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Central European Societies on the Map of Europe: A
Thematic Issue Dedicated to the European Social Survey's
Central European Data

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We dedicated this thematic issue of *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics (EEJSP)* entitled ‘Central European Societies on the Map of Europe’ to the studying of social phenomena of the region based on data from the *European Social Survey (ESS)*. The collection brings together papers that analyse the state of societies in Central and East Europe in a comparative and/or longitudinal perspective. The ESS provides an excellent source for analysing the changes in our societies both across time and location and analyse a variety of social phenomena on supra-national, national and subnational levels.

The European Social Survey is an academically driven cross national survey; one of the most well-known, trusted and widely used comparative European research projects providing internationally comparative data on political and social attitudes, beliefs and behavioural patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty countries. It supplies demands for data on topics studied across many social science disciplines, such as sociology, political science, public policy, minority studies etc. The ESS was initiated by the European Commission in 2001 with the aim to provide bi-yearly data on the demographic and social characteristics of Europe’s as well as its populations’ political and public preferences, social attitudes and values influencing people’s behaviour. In 2005 the ESS was the winner of the Descartes Prize for Research & Science Communication and in 2013 it was awarded the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC) status which twenty-five countries have joined as regular members and a further six countries have gained guest status. As of now, it is the largest Research Infrastructure Consortium in the EU.

In addition to its time and geographical coverage the greatest asset and value of ESS is its quality. The preparation of the survey, translation of questionnaires, sampling as well as the actual fieldwork all follow a very strict procedure, which is constantly controlled and tested by scholars collaborating with ESS headquarters. Thanks to these efforts the ESS became the most reliable cross-national comparative survey in the continent.

Sampling is one of the key prerequisites of quality data and comparability across countries. The objective of the ESS sampling strategy is the design and implementation of workable and equivalent sampling plans in all participating countries. Samples must be representative of all persons aged 15 and over (no upper age limit) resident within private households in each country, regardless of their nationality, citizenship or language. Individuals are selected by strict random probability methods at every stage. All countries aim for a minimum ‘effective

achieved sample size' of 1,500 or 800 in countries with ESS populations of fewer than 2 million after discounting for design effects.

The questionnaire and its translation is the other key point of the quality of an international comparative survey. The ESS questionnaire consists of seven modules, five of which – the so called core modules – are repeated every second year. Two modules however, – so called rotating modules – change.

Questionnaire content of the nine Rounds of the European Social Survey

- **Round 1 (2002)**
 - Immigration
 - Citizenship, involvement and democracy (CID)
- **Round 2 (2004)**
 - Family, work & well-being
 - Economic morality in Europe
 - Health and care seeking
- **Round 3 (2006)**
 - Personal and social wellbeing
 - Timing of life
- **Round 4 (2008)**
 - Ageism
 - Welfare
- **Round 5 (2010)**
 - Trust in the police & courts
 - Work, family & well-being
- **Round 6 (2012)**
 - Understanding/evaluation of democracy
 - Personal and social wellbeing
- **Round 7 (2014)**
 - Health inequalities
 - Immigration
- **Round 8 (2016)**
 - Climate Change, Energy Security and Energy Preferences
 - Welfare Attitudes
- **Round 9 (2018)**
 - Justice and fairness
 - Timing of life
- **Round 10 (2020, in progress)**
 - Digital Social Contacts in Work and Family Life
 - Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy

Multi-national teams of researchers are selected through an open call to contribute to the design of two rotating modules for the questionnaire. Questions incorporated into the questionnaire are selected and tested in multiple rounds. Translation of the questionnaire also follows a uniquely complex and multi-layered process, which guarantees that responses to questions are comparative across languages and cultures to the highest possible levels.

The European Social Survey is a public good: data and the entire documentation of ESS is open access to any interested scholar, policy analyst and student. It is extensively used in higher education both as a data source for courses or as a source for dissertations. It is also widely used in academia. It has almost 135 thousand registered users 66.5 per cent of whom are students, 18 per cent are faculty and researchers, 7 per cent PhD students and the rest includes private, non-governmental and governmental organizations. The ESS provided a source for over 3000 academic publications in the past fifteen years. However, in the Central East European region ESS data is still somewhat underused: with the exceptions of Poland, Slovenia and Hungary the number of registered users as well as publications relying on ESS data still have a wide open space for expansion. With this special issue we

aimed to contribute to this expansion and publish studies that focus on this region of Europe, which has been the most turbulent part of the European Union in terms of changes to its societies, political and social attitudes and values that drive the behaviour of its populations. There has been a lot happening to societies and ESS provides a fertile ground to analyse and explain some of the phenomena that are rather distinct from the rest of Europe and explain the differences from the rest of Europe and within the region.

This special issue of *Intersections EFJSP* is interdisciplinary in the sense that it includes six original research articles that discuss various aspects of societies and politics of Central East European countries in the light of ESS data, and a review of an edited volume based also on data from the ESS.

The first paper, co-authored by Messing, Ságvári and Simon, and entitled 'Methodological challenges in cross-comparative surveys: The case of understanding attitudes towards democracy in Hungary' is of a methodological nature. Two of the authors serve as lead researchers of the European Social Survey in Hungary and this paper was inspired by their experiences concerning the challenges and difficulties that designing and implementing such a huge cross-country comparative survey poses. In their paper they discuss the validity of questions measuring attitudes towards democracy in a cross-country comparative survey. The authors apply statistical and qualitative (focus group discussion) methods to show dilemmas of understanding responses to questionnaire block assessing attitudes towards democracy. The study shows that validity and reliability of data of cross country comparative surveys have to be treated with care even in the case of the most well-designed and carefully implemented projects such as the ESS and that there are limitations of analysing such data that need to be taken into consideration.

The paper authored by Cichocki and Jablowski from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań examines the impact of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 on the attitudes of the populations of the four Visegrad countries, based on survey rounds before (R7 in 2014) and after (R8 in 2016) the crisis. Their focal question is the role of basic human values – such as Security and Humanitarianism – in transforming attitudes. The analysis demonstrates that the securitisation of the immigration question in public discourse seems to have had a strong impact on the structure of anti-immigration attitudes in Czechia, Hungary and Poland.

The Thematic Issue includes another paper that discusses the impact this significant event had on populations on Central and East Europe. Barna and Koltai in their article entitled 'Attitude change towards immigrants in the turbulent years of the migrant crisis and the anti-immigrant campaign in Hungary' focus on Hungary, the country which has acted as a core source of anti-immigrant political narratives and whose population has become the most negative towards any kind of migration since 2015. Hungary is an interesting case also, because while earlier it fitted into the pattern of post-communist countries with minor migration flows, lack of knowledge and awareness about migration but still relatively strong anti-immigrant sentiments, it became a stronghold of anti-immigrant discourses and attitudes within Europe, not independently from the government initiated anti-immigration campaign.

Takács and Szalma's study of social attitudes towards homosexuality in two still quite similar, but in many respects different Central East European countries –

Hungary and Romania – aims to answer the question how religious denomination influences these attitudes. The two countries while similar in their recent historical traits, post-communist traditions and levels of economic development are different in terms of dominant denominations in their societies: in Hungary this is the Catholic Church, while in Romania the Orthodox Church is the dominant religion. In addition to European Social Survey data they include European Value Survey data in their analysis too.

Fedakova and Veira Ramos discuss the issue of job security. They compare Central European countries with Northern and Southern European countries based on ESS Round 5 data from 2010/11, when work, wellbeing in recession was the topic of one of the Rotating Modules of the survey. They examine predictors of subjective job security in the three country clusters against personal demographic background characteristics, job characteristics and organizational characteristics. They found that in the three country clusters these explanatory variables drive the feeling of one's job being secure to a different extent: while in Visegrad countries mainly job characteristics explained the perception of job security, in the Southern country cluster it is individual's education and age whereas in the Northern countries organizational characteristics played a more significant role in explaining how people feel about job security.

The paper written by Nagy, Grajczár and Örkény compares developments in attitudes towards different types of solidarity in Austria and Hungary. The main argument is that recent times of crisis induced by the economic turmoil and the mass inflow of refugees to Europe provided abundant opportunities for right-wing populists to prosper. Solidarity is defined at macro, mezzo and micro levels, and a wide range of the available ESS variables are used to operationalize the concepts. Based on the merged dataset of the two countries and applying multivariate methods five distinct clusters were identified and they are presented in detail in the paper. Results show that basic dynamics of solidarity patterns are quite similar in both countries, but some notable differences could be observed. In Austria different types of solidarity are mostly ideology- and value-based, while in Hungary there is a general right-wing radicalization tendency and rather individual problems and subjective perceptions explain patterns of solidarity.

The paper written by Piterová and Výrost focus on social solidarity and social differentiation as two elements of welfare attitudes. The authors compare results from the 4th and 8th round of the ESS, and compare three distinct country groups. The Visegrad countries (without Slovakia) are compared to Northern and Western Europe. Results suggest that differences in welfare attitudes might not be so obvious, but diverging patterns crystallize along individual characteristics such as interpersonal and institutional trust and basic human values.

In the last section we included the review of two edited volumes that both utilize data from the ESS and cover important social issues. The book review written by Ságvári summarizes the content and most important findings of the book *Values and identities in Europe: Evidence from the European Social Survey* edited by Michael J. Breen and published by Routledge in 2017. Daniel Oross has written a review on *New Uncertainties in Europe*, a book published by Peter Lang. The book's

chapters focus on migration and the related phenomena of discrimination and xenophobia.