

Harmonization of EU Immigration Policy and Public Opinion About Immigration in West and East European Countries

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Abstract: Europeanization of the European Union (EU) Immigration policy is a widely debated topic in recent years. In this regard, achieving a common immigration policy has been one of the central aims of the EU. This paper analyzes the theories of European integration with regard to creating a harmonized immigration policy and argues that public opinion in member states will be the main determinant of the success of these efforts. Therefore, a detailed analysis of public attitudes towards immigration both in Western and the newly admitted Eastern countries is necessary. The results of my analysis show that West and East European public opinion significantly differs in terms of attitudes towards immigration which might prevent to achieve a harmonized EU immigration policy.

Keywords: EU, Integration, Immigration, Public Opinion

AB Göçmen Politikasının Uyumlaştırılması:

Doğu ve Batı Avrupa Temelinde Kamuoyunun Yaklaşımı

Öz: Avrupa Birliği'nin (AB) göçmen politikasının uyumlaştırılması son yıllarda geniş bir şekilde tartışılmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, ortak bir göçmen politikası belirlemek AB'nin temel hedeflerinden biri haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışma öncelikle Avrupa entegrasyonu ile alakalı teorileri incelemekte ve üye ülkelerdeki göçmenlere yönelik kamuoyunun ortak politika oluşturma yönündeki çabaların başarısının temel belirleyicisi olacağını ileri sürmektedir. Bu nedenle, AB'nin hem Batı Avrupalı hem de Doğu Avrupalı üye ülkelerindeki göçmenlere yönelik kamuoyunun detaylı bir şekilde incelenmesi son derece önemlidir. Analizin sonuçları Batı ve Doğu Avrupa'da göçmenlere yönelik kamuoyunun önemli ölçüde farklılaştığını ve bu durumun da AB göçmen politikasının uyumlaştırılması açısından ciddi sorunlara yol açabileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: AB, Entegrasyon, Göç, Kamuoyu

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I. Introduction

For the past 60 years, EU and the institutions that led to its establishment have affected the structure of politics in member countries. After transforming into a supranational organization with the Single European Act and Maastricht Treaty, the EU has become a multilevel polity in which European issues became important for the governments of member states, citizens, political parties and political groups in those states (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002: 879). As a result of this process issues about EU have gained great importance in the domestic politics of member countries and the political contestation inside the country increasingly engaged with EU

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Harmonization of EU Immigration Policy and Public Opinion About Immigration in West and East European Countries

dimension. Parties in the member states have revealed their positions about European integration, and EU issues have increasingly become salient. One of the most salient issues in EU agenda is immigration.

In Western Europe mass immigration began with little debate after the end of the Second World War. In fact the immigrants of that era were greatly welcomed and seen as a solution to the lack of manpower. Industries and governments in the Western Europe set up programs to recruit workers and use them in their post-war booming economy. Countries like Britain depended on their former colonial subjects. As Caldwell (2009:3) argues, Europe became a destination for immigrants as a result of the consensus among its political and commercial elites. However, these elites had made certain assumptions which turned out to be wrong as decades of immigration experience proved.

In the minds of the elites, these “guest-workers” would be few in number. They were coming to fill in short-term gaps in the labor force and therefore, they would stay temporarily and go back to their country when their service is no more needed. In other words, the elites thought they could hire young men from the sending countries who would work for limited time periods without expecting to be a citizen, benefit from welfare or bring in their families (Keeley, 2009:27).

In the following years these countries had to relax their laws regarding family reunification. Although most of the immigrant receiving countries made their immigration regime stricter, immigrant population continued to grow due to family unification. Also, the established networks reduced the cost of migration. As an inevitable result of this trend, immigration issue gained sociological and public policy aspects in addition to its economic dimension. It is a fact that immigration is unlikely to decrease in the near future. The declining fertility rates and the demand for cheap labor force in the industrial democracies provide the “pull” factors that lead to international migration whereas the economic problems and socio-political instability in the less developed countries constitute the necessary “push” factors (Dancygier, 2010:3). Aside from the continuing migration flows, millions of settled immigrants are becoming a part of their host society which means that immigration is bound to have a permanent effect on the political systems and the social fabrics of the receiving states (Dancygier, 2010:3).

Immigration has long been in the agenda of EU. According to Eurostat population survey birth rates are decreasing and life expectancy is increasing. Considering the increasing life expectancy, and decreasing birth rate (Eurostat 2016), West European countries seem to be doomed to rely on immigrant labor force to sustain their economic wealth. On the other hand, it is a fact that there is a growing hostility against immigrants. Extreme right wing parties have shown important

success by using anti-immigrant feelings. This dilemma brings about the problem of balancing the need of immigrant work-force with the public opinion.

As different scholars argued (Meguid, 2005; Bale, 2003) the acceptance of (or opposition to) the rhetoric used by the extreme right wing parties made the issue of immigration more salient, and to some extent the positions of the right wing parties were justified and acquitted of being extreme. Another factor that makes immigration crucial for EU is its importance in terms of the functioning of the single market. In this regard, immigration is considered as an important and salient political issue in the EU, both because of its influence on electoral outcomes and its necessity for single market (Givens and Luedtke, 2004:145).

In this paper, I first explain the theories regarding the harmonization -(the terms harmonization, supranationalization and Europeanization of the immigration policy refer to the same concept and are used interchangeably)- of the EU immigration policy, and then test the attitudes towards immigrants in order to see whether there is a different pattern in East and West Europe which might hamper the efforts to reach a more harmonized EU immigration policy. The paper proceeds as follows: The first section reviews the literature on the harmonization of EU immigration policy as well as the theories regarding attitudes towards immigration. The next section tests the theories of attitudes towards immigration and try to see whether East and West European member countries introduce different patterns, and the last section will conclude by mentioning the policy implications of these results.

II. The Quest for A Common Immigration Policy

The Schengen Treaty, which provides the basis of freedom of movement, was signed in 1985 and along with the subsequent The Schengen Convention in 1990 it lifted the borders between the participating countries. As The Amsterdam Treaty came into force in 1999, the Schengen cooperation was integrated into the EU legal and institutional framework and a protocol attached to the Treaty of Amsterdam incorporated the developments made in the intergovernmental framework into the legal and institutional framework of the EU. Today, over 400 million people live in the Schengen area, and it covers 22 EU Member States plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. The harmonization of free movement means that it is governed by the European Commission and Parliament, under the legal jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice (Givens and Luedtke, 2004:146).

The harmonization of the European immigration has been on the agenda of the EU in recent years. Many scholars have introduced the policies on internal security, national defense and immigration, as national states' own policy domain and as areas where integration was least likely to occur (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970: 263). Until recent trend towards supra-nationalization, immigration policies

Harmonization of EU Immigration Policy and Public Opinion About Immigration in West and East European Countries

have been widely remained under the control of national states (Ette and Faist, 2007: 6). The harmonization of the EU immigration policy requires a common policy for EU's external borders and for third-country nationals who are legal residents but not nationals of any member state. (Givens and Luedtke, 2004:146). Any third-country national can enter the Schengen area without border controls once he is admitted to any member state. Therefore immigration is becoming a common area on which member states have conflicting costs and benefits. Many scholars (see for example Geddes, 2003; Givens and Luedtke, 2004) argue that despite the increasing attempts of cooperation, there are still some aspects of the EU immigration policy that have not been harmonized. This fact brings about the question: "What accounts for the variance among member countries in terms of accepting a harmonized immigration policy?"

Looking at the literature on Europeanization of immigration policy, one can spot the clear divide between the neo-functional and intergovernmental theories of European integration. Neo-Functionalist approach which is founded by Ernst Haas argues that there is a spillover effect between policy areas and initial decisions taken by a government in one area will create pressures for extending the authority to other areas. As a result, the neo-functionalists argued that sectoral integration would lead to "unintended consequences" by promoting further integration (Pollack, 2005). According to this theory, the construction of a single market with the right of free-movement of goods and individuals led to additional regulations to maintain public order across the EU (Ette and Faist, 2007: 7).

The second view on the European integration on immigration policy focuses on state level interactions and takes an intergovernmental perspective. Liberal Intergovernmentalism which was developed by Andrew Moravscik as a critic to neo-functionalism argued that EC can be best explained as an international regime for policy co-ordination (Moravscik, 1993). The best way to explain this policy coordination is to use the sequential analysis of national preference formation and intergovernmental strategic interaction. In this regard, liberal inter-governmentalism rests on three pillars: the assumption of rational state behavior, a liberal theory of national preference assumption, and an inter-governmentalist analysis of interstate negotiation (Moravscik, 1993:480). In a nutshell, the liberal intergovernmentalist approach has two stages. In the first stage, national interests are determined in state level by the constraints and opportunities which are results of economic interdependence. At state level the national government will decide in favor of the actors that are more powerful. After the decision is made at the national level and the best interest of the country is determined, the inter-state bargaining stage will follow. In this stage, *the outcomes of the intergovernmental negotiations are determined by the bargaining power of the states and the functional incentives for*

institutionalization created by high transaction costs and the desire to control the domestic agendas (Moravcsik, 1993:517). Here, the game starts at national level and the nation state has the power to manage international immigration and control the national territory, and it will decide the level of harmonization based on national incentives and then negotiate according to its bargaining power.

Intergovernmentalist approach also differs in itself. The first view argues that growing international migration led to the convergence of national preferences and established a base for cooperation and nation states became more induced to collaborate to reduce the transaction costs (Ette and Faist, 2007; Moravcsik 1993). According to the second perspective, the domestic political constraints are the main determinants of the supranational cooperation. More specifically, factors such as public opinion, the size of ethnic groups, and the economic situation of the country are claimed to have led to the loss of control over the immigration agenda (Freeman 1995; Lahav 2004). From this perspective the harmonization of immigration policy gives the politicians and bureaucrats the chance to put the blame on EU and avoid responsibility as well as possible electoral punishments (Guiraudon, 2003).

So far, I have mentioned the factors behind the harmonization of the EU immigration policy and the theories explaining this process. Although EU emerged as an elite project, it is impossible to ignore the role of public considering the increasing role of European Parliament in the decision-making process. Scholars also argue that it is the national resistance that led immigration harmonization to lag behind other EU policy areas (Moravcsik, 1993, Givens and Luedtke, 2004), and they show that EU immigration policymaking has a bottom-up structure in that institutions regarding immigration policy arise from *domestic politics and national immigration policies* (Givens and Luedtke, 2004).

In this regard, in order to understand the new politics of immigration and the efforts to harmonize the EU immigration policy, we need to focus on the roots of the phenomenon and explore the public opinion in EU countries. Therefore, in the next section I will empirically test the “rational”, “symbolic” and “informational” theories of attitudes towards immigration in Europe. Although there is a great volume of studies that focused on West Europe, there has been little attention to East European countries. To fill this gap, I analyze the newly admitted Eastern members of EU along with the West European members and compare the validity of the above theories for each set of countries.

Theories of Attitudes towards Immigration

The literature (Citrin et. al. 1997, Gurr, 1970; Olzak 1992) developed two explanations regarding attitudes towards immigration. These two explanations introduce interests and cultural identity as main sources of attitudes towards

Harmonization of EU Immigration Policy and Public Opinion About Immigration in West and East European Countries

immigration. In both theories, the prerequisite of opposition to immigration is a sense of threat perceived from the immigrants.

Economic Interests

According to the interest based theories, the source of opposition against immigrants stems from the ethnic competition over scarce resources. Olzak (1992) for example argued that historically, fluctuations in anti-immigrant sentiment in the US have usually come after great economic downturns when there had been an increased tendency among politicians to put the blame on immigrant workers for unemployment and decrease in wages. Deprivation theory (Gurr, 1970) that focuses on the impact of group comparisons on discontent, point to the general expectation that at the individual level, economic threat, drives opposition against immigrants (Citrin et. al. 1997).

People might feel threatened in different ways. It is possible to observe opposition due to direct competition in the workforce as well as opposition due to a conceived threat in terms of acquiring less government benefits. Citrin *et al.* provide a useful set of sub-theories regarding the opposition towards immigration. To achieve a more comprehensive test of economic interest model, the authors examine the “impacts of the individual's financial resources, perceived economic prospects, labor market situation, and fiscal concerns in order to provide a more comprehensive test of the “economic” model of opinions about immigration” (1997:859). I tease out the economic interest theory and use their classification and hypotheses as long as my data allows me.

Resources: According to this hypothesis people who are having financial problems, who are more insecure about their future, and who are economically disadvantaged should be more likely to oppose immigration (Citrin et. al., 1997: 860).

Labor market competition: According to the this hypothesis, perceived threat of job loss which is determined by factors such as occupation, unemployment, or anxiety about one’s job security, is one of the most significant sources of opposition against immigration (Citrin et. al., 1997: 860).

Tax burden: According to a “tax burden” hypothesis, if people have negative ideas about the impact of immigrants on government benefits, they will be more likely to oppose to immigration.

Now based on these theories we can examine several hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *The economic health of a country will have a direct impact on the attitudes towards immigration. People who are experiencing greater hardships such as unemployment will be more opposed to immigration.*

Hypothesis 2: *Negative assessments of the economy will lead to opposition against immigration.*

Threats to Cultural Identity:

Symbolic politics theory argues that the role of values and identities has a significant effect on opinion formation and this effect is usually superior to the influence of material interests (Sears, 1996, Berg 2010; 2013; 2014). In the case of immigration, if there is a perceived threat against the cultural life of the country in question, the residents will be more likely to oppose immigration. In this regard saliency is important. In other words, a large population of immigrants will more likely drive negative sentiments against immigrants. We can derive the following hypothesis to test the role of perceived cultural threat on opposition against immigration.

Hypothesis 3: Anti-immigrant sentiments should rise when the perceived threat rises, when there are a large number of immigrants in the population.

The Role of Information:

Although the economic interest and cultural threat hypotheses have been widely emphasized and in the literature, little attention have been paid to the role of public knowledge on opinion about immigration (Sides and Citrin, 2007:480). Freeman mentions the role of knowledge in predicting the attitudes and policy preferences. In this regard he argues that the lack of information have caused the opinion discrepancy between the elites and the public. In his study, Freeman (1995) argues that the public had little knowledge about immigration flows and policies and claimed *that citizens in democracies are rationally ignorant of many issues because the incentives to become informed fail to override the costs of obtaining information* (p. 883). Sides and Citrin argue that the overall tendency is to overestimate the immigrant population in the country and when minorities are perceived as threat, the overestimates of the minority populations may lead to opposition to programs that would benefit these groups (2007:480). In this regard, we can derive the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: In most countries, the respondents will overestimate the proportion of immigrants.

Hypothesis 5: Those who overestimate the proportion of immigrant population will be more opposed to immigration since they will perceive a greater threat.

Why Compare East and West?

There are numerous studies which compare West European countries with East European ones. These studies generally focus on electoral systems (Birch, 2002) or the structure of party competition (Sitter, 2002; Marks et. al., 2006). Previous studies mostly focused on Western European countries in terms of attitudes towards immigration (Bonjour 2011; Ceobanu and Escandell 2010). To the best of our knowledge there has been no study which compared East and West. I believe

Harmonization of EU Immigration Policy and Public Opinion About Immigration in West and East European Countries

comparing these two sets of countries offers several benefits because from many aspects, the East and West Europe differ from each other. First of all,

- The phenomenon of immigration is new to East European countries since they became independent after 1990. Whereas, the West European countries have been experiencing immigration for almost half a century.

- This comparison allows us to create a baseline for studying trends in attitudes once outsiders and potential immigrants turn into insiders (Sides and Citrin, 2007:481)

- The direction of immigration in Europe is still from East to West. Therefore citizens of East European countries are still considered as potential immigrants. This might create an incentive in East European public to sympathize with the immigrants.

- Many people in East European countries still have friends and relatives who are living and working in West European countries. Therefore, they might have more favorable ideas about immigrants.

- There are not large immigrant populations in East European countries. This might reduce the saliency of the issue as well as opposition against immigration.

- EU has an organizational structure which mostly relies on unanimity and qualified majority voting. If there appears to be a clear divide between East and West European countries, this might have broader policy implications in terms of harmonization of EU immigration policy. In other words, some countries might be more favorable to deal with immigration at national level whereas others might prefer supra-national policies.

III. Data and Model

In order to test the above hypotheses I use data from the European Social Survey (ESS) which is funded by European Commission's 6th Framework Program, the European Science Foundation, and national funding bodies in each country. ESS is an academically-driven multi-country survey, which has been administered in over 30 countries to date. I use 4th round (2008) which is the most recent round available. This round of the survey covers 31 countries. The surveys were conducted face to face. It involves strict random probability sampling and a minimum target response rate of 70%.

The survey was conducted in Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, and United Kingdom. In order to be able to compare East European EU member countries with West European counterparts, I dropped Russian Federation, Ukraine, Turkey, Israel, Norway and Switzerland from the survey.

Breaking down the dataset, enables me to compare East and West European countries and see whether attitudes towards immigrants present different patterns.

Considering that the results are pooled across EU member states and that there are contextual variables, some corrective measures are necessary to account for the potential non-uniqueness of observations within countries (Mclaren, 2007:260). Therefore, I use multi-level modeling techniques to correct for potentially biased standard errors and eventually to estimate the impact of context on attitudes towards immigrants. As McLaren mentions (2007:60), the potential for non-uniqueness may lead to the commitment of a Type I error (that is, rejecting the null hypothesis when the null is, in fact, true). By using multilevel modeling techniques, we can avoid this problem by re-computing standard errors based on the intra-class correlation and the numbers of observations at different levels like individual and country levels (Mclaren, 2007:261). Gelman (2007:246) also emphasizes that multilevel modeling is useful to account for individual and group level variation.

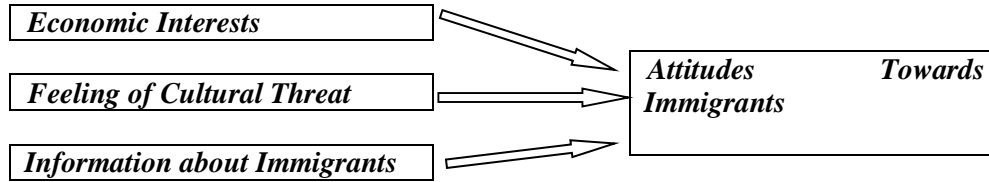


Figure 1: A Model of Attitudes towards immigration.

The literature on immigration focuses on three main sources of attitudes towards immigration. Economic explanations emphasize the role of interests and argue that people who perceive immigrants as a threat to their financial situation will be more likely to oppose immigration. Similarly, theories of cultural feelings focus on the perceived threat stemming from immigrants and argue that if there is a perceived threat that the immigrant population is undermining the dominant culture of the country, opposition against immigrants will increase. Lastly, information theory argues that level of information about the immigrant population in the country drives the attitudes towards immigration.

In order to test the specific hypotheses above, I need to specify the variables that can measure economic interests, perceived cultural threat and strength of cultural identity and information about immigration level. The dependent variable in this study is preferred level of immigration. The survey question is administered as “To

Harmonization of EU Immigration Policy and Public Opinion About Immigration in West and East European Countries

what extent do you think [country] should allow people of the different race or ethnic group as most [country] people to come and live here?" The answers range from allow many to allow none. I include two measures of economic interest. First variable measures the perceptions regarding the state of the economy in the country. The other variable measures the respondents occupational status (whether unemployed or not). Unfortunately, ESS does not reveal the income of the respondents which prevented me to include it as an independent variable.

I also included a variable that measures respondents' idea about the immigrants' overall burden to the countries' economy. The survey question is administered as follows: *"A lot of people who come to live in [country] from other countries pay taxes and make use of social benefits and services. On balance, do you think people who come to live in [country] receive more than they contribute or contribute more than they receive? Please use this card where 0 means they receive much more and 10 means they contribute much more."* This variable enables to test the "tax burden" theory. Lastly, I included the countries' GDP per capita (World Bank, 2017) as an unbiased measure of economic situation.

To measure the effect of perceived cultural threat from immigrants I use the following survey question: *"Would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?"*. Another measure is the respondent's adherence to national culture and traditions.

To test the information theory, I use respondents' perceived immigration level in the country. ESS asks respondents the following question: *"Of every 100 people of working age in [country] about how many would you say were born outside [country]?"* I also include a measure of absolute misperception, like Sides and Citrin, by calculating the absolute difference between the perceived and the actual percentage of immigrants in the country (UN 2017). This measure enables me to investigate the role of misperception on the preferred level of immigration. I also include a number of political demographic factors such as ideology, social trust, life satisfaction, age, education and gender.

The results of the multilevel model are presented in Table 2. As we see, we observe different patterns of attitudes in West and East Europe. None of the "economic interest" variables are significant in the Eastern model whereas unemployment and the perceived burden of the immigrants to welfare system is significant predictors of preferred level of immigration. In West European countries those who are unemployed prefer lower levels of immigration and similarly those who think immigrants take more than they contribute prefer lower levels of immigration. In terms of perceived cultural threat, again we observe different patterns. In East European countries the cultural threat variable is not statistically significant.

However, in Western European countries the effect is statistically significant. The coefficient sign is positive because higher values means support for the idea that immigrants enrich, not undermine, the cultural life. In other words, as respondents' support for the idea that "immigrants enrich cultural life" increases, the preferred level of immigration increases as well. This means our "cultural threat" hypothesis does not hold in Eastern context. Adherence to national customs and traditions is a significant determinant of preferred level of immigration in both West and East European countries. As, people become more traditional they prefer less immigration.

Sides and Citrin argued that information has an important role in the attitudes towards immigration. Based on their argument we hypothesized that the respondents in each country will overestimate the number of immigrants. Below figures compare the actual and perceived level of immigration in Western and Eastern countries. The information about the actual level of immigration is gathered from United Nations World Population Policy Report (2006). As we see from Figure 2 below, not all countries in the West Europe have a negative misperception regarding the actual percentage of immigrants. In fact, in Germany, Ireland, Sweden and Netherlands respondents underestimate the immigration level and in UK and France the two percentages are almost at the same level. This finding is contrary to Side and Citrin's findings which found that in all countries the respondents overestimated the actual level of immigration. On the other hand, respondents from all East European countries overestimated the level of immigrant population in their country.

When we return to our model, we see that the perceived level of immigration and misperception have a negative effect on the preferred level of immigration level both in East and West European countries. These results partially confirm the information theory and our hypotheses (H4 and H5 in East and H5 in West Europe) regarding it. Education, ideology and social trust have a significant impact on preferred immigration level. As expected, people who are more educated, more liberal and have a high level of social trust prefer higher levels of immigration in both East and West. Life satisfaction is a significant determinant of support for Immigration in Western European countries whereas it is not statistically significant in Eastern European countries. Lastly, gender seems to matter in Eastern European context. Men are less likely to prefer higher levels of immigration than women.

Harmonization of EU Immigration Policy and Public Opinion About Immigration in West and East European Countries

Table 1: A model of Attitudes towards Immigration in East and West

	East	West
<i>Economic Interests</i>		
Satisfaction with the economy	0.0007 (0.0005)	0.0008 (0.0006)
Unemployment	-0.0566 (0.0261)	0.0456** (0.0335)
Immigrant Contribution	0.0015 (0.0003)	-0.0003*** (0.0002)
GDP	0.0432 (0.0129)	-0.0107*** (0.0267)
<i>Cultural Threat</i>		
Cultural threat from immigrants	0.0034 (0.0004)	0.0003*** (0.0004)
Tradition	-0.0416*** (0.0038)	-0.0404*** (0.0061)
<i>Information</i>		
Perceived immigration level	-0.0171*** (0.0011)	-0.0051*** (0.0013)
Misperception	-0.0174*** (0.0012)	-0.0040*** (0.0014)
<i>Control Variables</i>		
Ideology	-0.0017*** (0.0002)	-0.0007*** (0.0002)
Social Trust	0.0197*** (0.0013)	0.0092*** (0.0014)
Life satisfaction	0.0048 (0.0010)	0.0002*** (0.0011)
Education	0.0306*** (0.0018)	0.0057*** (0.0016)
Age	0.0000 (0.0000)	0.0000 (0.0000)
Male	0.0046*** (0.0101)	-0.0406 (0.0133)
(Intercept)	0.8578 (0.4498)	2.8080 (0.5359)
N	16.256	25.066

*Standard Errors in parentheses. **p <0.05; ***p<0.01

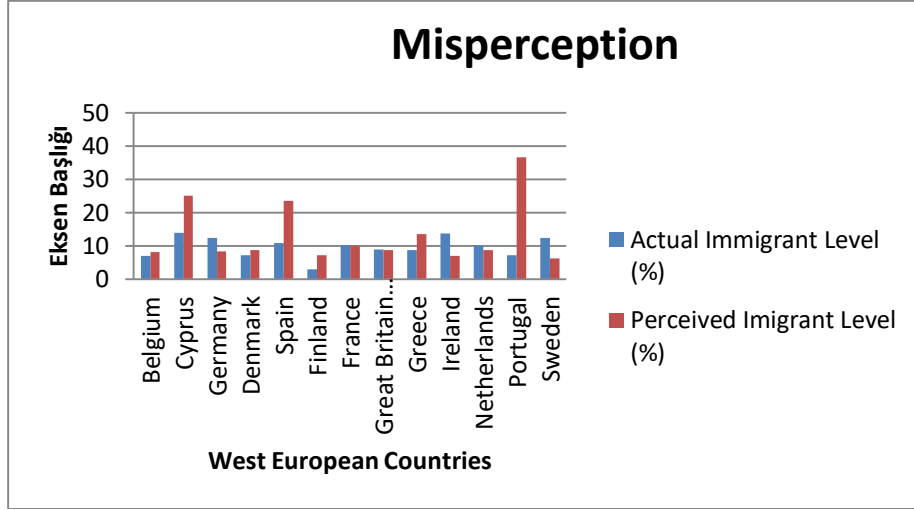


Figure 2: Estimated versus actual percentage foreign-born residents in Eastern European countries. Source: 2008 European Social Survey, UN World Population Policy Report.

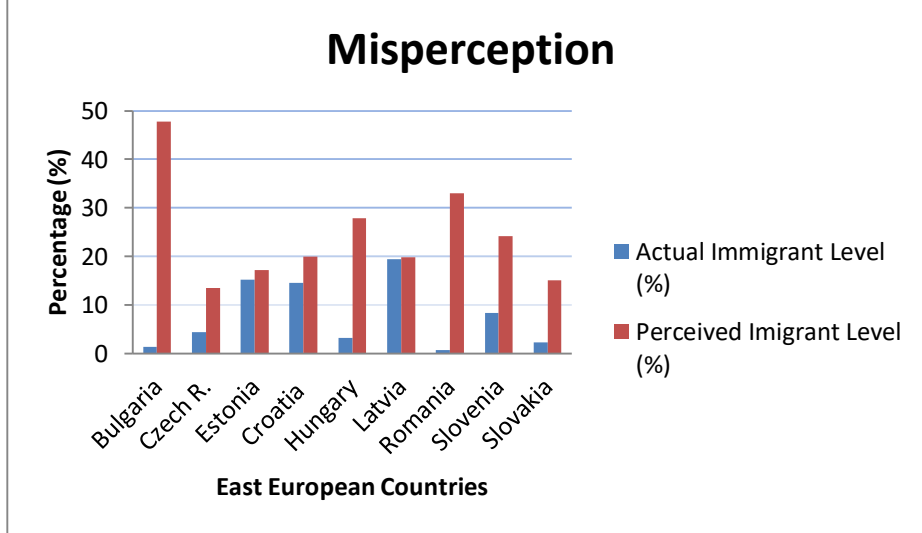


Figure 3: Estimated versus actual percentage foreign-born residents in East European countries. Source: 2008 European Social Survey, UN World Population Policy Report.

IV. Conclusion

Harmonization of the EU immigration policy is one of the most important policy goals for the EU. Immigration is becoming more and more salient in the EU politics as the recent flows from Libya and Tunisia provoked debates about a harsher immigration policy and countries like France and Italy push for reforming Schengen Treaty. There seems to be a growing conflict between member states regarding the common immigration policy. Those states who feel more threatened by immigrant populations tend to be more skeptical against a common immigration policy. The literature on EU immigration policy harmonization has been fairly descriptive and has not offered systematically testable hypotheses. My model has addressed this shortcoming by testing the attitudes towards immigration in two different sets of countries which might help us to understand the causes of variation in attitudes towards harmonization.

The results of my analysis showed that citizens of West European countries feel more threatened about their economic interests and perceive more negative effects of immigrants on their countries' cultural life. This pattern does not seem to exist in East European member countries. Citizens of East European countries neither economically nor culturally feel threatened by immigration. From many aspects these results are plausible.

Although East European members of the EU have shown great development over the last years, there is a significant gap in terms of life standards between East and West. Therefore, the direction of immigration in Europe is still from East to West. In this regard, it is highly likely that citizens of East European countries still perceive themselves as potential immigrants and sympathize with immigrant populations. Another explanation is the lack of large immigrant populations in East European countries. However, the absolute misperception indicator shows that citizens of these countries believe that there are much more immigrants in their country than the actual number which makes this explanation less plausible.

Finally, these results have broader policy implications for EU. The difference between public opinion in East and West European member countries might make it harder to harmonize the EU immigration policy. This clear pattern might lead the countries who feel "threatened" by immigrants to follow national practices of immigration policies and even worsen the current EU immigration policy. In order to achieve a common immigration policy, countries should inform the public about immigration and reduce the misperceptions regarding immigrants. Although, initially these efforts might require a trade-off between electoral success and achieving a more harmonized and common immigration policy, they will eventually pay-off by providing a stable system which will benefit all member states.

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Harmonization of EU Immigration Policy and Public Opinion About Immigration in West and East European Countries

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