

Left-Right Self-Placement in Western and Eastern Europe

Is left-right self-placement an accurate mechanism reflecting the
publics' value positions?

By

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

(2011)

Abstract

While increasingly popular within electorates, the left-right discourse has become a stagnating area of political science, with comparative studies about the meaning of left and right to voters being particularly outdated. This thesis attempts to provide an overview of the general left-right discussion from the theoretical perspective of the related globalization literature and the typology of theories about the changing meaning of left and right – irrelevance, persistence, pluralisation and transformation. The main argument is that while the use of left-right self-positioning is on the rise, it increasingly fails to be a mechanism that accurately describes the value positions of those who use it. This is partly due to its sheer complexity, emanating from the historical ‘custom’ of inclusion of all new issue areas under its wings. This argument’s validity is tested by analyzing some of the most significant changes that Western societies have encountered in recent decades related to rapid economic globalization. If it is true that the socio-economic dimension has risen among the European publics so much as to make it by far the most visible aspect of society, as is argued here, it should also be the value dimension most strongly related to left-right self-placement. The socio-economic dimension is hypothesized to be particularly salient among the electorates of Central and Eastern Europe thanks to their unique overall position after the dissolution of the USSR and their gradual entry into the EU. The hypotheses are tested by way of bivariate and multivariate regression analyses, with the dependent variable being the left-right self-placement of European electorates, and the independent variable being a battery of questions organized according to the different value dimensions of the left-right discourse (religious, socio-economic, postmaterialist, nationalist) into indices for each of the studied countries. Compared against the theoretical perspectives and older empirical studies, findings show that left-right self-placement’s relationship with the publics’ value positions is further decreasing.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank, first and foremost, Gábor Tóka for supervising me and for the guidance, suggestions, and clarity with which he provided me. I would also like to thank Dorothee Bohle, Zsolt Enyedi, Radoslaw Markowski and Levente Littvay for all I learned in the classes that I took with them, as well as Paul Weith for the additional advising which he gave me for my thesis. Beyond this, I am grateful to my family, friends and colleagues for their unending support of my academic pursuits. Finally, I extend these acknowledgements and gratitude to all my friends who I met this year at CEU.

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Introduction

Spatial metaphors are vital tools for all aspects of our own self-definition and that of our surrounding environment. Comparison and antonymy are the concepts that most immediately spring to mind when we are asked to describe anything, and these themselves are already to an extent categories of space. It is then no wonder, as Laponce (1981) engrossingly portrays, that the human world is filled with dyadic and triadic classifications and shortcuts.

The left-right spectrum has been an important part of at least the Western political space since the French Revolution, absorbing and simplifying such dichotomies as secularism-religion, equality-hierarchy, internationalism-nationalism, and many others – as widespread in their content as in the longevity of their existence, from the very ancient to the most contemporary (postmaterialist) values. Despite naturally undergoing changes and shifts throughout that period, the left-right distinction has survived to this day, and its use is even on the increase. If this increased use is to have any meaning however, it should be proven that it accurately reflects electorates' value positions. I test this hypothesis by measuring self-placement's relationship to its traditional value dimensions, with the contemporary reification of the socio-economic dimension as a primary interest in this thesis.¹

Why the sudden rise in the preeminence of this particular dimension? Globalization literature is filled with admonitions regarding the dangerous rise of the economic dimension – brought forth above all by advances in communication and transportation technologies – that supposedly corrupts, or at the very least sidelines other societal values. Since the establishment and rapid spread of the Washington Consensus ideology from the 1980s onwards – the main driving force behind economic globalization – labour scholars

¹ The left as the custodian of equality and justice through redistributive social and economic intervention of the state. The Right as the defender of private property, capitalism, and the curtailment of state by deregulatory policies.

increasingly talk about the decline of the left, which has been on the upsurge especially since the end of World War 2, building on its notable successes throughout the prewar period. The spread of the neoliberal ideological paradigm, together with the dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, with sudden hypermobility of capital, and a collusion of other factors has severely disrupted the balance of class forces, weakening and dividing the labor class, forcing its traditional political allies – social democratic parties – into the center.

Connecting this unique set of circumstances to the wider left-right debate, it is necessary to find out whether these developments affected voters' value orientations regarding their left-right self-placement. This is especially so because the left-right discourse has become a stagnating area of political science, with comparative studies about the meaning of left and right to voters being particularly outdated. What does theory tell us about the electorates' self-placement?

Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) found that “on the whole, in Western political cultures left-right labels seem to be used in connection with political parties more often than with any other groups“, indeed, according to their research self-placement appears to correspond most strongly with party identification, and much less with ideology (value orientations), political cognition, social class and religion. These findings, while contested, seemed to hold for most of the Western European countries studied with relatively stable party systems, but what of the notoriously unstable party systems of Central and Eastern Europe, in which new parties emerge and old ones perish almost every electoral period? Can similar connections be traced there? And if it is true that left-right self-positioning occurs early in life either together with party identification or after it, is it not plausible to suggest that the rise of populist parties could further distort left-right identification of the masses? It would certainly appear so, when these parties commonly cherry-pick issues and their positions on them based on current popularity and prevailing opinion, while at the same time retaining

labels such as ‘social democratic’ or ‘conservative’. Speaking of issues, is it not true that a significant portion of the electorate subscribes to a left-right identification based on issue preferences and values, as should be the case normatively and as much of the literature also empirically supports? (Huber, 1989)

Derived from the ‘values’ stream, Kitschelt and Hellemans (1990) formulated a typology of theories of the changing nature of the left-right discourse – *irrelevance, persistence, pluralisation, transformation* – which serve as guides throughout this thesis.

Dozens of pertinent questions arise, but contrariwise to all that, a number of commentators and pundits have declared – especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall – that the left-right distinction is no longer relevant. Others, especially in the US, but also in Italy and elsewhere, increasingly talk of a different irrelevance: the so called ‘false left-right paradigm’, the electoral battle between the left and the right being apparently just a show played out to divide and distract the publics, veiling ulterior elite corporate motives. This radical charge is an old one, as evidenced at least as far back as in Upton Sinclair’s (1906) controversial piece ‘The Jungle’, yet persistent. Support or disprovement of such serious allegations is not the subject of this thesis however.

On the contrary, one of the basic arguments and assumptions is that the left-right distinction matters, and matters greatly – if for no other reason than its widespread use – although increasingly failing to reflect publics’ positions. Indeed, it takes nothing more than a cursory glance at contemporary electoral battles to see that the left-right distinction plays a key role as much as it ever had; electorates label themselves through this dyad (or triad if we include the center as a separate entity, rather than a continuum), parties propagate and define themselves by it, and the whole electoral battle is often discursively simplified along these cleavage lines (take for example the US presidential elections of 2008, Slovak parliamentary

elections of 2010, or Czech parliamentary elections of 2010 just to name a few).² Recently, the global financial crisis and the Euro Area debt crisis have further exacerbated these cleavages and intensified the socio-economic dimension's public visibility and rise to the forefront of interest in Europe as well as the West in general.

Simplification, shortcutting, and the resultant loss of accuracy are understandable epiphenomena of these battles, but no matter how strictly we posit ourselves against the relevance of the left-right divide, the very fact that it pervades the discursive space on all levels from individuals through media to politicians locally and globally proves its relevance. We can argue whether this relevance is 'genuine', whether it reflects true positions, but either way, if people ascribe meanings to certain phenomena, identify with them and act upon them, they are as relevant as can be, and require our fullest possible understanding. But it is a major problem if these phenomena are not fully grasped by their wielders, from whence a severe distortion of reality may ensue, as I suspect is the case.³

The primary question I try to answer in this thesis is: Despite the rise of its use, is the left-right distinction an accurate descriptor of the public's values?

I first hypothesize (1) that due to its sheer complexity and the plethora of distortionary effects that stem from the ever changing structure of societies, left-right self-placement does not provide an accurate and reliable mechanism for describing the public's values. This is

² Other cleavages are more or less present in different countries in different degrees, to name just the most important ones we can fall back on Lipset & Rokkan (1967) who identify four main cleavages: Owner – Worker (the main area of left-right involvement, although it can be argued it plays a role in the other cleavages as well), Church – State, Urban – Rural, Centre – Periphery.

³ To illustrate the potential distortive power of the labels of 'left' and 'right' I will once more invoke Upton Sinclair, who, with regards to his 'natural experiment', remarked that: "The American People will take Socialism, but they won't take the label. I certainly proved it in the case of EPIC. Running on the Socialist ticket I got 60,000 votes, and running on the slogan to 'End Poverty in California' I got 879,000. I think we simply have to recognize the fact that our enemies have succeeded in spreading the Big Lie. There is no use attacking it by a front attack, it is much better to out-flank them".

tested by measuring the strength of the relationships between left-right self-positioning and selected indices of value dimensions.

Secondly, I hypothesize (2) the socio-economic value dimension to be the strongest one due to the rapid changes of societies brought by economic globalization, putting this dimension at the forefront of visibility and thus interest among the European Union publics.

Thirdly, I hypothesize (3) that due to the exceptional transitional position of the Central and Eastern European EU members, the salience of the socio-economic position should be even stronger than in the West, even though the overall usage of the left-right dichotomy is likely lower in the CEE region.

The fourth hypothesis (4) pertains to Kitschelt and Hellemans' (1990) typology. I argue that while the status quo of the left-right dichotomy in the EU can best be described by a combination of the *persistence* and *pluralisation* theories, it gradually moves towards a form of the *irrelevance* theory.

Apart from these four primary hypotheses, a final point of interest, or rather a recurrent theme in this thesis, is to show on various examples of the wider left-right discourse that while its main function is to serve as a simplification mechanism, the left-right dyad is due to its complexity also highly susceptible to manipulation, effectively distorting the democratic political space.

If what is claimed in thesis is true, it would essentially suggest that the complexity of the left-right spectrum may lead to dysfunctional political representation, where voters' ideology and values are to the left or the right, yet they vote and in their daily lives think they stand behind the opposite, further enforcing this ideological imbalance. While this particular claim is extremely hard to establish with the available data and will be treated merely as a

serious, but largely theoretical consideration informing the wider discourse, the thesis should provide a reliable answer to its main question, which is just as important.

Simply put, democracy is based on the will of the people. This will can be used under false pretenses and understandings, or tampered with for various purposes. We need to understand such mechanisms and if possible be able to quantify their effects in the electoral arena and the society at large. Answers provided by this thesis are of tremendous importance for the better understanding of the electorates' left-right positioning, their responsiveness to the changing tides of societies, for the uncovering of the distortive potential of the left-right dichotomy, and the underlying causes of these distortions. A further incentive to undertake this research comes from the fact that some of these questions and the fusion of these related and interconnected phenomena have up to this point surprisingly received only marginal interest from the available literature, and those aspects that have, are largely outdated. Once at least a part of this important equation can be established, a vast underresearched field opens up for further study and elaboration.

Apart from this introduction, the thesis consists of the five following parts:

1. First, I proceed by presenting the underlying theoretical framework, followed by a comprehensive critical literature review of the left-right debate to summarize and evaluate the most important developments and positions, connecting the two throughout. Intermingled with this process will be an analysis of the left-right dichotomy and its changing meaning in the contemporary era, all of which also serves to justify the validity of my propositions in this thesis.
2. In the second part I restate my research questions and hypotheses as a preparation for the empirical portion of the thesis.

3. The third, methodological part of my thesis presents the research model and the method of measurement. In order to find and quantify relevant relationships, regression analyses are ran with left-right self-placement being the dependent variable against indices of the main left-right value orientations serving as independent variables, split by countries.
4. In the fourth section I present and describe the results of my research, comparing them with previous results in the field, and analyzing these empirical results vis-à-vis the theoretical framework of this discussion.
5. In the final, concluding part I summarize the main findings and offer suggestions on how this work can be built upon by further research.

1. Theoretical Framework & Critical Literature Review Analysis

This chapter has two purposes. The main is to immerse the reader into the main theoretical framework this thesis approaches its topic from, namely the four theories of Kitschelt and Hellemans (1990). But before that, I believe it is necessary to update the state of affairs of the past few decades in the European Union and see how the left-right dichotomy fits in the picture, as the region has gone through some rather important changes and shifts. The globalization literature's work on the capital-labour struggle, describing the way capital internationalized economy is the most fruitful way to go I believe, as it is strongly related to the left-right dichotomy and serves as a justification for some of my hypotheses. The second purpose is to provide a brief yet comprehensive conceptualization, summary and evaluation of the most important developments and debates arising from the available left-right literature, as well as to have a look at the historical evolution of the left-right discourse, with accompanying rigorous analysis throughout.

1.1 Economic Globalization, Disruption of the Class Balance and the Decline of the Left

1.1.1 The International Influence

The fiercest capital-labor struggle started in the 18th century with the beginning of the industrial revolution. This struggle eventually laid the foundations for leftist movements such as Marxism, socialism, communism, and more recently social democracy that eventually succeeded in the provision of labor rights and the establishment of welfare regimes as instrumental parts of modern democratic systems. The Great Depression of the late 20s and

early 30s of the last century further increased the intervening role of the state in economy and society, this trend culminating into the unique post-World War 2 era labour-capital compromise. (Zinn, 2003; Crouch, 2010)

The post-war compromise was brought upon by a historically special set of circumstances that finally came to a gradual end beginning with the inflation crises of the 70s that appeared to discredit Keynesian demand management and the later onset of globalization that led to the elimination of capital controls, with power once again shifting decidedly towards capital. (Crouch, 2010) Quantitatively diminishing labor's internal divisions further intensified with the expansion of its roles from producers to simultaneously consumers and mini-financiers. (Boyer, 2010)

Neoliberalism, the new socio-economic doctrine that inspired an ideology essentially stressed the importance of market forces instead of state forces, private sector instead of the public sector. As mentioned by Williamson (1989), who originally coined the term Washington Consensus, neoliberalism essentially calls for fiscal policy discipline, restructuring of public expenditure priorities, lower taxes, market determined interest rates, competitive exchange rates, trade liberalization, encouragement of foreign direct investment, privatization, deregulation and protection of property rights.

According to George (1999), neoliberalism was conceived at the University of Chicago by the philosopher-economist Friedrich von Hayek and his students like Milton Friedman, who, together with their supporters and funders over time created "a huge international network of foundations, institutes, research centers, publications, scholars, writers and public relations hacks to develop, package and push their ideas and doctrine relentlessly." Through the influence of the USA and its financial and corporate interests, this doctrine has also taken over the international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and the World Trade Organization, in a fashion that was

described by Stiglitz (2002) as resembling a clandestine coup d'état. Through these it has been rapidly exported and often even imposed abroad. At any rate, the neoliberal ascension has been nothing short of extraordinary and while the frequent crises that it seems to be spurring have generated numerous opponents, it still reigns today as the dominant economic paradigm and a staple of the right's (perceptually meaning USA) victory over the left (perceptually meaning USSR).

The overwhelming force and clout of neoliberalism, as illusory as its basis has been since it appears to have been based largely on unsecured credit and housing debt, has corrupted labor's traditional political custodians – social democratic parties – forcing them to move more towards the middle. This trend can be traced for example to Tony Blair's 'New Labour', Gerhard Schröder's 'Neue Mitte' or the former Italian Communist Party, which had already once changed to 'Democratici di sinistra', only to change once more, dropping its 'di sinistra' part. (Allen, 2009; Crouch, 2010)

This all took place at the same time as the left was weakening due to other societal changes and pressures. To name just a few: changing nature of the workplace and production regimes, effectively meaning the decline of unionism; cross-cutting postmaterialist issues; decrease in international worker solidarity as an effect of the hypermobility of capital; and many more. Apart from essentially creating some parts of the global economic infrastructure, and overtaking others, further proof of the power and dominance of neoliberalism can be derived from its permeation into the realm of culture, extending its ideological basis from states and international organizations to individuals and their social relationships. (Ong, 2006) Neoliberalism has become the very essence of economic globalization, enabling the transnational movement of factors of production, consumerism, corporatization, franchising, commodification – and through all these increasing the visibility and perceived importance of the economy not just for the technocrats, but for each individual, basically changing society.

This short treatise on neoliberal ascension is an important and relevant one for this thesis for two reasons. Firstly, it sets the stage, and is indeed at the very root of some of the distortionary effects that will be outlined in the following chapters. Secondly, if the left-right dichotomy is an accurate informer of the publics' value positions, it should by extension also strengthen the relationship of the socio-economic dimension – (which has thanks to the globalization of economy reached new heights in visibility) – with left-right self-positioning.

1.1.2 The European Union Influence

The above constitutes the international cultural dimension that had a tremendous impact on the world, but the European continent had its own share of regional developments that further drive in the point that economy, and perhaps more specifically 'rightist' economy, has risen in visibility to the forefront of publics' interest.

The European Union has for some been a club predominantly gathered around economy since the very beginning, and due to its technocratic nature has attracted only little attention from the general European populations. In the early 80s it faced a severe existential crisis that was solved almost a decade later with the passing of the Single Market Programme, leading to the Economic and Monetary Union of 1999. (Fligstein and Mara-Drita, 1996)

Since then, public discussions accompanied every country's decision to adopt the single currency, but it wasn't until the global financial crisis hit in 2007 that the EU and the Euro Area were suddenly among the most discussed topics in individual member states. With the first large-scale economic crisis that the EU has gone through since the creation of the Single Market Programme, passing of the Maastricht Treaty and creation of the monetary union, EU has become a much more visible actor not only internationally, but also domestically. Most recently, when the publics were informed about Greece, later followed by

Ireland and Portugal, and also that these countries will require hefty bailouts, visibility of the socio-economic dimension has reached maximum levels, and is likely to play an even bigger role in the future.

1.2 The West Vs. The East in the Left-Right Discourse

The influences that I have described above are argued to have put the socio-economic dimension at the forefront of societal interest, and by transition are hypothesized to translate into being the preeminent value predictors of left-right self-placement in the EU, if this self-positioning is indeed accurately describing publics' value positions. Could it be a plausible assumption that these influences have even a starker impact in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe compared with the Western Europe due to the specificities of their rapid (incomplete) transition from communist states to liberal democracies, essentially creating a much more noticable contrast among their electorates? Is it plausible to hypothesize any other clear differences between the West and the East that are related to the left-right dichotomy? I answer positively on both counts.

1.2.1 Incidence of Left-Right Self-Placement between the West and the East

If it is true, as Laponce (1981) maintains, that parliamentary democracy is one of the major disseminators of the left-right divide among countries, the simple fact that democracy has become the dominant way of organizing politics in the Central and Eastern Europe only in the last 20 years offers a logical hypothesis that the very incidence of left-right self-placement should be lower there than in the West. Among the Western countries, a similar assumption could be said to hold water regarding Portugal, Spain and Greece, which managed to drop the

shackles of authoritarianism only 10-15 years before the CEE region, thus also being younger democracies than the rest of the West, but these will not be discussed at length.

So what particular causes could there be for voters coming from younger democracies to have a lesser affinity with left-right self-placement than their Western counterparts? An obvious cause is that living under an essentially authoritarian regime ideologically ensures political homogeneity when it comes to the official line. This comes in huge contrast with democratic parliamentary regimes, especially those with multiparty systems, where the electoral battles, wideranging value positions of parties and their representatives, frequent government changes, or just the elementary right to express one's opinion, combined with media coverage of all this facilitate the introduction of the left-right discourse to their populations.

Badescu and Sum (2005) cite several other differences that could be encountered in the CEE region. For example, transitional expectations of the majority of the CEE populations have been incredibly high. Because their expectations have not been met by the transition to democracy in the early years, and in fact the absolute numbers of those finding themselves under the poverty line or unemployed has significantly risen in the entire region, the populations became disillusioned about the new democratic regime and apathetic to its processes. Decreasing voter turnouts across the board in this region appear to attest to this. A further cause could be that due to the still atrophied civil society, often very little public discussion takes place before policies are implemented.

Accession to the European Union can be said to have the opposite effect however at least on the elite level, as parties are required to review their overall ideological positioning with regards to access into the European Parliament blocs, and the societies are faced with increasing influence of the EU, having to essentially adopt the entire body of the *Acquis Communautaire* and its ideological underpinnings.

Research conducted by Sum and Badescu (2005) using the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems' Module 1 (1996-2001) corroborates the hypothesis that the use of left-right self-placement is lower in Eastern Europe. In order to provide a kind of map of Europe⁴ from the left-right point of view, and support the above hypothesis from the specific data that are used in this thesis – European Social Survey (2002) and (2008) – I present a longitudinal descriptive outline of the studied countries, such as mean left-right self-placements per country and the actual percentage of self-placers, as can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2. This should provide us with the right context and some preliminary ideas regarding my primary research question and hypotheses.

Unfortunately, a wider longitudinal presentation was not possible, because European Social Survey operates only since 2002. The only significant differences between 2002 and 2008 appear in the Belgian electorate's increase in the use of left-right self-placement from the low (for a Western European country) 86.0% in 2002 to the high 95.4% in 2008; and from the Portuguese apparent decrease of its use from 79.7% in 2002 to the lowest overall score of 67.5% in 2008, although with an extremely high refusal rate for that year for both Portugal and Spain.

The secondary hypotheses presented in the previous pages of this chapter appear to have been empirically confirmed. The average left-right self-placement of Western countries excluding Portugal, Spain, and Greece is 94.2%. The three southern countries' average use of left-right self-placement was only 76.9%, although, as has been mentioned, this percentage was driven lower due to the exceptionally high refusal rate of Portuguese and Spanish respondents for the year 2008 (and is at any rate a really high number, proving that the left-right dichotomy is gaining ground, although it is still not clear whether it is really understood, and by approximately how many self-placers).

⁴ All the available European Union countries for the European Social Survey's 2008 batch were used for this comparison.

Table 1: Left-Right Self-Placement Map of the EU from the European Social Survey 2002

	Left(0)-Right(10) Mean (0-10)	Left-Right Self-Placement (%)	Don't know (%)	No answer (%)	Refusal (%)	N
Belgium	4.83	86.0	13.4	0.6	0	1899
Bulgaria	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Czech Republic	5.41	89.9	9.7	0.4	0	1360
Denmark	5.54	92.9	6.2	0.9	0	1506
Estonia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Finland	5.62	94.6	4.1	0	1.3	2000
France	4.75	93.5	6.5	0	0	1503
Germany	4.60	92.7	4.6	0	2.7	2919
Greece	5.66	77.3	16.8	0	5.9	2566
Hungary	4.95	83.0	13.7	0.2	3.1	1685
Ireland	5.41	82.8	16.4	0.8	0	2046
Latvia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Netherlands	5.30	95.3	4.7	0	0	2364
Poland	5.10	83.3	16.6	0.1	0	2110
Portugal	4.95	79.7	11.8	5.3	3.2	1511
Romania	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Slovakia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Slovenia	4.70	78.7	20.3	1.0	0	1519
Spain	4.42	80.8	18.3	0	0.9	1729
Sweden	4.88	94.6	3.9	0	1.5	1999
United Kingdom	5.14	90.6	9.2	0	0.2	2052

Table 2: Left-Right Self-Placement Map of the EU from the European Social Survey 2008

	Left(0)-Right(10) Mean (0-10)	Left-Right Self-Placement (%)	Don't know (%)	No answer (%)	Refusal (%)	N
Belgium	4.93	95.4	3.9	0	0.7	1760
Bulgaria	4.92	72.1	27.8	0.1	0	2230
Czech Republic	5.42	90.3	9.7	0	0	2018
Denmark	5.31	96.0	3.7	0.3	0	1610
Estonia	5.19	78.3	21.7	0	0	1661
Finland	5.72	95.0	3.8	0	1.2	2195
France	4.79	94.0	3.8	0	2.2	2073
Germany	4.54	92.2	4.9	0	2.9	2751
Greece	5.12	82.8	17.2	0	0	2072
Hungary	5.56	79.9	11.1	0	9.0	1544
Ireland	5.13	91.9	8.1	0	0	1764
Latvia	5.75	83.8	15.9	0	0.3	1980
Netherlands	5.15	96.0	3.4	0	0.6	1778
Poland	5.75	83.2	16.7	0.1	0	1619
Portugal	4.83	67.5	21.8	0	10.7	2367
Romania	5.59	68.9	30.0	1.2	0	2146
Slovakia	4.73	85.7	14.2	0.1	0	1810
Slovenia	4.63	79.5	20.4	0.1	0	1286
Spain	4.54	80.3	9.5	0	10.2	2576
Sweden	5.12	97.1	2.5	0.2	0.2	1830
United Kingdom	5.01	90.0	9.5	0	0.5	2352

The only CEE country that approximated the West in the use of left-right self-placement was the Czech Republic with 90.3%, which surpassed even the percentage of the lowest scoring Western country, the United Kingdom with 90% - the lower percentage for the UK being explained by its two-party system and from that stemming longterm use of a different dyad. The CEE region of the European Union averaged 80.2% on the use of left-right self-placement, with Bulgaria and Romania scoring the lowest in this batch, which could possibly be at least partly explained by their later accession into the European Union.

An important aspect to note is that even though the CEE region in general is perceived – and this has been empirically supported by various data (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2010) – as left leaning, left-right self-positioning does not seem to reflect this in many countries. Also note the self-positioning results of the Scandinavian countries for similar reasons. While political science has its explanations for these phenomena, such discrepancy strongly points to the direction that left-right self-placements are essentially merely emotive and at best partial representations of actual positions.

1.2.2 The Authoritarian Legacies of Communism

Authoritarian heritage is a commonly looked upon potential cause of many contemporary phenomena. In his excellent book, Ost (2006), supported by Crowley's (2004) earlier work, describes the way that Polish Solidarity was self-hijacked and transformed from a traditional labor movement to a fervent promoter of neoliberal market economy and why this occurred.

According to the neoliberal theory, trade unions are essentially unnecessary organizations, because the market is supposed to be the most fair and decisive authority. Neoliberalism and trade unions are thus as antithetical as can be. The very fact that the

leadership as well as large numbers of qualified rank and file of the largest labor movement in Poland turned almost 180 degrees is a startlingly clear example of the differences between Western and Eastern Europe, as well as that of a surviving distortionary left-right trend which pervades in the societies of Central and Eastern Europe.

The distortion is twofold. Firstly, as was described in detail, the economic right (neoliberalism, laissez-faire market economy, etc.) has become the dominant mode of conduct and indeed artificially tied to what is thought as ‘modern’ and successful since the beginning of the 80s and especially related to the end of the Cold War, whereas the left has been often quite successfully tied to the failure and authoritarianism of the past communist regimes as such. So essentially not because modern democratic leftist policies have been tried and failed (see Scandinavia, which scores the highest in any country ranking of quality in almost all aspects, suggesting exactly the opposite), but because they have in the CEE region been in their entirety tied with the authoritarian dysfunctional characteristic of the understandably hated past regime. The tying does not concern only the quickly ‘reformed’ communist parties that appeared in most of the CEE countries after transition, but was over time masterfully employed and still being used as a political tactic against democratic leftist theory in general. The neoliberal doctrine is further spread by establishing well-funded think tanks all over the world, Central and Eastern Europe not excluded, and through the use of effective campaigns such as Margaret Thatcher’s TINA (There Is No Alternative) in the UK.

The second culprit is to be found in the perverse organization of society of the communist regimes themselves, and the legacy they left behind. Through meticulous research involving countless interviews with labor union heads as well as the rank and file, Ost (2006) found that the fact that frequent labor concessions were an inherent part of the communist system and that workers’ influence functioned through hidden workplace mechanisms was

a significant cause of the worker docility in the postcommunist period. Another inherent feature of that system, the equal remuneration for all workers despite their different qualities and work ethic fostered labor's divisions, which became particularly pronounced the very moment that skilled workers were able to resentfully leave behind the heavy burden of their less endowed brethren and 'their' unions.

The authoritarian perversions of the former regimes that were present in the CEE region were naturally not forgotten, nor had been their forceful imposition by the USSR, as Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 can attest to most clearly. Through the workings of these two influences – the unbridled power of the prevailing economic paradigm, together with the negative legacy that was left behind by communism – the general left has been strongly delegitimized with especially the younger generations of Central and Eastern Europeans, informing their left-right self-positioning, but not necessarily their values.

Much related to the above distortionary phenomena, Czech sociologist Jan Keller (2010) describes and analyzes a certain significant portion of the Czech right wing population – what he calls the “right wing urban poors” – who depend on the welfare state, but despite that vote right wing parties (which in the Czech Republic are working hard at reforming the welfare state, effectively by simply reducing it). This portion of the population can be divided into two groups.

The first group generally consists of urban dwelling university students and relatively fresh graduates of around the age of 30-35 (this societal stratum covers the largest right wing voting base in the Czech Republic). This group can, at least for now, afford to vote for the reduction of the welfare state, because it has largely already consumed the goods deriving from it or is still doing so unwittingly. They continue to enjoy free education, and because the number of university students during communism was kept quite low, they are able to easily

penetrate the job market and land profitable jobs, and since many of them have not started their own families, are quite well off.

Of course, those that are still studying fervently oppose the proposed introduction of fees for university education, while at the same time espouse a strongly neoliberal ideology and vote right nevertheless, not even realizing the irony. At the same time, each passing generation will however have a decreased chance for this success story, because the job market begins to approximate the Western one, i.e. it is being oversaturated by university students. In effect, this group is being blinded by short term gains stemming from the former regime, paradoxically at the same time opposing everything connected to it, as it has so successfully been tied to authoritarianism and failure. This all simply due to the perception of communism as essentially meaning the left. Keller (2010) estimates this particular group to account for around 10% of the Czech population.

The second group consists of that portion of the middle class that was forced to descend the societal ladder and take up a lower paying job than they are qualified for. This group depends on the welfare state and should thus oppose neoliberal reforms, but at the same time they vote right because, quite schizophrenically, they are extremely critical of government interventions that support the unemployed or marginalized, such as the Roma population. Members of this large group furthermore blame the unemployed and the marginalized also because they were forced to take a lower paying job, yet those below them, the blamed, are seemingly not ready or able to do the same (not realizing that they likely took the jobs of those currently unemployed). According to Keller's (2010) research, many of them vote right not because it is to their advantage or because the right embodies their values, but because it makes them feel more middle class, and above all more well off than those below them, an essential feeling in a society that has taken on neoliberal values.

Political economy provides more examples that support the uniqueness of the authoritarian communist legacy theory. This support comes from the varieties of capitalism literature, which broadly divides capitalist economies into two main institutional setups: Liberal Market Economies (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, UK, USA); and Coordinated Market Economies (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden). In simplistic terms, LMEs rely strongly on market relations to solve economic coordination issues, while CMEs rely on non-market relations, they are basically neocorporatist economies where governments hold a strong interventionist role. (Hall and Soskice, 2001) From the neoliberal point of view, one could say that the LMEs espouse rightist individualist socio-economic ideals, while the CMEs espouse more leftist egalitarian ideals.

This division has naturally not bypassed the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Bohle & Greskovits (2007a) find that the Baltic states' (note that these were the most strongly affected region by communism, having been an actual part of the USSR) institutional structure is a particularly market-radical neoliberal one, the Visegrad four countries' institutional structure is a less market-radical one, but what they still call embedded neoliberal, and Slovenia is the only country of the entire CEE region that has taken the neocorporatist route, joining other CMEs on the political economic map of Europe. This distribution of rightist capitalist and leftist capitalist forces in the CEE region is supported by other authors as well (Crowley, 2005; Meardi, 2002), Meardi going as far as to call the CEE region the 'Trojan horse for the Americanization of Europe' with regards to their entry into the EU, essentially serving as neoliberal proxies that are to transform the EU from within, slowly picking at the traditional European social state model.

But if it is indeed true that the double influence of the global neoliberal thrust, together with authoritarian legacies is at least partly responsible for this distribution of forces, why does Slovenia differ? Grdesić (2008) provides an answer to this, distinguishing between

different versions of communist authoritarian legacies. He argues that due to the relative popularity and specifics of Tito's legacy in former Yugoslavia – namely 'self management' and 'social ownership', thanks to which labor in these countries was much more active and used to dealing with both the managers and the state, thus more closely resembling a corporatist structure – Slovenia has gone the neocorporatist way, contrary to all the other countries of the postcommunist space. The theory essentially proposes that because the Slovenian experience has been different, much milder than the one encountered by the Visegrad four and the Baltic countries, the anticommunist ideological legacy was missing, enabling Slovenia to take a different route relatively clear of any distortionary influences.

Could it be plausible that the stronger the strangle of USSR before 1989, the greater surge towards the opposite, neoliberal pole might have been desirable for the elites and populations? It does appear that the countries most under the Soviet clout, such as the Baltics – which also incidentally possess a large Russian population and thus are of particular interest to Russia – made the biggest aboutface towards neoliberalism, as if wishing to completely distance themselves from the past and the Russian influence it embodies. Alternatively, could it be that the general left pull of Portugal, Spain and Greece (although notice that Greek self-placement is oriented to the right) could be a result of their right wing authoritarian past?

It is by no means implied that the distortionary effects of communist legacies are the only effects, or even the strongest effects that shaped the paths of CEE countries. For one thing, as can be derived from Kitschelt et al. (1999) and countless works of the institutionalist literature, each country in the region had its own unique institutional structure from which it began its transition, not to mention other, completely historically contingent causes and effects that human history is filled with. For another, the distortion does not flow only in one way. One cannot forget to mention the years of pro-communist, anti-capitalist and anti-

religious indoctrination that was present in this region. Empirical evidence suggests that while it is true that the elites, intelligence and the young are under a strong rightist pull in the CEE countries (which is a direct opposite to the Western positioning of this particular strata), the majority population is generally under a leftist pull, very likely connected to communist indoctrinative influence, especially its anti-religious thrust. (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2010)

The important lesson to take from this analysis is not that one distortion or the other, whether with a left pull or right, is more or less devious, or that one steers further from any potential 'natural' course (the claim of such 'naturalness' likely being nonsense in any case).

What it shows first is that the Central and Eastern European countries' publics are still so to speak in their own paradigm when it comes to left-right self-positioning and thus plausibly different in major ways from the West. I argue that thanks to the strong position of the USA and its ideological position of a savior among the CEE elites (to see this positive association translated to policy take for example the division between the 'Old and New Europe' in the runup to the War in Iraq of 2003), together with the much lesser general prominence of the religious and postmaterial value dimensions in much of the region, the socio-economic dimension will have a stronger relationship with left-right self-placement than in the West. This is also hypothesized to be because of the strong wish to approximate the West, which by many is perceived as superior.

A second important aspect to take into account is the obvious way that the left-right discourse can potentially be misconstrued and used as a powerful weapon, shaping the paths of entire regions for many years to come (such as the outlined asymmetric connection between the modern democratic left and authoritarianism, a simplification that runs rampant across parts of the CEE publics).

1.2.3 Previous Studies of the Left-Right Distortion Phenomena

Has the left-right literature described or studied the outlined phenomena? The answer appears to be more or less negative. Studies that have attempted to uncover the percentage of left-right misplacements are not a complete novelty, but they can be considered exceptions.

Laponce (1981) mentions the 1974 Barnes Survey, in which respondents were first asked to self-place themselves on a left-right scale and then were asked to elaborate on their choice. Of those that were able to provide any answers at all (only from around a quarter to third of the entire sample at that time – in stark contrast to today's situation), 15% of the US respondents provided a wrong justification of their choice, compared to 19% for the UK, and 9% for both Netherlands and West Germany. The reason for the poorer results of US and UK respondents at that time was found in the fact that the left-right dyad has not been as prevalent in those countries up to that point (the respondents preferring Liberal-Conservative and Labour-Conservative respectively), this point further accentuated by Inglehart and Klingemann's (1976) work that suggests a much lesser prominence of the left-right dimension in two-party systems due to effects of a lesser polarization, although that too has changed with time as the UK's self-positioning percentage shows. More importantly, an interesting aspect this survey was missing was that it failed to elaborate on which side was wrong more often (the left or the right), and whether the difference was significant. A more recent exceptional example of measuring misplacement was found in Freire and Belchior (2009), but even there it was not much more than an off-hand remark that based on the results, "right wingers do have less clear and structured views of the substantive content of left and right."

Due to the sheer complexity of the left-right distinction, it has been expressed for example by Laponce (1981) that it is a precarious undertaking indeed to mark a respondent as 'wrong' or 'misplaced'. He cited examples of studies that suggested that even though certain people had their own logical understandings of phenomena, they were often unable to express

them with words. While this certainly is a finding one should not ignore, if the model is simplified and clear, asking specific questions on a dominant dimension of the left-right, the respondents' answers should ideally reflect their self-placements. That is of course if values are reliable predictors of left-right self-placement, as it normatively should be, and as is reported in parts of the literature. Whether this really is or is not the case, the lack of information on this subject most certainly is one of the weaknesses of the left-right literature, and based on the potential societal effects such distortions may carry, it is not a matter to be taken lightly.

1.3 Historical Evolution and Contemporary State of the Left-Right Debate

After describing the significant and rapid changes that were brought by globalization, by major structural shifts such as the end of the Cold War, and by further enlargement and deepening of the EU project, this part of the thesis will concentrate on the theoretical core of the left-right debate. Attempting to comprehensively and above all accurately conceptualize the whole left-right debate is an overwhelmingly difficult task. Still, and perhaps all the more, such conceptualization is necessary, because it introduces the historical complexity of this divide, lists important theories that guide the overall arguments of this thesis and serves as a strong justification for them. It also clearly traces the thought process of the author, displays the debate in a more concise form to the reader, and provides insight into why specific empirical choices and decisions have been taken in the research part of this work.

1.3.1 The Left and the Right

The left-right political discourse originated a few weeks after the convening of the French Estates General during the period of the French Revolution in 1789. In the following

months and years during the National Assemblies, the seating arrangement became such that supporters of the king sat on the right, and supporters of the revolution on the left. (Gauchet, 1997) Throughout the past centuries, the left-right distinction has undergone a number of shifts and changes compared to how it is understood today, and is logically bound to continue this trend. This obviously creates tremendous difficulties even for scholars attempting comparisons based on the broad left-right categories, but at the same time, despite the shifting tendency of meanings of these categories over time, there are certain general metacharacteristics that have to a larger extent persisted, and can certainly be identified today. (Laponce, 1981) This is not to say that these have been impervious to some changes, but there are those who argue for the embeddedness of the general meanings of contemporary *left* and *right*.

So what is it then that the *left* and the *right* are supposed to stand for? Three decades ago, Laponce (1981), through a meticulous research process found four stable, yet relatively broad concepts, which according to him withstood the test of time (at least 150 years) and different cultures, as outlined in Table 3, which was imported from his book.

Table 3: The stable concepts used in association with left/right (concepts over which there was no disagreement among selected ‘informants’)

	Left	Right
Political contrasts	equalitarian	hierarchical
Economic contrasts	poor	rich
Religious contrasts	free thought	religion
Orientation to time	discontinuity	continuity

(Laponce, 1981, p. 119)

While Laponce’s framework functions well on a broad historical basis, showing the inherent complexity that falls under the left-right distinction, providing a good starting overview, in this thesis I am interested specifically in the socio-economic value dimension of

the left-right distinction and its changing definition over time. I argue that it should have, due to the effects described in more detail above, gained widespread value preeminence that should continue to grow among contemporary European respondents at the expense of the other value dimensions that should theoretically be on the decline. The remaining dimensions elaborated on by Laponce are thus hypothesized to be of secondary interest, although they have to be accounted for nevertheless and tested accordingly.

With all this in mind, I rather suggest a more specific, more attuned to current times definition of the socio-economic dimension. What does it mean in contemporary times? Lipset et al. (1954) attempted to provide a more concrete definition more than fifty years ago: “By Left we shall mean advocating social change in the direction of greater equality – political, economic, or social; by Right we shall mean supporting a traditional, more or less hierarchical social order, and opposing change toward greater equality.” While more workable and much more specifically attuned to socio-economics, I suggest a further updating to account for the global paradigm shift that occurred with the onset and rapid spread of the so called Washington Consensus, as formulated by Knapp & Wright (2001) and amended by myself: Those on the Left seek social justice through redistributive social and economic intervention by the state. Those on the Right defend private property, capitalism, and the curtailment of state by deregulatory policies. This is the definition that most accurately and overwhelmingly defines the left and the right in the contemporary European Union, as it contains the particular issues that are contested between the prevailing neoliberal paradigm and those opposing it.

As seen, the definitions of even the oldest dimensions differ in certain respects. This is understandable, but when mixed with the other value dimensions they likely provide a very unbalanced and complicated picture to its numerous potential users, a situation ripe for exploiting.

1.3.2 Partisanship Vs. Values

As has been hinted at in the introduction, one of the main scholarly points of contention is essentially that between partisanship and values, between what Milic (2007) calls the “party surrogate view” and the “value derivative view”. The first, held by Butler and Stokes (1969), and especially gaining prominence since Inglehart and Klingemann’s (1976) seminal article, claims that at least among Western European electorates one’s left-right self-placement is related more closely to party affiliation rather than to any issue preferences. (Converse and Pierce, 1986) If this is true, it could be one more argument to suggest that left-right self-placement does not successfully relate to the values of self-placers.

On the other hand, more recent empirical findings of Sani and Sartori (1983), Huber (1989), and Knutsen (1997) suggest that while partisanship may be the slightly more dominant predictor in some countries, in other, more advanced societies, it is issue preferences and values of individual voters that are the reflection of their left-right self-placement. It is furthermore also highly questionable whether it is issue preferences or partisanship that come first with a young first time voter. Niemi and Jennings (1991) add to this discussion through their own research that strongly suggests that the initial political direction of a child, whether partisanship, issue preferences or values, is significantly related to that of the parents and decreases with time, although remaining quite strong throughout life. Modern genetical research has also proposed that political values may even be inherited. But let us not digress so much. By now it has to be clear that this thesis concerns itself predominantly with the “value derivative view”, but it is worth noting some specific aspects of partisanship as well.

Milic's (2007) work implies that the "party surrogate view" is problematic because the percentage of left-right self-placers is more often than not much higher than the percentage of partisans, suggesting that people that fill the difference place themselves based on particular issue preferences, values, or other than partisanship cues, such as those derived from the media, as Freire and Belchior (2009) suggest. While disagreement as to the ratio between the prevalence of partisanship and issue preferences/value orientations persists, it is clear that values should play a significant role in self-placement just as part of the literature claims. But is the role values play in left-right self-positioning really that significant?

Parliamentarism and popular ideologies such as socialism are historically most strongly tied with spreading the left-right dimension around the world, and parties have indeed historically been the traditional custodians of the left and the right (as well as the center logically), by ideology, and often also by name. At the same time however, parties have also embodied other dyads than the left-right one, by some thought of as strongly connected to it, by others deemed as separate; such as liberal-conservative, authoritarian-libertarian or extreme-moderate, which further greatly complicate left-right understanding and will be discussed in more detail in the following parts of this chapter.

Furthermore, party affiliation may just as easily be caused by sympathies to a single particular individuality within the given party, not necessarily its programme or general issue statements and positions. If it is then indeed true that a majority of left-right self-placers derive their placement from partisanship, and according to Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) this group consists about equally of politically cognizant as well as relatively disinterested individuals, then it may very well be that partisanship is one of the major causes of incongruent self-placement.

What potentially further exacerbates this distortionary effect on voters' socio-economic left-right self-placement is also the fact that socio-economic issues have unprecedentedly and noticeably gone global, or at the very least European. This means that national governments, whether left or right, have a much lower sovereignty in these issues and thus cannot act as 'left' or as 'right' as they present themselves, but only as much as the global prevailing paradigm allows for. After all, even a leftist government will have to think long and hard before undergoing for example a tax reform introducing progressive taxes, raising corporate taxes, or strengthening the position of employees versus employers. This naturally being caused by the very relevant fear of the 'race to the bottom' effects, leftist governments having to keep in mind how such reforms would affect potential foreign direct investment inflow, or even worse, whether such moves might constitute capital flight from their country to more 'responsible' neighbours, costing jobs and thus political currency with its population. Even if a country does go ahead with such reforms, it can quickly find itself under assault by the global financial institutions, rating agencies and other tools of the prevailing paradigm.

Such realities naturally shift the entire socio-economic left-right dimension closer to one side, to the right in this case, and with it possibly also the outward left-right attitudes of partisans that are being solely led by the party and not their own value positions. It is after all hardly a stretch to imagine, and it indeed is an established fact, that what we call *left* in the USA does not equal for example the *left* in Sweden, further complicating the discourse.

To ascertain the specific influence of the above mentioned partisanship phenomenon for all the European countries in this thesis would require a lengthy individual qualitative case by case analysis that my limited word count does not permit, and for which most of the surveyed databases do not provide the necessary questions anyway. Still, the distortionary potential of partisanship has to be kept in mind at least as a theoretical possibility.

1.3.3 Typology of Change: Irrelevance, Persistence, Pluralisation, Transformation

In what I find to be one of the most important articles about the left-right dichotomy and a guiding light of this thesis, Herbert Kitschelt and Staf Hellemans (1990) formulated the typology of theories on the changing nature of the left-right: irrelevance, persistence, pluralisation, transformation. According to Knutsen (1995), these theories operate with three main value dimensions (religious-secular, left-right materialist – which I call socio-economic in this thesis, and materialist/post-materialist), which are essentially said to be differently tied in to the concepts of preindustrial, industrial, and advanced industrial societies. It is necessary to point out that these theories are not comparatively aimed at particular regions or countries, so when applying them to such a varied and uneven area as the European Union, it may very well be that some of their individual characteristics may work in unison. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that some of them are actually highly compatible and it is possible to create an explanatory mosaic out of them, as I present below.

The *Irrelevance* theory states that the left-right distinction is no longer workable and will over time be replaced by a different, more suitable simplification mechanism. “Left and right are becoming increasingly irrelevant because this terminology cannot transcend the economic connotations related to the conflict structure of industrial society, and its meaning related to the conflicts which originated in pre-industrial society. Furthermore, in advanced industrial society even economic values and issues, as well as religious/secular values, have become less connected to left-right self-placement, since the terms ‘left’ and ‘right’ are making less and less sense to the electorate.” (Knutsen, 1995, p. 66)

This theory goes hand in hand with the main argument of my thesis to the point that the left-right dichotomy has become too complex a mechanism to be comprehended by the publics. My argument diverges in that I do not see the inability to “transcend the economic connotations related to the conflict structure of industrial society” as a fatal flaw. I argue that this conflict structure will rightly prevail for a long period still, as the European Union contains the industrial society element among its member states and their societies, as well as in its relations with the Third World for example. I actually argue that this element has reached new levels of visibility, and can (should) thus become the main value predictor of left-right self-placement.

The *Persistence* theory states that the old dimensions (religious and socio-economic) are and will continue to be significant, but are more and more being penetrated by other dimensions, becoming strongly correlated among each other in the publics’ minds. More specifically, the old dimensions remain dominant and new ones penetrate them, but the left-right meanings of the latter are interpreted based on the former.

This theory too to an extent goes along with my argument that will be further developed in the following subchapters. In short, I see it as an existing trend that new value dimensions become over time assigned under the left-right dichotomy, but I also argue that this will eventually (if it has not already) lead to such confusion as to essentially lead to the *Irrelevance* theory with regards to publics’ left-right self-placements – there will be no meaningful persistence. The dichotomy might persist through continued use, but that by itself is hardly a meaningful existence if it is not coherently informed by the publics’ values. As suggested above, I hypothesize the socio-economic dimension to be the most likely relevant survivor of the left-right dichotomy for a long period still, with other dimensions either broken down and placed under other dyads specifically related to them (this I believe would

be the ideal outcome), or remaining under the left-right in weakening forms, causing disruption (which is more likely). For example, I argue that ideally the religious-secular dimension should become uncorrelated with the left-right dichotomy, forming its own dyad, but more likely will simply remain for many people under the left-right dichotomy, causing disruption until it eventually wanes.

The *Pluralisation* theory is similar to the *Persistence* theory in that it also considers the old dimensions to remain significant. It diverges only in that new value orientations which penetrate the left-right distinction will not be interpreted subserviently to the old dimensions. The new dimensions are to add new meanings to the left-right dichotomy on an equal footing with the old, over time possibly, but not necessarily even getting stronger.

There is little difference in my argumentation regarding the *Persistence* and *Pluralisation* theories. Whether it is one or the other, new value orientations penetrated the left-right dichotomy already and made it so complex as to lead to a form of the *Irrelevance* theory.

The *Transformation* theory essentially states that the new materialist/post-materialist dimension as described in Inglehart's (1990) 'new politics' hypothesis will take over the left-right dichotomy, with the traditional dimensions significantly declining. When this is supposed to happen is not specified however. (Knutsen, 1995)

I can imagine such transformation in the future, but it seems more plausible that the socio-economic dimension will continue to dominate the left-right discourse for the perceivable time, being mixed with the other dimensions, old and new, causing disruption, until their irrelevance. This I argue is already slowly but broadly happening to religion in the

West, and might eventually happen to what I call the socio-economic dimension, although its mission is by far not over.

Having introduced the typology of theories about the changing meaning of left and right, and connecting them with the argument presented in this thesis, let us continue first by outlining some of the other dyadic relationships that simplify the political space, and end by taking a closer look at the socio-economic dimension.

1.3.4 Other Dyadic Axes

It is argued that even though the left-right dyad is today the most widely used mechanism to explain one's values, it often remains to be quite mistakenly collated with other similar dyads that surely are connected to it, but in essence describe different phenomena. Such collusion and historically indiscriminate usage of these dyads serves to further complicate orientation in the political space and makes left-right self-placement a less accurate measure of value positions.

The liberal-conservative, or progressive-conservative dyad has enjoyed popularity mainly in the USA, where it historically served as a proxy for the left-right, the term 'conservative' being strongly tied to pro-business or pro-capitalist policies. Nowadays, the two are beginning to merge into the more recent liberal left - conservative right distinction. According to Giddens (1994), this dyad has been perceived differently in Europe, the term 'conservative' being much more linked to the influence of religion.

The authoritarian-libertarian dichotomy is often thought of as the other major, cross sectional dyad, completing what is called the 'political compass', which sees the left-right merely as an economic distinction and authoritarian-libertarian as the socio-political dyad. It

is a spin off of libertarian David Nolan's Nolan Chart. Both the Nolan Chart and the political compass have gained widespread popularity on the Internet, thus being available to an ever increasing audience in advanced democracies especially. The double axes of left-right and authoritarianism-libertarianism are also the essential building blocks of Bobbio's (1997) political universe, and he goes as far as to say that the latter is the cause of the former. This is because it was the rise of the values of liberty that enabled democracy to prevail and for the left and the right to be able to alternate in government by way of the democratic process. They should not however be equated as is sometimes the case.

Bobbio (1997, p. 27) explains that "the difference between extremism and moderatism mainly concerns method, whereas the antithesis between left and right mainly concerns values. The difference over values is stronger than the one over methods." Because the difference between extreme and moderate is essentially radicalization of positions rather than any set of positions per se, this dyad is intrinsically different from the left-right – both the leftists and rightists may meet at the extremes or in the moderate space, and in this there is a connection, but these dyads are not to be thought of as naturally coinciding.

1.3.5 Socio-Economy as the Dominant Value Dimension of the Contemporary Left-Right?

Apart from the fact that the socio-economic dimension has for a long time been part of the left-right dichotomy, and that it has in the contemporary world become especially salient, is there anything else that would argue for the potential survival of this particular dimension compared with the others? Bobbio (1997) argues that "*left* and *right* are not absolute terms, but represent a shifting map of the political spectrum, relative to the particular cultural and historical contexts of a given time." At the same time, within these contexts, they are exclusive, antithetical. He also strongly argues for the preeminence of the socio-economic

dimension of the left-right value scale, namely equality versus hierarchy, or, as Laponce (1981) calls it the horizontal versus the vertical, although Laponce understands a much broader set of values behind these terms; apart from socio-economic issues also the hierarchies imposed by state and church. As Bobbio (1997) discusses at length in his book, equality has in the past indeed been a wider than just socio-economic term in Europe. What immediately springs to mind is for example political equality, such as voting rights for all men, not just the privileged, and voting rights for women. These questions might still be pertinent elsewhere, but in the European Union it should be safe to say that the term equality pertains predominantly to socio-economic issues. Downs (1957) too argued that the left-right dimension essentially boils down to the level of government intervention in the economy.

Knutsen's (1997) analysis seems to confirm the dominance of the socio-economic dimension as well. His value model consisted of three clusters of left-right orderings, measuring the issue relevance of the Religious/Secular dimension, Left-Right Materialist Orientations, and Materialist/Postmaterialist Value Orientations. His research has shown that for industrial societies of Europe in the year 1990, it is exactly these – what he calls 'Left-Right Materialist Orientations', testing predominantly issues of welfare, taxes, and government intervention – that serve as an important predictor with the largest effect before party choice is controlled for. Interestingly, in his 1981 dataset, the 'Left-Right Materialist Orientations' cluster fared significantly worse, often finding itself behind some of the other clusters in different countries. This appears to support the hypothesis that the socio-economic dimension might be getting more salient, but were the results significant enough as to make the left-right self-placement meaningfully connected to publics' actual values?

As demonstrated, the argument is that the pervasive preeminence of economy in the West in the last thirty years – (the global spread of the Washington Consensus; the neoliberal assault on the traditional European welfare state; the establishment of the single market and

currency within the EU, which is still primarily an economic union; the overwhelming impact of the global financial crisis; the resultant debt crisis of the Euro Area and its uneasy solutions; or even the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, which opened the floodgates with the above mentioned phenomena, exporting the same paradigm from the West also to the East) – has naturally pushed the economic dimension to the forefront of visibility and thus interest in Europe. While this is a generalization that can surely be slightly disputed at least in such exceptional cases as Poland, where the religious-secular dichotomy has traditionally been strong, I hypothesize that even here the socio-economic dimension should have massively risen in importance and should come out as at least one of the dominant value dimensions.

To make myself fully understood, the above does of course not mean that religion, secularism, postmaterial values and other terms more or less associated with the left and the right historically and more recently have become completely redundant. For one thing, postmaterial values are supposedly on the rise in Europe, and there is nothing to suggest that this trend should not continue. (Norris and Inglehart, 2009) What I mean is that these should first of all be covered by different dyads for greater clarity, and not necessarily associated with the left-right as they often are being, because this leads to significant confusion.

It is hard to argue against the proposition that the left-right dyad in its sheer complexity is historically replete with myths that prove ever more elusive in modern times. I would thus like to propose, very much in line with Bobbio (1997) and implicitly Knutsen (1997), that the socio-economic equality versus hierarchy dimension of the left-right value scale should in actuality be the most stable, and primary (if not the only) value dimension to take account of when attempting to predict electorates' left-right self-placement. This has historically not been so, because as has been shown, the various dimensions have all been

collated and intermingled in the general discourse and in peoples' minds, and this very fact is the source of much confusion and distortion of political reality.

As Bobbio (1997) argued vis-à-vis religion, finding a left wing believer or a right wing atheist is not exactly a difficult task today. Religion, as thought of in the past is also in decline in Europe, with more and more people finding it an increasingly personal issue, unwilling to subject their beliefs to an ecclesiastical order, especially when that order still attempts to control opinions in the matters of sexuality and sexual attraction, household hierarchy, the traditional position of man and woman and other areas that are increasingly being seen as invasive. (Norris and Inglehart, 2009; USA Today, 2000) Furthermore, the legitimacy of at least the Catholic order has been shaken in the past years by the disclosure of massive international scandals involving clergy. To complicate the left-right religious dimension further, some religious terms themselves were often found on the left side of the spectrum, rather than on the right. In the Laponce (1981) surveys, the terms *God*, *priest*, and *religion* are on the right, but *Jesus Christ* was often placed on the left.

Taking a closer look at the country level, one also tends to find that some of the most religious countries in Europe, such as Portugal, Spain and Italy, are incidentally among the most leftist (not to mention Latin America as a shining example of this 'discrepancy'). All in all, it should only be a decreasing minority that in Europe vote solely based on its religious convictions, without any other and above all socio-economic considerations, suggesting that self-placement based on this particular dimension should also be in decline across Europe. Supporting this is the fact that even this minority is not sent by their churches to vote anti-left anymore, but rather anti-liberal, with both the leftist and the rightist liberalism being the largest opponents of religion today.

What is more, modern times, technological progress and globalization have further complicated matters by introducing new issue areas that did not at first readily and easily fall within what is traditionally thought of as left and right. These issues fall under the postmaterialist value orientation identified by Inglehart (1971), who created a specific index that is being used even today. Rather than the index however, I believe it is more accurate to be guided by the general ideas to provide the most up to date definition of postmaterialism. Basically, it pertains to a wide-ranging new worldview based on individual improvement, strengthening of the civil society and humanism as such.

Specific issue areas that have become associated with this value dimension are for example environmental issues, issues of bioethics such as abortion, issues brought forward through the various civil rights movements such as gay rights, immigration rights, or most recently issues of privacy, leakage of sensitive government information, etc. They are also said to be issues connected to the most affluent of societies, as these have come closer to solving their more traditional socio-economic problems. Even these postmaterialist issue areas however appear to have over time settled into the left-right value scale. To generalize, the left appears to be more conscious and protective of the environment, more protective of more marginalized groups such as mothers, homosexuals and minorities, more cautious regarding government surveillance and more accepting of corporate or governmental whistleblowers. The right, on the other hand, holds the more traditional (capital punishment), or 'natural' (pro life, anti cloning, anti in vitro fertilization, etc.) positions in all of these instances, and in matters of security is more receptive regarding surveillance and less accepting of whistleblowers.

Such generalizations, though persistent, are however extremely problematic and misleading – and thus the confusion prevails. It is hardly logical to order these values under the left-right discourse as has become the norm, as it is not at all obvious that these issues are

strongly connected to the left or the right among the publics. These issues and wider value orientations, when they show up in party programmes, are just as likely to show up on leftist ones as they are on rightist ones, as they are in actuality most suited to the liberal-conservative distinction, rather than the left-right one.

Extremism and nationalism are other popular dimensions embodied in the left-right dichotomy, particularly connected with the right. Once again however, one can counter with the fact that right wing extremists could potentially be offset by left wing anarchist elements, although it has to be admitted that in the populations of most European countries, left wing anarchist extremists constitute a minority even when compared to the minority of right wing extremists.

Nationalist attitudes have too been connected largely with the right in contemporary times. But for example, it is questionable whether the working class left hold such internationalist attitudes or view foreign workers with internationalist solidarity when these are threatening their jobs. Indeed, the lack of internationalist working class unity and solidarity is often cited as one of the main reasons for capital's victories over labour. Another example could be opinions on what have been called 'inadaptable' minorities by some, such as the Roma, or some Muslim ones. While the passions that these minorities evoke in some people are rather condemnable, it cannot be said that these passions occupy only the nationalist right spectrum. All of these can hardly be called exceptions.

At any rate, all of these dimensions are likely to constitute some positive relationship with left-right value self-placement, however unclear such connection to the left-right dyad may actually be, but even despite the potential power of nationalism in some countries and religion and postmaterial values in others, the sheer exposure to, and stable centrality of the socio-economic dimension in the lives of contemporary European publics should ensure that

this dimension will prevail if left-right self-positioning is indeed any indicator of value positions. But it may likely be that even this salient dimension gets lost in the vast ocean of meanings.

Very much against to what I have written here, in his 1995 study covering the relationship between value positions and left-right self-placement for a number of Western European countries between the years 1973-1990, Knutsen actually found relatively strong correlations in all three dimensions he studied, apart from the socio-economic also including religious and post-materialist. Could it be that these three dimensions make more sense to at least the more politically educated Western publics than I am willing to admit? In order to find out, apart from providing my own results of these relationships for the year 2008, one of the major contributions of this thesis will be to compare Knutsen's 1995 study with my more recent results. This will make for a very interesting longitudinal look at the developments between the publics' value orientations and their left-right self-positioning, if only for a selected group of Western European countries. These results will also provide an excellent basis for the confirmation or rejection of my views regarding Kitschelt and Hellemans' (1990) typology.

1.3.6 New Dichotomization as a Solution to Left-Right Complexity

It is impossible to account for the entirety of the left-right debate in such a short space frame, but having gone through the most important and salient issues in the theoretical and empirical discussion of the left-right, its intrinsic connection to economic globalization, and having outlined the more obvious as well as the more hidden differences and specificities between the West and the East, I hope I have successfully argued my positions and

established the ‘preeminence of the socio-economy’ assumption in contemporary Europe at least in theory, ready to be empirically tested.

I would like to end this chapter with a practical proposition. From the above mentioned it is obvious that the left-right debate is one of the most powerful dyads organizing politics. Even when it entered widespread use in France in the 18th century, it was already essentially a superissue that within it embodied numerous dimensions. I argue that in the more than two centuries of its existence, these internal dimensions have intensified, further extended their reach, mingled in with the other dyadic axes that were outlined above, and in so doing made the original dyad ungraspable. (Langford, 1991) The left-right dyad in effect became a hyperissue, consisting of a number of superissue dimensions, that are due to their complexity easily misused for various goals and interests. I thus propose to simplify and clean up the whole distinction as outlined in Table 4. It is not a perfect solution, as its parts are still quite complicated and sometimes contain conflicting dimensions that are sure to change over longer periods of time. Furthermore, it is clear that anything that is made for people will sooner or later become subservient to subjective interpretations, but I believe it would clear up a lot of the confusion if the values within the contemporary political space would be organized along these lines, as they most closely approximate an accurate description of what we can, for lack of a better term, call contemporary ‘reality’.

Nobody can predict with any certainty which of the four outcomes formulated by Kitschelt and Hellemans (1990) will prevail, or whether some completely different development will not prove victorious. The table is thus not supposed to serve as a prediction of things to come, but rather an attempt at a normative solution – an outcome that should occur if we wish to clear up the in my opinion extremely messy and potentially dangerous

status quo of the publics' value orientations and their ability to translate them accurately in their left-right self-positioning.

Table 4: Proposal for a more accurate dichotomization of the contemporary political space

Value Cluster	Dyad (Triad)	
Socio-Economy – this dimension essentially embodies social and economic issues as portrayed in this work with equality being the key term, battle lines drawn between those who think inequalities are essentially social and thus possible to eradicate and those who think they are unfortunate but natural and only the most severe should be tackled so as not to endanger the existing order	Left	Right
Freedom of Choice – this dimension pertains to the extent that individual liberties and postmaterial values should be tolerated by law, such as drug use, abortion, gay rights, new bioethics, the position of women, etc.	Liberal	Conservative
Religion – this dimension pertains to the level of religiosity / spirituality of an individual	Secular	Religious / Spiritual
System – this dimension pertains to the distinction of preference for the type of political system one would wish to live under, distinguishing extreme elements from the moderate	Democratic	Authoritarian / Anarchic
Outlook – this dimension describes the importance that one ascribes to the preservation of national identity in an increasingly globalized and internationalist looking world	Internationalist	Nationalist

2. The Research Question and the Primary Hypotheses

After outlining the most important aspects and evolution of the left-right dyad and its numerous dimensions, connecting it to the wider economic globalization debate and theories of the changing nature of the left-right dichotomy, allow me to once more, and in a more structured manner restate my research questions and hypotheses before moving on to the specific methodology and measurements.

Research Question: Despite the rise of its use, is the left-right distinction an accurate descriptor of the public's values?

H1: LEFT-RIGHT SELF-PLACEMENT DOES NOT PROVIDE AN ACCURATE AND RELIABLE MECHANISM FOR DESCRIBING THE PUBLICS' VALUES IN THE SELECTED EU MEMBER STATES.

H2: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC VALUE DIMENSION HAS THE STRONGEST RELATIONSHIP WITH LEFT-RIGHT SELF-PLACEMENT AMONG THE TESTED VALUE DIMENSIONS IN THE SELECTED EU MEMBER STATES.

H3: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC VALUE DIMENSION HAS A STRONGER RELATIONSHIP WITH LEFT-RIGHT SELF-PLACEMENT IN THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN REGION THAN IN THE WESTERN EUROPEAN REGION OF THE SELECTED EU MEMBER STATES.

H4: WHILE THE STATUS QUO OF THE LEFT-RIGHT DICHOTOMY IN THE EU CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED BY A COMBINATION OF THE PERSISTENCE AND PLURALISATION THEORIES, IT GRADUALLY MOVES TOWARDS A FORM OF THE IRRELEVANCE THEORY.

3. Methodology

The outlined research design is a simple and effective one, being used by a substantial number of relevant authors in this area of the discipline for purposes such as mine in this thesis. (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Knutsen, 1995) It consists of a comparative bivariate analysis running a regression with left-right self-placement as the dependent variable and an index of questions pertaining firstly to the religious value dimension, secondly to the socio-economic value dimension, thirdly to the postmaterialist value dimension, and finally the nationalist value dimension as the independent variables for each country. Like this, it will be possible to measure the strength of the relationships of these four value dimensions with European publics' left-right self-placement in the chosen countries and compare their overall salience to left-right self-positioning on a cross-country basis. (Gravetter and Wallnau, 2008) The regression outcomes are reported mainly to provide for more information, most of the work will be done by looking at correlations however.

Multivariate regression analysis is also undertaken with the dependent variable being left-right self-placement and the four indices as the independent variables for the bulk of the studied EU electorate.

After this, I will continue with a longitudinal comparison of my 2008 data with Knutsen's (1995) results measuring similar relationships for the 1973-1990 period, analyzing my results and interpreting them according to Kitschelt and Hellemans' (1990) typology.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the data for this research will be obtained from the European Social Survey (2008).⁵ This database is not exactly ideal for the indexing of all the value dimensions measured, but it does provide an especially robust set of questions for

⁵ The specific methodology on when, where, why, how and from whom the data was gathered can be easily accessed on the ESS website: <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/ess/>.

the socio-economic and postmaterial dimensions, and a key question for ascertaining the relationship of the religious dimension with left-right self-positioning. All in all, the other databases reviewed (Eurobarometer, European Values Study, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, etc.) had their own weaknesses and a trade-off of some kind would have occurred in any case. The European Social Survey (2008) database can be said to be an overall good fit for this research.

The key dependent variable is ‘Placement on the left right scale’.⁶ According to Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) the 0–10 scale can quite plausibly be seen as problematic, because a substantial amount of respondents unfamiliar with the left-right dichotomy are known to opt for the middle point (which would be number 5 on this scale), and 5 indeed was the median and mode for all the countries surveyed. While I agree with this point, it is also true on the other hand, that there certainly might be many people that are perfectly familiar with and knowledgeable of the left-right dichotomy, yet they still prefer to place themselves in the very centre. Moreover, an even scale is no guarantee that unknowing individuals would not place themselves in one of its two midpoints anyway. Since my interest was to uncover the strength of the relationships between the publics’ left-right self-placement and their value orientations, I found it imperative to account for these centrist cases and opted to keep the scale unchanged. While this poses certain methodological dangers if the central point indeed contains a significant number of cases that are in fact not familiar with the left-right dichotomy, it has to be said that all research designs bring forth such conundra, and hard choices always need to be made at some point.

⁶ **The actual question posed was:** In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right? (Respondents were also able to respond “Don’t know” – this statistic has been analyzed in the previous chapter.)

This brings us to the independent variables and thus the indices themselves. Where this applies, individual questions were standardized and added together after undergoing a test of reliability using Cronbach's alpha. However, the only successful index, having on average over 0.80 on the internal consistency test was the socio-economic index. The postmaterialist and nationalist indices both scored just slightly lower on average than the traditionally accepted 0.70. Still, I maintain that the individual questions should be highly pertinent to the value orientations whose strength of relationship to left-right self-placement they measure.

The index of religion often consists of only one or two key questions (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976; Knutsen, 1995) and it is no different in this work. The position of religion in a person's life has often been measured by way of measuring church attendance. I argue that this measure can be a source of slight imprecisions, since church attendance does not necessarily have to be connected to the level of religiousness of a person, it can for example merely attest to the fact that the person visits the church on a regular basis because of family, or some other reason. A theoretically more precise measure is the one used in ESS (2008), which directly asks how religious the respondent is.

1. How religious are you?⁷

The socio-economic index is specifically designed to take account of the main socio-economic divisions as proposed and propagated by the prevailing neoliberal paradigm – most importantly regarding equality of incomes and government responsibility for the redistribution of welfare and social services. It consists of these particular statements, to which respondents were asked to provide their opinion.

1. Government should reduce differences in income levels.⁸

⁷ **The actual question posed was:** Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are? (0-10 scale: 0-Not religious at all, 10-Very religious)

2. For fair society, differences in standard of living should be small.⁹
3. Job for everyone, governments' responsibility.¹⁰
4. Health care for the sick, governments' responsibility.¹¹
5. Standard of living for the old, governments' responsibility.¹²
6. Standard of living for the unemployed, governments' responsibility.¹³
7. Child care services for working parents, governments' responsibility.¹⁴
8. Paid leave from work to care for sick family, governments' responsibility.¹⁵

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the spread of postmaterial values has often been measured by the 'Inglehart index' (1971). Postmaterialism can however be measured by different indices, and ESS (2008) provides a particularly good set of questions for this purpose.

1. Important that people are treated equally and have equal opportunities.¹⁶
2. Important to understand different people.¹⁷

⁸ **The actual question posed was:** Using this card, please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels. (1-Agree strongly, 2-Agree, 3-Neither agree nor disagree, 4-Disagree, 5-Disagree strongly)

⁹ **The actual question posed was:** For a society to be fair, differences in people's standard of living should be small. (1-Agree strongly, 2-Agree, 3-Neither agree nor disagree, 4-Disagree, 5-Disagree strongly)

¹⁰ **The actual question posed was:** People have different views on what the responsibilities of governments should or should not be. For each of the tasks I read out please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much responsibility you think governments should have. 10 means it should not be governments' responsibility at all and 0 means it should be entirely governments' responsibility. Firstly, to ensure a job for everyone who wants one?

¹¹ **The actual question posed was:** Secondly to ensure adequate health care for the sick?

¹² **The actual question posed was:** Thirdly to ensure a reasonable standard of living for the old?

¹³ **The actual question posed was:** And how much responsibility do you think governments should have to ensure a reasonable standard of living for the unemployed?

¹⁴ **The actual question posed was:** And how much responsibility do you think governments should have to ensure sufficient child care services for working parents?

¹⁵ **The actual question posed was:** And how much responsibilities do you think governments should have to provide paid leave from work for people who temporarily have to care for sick family members?

¹⁶ **The actual question posed was:** Now I will briefly describe some people. Please listen to each description and tell me how much each person is or is not like you. Use this card for your answer. (1-Very much like me, 2-Like me, 3-Somewhat like me, 4-A little like me, 5-Not like me, 6-Not like me at all)

3. Important to make own decisions and be free.¹⁸
4. Important to help people and care for others well-being.¹⁹
5. Important to care for nature and environment.²⁰

The index of nationalism constructed from the ESS (2008) database is not an especially robust one, but both of the questions are a good indicator of nationalist tendencies in the European Union. Nationalism in the EU is indeed very much related to immigration. Furthermore, a nation's sovereignty, which the EU member states pool in many areas, has always been the staple of nationalist thought. One area that the ESS database lacks and which likely would have strengthened the power of this index is about the opinions on minorities in a given country.

1. European Union: European unification go further or gone too far?²¹
2. Immigrants make country worse or better place to live?²²

¹⁷ **The actual question posed was:** It is important to her/him to listen to people who are different from her/him. Even when she/he disagrees with them, she/he still wants to understand them. (1-Very much like me, 2-Like me, 3-Somewhat like me, 4-A little like me, 5-Not like me, 6-Not like me at all)

¹⁸ **The actual question posed was:** It is important to her/him to make her/his own decisions about what she/he does. She/he likes to be free and not depend on others. (1-Very much like me, 2-Like me, 3-Somewhat like me, 4-A little like me, 5-Not like me, 6-Not like me at all)

¹⁹ **The actual question posed was:** It's very important to her/him to help the people around her/him. She/he wants to care for their well-being. (1-Very much like me, 2-Like me, 3-Somewhat like me, 4-A little like me, 5-Not like me, 6-Not like me at all)

²⁰ **The actual question posed was:** She/he strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to her/him. (1-Very much like me, 2-Like me, 3-Somewhat like me, 4-A little like me, 5-Not like me, 6-Not like me at all)

²¹ **The actual question posed was:** Now thinking about the European Union, some say European unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far. Using this card, what number on the scale best describes your position? (0-10 scale: 0-Unification go further, 10-Unification already gone too far)

²² **The actual question posed was:** Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries? (0-10 scale: 0-Better place to live, 10-Worse place to live)

4. Presentation and Discussion of Results

Before we get into the proper presentation and discussion of the results, it is important to keep in mind a few things. First of all, the results of this study should not be extrapolated to other geographical regions. As we will see, even in the European Union, with one of its roles essentially being to homogenize the member states in at least certain areas, the results differ significantly both in their intensity and direction. This goes as much for Western Europe, as it does for Central and Eastern Europe, which has lived through its own share of homogenization of a different kind. The use of the term European Union should also be taken with caution, as the EU currently consists of 27 member states, but the 2008 batch of European Social Survey provides only 21, with such notable omissions as Italy or Austria.

Another thing to take into account is that it is not in the range of this thesis to devote much time to individual country analysis, as much as it would be interesting and important to do so. A case in point could be Latvia, which turned out to be by far the biggest outlier of the studied countries in our topic. Despite a relatively high percentage of self-placers (83.8%), it scored extremely low on correlations between left-right self-placement and all of the value dimensions. Left-right self-placement resonated most strongly with the nationalism index with an almost insignificant $R(1491) = 0.064$, $p < 0.000$. While it would be fascinating to try and uncover the basis by which Latvians place themselves on the left-right scale instead of their values, this thesis is devoted to much broader trends. With this out of our way, let us proceed.

4.1 European Social Survey 2008 Results

When writing about left-right self-placement, one is essentially not moving in the real world – however hard such a world may be to establish, if it is possible at all – but in the

world of electorates' perceptions. The results below are therefore not necessarily any indication of the salience or domination of any particular value dimension in the given country. For example, we can notice that the postmaterialist value dimension shows relatively weak relationships in most countries, save for the 'usual suspects', and even in those cases it never reaches preeminence. This does not necessarily reflect the level of importance of those values in a given country, but merely the relationship of that value dimension to left-right self-positioning. The main results are presented in Tables 5, 6, 7 and 8, followed by Tables 9 and 10, which provide means and rankings for different regions and value dimensions, making for a more user friendly presentation of results. Different authors frequently have different interpretations of the same data, mine is this.

Table 5: Correlations and Regression Output between Left-Right Self-Placement and the Religion Index

EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY 2008						
	R	R Square	B (Std. Error)	t	F (df)	Sig.
Belgium	0.126	0.016	0.081 (0.016)	5.18	26.8 (1, 1676)	0.000
Bulgaria	0.079	0.006	0.082 (0.026)	3.14	9.9 (1, 1599)	0.002
Czech Republic	0.039	0.002	-0.033 (0.020)	-1.62	2.6 (1, 1754)	0.105
Denmark	0.118	0.014	0.097 (0.021)	4.65	21.6 (1, 1542)	0.000
Estonia	0.067	0.005	-0.050 (0.020)	-2.43	5.9 (1, 1294)	0.015
Finland	0.244	0.060	0.181 (0.016)	11.49	132.1 (1, 2081)	0.000
France	0.232	0.054	0.186 (0.018)	10.48	110.0 (1, 1943)	0.000
Germany	0.166	0.028	0.101 (0.012)	8.46	71.6 (1, 2527)	0.000
Greece	0.286	0.082	0.247 (0.020)	12.32	151.9 (1, 1711)	0.000
Hungary	0.156	0.024	0.118 (0.021)	5.54	30.7 (1, 1230)	0.000
Ireland	0.197	0.039	0.135 (0.017)	8.09	65.4 (1, 1617)	0.000
Latvia	0.009	0.000	-0.008 (0.022)	-0.37	0.1 (1, 1635)	0.712
Netherlands	0.129	0.017	0.085 (0.016)	5.37	28.9 (1, 1701)	0.000
Poland	0.236	0.056	0.218 (0.025)	8.86	78.6 (1, 1336)	0.000
Portugal	0.142	0.020	0.113 (0.020)	5.69	32.4 (1, 1581)	0.000
Romania	0.117	0.014	0.142 (0.032)	4.47	20.0 (1, 1442)	0.000
Slovakia	0.116	0.013	0.085 (0.019)	4.59	21.0 (1, 1544)	0.000
Slovenia	0.295	0.087	0.244 (0.025)	9.74	94.9 (1, 996)	0.000
Spain	0.269	0.073	0.186 (0.015)	12.68	160.9 (1, 2059)	0.000
Sweden	0.104	0.011	0.084 (0.019)	4.40	19.3 (1, 1770)	0.000
United Kingdom	0.084	0.007	0.052 (0.013)	3.88	15.0 (1, 2108)	0.000
Mean	0.152					

Overall, the results seem to confirm the primary hypothesis. If taken as a whole, the results quite persuasively show that values have only a weak relationship with left-right self-positioning in the studied batch of European Union member states for the year 2008.

Table 6: Correlations and Regression Output between Left-Right Self-Placement and the Socio-Economic Index

EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY 2008						
	R	R Square	B (Std. Error)	t	F (df)	Sig.
Belgium	0.113	0.013	0.239 (0.052)	4.60	21.2 (1, 1654)	0.000
Bulgaria	0.137	0.019	0.307 (0.057)	5.35	28.6 (1, 1501)	0.000
Czech Republic	0.327	0.107	0.577 (0.040)	14.31	204.9 (1, 1708)	0.000
Denmark	0.397	0.157	0.908 (0.055)	16.59	275.2 (1, 1475)	0.000
Estonia	0.255	0.065	0.446 (0.048)	9.20	84.7 (1, 1220)	0.000
Finland	0.268	0.072	0.604 (0.048)	12.53	157.0 (1, 2034)	0.000
France	0.292	0.085	0.627 (0.047)	13.34	178.1 (1, 1914)	0.000
Germany	0.233	0.054	0.384 (0.032)	11.87	140.9 (1, 2448)	0.000
Greece	0.087	0.008	0.195 (0.054)	3.57	12.8 (1, 1688)	0.000
Hungary	0.144	0.021	-0.331 (0.066)	-5.01	25.1 (1, 1192)	0.000
Ireland	0.117	0.014	0.209 (0.044)	4.70	22.1 (1, 1590)	0.000
Latvia	0.008	0.000	-0.019 (0.060)	-0.31	0.1 (1, 1587)	0.753
Netherlands	0.256	0.066	0.584 (0.054)	10.76	115.9 (1, 1648)	0.000
Poland	0.034	0.001	0.062 (0.052)	1.19	1.4 (1, 1259)	0.232
Portugal	0.025	0.001	0.045 (0.046)	0.97	0.9 (1, 1545)	0.332
Romania	0.014	0.000	-0.027 (0.051)	-0.53	0.2 (1, 1352)	0.596
Slovakia	0.166	0.027	0.327 (0.051)	6.37	40.6 (1, 1441)	0.000
Slovenia	0.054	0.003	0.129 (0.076)	1.69	2.8 (1, 979)	0.091
Spain	0.134	0.018	0.303 (0.052)	5.84	34.2 (1, 1873)	0.000
Sweden	0.368	0.135	0.835 (0.051)	16.24	263.8 (1, 1685)	0.000
United Kingdom	0.217	0.047	0.391 (0.039)	10.03	100.6 (1, 2039)	0.000
Mean	0.173					

Multivariate regression analysis of the whole EU sample with left-right self-placement being the dependent variable and the four value indices being the independent variables has shown only a rather weak relationship with values explaining less than 5% of the variations in left-right self-positioning.

$$B = (0.113, 0.265, 0.044, 0.008), t(30\ 260) = (27.2, 24.1, 11.6, 2.3), p < 0.000$$

$$R^2 = 0.046, F(4, 30\ 260) = 367.68, p < 0.000.$$

While such a result is not exactly a special case in the social sciences, it quite clearly shows that left-right self-placement is a poor predictor of values.

The second hypothesis, regarding preeminence of the socio-economic dimension has also been confirmed, albeit barely. The socio-economic dimension does indeed hold the highest mean correlation score for the entire sample as seen in Table 6, and as Table 10 shows, judging by left-right self-placement, it is the preeminent value dimension of ten countries. However, I have greatly underestimated and quite prematurely wrote off the power and influence of religion in some European countries. Despite the economization of the Western society, religion showed only a slightly lower mean correlation score for the entire sample as seen in Table 5, and as Table 10 shows, judging by left-right self-placement it is the preeminent value dimension of nine countries.

Table 7: Correlations and Regression Output between Left-Right Self-Placement and the Postmaterialist Index

EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY 2008						
	R	R Square	B (Std. Error)	t	F (df)	Sig.
Belgium	0.092	0.008	0.063 (0.017)	3.75	14.1 (1, 1668)	0.000
Bulgaria	0.000	0.000	0.000 (0.019)	0.01	0.00 (1, 1523)	0.991
Czech Republic	0.019	0.000	-0.012 (0.015)	-0.77	0.6 (1, 1757)	0.438
Denmark	0.186	0.034	0.125 (0.017)	7.34	53.8 (1, 1509)	0.000
Estonia	0.013	0.000	0.008 (0.017)	0.47	0.2 (1, 1274)	0.637
Finland	0.083	0.007	0.054 (0.015)	3.54	12.5 (1, 1791)	0.000
France	0.103	0.011	0.066 (0.014)	4.54	20.6 (1, 1934)	0.000
Germany	0.156	0.024	0.097 (0.012)	7.90	62.4 (1, 2518)	0.000
Greece	0.061	0.004	0.040 (0.016)	2.54	6.4 (1, 1708)	0.011
Hungary	0.037	0.001	0.025 (0.020)	1.23	1.5 (1, 1141)	0.216
Ireland	0.091	0.008	0.049 (0.013)	3.65	13.3 (1, 1612)	0.000
Latvia	0.032	0.001	-0.024 (0.019)	-1.30	1.7 (1, 1635)	0.191
Netherlands	0.147	0.022	0.096 (0.016)	6.03	36.4 (1, 1642)	0.000
Poland	0.064	0.004	0.045 (0.019)	2.33	5.4 (1, 1315)	0.020
Portugal	0.000	0.000	0.000 (0.013)	-0.00	0.0 (1, 1573)	0.995
Romania	0.041	0.002	-0.029 (0.019)	-1.53	2.3 (1, 1432)	0.124
Slovakia	0.004	0.000	0.003 (0.020)	0.14	0.0 (1, 1527)	0.884
Slovenia	0.142	0.020	0.112 (0.025)	4.52	20.4 (1, 992)	0.000
Spain	0.092	0.009	0.065 (0.016)	4.19	17.6 (1, 2047)	0.000
Sweden	0.159	0.025	0.110 (0.018)	6.24	38.9 (1, 1497)	0.000
United Kingdom	0.056	0.003	0.032 (0.013)	2.55	6.5 (1, 2073)	0.011
Mean	0.075					

Postmaterialism and nationalism both have on average shown only a negligible relationship with left-right self-placement as seen in Table 7 and Table 8, and Table 10 shows that judging by left-right self-placement, postmaterialism is not a preeminent value dimension for any of the countries in my sample, and nationalism scored highest only for Bulgaria and Latvia, with Latvia being the aforementioned outlier.

Table 8: Correlations and Regression Output between Left-Right Self-Placement and the Nationalism Index

EUROPEAN SOCIAL SURVEY 2008						
	R	R Square	B (Std. Error)	t	F (df)	Sig.
Belgium	0.020	0.000	0.010 (0.013)	0.79	0.6 (1, 1647)	0.429
Bulgaria	0.153	0.023	-0.109 (0.020)	-5.36	28.7 (1, 1202)	0.000
Czech Republic	0.206	0.042	-0.126 (0.015)	-8.56	73.3 (1, 1603)	0.000
Denmark	0.167	0.028	0.093 (0.014)	6.54	42.8 (1, 1497)	0.000
Estonia	0.141	0.020	-0.073 (0.015)	-4.92	24.2 (1, 1200)	0.000
Finland	0.063	0.004	-0.039 (0.014)	-2.84	8.0 (1, 2049)	0.004
France	0.166	0.028	0.103 (0.014)	7.33	53.7 (1, 1898)	0.000
Germany	0.115	0.013	0.052 (0.009)	5.71	32.6 (1, 2436)	0.000
Greece	0.015	0.000	-0.009 (0.014)	-0.60	0.3 (1, 1580)	0.544
Hungary	0.114	0.013	0.072 (0.020)	3.62	13.1 (1, 997)	0.000
Ireland	0.056	0.003	-0.028 (0.012)	-2.24	5.0 (1, 1592)	0.025
Latvia	0.064	0.004	-0.043 (0.017)	-2.47	6.1 (1, 1491)	0.013
Netherlands	0.119	0.014	0.071 (0.014)	4.89	23.9 (1, 1660)	0.000
Poland	0.007	0.000	0.004 (0.018)	0.23	0.5 (1, 1224)	0.812
Portugal	0.016	0.000	-0.008 (0.015)	-0.57	0.3 (1, 1268)	0.564
Romania	0.095	0.009	-0.071 (0.021)	-3.36	11.2 (1, 1229)	0.001
Slovakia	0.105	0.011	-0.077 (0.020)	-3.80	14.4 (1, 1293)	0.000
Slovenia	0.050	0.003	0.035 (0.023)	1.53	2.3 (1, 935)	0.125
Spain	0.154	0.024	0.078 (0.012)	6.74	45.5 (1, 1867)	0.000
Sweden	0.024	0.001	-0.016 (0.016)	-0.99	0.9 (1, 1653)	0.322
United Kingdom	0.172	0.030	0.081 (0.010)	7.92	62.7 (1, 2048)	0.000
Mean	0.096					

Looking at the data regionally, the results shown in Table 9 force me to reject my third hypothesis about the Central and Eastern European region having a stronger relationship between left-right self-placement and the socio-economic value dimension due to the stark contrast provided by a rapid transition from essentially state controlled economies to capitalist liberal market economies. Western Europe has scored higher correlation means for all the value dimensions except for nationalism, which was only slightly higher for the CEE region.

Left-right self-placement based on values has thus been shown to be more a function of the age of democracy, and in many countries logically a function of a deep-seated societal cleavage or value dimension. It has been shown quite persuasively I believe, that such deep-seated societal cleavage structures or value dimensions cannot be completely uprooted, not even by decades of indoctrination or of exposure to certain phenomena, as evidenced by continued Polish or Spanish religiosity for instance, which is not to say that decades of such distortionary influences do not leave their own scars.

Table 9: Mean Correlations between Left-Right Self-Placement and the Value Indices per Region

European Social Survey 2008				
Mean Correlation with Left-Right Self-Placement as dependent variable	Religion	Socio-Economy	Postmaterialism	Nationalism
Western Europe	0.174	0.208	0.102	0.090
Spain, Portugal, Greece	0.232	0.082	0.051	0.061
Western Europe excluding Spain, Portugal, Greece	0.155	0.251	0.119	0.100
Central and Eastern Europe	0.123	0.126	0.039	0.103
Bulgaria, Romania	0.098	0.075	0.020	0.124
Eastern Europe excluding Bulgaria, Romania	0.131	0.141	0.044	0.098

Table 10: Dominant Value Dimension of the Measured Countries Based on their Correlations with Left-Right Self-Placement

European Social Survey 2008			
Religion	Socio-Economy	Postmaterialism	Nationalism
Slovenia (0.295)	Denmark (0.397)		Bulgaria (0.153)
Greece (0.286)	Sweden (0.368)		Latvia (0.064)
Spain (0.269)	Czech Republic (0.327)		
Poland (0.236)	France (0.292)		
Ireland (0.197)	Finland (0.268)		
Hungary (0.156)	Netherlands (0.256)		
Portugal (0.142)	Estonia (0.255)		
Belgium (0.126)	Germany (0.233)		
Romania (0.117)	United Kingdom (0.217)		
	Slovakia (0.166)		

Finally, how do all these results fare when analyzed from the point of view of Kitschelt and Hellemans' (1990) typology of theories? I would argue that they very much go hand in hand with the mosaic that I built, supporting my fourth hypothesis, although they can support only the initial stages of that mosaic, and this too is subject to interpretation.

Broadly speaking, just as I predicted, the socio-economic dimension continues to be the most salient value related to left-right self-positioning, and the data have revealed that the religious dimension too has by far not lost its clout in some countries. With a varyingly strong postmaterial value dimension, depending on particular countries, all this either supports the *Persistence* or the *Pluralisation* theories – persistence most likely in the industrial societies of the EU, pluralisation most likely in those that can be called postindustrial.

But despite the tremendously large left-right self-placement percentages in majority of the EU member states, values are overall incomparably weakly related to electorates' self-positioning. I argued in the previous chapters that this is because of the excessive intermingling of various issue areas, value dimensions and other dyadic relationships under the 'auspices' of the left-right dichotomy. This makes the whole dichotomy incomprehensible, not to mention potentially distortionary as has been argued previously, eventually leading to a form of the *Irrelevance* theory. I say 'form' however, because the left-right dichotomy has been in existence in some shape or another for a long time, transcending much farther than the French Revolution. As Laponce's (1981) excellent research implies, it is in a way natural for humans. Thus, even when incomprehensible, and so in a way irrelevant, as I argue is the majority case even today, it will continue being in use. Finally, after it loses some of the waning dimensions, such as will eventually be the case with religion I predict, perhaps the *Transformation* theory will become more relevant.

This view of mine is a highly predictive one and predictions are indeed feeble entities. It is problematic because it relies on certain assumptions that might or might not materialize.

There is not much that I can do with regards to future, but what could give my theory more weight would be to look back at the path of development and try to unearth visible trends that might shine more light on the discussion.

4.2 A Longitudinal Comparison: Oddbjørn Knutsen's 1973-1990 Data Vs. ESS 2008

In (1995), Oddbjørn Knutsen published a longitudinal study that has in many respects been an inspiration for my thesis. It measured relationships between left-right self-placement and three value dimensions ascribed to have been dominant in the preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial eras. These dimensions were respectively religion, left-right materialist values (which I call socio-economic values in my thesis), and materialist/postmaterialist values (which I simply call postmaterialist in this thesis). His methods consisted of an analysis of correlations, followed by a multivariate analysis. As data sources, he used Eurobarometer and European Values Survey for the years 1973-1990 to essentially give empirical weight to one of the outcomes of Kitchelt and Hellemans (1990) typology, just as I am trying now, 15 years later, for a period which comes almost 20 years after those of the Knutsen study.

Table 11: Longitudinal comparison of correlations between the periods 1973-1990 and 2008

Table 2: Correlations between religious values (church attendance) and left-right self-placement scale							
	1973	1978	1981	1990	Mean	Dif. 90-73	ESS 2008
Netherlands	0.43	0.44	0.37	0.37	0.40	- 0.06	0.12
Belgium	0.33	0.31	0.35	0.25	0.31	- 0.08	0.12
France	0.36	0.31	0.24	0.28	0.30	- 0.08	0.23
Germany	0.26	0.21	0.33	0.25	0.26	- 0.01	0.16
Italy	0.23	0.33	0.20	0.27	0.26	0.04	N/A
Denmark	0.20	0.22	0.03	0.17	0.16	- 0.03	0.11
Ireland	0.15	0.13	0.15	0.18	0.15	0.03	0.19
Britain	0.16	0.07	0.08	0.12	0.11	- 0.04	0.08
Mean	0.27	0.25	0.22	0.24	0.24	- 0.03	0.14

(Knutsen, 1995, p. 72) [The only change to the original is inclusion of the ESS column.]

A few notices of caution: tying into what has been discussed in the methodological section of my thesis, it may be of some importance to report that Knutsen's (1995) study used a 10-point left-right scale; furthermore, while the religious²³ and left-right materialist²⁴ dimensions can easily be compared to my ESS (2008) data, the materialist/postmaterialist²⁵ dimension might be seen by some as problematic, although I maintain that all of the value dimensions are indeed quite easily comparable without much loss to the different methodological approaches between my thesis and Knutsen's (1995) article.

Table 12: Longitudinal comparison of correlations between the periods 1979-1990 and 2008

Table 3: Correlations between left-right materialist orientations and left-right self-placement scale							
	1979-83*	1979 (5 items)	1990	Mean	Diff. 79-83/90	Diff. 79-90	ESS 2008
Denmark	0.41	0.42	0.48	0.45	0.07	0.06	0.39
France	0.37	0.32	0.37	0.37	0.00	0.05	0.29
Netherlands	0.31	0.36	0.35	0.33	0.04	- 0.01	0.25
Britain	0.24	0.32	0.36	0.30	0.12	0.04	0.21
Italy	0.25	0.38	0.29	0.27	0.04	- 0.09	N/A
Germany	0.12	0.15	0.30	0.21	0.18	0.15	0.23
Belgium	0.11	0.15	0.22	0.16	0.11	0.07	0.11
Ireland	0.03	0.09	0.19	0.11	0.16	0.10	0.11
Mean	0.23	0.27	0.32	0.28	0.09	0.05	0.22

Average correlations from EB 11, EB 16 and EB 19 based on three items.

(Knutsen, 1995, p. 73) [The only change to the original is inclusion of the ESS column.]

Knutsen's (1995) data provide strong support for the *Pluralisation* theory. "The strongest evidence in favour of pluralisation theory are the findings about the persistent impact of left-right materialist orientations, the increasing impact of materialist/post-

²³ Knutsen used church attendance to measure the relationship between left-right self-placement and the religious value dimension.

²⁴ Knutsen used questions pertaining to the inequality of income, the government's role in the management of economy, the government's role in the provision of social services and redistribution, and individual versus collective rights to measure the relationship between left-right self-placement and the left-right materialist value dimension.

²⁵ Knutsen used the traditional 12-item battery 'Inglehart index' to measure the relationship between left-right self-placement and the materialist/postmaterialist value dimension.

materialist orientations, and the increase in the explained variance of value orientations in the self-placement scale.” (Knutsen, 1995, p. 86) When taken as standalone results, my thesis also supports either the *Pluralisation* or the *Persistence* theory depending on individual countries. However, looking at Table 11, 12 and 13, which are the exact correlation tables from Knutsen’s (1995) article with the addition of a final column providing data from the ESS (2008) dataset, the overall picture appears to be quite different.

Table 13: Longitudinal comparison of correlations between the periods 1973-1990 and 2008

Table 4: Correlations between materialist/post-materialist orientations and left-right self-placement scale								
	1973	1978	1979-1983*	1988	1990	Mean	Diff. 73-90	ESS 2008
Denmark	0.25	0.48	0.41	0.52	0.40	0.41	0.15	0.18
Netherlands	0.24	0.36	0.42	0.31	0.41	0.35	0.17	0.14
France	0.34	0.36	0.34	0.39	0.27	0.34	- 0.07	0.10
Germany	0.23	0.26	0.34	0.38	0.37	0.32	0.14	0.15
Italy	0.28	0.30	0.30	0.22	0.25	0.27	- 0.03	N/A
Britain	0.20	0.16	0.26	0.45	0.31	0.28(0.23)	0.11	0.05
Belgium	0.09	0.14	0.14	0.27	0.16	0.16	0.07	0.09
Ireland	0.13	0.17	0.11	0.20	0.18	0.16	0.05	0.09
Mean	0.22	0.28	0.29	0.34	0.29	0.29	0.07	0.11

* Average correlations from EB 11, 16 and 19 based on four New Politics items. The coefficient in parentheses for Britain is based on only four results. The deviant coefficient from 1988 is omitted. For the other countries the average correlations drops by 0.03 or less when the somewhat deviant results from 1988 are omitted from the calculation of average correlations. The mean for all countries drops only from 0.29 to 0.27

(Knutsen, 1995, p. 73) [The only change to the original is inclusion of the ESS column.]

For the studied countries, and admittedly, the sample is quite small, the comparison of the 1973-1990 period and 2008 show startlingly different trends. The 1973-1990 period showed a slight decline for most of the countries for the religious value dimension, while a slightly rising tendency for both the left-right materialist and materialist/postmaterialist dimensions in most countries. Typical *Pluralisation* theory. When the 2008 results are added into the mix, the results show a decline in all of the dimensions for all of the countries except for Ireland, which remains stagnant in the socio-economic dimension and has actually gained

0.01 point in the religious dimension. On average however, all of the countries combined (excluding Italy for which I lacked data) fell by 0.10 in the religious dimension, 0.06 in the socio-economic dimension and 0.18 on the postmaterialist dimension. Should this prove to be a continuing trend, it would appear that my hypothesis about the *Persistence* and *Pluralisation* theory is a sound one, meaning that the left-right dichotomy – while its use remaining high – could due to oversaturation be moving towards at least a form of *Irrelevance*. The *Transformation* theory does not appear to be in the cards for any meaningfully foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I attempted to trace and connect two distinct yet closely related clusters of characteristics of the left-right self-placement mechanism.

Through the first cluster, divided into four hypotheses, I was primarily arguing that the left-right dichotomy has become so incomprehensible and oversaturated, that it does not provide meaningful information about the value positions of self-placers, whose numbers are despite this confusing state historically higher than ever before. It was hypothesized that if electorates' value positions indeed translated into their left-right self-placement, the most visible and arguably most relevant socio-economic value dimension would overwhelmingly provide the basis by which they would do it. The socio-economic dimension was argued to be an even stronger predictor in the Central and Eastern European region due to its uneasy process of transition and other phenomena related to it. Finally, based on Kitschelt and Hellemans' (1990) typology, a hypothesis was presented about the status quo and its chronological trend, claiming that while a combination of the persistence and pluralisation theories are best suited to describe the status quo, the chronological trend appears to move towards a form of the irrelevance theory, very much in line with the primary hypotheses.

My research, built on the European Social Survey's latest 2008 dataset – utilizing the methods of bivariate and multivariate analysis as well as a longitudinal comparative study – provided interesting and relevant results, supporting most of my hypotheses. The findings have shown that while the socio-economic value dimension is indeed the dominant one, it is only marginally so, and at any rate, all of the value dimensions together share only a weak relationship with left-right self-placement in the European Union. This provided further support to the hypothesis in which a gradual shift towards a form of the irrelevance theory was claimed. The only hypothesis that had to be rejected was about regional differences.

Western European countries have shown that left-right self-placement has a stronger relationship with values there than it does in Central and Eastern Europe, although the difference was not large and the percentages low in any case.

Through the second cluster, I attempted to show on both theoretical and practical examples the serious repercussions that the distortionary effects may bring by exploitation of the incomprehensible left-right dichotomy.

I believe that the thesis resulted in formulating many more questions, untested hypotheses and possible avenues to pursue than it provides answers for. Still, it has for example also shown ample evidence that the left-right distinction matters because of its widespread use, and that it has because of that by far not reached its zenith. Indeed, according to Bobbio (1997) and Zolberg (in: Tilly, 1995), the challenge of its socio-economic dimension will continue to be salient if for nothing else than the international dimension vis-à-vis the First and the Third World. At the same time, I have argued and shown on multiple examples from theory and practice that due to its shifting nature and a whole host of other potential causes, it is more than plausible that it continues to perplex even those portions of electorates that actively subscribe to it, potentially leading to a form of irrelevance.

Everything that has been written in this thesis about the left-right dyad points to the conclusion that it is an extremely complex duality. It is indeed often called a 'superissue', but it gets further complicated in the public's minds by mixing with the other related axes, making for a very incoherent picture, as publics generally tend to place themselves on the left-right scale while keeping in mind issues and values that are much more accurately dichotomized by the other mentioned dyads. This increasing complexity is why I find it more accurate to call it a 'hyperissue' which consists of multiple superissues, and why I proposed a

more specific, albeit only theoretical schema for people to be able to orient themselves in the political space and inform about their value positions.

The problem however is not only in the publics' minds but in our discipline itself, failing to take much notice and adapt to the new situation. The sets of questions that are chosen to be asked even in the largest and most reliable datasets nearly always ask for respondents' left-right self-placements, but not nearly as enough to place themselves on the other dyads at the same time as I had suggested. The other dyads carry methodological concerns of their own, but hardly more serious than the one about left-right self-placement that is often expected to embody them. Another obvious fix in a situation when the confusion is already a part of daily reality could be to ask respondents' for their preferred dimension of interest, the one which they most strongly associate with left-right self-placement. These questions are often dispersed among the various datasets, creating tremendous difficulties in using such information effectively. The successful spread of the left-right dyad is a testament to its persistent, even rising relevance of sorts, but perhaps it is not far off the mark to suggest that a significant part of the electorate operates with it rather incorrectly. Thus, what is supposed to be a tool for simplifying orientation through the political plane is often the source of much confusion and possibly an ideological weapon as well.

Through this research I tried to provide a unique, better understanding of our electorates and their understanding of left-right self-placement, of the underlying psychology, and of the structural and other possible influences that shape voter choices and behavior.

Using the words of Tilly (1995), "I have woven an uneven tissue of conjectures, draped it over a disparate collection of facts and arguments, anchored it to a tendentious reading of European history, shifted my warp and woof frequently without warning, and thus left great gaps in the fabric". Nevertheless, I am hopeful that this thesis contributed to the ongoing debate by providing its own concrete results, and that it may serve as a viable

inspiration for further research in the field. Further research that this particular part of the political science discipline is in dire need of, I would add – not only with regards to replacing the outdated comparative studies, but perhaps also to try and take account of the many phenomena that were hinted at here.

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