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Individual-level factors influencing voter turnout in the 2014 European Parliament election

Since the first elections to the European Parliament held in 1979, there has been a steady tendency of declining voter turnout in each subsequent election. Moreover, EU member states differ significantly in terms of the electoral participation of their citizens. In Belgium and Luxembourg 89,6% and 85,5% of citizens respectively took part in the 2014 European Parliament elections, while in the Czech Republic and Slovakia only 18,2% and 13% of the citizens took part in the election of MEPs.

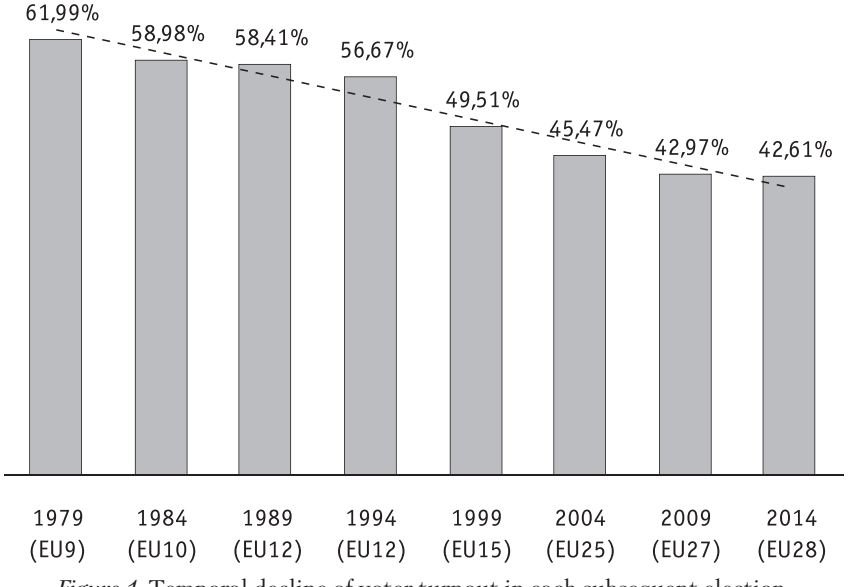

Figure 1. Temporal decline of voter turnout in each subsequent election to the European Parliament. *Source:* European Parliament

Another important observation is that the low level of citizen participation in elections to the European Parliament is not a sign of a general detachment of the population from politics. The comparison of citizens' participation in the 2014 EP elections and in the temporally closest national parliamentary elections shows that the voter turnout rates in national parliamentary elections are much higher (the term "Euro-Gap" is used to refer to such a gap [Rose, 2004]). In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where the lowest voter turnout was observed in the European elections, about 60% of citizens participated in national parliamentary elections [IDEA Voter Turnout Database, 2019].

Temporal decline of voter turnout, cross-country differences and 'Euro-Gap' encourage researchers to define the factors influencing voter behavior. This research aims to find out the factors causing cross-country differences in voter turnout for EP elections using the data of 2014 EP elections.

Possible factors influencing voter turnout

One of the first explanations for these trends was the second-order elections theory. Back in 1980, the authors of the theory emphasized that the "second-order" elections are common for democracies. The most important elections (first-order elections) are the elections of national parliaments in parliamentary systems and the election of a president in presidential political systems [Reif, Schmitt, 1980]. Such elections determine who will hold the highest positions, formulate and implement public policies. The second-order elections are municipal, regional elections, elections to the second chamber of parliament. It is assumed that for EU citizens the elections of MEPs are second-order elections [Marsh, 1998].

The theory focuses more on the shifts in electoral preferences in second-order elections. Lower voter turnout is explained by the theory in a simple way — citizens are more likely to abstain when they consider the elections not important (elections result will not change the situation in their country) [Schmitt, 2004]. It is worth mentioning that real powers of European Parliament and powers as perceived by EU citizens may differ significantly, but voter behavior is driven mainly by individual perceptions.

The theory explains lower turnout in EP elections compared to national parliamentary elections, but cross-country differences remain unexplained. Therefore, it is necessary to include additional factors in the analysis.

Factors affecting citizens' participation in elections may be divided into micro-level factors (individual motivations) and macro-levels (external conditions). It is worth mentioning also that the voter behavior in the EP elections is also influenced by both factors that generally influence electoral behavior (trust in national authorities, interest in politics, feeling the ability to influence decision-making), as well as factors specific to the EP elections (trust in EU institutions, evaluations of the EU, attitudes towards EU integration).

The researchers of voter behavior suggest compulsory voting, intensity of political competition, electoral system, number of parties, timing of election to be the most important macro-level factors influencing voter turnout. For the research of cross-country differences in the EP election voter turnout these factors are hardly applicable.

The strong effect of compulsory voting on the voter turnout in both national and EP elections is undoubted and gained enough researchers' attention [Jack-

man, 1987; Blais, 2006; Fiorino, 2016; Blais, 2003]. Timing of election is the same in all countries of the EU so there will be no distribution of data for this factor [Mattila, 2003]. Number of parties which participate in EP election in each country is hardly countable. For example, in Bulgaria voters are allowed to vote for individual candidates as well as political parties. Great Britain and Belgium are divided into several electoral constituencies in every of which different number of parties takes part in election [Oelbermann, 2015]. What about electoral system, in all EU member states some kind of proportional system is used while conducting European elections [Oelbermann, 2015]. The significant impact of electoral system was found only on the general level: voter turnout is higher in the countries which use proportional systems in comparison with countries where the majoritarian system is used [Blais, Aarts, 2006; Blais, Carty, 1990].

The only factor left is the intensity of political competition. The intensity of political competition is assumed to increase voter turnout. Close competition and absence of a clear leader before elections increases the perceived weight of citizen's individual vote and perceived ability to influence election result that motivates a citizen to participate in election. In the absence of a clear leader, the logic that the majority still elects a candidate without the participation of a particular citizen ceases to work, so the citizen feels more strongly about his or her ability to influence the election result. Close competition encourages also political parties to make more mobilization efforts [Blais, 2006; Sцderlund, Wass, Blais, 2011]. However, this logic works in national elections when elections outcome is perceived as important by both citizens and parties. Outcomes of second-order election are less important and absence of clear winner does not motivate citizens to participate.

Researchers also suggest the impact of economic development on voter turnout. It may be assumed that there is a correlation between turnout in EP election and economic indicators in EU member states (the lowest turnout is observed in Eastern European states which have lower level of economic development). However, the differences in turnout are hardly explainable by economic variables in case of EP elections and EU member states because on the theoretical level economic development affects voter turnout to the certain extent [Powell, 2009; Blais, Dobrzynska, 1998]. All EU member state have reached the level of economic development after which economic variables become not so important predictors of electoral participation.

Micro-level factors are individual motivations and attitudes which encourage or discourage a citizen's participation in the elections. Some of the factors which are used in the current research were used in previous works. Nevertheless, such factors are included in the current research as the goal of research is to define the aggregate effect of several factors and the effect of these factors was not studied on the case of 2014 EP election.

The main individual motivations likely to influence the citizens' participation in the EP elections are:

— trust in institutions (trust in the EU institutions is assumed to encourage loyalty and therefore electoral participation, but trust in national authorities is also assumed to shape citizens' political behavior which will influence turnout in EP election) [Mattila, 2003; Gronlund, 2007];
— perception of EU membership as a good or bad thing for one's country (was assumed to influence electoral participation by the authors of sec-

ond-order elections theory, but appeared to be insignificant variable in several studies) [Franklin, Marsh, van der Eijk, 1996; Reif, Schmitt, 1980; Rose, 2004];
- positive or negative attitudes towards the future EU integration [Hobolt, Spoon, Tilley, 2008];
- one's identification with the EU/Europe is assumed to foster participation in the EP elections [Franklin, Bernhard, 2009];
- one's awareness of EP's functions, activities, powers etc. [Mattila, 2003; Clark, 2013];
- low perceived importance of questions which belong to the EP competences [Clark, 2013];
- one's interest in politics [Blais, 2006; Sцderlund, Wass, Blais, 2011];
- sense of political efficacy (the individual's perception of his or her ability to influence the politics) [Dyck, Lascher, 2009];
- habitual voting and related factor of perception of voting as the civic duty [Schmitt, Mannheimer, 1991; Franklin, 2004].

The use of binary logistic regression to measure the effect of individual-level factors on the voter turnout in the 2014 EP elections

To analyze the influence of the listed individual-level factors on the voter turnout the European Election Study 2014 (EES) data are used. The EES-2014 post-election survey was conducted in collaboration with the European Parliament. The field research was conducted by TNS Opinion, which also conducts Eurobarometer polls. The sample for the EES-2014 post-election survey included about 1,100 respondents in each EU Member State (except for Malta and Luxembourg, where 500 citizens we polled, and United Kingdom with 1300 respondents of which 300 represented Northern Ireland). The total sample size was 30,000 respondents [EES, 2014]. The European Election Study partially duplicates the Eurobarometer questions regarding citizens' attitudes towards the EU, interest in politics, trust in institutions etc.

However, the EES poll does include the important question "Did you vote in the last European Parliament elections?" which is not included in the Eurobarometer polls. Answer options to this question are coded as a dichotomous variable ("yes" or "no"). Obviously, respondents' reported turnout level may differ from actual ones, but the inclusion of this question in the survey broadens the range of possible statistical methods for analysis (for example, it becomes possible to use binary logistic regression to find out the influence of many factors on the resulting dichotomous variable).

One of the most appropriate ways to find out individual-level factors influencing the participation of EU citizens in the EP election is to use the binary logistic regression method. The binary logistic regression allows us to find out the effect of predictors expressed in nominal and interval scales on the resulting dichotomous variable [Field, 2009]. In our case, the European Election Survey post-election poll includes the question "Did you participate in the last European Parliament elections?" with the "Yes" and "No" options available to respondents. Since the answer to this question involves two possible options, this variable can be considered dichotomous and used as a dependent variable when constructing a binary logistic regression model.

Factors likely to influence respondents' decision to vote or refuse to vote are measured with questions about respondents' trust in EU institutions, evaluating their own country's membership in the EU as a good or bad thing, and other factors selected for analysis in the current survey. Since predictors in the binary logistic regression model can be interval and nominal (dichotomous), the nominal variables available in the survey must be dichotomized by recoding possible answers. Some of the variables already available in the survey are dichotomous in their initial form and do not require further processing.

For example, the distribution of respondents' answers to the question of whether they are interested in politics or not is as shown in table 1.

Table 1

EU citizens' reported interest for politics. Data: EES-2014

"For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your attitude or opinion: You are very interested in politics"

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes, definitely	4179	13,9	14,0	14,0
Yes, to some extent	10420	34,7	34,9	48,9
No, not really	8601	28,6	28,8	77,7
No, not at all	6659	22,1	22,3	100,0
Total	29859	99,3	100,0	

According to the data, 48,6% of respondents are interested in politics, of which 13,9% are "definitely interested" and 34,7% are "to some extent" interested. For the use of the binary logistic regression model, four possible answers should be reduced to two categories. In our case, the most appropriate approach is grouping in the "interested" and "not interested" groups, which embrace groups of 'very' and 'rather' interested respondents and 'rather not' and 'not at all' interested respondents, respectively.

After dichotomizing the 'interest in politics' variable, the frequency distribution of the respondents' answers looks like table 2.

Table 2

'Interest for politics' variable after dichotomization. Data: EES-2014

"For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your attitude or opinion: You are very interested in politics"

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Interested	14599	**48,6**	48,9	48,9
Not interested	15260	**50,8**	51,1	100,0
Total	29859	99,3	100,0	

Non-dichotomized data (in their initial form) can be used for cross-tabulation analysis to visually identify differences between groups of respondents. For example, the contingency table for the parameters of 'voting in the European Parliament elections' and 'interest in politics' for the whole sample without division by country would look like table 3.

Table 3

Contingency table for 'voting in the last EP elections' and 'interest for politics' variables. Data: EES-2014

	Are you interested in politics?				Total
	Yes, definitely	Yes, to some extent	No, not really	No, not at all	
Voted	3324 79,6%	7365 70,8%	4601 53,7%	1844 27,8%	7134 57,5%
Did not vote	853 20,4%	3037 29,2%	3974 46,3%	4795 72,2%	12659 42,5%
Total	4177 100,0%	10402 100,0%	8575 100,0%	6639 100,0%	29793 100,0%

It is observed that among the group of respondents who are most interested in politics, almost 80% participated in the last elections to the European Parliament, while about 20% did not participate. The proportion of respondents who participated in the European elections gradually diminishes with the decrease in the interest of these respondents in politics: among those who are "rather interested" in politics, about 71% have participated in the elections; among "rather not interested", 54% took part in the elections; and among those who are not interested in politics at all, only 28% participated in the elections.

The binary logistic regression has a different focus compared to multiple linear regression. For the binary logistic regression individual citizens are the units of analysis. The goal of binary logistic regression is to predict the value of a dependent dichotomous variable (voted in the EP election or did not vote) based on respondents' answers to other questions in the survey. These questions are used as independent variables and dichotomized to become usable for logistic regression analysis.

While binary logistic regression uses individual citizens as the units of analysis, for multiple linear regression the units of analysis are the 28 EU member states. For each member state, the value of the dependent variable is the actual level of voter turnout in the 2014 EP election, expressed as the percentage of registered voters. The values of independent variables for each country are expressed in percentages and represent the proportion of citizens in each country who trust the government, who consider their country's membership in the EU a good thing, etc.

The advantage of binary logistic regression is its ability to analyze individual respondents, who report themselves as voting or non-voting and at the same time express their attitudes while answering other survey questions. In comparison, multiple linear regression compares the number of people in each country who took part in the election and who share certain attitudes. In this case, we establish connections between some phenomena based on a comparison of percentages of citizens, but we are not able to say, for example, whether 60% of the citizens in a certain country who voted in the election and 60% in the same country who trust the government are the same people.

The limitation of logistic regression is that reported voter behavior may differ from the actual one. In particular, in the EES survey, the reported level of participation in elections to the European Parliament is often higher than the actual figures (*Fig. 2*).

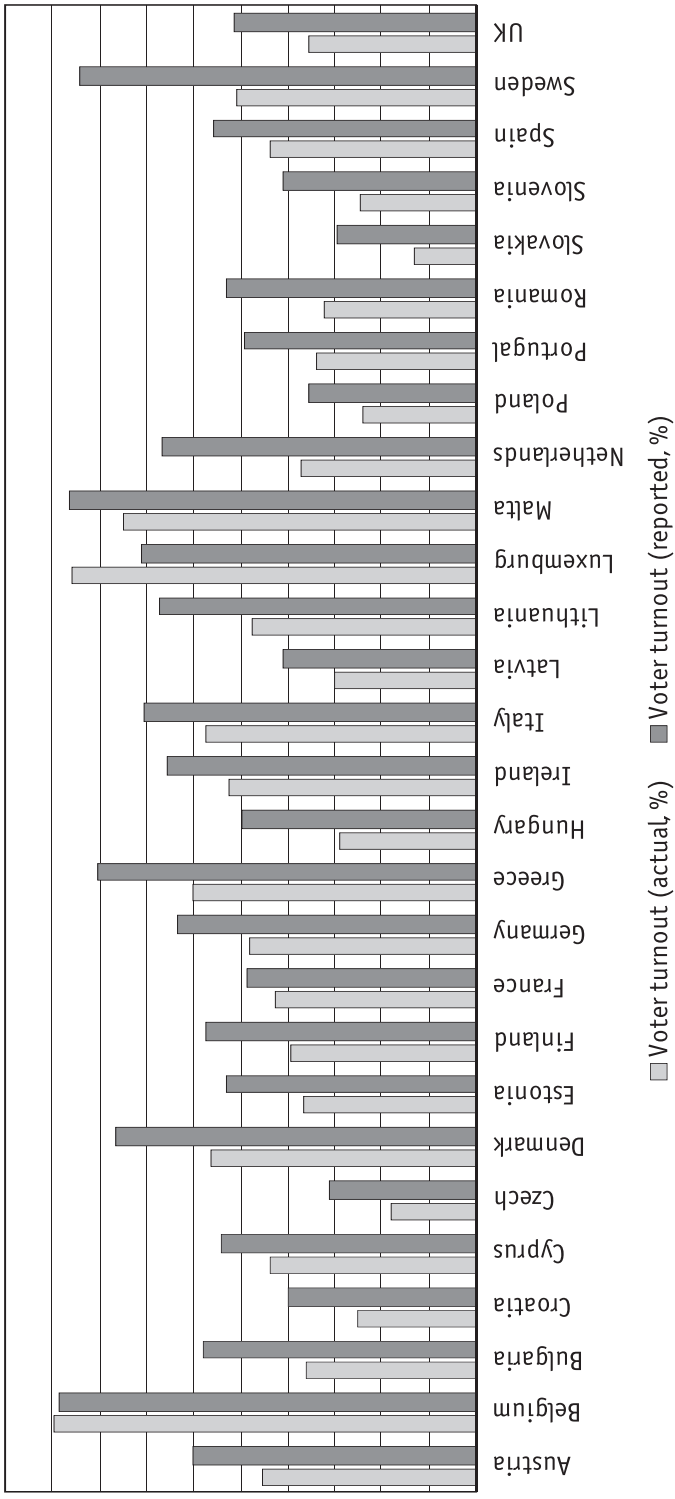

Figure 2. The differences in actual and reported in EES-2014 levels of voter turnout

Another limitation is that researchers are limited in the selection of predictors. As observations in logistic regression are individual respondents, we are able to use only questions asked within the same survey as independent variables; the data from other surveys are not comparable because every survey has a different sample.

The result of logistic regression analysis is the probability of a certain event. In our case, we are trying to determine the probability that a respondent with a particular set of answers to other survey questions will choose 'yes' when answering the question 'Did you vote in the last elections to the European Parliament?'.

The probability is calculated by using the binary logistic regression formula:

$$p = 1 / 1 + e^{-z}$$

in which $z = b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + ... b_nx_n + a$, which is the ordinary linear regression equation; x_1, x_2, etc. are the values of the independent variables; b_1, b_2 are the regression coefficients for the respective independent variables; the value of a is a constant for the model. The regression coefficients and constants are calculated by the SPSS statistical package when processing the logistic regression model [Field, 2009].

Variables

The following questions from the EES survey were used for analysis (table 4).

Table 4

Questions in the EES-2014 survey used as predictors of voter turnout

Questions	Answer choices	Coding in EES-2014 database
European Parliament elections were held on the ... (date according to country). For one reason or another, some people in ... (country) did not vote in these elections. Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?	1 — "voted" 2 — "did not vote"	qp1
For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your attitude or opinion. 1. You had all the necessary information in order to choose who to vote for in the recent European elections 2. You trust the institutions of the EU 3. You feel you are a citizen of the EU 4. The European Parliament takes into consideration the concerns of European citizens 5. You feel attached to ... (country) 6. You feel attached to Europe 7. It is very important for you which particular candidates have been elected as MEPs in the European Parliament elections in ... (country) 8. You are very interested in politics	1 — "Yes, totally" 2 — "Yes, somewhat" 3 — "No, not really" 4 — "No, not at all" Recoded: 1 — "Yes" 2 — "No"	qp6_1 — qp6_9 (except for qp6_8, which duplicates qp6_7)

Table 4 continued

Questions	Answer choices	Coding in EES-2014 database
Generally speaking, do you think that ... (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the EU is...?	1 — "good thing" 2 — "bad thing" 3 — "neither good nor bad thing"	qp7
Personally, do you remember having seen on TV, in the Internet or on posters, read in newspapers or heard on the radio a campaign encouraging people to vote in the European elections?	1 — "yes" 2 — "no"	qp8
How often did you do any of the following during the four weeks before the recent European elections? 1. Watch a programme about the European elections on television 2. Read about the European elections in a newspaper 3. Talk to friends or family about the European elections 4. Attend a public meeting or rally about the European elections 5. Read about the European elections on the Internet (websites, social media, etc.)	1 — "Often" 2 — "Sometimes" 3 — "Never" Recoded: 1 — "Have done" 2 — "Have not done"	qp11_1 — qp11_5
Did anyone from one of the national political parties contact you regarding your vote in the recent European elections?	1 — "yes" 2 — "no"	qp12
And at which level do you think the most important issue or problem facing your country at the moment should be dealt with?	1 — "At local or regional level "2 — "At national level" 3 — "At European level" Recoded: 1 — "At national level" 2 — "At European level"	qpp3
For each of the following statements, please tell me to what extent it corresponds or not to your attitude or opinion: 1. You trust the national parliament of your country 2. Your national parliament takes the concerns of citizens of your country into consideration 3. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like you can't really understand what's going on	1 — "Yes, totally" 2 — "Yes, somewhat" 3 — "No, not really" 4 — "No, not at all" Recoded: 1 — "Yes "2 — "No"	qpp9_1 — qpp9_3

End of Table 4

Questions	Answer choices	Coding in EES-2014 database
Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion?	10-point scale where '0'means unification "has already gone too far" and '10' means it "should be pushed further". Recoded: values 0-5 and 6-10 united in two categories: "unification should not be pushed further" and "should go further".	qpp18
Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular political party? If so, which party do you feel close to?	Recoded: 1 — "No" 2 — "Yes", embraces all respondents who stated one of the parties	qpp21
Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements 1. My voice counts in the EU 2. My voice counts in my country	1 — "Yes, totally" 2 — "Yes, somewhat" 3 — "No, not really" 4 — "No, not at all" Recoded: 1 — "Yes" 2 — "No"	d72_1 — d72_2
When you get together with friends or relatives, would you say you discuss frequently, occasionally or never about: 1. national political matters 2. European political matters	1 — "Often" 2 — "Sometimes" 3 — "Never" Recoded: 1 — "Yes" 2 — "No"	d71_1 — d71_2

Results

Most of the selected predictors appear to have statistically significant effects on the dependent variable. The following variables were found to be insignificant:

— qpp9_2 (Your national parliament takes the concerns of citizens of your country into consideration)
— d71 (When you get together with friends or relatives, would you say you frequently, occasionally or never discuss national/European political matters)
— qp6_5 (Feeling attached to respondent's country)
— d72_2 (Feeling that respondent's voice counts in his or her country)
— qp6_4 and qp6_2 (Trusting EU institutions and feeling that the European Parliament takes into consideration the concerns of European citizens)
— qp11_5 (Reading about the European elections on the Internet (websites, social media, etc.)

The result of binary logistic regression analysis is as follows (table 5).

Table 5

Regression coefficients for the variables which have statistically significant impact on the dependent variable

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.
qp6_1_binary	–,555	,042	175,259	1	,000
qp6_3_binary	,142	,052	7,574	1	,006
qp6_6_binary	,172	,052	11,074	1	,001
qp6_7_binary	–,947	,041	529,687	1	,000
qp6_9_binary	–,342	,042	66,808	1	,000
qp7_binary	–,377	,044	73,110	1	,000
qp8	,250	,045	30,641	1	,000
qp11_1_binary	–,416	,045	84,081	1	,000
qp11_2_binary	–,213	,042	26,307	1	,000
qp11_3_binary	–,469	,044	113,555	1	,000
qp11_4_binary	–,435	,077	31,592	1	,000
qpp3_binary	,127	,041	9,807	1	,002
qpp9_1_binary	–,158	,042	14,319	1	,000
qpp9_3_binary	,080	,041	3,850	1	,050
qpp18_binary	–,092	,041	4,997	1	,025
qpp21_binary	,565	,040	199,223	1	,000
d72_1_binary	–,621	,042	216,330	1	,000
qp12	–,525	,057	84,112	1	,000
Constant	6,344	,250	642,477	1	,000

Given the main characteristics of the binary logistic regression model, we have the necessary data for calculating the probability of a respondent's decision to vote. Imagine the respondent who:

— has all the necessary information in order to choose who to vote for in the recent European elections (qp6_1 = "1");
— feels he or she is a citizen of the EU (qp6_3 = "1");

— feels attached to Europe (qp6_6 = “1”);-for whom it is very important which particular candidates have been elected as MEPs in their country (qp6_7 = “1”);
— is interested in politics (qp6_9 = “1”);
— thinks that his/her country’s membership of the EU is good thing (qp7 = “1”);
— has seen a media campaign encouraging people to vote in the European elections (qp8 = “1”);
— watched a programme about the European elections on television, read about the elections in a newspaper, talked to friends or family about the European elections, attended a public meeting or rally about the European elections (qp11_1 — qp11_4 = “1”);
— believes that the main problem facing his or her country should be dealt at the European level (qpp3 = “1”);
— trusts national parliament (qpp9_1 = “1”);
— does not consider politics too complicated (qpp9_3 = “2”);
— believes that the European integration should be pushed further (qpp18 = “2”);
— feels close to certain political party (qpp21 = “2”);
— believes that his or her voice counts at the European level (d72_1 = “1”);
— was contacted by national political parties regarding his or her vote in the recent European elections (qp12 = “1”)

We assume that such a respondent has a high probability to take part in the elections. After attributing these values to independent variables, it is possible to calculate the probability of choosing the answer ‘voted’ to the question ‘Did you vote in the recent EP elections?’ by such a respondent.

Firstly, it is necessary to calculate the value of z in the binary logistic regression formula using attributed values to the independent variable, regression coefficients, and the constant.

$$z = b_1x_1 + b_2x_2 + \ldots b_nx_n + a = (-0{,}555 \times 1) + (0{,}142 \times 1) + (0{,}172 \times 1) + (-0{,}947 \times 1) + (-0{,}342 \times 1) + (-0{,}377 \times 1) + (0{,}25 \times 1) + (-0{,}416 \times 1) + (-0{,}213 \times 1) + (-0{,}469 \times 1) + (-0{,}435 \times 1) + (0{,}127 \times 1) + (-0{,}158 \times 1) + (0{,}08 \times 2) + (-0{,}092 \times 2) + (0{,}565 \times 2) + (-0{,}621 \times 1) + (-0{,}525 \times 1) + 6{,}344 = \boldsymbol{3{,}083}$$

The result of the binary logistic regression formula calculation is as follows:

$$p = 1 / 1 + e^{-z} = 1 / 1 + 0{,}046 = 0{,}956$$

So, the respondent with the described characteristics has the 95,6% probability to take part in the EP election, Obviously, we do not have many such real respondents, There are only 25 respondents who answered these survey questions in the above described way from a general sample of 30064 persons in the EES study, Among them, 23 respondents took part in the European election, 2 persons reported problems with health and being far from home as reasons for non-voting.

To check the results of the research, the list of independent variables may be reduced to the most important factors with the highest regression coefficients (more than 0,5). In this case, the imaginary respondent:

— has all the necessary information in order to choose who to vote for in the recent European elections (qp6_1 = "1");
— for whom it is very important which particular candidates have been elected as MEPs in their country (qp6_7 = "1");
— feels close to certain political party (qpp21 = "2");
— believes that his or her voice counts at the European level (d72_1 = "1");
— was contacted by national political parties regarding his or her vote in the recent European elections (qp12 = "1");
— communicated with friends or family about European elections (qp11_3 = "1");

The same calculations (but with updated regression coefficients and constant) of the logistic regression formula have the following result.

$$p = 1 / 1 + e^{-z} = 1 / 1 + 0{,}083 = 0{,}923$$

This result shows that the respondent who answered the selected 6 questions in the above suggested way has 92,3% probability to participate in the elections. In the EES dataset, we have 1024 such respondents, 954 of whom (93,2%) answered 'yes' to the question about their participation in the elections. 70 respondents who reported non-voting state the following reasons (table 6).

Table 6

Reasons of non-voting as reported by absentees

Reason	Numbers
Sick or health problem at the time	10
On holiday or away from home	17
Too busy or no time or at work	15
Involved in a family or leisure activity	10
Registration or voting card problems	3
Lack of trust in or dissatisfaction with politics in general	8
Not interested in politics as such	5
Not interested in European matters	1
Not really satisfied with the European Parliament as an institution	3
Opposed to the EU	4
Do not know much about the EU or the European Parliament or the European Parliament elections	1
wrapdefaultVote has no consequences or vote does not change anything	6
Other	5
Do not know	1

Some respondents who were inclined to vote did not do this because of external reasons (health problems, being away from home). Other respondents explain non-voting by lack of interest or trust in politics, being opposed to the EU, etc. Such respondents appear because the corresponding variables (which excluded such respondents) were not considered after reducing the number of variables. Generally, the binary logistic regression predicted the participation of respon-

dents in the EP elections with a high level of accuracy and has shown the main individual motivations which make a person inclined to vote.

Discussion

The identified factors which influence the respondent's decision to vote in their essence correspond to the assumptions of second-order elections theory. One of the strongest factors is the importance for the respondent of who is elected as MEP in his or her country. This shows citizen's perception of the European elections as important that motivates a citizen to participate in the elections. This conclusion directly corresponds to the second-order elections theory, which explains low voter turnout by low perceived importance of the EP elections [Reif, Schmitt, 1980].

Important factor is the information messages concerning European elections in the public space. Citizens who stated that they had received information about the European elections from the media or who had been contacted by party representatives, appeared to be inclined to participate in the European Parliament elections. The actualization of the European elections in public space depends to a large extent on the mobilization efforts made by political parties. However, if national political parties themselves do not consider the elections to the European Parliament as important, they make the rational decision not to spend resources on the election campaign before the European elections. According to EES data, respondents who had all the necessary information in order to choose who to vote for in the 2014 European elections are much more inclined to vote. Obviously, the number of such informed citizens depends on mobilization efforts of political parties and information messages in public space. Information silence and lack of efforts by parties to mobilize voters result in significantly lower turnout rates. This factor is of the biggest importance for the Eastern European countries which joined the EU after 2004. These countries have the lowest voter turnout level among all EU member states (13,05% in Slovakia and 18,2% in Czech Republic in 2014 EP elections). Trying to explain this phenomenon researchers define different factors in individual countries which caused low turnout in 2014 EP elections, but the common feature of all Eastern European countries is a low intensity of election campaign. National political party give the priority to national political arena and consider EP elections as second-order elections. This causes low mobilization efforts made by political parties and as a consequence less information about EP elections in public space and less public attention [Fislage, 2015]. As the result, voters also consider EP elections as second-order elections and decide not to participate.

A sense of belonging to the European community, a positive assessment of respondent's country membership of the EU, a positive attitude towards deepening European integration also influence citizens' inclination to participate in the European Parliament elections, but these factors have been somewhat less important, although their impact is statistically proven.

The individual orientations shaped by national political contexts are also important factors of voter behavior: trust in national authorities, interest in politics and a citizen's commitment to a particular party make him or her more inclined to participate in elections. Although these factors do not directly determine citi-

zens' attitude towards the European Parliament or the EU as a whole, they do form specific patterns of citizens' electoral behavior at national level which also extend to the behavior during the EP elections. Second-order election theory states that EP election campaigns are dominated by national matters (topics relevant to each country, political situation in each country, etc.) [Reif, Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt, 2005]. Accordingly, if voter behavior in the European elections is affected by factors shaped in national political environment, such behavior can be seen as an evidence of the second-order nature of the European elections. One of the interesting findings based on the EES data is that trust in the EU institutions has no statistically significant effect on voter's decision to participate in elections. On the contrary, trust in national authorities appeared to be a significant variable. Some researchers state that trust in national authorities is significantly lower in post-socialist countries that lowers participation in national politics and consequently lowers voter turnout in EP elections [Rose, 2004].

The second-order nature of EP elections may also diminish the effect of some macro-level factors. The intensity of political competition is assumed to increase voter turnout. Close competition and absence of a clear leader before elections increases the perceived weight of citizen's individual vote and perceived ability to influence election result that motivates a citizen to participate in election. This logic works in national elections when elections outcome is perceived as important by both citizens and parties. Outcomes of second-order election are less important and absence of clear winner does not motivate citizens to participate.

Conclusion

According to the results of analysis of EES-2014 post-election survey data, the main individual-level factors which make a citizen inclined to take part in the European elections are the following:

- having the necessary information in order to choose who to vote for in the recent European elections;
- importance for a person which particular candidates have been elected as MEPs in his or her country;
- feeling close to certain political party;
- belief that one's voice counts at the European level;
- being contacted by national political parties regarding one's vote in the recent European elections;
- communication with friends or family about European elections.

As we can see, feeling of political efficacy makes voting a sensible act for a person. Feeling close to certain political party motivates a person to support his or her party in all types of elections. Other factors are related to the second-order elections theory. 'Having the necessary information about candidates', 'communication of citizens with their friends and families', 'being contacted by national political parties' are the factors which are the consequences of the second-order nature of the European elections. Public discussions of the EP elections topic, availability of information about parties and electoral process as a whole, field work with the citizens are the consequences of parties' mobilization efforts during the pre-election campaign. If the parties do not consider European elections as important, they rationally decide not to spend resources for election campaign. As the result, infor-

mation silence caused by low perceived importance of EP elections reinforces the public consideration of the European elections as not important.

Other individual motivations (feeling attached to Europe, being interested in politics, trust in the EU institutions, positive evaluation of one' country membership of the EU etc.) do make their contribution in the prediction of individual act of voting, but the impact of these variables is lower than of the above listed variables.

The importance of factors related to the second-order elections paradigm is partly confirmed by the voter turnout in 2019 EP elections. More mobilization efforts by the parties and more visible election campaign made the topic of the EP elections more public and motivated the voter to turn out.

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Individual-level factors influencing voter turnout in the 2014 European Parliament election

The participation of EU citizens in the European Parliament elections is much lower than in the national elections and differs significantly across the EU member states. The articled is aimed at finding out the factors that influence the participation of EU citizens in the elections to the European Parliament. The study outlines the theoretical approaches to understanding the phenomenon of the European Parliament elections and the assumptions of researchers about the factors that may influence the electoral activity of citizens. According to second-order elections theory by Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt citizens perceive European Parliament elections as less important than national elections that results in lower participation. However, the behavior of voters may also be affected by a number of factors which may be regarded as individual-level motivations (trust in national and European authorities, attitudes towards EU institutions etc.). With use of binary logistic regression method it was defined which factors influenced the participation of citizens in the European Parliament election 2014 and explained the differences in the electoral activity of citizens of different EU countries. The nature of the identified factors that influence the participation of citizens in the elections to the European Parliament suggests that the second-order elections theory is still valid.

Keywords: *elections, voter turnout, EU, factors, attitudes*