

“10 years in the EU
– Taking stock and assessing prospects”
Central European University, Budapest
April 14-15, 2014

How are Hungarians Euro-skeptics?

Borbála Göncz, PhD

Corvinus University of Budapest
Institute of Sociology and Social Policy

Content

- Euro-skepticism – the concept
- Hungary - the context
- Public support
- Elites vs. the public
- What people really think? - A deeper view
- Concluding notes

Euro-skepticism: the concept

- soft vs. hard Euro-skepticism (*Taggart&Sczerbiak*)
- diffuse vs. specific support (*Easton*)
- support European integration vs. EU (*Kopecky&Mudde*)
- Euro-skepticism: support the idea of European integration, but skeptical about the EU in its current form
- overt vs. covert support (*Easton*)
- determinants of support
 - utilitarian (*Gabel*)
 - cueing rationality (*Andersen, Gabel*)
 - normative

Public discourse on the EU in Hungary

During the '90s:

- consensus among the political elites
- „Return to Europe”

Accession approaching:

- Increased debates, increased media coverage

2004-2010:

- Pragmatic, policy-oriented communication of the EU
- *EP elections (2004/2009)*

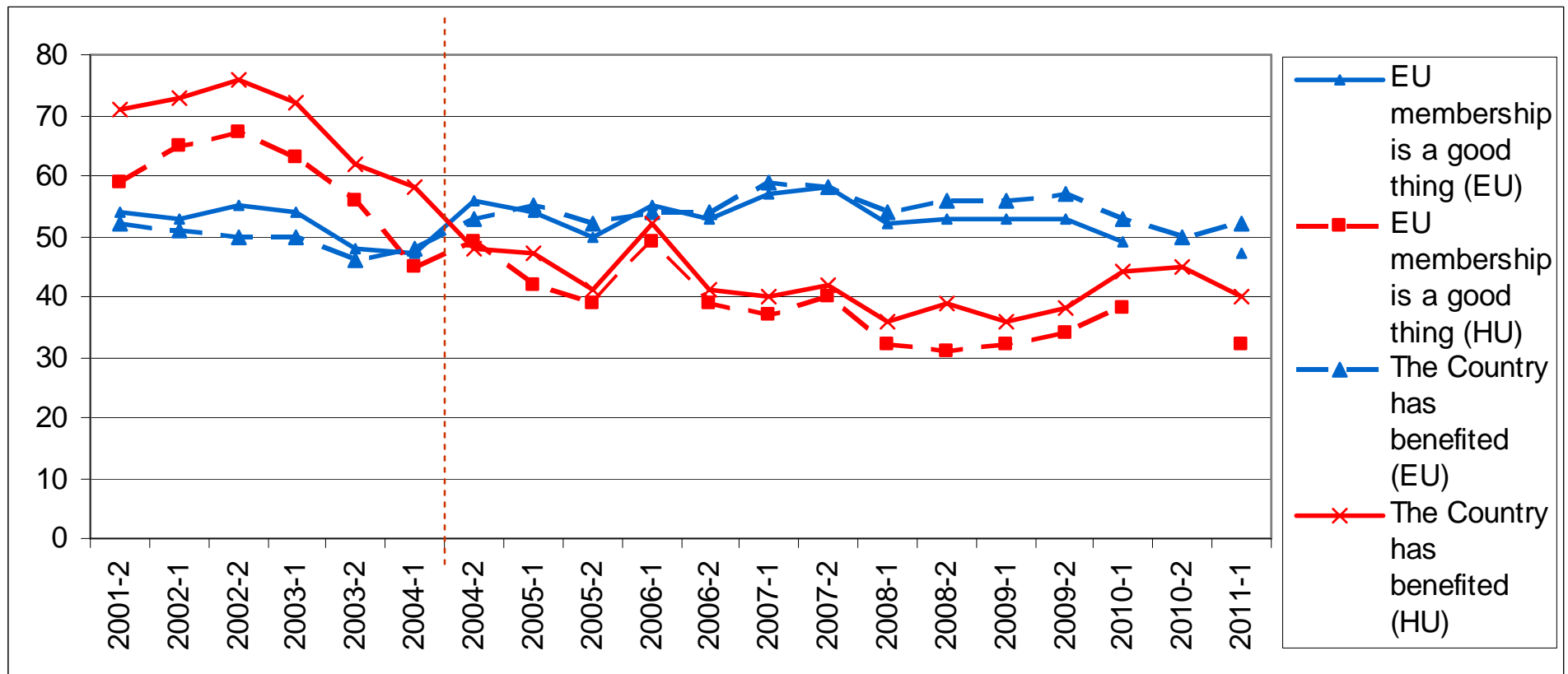
Since 2010:

- Symbolic discourses on the EU
- Double discourse
- *Hungarian Presidency (2011/1)*

Support for the EU in comparative perspective after 2000

Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY's) membership of the European Union is/ would be...? ... a good thing

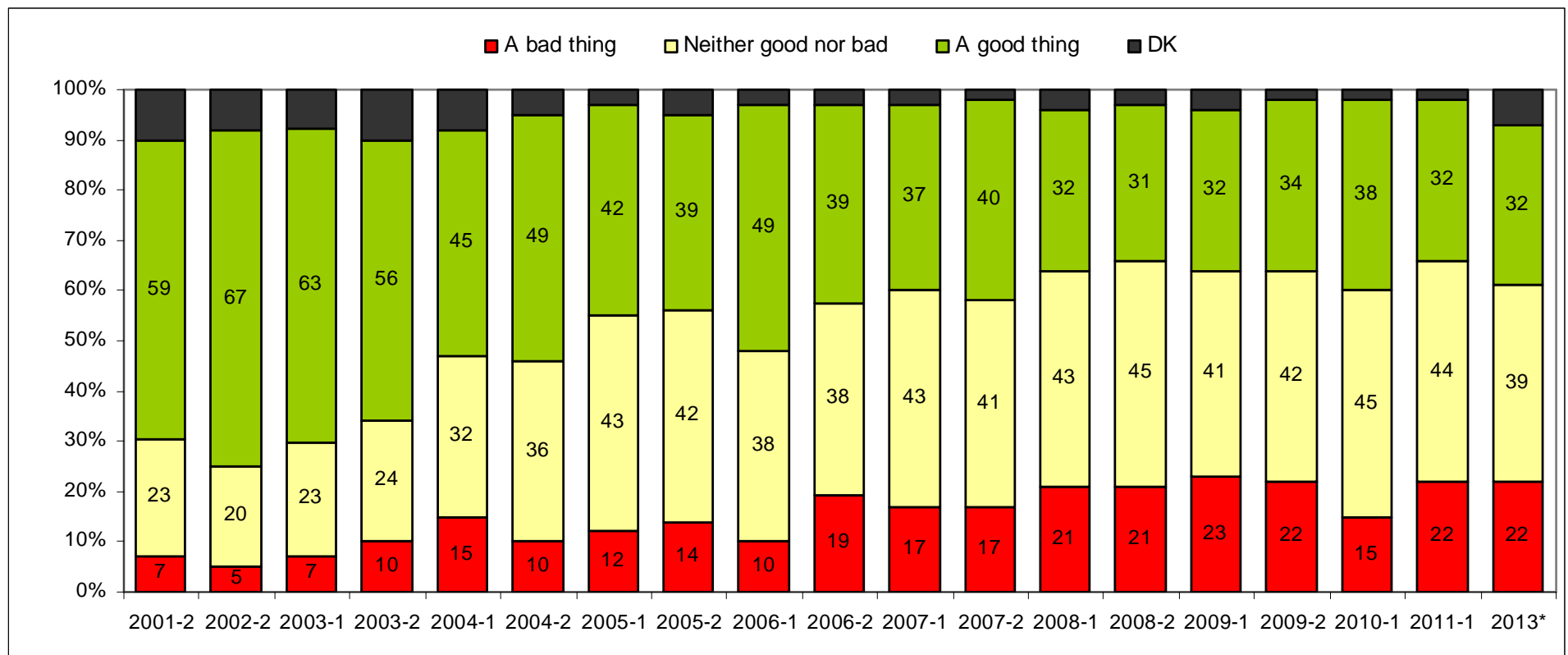
Taking everything into account, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited/ would benefit or not from being a member of the European Union?



Source: Eurobarometer, Candidate Countries Eurobarometer

Support for the EU in Hungary - 2001-2011

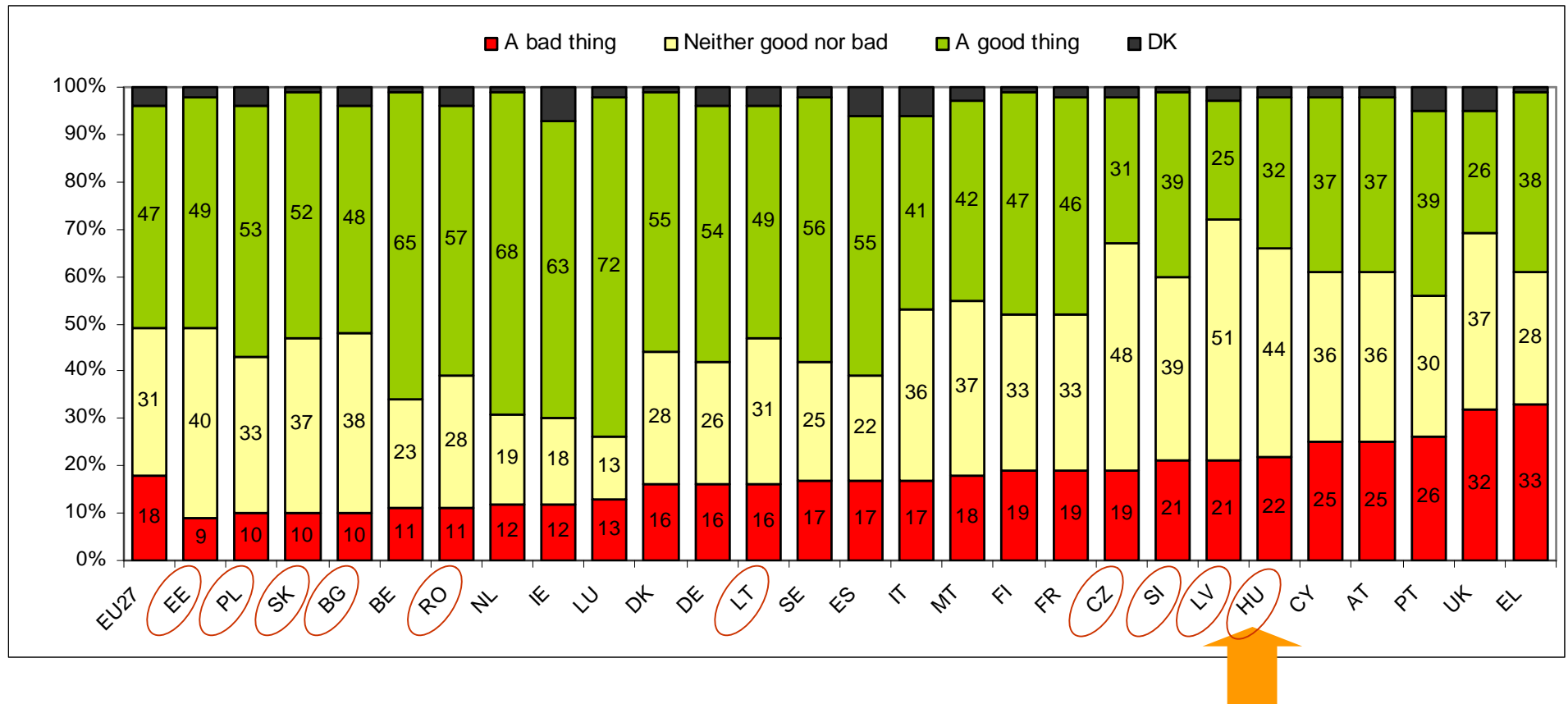
Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY's) membership of the European Union is/ would be...?



Source: Eurobarometer, Candidate Countries Eurobarometer, * TÁRKI

Support for the EU in 2011

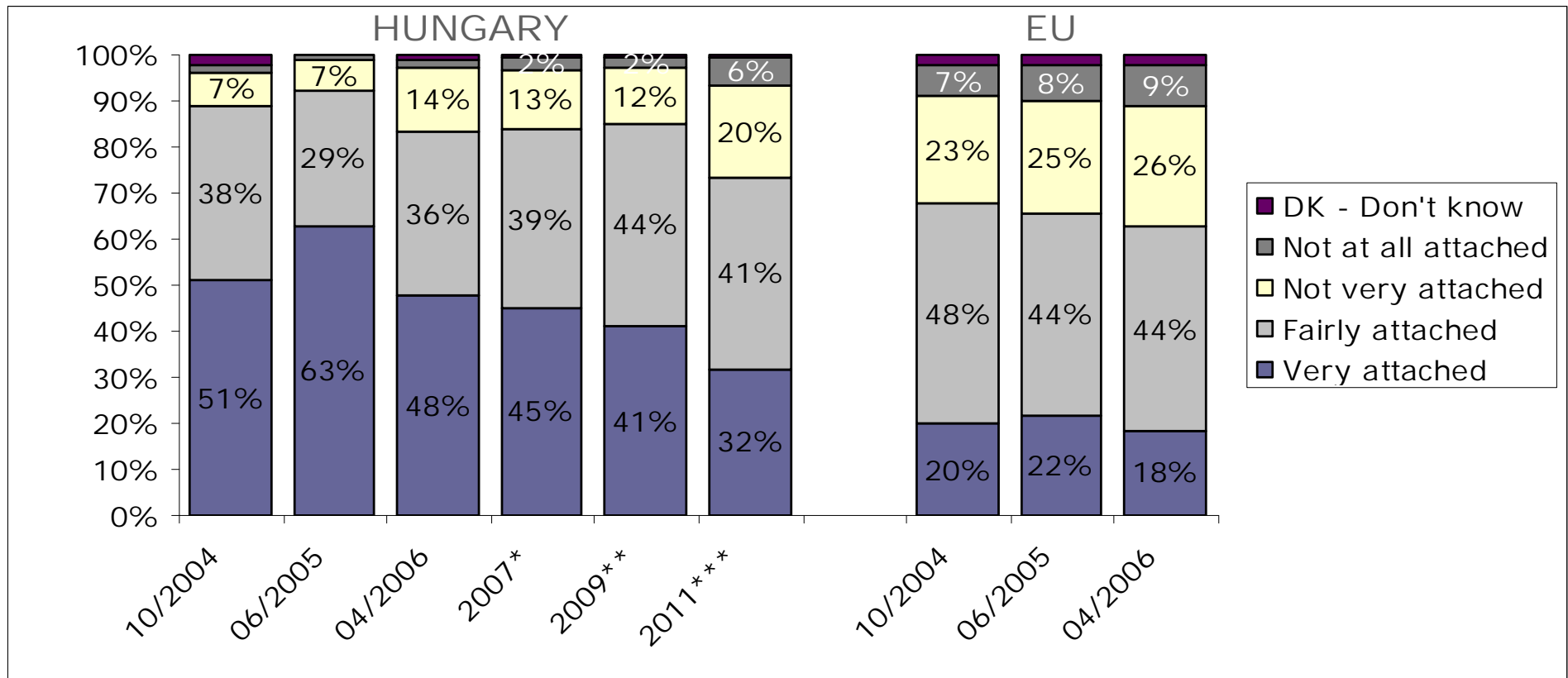
Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY's) membership of the European Union is/ would be...?



Source: Eurobarometer, Candidate Countries Eurobarometer

Attachment to Europe

People may feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country or to Europe. Please tell me how attached you feel to... Europe



Source: Eurobarometer

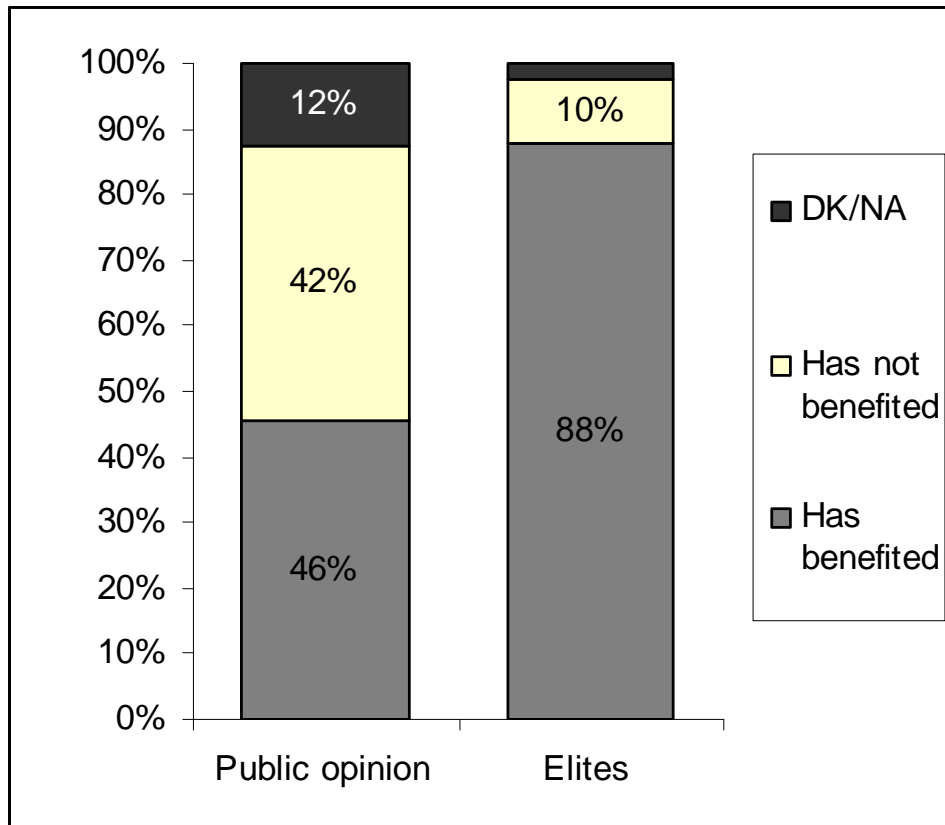
*IntUne

** Hungarian Election Survey

*** EIF

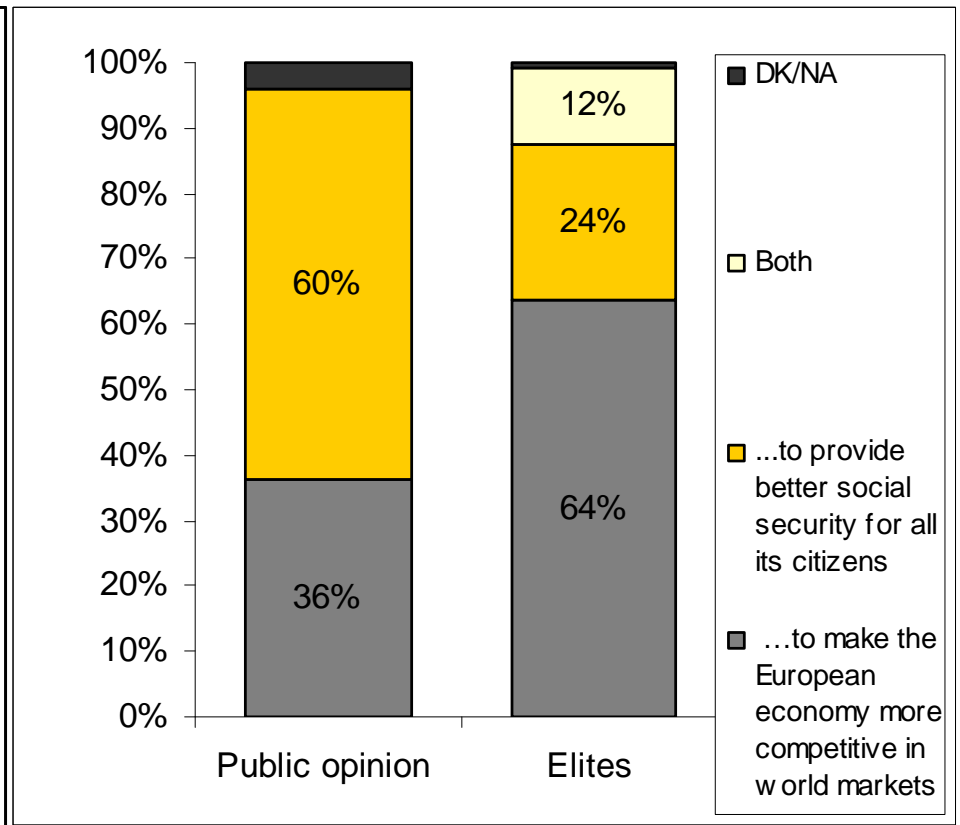
Public opinion vs. elites' opinion

COUNTRY HAS BENEFITED FROM THE EU MEMBERSHIP



Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?

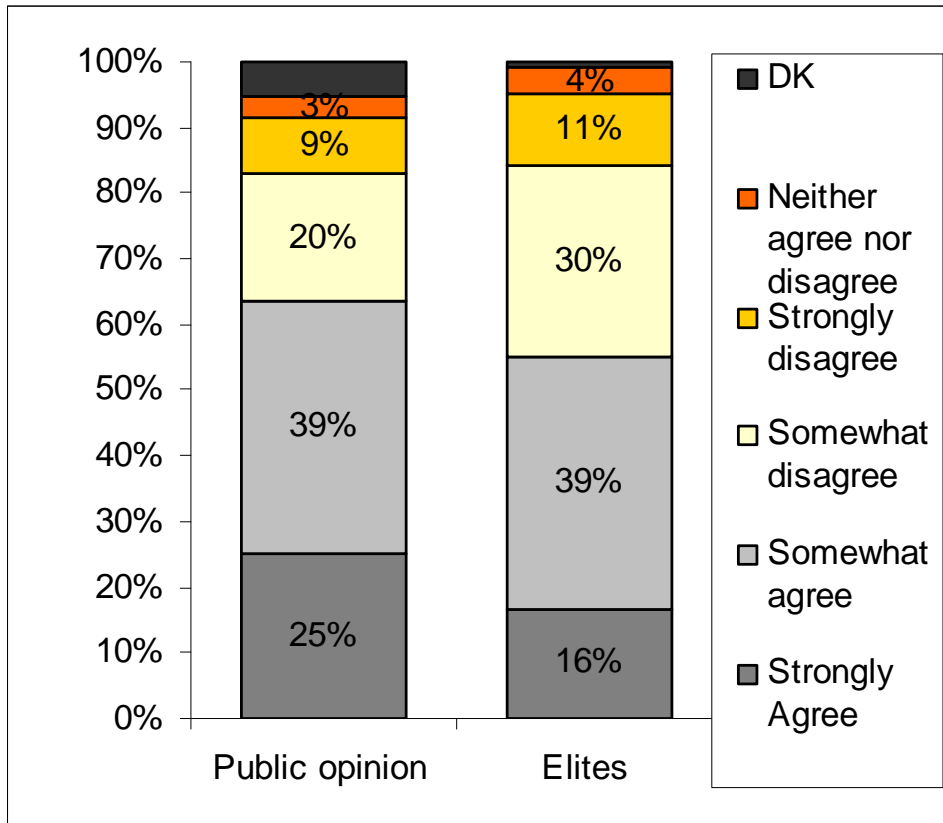
THE MAIN AIM OF THE EU SHOULD BE...



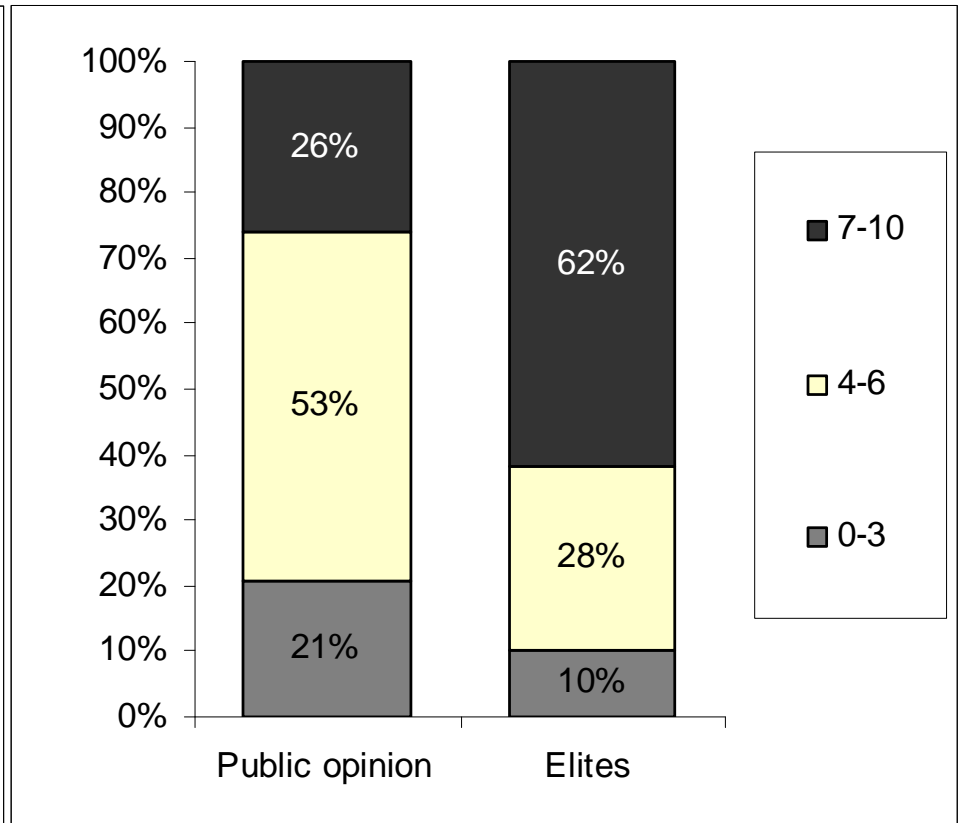
I'm going to read you two statements. Please tell me which of them comes closest to your view.

Public opinion vs. elites' opinion (2)

INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY NOT TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT



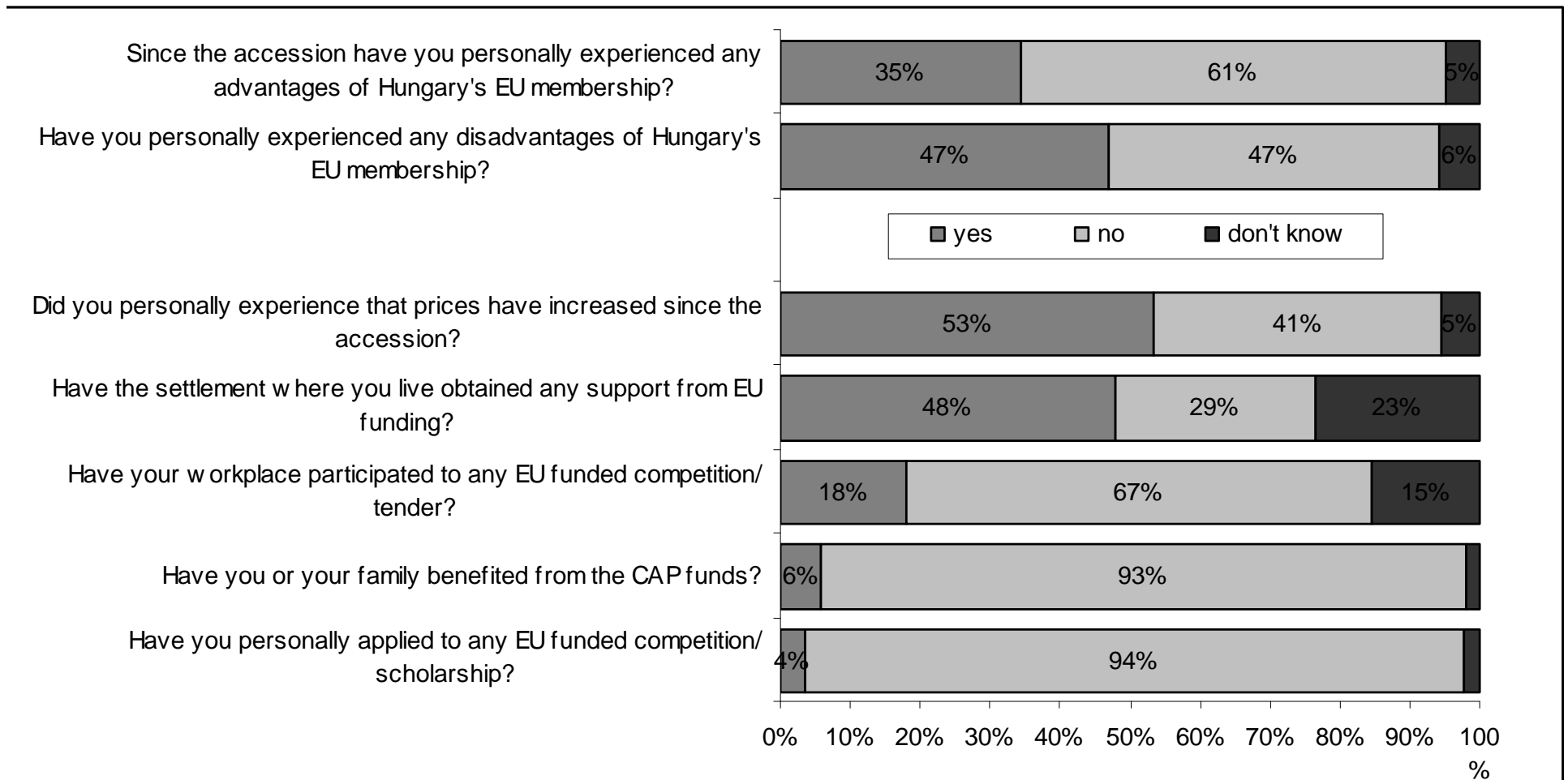
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION SHOULD BE STRENGTHENED



Those who make decisions in the European Union do not take enough account of the interests of (OUR COUNTRY)

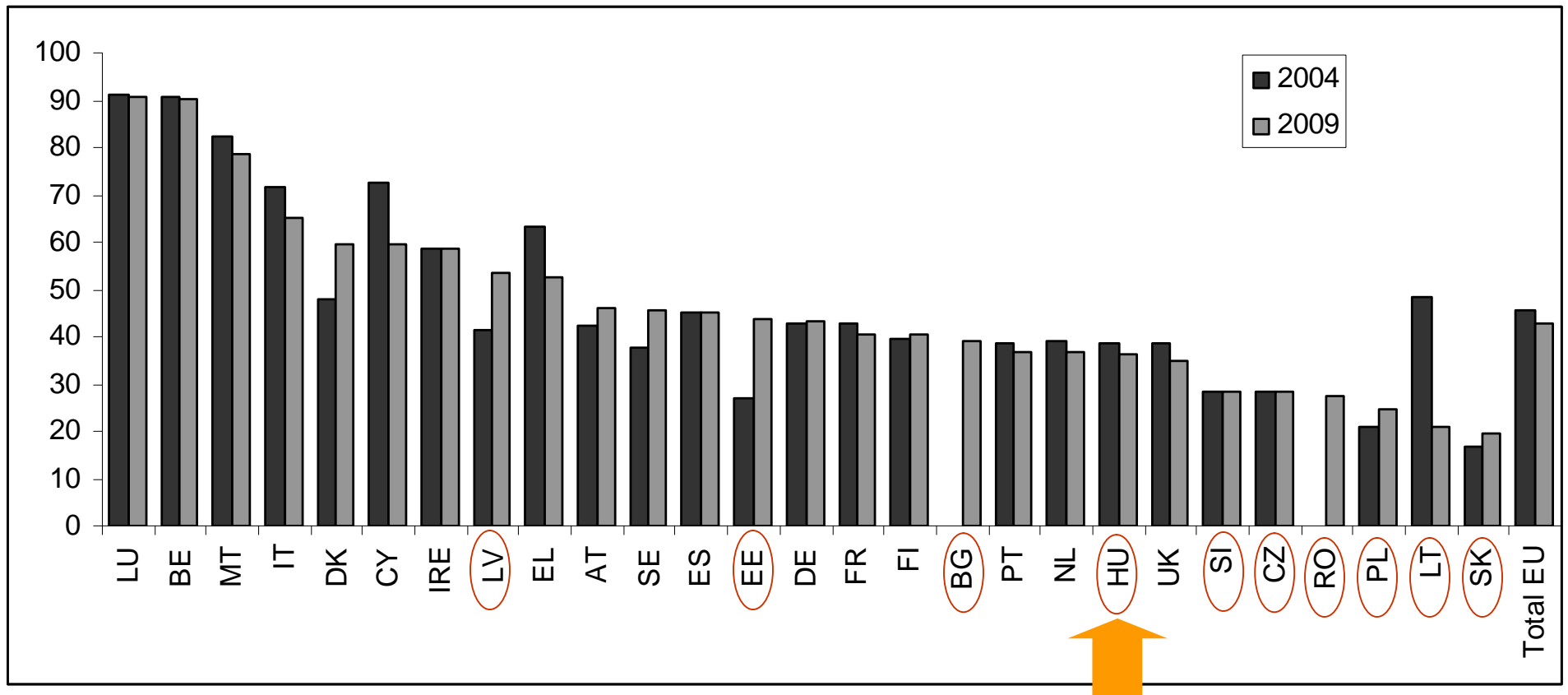
Some say European unification has already gone too far (0). Others say it should be strengthened (10). What is your opinion? (0-10)

Personal experiences



Source: Hungarian Elections Surveys 2009 (n=2980)

European Parliamentary Elections (2004/ 2009) – turnout %



What people really think?

- Qualitative approach – 20 in-depth interviews (2008-2009)

Main findings:

- Dominance of utilitarian/ pragmatic approach
- Those who couldn't tell much about the topic were more likely to hold a discourse about European values and history and were also more positive
- Accession: a necessity or unavoidable event
- Evaluation of the EU is highly dependent on the evaluation of the domestic political arena
- Europe vs. European Union:
 - interchangeable concepts and appear with a similar content in the discourses
 - EU: unity, advantages, disadvantages
 - Europe: fragmented, multi-faceted entity, geographical
- Diverse meta-narratives on Europe and the European Union

Embeddedness in the politics

„I went [to the referendum on EU accession], alone. The others from my family didn't come because of their disappointment. Unfortunately. But I still went because I felt that I had to. I have a right to vote, so I have to go. And I voted yes, I thought that it would be good for us. At the same time I think that with this European Union it could be good for us, or better for us... but it isn't. Because our government here in Hungary doesn't make us, the people, feel that it was worth for us to join. So I am disappointed in this too. I am disappointed that we became member of the Union.“

(50-59 year old man with technical education)

Rejection of symbolic narratives

„... For me, the essential is to have a calm and peaceful life without wars and aggression. If this is what Europe stands for, I can imagine that. Peace... and the single duty to care about making life as good as possible for everyone with the smallest possible social differences, if things are going this way, then I could imagine a label such as European society. But right now I don't relate it to culture at all [...] I am more of a down-to-earth kind of person, and I don't like if even politicians have these elevated speeches... So for me Europe is a geographical notion and I usually don't attach anything else to it... no big ideas. So... if things like democracy, humanism, or so are attached to it, then it's OK, then that could be the meaning of Europe. But my problem is that I'm more pessimistic... and I think that these things hold until there are political and economic interests behind.“

(40-49 year old man with university education)

Concluding notes

- Decreasing support, increasing negative and neutral opinions
- BUT a principled rejection of the integration process is not really present
- The perception of the EU is more positive among the elites than among the general public, although public opinion can't be considered homogeneous
- The embeddedness of the subject in domestic political arena is very important
- The utilitarian logic represents the relevant frame of reference when evaluating the European integration process

Thank you for your attention!