

Segmentation of Public Perceptions on Romania's Accession to the EU

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***Abstract:** European Union (EU) enlargement and integration generated intense debate almost immediately following the first wave of discussion on expansion. Now that the EU border has reached the line of the former Soviet states, the topic is less hypothetical and more significant than ever, especially because the entire EU project's success seems to depend heavily on favorable public opinion. In Romania most of the quantitative measures of public opinion on European issues, like those of the Eurobarometer series, have been run since the beginning of the '90s. Yet, a study concerned with measuring the individual, subjective opinions about EU accession, as well as the formation of these opinions, was still much needed. Q methodology is highly suitable for such an endeavor. As a consequence, concourse statements about EU enlargement and integration were gathered after qualitative discussions with individuals. A Q deck of 46 statements was generated and administered to a sample of 170 individuals. Five factors emerged in the analysis, covering rather surprising and often bleak attitudinal structures. Some of those perceptions were identified as being part as a deeper cultural heritage rooted in Romania's recent history. Some others should be attributed to an often wrong and incoherent framing of the issues by the media and politicians.*

Continental Context and the "Democratic Deficit"

EU expansion towards the East has been a major discussion theme throughout the European continent for more than 10 years. Rationally and emotionally fueled polemics have emerged in all European cultures and countries and at all social levels, regardless of the income, social status or profession of the discussants.

Within the core of EU senior states, strong voices – administrative, academic or civil society – have been heard, claiming that the EU already has enough difficulties in economically and culturally sustaining and integrating its actual members. At the same time, other opinions claim that accepting new economies in the EU can only be beneficial, as long as a set of minimal conditions are met by those states. Outside the EU, in states aiming

towards EU accession, equally heterogeneous speculations have been made regarding the desirability of such a process. The official voices of each state proclaim that accession is the only possible course to successful future evolution of their countries. But “euroskeptical” opinions have been prominently voiced, thus underscoring the inevitability of major difficulties and problems associated with an accelerated integration process. This state of divergent opinions continues today, even though the border of the EU has reached the line of the former USSR states, recently including Romania and Bulgaria into the Union.

The EU aims to achieve opinion coherence on major (domestic and international) issues, but seems to struggle – sometimes without much success – to reach such a high and much needed degree of unity at formal levels. This lack of coherence is called by some a “democratic deficit,” defined as a “discrepancy between the European Union’s advancing institutional development with increasing competences over the lives of Europeans, on the one hand, and the continuing dominance of national politics as the space for public debates and source of collective identities, on the other” (Statham, Firmstone & Gray, 2005, p. 4).

Regarding public opinions on EU issues, things are even more complex. The attitudes and perceptions on cultural, economical or administrative issues are sometimes not only segregated by *nation* but also *inside* nations. In fact many of the political analysts observing the Union’s meetings at its home in Brussels have been forced to notice that the media tends to analyze and report EU actions exclusively through a national perspective. The *Financial Times*’ Robert Graham has even gone so far as to say that the weakest point of the entire EU project is its ability to communicate successfully to its 450 million citizens (2005).

We may compare this to an exercise in political branding – not too far-fetched as a comparison, since the branding of nations has become a favorite topic for many governments. Theorists say it is of critical importance to close the gap between the external and internal perceptions of a brand or – when the gap cannot be closed – at least to make sure that the identity (the internal perception) is coherent and positive enough to work as a converting element for the image (the external perception) (Davies & Chun, 2002).

Public Opinion and the Issue of EU Integration

The entire concept of the EU is based on a certain level of homogeneity that will have to be attained and maintained in order to have a community that is both formally and organically integrated. In the context of accepting new states with various levels of development, this homogeneity could be problematic. While the Huntingtonian perspective of a culturally and religiously split Europe (Huntington, 1993) is still held by many, new models derived from communication science claim that the success of the EU enlargement depends on the Union’s ability to form a favorable public perception of the integration process.

This favorable perception might be, as suggested by Inglehart (1970), induced simply by raising the education levels of European citizens, and therefore their awareness and knowledge of otherwise sophisticated political concepts. Still, while initial data have shown a strong support for the Inglehart theory, later studies have failed to reveal the necessary causal connections between the two variables (Janssen, 1991; Gabel, 1998). The favorable perception may also be induced by the number of positive experiences generated by living in a united Europe (Himmelsbach, 2005). The same perception over the enlargement of the EU could be increased if citizens feel that they actually have some material benefits as a direct result of the EU membership (Gabel & Palmer, 1995).

Public image regarding the EU integration could also be negatively affected by the fact that some cultures perceive possible future interactions with other cultures as threatening. Although it seems to be an altered remnant of the Huntington cultural theories, this model – stating that the perceived threat of other cultures might induce a negative perception of the enlargement – has attracted some support (McLaren, 2002).

Another highly important factor influencing public perceptions of EU integration is the media (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). Moreover, the frame in which the media present information to the public may by its very nature determine a specific, positive or negative, public reaction (de Vreese, 2005). In this respect, framing the EU enlargement from an opportunity perspective has been stated to be significantly more beneficial to the public perception than presenting the same data from a risk perspective frame (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006).

As a conclusion, factors that might influence the way people build and express their attitudes and opinions on the topic of EU enlargement are numerous and may have different salience to different individuals. For some people the level of education might be a major opinion driver vis-à-vis the topic, while for others their cultural background may act in the same way. Furthermore, differences in exposure to media and media framing of the issues may also moderate considerably the construction of political perceptions. These factors have the tendency to combine in ways that are extremely specific for each individual. Hence, forming a perception on the EU enlargement issue is a highly subjective process that needs to be addressed through measurement mainly at an individual level and not by nationwide surveys.

Political Public Opinion Measures in Romania

The overall body of investigations of European public perceptions is very rich in research projects and information, but at the same time extremely heterogeneous. Research has been conducted on all major themes: amongst the most relevant we may mention EU integration, euroskepticism, EU expansion and European identity.

The *Central and Eastern Eurobarometer* (CEEB) from 1990 to 1998 investigated public perception regarding a set of EU-relevant topics in the Central and Eastern regions of the continent. After the project of European expansion became clear, a new public opinion instrument, the *Candidate Countries Eurobarometer* (CCEB) replaced the CEEB, starting in 2001. A comprehensive meta-analysis of the work conducted on public perceptions investigation of the EU subject and at a generous EU scale remains to be developed.

Romania has been included, with quantitative data gathered on national representative samples, in both Eurobarometers (both CEEB and CCEB) from 1991. Through this research, public perceptions have been closely monitored in Romania with a methodology that is common for all states participating in the study. Among the investigated topics, one may find, among others: (a) population morale – with its component of confidence in the EU and in national institutions, confidence in the general directions followed by Romania or overall optimism; (b) knowledge of the EU – access to basic knowledge about the EU, personal competence regarding EU and overall interest in the Union; and (c) values – such as EU and the national values and values integration in culture and society (European Commission, 2006).

Other, more qualitative research efforts also have included Romania. For example, one study conducted by the European Commission in 2001 was focused on gaining a more profound, substantiated vision of not only the perceptions on the EU, but also on attitudes, emotions and expectations of people in the states that were set on a clear course to accession. Among the objectives of the study were: (a) understanding perceptions and images of Europe and the European Union: the way they are now and what they are based on; (b) understanding the reasons, and the extent to which people embrace the idea of an European Union; and (c) identifying fears, reservations and objections, and the underlying reasons for them (EC, 2001).

Conclusions, in the cases above, as in many other situations, were predominantly optimistic and portrayed the image of a people having a strong positive and overtly confident outlook over matters regarding EU.

Additional extensive research efforts have been oriented towards measuring public opinion on political issues, from a more pragmatic perspective, driven by the main actors on the political stage. Unfortunately, these efforts are less relevant for the bigger European context due to what we may call the “PR factor” biasing them. The PR factor functions mainly in two important ways. First of all, a clear-cut separation line cannot be drawn between the methodological accuracy of the exercises on one hand and the need for flexibility in interpreting results for public relations reasons, on the other. As a consequence, many of the results are questionable, not necessarily because they have been tampered with, but mainly because in many of the cases the entire research design was built to satisfy propaganda

needs and not to produce new knowledge. Second, projects developed exclusively for understanding how and why public opinion shapes around EU matters are actually scarce, as the subject has usually been insubstantially investigated as a small component of larger “all in one” measurements.

Considering the large number of models, all with significant potential in explaining what influences public perception, and at the same time the limited body of research conducted in Romania so far, it was obvious to us that a less shallow approach was needed to gain knowledge of what the public thought about the EU enlargement. From our perspective this research effort should abide by the following principles in order to provide new relevant data on the subject:

1. It would have to be completely free from hidden agendas or secondary objectives.
2. It would have to approach the subject from a quantitative-qualitative perspective aiming to (a) segment the public on its relationship with EU integration and (b) understand how and why the segments are actually formed.

Method

A strong point has been made for the fact that an individual’s relationship with politics is a highly intimate, subjective process. A huge subject like the EU enlargement can only contribute to the diversity and subjectivity of this process. Under these circumstances, using Q methodology to gather and segment data on the public perceptions of Romanians on EU integration is an obvious methodological choice, since in the realm of methodology the Q paradigm is so far the only one created explicitly to deal directly with subjectivity.

In fact, the study of the relationship between the individual and the political field is not at all a stranger to Q, while at the same time mainstream political science seems to approach the field with exaggerated bashfulness. Steven Brown’s work in the field, *Political Subjectivity* (1980), provides a large number of examples of how Q methodology may be applied in political science. Besides the role of actually providing important insight on the technicalities of Q, Brown’s work also has the merit of revealing how important and useful this methodology is when studying political culture, a field that up until that moment had been poor in methods dealing with its intrinsic subjective nature (Baas, 1997).

As a consequence, the body of works using Q to investigate aspects of the individual’s interaction with political culture has grown. Important examples are Kanihan & Kinsey’s identification of political involvement characteristics and categories (1997) and Baas’ longitudinal study on the interpersonal sources of the development of political images (1997). In addition, we must mention Andrew Baker’s efforts to identify political subcultures in Mexico (1997), because in his work the author also stresses that the classic approach of studying political cultures through analysis of

aggregated survey responses fails to really understand the individual by producing “unidimensional results for multidimensional individuals” (Baker, 1997, p. 75). Other interesting work has been conducted on the meaning and subjective interpretation of political cartoons (Kinsey & Taylor, 1982; Root, 1995). An example of one nation-specific research project is the study conducted on East German attitudes towards political authority, which discovered a split into two factors: Constitutionalists, who are actively involved in the democratic system and ready to defend its values, and Individualists, who are strongly committed to living a personal life and generally skeptical vis-à-vis the system (Koch, Matthes, Martin & Taylor, 1992). Furthermore, Steven Brown himself has developed his observations, based on case studies, on how political subjectivity should be analyzed and interpreted (1989) and how subjectivity is structured in political theory and behavior (1993).

Our point regarding the usage of the Q methodology for understanding political subjectivism in general and the perceptions regarding EU enlargement in particular is that, at the present moment, this is actually the only methodology that allows the researcher to approach the problem with a completely open mind – an attitude that is absolutely mandatory if one desires to really understand how the public feels on the issue, without attempting to fit people into a priori, “objective,” desk-researcher concepts.

Instrument and Selection of Items

Given the general premise of our study we have decided to ignore much available information on the subject, so we can avoid making professional judgments as armchair scientists over statements that we thought would be useful in describing the Romanian people’s attitudes and thoughts over the EU integration. A supplementary argument supporting this decision was that the local political theatre is rather specific as compared with other Central and East European countries and therefore direct interactivity with the data carriers is highly recommended in order to actually get the pulse of subjectivity.

As a consequence we preferred a thorough concourse analysis in order to identify the main topics and attitudes towards the future accession of Romania in the EU. We conducted in-depth personal interviews with 25 persons, all from urban areas. To minimize potential bias, participants in this qualitative stage were all normal, everyday people, connected to the political realm to an average degree, and not politically affiliated persons, journalists, marketing or communication specialists. Gender distribution of the participants was normal for the Romanian general population – 13 females and 12 males. Ages of the participants spanned, with a quasi-normal distribution, from 18 to 45. Income distribution was also normal and education levels were all equal or higher than high school graduation. Interviews were conducted during the months of September and October 2006.

We deliberately planned free discussions – following only a thematic guide to ensure we touched on subjects similar to the ones measured by the *Eurobarometer*: (a) general perception of the EU in general, (b) overall attitudes on the enlargement process, expectations of local changes after EU accession, (c) general EU rules and laws that will change the old Romanian ways and the direction of those changes, and (d) resemblances and perceived cultural differences between Romania and the EU.

The most relevant general conclusions of the interviews are:

1. Both recollection and recognition (spontaneous and assisted) awareness for issues regarding the EU integration of Romania were extremely low. None of the issues captured from the discourse analysis is mentioned (unprompted recall) by more than half of the interviewed persons.
2. There is no widespread consensus on any of the statements discussed, opinions range extremely widely.
3. Participants tend to “attach” rapidly to the subject; while shy and hesitating in the beginning they seem to develop and form an opinion as the discussion evolves and in the end they even seem to have a strong emotional connection to their opinions.

We were able to include the general opinions extracted from participants into two major categories, (a) materialistic or pragmatic aspects and (b) political aspects. Both these categories contain a set of positive and a set of negative statements. In an effort to sum up as many subjective opinions as possible, 46 statements were eventually extracted in the four classes mentioned above, to form the Q deck. The statements are in the Appendix.

Data Collection

Q sorting was done by 170 participants selected by the same criteria used for the qualitative phase. We aimed for a normal distribution on demographic variables like gender, age and income while at the same time searching for at least high school education. Data collection was conducted after a 15-minute preliminary discussion with the participants about the general purpose of the study, under a field worker’s supervision. Field workers were instructed to observe sorting patterns, noting any that appeared consistently among different participants. The sorting was forced-choice, with participants asked to rank statements on a scale from -4 (most unlike or uncharacteristic of their beliefs) to +4 (most like or most characteristic of their beliefs) following a normal-distribution-shaped Q matrix. When the respondents were available, a post-sorting discussion also took place to seek possible interesting new opinions and attitudes on the topic.

In Q Methodology, a P-set of 170 is highly unusual. We chose to use a large P set because Q-methodology is not widely known in Romania. Acceptance of methodological viewpoints which defend low-volume samples is scarce and social scientists look for the volume as a guarantee of

generalizability of conclusions. The present study was intended for the use of policy-makers and working with a very low number of subjects would have possibly jeopardized the trust they would have placed on its results. Thus, the high P-sample volume is not based on methodological motives, but on practical reasons.

The most relevant first-hand conclusions resulting from the observation of the sorting process are as follows:

1. Clarifying personal opinions about matters pending of the EU integration is rather easy for the interviewed subjects, once prompted.
2. Most of the participants have a strong opinion on the matters discussed, the middle opinion tier seems to have not very many adherents, and opinions are mostly polarized.
3. People have issue strong opinions even on matters they are not familiar with or haven't thought too much about.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Q-Sorts were entered into *PQMethod* and the 170 x 170 sort correlation matrix was submitted to a principal component factor extraction. Judgmental rotation was used to produce a simpler structure and a five-factor solution was finally selected, based both on ease of interpretation and on the aim of integral inclusion of the 170 sorts in the factors. The five factors account for 47.9 percent of the variance in the Q-Sorts and are not strongly correlated with one another.

The five factors were dubbed The Moderate Pessimist, The Unbalanced Optimist, The Dark Realist, The Compulsive Dreamer, and The Political Pessimist. A short discussion of each follows.

Factor 1. The Moderate Pessimist

Individuals from this factor are people who are generally "over-concerned" with the social and economical status of others rather than being preoccupied by their own life. As a consequence, they are afraid that once Romania gets into the EU the overall mentality of the people will slowly shift to resemble the Western approach. That is, people will become more and more individualistic, focused on personal gain and this selfishness will significantly increase the gap between the poor and the rich. At the same time the lack of concern the rich will have for the less privileged will turn to some sort of abhorrence that will be legitimized by the new mentality.

In a similar way, Factor 1 is somewhat fearful of the equilibrium that will have to be achieved between Romania and the rest of the EU. They are afraid that the EU will ask a lot of them: that it will give something but at the same time, not actually regard Romanians as partners but more as "poor cousins." Romanians will be, at least formally, part of a select "club" but will not actually enjoy full membership. For example Romanians' right to travel in Europe will remain similar to the current status – people from this Factor

expect Romania to be imposed a special status and Romanian citizens to enjoy less freedom of movement than other European citizens.

People from Factor 1 do not expect major improvements to appear after EU integration. All the major issues that ripple through Romanian society today – bad administration of infrastructure, virtually nonexistent social insurance, inflation, corruption, low quality of government, incoherent political behavior – will not change significantly or will not change at all. These are severe problems, endemic for Romania, and the EU will not be able to change those, not in a short period of time anyway.

Participants from Factor 1 are also afraid that the efforts the country will make to support integration won't meet success. The EU moves in far too fast and this trait will affect negatively many aspects of our life – e.g. prices for food, land and houses will increase and competition for jobs will also grow.

As seen in the above these people are rather pessimistic about what concerns the future of our country after the moment of integration. Nevertheless, Factor 1 still expects some good elements to emerge after EU integration: (a) the level of foreign investments in Romania will increase; (b) tourism will develop; (c) more foreign companies will come to Romania, which will generate more jobs and will probably increase the income of the population. One may notice that all three elements lack specificity; while being positive elements, they indicate the presence of high, but general *expectations, not certitudes*.

The “foreign Western companies” have taken the role of “the Americans” who were supposed to come after the war. A vague and spontaneous association links the growth from new companies, social happiness, more jobs and bigger salaries. At the same time, however, Romanians do not associate directly the increase in salaries with EU integration. So, EU integration has succeeded in generating a modern day myth: the myth of the foreign investor who by its very presence is going to improve the quality of life for a whole nation.

Statements with the highest positive and negative scores for Factor 1 are presented in Table 1.

Factor 2. The Unbalanced Optimist

People on Factor 2 are rather optimistic concerning EU integration. These people really feel that, when Romania is accepted into the EU, its citizens will actually gain access to a new level of personal freedom, which is perceived as the key for achieving higher living standards. The most important positive event that will happen after the integration is the elimination of the visa procedures and regulations, This will grant freedom of movement for Romanians to travel all over Europe. This also means that people will also be free to pursue any professional objectives they may have. High professional competence will no longer be restrained to local boundaries. Work opportunities for Romanians will expand, because anyone

who is well prepared will be able to at least try to achieve success in other European countries.

Table 1. The Moderate Pessimist. Statements with strongest vs. weakest agreement

	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Factor score</i>
30	The "selfish" Western mentality that increases the gap between the rich and the poor will intensify in our country (the "Western" people are exclusively preoccupied by the increase of their standard of living, and do not care anymore for the "underprivileged").	4
8	The level of foreign investments in Romania will increase.	4
14	Our tourism will develop.	3
13	A lot of foreign companies will enter Romania, which will lead to more jobs and higher remunerations.	3
18	There will be a higher competition for jobs.	3
19	There will higher requirements for the people that are looking for a job, and those that are not well prepared will be without a job.	3
24	The prices for food, lands, or houses will increase.	2
34	Romania's integration will lead to an improved image of the country and of its citizens.	2
21	We will be imposed with a discipline that is not always appropriate.	-2
12	We will have a better infrastructure: roads, highways, railroads.	-2
26	The state will be less involved in ensuring better life conditions and a decent living for the poor.	-2
45	Foreigners will be permitted to run and be elected for positions of authority in our country.	-2
33	We will have an improved political life as a result of EU models (both citizen's involvement and politician's care for the citizen).	-3
17	The Romanians will understand rapidly that, if everyone works and fights for the increase in quality of their own life and of their families', then the whole country will develop, and by that all the people will live better.	-3
31	We will have an increased quality of the government, as a result of transferring some of the power to the EU institutions, which are impervious to corruption.	-3
9	We will have a lesser inflation or not at all.	-3
40	We will have less corruption.	-4
2	We will be able to go to work anywhere in Europe, without restrictions, as we desire.	-4

Note: Only statements with Z-Scores >1.0 or <-1.0 were included.

Moreover, Factor 2 perceives EU integration as a starting point for an overall increase and improvement of the Romanian business climate.

Integration will be a long awaited sign of “free passage” for lots of foreign investors who are at the moment rather reticent about expanding to Romania.

This theme of the “investment flood” was also present as a characteristic for Factor 1, but as one of the few positive elements of a segment that is otherwise defined by pessimism. While just a poor thin red line in Factor 1, in Factor 2 the above mentioned theme becomes a broad fire-red ribbon. Individuals from Factor 2 are convinced that EU integration will inspire confidence among other European countries in the Romanian economy and will also unleash lots of investments just waiting to pour into Romania.

Optimism specific to Factor 2 does not stop here. It also emerges in an assumption that after day “X” many of the systemic advantages that may be noticed at work all over Europe are going to simply be enforced and applied in Romania: (a) quality control systems will be much better – all local products and services will increase in quality; (b) social security systems will evolve and improve – the public health system and the pensions system will contribute to a higher quality of life; and (c) the generally acknowledged European discipline will begin to work in Romania with beneficial effects for everyone.

People from Factor 2 perceive the whole integration phenomenon as some sort of “mob welcoming” – our country is going to become a full member of a well functioning club with all the specific privileges included. There will be an increase in tourism, people will go anywhere they want, national interest will still be protected because there will be no loss of sovereignty through the integration process, we will be helped financially and symbolically without being forced to adopt elements that are not specific to us.

Factor 2 also seems to be seduced by the sole idea of merging with a functional and exigent system which will somehow make us better. More discipline and more regulations on issues that are not yet practiced in Romania at European standards will eventually have only positive effects on Romanian life.

Only few negative elements typical in discussion of EU integration are present among the main traits of Factor 2. These people know that they will have less buying power than their Western counterparts, because salaries are still going to be lower in Romania. At the same time, Factor 2 expects that significant material aid from the EU is unlikely after the integration. As seen in the above, people like Factor 2 are fascinated by *the system*, and they expect the support to be significantly based on know-how and methodologies and not on rough technology or money.

The above allows us to conclude that, while being strongly optimistic, Factor 2 is somehow unbalanced in the sense that its commitment to all the good elements and effects that are to be expected from EU integration is slightly impaired by the presence of a few negative elements. Yet, in the main, we may say that Factor 2 looks forward to EU integration and at the

same time is more involved in the subject than Factor 1. These people are believers, because they are fascinated by the Western way and the high standards of living and they naïvely expect those to simply manifest in Romania as well.

Statements with the highest positive and negative scores are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Unbalanced Optimist. Statements with strongest vs. weakest agreement

	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Factor score</i>
35	The visa regulations and procedures will be eliminated, and we will be able to travel anywhere, anytime.	4
8	The level of foreign investments in Romania will increase.	4
29	We will have less buying power in comparison with the EU's citizens, because they earn more money than us.	3
5	Romania will have a better health insurance system, as it should.	3
15	All our products will increase in quality; for instance our groceries will be "cleaner" and with fewer toxins.	3
11	There will be an intensified business interaction between Romania and the other countries in the EU, which will lead to more external contracts for Romanian companies, and hence more money in the country.	3
28	There will be many restrictive regulations on certain issues that are not to the EU's liking (agriculture, food production, e.g. the fact the people are not allowed any more to brew their own "palinka" or eat their own home-grown swine for Christmas).	-2
41	We will lose some of our sovereignty, and thus we will have less power to protect national interests.	-2
43	We are a small country, and the "big ones" will run us even easier than before.	-2
34	Romania's integration will lead to an improved image of the country and of its citizens.	-3
45	Foreigners will be permitted to run and be elected for positions of authority in our country.	-3
46	They will try to impose their own lifestyle and values – we don't need lectures, but material aid.	-3
9	We will have a lesser inflation or not at all.	-3
21	We will be imposed with a discipline that is not always appropriate.	-4
10	Our whole industry will receive last-hour technology, accordingly to the quality standards of the EU.	-4

Note: Only statements with Z-Scores >1.0 or <-1.0 were included.

Factor 3. The “Dark” Realist

Respondents from Factor 3 seem to have a very clear cut and pragmatic vision of EU integration. They seem to be rather up-to-date with the subject and more aware – by comparison with other factors – of the strengths and weaknesses that will manifest once Romania has joined the EU. They are concerned with the fact that one of the most important integration criteria that Romania will have to meet will be related to the status of some of its economical and industrial fields. As a consequence, governmental subventions, now sustaining some of the dying industrial entities, will be heavily reduced or even discontinued.

Moreover, people in Factor 3 know that even after formal admittance of Romania to the EU, Romanians will still remain second-rate citizens, while there are already official political voices making clear references to some sort of a “special admittance” or “special status members,” when speaking of the future integration processes.

Following European standards, prices for utilities (energy, electricity and fuel) are expected to increase. The same standards will also impose several new regulations affecting matters where Romania falls short – some of the “old ways” for running things in our country are going to be changed, especially in agriculture.

People from this segment are highly individualistic. They perceive the future EU integration as a chance for everyone else in Romania to understand that the general quality of life and public wealth may only be increased if people strive for their own good and become less preoccupied with what’s happening with the others. In this regard, they are opposite Factor 1, which displayed a concern for other people’s problems. People from Factor 3 believe that EU integration will provide the shock mandatory for a shift in mentality, so that Romanians will finally begin to understand that society is pushed forward and up by the singular efforts of its members and not by government intervention and social care. In local and colorful terms, this means that people will finally stop wondering why the neighbor’s goat gives so much milk and look for ways to make their own goat do the same thing.

Furthermore, people from Factor 3 consider that the road to individualism is inevitable, once formal integration takes place. The savage capitalism specific to the present Romanian society – a mixed form of individualism and lack of respect for the other – will turn to responsibility for personal growth as well as for less-privileged fellow humans. From this point of view, we may say that Factor 3 looks forward to embracing the value of individualism shared by Western European societies, because of a belief that this is the only way to achieve personal and social growth. At the same time, government involvement in social problems, in ensuring a decent living for the poor, will not be decreased.

Individuals from Factor 3 are aware that EU integration will not solve (at least not on the spot) our most important problems: (a) inflation, (b) poor customer service, (c) poorly administered infrastructure and (d) a corrupt justice system. All these will continue to exist after integration, because remedies for them will have to come from inside.

In this Factor's perspective, EU integration is not necessarily a way of solving our problems, an instant key for a better life, but rather a special opportunity to solve our problems on our own, while being morally and symbolically supported by the Union. In political terms, EU integration will be a sign for the rest of the world that Romania is determined to improve, some sort of mission statement that will be followed by real efforts that will have to prove our intentions.

Statements with the highest positive and negative scores are presented in Table 3.

Factor 4. The Compulsive Dreamer

Individuals from Factor 4 are fascinated by the idea of EU integration. It is truly their dream because they are convinced that practically all aspects of life in Romania – social, economical, political, administrative – will improve significantly after accession. The image these people share about the integration is so positive and has so little negative imprints that any reality check will reveal these people as incurable dreamers.

A first thing fascinating Factor 4 is the freedom of movement that will allow people to travel easily to any place they wish inside Europe. This liberty of travel is also associated with the possibility of seeking a better work place regardless of borders. This Factor is also convinced that lots of foreign companies will come to Romania for business, thus generating more work and an overall increase in salary levels. Overall, work and professional opportunities will benefit: (a) working conditions in Romania will improve (not only in terms of financial advantages), (b) jobs will be more certain, (c) salaries will be higher, (d) new work will appear, and (e) in the event the above are insufficient, one will always be able to go to other countries to pursue professional objectives.

A very interesting trait of people from this Factor, differentiating them from all other Factors lies in the fact that Factor 4 is convinced that EU integration will be such an outstanding boost that it will help overcome even the most difficult problems Romania faces today. As a consequence, corruption will decrease to levels similar to those in Europe; the quality of government will increase significantly, especially due to the fact that some of the local power will be transferred to EU institutions. Additionally, individuals from Factor 4 are completely confident that EU integration will also determine a real boom in industrial areas, mainly through the infusion of state-of-the-art technology, working at European technical standards. We may regard this point as the inflection point where people from Factor 4

actually began losing contact with reality, skip optimism and go directly to dreaming.

Table 3. The "Dark" Realist. Statements with strongest vs. weakest agreement

	Statement	Factor score
23	There will be fewer subventions or none, as the EU recommends.	4
44	Even after integration, we will remain second-hand citizens of the European Union.	4
25	The prices for utilities (energy, electricity, fuel) will increase.	3
35	The visa regulations and procedures will be eliminated, and we will be able to travel anywhere, anytime.	3
28	There will be many restrictive regulations on certain issues that are not to the EU's liking (agriculture, food production, e.g. the fact the people are not allowed any more to brew their own "palinka" or eat their own home-grown swine for Christmas).	3
20	We will have more restrictive quality regulations.	3
17	The Romanians will understand rapidly that, if everyone works and fights for the increase in quality of their own life and of their families', then the whole country will develop, and by that all the people will live better.	2
32	Romania's integration will be a good political signal for the rest of the world.	2
7	We all will have our professional qualifications recognized at international level.	-2
9	We will have a lesser inflation or not at all.	-2
16	We will have a better and more considerate customer service.	-3
33	We will have an improved political life as a result of EU models (both citizen's involvement and politician's care for the citizen).	-3
30	The "selfish" Western mentality that increases the gap between the rich and the poor will intensify in our country (the "Western" people are exclusively preoccupied by the increase of their standard of living, and do not care anymore for the "underprivileged").	-3
26	The state will be less involved in ensuring better life conditions and a decent living for the poor.	-3
12	We will have a better infrastructure: roads, highways, railroads.	-4
10	Our whole industry will receive last-hour technology, accordingly to the quality standards of the EU.	-4

Note: Only statements with Z-Scores >1.0 or <-1.0 were included.

Factor 4 believes that after EU admittance some of the economical aspects of Romanian life will remain similar, in spite of the new exigencies imposed by the EU: (a) subvention granted by the state to the less functional areas of the economy and industry will not be discontinued, (b) Romania will be completely independent, (c) the Romanian government will not have to

answer in any way for its actions to higher EU instances, and (d) prices for food, lands and houses will remain the same.

For people in Factor 4 the integration is neither a political phenomenon nor a growth opportunity, but is a process designed especially to make things better for Romanians without requiring sacrifices or supplementary efforts. Romania will be integrated as a full member with rights and benefits similar to those of the “seniors” of the Union, without giving up “old ways” of living.

Table 4. The Compulsive Dreamer. Statements with strongest vs. weakest agreement

	<i>Statement</i>	<i>Factor score</i>
25	The prices for utilities (energy, electricity, fuel) will increase.	4
35	The visa regulations and procedures will be eliminated, and we will be able to travel anywhere, anytime.	4
22	In all the Romanian state-owned companies there will be restructuring and massive personnel dismissals.	3
2	We will be able to go to work anywhere in Europe, without restrictions, as we desire.	3
13	A lot of foreign companies will enter Romania, which will lead to more jobs and higher remunerations.	3
40	We will have less corruption.	3
4	We all will have better working conditions (not only financial advantages).	2
28	There will be many restrictive regulations on certain issues that are not to the EU's liking (agriculture, food production, e.g. the fact the people are not allowed any more to brew their own “palinka” or eat their own home-grown swine for Christmas).	-2
46	They will try to impose their own lifestyle and values – we don't need lectures, but material aid.	-2
24	The prices for food, lands, or houses will increase.	-3
44	The jobs will be more uncertain.	-3
27	Even after integration, we will remain second-hand citizens of the European Union.	-3
41	We will lose some of our sovereignty, and thus we will have less power to protect national interests.	-3
32	Romania's integration will be a good political signal for the rest of the world.	-4
23	There will be fewer subventions or none, as the EU recommends.	-4

Note: Only statements with Z-Scores >1.0 or <-1.0 were included.

All of the above show that Factor 4 is to some degree placed outside the pessimism–realism–optimism scale, which we have tried to establish throughout this analysis. Type 4 individuals are pure dreamers, lacking contact with reality in issues of EU integration. They have built their own image of the accession process and of its impact upon themselves by joining

together all the good and happy pieces of the puzzle and won't go a single step outside their comfortable mindset and of the beautiful but unfortunately unrealistic story.

Statements with the highest positive and negative scores for Factor 4 are presented in Table 4.

Factor 5. The Political Pessimist

Individuals from Factor 5 are also pessimists, but they are highly focused on two main issues with regard to the subject of EU integration.

First, Factor 5 is, by comparison with previous Factors, far more concerned with political aspects of Romania's admittance into the EU. In this regard, we may say that individuals in this Factor are dominated by some sort of "smaller country" complex. They regard any possible relationships between Romania and the stronger countries in Europe with a suspicious eye and expect that: (a) first of all these countries will always treat us as some sort of peripheral system that needs to be subordinated, (b) EU membership will, in fact, do nothing else but facilitate control over Romania for these European superpowers: "Germany and France have dominated our destiny anyway, now that we are in the EU it will be even easier for them to do just that".

Yet, in spite of the above, EU integration seems to be the only choice for Romania. Post-sorting interviews have shown that these individuals share a mindset stating that since we are so small and so helpless it is better to have good relations with these superpowers so that they may give us the help we need: "since we do not have a chance to be competitive at least we may be submissive." Moreover, we actually need the European powers to be our friends, in spite of all the risks, since they are the only ones who could protect us from the potential evil intentions of the traditional wrongdoers Russia and Ukraine.

People from Factor 5 are convinced that Romania does not stand a chance to front up to the European superpowers. As a consequence, they accept that making friends with them is the only possible way of getting ahead. We may say that superpower phobia is one of the main motivating factors that make these people look forward to the EU integration.

Participants loading on this Factor seem to be highly concerned with integration issues regarding work and professional contexts. While they expect salary levels in Romania to increase, these people also know that competition for finding or keeping work will also increase. At the same time, actual work opportunities will not increase, because nobody in Europe will acknowledge our "local" professional or study diplomas (note the "smaller country" complex at work again). From this point of view, we may conclude that individuals on this Factor expect little good to happen on the labor market after the integration.

Table 5. The Political Pessimist. Statements with strongest vs. weakest agreement

	Statement	Factor score
18	There will be a higher competition for jobs.	4
35	The visa regulations and procedures will be eliminated, and we will be able to travel anywhere, anytime.	4
3	We will have higher salaries in Romania.	3
37	We will have better relations with European powers (Germany especially), and that will lead to greater investments and financial aids.	3
36	We will have increased protection against possible aggressive neighbors (Russia, Ukraine).	3
14	Our tourism will develop.	3
2	We will be able to go to work anywhere in Europe, without restrictions, as we desire.	2
43	We are a small country, and the "big ones" will run us even easier than before.	2
6	We will have better retirement conditions; the public pensions system will be more effective, and there will also be a private pensions system.	-2
20	We will have more restrictive quality regulations.	-3
32	Romania's integration will be a good political signal for the rest of the world.	-3
45	Foreigners will be permitted to run and be elected for positions of authority in our country.	-3
40	We will have less corruption.	-3
31	We will have an increased quality of the government, as a result of transferring some of the power to the EU institutions, which are impervious to corruption.	-4
33	We will have an improved political life as a result of EU models (both citizen's involvement and politician's care for the citizen).	-4

Note: Only statements with Z-Scores >1.0 or <-1.0 were included.

Beside the two main issues mentioned above, people from Factor 5 are basically pessimistic toward any changes induced by Romania's admittance in the EU. For example, they are convinced that Romania's major systemic problems will remain unchanged after day "X". Local political practice, dominated by lack of morality and by mercantilism will remain unchanged, because neither electors nor elected will change their behavior. The quality of government will not improve; corruption will remain at the same high levels; the social security, health insurance or pension systems will stay bankrupt etc. Interesting enough, this Factor is not even affected by the "investor flood" syndrome noticed on previous Factors. People in Factor 5 do not believe that foreign companies will invest more in our country after the integration. At the same time, life will become tougher after admittance,

for example (a) new regulation on certain issues will restrict some of the traditional ways, (b) prices for utilities will go up, and (c) prices for food, lands and houses will also go up.

Statements with the highest positive and negative scores are presented in Table 5.

Conclusions

Aside from the practical implications of this particular study, the present analysis has proven that Q Methodology has an enormous potential for in-depth analyses of public opinion, especially in high-stake areas, where blindspots are usually manifest and political decision is thus bound to bet on wrong assumptions. The data presented above and the resulting Factor portraits allow us some interesting conclusions about the shape of public perception of Romanians on EU enlargement.

A first and overall conclusion is that it is clear that policy makers should be concerned that their overoptimistic tones in framing discussions about Romania's accession to the EU are not necessarily wise. People's optimism is tainted by lack of knowledge and unrealistic expectations, both positive and negative. The potential for a clash between expectations and outcomes is very probable in at least three of the five identified Factors.

In the case of The Moderate Pessimist, the gap between expectation and certainty regarding EU integration seems to be the most relevant issue. This schism is generated, in our opinion, by the differences in level of involvement with the subject. While being widely communicated by the media and the politicians as some sort of magic recipe of success and high life standards, the subject in fact lacks any clear details. Mass media messages like "the integration into EU is the most important goal that Romania has" have been so far very efficient in generating expectation but not knowledge. People are told that "all will be good" and as a consequence they have general good expectations about accession, but they have not been provided with details. Naturally, any attempt to analyze further takes participants to a darker area where most of the consequences of the integration seem to lose the glamour and to become bleak. In conclusion, we may say that the generality of media messages regarding Romania's EU integration is in indirect proportion with level of involvement of individuals with the subject, which is also in an indirect relationship with peoples' optimism.

Another interesting theme that seems to be present in the cases of Factor 1 and 2 is the idealism shaping up around potential foreign investments. The long-expected flood of investors is indeed a theme that is somehow recurrent in all communication done so far by important opinion-holders in mass-media. Communication in this specific matter seems to be (a) generating a comfortable mindset for the individuals that perceive the process as a very positive one, (b) maintaining shallowness in a sense that once the idea is achieved further analysis on the subject tends not to take place, and (c)

lowering responsibility and a sense that EU integration is perceived as a process when personal evolution is determined mainly by other people's actions and decisions.

An interesting theme that is specific to Romania is the mentality that places exaggerated stress on what others have or do, some sort or inverted individualism. We may only speculate about the roots of the "my own goat vs. my neighbor's goat problem," but its manifestations are obvious when comparing traits typical for Factors 1 and 3. Many will agree that it is entirely possible that decades of communism and state-controlled social structure have left a permanent impression on the Romanian mentality.

The free travel theme seems to fascinate all Factors. On various scales of intensity it is present within all Factor portraits. The origins of this phenomenon lie, most probably, in the generations and generations of frustrated individuals who weren't allowed to travel anywhere beyond the iron curtain during the communism. The fact that Western Europe has been over the last five decades some sort of dream land, the fact that the idea of traveling in itself was forbidden and punished by state, has slowly generated a compulsive attitude towards travel. This attitude has been inevitably inherited by more recent generations. As a consequence, EU integration seems to be the perfect remedy for this problem and one of the most appreciated and expected benefits of the process will be the freedom to travel freely across Europe.

Another theme that may be identified especially in Factor 5 is "the smaller country factor." This is a shared psychological complex that manifests itself during the most unusual situations. One may see it at work in Romania on some politicians who react unfortunately too often in too submissive or too aggressive ways to situations of foreign policy. But this syndrome may be seen most frequently on normal people in normal, everyday situations, in reactions like: "This Coke tastes horrible. . . . What would you expect, they have a different recipe for poorer or smaller countries"; "The bloody soccer referee has ruled against us the entire 90 minutes. . . . That's what happen when you are small and insignificant," etc. It is not at all a surprise that this syndrome is manifest in such a sensitive issue like Romania's accession in the EU and its relationships with the powers in the Union.

Romania has not had its share of euroskepticism, as have other former communist states, like Hungary, Poland or the Czech Republic prior to their EU accession. Far from conveying Romanians' overall optimistic attitudes, which would guarantee a smooth and unproblematic integration, we believe that the actual situation is volatile and has raised unfocused and unrealistic expectations in most of the Romanian public. The chunks of subjectivity identified in the present study should help in understanding how Romanians really feel when discussing their country's EU accession and should help policy-makers defuse a potentially unpleasant trap.

Romania was accepted into the EU in January 2007, and is in the formal accession process. Under these circumstances, some may argue that the issue under study here is already on its way to being solved by history. Yet, many of the themes that we identified in the above are so deeply related to the very core of our nation and its scarred mentalities, that we expect them to be present even long after our formal EU admission. Already we may see these manifestations emerging in everyday political life. In this context, further investigation of the topic, with the use of subjectivity-focused methodology, may prove to be not only interesting, but also of a huge practical impact if absorbed in their policies by decision-makers.

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Appendix A

Q Sample with Z-Scores for the 5-Factor Solution

Material aspects – Positive

No.	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
1	There will be new work opportunities for me and for all Romanians in general.	0.43	0.94	0.95	0.88	-0.93
2	We will be able to go to work anywhere in Europe, without restrictions, as we desire.	-1.86	-0.45	-0.04	1.21	1.16
3	We will have higher salaries in Romania.	-0.25	0.67	-0.57	-0.49	1.44
4	We all will have better working conditions (not only financial advantages).	0.31	-0.23	-0.07	1.08	-0.01
5	Romania will have a better health insurance system, as it should.	-0.80	1.52	-0.26	-0.55	-0.89
6	We will have better retirement conditions; the public pensions system will be more effective, and there will also be a private pensions system.	-0.49	0.51	-0.23	0.80	-1.10
7	We all will have our professional qualifications recognized at international level.	0.74	-0.59	-1.02	0.41	-0.78
8	The level of foreign investments in Romania will increase.	1.61	1.69	0.00	0.00	0.57
9	We will have a lesser inflation or not at all.	-1.73	-1.49	-1.13	0.82	-0.71
10	Our whole industry will receive last-hour technology, accordingly to the quality standards of the EU.	-0.62	-1.95	-2.08	0.82	-0.65
11	There will be an intensified business interaction between Romania and the other countries in the EU, which will lead to more external contracts for Romanian companies, and hence more money in the country.	0.68	1.01	0.46	-0.23	0.86
12	We will have a better infrastructure: roads, highways, railroads.	-1.23	0.13	-1.94	-0.78	0.28

No.	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
13	A lot of foreign companies will enter Romania, which will lead to more jobs and higher remunerations.	1.48	0.64	-0.99	1.21	-0.82
14	Our tourism will develop.	1.54	0.93	-0.04	-0.04	1.28
15	All our products will increase in quality; for instance our groceries will be "cleaner" and with fewer toxins.	-0.31	1.40	0.07	0.27	0.27
16	We will have a better and more considerate customer service.	0.25	0.88	-1.21	0.27	-0.34
17	The Romanians will understand rapidly that, if everyone works and fights for the increase in quality of their own life and of their families', then the whole country will develop, and by that all the people will live better.	-1.42	0.32	1.13	-0.31	-0.70

Material aspects – Negative

No.	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
18	There will be a higher competition for jobs.	1.24	0.93	0.49	0.15	1.86
19	There will higher requirements for people that are looking for a job, and those that are not well prepared will be without a job.	1.23	-0.42	0.53	0.13	-0.07
20	We will have more restrictive quality regulations.	0.55	0.34	1.28	-0.78	-1.13
21	We will be imposed with a discipline that is not always appropriate.	-1.11	-1.93	-0.38	0.53	0.67
22	In all the Romanian state-owned companies there will be restructuring and massive personnel dismissals.	0.68	-0.51	0.57	1.38	0.54
23	There will be fewer subventions or none, as the EU recommends.	0.00	-0.05	2.12	-2.03	-0.58
24	The prices for food, lands, or houses will increase.	1.23	-0.47	0.49	-1.44	0.90
25	The prices for utilities (energy, electricity, fuel) will increase.	0.06	0.94	1.59	1.76	0.91
26	The state will be less involved in ensuring better life conditions and a decent living for the poor.	-1.24	-0.22	-1.48	0.61	-0.64

No.	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
27	The jobs will be more uncertain.	-0.12	0.20	0.46	-1.62	0.23
28	There will be many restrictive regulations on certain issues that are not to the EU's liking (agriculture, food production, e.g. the fact the people are not allowed any more to brew their own "palinka" or eat their own home-grown swine for Christmas).	0.68	-1.03	1.33	-1.09	0.96
29	We will have less buying power in comparison with the EU's citizens, because they earn more money than us.	0.37	1.64	0.99	-0.76	-0.22
30	The "selfish" Western mentality that increases the gap between the rich and the poor will intensify in our country (the "Western" people are exclusively preoccupied by the increase of their standard of living, and do not care anymore for the "underprivileged").	1.79	-0.55	-1.44	0.22	-0.49

Political aspects – Positive

No.	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
31	We will have an increased quality of the government, as a result of transferring some of the power to the EU institutions, which are impervious to corruption.	-1.48	0.41	-0.04	0.90	-1.85
32	Romania's integration will be a good political signal for the rest of the world.	0.62	-0.33	1.02	-2.02	-1.16
33	We will have an improved political life as a result of EU models (both citizen's involvement and politician's care for the citizen).	-1.36	-0.22	-1.33	-0.68	-2.23
34	Romania's integration will lead to an improved image of the country and of its citizens.	1.05	-1.15	-0.57	0.23	0.43
35	The visa regulations and procedures will be eliminated, and we will be able to travel anywhere, anytime.	-0.87	2.29	1.55	1.73	1.59

No.	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
36	We will have increased protection against possible aggressive neighbors (Russia, Ukraine).	0.19	-0.78	0.04	0.58	1.30
37	We will have better relations with European powers (Germany especially), and that will lead to greater investments and financial aids.	0.49	0.10	-0.57	0.27	1.35
38	We will have access to the decisional process inside the EU.	0.19	-0.95	-0.49	-0.22	-0.33
39	We will have a better justice system (under EU laws and judicial mechanisms).	0.80	0.71	-0.99	0.04	0.20
40	We will have less corruption.	-1.85	-0.07	0.04	1.09	-1.70

Political aspects – Negative

No.	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
41	We will lose some of our sovereignty, and thus we will have less power to protect national interests.	-0.43	-1.03	0.60	-1.99	0.29
42	We will have to conform to the EU policies, regardless of our own foreign policy interests (and we will possibly have problems regarding the relationship with the USA and other countries)	0.61	-0.93	0.38	0.90	0.80
43	We are a small country, and the “big ones” will run us even easier than before.	-0.31	-1.05	-0.64	-0.53	1.10
44	Even after integration, we will remain second-hand citizens of the European Union.	-0.31	0.83	1.97	-1.62	-0.87
45	Foreigners will be permitted to run and be elected for positions of authority in our country.	-1.29	-1.24	-0.11	0.27	-1.37
46	They will try to impose their own lifestyle and values – we don’t need lectures, but material aid.	0.25	-1.38	-0.46	-1.35	0.59