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IN THE EU AND NATO BUT CLOSE TO RUSSIA — POST-CRIMEA ATTITUDES IN BULGARIA AND HUNGARY

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Abstract

This article focuses on attitudes towards Russia in Bulgaria and Hungary – two EU and NATO countries with special relations to Russia – in the wake of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and military intervention in support of separatists in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine in 2014 and onwards. We begin by putting the relations to Russia in a historical perspective. We then set out to account for support for Russia with the help of survey data from the Post-Crimea Barometer (2015) – a unique survey focusing on geopolitical orientation (East versus West) and attitudes towards Russia in Latvia, Hungary and Bulgaria in a post-Crimea setting. Latvia is a special case because of its large Russian minority population; we therefore confine our comparison to Bulgaria and Hungary. The findings suggest that long-term attachment to Russia is decisive in Bulgaria. In Hungary, long-term attachment to Russia is important, but not sufficient to account for post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia.

Keywords: Bulgaria, geopolitical orientation, East/West divide, European Union (EU), Hungary, Putin, Russia, Ukraine

Introduction

Eastward enlargement made the EU and NATO more politically heterogeneous than ever before. This paper focuses on attitudes towards Russia in Bulgaria and Hungary – two EU and NATO countries with special relations to Russia – in the wake of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and military intervention in support of separatists in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine in 2014 and onwards.

The Russian connection makes Bulgaria and Hungary into deviant cases in the broad European context, but the two countries are by no means interchangeable. Bulgaria's ties to Russia have deep historical roots, while Hungary's alignment with Russia is of a more recent vintage. The following section sets out to explain what makes Russia important in Bulgaria and Hungary against the backdrop of contemporary political history. The two subsequent sections revolve around survey data from the *Post-Crimea Barometer* (2015) – a unique survey focusing on geopolitical orientation (East versus West) and support for Russia in Latvia, Hungary and Bulgaria in a post-Crimea setting. Latvia is a special case because of its large Russian minority population; we therefore confine our comparison to Bulgaria and Hungary.

We begin our inquiry by raising two descriptive questions: "What is the relative size of the pro-Russian and pro-Western segments of the population in the two countries, and what separates those leaning westwards from those tilting towards Russia?" In the following section, we turn towards an item explicitly designed to tap support for Russia in a post-Crimea setting. We use it as dependent variable and test it against a cluster of potential explanatory variables introduced in a stepwise fashion. This leads us to a model highlighting the importance of long-term attachment to Russia. The findings suggest that long-term attachment to Russia is the main and decisive determinant of post-Crimea attitudes in Bulgaria. In Hungary, long-term attachment to Russia is important, but as such not sufficient to account for post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia. The implications of the findings will be discussed in the fourth and final section.

Bulgaria and Hungary between East and West

The decisive role played by Russia in the liberation of Bulgaria from Ottoman domination in 1878 created a long-lasting myth about the special relations between these two Orthodox and Slavonic countries. But the relations between the two countries were not without frictions. Russian interference in Bulgarian domestic affairs, including the attempts to place a Russian puppet on the throne in Sofia, and Russia's dismissal of Bulgaria's efforts to achieve full independence and unification with its brethren in Macedonia paved the way for a major cleavage between *Russophiles* and *Russophobes*. This divide was clearly visible in all the political parties that emerged after the formation of the new state. The clash between Russophiles and Russophobes culminated during the rule of Bulgaria's anti-Russian and pro-Western strongman Stefan Stambolov (1886–1894). It was mainly an elite-level phenomenon. Most people were still under the sway of the myth about Russia as their liberator (Radev 2000, 293–359; Crampton 1987).

The controversies and disputes with and about Russia continued in the decades to come. Bulgaria fought the two world wars against Russia – in both cases in alliance with Germany and to regain territories it considered part of its national heritage. The Second World War (1939–1945) brought Bulgarian troops into Macedonia and Greece, where they served as an occupying power under German auspices. A communist-led coup in 1944 put an end to the military alliance with Germany and brought the left- and pro-Russia leaning Fatherland Front into power. The communists in the Fatherland Front gradually reduced the scope for alternative political movements and eventually established a full-fledged dictatorship, where political opposition had a high cost attached to it. The execution of

opposition leader Nikola Petkov in September 1947 marked the end of the transition to totalitarian rule, but the show trials continued well into the 1950s (Karasimeonov 1999, 43).

The 'liberator' myth served the local communists well in their efforts to promote loyalty towards the Soviet Union and help Soviet Russia establish control over Bulgaria. Unlike other East Europeans, most Bulgarians accepted Soviet domination without any serious resistance. The local communists copied Soviet practices for the domestic arena and made official Soviet foreign policy into their own. This is how Bulgaria earned its reputation as Moscow's most loyal ally within the Soviet Empire. There were in fact no limits to Bulgaria's servility towards the Soviet Union. Meeting in a plenary session in 1963, the Bulgarian Communist Party Central Committee announced that Bulgaria was ready to become the 16th republic of the Soviet Union – an offer reputedly 'turned down' by the Soviet leaders. Later on, Gorbachev's reform policies (1985–1990) put the Bulgarian communists, particularly their long-standing chairman Todor Zhivkov, in a somewhat awkward position. Gorbachev had little sympathy for his 'staunch' Bulgarian ally, who saw the very changes Russia advocated as a threat (Markov 1993).

The internal party coup d'état that brought down Zhivkov in November 1989 spelled the beginning of a new era of change from totalitarian rule towards democracy. The East/West divide re-emerged with new force, and in the form of a political cleavage with the Bulgarian Socialist Party (formerly known as the Bulgarian Communist Party) and the pro-Western Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) as polar extremes (Karasimeonov and Lyubenov 2013). The tensions between the two parties revolved around the future geopolitical orientation of the country. EU membership was not a major issue of contention, but the prospect of NATO membership was initially anathema to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). Arguing that NATO membership would jeopardise the good relations with Russia, the BSP advocated neutrality. In 2001 the BSP made a U-turn and joined forces with the UDF on this issue. Bulgaria formally joined NATO in 2004, three years prior to its EU accession, but many Bulgarians feel uncomfortable with the Bulgaria's current geopolitical orientation and want to cultivate their cultural and historical ties to Russia (Karasimeonov 2010, 127–157).

Hungary has considerably weaker ties to Russia than Bulgaria. Hungarian and Russian belong to different language groups and are not mutually understandable; Hungarians and Russians do not share the same religious heritage, and the two countries have a long record of conflict and competition. Hungary fought Russia in the two world wars and ended up on the losing side in both cases. The outcome of the First World War was particularly devastating for Hungary. The state to which it belonged – the Austro-Hungarian Empire – imploded and disintegrated into a number of independent states. Hungary was one of the successor states, but in the process, it was deprived of two-thirds of its territory, leaving millions of Hungarians stranded in neighbouring states. This traumatic experience was to dominate Hungarian politics throughout the interwar era; and in the Second World War, Hungary joined forces with Germany to regain its lost territories. This strategy would have proved successful if Germany had won the war. But it did not, and the borders laid down by the Trianon Peace Treaty of 1920 were reinstated. The Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact did not give Hungary much leeway to air its national grievances against neighbouring allies such as Czechoslovakia and Romania, but discontent with the Trianon borders simmered under the surface and reappeared after the collapse of communism in 1989–90. In contemporary Hungary, National Cohesion Day is officially cele-

brated on 4 June in remembrance of the 'dire consequences' of the Trianon Peace Treaty, signed on 4 June, 1920 (Hungary Today, 4 June 2015).

Hungary's transition to totalitarian rule was gradual and drawn-out, and the communist regime that emerged was brutal and quick to clamp down on whatever opposition that remained. Burdened by huge war reparations to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and a haphazard shift from market economy to central planning, the Hungarian economy got out of hand (Borhi 2004, 144–151). Average disposable incomes fell drastically; collectivisation led to inadequate food supply and rationing had to be re-introduced in the early 1950s (Institute for the History of the Hungarian Revolution 2003). The verdict of the Hungarians was harsh and came in the form of a popular uprising in October and November of 1956. Soviet troops were called in twice to prop up the beleaguered communist regime – at the beginning of the unrest and once again to stop the newly appointed prime minister Imre Nagy from delivering on his promise to pull Hungary out of the Warsaw Pact and re-introduce political pluralism and free elections (Gati 2006; Brzezinski 1965).

Generally referred to as the Rákosi era after its communist helmsman, the time period between 1945 and the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 attracts very few positive voices among contemporary Hungarians (Post-Crimea Survey 2015). The following Kádár era (1956–1989) receives considerably more favourable retrospective ratings, but the first few years after the revolution were difficult. Janos Kádár had limited legitimacy in Hungary after having called on the Soviet Union to crush the Hungarian Revolution. He was under pressure from his allies at home and not least abroad to weed out the 'counter-revolutionaries'. This purge of counter-revolutionaries put some 26,000 Hungarians on trial, with half of them receiving prison sentences. The Hungarian army was put under the strict control of the Soviet army and no less than 200,000 Hungarians fled the country (Pammer 2006). But the situation gradually stabilised, and in the 1960s, the Kádár regime embarked on economic reforms that brought wealth and earned Hungary the reputation as 'the happiest barrack in the Communist camp' (Bohlen 1991).

As Hungarians were re-considering their options in the early 1990s, their mood was strongly in favour of 'returning to Europe'. Hungary was hailed in Western Europe and North America as a model transitional democracy. In 1990, it became the first East European country to join the Council of Europe; it formally became part of NATO in 1999 and part of the European Union five years later on. This quick and decisive westward move enjoyed widespread popular approval and the support of the major Hungarian parliamentary parties. But the political parties had different visions of the EU. EU accession negotiations took place at a point in time when Fidesz had begun its remarkable transition from a club of young liberals in the early 1990s to a party of EU-sceptic, social conservative Hungarian nationalists a decade later on (Tóka and Popa 2013). The vision of the EU cultivated within Fidesz was that of a union of nation states, i.e. an intergovernmental organisation rather than the partly supranational organisation already in place in 2004. Fidesz leader Viktor Orbán – Hungary's prime minister since 2010 – has made a point of undermining the EU policies and decisions that he rules out as inappropriate, such as EU quotas for refugees to ease the burden on Greece and Italy, the first point of entry into the EU for most refugees from the Middle East and Africa, or the EU energy union that would seem to exclude a Russia-built nuclear power plant in Hungary. This is clearly a challenge to the EU, but Orbán's overt references to political 'systems that are not Western, not lib-

eral, not liberal democracies, and perhaps not even democracies' as a source of inspiration are more ominous. Russia and China were among the countries explicitly mentioned in Viktor Orbán's frequently cited speech to an audience of ethnic Hungarians in Romania on 26 July 2014 (Orbán 2014). The liberal opposition in Hungary immediately voiced its concern. In the following section, we will see that this East/West divide manifests itself not only on the elite, but also on the grassroots level.

Europe or Russia?

The architects of the Post-Crimea Survey (2015) use the following item to tap the geopolitical divide in Hungary and Bulgaria: *In your opinion, should the economic relations and general political orientation of (our country) be mainly towards Russia or towards the European Union?* The choice was binary. Of the Hungarians (N=1043) in the survey, more than 72 per cent opted for the EU. In Bulgaria (N=1010) some 54 per cent expressed a pro-European geopolitical orientation. Russia attracted only 13 per cent of Hungarian respondents, only half the strength that Russia garnered in Bulgaria (26%). The binary choice between Russia and the EU was perceived as sensitive, particularly in Bulgaria where one out five opted out of the question altogether. But this does not change the general trend. The EU would remain the people's choice in Hungary and Bulgaria even if the missing cases were to be arbitrarily allocated to Russia.

Having concluded that the pro-Western camp carries more clout in both countries, we now turn our attention to differences within and between the two countries. This will be done in a series of tables based on multiple indicators; in the process, we will learn more about the strength and polarising potential of the East/West divide in the two countries. Table 1 strongly suggests that the East/West divide in Bulgaria is more deeply embedded in society and politics than the East/West divide in Hungary. In Bulgaria, the pro-Russian geopolitical orientation is the choice of the less privileged; the pro-EU orientation that of those better off. In Hungary, on the other hand, the East/West divide does not seem to be intertwined with social class. In Bulgaria the East/West divide triggers party ID, structures the party system and singles out the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) as the primary carrier of the pro-Russian banner. In Hungary the East/West divide does not seem to have left any lasting imprint on the party system as of 2010 and onwards. The two most popular parties in 2015 – Fidesz and Jobbik – successfully recruit voters from both sides of the geopolitical divide. With 20 per cent of the votes, Jobbik – generally considered part of the European right-wing extreme – ends up almost on par with Fidesz among Hungarians with a pro-Russian geopolitical orientation (Table 1).

This brings us to the perhaps most striking difference between the two countries – the pronounced right-wing undercurrent in Hungarian politics. Those who place themselves to the right of the centre systematically outnumber those who position themselves to the left of the centre on the 11-point scale (0–10) used in the Post-Crimea Survey. There are as many rightists or conservatives among Hungarians with a pro-Russian orientation (58%) as there are leftists among Bulgarians leaning towards Russia. Hovering around 36 per cent, the balance between left and right is of the same magnitude in both cases. Though sharing geopolitical preferences, the pro-Russians of Bulgaria and Hungary thus represent mirror images of one another on the left/right continuum (Table 1). Bulgarian pro-Russians lean left; Hungarian pro-Russians lean right. With the former communist party

(BSP) as the traditional and primary carrier of the pro-Russian banner, the East/West divide is deeply entrenched in Bulgaria. It is less strongly pronounced in Hungary, but plays an important role in the ideological profile of the leading right-wing Hungarian parties.

Table 1. Structure of the East/West divide in Hungary and Bulgaria. (%)

	Hungary		Bulgaria	
	Pro-Russia	Pro-EU	Pro-Russia	Pro-EU
Low status	45	44	64	40
Education (high level)	13	15	18	31
Party ID	49	39	60	53
Top-ranked parties in polling within the survey	Fidesz (24%) Jobbik (20%)	Fidesz (23%) Jobbik (9%)	BSP (32%) GERB (9%)	GERB (33%) DPS (7%) Reform Bloc (7%)
Centre preferences on the left/right scale	20	35	21	27
Left/right balance	-36 (22–58)	-11 (27–38)	+37 (58–21)	-43 (15–58)
Communist era positively rated	46	38	75	20

Note: Low status is defined as the first three steps (1–3) in a ranking of self-perceived social status on a seven-point scale running from low (1) to high (7). The level of education was measured using a three-point scale from low to high. The question about party ID is dichotomous. We have recorded those who answered the question in the affirmative. Top-ranked parties are those with the largest share of votes in an 'election' organised within the survey. In the following item respondents were asked to place themselves on a scale, where 0 means left and 10 means right. Some people are neither left, nor right. This corresponds to a score of 5 on the eleven-point scale. It is equally far removed from both polar extremes. We refer to this position on the left/right scale as a centre preference. If the relative size of leftists (0–4) and rightists (6–10) were the same, the difference between them would be 0. A plus difference attached to it means that the leftists are more numerous than the rightists; and a difference that comes with a minus sign attached to it tells us that the rightists outnumber the leftists. In the last two questions, Hungarian and Bulgarian respondents were asked to identify the period in contemporary history when their country was best off, including the communist era and the present, on-going period (2004/2007 and onwards). The Hungarian survey differentiates between the Rákosi and Kádár eras. The Hungarian data presented in this table includes the entire communist period.

The items mentioned thus far are familiar from standard West European studies of electoral behaviour, but Table 1 also features a concession to the area-specific context – a question tapping attitudes towards the communist past. It is included because we have reason to believe that favourable ratings of the communist past may promote pro-Russian attitudes. Positive feelings about the communist era are indeed widespread. One out of five pro-European Bulgarians and almost two out of five pro-European Hungarians recall it as a golden age. Those with a pro-Russian geopolitical orientation are even more enthusiastic about the communist past. Three out of four of Bulgaria's pro-Russians single out the communist era as the peak experience in Bulgaria's contemporary history. With a positive rating of 46 per cent, Hungary's pro-Russians are a bit more reserved about the communist past but manifest strong emotional ties to it.

The East/West divide in Hungary and Bulgaria partly coincides with what may be described as a regime divide in the Eastern flank of the European Union. It revolves around questions about democracy, the rule of law, European integration and the role of Russia in the region. Its presence is particularly strongly felt in Bulgaria. Only a fraction of Bulgar-

ia's pro-Russians (17%) express principled support for democracy; more than two-thirds advocate strongman rule. They score extremely low on a number of system performance indicators such as satisfaction with the way democracy works and respect for human rights. They obviously do not believe that the most recent elections were conducted fairly and – with the exception of the army – they have very limited trust in institutions. The judiciary system and the parliamentary institutions are held in particularly low esteem (Table 2). Bulgaria's pro-Europeans have more democratic and more moderate views and the distance between the two geopolitically defined groups remains large across items.

Table 2. Support for democracy and trust in institutions within the geopolitical camps in Hungary and Bulgaria. (%)

	Hungary		Bulgaria	
	Pro-Russia	Pro-EU	Pro-Russia	Pro-EU
Satisfied with the way democracy works	34	32	9	34
Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government	43	63	17	66
Best to get rid of Parliament and elections and have a strong leader	46	26	67	27
The government has no respect for human rights	43	49	92	57
The government treats people equally and fairly	51	37	16	30
The recent elections were conducted fairly	58	55	29	52
Trust in courts	35	43	9	23
Trust in police	49	53	13	34
Trust in army	50	46	37	53
Trust in Parliament	21	24	3	12
Trust in Government	23	26	2	28
Trust in parties	21	19	4	14

Note: The per cent satisfied with the way democracy works is based on the categories very and fairly satisfied (1–2). In the following question, the respondents were confronted with three statements about democracy and its alternatives and asked to identify the statement they agree most with. We consider 'agreement with the statement about democracy as preferable to any other form of government' as our measure of principled support for democracy. Support for strongman rule is tapped by the response categories 'strongly agree' and 'somewhat agree' (1–2) with the call for scrapping the parliamentary system. In their rating of the government's handling of human rights, the respondents were offered four alternatives. The last two ('not much respect' and 'no respect at all for human rights') provide a measure of overall dissatisfaction with the government's human rights record. Treatment by the government is considered equal and fair if the respondents 'definitely' or 'somewhat' agree. Similar comments apply to the prod about the fairness of the most recent elections. Here the relevant response categories are 'fairly' and 'to some extent fairly' conducted elections. In the last set of questions, the respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they trust a number of institutions to look after their interests. The answers were recorded on a seven-point scale from 'no trust at all' (1) to 'great trust' (7). As trusting we count those in the upper echelons of this ladder (5–7).

The Hungarians do not quite fit into this mould. Pro-Russian Hungarians are less likely than their pro-European Hungarian counterparts to express principled support for democracy. They are more likely than Hungarian pro-Europeans to call for strongman

rule. But they are much more open for democracy and are averse to strongman rule than Bulgaria's pro-Russians. On the whole, the gap between the geopolitical camps is much smaller in Hungary than in Bulgaria. The four performance-related items generally generate small between-group differences in Hungary, and the trust items fluctuate around considerably higher levels than in Bulgaria. Trust in the judiciary, the police and the army are rather widespread, but support for the parliamentary institutions is low.

Table 3. Attitudes towards Russia and the EU within the two geopolitical camps in Hungary and Bulgaria. (%)

	Hungary		Bulgaria	
	Pro-Russia	Pro-EU	Pro-Russia	Pro-EU
Country benefits from EU membership	48	75	18	84
European unification has gone too far	56	41	73	39
EU tends to interfere too much in domestic affairs	78	72	93	57
Trust in the European Union	24	42	9	66
Russia definitely not a military threat	23	16	67	37
Admiration for President Putin's leadership	56	25	86	19
EU sanctions against Russia should be removed altogether	11	5	72	18

Note: The question about the benefits of EU membership is dichotomous (yes/no). The table reports the per cent respondents who believe their country has benefited from EU membership. The question about European unification is based on an eleven-point scale (0–10). 0 means that European unification has already gone too far and 10 means that European unification should go further. Answers within the range of 0–4 are considered EU-sceptical. Reactions to the statement that 'the EU tends to interfere too much in domestic affairs' were recorded on a four-point scale (strongly agree – strongly disagree). Respondents who 'strongly' or 'somewhat' agree are considered as EU-sceptical. Trust in institutions was measured on a scale from 1 (no trust at all) to 7 (great trust). As trusting we count those in the upper echelons of this ladder (5–7). The following item raises the question of Russia as a military threat (definitely no – definitely yes). Table 3 reports the number of respondents who believe there is no such threat. Admiration for President Putin was measured on a four-point scale (strong admiration – definitely no admiration at all). We consider those who express 'strong' or 'some' admiration for Putin as his admirers. The last item taps attitudes towards the post-Crimea EU sanctions against Russia. The table identifies the number of respondents who think that these sanctions should be removed altogether.

A similar pattern appears in Table 3 on attitudes towards the EU and Russia. EU-scepticism is widespread in both countries. Those with pro-Russian orientation are generally more sceptical than those leaning towards the EU; the gap between the two geopolitical camps is generally large in Bulgaria. Only 9 per cent of Bulgaria's pro-Russians trust the EU while 66 per cent of its pro-Europeans embrace it. The Hungarian response is somewhat more balanced – 24 per cent trust among the pro-Russians and 42 per cent among the pro-Europeans. Most experts believe that Hungary and Bulgaria profit from EU membership in the form of a continuous flow of infrastructural support and other benefits such as the customs union, but pro-Russians remain sceptical. Only 18 per cent of Bulgaria's pro-Russians and 48 per cent of Hungary's pro-Russians answer the question about EU benefits in the affirmative. The pro-Europeans, on the other hand, mobilise vast majorities of supporters for the EU – 84 per cent in Bulgaria and 75 per cent in Hungary. The items tapping attitudes towards Russia follow the same pattern. Pro-Russians are more likely than pro-Europeans to downplay Russia's importance as a military threat, to express

admiration for President Putin, to call for the removal of the EU sanctions imposed on Russia in the wake of its annexation of Crimea and military interference in support of separatists in the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine. The gap between the two geopolitically defined groups is consistently larger in Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian East/West divide is simply more polarising than the Hungarian ditto. It coincides neatly with the standard East European regime divide and structures opinions on a wide range of issues. It revolves around the Bulgarian Socialist Party and its generally leftist voters. The BSP is the major leftist party in Bulgaria, but not the only pro-Russian voice in Bulgarian party politics. Ataka – a strongly nationalist and xenophobic party with a left-wing social programme and represented in parliament since 2005 – actually stands out as the most strongly pronounced pro-Russian party in contemporary Bulgarian politics. It is a staunch supporter of Russian foreign policy, including the annexation of Crimea and the ensuing conflict with Ukraine, and a harsh critic of the European Union with an electoral support in the range of 4–7 per cent. The ABV should also be mentioned in this context. It was formed in 2012 by former president Georgi Parvanov (2001–2011) and other former members of the BSP. It casts itself as a centre-left party with a pro-European orientation against the backdrop of basically pro-Russian attitudes. It was part of the government between 2014 and 2016, but failed to surpass the 4 per cent hurdle in 2017 (Karasimeonov 2010, 210–230).

The Hungarian East/West divide revolves around two of Hungary's current major political parties – Fidesz and Jobbik – and their predominantly right-wing voters. Building a pro-Russian geopolitical bloc on the right-wing segment of the electorate is no doubt feasible. But successfully appealing to both geopolitical camps without losing grip on either of them may prove difficult for Fidesz and Jobbik in the long run (cf. Table 1). This is why we would be inclined to classify the Bulgarian East/West divide as a cleavage and we will keep referring to the tug of war between East and West in Hungary as an attitudinal divide (see Deegan-Krause 2013).

Support for Russia in a post-Crimea context

When asked if and how the annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine had affected their attitudes towards Russia, Bulgarian respondents stand out as much more supportive of Russia than their counterparts in Hungary (Post-Crimea Barometer 2015). The pattern becomes particularly pronounced if we sort the respondents by geopolitical orientation (Table 4).

Bulgarians with a pro-Russian geopolitical orientation address the issue of Russian annexation and interference in Ukraine as if they were Russian nationalists and almost unanimously pledge allegiance to Russia. Three out of four claim that they remain positive about Russia; and an additional 15 per cent say they sympathise more with Russia now than they did before. This stands in sharp contrast to all other respondents in Table 4, most of whom define themselves as neutral towards Russia. Russia also has a substantial number of supporters (22%) among Hungarians with pro-Russian geopolitical preferences and among Bulgarians with pro-European geopolitical leanings. The latter actually have more in common with the former than with the pro-European Hungarians. In Hungary geopolitical commitment structures the debate about Russia only weakly. In Bulgaria geopolitical commitment to Russia virtually precludes critical comments about

Russia, but geopolitical commitment to Europe is not sufficient to marginalise the attraction of Russia.

Table 4. Post-Crimea support for Russia by geopolitical orientation. (%)

	Hungary		Bulgaria	
	Pro-Russia	Pro-EU	Pro-Russia	Pro-EU
Now I sympathise more with Russia	3	1	15	0
I kept my positive attitude towards Russia	19	5	74	22
I kept my neutral attitude towards Russia	62	62	10	55
I kept my negative attitude towards Russia	9	17	1	11
Now I sympathise less with Russia	7	15	0	12
Total	100	100	100	100

Note: The question reads: *Did you change your attitude towards Russia after the annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in Ukraine?* Breakdown by geopolitical preferences – pro-Russia versus pro-EU.

Geopolitical orientation is just one of the many factors that may shape Hungarian and Bulgarian attitudes towards the new and more assertive Russia. Tables 1–3 in the previous section include an array of items that qualify as explanatory or independent variables in a regression model designed to explain variations in support for Russia. We have the standard socioeconomic indicators in Table 1, the democracy-related indicators in Table 2 and the foreign policy perceptions (EU versus Russia) listed in Table 3. We know that geopolitical preference – pro-Russia or pro-EU – makes a difference for how Hungarians and Bulgarians respond to most of the items that passed by in the previous section. At this stage of the inquiry it is therefore tempting to take the most challenging question in the questionnaire about Russia – the one raising the issue how to relate to Russia against the backdrop of the annexation of Crimea and the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine – and cast it as a function of the whole set of independent variables [$y=f(x_1, x_2 \dots x_n)$].

Regression analysis is based on causal logic and might help us identify the determinants of support for Russia in the post-Crimea context. Does it go up or down as people get better off, more attached to Western style democracy and the EU and as Russia stands out as more or less threatening? The variables in the model are mainly attitudinal; and, in most cases, it is difficult to argue that there is a sequential order between them. Our dependent variable draws attention to a recent problem in 2015 – Russian aggression in Ukraine – and the response to it may be seen as a product of items tapping long-lasting support for democracy, the EU and general attachment to Russia. Our independent or explanatory variables are not only numerous but also plagued by multi-collinearity. The variables listed in Table 2, tapping support for democracy, may serve as an example. Two of them – preferences for democracy as the best form of government as opposed to support for strongman rule – were designed to measure principled support for democracy; four of them are performance related measures of satisfaction with democracy; and yet another cluster of items tap trust in parliamentary institutions and the keepers of law and order (the courts, the police and the army). If we put all 12 of them into a factor analysis, we get a three-factor solution explaining two-thirds of the variance neatly corresponding to the three original variable clusters in Hungary as well as Bulgaria (see Appendix 1). Within-cluster correlations are high as a rule. The four performance indicators have a Cron-

bach alpha between .80 (Bulgaria) and .85 (Hungary); and the six trust items generate a Cronbach alpha hovering around of .86 in both countries. An overlap of this magnitude suggests that the variables basically measure the same thing – in these cases presumably overall satisfaction with the way democracy works and trust in state institutions.

When two or more independent variables overlap to a large extent, the estimates of their relative weights in the model become shaky but multi-collinearity does not affect the predictive power of the model. It is measured in terms of the R^2 or per cent variance explained ($R^2 \times 100$). Table 5 below shows how the predictive power of the model increases as we gradually move from a simple control for standard background variables (Step 1) to the full model (Step 5).

Table 5. Five steps explaining post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia. Per cent variance explained.

	Variables added to the model in each step	Hungary	Bulgaria
1. Control variables	Social status Education	.9	2.4
2. Support for democracy	Satisfaction with democracy Principled support for democracy Support for strongman rule Respect for human rights People treated equally and fairly Recent elections conducted fairly	6.8	15.7
3. Trust in institutions	Trust in courts Trust in police Trust in army Trust in parliament Trust in government Trust in parties	8.8	22
4. Attitudes towards EU	Country benefits from EU membership European unification has gone too far EU tends to interfere too much in domestic affairs Trust in the European Union	10.2	23.3
5. Attitudes towards Russia	Russia – a military threat? Admiration for President Putin's leadership EU sanctions against Russia? Geopolitical preference: Russia versus EU	28.5	54.6

Note: Each step includes additional variables into the model and the final model counts no less than 22 independent variables. We therefore use the adjusted R^2 in the calculation of the per cent variance explained in the last two columns. The adjusted R^2 increases only if the additional variables improve the model more than is expected by chance and makes comparisons between models meaningful. Post-Crimea support for Russia serves as the dependent variable in the five regressions summarised in Table 5. It is presented in Table 4 above. The exact wording or scaling of the independent or explanatory variables in the five regressions may be gauged from Tables 1–3.

The impact of the two socioeconomic variables is modest – at the most 2.4 per cent in Bulgaria. If we add the six democracy-related items to the model, its predictive power

jumps to 6.8 per cent in Hungary and 15.7 per cent in Bulgaria. This pattern is repeated as we incorporate the trust items into the model. The predictive power goes up to 8.8 per cent in Hungary and 22 per cent in Bulgaria. The addition of EU-related items has a minor effect on the predictive power of the model in Hungary as well as in Bulgaria (Step 4). In Hungary its predictive power increases to 10.2 per cent, and in Bulgaria to 23.3 per cent. The last step – the inclusion of overall attitudes towards Russia – makes a big difference in both countries. In Hungary the variance explained jumps to 28.5 per cent and in Bulgaria to 54.6 per cent. This corresponds to coefficients of association between the dependent and independent variables (Multiple R) of .534 in Hungary and .74 in Bulgaria.

The strong performance of the items that were added to the model in the final stage of the stepwise procedure suggests that this is where we should look for key determinants of post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia in Hungary and Bulgaria. This is not quite unexpected. Our dependent variable measures support for Russia in Bulgaria and Hungary at a point in time when Russia is castigated by the international community for its aggressive behaviour in neighbouring Ukraine, but it is expressed against the backdrop of the reservoir of support built up over time and reflected in items such as the four variables tapping overall support for Russia in Table 6. An explanatory model exclusively based on these four items is not only more parsimonious than the complex model we ended up with after the inclusion of the various variable clusters in Table 5. It also turns out to be almost on a par with the complex model in terms of explanatory power, which may be attributed to the high level of multi-collinearity in the complex model.

Of the four items in the model, the question tapping admiration for President Putin's leadership stands out as the key determinant in both countries. Admiration does not necessarily spell approval or support, but admiration for President Putin's leadership does indeed translate into post-Crimea support for Russia in Bulgaria and Hungary. Rejection of the EU sanctions imposed on Russia and geopolitical orientation towards Russia pull in the same direction in both countries, particularly strongly so in Bulgaria.

The notion that Russia might constitute a military threat turns up as a major determinant only in Hungary. In Bulgaria, this issue does not seem to be on the agenda. An overwhelming majority of Bulgarians (90%) believe that Russia is indeed a friendly neighbour; and given the other variables in the model its contribution to the variance explained is small and can be dismissed as non-significant (see Table 6). With this major exception, the structure of post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia seems to be the same in both countries, but the presence of long-lasting ties with Russia is more strongly felt in Bulgaria. Geopolitical orientation is a much more powerful force in Bulgaria (beta weight: .253) than in Hungary (beta weight: .105). Bulgaria also comes out in the lead on admiration for Putin and rejection of EU sanctions, though modestly so. The most striking thing about the parsimonious model (Table 6) is that it works almost as well as the full model that comes out of the stepwise procedure in Table 5. In Bulgaria, the match is almost perfect – 54.6 per cent variance explained with 22 independent variables as opposed to 54.1 per cent variance explained with four independent variables. In Hungary, the corresponding gap is somewhat wider – 28.5 versus 24.9 per cent.

The implication is that we might need different models for Bulgaria and Hungary. Three variables – admiration for Putin, rejection of EU sanctions and geopolitical orientation – would in fact be sufficient to account for post-Crimea attitudes in Bulgaria. In Hungary we obviously need all the four variables in Table 6 and possibly a few more.

This brings us back to the long list of potential predictors in Tables 1–3. They are marred by high within-cluster correlations, and in Appendix 2 we have therefore reduced the number of new variables entered into the model based on the four items tapping general support for Russia. This gives us a model including a total of 11 independent variables; and for comparative purposes we ran this model on data from both countries.

Table 6. Explaining post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia in terms of overall support for Russia. Linear regression.

Model	Unstandardized coefficient B	Standard Error	Standardized coefficient Beta	Significance
Hungary				
Constant	1.686	.229	–	.000
Russia – a military threat?	.143	.041	.124	.001
Admiration for Putin’s leadership	.411	.042	.367	.000
EU sanctions against Russia?	–.133	.042	–.117	.001
Geopolitical orientation (Russia vs Europe)	.247	.083	.105	.003
Variance explained	24.9%			
Bulgaria				
Constant	1.314	.246	–	.000
Russia – a military threat?	.050	.045	.038	.260
Admiration for Putin’s leadership	.406	.046	.378	.000
EU sanctions against Russia?	–.207	.042	–.198	.000
Geopolitical orientation (Russia vs Europe)	.532	.091	.253	.000
Variance explained	54.1%			

Note: Table 6 reports the outcome of identical regression models in Hungary and Bulgaria. In bi-variate regressions, the regression coefficient gives us the slope of the regression line. In multi-variate regressions, the regression coefficients reflect the contribution of the different variables to the slope of the regression line. The standard error provides information about the stability of the estimate. If the regression coefficient and the standard error are of roughly the same magnitude, the estimate becomes unstable and insignificant. The standardized coefficients control for differences in scaling and are thus well suited for comparative purposes.

We will not go through the outcome of the regressions item by item, but a few highlights are in order. (1) Social background is non-significant in Hungary as well as Bulgaria. Post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia are attitudinal rather than class driven. (2) In Bulgaria, only three variables mentioned above come out as significant. These three items are indeed sufficient to account for post-Crimea attitudes in Bulgaria. (3) Hungary offers a more mixed picture. Variables tapping general support for Russia play a prominent role, but three other variables – support for strongman rule, satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions in the form of an additive index – also make significant contributions to the variance explained. In Hungary, post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia clearly revolve around more than just Russia.

Concluding remarks

The East/West divide has made a large imprint on Bulgaria and Hungary. Pro-Russian sentiments are widespread in both countries. They rest on a fundament of long-term attachment to Russia and its indisputable leader since the beginning of this century. This fundament is particularly strong in Bulgaria, where the East/West divide has all the trappings of a full-blown cleavage. It is deeply entrenched, strongly divisive and built into the contemporary party system where it revolves around the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), formerly known as the Bulgarian Communist Party. The BSP provides Russia with a large number of loyal supporters, but it is by no means the sole provider. Russia has many friends within mainstream Bulgarian parties; and its few consistent and outright critics are part of the small Bulgarian right-wing extreme. This pattern is clearly visible in the reactions of most Bulgarians to the EU sanctions imposed on Russia after its annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Gallup International 2015). This prompts us to describe the East/West divide in Bulgaria as an *asymmetrical cleavage*. It is a powerful force reducing the attraction of Europe in Bulgaria. With the benefit of hindsight, the Bulgarian Communist Party vision of Bulgaria as a Soviet republic proclaimed in 1963 may have been based on an accurate assessment of the pro-Russian sentiments in the country at the time.

The Hungarian East/West divide does not have the same potential. It is less firmly entrenched and less divisive than the Bulgarian East/West divide; it is only weakly integrated into the Hungarian party system. Russia's friends in Hungary flock to the same political parties – Fidesz and Jobbik – as its critics. Building a pro-Russian geopolitical bloc on this right-wing segment of the electorate is no doubt feasible, but in the long run it may prove difficult for Fidesz and Jobbik to successfully appeal to both geopolitical camps without losing grip on either of them.

The gap between the Russia's friends and its critics is consistently wider in Bulgaria. In statistical terms, there is therefore more variance to be explained in Bulgaria than in Hungary. Both countries are nevertheless submitted to the same logic. Post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia are primarily a function of items tapping general support for Russia, including geopolitical orientation and admiration for President Putin. Nothing tops the impact of admiration for Putin. His charisma is clearly an asset for Russia in both countries. But admiration for an incumbent president does not necessarily carry over to his successor. Geopolitical orientation towards a country or region holds out the prospect of continuous goodwill. In Bulgaria this is the second most important predictor in both configurations of the model (Table 6 and Appendix 2). In Hungary, its impact is considerably more modest. The bottom-line is that swift change is possible, particularly in Hungary with its weakly entrenched East/West divide.

Appendix 1

Table A1.1. Dimensions of support for democracy in Hungary. Varimax rotated principle component matrix

	1	2	3
Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Hungary?	.792	-.103	.037
Principled support for democracy versus authoritarian preferences	.033	-.146	.753
Best to get rid of Parliament and elections and have a strong leader who can quickly decide everything.	.009	-.045	-.812
How much respect do you think Hungary's government has for individual human rights?	.845	-.122	.106
Equal and fair treatment by the government?	.770	-.122	-.133
Would you say that the most recent election of parliament was conducted fairly or not?	.773	-.134	.182
Trust in courts	-.367	.746	-.025
Trust in the police	-.176	.844	-.134
Trust in the army	-.159	.843	-.011
Trust in parliament	-.756	.403	.014
Trust in government	-.782	.375	.028
Trust in political parties	-.687	.399	.125
Per cent variance explained	37	21	19

Note: Five iterations were required to obtain the Varimax rotated component matrix for Hungary explaining a total of 68 per cent of the variance in the original correlation matrix. The three components or factors (1, 2 and 3) may be seen as analytical variables. The factors are determined by the group of variables with the strongest loadings on or correlations with the factor. Factor 1 is primarily defined by the four performance related items; factor 2 by the trust items in; and factor 3 by the two items tapping principled support for democracy.

Table A1.2. Dimensions of support for democracy in Bulgaria. Varimax rotated principle component matrix

	1	2	3
Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Hungary?	-.338	.625	-.343
Principled support for democracy versus authoritarian preferences	-.107	.282	-.731

	1	2	3
Best to get rid of Parliament and elections and have a strong leader who can quickly decide everything.	.116	-.022	.853
How much respect do you think Hungary's government has for individual human rights?	-.412	.693	-.258
Equal and fair treatment by the government?	-.088	.750	-.056
Would you say that the most recent election of parliament was conducted fairly or not?	-.158	.788	-.070
Trust in courts	.768	-.120	.107
Trust in the police	.848	-.057	.078
Trust in the army	.724	-.223	-.076
Trust in parliament	.661	-.362	.326
Trust in government	.634	-.389	.379
Trust in political parties	.666	-.300	.356
Per cent variance explained	29	21	15

Note: Four iterations were required to obtain the corresponding Varimax rotated principle component matrix for Bulgaria. It is a three-factor solution accounting for 65 per cent of the variance. The three factors are defined in terms of the same variable clusters as in Hungary, but the order between them is somewhat different. In Bulgaria, the trust items define Factor 1 and relegate the four performance related items to Factor 2. Factor 3 remains defined by items tapping support for democracy in both countries.

Appendix 2

Table A2.1. Explaining post-Crimea attitudes towards Russia with a multiple set of indicators. Regression analysis

Model	Unstandardized coefficient B	Standard Error	Standardized coefficient Beta	Significance
Hungary				
Constant	1.312	.364	—	.000
Social status	-.010	.033	-.012	.764
Education	-.061	.052	-.047	.241
Support for strongman rule	.090	.032	.101	.005
Satisfaction with democracy	.194	.048	.178	.000
<i>Trust in judicial institutions</i>	-.023	.012	-.083	.057
<i>Trust in political institutions</i>	.048	.014	.166	.001
EU membership beneficial	-.097	.074	-.048	.192
Russia – a military threat?	.150	.042	.130	.000
Admiration for Putin's leadership	.347	.044	.310	.000
EU sanctions against Russia?	-.160	.042	-.140	.000

Model	Unstandard- ized coefficient B	Standard Error	Standardized coefficient Beta	Significance
Geopolitical orientation (Rus- sia vs Europe)	.216	.086	.092	.012
Variance explained	28.6%			
Bulgaria				
Constant	1.241	.397		.002
Social status	.024	.034	.027	.467
Education	.100	.067	.057	.139
Support for strongman rule	.019	.038	.020	.620
Satisfaction with democracy	.008	.054	.006	.884
<i>Trust in judicial institutions</i>	.023	.014	.069	.107
<i>Trust in political institutions</i>	-.028	.017	-.075	.105
EU membership beneficial	-.131	.092	-.062	.154
Russia – a military threat?	.015	.049	.012	.754
Admiration for Putin’s lead- ership	.421	.050	.397	.000
EU sanctions against Russia?	-.194	.046	-.186	.000
Geopolitical orientation (Rus- sia vs Europe)	.431	.114	.205	.000
Variance explained	54.6%			

Note: The model contains two background or control variables; one item indirectly tapping principled support for democracy; one performance related item; two additive trust indices – *trust in judicial institutions* (courts and police) and *trust in political institutions* (political parties and parliament); and an item tapping support for the EU in addition to the four Russia centred variables in Table 6. This model performs just as well as the model with 22 independent variables we started out with in Table 5. Compared to the Russia centred model (Table 6) it offers a substantial improvement only in the case of Hungary.

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