (after) that what happens at European level had important consequences on their lives against 64% before the deliberation (see table 4). This might be explained by the fact that opinions became more realistic after the deliberation, and especially so after the plenary sessions with experts. It has to be noted that during the plenary session on the EU the experts mentioned several times that most of the information on the EU is only available on the internet – which, according to public reaction appeared an unfamiliar tool to many. It was also made clear several times that when it comes to the responsibility of deciding on investments financed by EU funds, the local government also must take its share of responsibility, and thus not only the EU or the Hungarian government can be blamed – in contrast to the initial reaction to the question asked. Both factors could be behind the fact that people felt the EU was slightly more distant after the event.

When looking at other results it is confirmed that this feeling of personal distance was rather about attitudes becoming more realistic and not so much about the feeling that the EU does not care enough. If we look at table 5 it becomes clear that the proportion of people claiming that the EU does not care much about its citizens has decreased. The competence level attributed to the EU also increased somewhat.

Table 4 – Personal feelings of being concerned

„How far do you feel that what happens to Europe in general has important consequences for people like you or to you?“ (%)		Before deliberation					
		Not at all	Not very much	A fair amount	A great deal	Don't know	Total
After deliberation	Not at all	0,9	0,9	0,9	0,9	0,0	3,7
	Not very much	0,9	14,8	9,3	10,2	0,0	35,2
	A fair amount	0,0	8,3	18,5	9,3	1,9	38,0
	A great deal	0,9	2,8	6,5	0,0	0,0	10,2
	Don't know	0,9	0,9	3,7	4,6	2,8	13,0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3,7</b>	<b>27,8</b>	<b>38,9</b>	<b>25,0</b>	<b>4,6</b>	<b>100,0</b>

These tendencies also applied to opinions on Hungarian decision makers' care and level of competence which showed similar tendencies to those related to the EU. Beside the effect of



information and deliberation on EU-related issues there is another explanation that may apply, although it cannot be confirmed directly. Participants may attribute a higher level of competence and care to decision makers just because they feel more important and that they are being taken seriously by participating in the event. It has to be also noted that at the same time the tendency to having “no opinions” increased.

*Table 5 – Perception of Hungarian and EU decision-makers*

%		Disagree (1-2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Agree (4-5)	No opinion	Avg* (1-5)
Those who make decisions at the European Union level do not care much what people like me think	Before deliberation	13,0	23,1	61,1	2,8	3,8
	After deliberation	12,0	31,5	49,1	7,4	3,5
Those who make decisions at the European Union level are competent people who know what they are doing	Before deliberation	28,7	39,8	26,9	4,6	3,0
	After deliberation	14,8	42,6	34,3	8,3	3,2
Those who make decisions at the European Union level do not take enough account of the interests of Hungary	Before deliberation	22,2	27,8	46,3	3,7	3,4
	After deliberation	14,8	31,5	43,5	10,2	3,5

\* Change in average is significant only for the second statement ( $t = -1,989$ ,  $p < 0,05$ )

This tendency to an increasing “no opinion” and thus a tendency to increasing uncertainty can be also seen when it comes to symbolic attachment to different territorial levels. Uncertainty mostly concerns the feeling of attachment to Europe (*see table 6*). Interestingly, people who previously stated a very strong attachment are those ones who became uncertain. Again, this phenomenon can have similar roots as decreasing feelings of personal concern and can be proof that attitudes were becoming more realistic and replacing non-elaborated positive attitudes. People who previously had poorly-grounded opinions on the EU (those who felt that the EU provided some kind of “ultimate hope”) could have changed their opinion after the deliberation.

However, decreasing level of territorial attachment not only affected the European level but all territorial levels – the level least affected was the one closest to people – attachment to their own town or village.

However, when trying to explore the roots of this phenomenon of uncertainty both in terms of symbolic attachment and decreasing feelings of being concerned about one’s personal life we didn’t find statistical evidence that the two answers were connected - these two aspects seemed to be independent from each other in the answers given after the deliberation.

*Table 6 – Territorial attachment*

Attachment to ... (%)		Not attached at all	Not very attached	Somewhat attached	Very attached	No opinion
Own town/ village	Before deliberation	4,6	15,7	25,9	53,7	0,0
	After deliberation	4,6	8,3	34,3	47,2	5,6
Hungary	Before deliberation	1,9	2,8	22,2	71,3	1,9
	After deliberation	0,0	4,6	23,1	60,2	12,0
Europe	Before deliberation	1,9	5,6	25,9	63,0	3,7
	After deliberation	2,8	6,5	29,6	43,5	17,6

When looking at factors that affected the change of both of these aspects separately we find that the change wasn't affected by opinion changes on other aspects of the EU, nor by subjective or objective levels of knowledge-gain<sup>6</sup>. In the case of decreasing symbolic attachment it can be said that being unemployed negatively affected the level of attachment, whilst the feeling of personal concern was influenced by education level and was diminished especially amongst those having a degree. Regarding symbolic attachment, this confirms that attachment to Europe was, for some, a kind of an ultimate hope – an idea which was challenged during the deliberation process.

## CONSISTENCY OF OPINION AND ATTITUDE CHANGES

In the previous chapter the opinion and attitude changes were presented at an aggregated level: however, examination of opinion changes at the individual level is also necessary to have a clearer view about them. In this part of the analysis the consistency of opinion changes will be analyzed, supposing that a positive change in one aspect of the EU means a positive change in other aspects too.

In order to be able to see whether the changes in the different aspects were consistent or not, a set of “change” variables were prepared based on the differences in answers given before and after the deliberation to the same question<sup>7</sup>. These changes were then standardized to eliminate the bias arising from the use of different scales. Correlation analysis<sup>8</sup> was performed to see whether these changes were connected to each other (*see table 7*).

Interestingly, the changes in opinions and attitudes towards the EU were not strongly connected to each other, with some exceptions. There was a strong positive link between changes of opinions about whether decision makers of the EU and Hungary care about what people think and between the changes occurred in terms of symbolic attachment to Hungary and Europe.

There was a moderately strong positive link between changes in opinion in terms of European unification and the increasing of economic competitiveness as an important goal of the EU. The same applied in the change of opinions related to European unification and to Hungary's EU membership being advantageous, where there was moderate positive correlation with perception that EU and Hungary's decision makers were competent.

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6 Two regression analyses were performed. In both cases the dependent variables were the individual changes in the answers given before and after the deliberation. Demographics, changes in opinion questions, knowledge level and the effect of the small group discussion were included as explaining variables.

7 The “no opinion” category of the variables was recoded into the middle of the scale. This methodological choice (in contrast to one excluding these answers from the analysis) was done in order to not lose respondents as the base sample size was already low (n=108). This way of recoding affects the different variables to a different extent, although when creating “change” variables it can be justified and the meaning makes sense.

8 Spearman correlations were used for each pair of variables – being a non-parametric measure of correlation this method works without making any assumptions about a normal data distribution.

Table 7 – Correlations of opinion/ attitude changes (Spearman correlation coefficients)

Change before > > after deliberation	European unification should be strengthened	Tax share at EU level	Hungary has benefited from EU membership	Fighting unemployment should be dealt with at EU level	EU: Direct consequences on one's life	Decision makers in Hungary do care	Decision makers in the EU do care	Decision makers in Hungary are competent	Decision makers in the EU are competent	Decision makers in Hungary are competent	Decision makers in the EU do care	Hungary's interests are taken into account	Attachment to Hungary	Attachment to Europe	EU role: European economy more competitive
Tax share at EU level	0,082														
Hungary has benefited from EU membership	0,085	-0,089													
Fighting unemployment should be dealt with at EU level	0,144	0,067	0,000												
EU: Direct consequences on one's life	0,057	0,064	0,070	-0,112											
Decision makers in Hungary do care	0,021	-0,137	0,039	0,034	0,049										
Decision makers in the EU do care	0,096	0,029	0,102	0,076	0,087	,613(**)									
Decision makers in Hungary are competent	,222(*)	0,030	,240(*)	0,015	-0,071	-0,082	-0,151								
Decision makers in the EU are competent	,296(**)	0,068	,260(**)	0,044	0,097	-0,089	0,045	,508(**)							
Hungary's interests are taken into account	0,141	0,206	0,083	0,050	0,043	,423(**)	,352(**)	0,021	-0,080						
Attachment to Hungary	-0,058	-,271(*)	-0,046	-0,091	-0,162	0,049	0,061	0,008	0,070	-0,122					
Attachment to Europe	,192(*)	-0,158	0,154	-0,025	-0,071	0,018	0,160	0,045	0,121	0,052	,524(**)				
EU role: European economy more competitive	,279(**)	0,166	0,176	-0,010	0,016	-0,001	-0,005	0,113	0,087	0,129	0,042	,229(*)			
EU role: Provide better social security for everyone	0,129	0,071	0,063	-0,088	0,094	-0,114	-0,158	0,164	0,143	-0,044	0,108	0,111	,367(**)		

\*\* : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* : Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Changes in the perceptions of whether the EU and Hungary cared about what people thought and the EU taking into account Hungary's interests were also moderately correlated in a positive way. Just as mentioned previously, in people's minds the main roles of the EU (being economic competitiveness or solidarity) didn't appear as being contradictory to each other, as changes in this regard were also somewhat positively correlated.

Overall, it can be said that opinion and attitude changes were not connected to each other with the exception of the perception of both the EU and Hungary's political decision makers which seemed to affect other aspects. Despite the lack of correlation between the changes in most aspects it cannot be said that changes were not consistent as only one negative moderate connection could be found; namely that a stronger attachment to Hungary meant a drop in the tax that would be allocated to the EU level. In the empirical and theoretical literature on the subject national identity appears to be negatively connected to the support of the integration process only when the integration process is perceived as being a threat to a rather culturally-rooted national identity (e.g. Carey 2002). This may provide an explanation in this case. However, as changes in European and national attachment were positively connected and there was no significant connection between European attachment and changes occurring in European unification, there is no further evidence for this phenomenon.

Before stating that opinion changes were largely independent it is worth examining how these opinions were constructed before and after the deliberation. It can happen that opinions before the deliberation were of a different structure and were constructed in a different way than opinions after the deliberation – the eventual change of structure could be proof of a certain crystallizing of opinions and attitudes.

When looking at the correlations between the variables concerning the different aspects of the EU before and after the deliberation we can see some changes in the links between them (see table 8). Whilst the strong positive correlation between perceptions of European and Hungarian decision makers' care and competences persisted together with the positive link between attachment to Europe and to Hungary, there were changes in how the perception of the EU and its content varied before and after the deliberation. Whilst European unification and Hungary's EU membership perception were rather linked to the importance one attributed to economic competitiveness before the deliberation, after the deliberation European unification was positively linked to the share of taxes allocated to the EU level, which in turn was connected to the delegation of unemployment issues to the EU level.

Table 8 – Correlations of opinions/ attitudes before and after the deliberation (Spearman correlation coefficients)

	European unification should be strengthened		Tax share at EU level		Hungary has benefited from EU membership		EU: Direct consequences on one's life		Decision makers in Hungary do care		Decision makers in the EU do care		Decision makers in Hungary are competent		Decision makers in the EU are competent		Hungary's interests are taken into account		Attachment to Hungary		Attachment to Europe		EU role: European economy more competitive		
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After	
Tax share at EU level	-0.280(*)	0.348(**)																							
Hungary has benefited from EU membership	0.163	0.219(*)	0.033	-0.006																					
Fighting unemployment should be dealt with at EU level	-0.039	0.165	0.078	-0.389(**)	-0.065	-0.174																			
Decision makers in Hungary do care	-0.179	-0.126	-0.214	0.007	-0.166	-0.132	0.008	-0.156																	
Decision makers in the EU do care	-0.296(**)	-0.073	-0.007	0.045	-0.158	-0.086	0.041	-0.081	0.707(**)	0.585(**)															
Decision makers in Hungary are competent	0.096	0.185	-0.114	0.291(*)	0.088(**)	0.133	-0.205(*)	0.062	-0.084	-0.221(*)	-0.103	0.034													
Decision makers in the EU are competent	0.177	0.077	-0.026	0.284(*)	0.336(**)	0.132	-0.032	0.091	-0.120	-0.175	-0.271(**)	-0.212(*)	0.561(**)	0.666(**)											
Hungary's interests are taken into account	-0.071	-0.077	-0.260(*)	-0.010	-0.148	-0.107	-0.074	0.251(**)	0.564(**)	0.311(**)	-0.511(**)	0.183	-0.007	-0.172	0.0661	-0.094									
Attachment to Hungary	-0.050	-0.057	0.146	0.003	-0.039	-0.051	0.098	-0.069	-0.096	0.029	-0.147	0.002	-0.124	0.101	0.028	-0.276(**)	0.193(*)								
Attachment to Europe	0.099	0.101	0.138	0.192	0.037	0.217(*)	-0.197(*)	-0.056	-0.113	-0.009	-0.092	0.004	-0.029	0.084	0.001	-0.026	0.084	0.601(**)	0.539(**)						
EU role: European economy more competitive	0.387(**)	0.196(*)	0.113	0.087	0.359(**)	0.200(*)	0.046	-0.010	-0.103	-0.030	-0.142	0.097	0.173	0.125	0.031	0.256(**)	-0.166	-0.059	0.032	0.136	0.167				
EU role: Provide better social security for everyone	0.080	0.090	-0.023	0.158	0.167	-0.050	0.106	0.127	0.107	0.067	0.055	0.142	0.185	0.009	-0.211(*)	-0.080	0.115	-0.019	0.064	0.026	0.086	0.059	0.384(**)	0.334(**)	

\*\* : Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* : Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Another interesting change is that, while before the event the perception of Hungary's EU membership was connected to the perception of European and Hungarian decision makers being competent, after the deliberation these opinions were rather linked to European attachment – which is a move from a more utilitarian evaluation approach to a more symbolic or affective one.

## FACTORS AFFECTING OPINION CHANGE

In the previous chapter we saw how the different aspects of opinions and attitudes on the EU were structured before and after the deliberation. In this part the question is what factors affect the changes in opinions and attitudes. In order to analyze this, a linear regression model is used to test the effect of information and small group discussions on opinion and attitude changes. The model is inspired by a model suggested by Luskin-Fishkin-Iyengar (2004) but using some technical changes regarding the calculation of the variables included.

The dependent variable used is an opinion change index where the opinion changes are firstly calculated from the pre-and post deliberation answers to a set of relevant questions<sup>9</sup>. Then these variables are standardized in order to avoid any bias due to the different scales used in the questions and collated into one index. All the variables used for the aggregated index are positively correlated with it ( $r > 0.3$ ).

As for the explanatory variables, the change in objective knowledge and its subjective aspect were also taken into account. To measure the effect of the small group discussions another index was used which collated the initial individual distances from the small group average on the same set of questions as used for the dependent variable. Finally, changes on other attitude questions related to Hungary and demographics were also included as control variables.

When running separate regression models for the demographics (*see Model 1 in table 9*), this explains about 9% of variance, with only education having a significant effect on the opinion change. The negative coefficients show that all groups changed less significantly than those with only primary school or less education. This finding seems to be in line with the presupposition that more educated people have better grounded opinions in both general terms and with reference to the EU, thus their opinions change less. When it comes to opinion changes about other attitude questions, the model included “Hungarian-level” control variables for those changes concerning the EU (*see Model 2*). The regression model also explains about 10% of the variance of the dependent variable. While symbolic attachment to Hungary has no significant effect, both perception of care and competence of the decision makers of Hungary has a significant positive impact on the opinion changes related to the EU – probably due to the fact that these variables are strongly correlated with their EU pairs included in the aggregate index. As for the model which included information level and the effect of the small group discussions (*see Model*

<sup>9</sup> The questions used are:

- Opinions on European unification
- Opinion on how important it is to make European economy more competitive
- Opinion on how important it is to provide better social security for everyone
- Opinion on whether fighting against unemployment should be dealt with at EU level
- Feeling of how much influence what happens to Europe has on one's life
- Opinion on whether Hungary has, on balance, benefited from being a member of the EU
- Attachment to Europe
- Perception of whether EU decision makers care about what people think
- Perception of whether EU decision makers are competent
- Perception of whether EU decision makers take into account Hungary's interests
- The aggregate index shows a nearly normal distribution – thus the use of a linear regression model is suitable.

3) this one has the highest explanatory power (22%) mainly due to the effect of the small group discussions, as neither subjective nor objective measures of knowledge have a significant effect. Regarding the small group discussions they are shown to have a significant negative effect, which means that, in the case of opinions initially being below the small group average, there was a positive change, whilst in the case of opinions being over the average a negative change occurred. We can thus experience an approximation of opinions within the groups<sup>10</sup>. The influences of group dynamics are not that evident, as in several cases groups experience a polarization of opinions during the deliberative poll. In the scientific literature, approximation of opinions is said to occur in an environment where the identities of the participants are similar and there is solidarity towards each other as an affective factor (Sunstein 2003). According to our results, the latter was clearly present in Kaposvár.

*Table 9 – Linear regression models (standardized coefficients)*

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
(Constant)	.	*	.		.		.	*
Male	-0,03						-0,06	
Age	-0,10						-0,16	
Residence in Kaposvár	0,05						-0,09	
Internet user	0,12						0,01	
Activity: unemployed	-0,10						-0,11	
Activity: inactive	-0,13						-0,08	
Education: vocational	-0,26	**					-0,22	**
Education: high school	-0,28	**					-0,10	
Education: university	-0,25	*					-0,01	
Change: Attachment to Hungary			0,027				0,05	
Change: Decision makers in Hungary do care			0,224	**			0,45	***
Change: Decision makers in Hungary are competent			0,254	***			0,18	**
Information: positive change					0,07		0,08	
Information: negative change					0,10		0,04	
Subjective knowledge improvement					0,07		0,11	
Index - initial distance from group average					-0,47	***	-0,54	***
R Square	0,093		0,100		0,221		0,447	
Adjusted R Square	0,010		0,074		0,191		0,350	
N	108		108		108		108	

Reference categories: female, activity: employed/entrepreneur, education: primary school or less, information: no change  
 Dependent: Index – Opinion change

<sup>10</sup> This is also proved by looking at the proportion of the standard deviation explained by the deviation within groups (ANOVA) – the deviation within group accounts for a smaller part after the deliberation in case of all questions with the exception of opinions on economic competitiveness as an important role and the level at which fighting unemployment should be dealt. Whilst the between-group differences are not significant before the deliberation, there are significant differences between groups after the event in case of several questions.

By putting all variables in one single model their explanatory power increases to 45% and the previously-mentioned factors maintain their significant effect with the initial difference from the small group opinion average being the most important. The effect of the level of education changes slightly as only those people with vocational education significantly change (negatively) their opinion when compared to those with a primary school education level or less – the effect of having a high school diploma or a university degree disappears when other variables are included in the model.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper the results of the Kaposvár deliberative poll were presented with regard to opinions and attitudes about the EU at both the aggregated and the individual level, focusing only on the opinion changes amongst participants of the deliberative weekend. The main findings were that, whilst the level of knowledge regarding the EU increases both in an objective and a subjective way, opinion and attitude changes are barely consistent. Changes in opinion on different aspects of the EU are rather independent from each other, which raises the question whether the opinions and attitudes were randomly produced, due to the lack of information and interest on the issue. When looking for a structure in the opinions and attitudes we found that different aspects are differently connected to each other before and after the deliberation - which may be a sign of the crystallization of opinions. Crystallization of certain opinions can be also assumed based on what was discussed during the small group discussions – participants discussed nearly all aspects of the EU covered in the survey which may have lead to more grounded opinions in those aspects.

After deliberation, support for the EU and the integration process became more accentuated while uncertainty about its direct consequences on one's life arose, together with decreasing symbolic attachment to it. When looking for the factors behind these tendencies we find that demographic factors or knowledge-gain has no real effect on opinion changes which are mostly influenced by the small group discussions. On the other hand, uncertainty is not connected to opinion change and different factors of uncertainty and the rising proportion of “no opinions” are not consistent either. There may be several explanations for this rising uncertainty, such as either the effect of group dynamics during deliberations, but it can also be explained by the fact that initially very positive attitudes became closer to reality. These propositions still need to be proved, although some evidence can be found in what was said during the small group discussions and especially by experts during the plenary sessions.

This paper represents just a first attempt to analyze the results of a deliberative poll with a special emphasis paid to an issue which typically generates low public interest. Whether opinion changes regarding the EU show a similar pattern to changes in other themes and which factors influence the growing levels of participant uncertainty may be the subject of further discussion and analysis.



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