

# **UNCOVERING CHALLENGES OF EUROSCEPTICISM: SPUTNIK V IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The post-Maastricht era in the European integration has brought a “boom” in the Eurosceptic literature. The literature has been, however, unable to explain the relationship between the Eurosceptic policies by non-Eurosceptic actors in practice. This thesis investigates in what ways the discourse framing and political party diverge and how the divergence matters to the latter. To do this, I look at the use of the Sputnik V vaccine in the European Union (EU) as a case when two political parties decided to pursue a unilateral solution over the approved common COVID-19 vaccine management after the national solutions had failed to be efficient to tackle the pandemic. Whilst the Hungarian governing party, Fidesz, has been studied by the Eurosceptic scholarship as Eurosceptic, this has not been the case of the Slovak OĽANO which followed Hungary’s suit as the only actor in the bloc to have done so. To investigate this, I conduct an analysis of the overall COVID-19 vaccine management both on the EU and national level, including the Hungarian and Slovak unilateral acquisitions of the Russian vaccine and the discourse on it. I argue that the emphasis on the party-based Euroscepticism has impeded the field of Euroscepticism to unpack the micro-level dynamics of actors’ policy choices.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APA	Advanced Purchase Agreement
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
EC (Commission)	European Commission
EMA (Agency)	European Medicine Agency
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
OLANO	Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities)
RDIF	Russian Direct Investment Fund
SaS	Sloboda a Solidarita (Freedom and Solidarity)
TEU	Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty)
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Treaty of Rome)

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The post-Maastricht era has witnessed a “boom” in Eurosceptic literature to describe cases such as Brexit, the ultimate case of the “contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporated outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration.”<sup>1</sup>

In analysing these cases when partial or total opposition to the European integration occurs, —which was designed as the ultimate promise of peace, prosperity, and economic growth.— the scholarship has predominantly emphasised the party-based lenses as guiding the explanation of such a phenomenon. Robust literature has built on this to look at other ways of studying it such as the regional trends and role of crisis times to study setbacks against the European integration overall or EU policies agreed on the EU level.

Euroscepticism no longer represents the fringe of the political spectrum. Instead, it has moved towards mainstream European politics. Since the 1980s when the British press firstly deployed the term in 1985 to describe “anti-marketeer” position, in the United Kingdom<sup>2</sup> during the COVID-19 pandemic, Eurosceptics formed the government, for instance, in Spain and Hungary (Figure 2). In January 2021, Hungary became the first EU member-state to contract the Russian Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine to fight the pandemic and achieve the herd immunity against the disease.<sup>3</sup> Yet, unlike Hungary, for instance, Spain has not considered the unilateral acquisition of the Russian vaccine.

On the other hand, Germany and France where Eurosceptics remained in the opposition, have considered acquiring the Sputnik V vaccine. Nevertheless, the Slovak non-Eurosceptic

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Taggart, “A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems,” *European Journal of Political Research* 33 (1998): 366.

<sup>2</sup> Sofia Vasilopoulou, “Theory, concepts and research design in the study of Euroscepticism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, edited by Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin and Simon Usherwood (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2018), 23.

<sup>3</sup> Valerie Hopkins, Henry Foy and Michael Peel, “Hungary approves Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine,” *Financial Times*, January 21, 2021, last accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/20bfa7ba-4df9-4422-9dbf-06811da1294c>.

OLANO followed Hungary's suit as the only actor in the bloc to do so (Figure 2). This occurred after the previous unanimous approval of all member states, including Hungary and Slovakia, on the common European Commission-led approach towards the COVID-19 vaccine management.<sup>4</sup>

Although the policymaking in practice is an intrinsic part of the understanding state behaviour, the Eurosceptic literature has failed to grasp the dynamics between Eurosceptic policymaking and pro-EU political party orientation. This remains one of the literature gaps in the field.

This, thus, prompts the following question: What are the ways in which the framing and political party orientation diverge? Consequently, how does this relate to the political party orientation?

Taking the unilateral decisions of Hungary and Slovakia to acquire the Sputnik V despite the agreement on the common EU COVID-19 vaccine management strategy as a case study, this thesis argues that the emphasis on the party-based Euroscepticism has impeded the field to unpack the micro-level dynamics of the concrete policy choices.

To do so, I look both at the decisions made about the COVID-19 vaccine management on the EU and national level. The national level particularly focuses on Hungary and Slovakia as the only countries to have acquired the Russian vaccine. This includes the qualitative analysis of the political discourse by the key policymakers involved in the process of acquiring the Russian vaccine to uncover the limits of the emphasis on the political party level in the study of the policy-political party orientation nexus.

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<sup>4</sup> "Questions & Answers on vaccine negotiations," European Commission, January 8, 2021, last accessed April 9, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda\\_21\\_48](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_48).



In the state-dominated international arena, the common EU approach to the COVID-19 vaccine management represents an example of a move led by a supranational actor to prevent vaccine nationalism amongst the states after the national responses had failed to tackle the consequences of the pandemic within the bloc. Comprehending the common COVID-19 management in the EU in contrast to the unilateral moves of Hungary and Slovakia, thus, helps us to understand the obstacles and challenges of an institutionalised global order overall.

At the same time, on the EU level, understanding the opposition to the decisions taken on the EU level will help us ultimately understand the EU politics overall and the limits of the further integration within the bloc as the EU is yet to become a political union.

Chapter 1 provides the literature review of the previously written literature and identifies the remaining literature gap on the Eurosceptic policy-pro-EU political party orientation nexus. Also, it establishes why to study policies such as the Sputnik V which may primarily not appear to be matter of Euroscepticism matters.

In Chapter 2, the conceptual frame and research design discusses the *modus operandi* and rationale behind the analysis. The methodology, data and scope section unpack the research design of the empirical chapters before concluding with limitations of the research.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the EU's tackling of the COVID-19 pandemic as regards the COVID-19 vaccine management. This is with a particular emphasis on the EU4Health programme, EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines, role of the European Medicine Agency (EMA) in the medicine regulation in the EU and the EMA's approval process of the Sputnik V vaccine to establish degree of the delegation of competencies to the European Commission and the European Medicine Agency by the member-states in the COVID-19 vaccines management.

Chapter 4 analyses the national level. It focuses on the Hungarian and Slovak cases as the only EU member-states to have gone forward with the acquisition of the Russian vaccine. I take the political discourse on the Sputnik V vaccine on social media as key to qualitative analysis. In countries where the trust towards the mainstream media is low<sup>5</sup> and the pandemic exacerbated the move of people's lives towards the digital space,<sup>6</sup> this provides further insights into the limits of the established Eurosceptic consensus. Lastly, Chapter 6 chapter concludes with reflections on the research question and offers starting points for further research.

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<sup>5</sup> GLOBSEC, *GLOBSEC Trends 2021: Central and Eastern Europe One Year into the Pandemic*, June 2021, last accessed May 15, 2022, [https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GLOBSEC-Trends-2021\\_final.pdf](https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GLOBSEC-Trends-2021_final.pdf), 72.

<sup>6</sup> Információs Társadalom Kutatóintézet, *Bizalom, tudatosság, veszélyérzet az interneten*, 2020, last accessed June 5, 2022, [https://www.ludovika.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EJKK-ITKI\\_Bizalom-tudatossag-veszelyerzet-az-interneten.pdf](https://www.ludovika.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/EJKK-ITKI_Bizalom-tudatossag-veszelyerzet-az-interneten.pdf), 4.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 *Euroscepticism as concept since 1985*

Since the 1998 Paul Taggart's seminal work on Euroscepticism as "contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporated outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration,"<sup>7</sup> many have contributed to describe and explain the puzzle of the anti-European project sentiments. This led to the expansion of the field and understanding of the dynamics of the phenomenon described by Taggart by, for instance, public Euroscepticism,<sup>8</sup> Euroscepticism of non-state actors,<sup>9</sup> Euroscepticism within the EU institutions<sup>10</sup> and as an independent variable in national and European parliamentary election outcomes.<sup>11</sup> Although this demonstrates that other sectors of society and actors are not immune to the EU opposing sentiments, political party-based Euroscepticism remains central to the scholarship. Yet, actors do not simply just oppose the EU. The degree of the opposition may vary, and the literature remains descriptive foremost.

To uncover the varying levels of opposition to the EU among the political parties, Taggart and Sczerbiak have argued for the conceptualisation of party-based Euroscepticism along the binary hard/soft lines. They offer a distinction between an opposition to the EU as a

<sup>7</sup> Taggart, "A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems," 366.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine E. De Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Theresa Kuhn, Bram Lancee and Oriane Sarrasin, "Growing Up as a European? Parental Socialization and the Educational Divide in Euroscepticism," *Political Psychology* 42, no. 6 (December 2021): 957-975; Pascal Siegers, "EU Performance and Euroscepticism," in *Euroscepticism: Images of Europe among mass publics and political elites*, edited by Dieter Fuchs, Raul Magni-Berton and Antoine Roger (Opladen and Farmington Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2009.), 115-133.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Bijsmans, "Varieties of opposition to the EU in the low countries: a comparison of the Dutch and Flemish press," in *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, edited by Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin and Simon Usherwood (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2018), 357.

<sup>10</sup> Nathalie Brack and Olivier Costa, "Euroscepticism in the EU institutions: a persistent and embedded phenomenon," in *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, edited by Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin and Simon Usherwood (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2018), 371-383.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver Treib, "Euroscepticism is here to stay: what cleavage theory can teach us about the 2019 European Parliament elections," *Journal of European Public Policy* 28, no. 2 (2021): 174-189; Hermann Schmitt and Cees van der Eijk, "There Is Not Much Eurosceptic Non-Voting in European Parliament Elections," in *Opposing Europe? The comparative party politics of Euroscepticism*, ed. Aleks Sczerbiak and Paul Taggart, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 208-237.

project and concrete policies or path of European integration.<sup>12</sup> Yet, as per Kopecký and Mudde, the *soft* Euroscepticism category is particularly problematic. Such distinction risks anti-democratic biases as any opposition to the project may fall into category.<sup>13</sup> Thus, others such as Nicolo Conti, Petr Kaniok, Sofia Vasilopolou and Cécile Leconte have sought to fill the binary hard/soft Eurosceptic ambiguity to explain what triggers political parties' Euroscepticism.

Whilst Conti distinguishes amongst five levels of Euroscepticism: hard, soft, no commitment, functional Euroscepticism, and identity Europeanism,<sup>14</sup> one may equally measure parties' degree of opposition to the EU on the Europeanist, Eurogovernmentalist and Eurosceptic three-point scale.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, Milardović has, for instance, equalled Euroscepticism to Eurorealism.<sup>16</sup>

The Eurosceptic tendencies, however, may as well go beyond the "Euro" lines. In her study of far-right Eurosceptics, Vasilopolou distinguishes between macro-level *polity* as European integration overall and *policy* Euroscepticism on the micro-level.<sup>17</sup> Other such as Leconte detect the variety of Euroscepticism as utilitarian, political, value-based Euroscepticism, and cultural anti-Europeanism.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, whilst the political parties-based approach may overall help us to identify the orientation of a political party and grasp the primary picture, it alone comes short of explaining

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<sup>12</sup> Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, "Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 43 (2004): 1.

<sup>13</sup> Petr Kopecký and Cas Mudde, "The Two Sides of Euroscepticism: Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe," *European Union Politics* 3, no. 3 (2002): 300.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolo Conti, "Party attitudes to European integration: a longitudinal analysis of the Italian case," (working paper, Sussex European Institute, 2003), 17.

<sup>15</sup> Petr Kaniok, "Europeanists, Eurogovernmentalists, and Eurosceptics: A Constructive Criticism of Previous Research," in *Euroscepticism and European Integration*, edited by Krisztina Arató and Petr Kaniok (Zagreb: Political Science Research Centre Zagreb, 2009), 169.

<sup>16</sup> Anđelko Milardović, "Euroscepticism in a Conflict of Ideologies of the Second Modernism," in *Euroscepticism and European Integration*, edited by Krisztina Arató and Petr Kaniok (Zagreb: Political Science Research Centre Zagreb, 2009), 40.

<sup>17</sup> Sofia Vasilopolou, *Far right parties and Euroscepticism: patterns of opposition* (London and New York: ECPR Press and Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Cécile Leconte, *Understanding Euroscepticism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 43.

the relationship between the parties' orientation and its policy choices. Particularly in the case of the actors who do not question the European integration per se, the political party's orientation may not be deterministic. In other words, a political party may be enthusiastic about the European integration, however, it may be pro-EU to greater and lesser extent as at different times. Consequently, the relationship between Eurosceptic policymaking and political parties' pro-EU orientation remains one of the existing gaps in the Eurosceptic literature.<sup>19</sup>

To find answers to the existing literature gaps, others have taken crisis times as the starting point of the analysis. Crises have been forming an indivisible part of the EU's identity and trajectory. As opportunity to innovate, the EU itself was born out of a crisis in the first place. Yet, the economic hardship experienced after the eurozone crisis tested the EU's ability to find its way out of the crisis, for instance.

Authors such as Mark Baimbridge explored the deleterious effect of economic crisis on political elites' stances. As a factor which triggers Eurosceptic sentiments among political elites under extraordinary circumstances, economic hardship may become the independent variable in the rise of the opposition to the European project and policies.<sup>20</sup>

Others such as Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel have explored the Euroscepticism and populism equation in crisis times instead. They argue that the picture remains complex, and one cannot draw conclusions easily. Indifferently to the degree of Euroscepticism of a political party, populist parties are overall selective with pursuing Eurosceptic policies.<sup>21</sup> Yet, although any crisis increases the hostility of the political environment, one may argue that every crisis

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<sup>19</sup> Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart, "Contemporary research on Euroscepticism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, edited by Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin and Simon Usherwood (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2018), 17.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Baimbridge, "The impact of the economic crisis on Euroscepticism" in *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, edited by Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin and Simon Usherwood (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2018), 427.

<sup>21</sup> Andrea LP Pirro, Paul Taggart and Stijn van Kessel, "The populist politics of Euroscepticism in times of crisis: Comparative conclusions," *Politics* 38, no. 3 (2018): 387.

may constitute *sui generis*. Furthermore, the inability of the authors to draw any concrete conclusions furthermore indicates the challenge how to unpack the relationship between the policy and political party orientation level.

Having identified the solely political party-based approach as insufficient, additional Eurosceptic literature has studied Euroscepticism from regional and country-specific perspective. Whilst some studies focus on the EU15,<sup>22</sup> others have looked at the trends in Central and Eastern Europe only.<sup>23</sup> Other strand of the literature has argued for the country-to-country approach to capture the peculiarities of the domestic context of both non-EU and EU member-states.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, the dynamics and substance of Euroscepticism may differ in the post-communist states from, e.g., the United Kingdom, as the country where Euroscepticism first emerged under a market-based economy. Instead of an anti-market position, different reasons may motivate Euroscepticism among the EU member-states of the 2004 enlargement. They may oppose the values the EU advocates, justifying the opposition to the values as “alien” to their national settings.<sup>25</sup> This may, thus, help us understand why, for instance, Spain with soft Eurosceptic *Podemos* (“We Can”)<sup>26</sup> as a junior coalition partner has not considered the Sputnik V authorisation.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 378-390.

<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Pridham, “European Party Cooperation and Post-Communist Politics: Euroscepticism in Transnational Perspective,” in *Opposing Europe? The comparative politics of Euroscepticism*, edited by Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart, vol 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 76-102; Kopecký and Mudde, “The Two Sides of Euroscepticism: Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe,” 297-326.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Harmsen and Menno Spiering, *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004); Olga Gille-Belova, “Perceptions of the European Union and Euroscepticism in Russia,” in *Euroscepticism: Images of Europe among mass publics and political elites*, edited by Dieter Fuchs, Raul Magni-Berton and Antoine Roger (Opladen and Farmington Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2009), 175-192.

<sup>25</sup> European Commission, “EU founding values: Commission starts legal action against Hungary and Poland for violations of fundamental rights of LGBTIQ people,” press release no. IP/21/3668, July 15, 2021, last accessed June 5, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_3668](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3668).

<sup>26</sup> Taggart and Pirro, “European populism before the pandemic: ideology, Euroscepticism, electoral performance, and government participation of 63 parties in 30 countries,” 286.

Alternatively, the differing nature of opposition along geographical lines identified by the scholars offers insights into why Germany which considered the authorisation of the vaccine. Yet, it has not moved forward with the deal with Moscow on the purchase of the Russian vaccine. The regional and country level, however, do not capture the picture fully. At the same time, such an approach may lead to rather deterministic conclusions. In other words, the Central and Eastern Euroscepticism assumption does not explain why Hungary' and Slovakia's neighbours have not followed their suit.

For instance, despite its strong Eurosceptic tendencies, Czechia has not opposed the European Commission's mandate on the COVID-19 vaccine negotiations and EMA's decision-making in the vaccine authorisation approvals (Figure 2). At the same time, the regional and country level come short of explaining the compatibility found between Slovak and Hungarian stance on the Sputnik V vaccine but this missing elsewhere. For instance, Hungary vetoed the EU's budget<sup>27</sup> whilst Slovakia did not. Thus, although one would hardly argue that understanding the peculiarities of policy-political party orientation nexus will not help us to understand Euroscepticism and European politics overall, this remains the Achilles' heel of the field and the policy level remains under researched.

## **2.2 EU's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and Sputnik V**

A growing number of authors have been contributing to comprehend the puzzle of the COVID-19 pandemic in the European Union.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "Hungary and Poland stick to EU budget veto, Hungarian minister says," *Reuters*, December 7, 2020, last accessed June 9, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/eu-budget-hungary-poland-idUSKBN28H1TI>.

<sup>28</sup> Florian Bieber, "Global Nationalism in Times of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Nationalities Papers* 50, no. 1 (2022): 13-25; Geert Bouckaert et al., "European Coronationalism? A Hot Spot Governing a Pandemic Crisis," *Public Administration Review* (May 22, 2020): 765-773; Eleanor Brooks, Anniek de Ruijter and Scott L. Greer, "THE EUROPEAN UNION CONFRONTS COVID-19: Another European Rescue of the Nation-State?," in *Coronavirus Politics*, edited by Scott L. Greer, Elizabeth J. King, Elize Massard da Fonseca and André Peralta-Santos (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Michigan Press, 2021), 235-248; Rebecca Forman and Elias

As regards the European Commission's role and performance in the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine management, the impact of the COVID-19 vaccine strategy on the principles of the EU have attracted scholarly attention of authors such as Kochenov and Veraldi. According to them, the decision on the common COVID-19 digital certificates had negative impacts on the free movement within the bloc.<sup>29</sup> Examples of such controversy include the non-recognition of the non-EMA approved vaccines in the EU Digital COVID Certificate.<sup>30</sup> Member-states such as Austria refused to recognise the Russian vaccine as compliant with the vaccine mandate.<sup>31</sup>

Consequently, research has already emerged on the authorisation of use of the Sputnik V vaccine. This has, however, focused foremost on the Russian "vaccine diplomacy" abroad aspect. Taking the geographical lenses as the starting point, Kazharski and Makarychev have proposed that the Sputnik V vaccine went beyond being solely a business project of Russia with the EU. Instead, the Russian vaccine represents a case when the political and business motives of the Kremlin meet.<sup>32</sup> Others such as Manfredi-Sánchez have focused on the narratives evolving around the Russian vaccine<sup>33</sup> as it quickly sparked controversy.<sup>34</sup>

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Mossialos, "The EU Response to COVID-19: From Reactive Policies to Strategic Decision-Making," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 59 Annual Review (2021): 56-68.

<sup>29</sup> Dimitry Vladimirovich Kochenov and Jacquelyn Dietrich Veraldi, "The Commission against the Internal Market and European Union Citizens' Rights: Trying to Shoot Down Sputnik with the "Digital Green Certificate"?" *European Journal of Risk Regulation* 12, no. 2 (2021): 404-414.

<sup>30</sup> "EU Digital COVID Certificate," European Commission, n.d., last accessed June 5, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/safe-covid-19-vaccines-europeans/eu-digital-covid-certificate\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/safe-covid-19-vaccines-europeans/eu-digital-covid-certificate_en).

<sup>31</sup> "Austria's vaccine mandate: What you need to know if you have a non EMA-approved vaccine," *The Local*, February 2, 2022, last accessed June 5, 2022, <https://www.thelocal.at/20220207/austrias-vaccine-mandate-what-you-need-to-know-if-you-have-a-non-ema-approved-vaccine/>.

<sup>32</sup> Aliaksei Kazharski and Andrey Makarychev, "Russia's Vaccine Diplomacy in Central Europe: Between a Political Campaign and a Business Project," *Mezinárodní Vztahy* 56, no. 4 (2021): 131.

<sup>33</sup> Juan Luis Manfredi-Sánchez, "Vaccine (public) diplomacy: legitimacy narratives in the pandemic age," *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* (2022): 1.

<sup>34</sup> Francesco Guarascio, "EU warns Hungary against use of Russia's COVID-19 vaccine," *Reuters*, November 19, 2020, last accessed May 29, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL1N2I41ZM?fbclid=IwAR1IR9Zdtb-O-7MV5HTTTwVSa5imP7t6vkRXbW7iUWoykqH3wWPbq8SpToY>.



Having considered the previously written Eurosceptic literature along with the vacuum on the Eurosceptic policy and pro-EU political party orientation nexus and the Hungary's and Slovakia's unilateral move after their endorsement of the Commission's mandate to negotiate the COVID-19 vaccines on behalf of the bloc, this thesis, thus, asks: What are the ways in which the framing and political party orientation diverge? Consequently, how does this relate to the political party orientation?

### 3 CONCEPTUAL FRAME AND RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 3.1 *Theory*

As mentioned in the previous chapter, among other, the Eurosceptic scholarship has been unable to provide answers to the puzzle between the political parties' pro-EU orientation and pursuit of what the field may define and study as a Eurosceptic policy.

Consequently, the Eurosceptic literature is yet to attempt to provide any insights into the use of Sputnik V in the bloc as a potential case of “contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporated outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration.”<sup>35</sup> The acquisition of the vaccine represented an unilateral move even though the mandate of the European Commission to negotiate on behalf of the bloc to ensure fairer and more equal access to the vaccines received endorsement by the member-states.

The inability of the Eurosceptic scholarship to fill in the literature gap requires a revision of the current approach. Indifferently to whether Euroscepticism represents a marginal or mainstream phenomenon or how many points of scale should one measure it, the political orientation is not the deterministic factor in the decisions taken on the national level in response to the EU consensus.

At the same time, decision-making of the political actors does not occur in isolation. Whilst the political party orientation may help us to understand what guides the execution of policies, it is not the only factor.

The Sputnik V case points out that the Eurosceptic policies may emerge indifferently to whether opposition to the European integration or EU policies, for instance, form a political party's political agenda intrinsically. I will argue that the emphasis on the party-based

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<sup>35</sup> Taggart, “A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems,” 366.

Euroscepticism has impeded the field to unpack the micro-level dynamics of their policy choices.

As regards the case study, although the use of Sputnik V in the bloc may not appear to be of foremost concern for the field of international relations and as linked to the study of Euroscepticism, the COVID-19 pandemic represents a global challenge and has been recognised so by the World Health Organisation.<sup>36</sup> As a pandemic, it is a case of “an epidemic occurring over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries” which affects a large number of people.<sup>37</sup> This moves the vaccine governance closer to the global governance overall and the role of international institutions such as the EU in the world order during the pandemic and beyond.

At the same time, understanding Euroscepticism is, also, far from not being the concern of the international relations scholarship. The EU is yet to become a political union. Therefore, the policy level and national decisions do matter. The Hungarian and Slovak decisions to pursue unilateral agreements on the COVID-19 vaccine procurement without the involvement of the European Commission to negotiate the vaccine deals on their behalf are an example of that. The mandate emerged as to ensure solidarity and as equal access to the vaccines as possible. My argument is that understanding the authorisation of the use of the Sputnik V in the two countries will contribute to our comprehension of the inability of the field of Euroscepticism to explain European solution-opposing policy choices as not sourced in an overall anti-EU orientation of a political party.

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<sup>36</sup> “Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic,” WHO, n.d., last accessed May 9, 2022, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

<sup>37</sup> Miquel Porta, *A Dictionary of Epidemiology*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 209.

### 3.2 Methodology, Data and Scope

To demonstrate how the emphasis on the political party level impedes the Eurosceptic literature to capture the policy level, the empirical Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the EU and national level as far as the COVID-19 vaccine management in the bloc is concerned.

On the EU level, I analyse the decisions taken as regards the main initiatives on the COVID-19 vaccine management. The role of the Commission and the European Medicine Agency is central to the analysis.

On the national level, more precisely, I look at the two main actors, the two governing leading political parties in the respective countries: Hungarian Fidesz and Slovak OĽANO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities). In Slovakia, the analysis focuses solely on OĽANO as, despite leading the governing coalition of four political parties (OĽANO, SaS (Freedom and Solidarity), SME RODINA (We Are Family) and Za ľudí (For People)), it pursued the vaccine unilaterally.<sup>38</sup>

Second, qualitative social media discourse analysis provides additional insights into the divergence between the political discourse and the political party orientation to study the limits of the party-based emphasis in the field. I looked at the strategic communication on social media of key political actors of the two political parties involved.

In Hungary, I focused on the Facebook account of the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the foreign affairs minister Péter Szijjartó. In Slovakia, it was the Facebook profile of Igor Matovič, the then Prime Minister, and Marek Krajčí, the then health minister. I gathered the data in the two respective countries by performing search on their communication channels for key words “Sputnik V,” “Sputnik,” “Russian vaccine” and “EMA.” Additionally, in the

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<sup>38</sup> “Two ruling Slovak parties demand PM Matovič quit as Sputnik deal shakes coalition,” *Reuters*.

Hungarian case, I added “orosz,” “Matovič” and “Szputnyik.” In case of reposted media or videos, only text of the social media posts was analysed.

I measured both frequency and whether the discourse displayed positive, negative, neutral or no sentiments towards the EU. I distinguish the discourse displaying positive sentiment as showing a degree of enthusiasm and endorsement of the EU approach. The neutral sentiments category represents the case of factual communication displaying no sentiments. The negative sentiments category describes instances when the EU opposing, questioning language is deployed. The no sentiment category represents cases when information on the topic was communicated but it did not target the EU. To observe the ways in which the discourse and political party orientation diverge, I look at the proportion of each category on monthly basis to uncover the degree of the divergence between the discourse and the political party orientation.

As regards the frequency, I look at the decrease and increase in the discourse based on the number of posts in each month throughout the monitoring period. I then compare the decreasing and increasing tendencies against the key events in the course of time such as the endorsement of the common approach, closure of the deal with the Russian manufacturer on the purchase of the vaccine, etc. On the other hand, in terms of the sentiment categorisation,

Lastly, the scope of the analysis concentrates on the time period between September 2020, the slow and steady beginning of the second wave of the pandemic and August 2021, the cancellation of the use of the Sputnik V in Slovakia.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Michal Hudec, “Slovak health ministry silent over Sputnik’s third dose,” *euractiv*, September 22, 2021, last accessed June 9, 2022, [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/slovak-health-ministry-silent-over-sputniks-third-dose/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/slovak-health-ministry-silent-over-sputniks-third-dose/).

### **3.3 Limitations**

As regards the case study choice, although some literature has begun to emerge on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU's COVID-19 vaccine management and use of the Sputnik V remain recent events. I recognise that this may pose a significant challenge to the empirical part of the thesis. Furthermore, I am aware that the ambiguity of the key definitions of the field such as the meaning of Euroscepticism itself poses additional constraints on the conceptual frame of the thesis. Yet, the remaining literature gap in the field demonstrates that it is not to be closed without any research on it.

At the same time, whilst the social media provides useful insights as increasingly important and main communication channels of the political elites with the citizens and people's trust in mainstream media the two countries remains low, my ability to gather the data was limited by Facebook's content personalising algorithms. Yet, this does not mean that the research should be disregarded overall. Search under different keywords, as explained in the Methodology, Data and Scope section, allowed me to gather as much data as possible which could have been omitted by the algorithms of the social media platform otherwise by limiting the search to one keyword, for instance, only.

Lastly, I am neither native nor fluent in Hungarian. This does not have to, however, pose an intrinsic challenge to the quality of the research as the content on Viktor Orbán's social media gets translated into English. Thus, significant data is available in English and translation tools provide additional support.

## 4 EUROPEAN UNION AND COVID-19 VACCINES

The path towards the common COVID-19 vaccine strategy and vaccine negotiation mandate was not straightforward. It was not before the spring 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic presented itself as an opportunity for a European solution to the rising confirmed COVID-19 cases, resources and vaccine management and the challenges which overall emerged with the pandemic after the national response had failed. Simultaneously, the common EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines was not the only initiative the pandemic crisis times gave birth to in the bloc.

Other measures touched upon, for instance, social and economic field as the pandemic impacted the societies overall. On the one hand, amongst the most important non-health developments, the EU member-states unprecedentedly approved the common debt to finance the recovery from the pandemic economic shocks.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, as regards this thesis, the health-related EU4Health programme and EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines initiatives represent the most relevant proposals.

Well before any of the initiatives emerged, the immediate response to the unprecedented threat of a new virus within the EU was of “corona nationalism.”<sup>41</sup> The rising number of confirmed COVID-19 cases caught the EU member-states unprepared as they mostly had ignored concerns and warnings previously issued by the international organisations, including the EU.

At times when the Northern Italy was yet to become the new epicentre of the pandemic instead of the Chinese Wuhan, the EC’s Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety on January 9, 2020 alerted of the appearance of a new virus in China for the first time. On January

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<sup>40</sup> European Commission, *The EU’s 2021-2027 long-term budget and NextGenerationEU: facts and figures*, 2021, last accessed June 6, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2761/808559>, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Bouckaert et al., “European Coronationalism? A Hot Spot Governing a Pandemic Crisis,” 765.

17, 2020, the first EU's conference call on prevention of the spread of the virus and what steps should the bloc saw no conclusions. Out of the 27 member-states, only 12 attended and disagreement defined the outcome of negotiations.<sup>42</sup> The attempts for an institutionalised, coordinated international response, thus, initially bore no fruit.

Uncoordinated national responses were, however, preferred initially not only among policymakers. In Hungary and Slovakia, decision making in the hands of national governments remained to enjoy considerable support among the public one year later. 6 out of 10 Central and Eastern Europeans (CEE) agreed in March 2021 that it should be their country's national government who should handle vaccine management. Only every fourth CEE citizen preferred to see the EU in charge instead.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst one could see the national solutions as natural outcome of the lack of health union in the EU, things changed significantly as the pandemic progressed towards the second wave. As the development of the COVID-19 jabs by the pharmaceutical companies across the world advanced, the questions such as vaccine procurement became increasingly pressing. The big EU member-states in a better negotiating position such as Germany sought to contract the vaccines on bilateral basis<sup>44</sup> at the expense of smaller states with lesser bargaining power in the Union. In June 2020, all EU member-states, however, endorsed the principles of the EU COVID-19 Vaccines Strategy despite the low degree of integration in the health field within the bloc.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Forman and Mossialos, "The EU Response to COVID-19: From Reactive Policies to Strategic Decision-Making," 59.

<sup>43</sup> GLOBSEC, *GLOBSEC Trends 2021: Central and Eastern Europe One Year into the Pandemic*, 60.

<sup>44</sup> Elena Sánchez Nicolás, "Commission silent as Germany buys own vaccines," *EUobserver*, January 8, 2021, last accessed June 1, 2022, <https://euobserver.com/health-and-society/150554>.

<sup>45</sup> "Questions & Answers on vaccine negotiations," European Commission.



## 4.1 EU4Health

Following the March 9 vote of the European Parliament and the March 17 vote of the European Council, the Regulation (EU) 2021/522 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 entered into force on March 26 to establish the new EU4Health Programme.<sup>46</sup> As a continuation of the 2014-2020 EU's Third Health Programme, the budget of 2.446 million EUR aims to provide funding to improve human health and its high-level protection across the bloc. To do so, the multiannual financial framework saw the establishment of a EU4Health Steering Group. The Commission's, member states' alternate members ensure consistency and complementarity of health policies on the member states level, monitor and execute the rules of procedure of the programme.<sup>47</sup>

Sourced in the underlying "PRP" principles of prevention, preparedness and response, the objectives of the regulation include an overall improvement and nurturement of health across the EU and people's protection against serious cross-border threats whilst enhancing the responsiveness of national health systems and coordination of member states. Furthermore, its ambitions include achieving availability, accessibility and affordability of medicines and crisis-related products. Also, it ought to strengthen health systems and help build their resilience and resource efficiency: e.g., better EU's crisis response capabilities, health crises management in the bloc and ensuring a universal health coverage in the bloc.<sup>48</sup>

One should not, however, see the EU4Health Programme as in a vacuum from other sectors and principles of the European integration. The principles of the EU4Health programme align with the two EU's constituting treaties: the Treaty on the Functioning of the European

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<sup>46</sup> European Commission, "Commission welcomes entry into force of EU4Health programme," press release no. IP/21/1344, last accessed May 11, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_1344](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_1344).

<sup>47</sup> "Regulation (EU) 2021/522 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 establishing a Programme for the Union's action in the field of health ('EU4Health Programme') for the period 2021-2027, and repealing Regulation (EU) No 282/2014 (Text with EEA relevance)," *Official Journal of the European Union* L 107 (March 26, 2021): 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Union (TFEU), the Lisbon Treaty, and the Treaty on European Union (TEU), also known as the Maastricht Treaty.

Whilst the programme comes out of the TEU's promotion of people's well-being, TFEU provides the EU with the role in health policies, services and medical care in the bloc.<sup>49</sup> This, thus, moves the health policies towards the internal market principles. Although no health union exists within the bloc, as Forman writes, the health sector is not intrinsically at odds with the free market and EU's economic union.<sup>50</sup> The free movement, for instance, touches upon the medicines' delivery. This comes, however, as a dichotomy between the internal market and responsibility of the Member States over the health sector.<sup>51</sup>

The EU4Health confirms such a contrast in practise. Whilst the programme emphasises the respect for the national frameworks and the Member states' competences in the absence of a health union within the bloc, the underlying logic of the initiative is that it presupposes a future creation of the European Health Union.<sup>52</sup> Thus, although there exists no health union in the EU, one cannot quickly conclude that the health sector is immune to the European integration. Within three weeks, the EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines followed.<sup>53</sup>

## **4.2 EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines**

In June 2020, the European Commission published the EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines proposal as “an urgent need for action” to put a common end to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having characterised the pandemic as a “crisis,” the proposal included a joint-

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>50</sup> Forman and Mossialos, “The EU Response to COVID-19: From Reactive Policies to Strategic Decision-Making,” 57.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> European Commission, “Commission welcomes entry into force of EU4Health programme.”

<sup>53</sup> Brooks, de Ruijter and Greer, “THE EUROPEAN UNION CONFRONTS COVID-19: Another European Rescue of the Nation-State?,” 239.

negotiation mandate of the EC on behalf of the member-states for a better and more efficient negotiation role in contract closure and approval of vaccines in the bloc.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the health union vacuum, the main goals of such a common way forward out of the pandemic led by the European Commission included a joint, thus, better negotiating position for the bloc whilst at the same time reducing the negotiation burden on the pharma companies. Such common approach, however, respects the limits of the commonness of EU affairs in health sector as the strategy, foremost, respects, the national legislatures. Later in the same month, this received endorsement by all member-states to organise the joint procurement.<sup>55</sup> Thus, Hungary and Slovakia included.

Problems have not, however, withstood the common, solidary approach of the bloc towards COVID-19 vaccine purchasing painted by the Commission in practice. In comparison to state actors such as Israel, the United States and the former EU member-state United Kingdom, the EC sought cheaper, thus, more accessible price via the Advanced Purchase Agreements (APA). The EC pursued the APA strategy as to allow the EU member states sign the contracts for the individual states on their own. In other words, whilst the EU negotiates with the companies on the volume of jabs the EU member-states are ready to contract, it does not purchase the jabs on their behalf. Furthermore, this neither means that any APA enters into force after the approval by the Commission only. Instead, it can be signed only after at least four EU member-states express interest in the negotiated agreement by the Commission with the pharmaceutical company.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> European Commission, “COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK: EU Strategy for COVID-19 vaccines,” Communication COM(2020) 245 final, June 17, 2020, last accessed April 9, 2022, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0245&from=EN>, 3.

<sup>55</sup> “Questions & Answers on vaccine negotiations,” European Commission.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

In practical terms, as of March 2020 at the time when Slovakia joined Hungary in its procurement of the Russian vaccine, the delivery of the COVID-19 jabs in the EU lagged significantly. The price of the less costly COVID-19 vaccine for the bloc was, thus, the efficiency. This became subject of the justification for the purchase of the Sputnik V vaccine in Hungary,<sup>57</sup> for instance. The European Commission is, however, the only EU body involved in the COVID-19 vaccine management in the bloc.

### **4.3 European Medicine Agency and medicine regulation in the EU**

It was not until the post-Maastricht era when the European Medicine Agency (EMA) saw its establishment in 1995. Instead of marking the creation of the bloc's health union, the agency emerged for coordination and resources pooling purposes only.<sup>58</sup>

The institution covers both public and animal health. Its main mission is facilitation of medicines development and access to them, marketing authorisation application evaluation, safety monitoring of medicines' lifecycle and of an information point for healthcare professionals and patients.

As regards the vaccines, overall initial marketing authorisation and clinical trials applications evaluations, arbitrariness on price and availability of medicines, their advertising and pharmaceutical patents controlling, for instance, are beyond the scope of the Agency's competences. Instead, they remain subject to EU member-states' national legislature.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Péter Szijjártó (Szijjártó Péter) "Az Európai Bizottság elhibázott vakcinabeszerzése miatt Csehország (is) nehéz helyzetbe került," Facebook, April 3, 2021, last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/szijjarto.peter.official/posts/pfbid0CqZbAkr6MFtNPou1iFsd5tJUhYhKUeMFZUDFaYefEjdJfn4KcjDcuqQsbzLimZazl>.

<sup>58</sup> European Medicines Agency, "The European Medicines Agency Code of Conduct," EMA/385894/2012 rev.1 (June 16, 2016): 3.

<sup>59</sup> "What we do: What we don't do," European Medicines Agency, n.d., last accessed April 26, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/about-us/what-we-do#what-we-don't-do-section>.

On the European internal market level, any medicine, including a vaccine, needs to undergo the approval process before the Agency grants its authorisation. The process includes three main stages: submission of marketing authorisation to the Agency, rolling review (evaluation of clinical trial data) and EMA's final granting of marketing authorisation. The manufacturers may withdraw from the process at any stage.<sup>60</sup> Otherwise, once approved, the medicine may be used across the whole bloc.

Indeed, the June 2020 endorsement of the EU COVID-19 Vaccines Strategy did not give birth to the first EMA-led vaccine authorisation in the bloc. For instance, in 2019, the Agency granted an EU-wide conditional marketing authorisation to the Ervebo vaccine against the Ebola virus.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, this does not mean that EMA may not act as the leading actor in a vaccine's approval for the EU market.

#### **4.4 EU's COVID-19 vaccine strategy, EMA procedures and Sputnik V**

On March 4, 2021, the EU's medicine regulator announced to have received the R-Pharm Germany GmbH's application for rolling review of the Sputnik V (Gam-COVID-Vac) COVID-19 vaccine on behalf of the Russian Gamaleya National Centre of Epidemiology and Microbiology (Figure 1).

Whilst the laboratory and clinical studies of the Russian vaccine sufficed to move EMA's evaluation towards the rolling review phase after the application submission of the manufacturer, it has been under rolling review since then. Although the Russia's sovereign wealth fund, the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) argued that the applicant has provided

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<sup>60</sup> "COVID-19 vaccines," European Medicines Agency, n.d., last accessed June 10, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/treatments-vaccines/covid-19-vaccines>.

<sup>61</sup> "Ebola," European Medicines Agency, n.d., last accessed April 26, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/ebola>.

the EMA with comprehensive data for the decision,<sup>62</sup> the EMA's human medicines committee has been unable to grant an EU-wide decision based on the evidence on the clinical trials success provided by the Russian side (Figure 1). Whilst recognising the EMA's professionalism, the Russian institute labelled the EMA's delayed decision as a case of "double standards" towards non-Western manufacturers.<sup>63</sup>

Indeed, the absence of the EMA's approval has not impeded the European Commission from seeking deals with other, Western, manufacturers. As per the APA principles, the advanced purchasing allows the Commission to negotiate volume of jabs which are then pendent from states' purchase and the medicine regulators' approval. Consequently, as of June 10, 2022, five, Western, COVID-19 vaccines have received the EMA's approval for the EU market. Yet, three, both Western and Eastern, vaccines remain under rolling review and one withdrew from the authorisation process. Under its COVID-19 vaccine management mandate, the European Commission has closed contraction deal with eight manufacturers.

In summer 2020, AstraZeneca became the first pharmaceutical company to close a deal with the EC. The EMA initiated the rolling review of the vaccine only one month and half later and it was not only until beginning of 2021 when the COVID-19 jab received the conditional marketing authorisation in the EU. Similarly, the other approved vaccines produced by BioNTech-Pfizer, Janssen, Moderna and Novavax, too gained the green light of the EMA only after the closure of the deal between the European Commission and the pharmaceutical companies (Figure 1).

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<sup>62</sup> Sputnik V, "EMA starts rolling view of Sputnik," March 4, 2021, press release, last accessed 26 April, 2022, <https://sputnikvaccine.com/newsroom/pressreleases/ema-starts-rolling-review-of-sputnik-v/>.

<sup>63</sup> Sputnik V, "Fortune – Russia has big plans for the Sputnik vaccine, and big warnings for 'the big pharma lobby': cut out the attacks, October 15, 2021, press release, last accessed April 26, 2022, <https://sputnikvaccine.com/newsroom/pressreleases/fortune-russia-has-big-plans-for-the-sputnik-vaccine-and-big-warnings-for-the-big-pharma-lobby/>.

On the other hand, as of June 10, 2022, no EC-contracted vaccine remains to be under the ongoing rolling review. The remaining two vaccines contracted by the EC, Valneva's VLA2001 and Sanofi Pasteur's Vidpreytyn remain under marketing authorisation evaluation. The HIPRA vaccine of the Western Spanish manufacturer remains under rolling review along with the Sputnik V and Sinovac's vaccine (Figure 1).

<b>Manufacturer</b>	<b>Vaccine</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Contract date (approval)</b>	<b>EMA rolling review begins</b>	<b>EMA approval</b>
AstraZeneca	Vaxzevria	approved	August 27, 2020	October 1, 2020	January 29, 2021
BioNTech-Pfizer	Comirnaty	approved	November 11, 2020	October 6, 2020	December 21, 2020
CureVac	CVnCoV	withdrew	November 17, 2020	February 12, 2021	none
HIPRA	COVID-19 Vaccine HIPRA	under rolling review	none	March 29, 2022	none
Janssen	Jcovden	approved	March 11, 2021	December 1, 2020	March 11, 2021
Moderna	Spikevax	approved	November 25, 2020	November 16, 2020	January 6, 2021
Novavax	Nuvaxovid	approved	August 4, 2021	February 3, 2021	December 20, 2021

Gamaleya National Centre of Epidemiology and Microbiology	Sputnik V, Gam-COVID-Vac	under review rolling	none	March 4, 2020	none
Sanofi Pasteur	Vidprevtyn	under marketing authorisation evaluation	September 18, 2020	July 20, 2021	none
Sinovac	COVID-19 Vaccine (Vero Cell) Inactivated	under review rolling	none	May 4, 2021	none
Valneva	VLA2001	under marketing authorisation evaluation	November 10, 2021	December 2, 2021	none



Figure 1 Overview of the COVID-19 vaccines which sought the market authorisation by the European Medicine Agency for the European market.<sup>64</sup> This is according to the status of approval, contract date,<sup>65</sup> beginning of the EMA's review,<sup>66</sup> formal application to the EMA<sup>67</sup> and EMA's approval if any.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> "COVID-19 vaccines," European Medicines Agency, n.d., last accessed June 10, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/treatments-vaccines/covid-19-vaccines>.

<sup>65</sup> European Commission, "Coronavirus: Commission approves contract with BioNTech-Pfizer alliance to ensure access to a potential vaccine," press release no. IP/20/2081, November 11, 2020, last accessed May 16, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2081](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2081); European Commission, "Coronavirus: Commission approves contract with CureVac to ensure access to a potential vaccine," press release no. IP/20/2136, November 17, 2020, last accessed June 1, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2136](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2136); European Commission, "Coronavirus: Commission approves contract with Moderna to ensure access to a potential vaccine," press release no. IP/20/2200, November 25, 2020, last accessed May 17, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2200](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2200); European Commission, "Coronavirus: Commission approves new contract for a potential COVID-19 vaccine with Novavax," press release no. IP/21/4061, August 4, 2021, last accessed May 17, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_4061](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_4061); European Commission, "Coronavirus: Commission approves contract with Valneva to secure a new potential vaccine," press release no. IP/21/5784, November 10, 2021, last accessed May 16, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_5784](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5784); European Commission, "Coronavirus: Commission approves third contract to ensure access to a potential vaccine," press release no. IP/20/1829, October 8, 2020, last accessed May 16, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_1829](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1829); European Commission, "Coronavirus: the Commission signs first contract with AstraZeneca," press release no. IP/20/1524, August 27, 2020, last accessed May 16, 2022, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_1524](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1524); Sanofi, "Sanofi and GSK will provide up to 300 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to the European Union," press release, September 18, 2020, last accessed May 17, 2022.

<sup>66</sup> "COVID-19 vaccines: under evaluation," European Medicines Agency, n.d., last accessed June 10, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/treatments-vaccines/vaccines-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines-under-evaluation# covid-19-vaccines-under-rolling-review-section>; European Medicines Agency, "EMA starts first rolling review of a COVID-19 vaccine in the EU," October 1, 2020, last accessed May 17, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-starts-first-rolling-review-covid-19-vaccine-eu>; European Medicines Agency, "EMA starts rolling review of Janssen's COVID-19 vaccine Ad26.COV2.S," December 1, 2020, last accessed May 17, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-starts-rolling-review-janssens-covid-19-vaccine-ad26cov2s>; European Medicines Agency, "EMA starts rolling review of mRNA COVID-19 vaccine by Moderna Biotech Spain, S.L.," November 16, 2020, last accessed May 17, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-starts-rolling-review-mrna-covid-19-vaccine-moderna-biotech-spain-sl>; European Medicines Agency, "EMA starts rolling review of Novavax's COVID-19 vaccine (NVX-CoV2373)," February 3, 2021, last accessed May 17, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-starts-rolling-review-novavacs-covid-19-vaccine-nvx-cov2373>; European Medicines Agency, "EMA starts second rolling review of a COVID-19 vaccine," October 6, 2020, last accessed June 10, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-starts-second-rolling-review-covid-19-vaccine>.

<sup>67</sup> European Medicines Agency, "EMA receives application for conditional marketing authorisation of COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca," January 12, 2021, last accessed May 17, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news/ema-receives-application-conditional-marketing-authorisation-covid-19-vaccine-astrazeneca>;

<sup>68</sup> "COVID-19 vaccines: authorised," European Medicines Agency, n.d., last accessed June 10, 2022, <https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/human-regulatory/overview/public-health-threats/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/treatments-vaccines/vaccines-covid-19/covid-19-vaccines-authorised>.

Thus, as per the APA mechanism, the EMA's approval and the origin of the vaccine have not been intrinsically an independent variable in the European Commission deal approvals. Similarly, although the European Commission has not sought a deal with the Russian side, the deal signing with the European Commission neither automatically leads to the EMA's approval. The only manufacturer to have withdrawn from the process remains, for instance, an EC approved negotiated and Western contractor.

At the same time, principles of European integration touch upon the health sector in the EU despite the lack of integration in the industry. Although the COVID-19 vaccine mandate could not be based on the framework of an existing health union, its June 2020 endorsement by all member-states delegated some of the competencies in the COVID-19 vaccine management to the EU, supranational level.

The vaccine negotiations and steps of the European Commission alone, however, do not suffice to capture fully the political party orientation-policy level nexus. Thus, an analysis of the execution of Hungary' and Slovakia's national approvals of the Russian vaccine in contrast to the discourse by the key policymakers involved in the move of the governments follows to uncover the divergence between the discourse and political party orientation and how they diverge.

## 5 EU COVID-19 VACCINE MANAGEMENT: SPUTNIK V IN THE EU

Although one may argue that every crisis event in the EU trajectory may represent *sui generis* at least in Eurosceptic terms, the COVID-19 pandemic has, also, been a case of the “contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporated outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration”<sup>69</sup> sentiments.

The beginning of the first wave of the pandemic in the EU countries witnessed, for instance, reintroduction of border closures within the Schengen space.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, individual, national solutions against the common, previously endorsed EU solutions have accompanied the vaccine management and their authorisation of use after the national approaches had initially failed.

Naturally, the answer to the puzzle of why Hungary and Slovakia pursued the Russian vaccine in the first place may as well be that the Commission simply did not approach the Russian manufacturer to purchase the Russian vaccine. So, the EU member states Hungary and Slovakia proceeded to do so as the common strategy did not intrinsically impede them from doing so.

Yet, this came after the common, EU-wide, solution emerged because the national response had proved less efficient and the member states entrusted the Commission with the negotiating competences, for example. In other words, after states reasoned that engaging the European Commission into the COVID-19 crisis management would be a better way out of the pandemic, Hungary and Slovakia stepped in to take the control back beyond the EC’s negotiated deals. They were, however, not the only ones who considered the purchase of the Russian vaccine.

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<sup>69</sup> Taggart, “A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems,” 366.

<sup>70</sup> H. van Eijken and J.J. Rijpma, “Stopping a Virus from Moving Freely: Border Controls and Travel Restrictions in Times of Corona,” *Utrecht Law Review* 17, no. 3 (2021): 34.

In total, another six EU member-states (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and Sweden) have informed about holding negotiation talks with Moscow on the potential purchase of the Sputnik V vaccine.

In Central and Eastern Europe, most Hungary' and Slovakia's neighbours have opted for a "middle ground" stance on the Russian vaccine. The governments of Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, and Romania were open to consider authorising the vaccine once the EMA would grant its approval. Thus, in contrast to Hungary and Slovakia, the EMA approval was crucial in the deal signing with the Russian party for the other Central and Eastern European countries to consider the vaccine.

As regards the Eurosceptic lenses, political parties identified by the scholarship as Eurosceptic formed part of the government in ten EU member-states during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, Eurosceptic parties were the leading governing parties. In the other half, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Spain, Eurosceptics have formed coalition as junior partners (Figure 2).

Not all have, however, considered to take the competencies back from the Commission in additional vaccine purchasing and negotiations. Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Spain have not considered the authorisation of the Russian vaccine even though other countries such as Germany, France and Luxembourg without Eurosceptic forces in the government have done so (Figure 2).

<b>EU member-state</b>	<b>Eurosceptic political party in government</b>	<b>Name of political party</b>	<b>Adoption of Sputnik V</b>
Austria	none		Considered if EMA approved
Belgium	none		Not considered

Bulgaria	Coalition partner <sup>71</sup>	Attack, National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB)	Considered if EMA approved
Croatia	none		Considered if EMA approved
Cyprus	none		Not considered
Czech Republic	none		Considered if EMA approved
Denmark	none		Not considered
Estonia	Coalition partner <sup>72</sup>	Conservative People's Party of Estonia	Considered if EMA approved
Finland	Coalition partner	Finns	Considered
France	none		Considered
Germany	none		Considered if EMA approved
Greece	none		Not considered
Hungary	Leading party	Fidesz-Christian Democratic People's Party	Adopted
Ireland	none		Not considered
Italy	Leading party	5 Star Movement (M5S)	Not considered
Latvia	Coalition partner	National Alliance	Considered if EMA approved
Lithuania	none		Not considered
Luxembourg	none		Considered
Malta	none		Not considered
Netherlands	none		Not considered
Poland	Leading party	Law and Justice	Not considered
Portugal	none		Not considered
Romania	none		Considered if EMA approved
Slovakia	Leading party <sup>73</sup>	Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLANO)	Adopted

<sup>71</sup> Only until June 2021 when Bulgaria held the 2021 parliamentary election.

<sup>72</sup> Only until January 2021 when Estonia held the 2021 parliamentary election.

<sup>73</sup> Whilst Taggart and Pirro have identified OLANO as non-Eurosceptic, the party identifies itself as Eurorealists. This is studied as a synonym of Euroscepticism by Milardović.

Slovenia	Leading party	Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)	Not considered
Spain	Coalition partner	Podemos (“We Can”)	Not considered
Sweden	none		Considered

Figure 2 Overview of the pursuit of the Sputnik V vaccine policy in the 27 EU member states according to whether the Eurosceptic forces have been at power during the monitoring period of the thesis (September 2020 – August 2021)<sup>74</sup> and have considered the purchase of the Sputnik V vaccine.<sup>75</sup> The government position distinguishes between the position of the leading party and coalition partner. The Adoption of Sputnik V category distinguishes between “considered if EMA approved,” “not considered,” “adopted” and “considered” to describe whether the acquisition was an option in the given country.

Thus, from the Eurosceptic view, the relationship of the policy level with the political party orientation is not as straightforward. One cannot easily conclude that Eurosceptic agenda and orientation of a political party automatically leads to Eurosceptic steps. Instead, non-Eurosceptic actors may seek steps which may become identified as EU opposing. This is the case of the Sputnik V use by Hungary and Slovakia.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Taggart and Andrea L. P. Pirro, “European populism before the pandemic: ideology, Euroscepticism, electoral performance, and government participation of 63 parties in 30 countries,” *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica* 51, no. 3 (2021): 285-287.

<sup>75</sup> “Austria will only use Sputnik V vaccine after EMA approval, Kurz says,” *Reuters*, April 19, 2021, last accessed June 5, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/austria-will-only-use-sputnik-v-vaccine-after-ema-approval-kurz-says-2021-04-19/>; “COVID-19: Germany to buy 30 million doses of Russia's Sputnik V vaccine pending regulator approval,” *Euronews*, April 22, 2021, last accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/2021/04/22/covid-19-germany-to-buy-30-million-doses-of-russia-s-sputnik-v-vaccine-pending-regulator-a>.

“Finland seeking talks with Russia over Sputnik V vaccine - health minister,” *Reuters*, April 15, 2021, last accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/finland-seeking-talks-with-russia-over-sputnik-v-vaccine-health-minister-2021-04-15/>; “Two ruling Slovak parties demand PM Matovič quit as Sputnik deal shakes coalition,” *Reuters*, March 15, 2021, last accessed March 22, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/slovakia-government-idUSL8N2LD4JN>; AFP, “Sputnik V in eastern Europe: Propaganda tool or godsend?” *The Economic Times*, March 13, 2021, latest edition, last accessed May 28, 2022, [https://english.sta.si/2881832/jansa-says-sputnik-vaccine-in-short-supply](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/sputnik-v-in-eastern-europe-propaganda-tool-or-godsend/articleshow/81480712.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst;Eho/ago/ep, “Janša says Sputnik vaccine in short supply,” <i>STA</i>, March 22, 2021, last accessed May 28, 2022, <a href=); Robert Muller and Jason Hovet, “Czech PM names fourth health minister amid Sputnik vaccine strife,” *Reuters*, April 7, 2021, last accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-czech-government-idUSKBN2BU110>; Zuzanna Reda-Jakima, “Luxembourg weighs ordering Russian vaccine,” *Luxembourg Times*, March 12, 2021, last accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.luxtimes.lu/en/luxembourg/luxembourg-weighs-ordering-russian-vaccine-604b4017de135b923650b6e7>; Niclas Rolander and Kati Pohjanpalo, “Sweden Working With ‘Several’ EU Nations in Sputnik Vaccine Talks,” *Bloomberg*, April 16, 2021, last accessed May 28, 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-04-16/sweden-works-with-several-eu-nations-in-sputnik-vaccine-talks#xj4y7vzkg>.

### 5.1 Hungary during COVID-19 crisis: Sputnik V and Euroscepticism

In contrast to the unilateral decision of OLANO to pursue Sputnik V without a coalition agreement, the delegation of competences to the EC to negotiate with the pharmaceutical companies on behalf of the whole bloc was not crucial in their management of the pandemic in the country. Well before the problems with the faulty and delayed COVID-19 jabs deliveries contracted by the Commission emerged, the Hungarian government had been vocal about its interest in the Russian vaccine.<sup>76</sup> The “any vaccine will help to save lives” approach became to define the Hungarian government’s stance.

Although, as per such an approach, one should not differentiate between the vaccines based on whether they have been produced by Eastern or Western pharmaceutical companies,<sup>77</sup> the European Commission never publicly ruled out purchasing the Russian vaccine just because being a Russian vaccine per se. Yet, indeed, the Commission has not approached the Russian manufacturer. Instead, it approached other eight producers it closed a deal with as the previous chapter demonstrates.

In practice, as early as in November 2020, first samples of the Russian vaccine became available for the Hungarian inspection before any grant of use and approval on the Hungarian national level.<sup>78</sup> Three months later, the Hungarian medicine regulator granted the authorisation use approval in the country to the Russian Sputnik V along the AstraZeneca vaccine in January 2021.<sup>79</sup> Both approvals preceded the authorisation for the use of the EMA (Figure 1). Consequently, on January 19, 2021, the government announced to have received a draft

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<sup>76</sup> MTI-Hungary Today, “Coronavirus: Hungary Takes Delivery of Russian Vaccine Sample,” *Hungary Today*, November 19, 2020, last accessed May 29, 2022, <https://hungarytoday.hu/hungary-delivery-russian-coronavirus-covid-vaccine-sample/>.

<sup>77</sup> Viktor Orbán (Orbán Viktor) “COVID 2/97. Nem majd, hanem gyorsan kell minél több vakcinát szerezni // We need to acquire as many vaccines as possible, as soon as possible,” Facebook, February 15, 2021, last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=425410581904780>.

<sup>78</sup> MTI-Hungary Today, “Coronavirus: Hungary Takes Delivery of Russian Vaccine Sample.”

<sup>79</sup> “Hungarian regulators approve AstraZeneca, Sputnik V vaccines,” *Al Jazeera*, January 21, 2022, last accessed June 5, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/21/hungarian-regulators-approve-astrazeneca-sputnik-v-vaccines>.

procurement contract from the Russian side.<sup>80</sup> Three days later, the two parties signed the agreement. In all cases, Hungary was the first European country to have done so.

After the Hungarian Minister of Health Gergely Gulyás pointed out the slow and insufficient vaccine rollout in the bloc under the contracts made by the Commission on behalf of the EU member-states, the European Commission quickly reacted to the Hungarian “own way of finding vaccine sources.”<sup>81</sup>

According to the Commission, the authorisation of any non-EMA approved vaccine on national level may undermine people’s trust in vaccines. This, thus, may put in danger the bloc’s ability to achieve herd immunity and to vaccinate sufficient proportion of population. Furthermore, the EU regulations allow import of unauthorised vaccines only in case of emergency. It is disputable whether the Sputnik V meets the criteria.<sup>82</sup> Despite the EC’s concerns, on the EU level, at least 75 percent of EU citizens have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 jab as of June 7, 2022. Hungary on its own, however, falls behind the EU average with 65.2 percent of the population having received at least one dose.<sup>83</sup>

### 5.1.1 Political discourse on Sputnik V in Hungary

Fidesz’s negotiation and contract of the Sputnik V vaccine did not withstand the discourse in the country. On social media, used by 75 percent of internet users in Hungary to consume news,<sup>84</sup> the communication of the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Péter Szijjartó mainly in charge of the Sputnik V negotiations peaked in

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<sup>80</sup> MTI-Hungary Today, “Hungary Receives Draft Contract to Procure Russian Vaccine,” *Hungary Today*, January 21, 2021, last accessed May 29, 2022, <https://hungarytoday.hu/coronavirus-hungary-contract-procure-russian-vaccine/>.

<sup>81</sup> MTI-Hungary Today, “PMO Head Gulyás: Slow Coronavirus Vaccine Licencing Process Costs Lives,” *Hungary Today*, January 21, 2021, last accessed May 29, 2022, <https://hungarytoday.hu/hungary-vaccines-choice-restrictions-eased/>.

<sup>82</sup> Guarascio, “EU warns Hungary against use of Russia's COVID-19 vaccine.”

<sup>83</sup> European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, “COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker,” 2021, last accessed June 7, 2022, <https://vaccinetracker.ecdc.europa.eu/public/extensions/COVID-19/vaccine-tracker.html#uptake-tab>.

<sup>84</sup> Információs Társadalom Kutatóintézet, *Bizalom, tudatosság, veszélyérzet az interneten*, 4.



November 2020 and has had an overall decreasing tendency since then. Thus, quantitatively, the discourse on the Sputnik V as a unilateral move over the previously endorsed EC's negotiation mandate for the EU was the most robust prior the signing of the deal with the Russian party.

Another peak in discourse on the vaccine coincided with the preliminary draft contract delivery, approval for use by the Hungarian authorities and the reaction of the Commission to the Hungarian decision in January 2021. Another significant rise in the discourse on the vaccine coincided with the March purchase of Sputnik V by Slovakia and Easter holidays period in April (Figure 3).

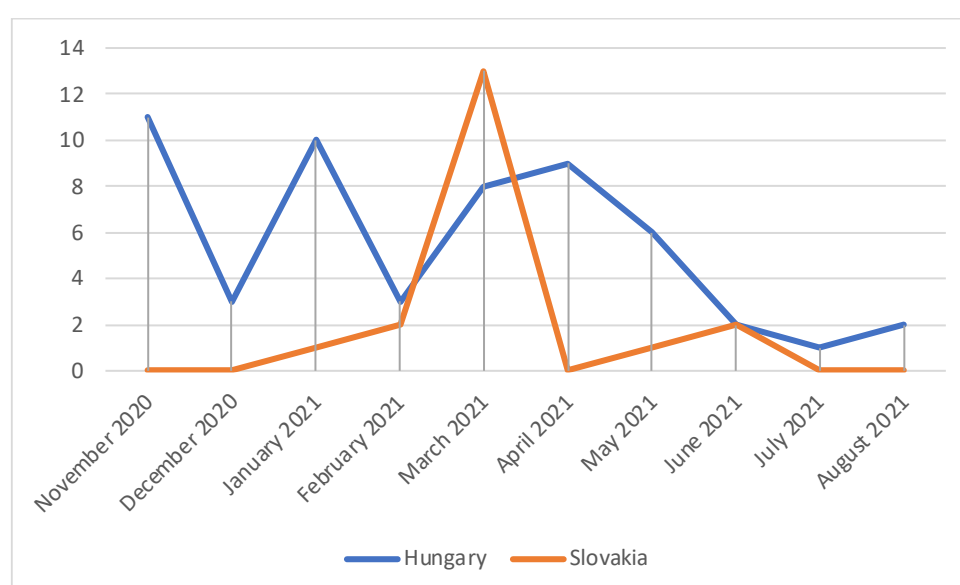


Figure 3 Evolution of discourse on the Sputnik V in Hungary calculated based on the number of posts on the Facebook accounts of Viktor Orbán and Péter Szijjártó.<sup>85</sup> In Slovakia, this is done by the number of posts on the Facebook accounts of Igor Matovič and Marek Krajčí.<sup>86</sup> 0 represents zero posts in the given month.

Overall, the discourse on the EU in relation to the Russian vaccine had neutral, negative connotation or the discourse on the vaccine has not addressed the EU. None of the posts have

<sup>85</sup> Viktor Orbán (Orbán Viktor), Facebook, n.d., last accessed May 29, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/orbanviktor>; Péter Szijjártó (Szijjártó Péter), Facebook, n.d., last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/szijjarto.peter.official>.

<sup>86</sup> Marek Krajčí (Marek Krajčí), Facebook, n.d., last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/krajci.marek>; Igor Matovič (Igor Matovic), Facebook, n.d., last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/igor.matovic.7>.

had positive connotation. As regards the government's critical stance towards the failing and delayed deliveries of the EC-contracted vaccines and EC's mandate to negotiate deals with the pharmaceutical companies, the negative sentiment peaked during April 2021. As mentioned above, this coincided with the potential re-opening of the country as the Easter approached.

At two instances, the Prime Minister and the foreign affairs minister particularly addressed the slow procurement of vaccines by the Commission.<sup>87</sup> On top of it, the minister, for instance, praised the Hungarian national solution and vaccine procurement as complementary to the EC's mandate as this allowed the country to secure enough vaccines to avoid "being in difficult situation" like other EU member states which followed the EC's mandate only.

Yet, the European Commission was able to misperform at the vaccine procurement only after both the European Parliament and the European Council voted on the COVID-19 vaccine strategy, including the Hungarian vote. In other words, whilst the spring of 2021 demonstrated that the European Commission indeed chose an unfortunate strategy and approach in comparison to more successful states such as the United Kingdom, Hungary's government had delegated it the competences it later on became to criticise.

### 5.1.2 Fidesz party and Euroscepticism

From the Eurosceptic perspective, Fidesz has been previously identified as a soft Eurosceptic political party.<sup>88</sup> In other words, whilst the party does not oppose the European integration per se, it represents a case of "contingent or qualified opposition"<sup>89</sup> at least partially according to the scholarship. In the case of COVID-19 pandemic, the Hungarian government

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<sup>87</sup> Viktor Orbán (Orbán Viktor) "COVID 2/142. Sürgetjük Brüsszelt, hogy gyorsítsa fel a vakcinabeszerezést // We are urging Brussels to speed up the procurement of vaccines," Facebook, April 1, 2021, last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=464966491418527>; Péter Szijjártó (Szijjártó Péter) "Az Európai Bizottság elhibázott vakcinabeszerezése miatt Csehország (is) nehéz helyzetbe került," Facebook, April 3, 2021, last accessed May 27, 2022.

<sup>88</sup> Taggart and Pirro, "European populism before the pandemic: ideology, Euroscepticism, electoral performance, and government participation of 63 parties in 30 countries," 285.

<sup>89</sup> Taggart, "A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems," 366.

went beyond the European Commission's mandate as it held the delegation of the competencies to the EC alone as insufficient.

As per its public discourse on the social media, it did not refrain from vocalising its critical position on the EC's faulty management of the mandate. This was, however, after the initial national solutions had failed to bore fruits in tackling of the COVID-19 pandemic and, as mentioned above, after Hungary had endorsed the EU solution in the first place. Furthermore, the nature of the discourse does not reflect the definition of Euroscepticism as most of it was not necessarily EU antagonising.

Thus, the Sputnik V case demonstrates the ambiguity of the Fidesz's party-based Euroscepticism. The soft Euroscepticism has been, however, established by the scholarship despite that and other authors have studied the party as such.<sup>90</sup> Hungary's endorsement of the common EC-led approach demonstrates that one may equally define the party as pro-EU. Although it pursued the Russian vaccine without the involvement of the Commission, it had endorsed the simplified and fairer joint negotiation approach on the vaccines contracted by the Commission in the first place. Therefore, this reflects the challenges of the party-based approach of studying the phenomenon of the opposition to the EU.

## **5.2 Slovakia during COVID-19 crisis: Sputnik V and Euroscepticism**

In Slovakia, whilst strict lockdown measures in the handling of the crisis defined the initial low rate of COVID-19 confirmed cases,<sup>91</sup> the second wave brought a U-turn along with a steep increase of both confirmed COVID-19 cases and death rate to the country (Figure 4).

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<sup>90</sup> Natasza Styczyńska, "Eurosceptic parties in the Central and Eastern European countries: A comparative case study of Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria," in *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, edited by Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin and Simon Usherwood (Abingdon, UK and New York: Routledge, 2018), 148.

<sup>91</sup> Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, "COVID-19: Prísne opatrenia sa ukázali ako účinné," press release, March 31, 2020, last accessed June 8, 2022, <https://www.health.gov.sk/Clanok?covid-19-prisne-opatrenia-sa-ukazali-ako-ucinne>.

Despite the fact that the expert community has been alerting the government about the potential collapse of the healthcare system in the country,<sup>92</sup> by March 1, 2021, the 7-day rolling average of the new COVID-19 cases amounted to 1,027 in the country of population of less than 6 million.<sup>93</sup>

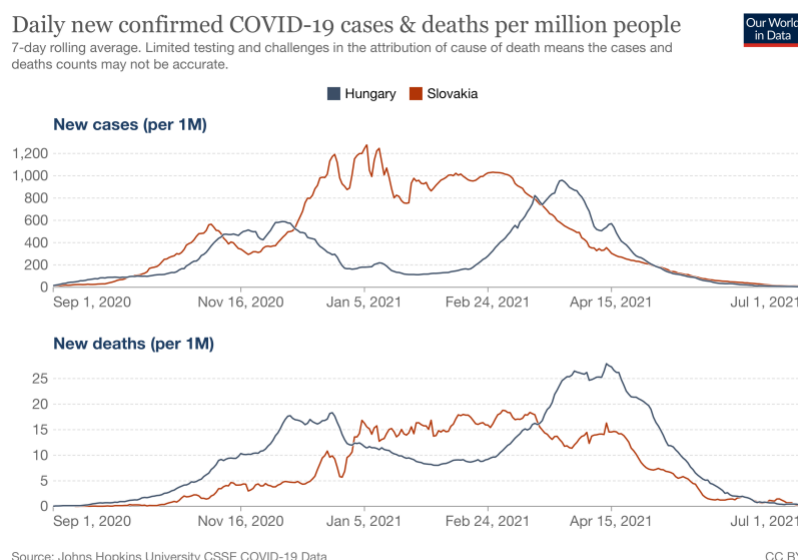


Figure 4 Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases & deaths per million people in Hungary and Slovakia based on a 7-day rolling review between September 2020 and August 2021.<sup>94</sup>

Christmas 2020 brought new hopes in the country on the end of the pandemic and lockdown measures. The COVID-19 vaccination began on December 26, 2020 when the epidemiologist and the country's leading figure in the handling of the pandemic Vladimír Krčméry received the first COVID-19 jab. To promote vaccination amongst the public, other

<sup>92</sup> Ján Krempaský, "Vyberú si, koho ošetrí. Slovensku hrozí kolaps nemocníc," *SME*, October 16, 2020, last accessed June 8, 2022, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22510323/slovensku-hrozi-pre-koronavirus-kolaps-nemocnic.html>.

<sup>93</sup> "COVID-19 Data Explorer: Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people: Slovakia," Our World in Data, n.d., last accessed June 8, 2022, <https://ourworldindata.org/explorers/coronavirus-data-explorer?zoomToSelection=true&time=2020-03-01..latest&facet=none&pickerSort=asc&pickerMetric=location&Metric=Confirmed+cases&Interval=7-day+rolling+average&Relative+to+Population=true&Color+by+test+positivity=false&country=~SVK>.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

key, both medical and non-medical, figures such as the Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová soon followed Krčméry's suit.<sup>95</sup>

Two months later, although the vaccination rate continued to grow in Slovakia, the progress was slow and represented only 0.14 % as of March 1, 2021 (Figure 5). Similarly to the whole bloc, Slovakia struggled with the shortage and delivery of the contracted vaccines by the Commission. The COVID-19 jabs often delayed or lesser amount of the vaccines were delivered.<sup>96</sup> Meanwhile, the COVID-19 death rate remained high in the country (Figure 4). It was not before the end of April that the situation got stabilised and the death rate began to decrease (Figure 4).

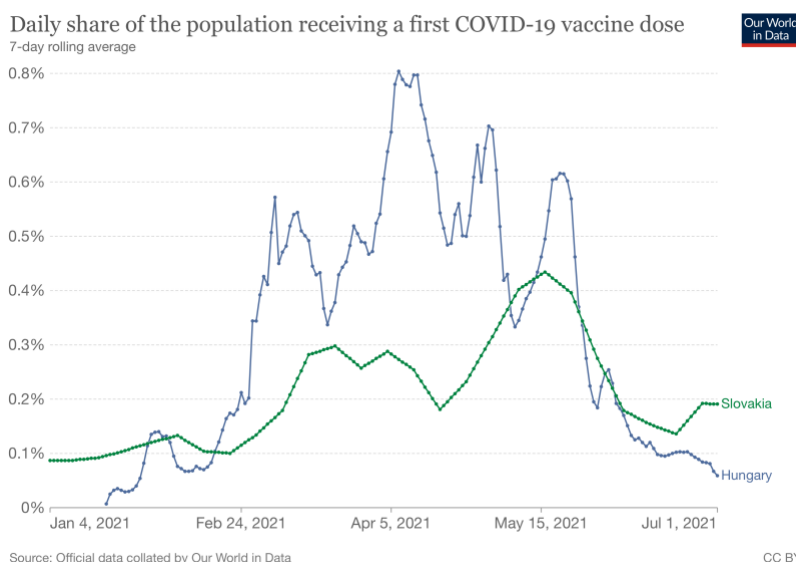


Figure 5 Daily share of the population receiving a first COVID-19 vaccine dose in Hungary and Slovakia based on a 7-day rolling review between December 2020 and August 2021. December 2020 stands for the beginning of the COVID-19 vaccination in the two countries. August 2021 stands for the cancellation of the use of Sputnik V in Slovakia.<sup>97</sup>

Although Slovakia, as the Central and Eastern Europe overall, succeeded at the COVID-19 response during the first wave more than the Western European EU member-states such as

<sup>95</sup> "President Zuzana Čaputová received the vaccine," *The Slovak Spectator*, December 27, 2020, last accessed June 8, 2022, <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22562388/president-zuzana-caputova-received-the-vaccine.html>.

<sup>96</sup> TASR, "Poslanci žiadajú prístup k zmluvám EÚ s výrobcami vakcín," *SME*, February 8, 2021, last accessed June 8, 2022, <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22591879/koronavirus-vakcina-covid-19-zmluvy-o-vakcinach.html>.

<sup>97</sup> Our World in Data, "COVID-19 Data Explorer," n.d., last accessed June 8, 2022, <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-data-explorer>.

Spain, Italy and Germany,<sup>98</sup> the desperate times of the spring 2021 in the country required solutions.

In February 2021, the governing coalition began to discuss the negotiation with the Russian manufacturer on the purchase of the Sputnik V. This was, however, vetoed by the OĽANO's coalition partner Za ľudí. The party claimed that it wanted to impede the Slovak public "to be laboratory rats for the vaccination by a non-approved vaccine."<sup>99</sup> Despite that, the delivery of the vaccine from Moscow occurred less than a month later as a unilateral move of the main government coalition party OĽANO behind the back of its other coalition partners.<sup>100</sup>

### 5.2.1 Political discourse on Sputnik V in Slovakia

Similarly to Viktor Orbán, Igor Matovič as the then Prime Minister was the key policymaker involved in the purchase and the discourse on it. The discourse of Igor Matovič peaked on the Sputnik V during the month of March. At two instances, Matovič's criticism directly targeted the work procedures of the EMA and the "discrimination that Slovak people vaccinated with Sputnik V may face."<sup>101</sup> For instance, when addressing the EMA, whilst appreciating the expertise of the medical community on the advice to purchase *any* vaccine as to achieve the herd immunity as soon as possible,<sup>102</sup> he criticised the speed of the procedures of

<sup>98</sup> Olga Löblová, Julia Rone and Endre Borbáth, "COVID-19 IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: Focus on Czechia, Hungary, and Bulgaria," in *Coronavirus Politics*, edited by Scott L. Greer, Elizabeth J. King, Elize Massard da Fonseca and André Peralta-Santos (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Michigan Press, 2021), 413.

<sup>99</sup> Denisa Hopková and Monika Vatrálová, "Vláda neschválila nákup vakcíny Sputnik V, návrh vetovala strana Za ľudí," *aktuality.sk*, June 22, 2021, last accessed June 2, 2022, <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/866591/vlada-neschvalila-nakup-vakciny-sputnik-v-navrh-vetovala-strana-za-ludi/>.

<sup>100</sup> "Two ruling Slovak parties demand PM Matovič quit as Sputnik deal shakes coalition," *Reuters*.

<sup>101</sup> Igor Matovič (Igor Matovic), "Strašenie už začína. Osobne nedovolím, aby boli naši ľudia akokoľvek v rámci EÚ diskriminovaní. #OdvážneÚprimnePreĽudí," Facebook, March 2, 2021, last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/igor.matovic.7/posts/pfbid02XqGRuX7riPpe3Dvd2pkKmxmirDdreekUugbxqT1GKGcFej37g4MjfArukWnNLwzul>.

<sup>102</sup> Igor Matovič (Igor Matovic), "SPUTNIK V Už vyše hodiny prebieha na Pandemickej komisii veľmi zaujímavá debata," Facebook, February 16, 2021, last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/igor.matovic.7/posts/10221480498214327>.

the Agency as a specialised and expert agency on medicine regulation.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, he, for example, endorsed the initiation of the EMA's rolling review of Sputnik V.<sup>104</sup> Overall, the Slovakia's former Prime Minister's Sputnik V discourse was not, however, necessarily directed at the EU.

Another key policymaker from the Slovak government involved in the process was the then health minister Marek Krajčí, also the member of the OĽANO party. As the health minister, the main focus of his communication was to inform the citizens on the availability of the vaccination with the Russian vaccine in the country.

At one instance, the then minister criticised the EC's approach to the APA agreements in contrast to the details of the Slovakia's deal with Moscow on the purchase of the Russian vaccine. This has, however, not criticised the overall delegation to negotiate with the pharmaceutical companies to the EC. Instead, he pointed out the faulty approach of the EC in practice as the "EU countries were forced to order much higher deliveries than they needed, some with delivery only in the fourth quarter of 2021. The reason is simple. Whoever contracted the most had the best chance of getting the vaccines as quickly as possible. That's how pharmaceutical companies and the EC set it up."<sup>105</sup> It was not until May 2021 when Slovakia had already signed the agreement with Moscow on the purchase.

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<sup>103</sup> Igor Matovič (Igor Matovic), "PROSBA Včera šéfka EMA (Európskej liekovej agentúry) Christa Wirthumerová-Hocheová odkázala nám - členským štátom EÚ," Facebook, March 9, 2021, last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/igor.matovic.7/posts/10221614151035564>.

<sup>104</sup> Igor Matovič (Igor Matovic), "☑️," March 4, 2021, last accessed May 27, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/igor.matovic.7/posts/pfbid0oF9nCLtF1eYkJ6z3jssVUPKWSAmqcXhjcJr2RGEbpQGwHH6CPqANo1CSbskrep8l>.

<sup>105</sup> Marek Krajčí (Marek Krajčí), "Hoax: Musíme odobrať všetky vakcíny Sputnik V Slovensko nemusí kúpiť všetky vakcíny Sputnik V. Objednali sme vakcínu pre 1 milión ľudí. Teda 2 milióny dávok." Facebook, May 5, 2021, last accessed May 27, 2022, [https://www.facebook.com/krajci.marek/posts/pfbid033UzrvvukXRbm9C5Yx3wzC8uCWxMvgxsNErLdaUEDa7pw7PtZD1kZJDJPsakg4aal?\\_cft\\_\\_\[0\]=AZV85R8RrLZoVB-6zF6zwysec31a9B5Fg9yJ7t6NKHAHPqjb3C4HuD7DIYkKtrDc8AAEPXaibiAu-FPOEeOcYhal9uIwa9NWNwiFv3bk8wUQfKcIY41XISy\\_ZtuUvIHU6uU&\\_tn\\_=%2CO%2CP-R](https://www.facebook.com/krajci.marek/posts/pfbid033UzrvvukXRbm9C5Yx3wzC8uCWxMvgxsNErLdaUEDa7pw7PtZD1kZJDJPsakg4aal?_cft__[0]=AZV85R8RrLZoVB-6zF6zwysec31a9B5Fg9yJ7t6NKHAHPqjb3C4HuD7DIYkKtrDc8AAEPXaibiAu-FPOEeOcYhal9uIwa9NWNwiFv3bk8wUQfKcIY41XISy_ZtuUvIHU6uU&_tn_=%2CO%2CP-R).

### 5.2.2 OĽANO party and Euroscepticism

From the Eurosceptic perspective, the dichotomy found in the discourse on the Sputnik V and the political party orientation does not withstand the comprehension of OĽANO as a Eurosceptic actor. Taggart and Pirro have in their cross-country analysis identified OĽANO as non-Eurosceptic (Figure 2). Yet, the party identifies itself as Eurorealists in their political manifesto.<sup>106</sup> Some of the literature has equalled this to Euroscepticism.<sup>107</sup> Thus, the degree of Euroscepticism of OĽANO is ambiguous.

Consequently, if one assumes that party-based Euroscepticism is how one ought to study Eurorealists such as OĽANO, this fails to explain why Slovakia would have voted for the EU COVID-19 Vaccines strategy in the Council in the first place. Thus, the use of the Sputnik V vaccine in Slovakia, too, helps us to explain how the emphasis on the party-based approach impedes the field from explaining the puzzle of the policy level and orientation of a political party.

In conclusion, the Eurosceptic typology may help us establish the orientation of Fidesz and OĽANO as the leading political parties in Hungary and Slovakia which pursued the Sputnik V acquisition. Challenges, however, do not withstand the ways of how Euroscepticism studies political parties such as Fidesz and OĽANO and beyond.

The party-based Euroscepticism explains little of why they went beyond the vaccine strategy mandate of the European Commission when they would not oppose the EC's negotiating role on behalf of the whole bloc elsewhere. Moreover, they pursued the Sputnik V vaccine only after the endorsement of the European Commission to negotiate on behalf of the

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<sup>106</sup> Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, *OĽANO PROGRAM 2020: Úprimne, odvážne pre ľudí*, n.d., last accessed June 8, 2022, [https://www.obycajniludia.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/OĽANO\\_program\\_2020\\_FINAL\\_online.pdf](https://www.obycajniludia.sk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/OĽANO_program_2020_FINAL_online.pdf).

<sup>107</sup> Anđelko Milardović, "Euroscepticism in a Conflict of Ideologies of the Second Modernism," in *Euroscepticism and European Integration*, edited by Krisztina Arató and Petr Kaniok (Zagreb: Political Science Research Centre Zagreb, 2009), 40.



bloc in the first place. This, thus, demonstrates the limits of the party-based approach against the political discourse as it has failed to provide answers on the link between Eurosceptic policy and pro-EU political party orientation.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to unpack how the emphasis on the party-based Euroscepticism impedes the field of Euroscepticism to grasp the dynamics between Eurosceptic policy making and pro-EU orientation of the political parties executing them which remains one of its existing literature gaps. To do so, it looked at the use of the Sputnik V vaccine in the European Union. On the EU level, it unpacked the EU's overall response to the COVID-19 pandemic as regards the COVID-19 vaccine management and complemented the empirical analysis with a closer look at how the political discourse by the key policymakers evolved and diverged from the party characteristics on the national level. Whilst other EU member states have considered the Russian vaccine, it particularly focused on Hungary and Slovakia as these two countries remain the only ones to have pursued and finalised the agreement with Moscow.

The Eurosceptic literature is not immune to ambiguities and challenges. For instance, there exists little agreement on what Euroscepticism is beyond Taggart's seminal work. This is not, however, because the scholars have not attempted sufficiently explain the dynamics of the opposition to the European integration. Quite on the contrary, Euroscepticism is a rapidly growing field. However, the party-based Euroscepticism remains to dominate the field. As per such a consensus, the analysis of the discourse demonstrates the relationship between the Sputnik V use and the political parties' orientation which opted for it to be ambiguous. Whilst one may argue that this may be because the degree of Euroscepticism may be difficult to establish, such a grey zone points out that the emphasis on party-based lenses does not suffice to explain the nature and dynamics of the phenomena studied by the literature.

Thus, the study of the opposition to the EU requires reflection of the field, at least. One shall not take the party-based approach for granted because it emerged as a starting point of the field. As the previous chapters demonstrate, regardless to how one may measure

Euroscepticism, Eurosceptic literature has become short of explaining the puzzle of what happens on the policy level.

Several limitations do not withstand this thesis such as the use of the Sputnik V being a recent event and the arbitrariness of the algorithms in my ability to gather as much data on social media discourse as possible. Furthermore, the remaining ambiguity of the key concepts of the field such as the definition of Euroscepticism per se challenges my ability to study the policy-political party orientation nexus. Despite that, closing of a literature gap requires its tackling. Unpacking of the challenges of the party-based approach is, however, only the first step.

If the literature gaps of Euroscepticism are to be closed, further research into the challenges of the methodology of the field need to go beyond simply acknowledging and identifying it. Whilst this is where the thesis has attempted to contribute to, more substantial work needs to follow. For instance, I acknowledge that the problem is more complex than just the emphasis on the party-based approach. Additional research into the role of the EU itself in the emergence of the opposition against itself beyond the study of Euroscepticism within the EU institutions would help to overcome the challenges of the current literature gap, for instance. This includes the puzzle of the EU membership as a source of alliance building and space for bargaining not only for the EU policies but also Eurosceptic policies.

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