

Are the Czech or Slovak regions “closer to Europe”? Pro-Europeanness from a subnational perspective

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ABSTRACT

Based on the 2003–2019 electoral data, this article evaluates the level of pro-Europeanness in Czechia and Slovakia at the regional and sub-regional levels during and after their EU accession period. The TOPSIS multi-criteria evaluation method and cluster analysis were used to quantify the pro-European levels and to create the subsequent categories of territorial units. The results show support for the ideas of European integration primarily in large urban regions (Prague, Brno, Bratislava, Košice), territorial units with a higher concentration of ethnic minorities, larger scale agricultural activities (southwestern Slovakia), and a high degree of religiosity (northeastern Slovakia). The low level of pro-Europeanness was predominant in the less developed north-western Czechia and parts of Moravia. In Slovakia, the Eurosceptic regions were mostly located in the northwest, where the values of statism, egalitarianism and nationalism have a strong tradition. This approach can be used to identify areas of weak support for the EU project at a spatially disaggregated level in other EU countries.

KEYWORDS

Pro-Europeanness; TOPSIS method; EU referendum; European Parliament elections; subnational level; Czechia; Slovakia

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1. Introduction

Czechia, Slovakia and eight other mainly post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, joined the European Union on May 1, 2004. In the periods before and after accession, the moods in the two countries in relation to the European integration project differed based on time, location, and the political and socio-economic conditions. Public support for the country's accession to the EU, as well as the referendum turnout itself differed for both countries, depending on their intraregional specifics. The same can be said for the period after May 1, 2004, in the case of the territorial specificities of turnout and votes for Eurosceptic parties in the European Parliament (EP) elections.

We have seen a gradual shift of Euroscepticism toward the centre of European politics since the 1990s. Nevertheless, it gained stronger influence after both enlargement and elections in 2004. For the new member states, there was high public support for the European Union project; however, it began to decline after accession. In addition to contextual factors such as the financial and migration crises, changes in the rhetoric of several political actors could have contributed to the rise of Euroscepticism. The extreme right-wing political parties learned from the past and instead of proclaiming radical views (including xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism) they moved on to a somewhat milder and more tolerant populism and thus Euroscepticism was addressed to a wider electorate (Goodwin 2011). The bearers of pro-European values or Euroscepticism include citizens on the one hand, and their political representatives, political parties and specific candidates on the other.

The main objective of this contribution is to identify the degree of pro-Europeanness of the public in Czechia and Slovakia at the time of accession to the EU and afterwards at the hierarchically lower, regional and sub-regional (district) levels, to create a typification of partial territorial units according to the long-term pro-European orientation and to characterize the groups formed on the basis of its indicators. For this reason, we apply TOPSIS multi-criteria decision making method regarding the value distance of given territorial unit to the most positive and most negative value within the set of units under study. We also try to outline possible factors related to pro-Europeanness at the regional and district levels, discussing with findings of previous studies on electoral behaviour (e.g. Krivý et al. 1996; Madleňák 2012; Pink 2012; Voda 2015; Kostelecký et al. 2016; Przybyła 2019). Thus, the aim is to map the "Europeanity" of the sub-national units of these countries, which is particularly important in relation to running an effective, place-specific campaign focusing on EU relevance and benefits, the meaningful dissemination of its promotional activities, and in the context of regional (cohesion) policy, also due to the proper direction of

real assistance from European structural and investment funds. Indeed, if we want to avoid disintegration processes within the EU and the threat of its gradual decomposition, just in those regions which are characterized by the highest degree of Euroscepticism, the EU's contribution to the future should be the most visible. This is prevented by the knowledge of "problematic" regions and the reasons that can cause Euroscepticism at the regional and sub-regional levels.

2. Theoretical background

The dominant concept of understanding European politics, in the case of European elections, is the second-order national election theory (Reif and Schmitt 1980). European Parliament elections were characterized as national elections taking place simultaneously in all the member states of the European Community. These are less important elections held in the shadow of major (general) national elections and are dominated by the same parties that focus more on national interests than European issues or on the position of the national parties to the EU (Hix and Marsh 2011). Nevertheless, the results of the national and European elections are still different. Second-order elections do not lead to national government formation and are therefore of less interest to voters, the media and political actors. This leads voters to make a different decision than if the national elections were organized on the same day (Hix and Marsh 2011). The electorate votes on the basis of what they think about the country's economic situation, the government's performance or the topics that move domestic politics at that moment (Carrubba and Timpone 2005; De Vries et al. 2011). For this reason, the campaigning and tactics of political parties in second-order elections are motivated by national themes (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Cabada 2010). Also, media coverage of these elections is usually limited. Furthermore, immediately after the election and the end of the campaign, the European Parliament returns to obscurity (Lodge 2010). In the analysis of the first European elections (1979), there is emphasized the fact that one of the main aspects of the second-order elections is that there is less at stake (Reif and Schmitt 1980). The election does not involve the national parliament or the government, and the electorate is not highly motivated to participate in the election or to vote differently than they would if national elections were held. The second order election theory predicts that elections to the European Parliament follow three main formulas: a lower rate of participation (lower turnout), a more positive outcome for small and new parties, and a loss of support for government parties stemming from the location of general elections in the national election cycle (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Hix and Marsh 2007). The validity of the theory in the context of post-socialist countries has been addressed by several authors, e.g. Linek et al.

(2007), Šaradín (2008), Havlík and Hoskovec (2009), Cabada (2010), Klíma and Outlý (2010), Kovář (2013), Kovář and Kovář (2014).

In order to understand the perception of the nature of the European Parliament elections by the political actors themselves (parties, politicians and voters), the connection of these elections with the concept of Europeanization must be recognized. Europeanization is defined as a process of changing the direction and content of politics in such a way that the political and economic dimensions of the European Community influence the structure of national politics, and shape the content and scope of national policies (Landrech 2002). It is clear that European issues have an increasing effect on political debates at the national level, but the response of national party systems is very limited, without a more significant formation of (new) parties built on a "European basis". In this context, it is worth mentioning the term "European cleavage", around which the pre-election struggle of the political actors involved in the existing social structure should ideally be shaped (ideally, real awareness of the dimension of the "Europeanness" concerning these elections). The term European cleavage, in contrast to the more traditional concept of cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), can in principle be defined as a concept for and against a territorial integration project within Europe (the EU as a centrally oriented and bureaucratic superstate, with a common economic or financial (monetary, fiscal or budgetary) policy on the one hand, or as a concept of a more lenient bundle of states, for example on a customs union basis or the existence of a common market, on the other). According to Bartolini (2007), this term can be understood on three levels: general (for and against the EU as a territorial integrator = independence / integration dimension), constitutive (the cultural level – who can access, division of competences between EU institutions and member states themselves, community decision-making mechanism) and isomorphic (ideological issues – liberalism, protectionism, welfare state, immigration policy, civil rights, etc.). We could assume that those who evaluate the process of European integration in their particular life as a disappointment tend to ignore the European Parliament elections, or they use the protest vote against the mainstream parties and support Eurosceptic political forces of an extreme right- or left-wing orientation.

The question remains regarding how much of the electorate and the political parties in the European Parliament elections place an emphasis on addressing internal political issues and how much the current challenges of European integration or the content of European policies themselves matter. There is, however, evidence that the Eurosceptic and pro-European parties place importance on European issues, and this approach has ideological and practical significance in terms of better electoral results. An election campaign for the European Parliament features a mix of

domestic and European issues, which was confirmed in the first direct elections in 1979 (Blumer 1983; Charlot 1986). Nevertheless, their importance varies from election to election and from place to place. In general, however, the importance of European themes gains momentum over time, but this is in contrast to the declining voter participation in the European elections. Traditional issues, such as research and development, food security, environment, foreign policy, immigration, and economic and industrial policy may be considered as "more European" (Budge 2001; Robert Schuman Foundation 2004). Nevertheless, the current pan-European themes of the given period, such as, the economic and financial crisis, Greece's debt crisis, Brexit, migration, reviving debates on the concept of a two-speed Europe, the future of EU regional policy, etc., as well as the hot topics of the domestic political scene, or analyses of election results in key European integration countries play a no less important role in this context.

In general, five basic forms of party Euroscepticism can be identified (Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002). The first category concerns major and government parties with a critical attitude towards the definition of European policies as regards the functioning and direction of the Community itself. This moderate form concerns the attitude of the social democratic parties toward the inadequate implementation of the socially oriented EU program, while the stronger form is represented by conservative or neo-liberal parties who call for less regulation and intervention by EU institutions. It therefore has a more ideological character. The second type of Euroscepticism also concerns government parties and deals with the European integration project in terms of a reasonable (or necessary) degree of Brussels interventions in policies implemented at the national level. It is therefore a pragmatic debate on the division of competences and agendas between EU institutions and member states. The third type of Euroscepticism is represented by a radical opposition to mainstream and government parties, in the sense of protest and enforcing one's own, far-right or far-left-oriented ideology, in the sense of maintaining national interests and identity on the one hand, and protesting against excessive liberalization of the public sector and economic relations with negative social consequences on the other. The fourth category of Euroscepticism is aimed at fundamentally restoring the functioning of the Community as a whole, the policy of exiting or refusing entry to the EU. However, in principle, parties of this type do not have a significant political impact on the domestic scene, but, somewhat paradoxically, in some countries they enjoy a more prominent role particularly in the European Parliament elections. The last type of Euroscepticism is relatively marginal in terms of political representation and time span, and is often connected to specific persons or "single use" parties. These formations do not require a fundamental reform of

relations within the EU but rather focus on subtle topics such as transparency and accountability for the staff of EU institutions, effective use of EU resources, salaries of MEPs, etc.

3. Methodology

In the empirical part of the paper, we use two types of electoral geographic data: the referenda on the country's accession to the EU in 2003 ("yes to EU") and the European Parliament elections held in 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019. In the second, we also work with the results of the Eurosceptic parties. We put them into this group based on the work of several authors and electoral programs of the parties themselves. In the case of the Czech political situation, we used several studies for the inclusion of the parties (Bradová and Šaradín 2004; Baun et al. 2006; Fiala et al. 2006; Linek et al. 2007; Havlík 2008; Havlík and Vykoupilová 2008; Hloušek and Pšeja 2009; Hricová 2009; Havlík 2010; Kovář 2014). In the case of Slovakia, we also used relevant literature for this purpose (Gyárfášová and Velšic 2004; Gyárfášová 2007). We refer to geographical context of electoral support for the parties in European elections (Plešivčák 2015) and the spatial differentiation of the extreme right support (Mikuš and Gurňák 2016; Mikuš et al. 2016). The character of the electorate was the decisive criterion for the inclusion of a political party among the group of Eurosceptic parties. Recessive parties were not taken into account. Given the above division of parties into types according to the degree of Euroscepticism and their relevance within the party system, we would like to mention the cases when the inclusion of parties to the Eurosceptic, or their exclusion, was a problematic matter. We emphasize that in classifying the parties, we primarily took into account the nature of the party's electorate rather than the official rhetoric of its then leaders. Among other parties, in the case of the Czechia, we also considered KSČM (2004–2019) and Úsvit (2014) to be the Eurosceptic parties (more precisely parties with a predominantly Eurosceptic electorate), although some authors label them soft Eurosceptic (Havlík and Kaniok 2006; Kaniok and Havlík 2016). The electorate of these two parties is indeed quite different from another party often associated with Euroscepticism, ODS (Občanská demokratická strana, *eng. Civic Democratic Party*). In the case of this party, we finally decided to not include it in the Eurosceptic Party Group, based on several arguments (Baun et al. 2006), as this party can rather be perceived as "pro-European with reservations". Given the ODS electorate, which is largely characterized by more educated voters living in the urban environment more in favour of the EU project, we have chosen not to include the party into the Eurosceptic group. In the case of Slovakia, there was a problem with ĽS-HZDS and SNS, parties that even expressed support for the

EU at the time ("at the last minute"); but ĽS-HZDS's policies in office as well as the profile of the then and later electorate, along with SNS and later especially ĽS-NS (Ľudová strana – Naše Slovensko, *eng. People's Party – Our Slovakia*) proved to be Eurosceptic to the largest extent when comparing all of the major political parties in Slovakia (Gyárfášová 2007). Even in the case of the European Union membership referendum in 2003, a low turnout (52%) demonstrably confirmed the fact that Euroscepticism in Slovakia was also present in the past (in comparison with the current ĽS-NS at the time of the impending membership in a more latent form). We do not consider it to be strictly correct and the only possible to refer to the divisions of various authors in this matter, as e.g. Hynčica and Šárovec (2018) describe the SaS as a Eurosceptic party, while a large part of its electorate supports the EU project. We also consider it relatively subjective to perceive parties such as KDH or SMER-SD (Henderson 2008) as Eurosceptic, even for the 2004 European Parliament elections. With these examples we wanted to illustrate the fact that the classification of parties as Eurosceptic is really a very problematic and to some extent subjective matter, in which different authors can work with different set of Eurosceptic parties in research, as a certain degree of subjectivity of classification is not possible to avoid.

For each election of the period under study (2004–2019), we identified the following parties as Eurosceptic parties:

Czechia

2004 European Parliament Elections – DS (Dělnická strana, *eng. Workers' Party*), KSČM (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, *eng. Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia*), NARKOA (Národní koalice, *eng. National Coalition*), NEZ (Nezávislí, *eng. Independent*), RMS (Republikáni Miroslava Sládka, *eng. Republicans of Miroslav Sládek*)

2009 European Parliament Elections – DS, KSČM, Libertas.cz, NS (Národní strana, *eng. National Party*), SSO (Strana svobodných občanů, *eng. Party of Free Citizens*), SPR-RSČ (Sdružení pro republiku – Republikánská strana Československa, *eng. Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia*), Suverenita (*eng. Sovereignty*)

2014 European Parliament Elections – Česká suverenita (formerly Suverenita, *eng. Czech Sovereignty*), DSSS/SPE (formerly Dělnická strana, Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti/Ne diktátu Bruselu!, *eng. Workers' Party of Social Justice/No to Brussels Dictate!*), KSČM, KSČ (Komunistická strana Československa, *eng. Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*), ND (Ne Bruselu – Národní demokracie, *eng. No to Brussels – National Democracy*), RSČMS (Republikánská strana Čech, Moravy a Slzská, *eng. Republican Party of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia*), SSO, SZR-NE (Strana zdravého

rozumu – Nechceme Euro, *eng. Party of Common Sense – We Don't Want the Euro*), Úsvit přímé demokracie (*eng. Dawn of Direct Democracy*)

2019 European Parliament Elections – ANS (Aliance národních sil, *eng. Alliance of National Forces*), APAČI (Alternativa pro Českou republiku, *eng. Alternative for Czech Republic*), Česká suverenita, Svobodní/Radostné Česko (*eng. Independents/Joyful Czechia*), ČSNS/Patrioti ČR (Česká strana národně sociální/Patrioti České republiky, *eng. Czech National Social Party/Patriots of Czech Republic*), KOAL (Konzervativní alternativa, *eng. Conservative Alternative*), KSČM, Moravané (*eng. Moravians*), První republika (*eng. First Republic*), SNČR (Strana nezávislosti České republiky, *eng. Independence Party of the Czech Republic*), DSSS/NF (Dělnická strana sociální spravedlnosti/Národní fronta, *eng. Workers' Party of Social Justice/National Front*), SPD – Tomio Okamura (formerly Úsvit přímé demokracie, Svoboda a přímá demokracie – Tomio Okamura, *eng. Freedom and Direct Democracy – Tomio Okamura*), SPR-RSČ, Rozumní/ND (formerly SZR, *eng. Reasonables/Národní demokracie*, formerly Právo a Spravedlnost, *eng. National Democracy*)

Slovakia

2004 European Parliament Elections – KSS (Komunistická strana Slovenska, *eng. Communist Party of Slovakia*), ĽS-HZDS (Ľudová strana – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko, *eng. People's Party – Movement for Democratic Slovakia*), SĽS (Slovenská ľudová strana, *eng. Slovak People's Party*), SNS/PSNS (Slovenská národná strana/Pravá Slovenská národná strana, *eng. Slovak National Party/True Slovak National Party*)

2009 European Parliament Elections – KSS, ĽS-HZDS, SNS

2014 European Parliament Elections – KSNS (Kresťanská slovenská národná strana, *eng. Christian Slovak National Party*), KSS, ĽS-NS (Ľudová strana – Naše Slovensko, *eng. People's Party – Our Slovakia*), NaS-NS (Národ a Spravodlivosť – naša strana, *eng. Nation and Justice – Our Party*), SĽS, SNS, Úsvit (*eng. Dawn*), Vzдор – strana práce (*eng. Defiance – Labour Party*)

2019 European Parliament Elections – Kotleba – ĽSNS (formerly Ľudová strana – Naše Slovensko, *eng. Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia*), KSS/Vzдор – strana práce, SĽS Andreja Hlinku (formerly SĽS, *eng. Slovak People's Part of Andrej Hlinka*), SME RODINA – Boris Kollár (*eng. We Are Family – Boris Kollár*), SNJ-sv (formerly KSNS, Slovenská národná jednota – strana vlastencov, *eng. Slovak National Unit – Patriot Party*), SNS

We wanted to approach the issue from a positive perspective, based on support for the EU project (Euro-optimistic), and not Euro-sceptically. Therefore,

we decided to work with the index of pro-Europeanness. When constructing, in addition to supporting EU accession by Referendum 2003, we considered supporting Eurosceptic parties, as is commonly used. We could not automatically work “with the rest” (100 per cent minus the support for the Eurosceptic parties) as a % for pro-Europeanness, as a much wider group of parties would include much more heterogeneous political entities (in relation to the level of EU support) than for parties defined as Eurosceptic. The settings of the model calculation in the TOPSIS method technically solve this “discrepancy” (index of pro-Europeanness vs. votes for Eurosceptic parties) very easily and is based on evaluating the influence of input variables with sensitivity to their orientation (increasing value of something “negative” means a decrease in the value of index of pro-European and vice versa. The researcher sets the desired orientation of the variable – for our research a positive orientation in supporting the country's accession to the EU, and a negative orientation in supporting the Eurosceptic parties, which in both cases means increasing the value of the index of pro-Europeanness).

The variables entering the index of pro-Europeanness thus were as follows:

- Votes for accession to the 2003 European Union referendum (%) – *the more the better*
- Votes for Eurosceptic parties in the 2004 European Parliament elections (%) – *the less the better*
- Votes for Eurosceptic parties in the 2009 European Parliament elections (%) – *the less the better*
- Votes for Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 European Parliament elections (%) – *the less the better*
- Votes for Eurosceptic parties in the 2019 European Parliament elections (%) – *the less the better*

We obtained data for the state, regional and district levels from the databases of the Czech Statistical Office and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (Czech Statistical Office 2019; Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2019).

We use the TOPSIS method (Technique for Order Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution) to evaluate the position of the regions and districts under study in mutual comparison based on the values of the set of indicators mentioned above. This method generates score for the index of pro-Europeanness to rank the mentioned territorial units. For the need of the empirical part of the paper, we decided to use this method, which in relation to the objectives of the work can be assessed as adequate (for this reason, it was not necessary to use other methods, e.g. factor analysis). Given that in this part of the paper we decided to evaluate a set of variables indicating the degree of pro-Europeanness across the regions and districts of Czechia and Slovakia, the use of TOPSIS method as one of the multicriteria evaluation tools can be considered

desirable. In addition, if we work with several territorial units, in this case 20 at the regional and 149 at the district level, the use of this method is the right choice, because in the case of a given territorial unit it takes into account the level of each input variable to ideal and to the least desirable value within the set of units (i.e. with respect to the value of the most successful and the least successful region or district).

Accelerators increasing the value of the pro-Europeanness index were the high values of indicator a (the higher the better) and the low values of indicators b - e (the lower the better). When calculating index (in scale from 0 to 1), each input indicator (a - e) was equally weighted, by $1/5$ (0.2).

The TOPSIS method (Hwang and Yoon 1981) is considered one of the most classical multi-criteria decision making methods (Opricovic and Tyeng 2004; Shih et al. 2007; Manokaran et al. 2011).

It constitutes a collection of shortcut methods designed to minimize the distance from the ideal solution. These methods use an ideal variant as the object of aspiration. The selected "best" compromise variant is then the one which according to the selected metrics is the closest to the ideal option.

It provides a complete ordering of all variants. To resolve the problem, the multi-criteria decision matrix as well as the weight vector of individual criteria has to be determined. The main principle of this method is to identify the variant that is closest to the positive ideal solution, and farthest from the negative ideal solution.

The calculation procedure is as follows.

1. To calculate the normalized multi-criteria decision matrix

$$R = (r_{ij})$$

using the formula:

$$r_{ij} = \frac{y_{ij}}{(\sum_{i=1}^p (y_{ij})^2)^{\frac{1}{2}}}, i = 1, 2, \dots, p, j = 1, 2, \dots, k$$

After this transformation, the columns in the matrix are vectors of unit size by Euclidean metrics.

2. To calculate the weighted multi-criteria decision matrix

$$W = (w_{ij})$$

how the j -th column is multiplied by the appropriate weight, as follows

$$w_{ij} = (v_j r_{ij})$$

3. To determine the positive ideal solution

$$H_j = (\max_i w_{ij}), j = 1, 2, \dots, k$$

and the negative ideal solution

$$D_j = (\min_j w_{ij}), j = 1, 2, \dots, k$$

4. To calculate the distance from the positive ideal solution by using the formula as follows:

$$d_i^+ = \left(\sum_{j=1}^k (w_{ij} - H_j)^2 \right)^{\frac{1}{2}}, i = 1, 2, \dots, p,$$

and from the negative ideal solution by using the formula below:

$$d_i^- = \left(\sum_{j=1}^k (w_{ij} - D_j)^2 \right)^{\frac{1}{2}}, i = 1, 2, \dots, p,$$

The Euclidean distance measure was utilised to calculate the distance.

5. To calculate the relative distance from the negative ideal solution by using the formula below:

$$c_i = \frac{d_i^-}{d_i^+ + d_i^-}, i = 1, 2, \dots, p$$

Variants are then arranged in descending order according to the c_i values.

Subsequently, we used the cluster method to create groups of districts based on the pro-Europeanness index (Hastie et al. 2016). The increasing amount of data and information has led to the need to develop methods to clarify and classify them. In addition to other classification methods, cluster analysis has begun to be used. This method produces a certain number of clusters, with objects in one cluster having similar properties, and objects in different clusters having as many different properties as possible.

The input for cluster analysis is represented by N objects denoted by indexes $1 < i < N$, which have d features indexed as $1 < j < d$. These data are used to write to the $N \times d$ matrix:

$$X = \begin{pmatrix} x_{11} & x_{12} & \dots & x_{1d} \\ x_{21} & x_{22} & \dots & x_{2d} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ x_{N1} & x_{N2} & \dots & x_{Nd} \end{pmatrix}$$

Line d -dimensional vector x_i is a vector of the i -th object, while element x_{ij} denotes the value of the j -th feature of the i -th object.

The cluster analysis is comprised of four general steps. 1. Selecting and extracting the features, 2. Selecting the algorithm, 3. Verifying accuracy, 4. Evaluating the results.

The IBM SPSS Statistics 22 programme was used to conduct the clustering. As a result of clustering, based on the values of the index of pro-Europeanness, five groups of districts with internal similarity were generated.

4. Analysis, results and findings

4.1 Levels of Territorial Units

4.1.1 Regions

At the regional level, we analysed 22 spatial units, 14 regions in Czechia and eight regions in Slovakia (Fig. 1). These units also represent the NUTS 3 level. Their territorial and population size is markedly different, as the smallest region has an area of only 496.10 km² (the city of Prague as a separate NUTS 3 region) while the largest has an area of 11,014.97 km² (Central Bohemia Region). In Slovakia, the smallest region is the Bratislava Region (2,052.5 km²), and the largest is the Banská Bystrica Region (9,454.4 km²). In terms of population, the city of Prague is the smallest region in terms of area, but it has largest population (1,301,135 inhabitants) in Czechia, while the Karlovy Vary Region has the smallest population (data as of December 31, 2018, 295,686 inhabitants). In Slovakia, the differences between regions are also smaller in this indicator, as the region with highest number of inhabitants with permanent residence is the Prešov Region (825,022), and the region with the lowest number of inhabitants is the Trnava Region (563,591 as of December 31, 2018). The areas with the greatest population density are the city of Prague (2,622 inhabitants/km²) in Czechia and the Bratislava Region (321 inhabitants/km²) in Slovakia. On the contrary, the South Bohemian Region (63 inhabitants/km²)

and the Banská Bystrica Region (68 inhabitants/km²) are the least inhabited areas.

4.1.2 Districts

At the district level, we worked with 149 units, 77 in Czechia and 72 in Slovakia (Fig. 2, Tab. 1). In the case of Slovakia, the municipal districts of Bratislava (5) and Košice (4) were connected to one district in the entire city in order to strengthen the comparative value of the analysis with the other districts of the countries. The largest district in Czechia is the district of Klatovy in the Plzeň Region, with an area of 1,945.69 km², while the Levice district in the Nitra Region (1,551.1 km²) is the largest in Slovakia. On the other hand, the Brno-město district (230.22 km²) is the smallest in Czechia and the Kysucké Nové Město district (173.7 km²) is the smallest in Slovakia. In Czechia, the city of Prague has the largest population (1,301,135 inhabitants); on the contrary, the Jeseník district in the Olomouc Region has the smallest population (38,330 inhabitants as of December 31, 2018). The most populous area in Slovakia is the city of Bratislava (432,864 inhabitants), while the Medzilaborce district in the Prešov region is the least populous (11,896 inhabitants as of December 31, 2018). In terms of population density, Prague (2,622 inhabitants/km²) dominates in Czechia, while the Prachatic district in the South Bohemian Region (37 inhabitants/km²) is the least populated. In Slovakia, Bratislava (1,177 inhabitants/km²) has the

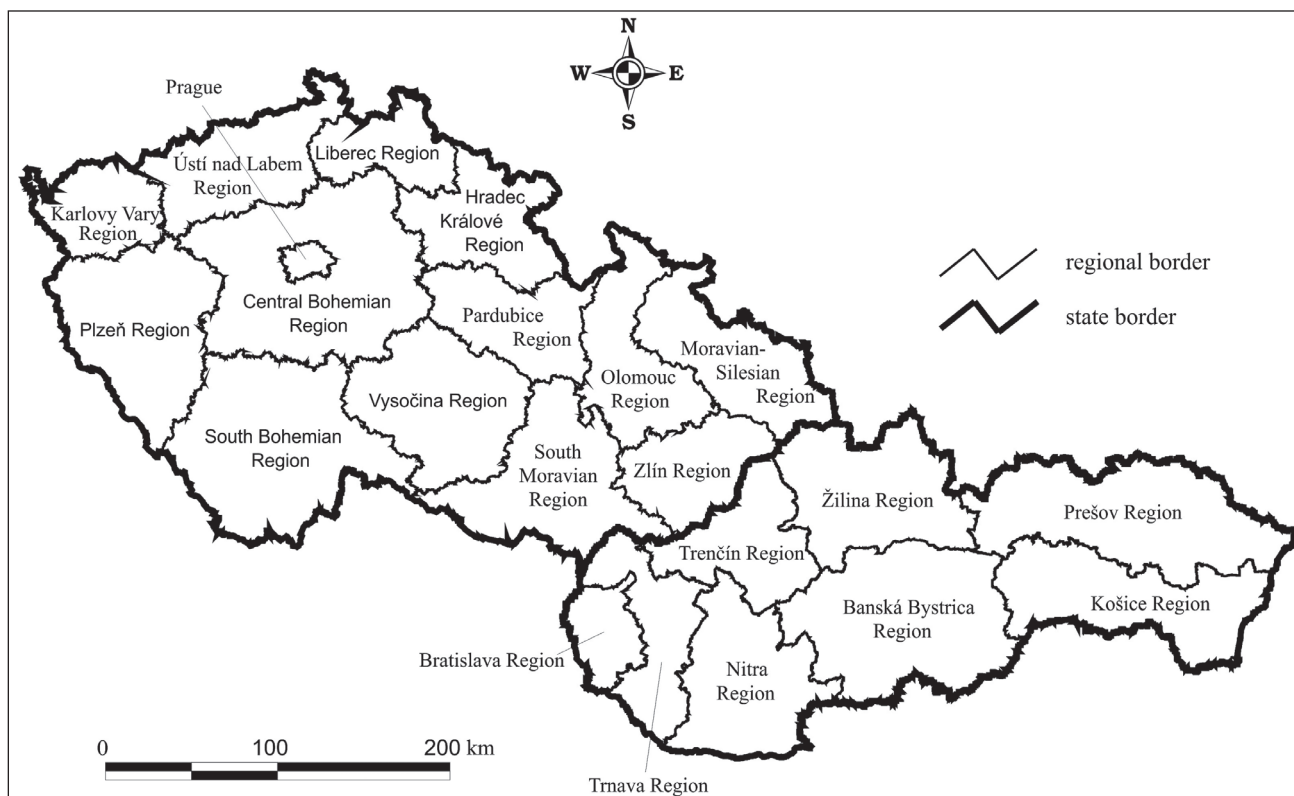


Fig. 1 Territorial composition of NUTS 3 regions in Czechia and Slovakia. Source: Czech Statistical Office, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2019).

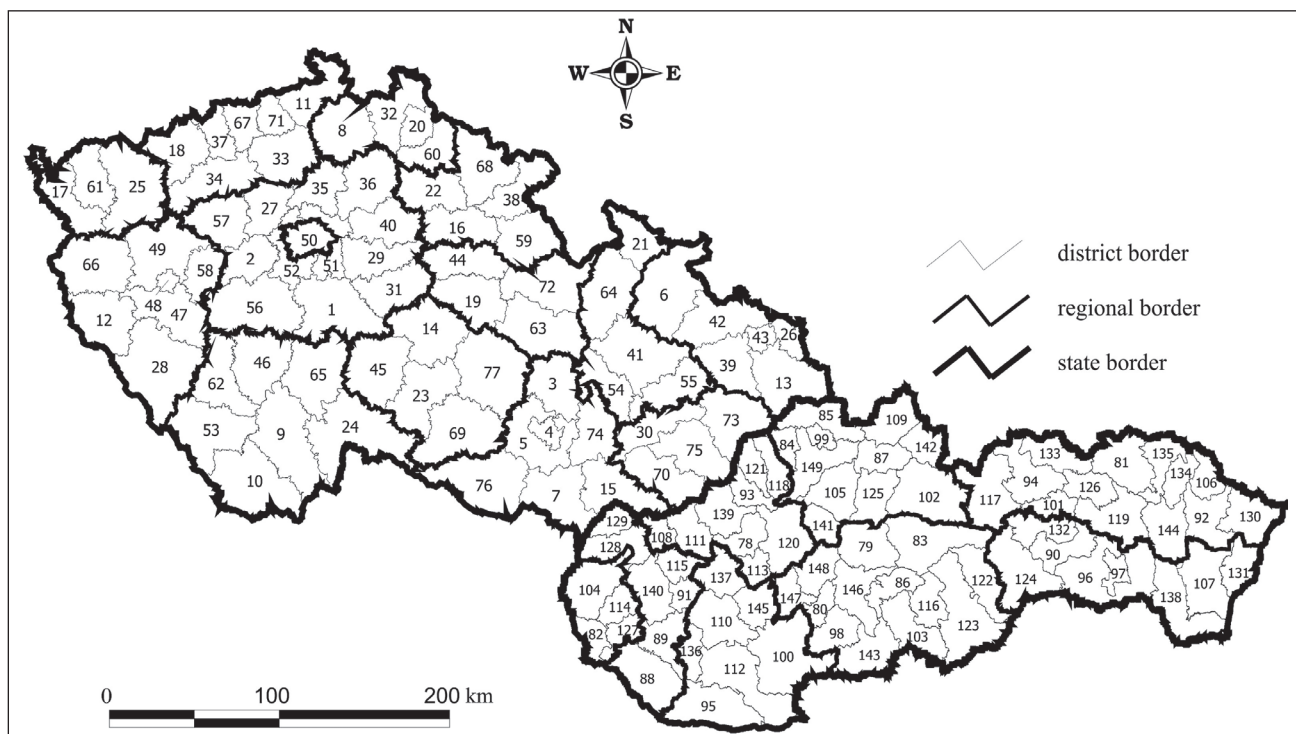


Fig. 2 Territorial composition of districts in Czechia and Slovakia.

Source: Czech Statistical Office, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2019).

Tab. 1 Order number of districts in Czechia and Slovakia.

Order Number	District	Region	Country
1	Benešov	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
2	Beroun	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
3	Blansko	South Moravian Region	Czechia
4	Brno-město	South Moravian Region	Czechia
5	Brno-venkov	South Moravian Region	Czechia
6	Bruntál	Moravian-Silesian Region	Czechia
7	Břeclav	South Moravian Region	Czechia
8	Česká Lípa	Liberec Region	Czechia
9	České Budějovice	South Bohemian Region	Czechia
10	Český Krumlov	South Bohemian Region	Czechia
11	Děčín	Ústí nad Labem Region	Czechia
12	Domažlice	Plzeň Region	Czechia
13	Frydek-Místek	Moravian-Silesian Region	Czechia
14	Havlíčkův Brod	Vysočina Region	Czechia
15	Hodonín	South Moravian Region	Czechia
16	Hradec Králové	Hradec Králové Region	Czechia
17	Cheb	Karlovy Vary Region	Czechia
18	Chomutov	Ústí nad Labem Region	Czechia
19	Chrudim	Pardubice Region	Czechia
20	Jablonec nad Nisou	Liberec Region	Czechia
21	Jeseník	Olomouc Region	Czechia
22	Jičín	Hradec Králové Region	Czechia
23	Jihlava	Vysočina Region	Czechia
24	Jindřichův Hradec	South Bohemian Region	Czechia
25	Karlovy Vary	Karlovy Vary Region	Czechia

Order Number	District	Region	Country
26	Karviná	Moravian-Silesian Region	Czechia
27	Kladno	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
28	Klatovy	Plzeň Region	Czechia
29	Kolín	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
30	Kroměříž	Zlín Region	Czechia
31	Kutná Hora	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
32	Liberec	Liberec Region	Czechia
33	Litoměřice	Ústí nad Labem Region	Czechia
34	Louny	Ústí nad Labem Region	Czechia
35	Mělník	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
36	Mladá Boleslav	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
37	Most	Ústí nad Labem Region	Czechia
38	Náchod	Hradec Králové Region	Czechia
39	Nový Jičín	Moravian-Silesian Region	Czechia
40	Nymburk	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
41	Olomouc	Olomouc Region	Czechia
42	Opava	Moravian-Silesian Region	Czechia
43	Ostrava-město	Moravian-Silesian Region	Czechia
44	Pardubice	Pardubice Region	Czechia
45	Pelhřimov	Vysočina Region	Czechia
46	Písek	South Bohemian Region	Czechia
47	Plzeň-jih	Plzeň Region	Czechia
48	Plzeň-město	Plzeň Region	Czechia
49	Plzeň-sever	Plzeň Region	Czechia
50	Praha*	Prague	Czechia
51	Praha-východ	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia

Order Number	District	Region	Country
52	Praha-západ	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
53	Prachatice	South Bohemian Region	Czechia
54	Prostějov	Olomouc Region	Czechia
55	Přerov	Olomouc Region	Czechia
56	Příbram	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
57	Rakovník	Central Bohemian Region	Czechia
58	Rokycany	Plzeň Region	Czechia
59	Rychnov nad Kněžnou	Hradec Králové Region	Czechia
60	Semily	Liberec Region	Czechia
61	Sokolov	Karlovy Vary Region	Czechia
62	Strakonice	South Bohemian Region	Czechia
63	Svitavy	Pardubice Region	Czechia
64	Šumperk	Olomouc Region	Czechia
65	Tábor	South Bohemian Region	Czechia
66	Tachov	Plzeň Region	Czechia
67	Teplice	Ústí nad Labem Region	Czechia
68	Trutnov	Hradec Králové Region	Czechia
69	Třebíč	Vysočina Region	Czechia
70	Uherské Hradiště	Zlín Region	Czechia
71	Ústí nad Labem	Ústí nad Labem Region	Czechia
72	Ústí nad Orlicí	Pardubice Region	Czechia
73	Vsetín	Zlín Region	Czechia
74	Vyškov	South Moravian Region	Czechia
75	Zlín	Zlín Region	Czechia
76	Znojmo	South Moravian Region	Czechia
77	Žďár nad Sázavou	Vysočina Region	Czechia
78	Bánovce nad Bebravou	Trenčín Region	Slovakia
79	Banská Bystrica	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
80	Banská Štiavnica	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
81	Bardejov	Prešov Region	Slovakia
82	Bratislava*	Bratislava Region	Slovakia
83	Brezno	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
84	Bytča	Žilina Region	Slovakia
85	Čadca	Žilina Region	Slovakia
86	Detva	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
87	Dolný Kubín	Žilina Region	Slovakia
88	Dunajská Streda	Trnava Region	Slovakia
89	Galanta	Trnava Region	Slovakia
90	Gelnica	Košice Region	Slovakia
91	Hlohovec	Trnava Region	Slovakia
92	Humenné	Prešov Region	Slovakia
93	Ilava	Trenčín Region	Slovakia
94	Kežmarok	Prešov Region	Slovakia
95	Komárno	Nitra Region	Slovakia
96	Košice – okolie	Košice Region	Slovakia
97	Košice*	Košice Region	Slovakia
98	Krupina	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
99	Kysucké Nové Mesto	Žilina Region	Slovakia
100	Levice	Nitra Region	Slovakia
101	Levoča	Prešov Region	Slovakia

Order Number	District	Region	Country
102	Liptovský Mikuláš	Žilina Region	Slovakia
103	Lučenec	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
104	Malacky	Bratislava Region	Slovakia
105	Martin	Žilina Region	Slovakia
106	Medzilaborce	Prešov Region	Slovakia
107	Michalovce	Košice Region	Slovakia
108	Myjava	Trenčín Region	Slovakia
109	Námestovo	Žilina Region	Slovakia
110	Nitra	Nitra Region	Slovakia
111	Nové Mesto nad Váhom	Trenčín Region	Slovakia
112	Nové Zámky	Nitra Region	Slovakia
113	Partizánske	Trenčín Region	Slovakia
114	Pezinok	Bratislava Region	Slovakia
115	Piešťany	Trnava Region	Slovakia
116	Poltár	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
117	Poprad	Prešov Region	Slovakia
118	Považská Bystrica	Trenčín Region	Slovakia
119	Prešov	Prešov Region	Slovakia
120	Prievidza	Trenčín Region	Slovakia
121	Púchov	Trenčín Region	Slovakia
122	Revúca	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
123	Rimavská Sobota	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
124	Rožňava	Košice Region	Slovakia
125	Ružomberok	Žilina Region	Slovakia
126	Sabinov	Prešov Region	Slovakia
127	Senec	Bratislava Region	Slovakia
128	Senica	Trnava Region	Slovakia
129	Skalica	Trnava Region	Slovakia
130	Snina	Prešov Region	Slovakia
131	Sobrance	Košice Region	Slovakia
132	Spišská Nová Ves	Košice Region	Slovakia
133	Stará Ľubovňa	Prešov Region	Slovakia
134	Stropkov	Prešov Region	Slovakia
135	Svidník	Prešov Region	Slovakia
136	Šaľa	Nitra Region	Slovakia
137	Topoľčany	Nitra Region	Slovakia
138	Trebišov	Košice Region	Slovakia
139	Trenčín	Trenčín Region	Slovakia
140	Trnava	Trnava Region	Slovakia
141	Turčianske Teplice	Žilina Region	Slovakia
142	Tvrdošín	Žilina Region	Slovakia
143	Veľký Krtíš	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
144	Vranov nad Topľou	Prešov Region	Slovakia
145	Zlaté Moravce	Nitra Region	Slovakia
146	Zvolen	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
147	Žarnovica	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
148	Žiar nad Hronom	Banská Bystrica Region	Slovakia
149	Žilina	Žilina Region	Slovakia

Notes: * whole city as a one district for this purpose

Source: Czech Statistical Office, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2019).

highest population density, while the Medzilaborce district (27 inhabitants/km²) has the lowest population density.

4.2 Results and Findings

4.2.1 Regions

Pro-Europeanness Index

At the regional level (Fig. 3), the highest pro-Europeanness index values (ranging from 0.700 to 0.906) reflecting five variables in total (votes for accession in the 2003 European Union membership referendum, votes for Eurosceptic parties in the 2004–2019 European Parliament elections) were recorded by Bratislava followed by other four regions from Slovakia (Trnava, Nitra, Košice and Prešov). A level of 0.700 was almost achieved also by the capital region of Czechia, Prague. Other two regions from Slovakia (Banská Bystrica and Žilina) reached the values of index from 0.500 to 0.600. The values between 0.400–0.500 were obtained by two regions from Czechia (Zlín and South Moravia) and the last Slovak region, Trenčín. On the contrary, the lowest values of the index (0.029–0.294) were reported by the Ústí nad Labem Region, the Karlovy Vary Region and the Moravian-Silesian Region in Czechia. Of the last twelve regions, all are from Czechia.

Considering regional perspective, one of the highest spatial concentrations were recorded also in regions of Prague, Bratislava and Košice, i.e. centres that have been more successful in the post-socialist transformation, with higher economic performance, localization of significant foreign investment, a population with higher education and socio-economic status, supporting, in general, liberal political parties.

Highest values also applied to regions using EU agricultural subsidies and promoting a policy of guaranteeing the rights of ethnic minorities (especially the Trnava Region and the Nitra Region in Slovakia), or typical of an approach toward the values of Christian Democracy (the Zlín Region in Czechia and the Prešov Region in Slovakia). On the contrary, the lowest values were recorded in the Czech regions with a peripheral position geographically and socio-economically (Ústí nad Labem Region and Karlovy Vary Region), with increased support for the far-left or far-right parties and the Slovak region with a traditionally egalitarian, etatist and nationalist electorate (Trenčín Region).

4.2.2 Districts

We came up with other interesting findings for the pro-Europeanness index at the district level.

Pro-Europeanness Index

The resulting index shows considerable spatial differences (Fig. 4). In the districts with the highest values of the index, the Slovakian districts absolutely dominate, with the first being Dunajská Streda (0.994) and second Komárno (0.903). Other districts with high values of index are located exclusively in the southwest of Slovakia. These districts, with geographical proximity to the capital, enjoy a significant position in the agro-sector and a strong Hungarian minority. In the case of Czechia, the highest values were reached by districts of Prague (Praha-západ, Praha and Praha-východ) and the city district of the second largest city of the country, Brno (Brno-město). On the contrary, districts with the lowest values (below 0.200) are located in west Bohemia in the Ústí nad

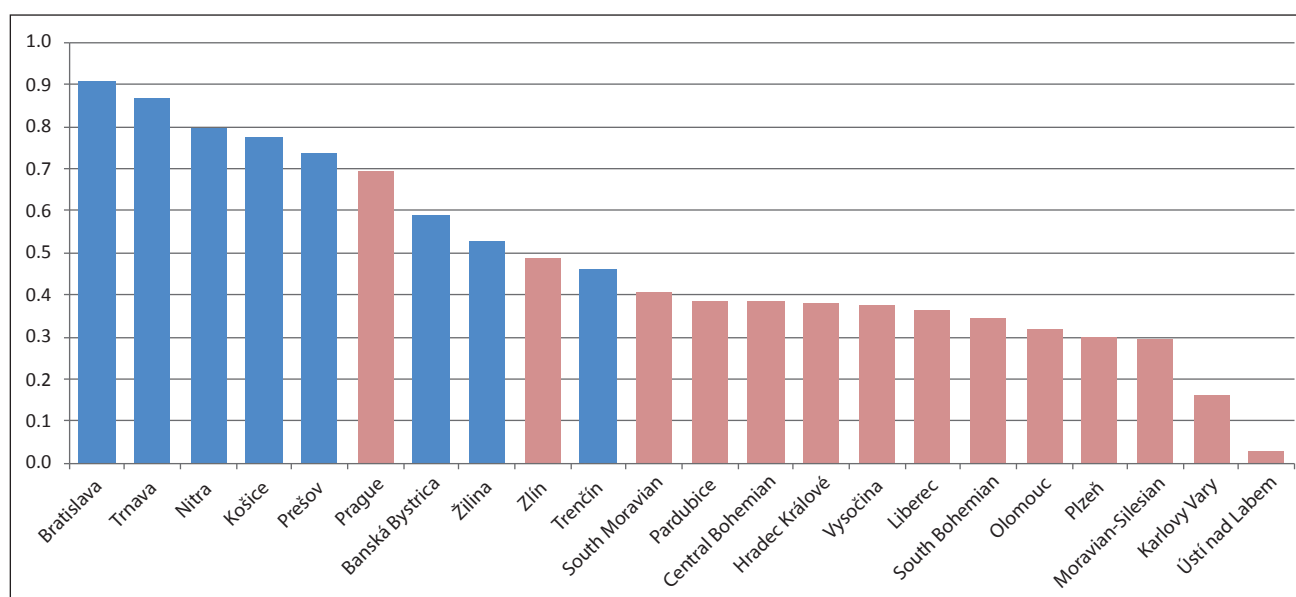


Fig. 3 NUTS 3 regions of Czechia and Slovakia by Index of Pro-Europeanness.

Note: Light grey indicates the Czech regions, dark gray indicates the Slovak regions.

Source: Czech Statistical Office, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2019), author's research.

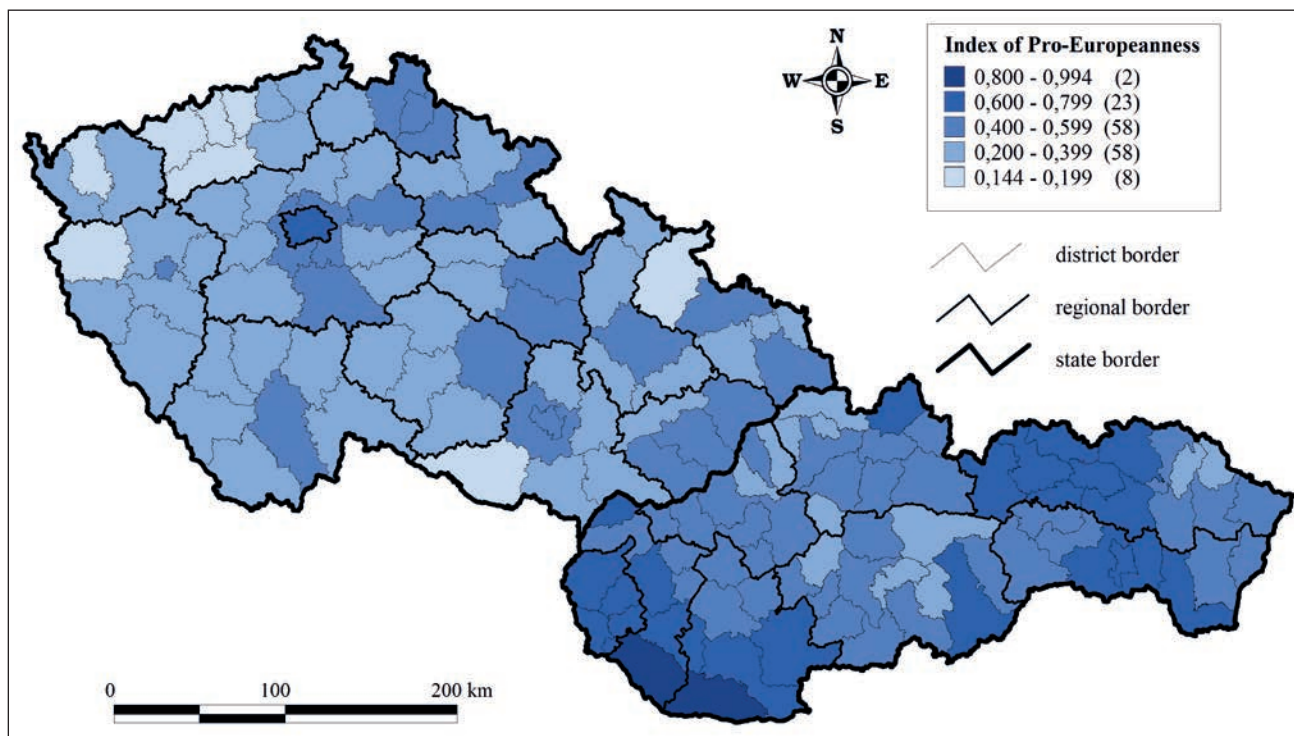


Fig. 4 Districts of Czechia and Slovakia by Index of Pro-Europeanness.

Source: Czech Statistical Office, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2018), author's research.

Labem Region (Most 0.144, Louny 0.156, Chomutov 0.164 and Teplice 0.171), the Plzeň Region (Tachov 0.161) and the Karlovy Vary Region (Sokolov 0.190). This group of districts is completed by couple from Moravia – Bruntál (0.151, Moravian-Silesian Region) and Znojmo (0.168, South Moravian Region). This group of districts is characterized by a relatively high unemployment rate and relatively low wages, with support for left-wing, far-left or far-right parties (Havlík and Voda 2016; Maškarinec 2017, 2019). In Slovakia, the districts with the lowest values are located in the northwestern corner of the country in the Žilina Region (Kysucké Nové Mesto, Čadca and Bytča) typical of long-term support for the values of egalitarianism, etatism and nationalism (Plešivčák 2011; Madleňák 2012).

4.2.3 Clusters

By using the cluster method, we derived five categories based on the values of the pro-Europeanness index (Fig. 5).

The first category, named “*districts of markedly pro-European orientation*”, consists of only two spatial units, both located in Slovakia. The districts belonging to this cluster are located in southwest Slovakia (Dunajská Streda and Komárno), with a traditional position of agriculture and a strong Hungarian minority. Compared to the national mean (Fig. 6), this group recorded strong support for country's accession to the EU (+14.06 pp) and very low support for Eurosceptic parties (−16.92 pp).

The second cluster, named “*districts of significantly pro-European orientation*” is comprised of 19 districts, of which all are located in Slovakia again. The largest concentration of these districts can be found in the area located in the southwest corner of the country (Bratislava, Šaľa, Galanta, Senec, Nové Zámky) and in the Prešov Region in the northeast (a compact belt of the six districts – Poprad, Kežmarok, Levoča, Stará Ľubovňa, Bardejov, Sabinov and Prešov) continuing to the Košice Region in the east of Slovakia (Košice and Trebišov). This cluster also includes three largest towns of Slovakia (Bratislava, Košice and Prešov). Compared to the national average (Fig. 6), this category declared a strong support for accession in the EU referendum (+12.71 pp) and lower support for Eurosceptic parties in the EU elections (−7.99 pp).

The third category of districts is described as “*districts of mildly pro-European orientation*”. It consists of 30 spatial units, the larger part of which (23) is located in Slovakia. The main concentration is recognized in the regions of Bratislava, Trnava and Nitra in the southwest of Slovakia with seven districts overall (Pezinok, Malacky, Trnava, Senica, Nitra, Piešťany and Hlohovec). The second compact area can be identified in the north of the country in the eastern part of the Žilina Region (Dolný Kubín, Tvrdošín, Martin, Liptovský Mikuláš and Ružomberok). This concentration is comprehensively complemented by four adjacent districts, from the Banská Bystrica Region (Banská Bystrica, Zvolen, Veľký Krtíš and Lučenec). The third concentration of districts of this type is

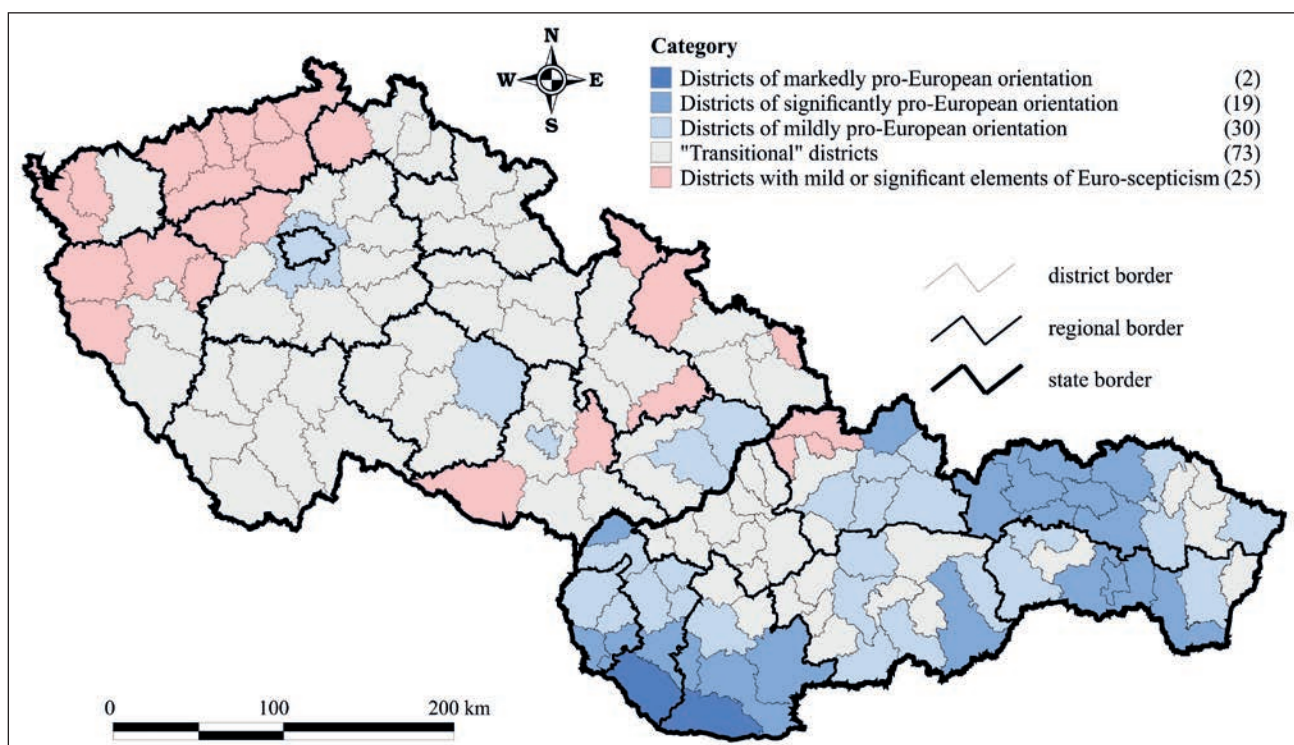


Fig. 5 Categories of districts in Czechia and Slovakia clustered by Index of Pro-Europeanness.
Source: Czech Statistical Office, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2019), author's research.

located in the eastern part of Slovakia in the regions of Banská Bystrica (Revúca), Košice (Rožňava, Spišská Nová Ves and Mihcalovce) and Prešov (Snina, Vranov nad Topľou and Svidník). In Czechia, the only cluster of districts of mildly pro-European orientation can be found in the capital region (districts of Prague). One district is located in the east of the Vysočina Region (Žďár nad Sázavou), three in Moravia in South Moravian Region (Brno-město) and Zlín Region (Zlín, Vsetín). Two largest cities of Czechia (Prague and Brno) fell into this category. This group is characterized by (Fig. 6) slightly above-average support for EU accession (+2.44 *pp*) and lower support for the Eurosceptic parties in EU elections (−4.06 *pp*).

The fourth group of districts, which is the most numerous of all clusters, we labelled "transitional" districts. Cluster analysis marked 73 spatial units (almost a half of all districts), of which 48 (66%) are located in Czechia. The largest concentration of districts of this type can be identified in the central and eastern Bohemia. In Slovakia, the most compact area is situated in all territory of Trenčín Region and adjacent districts. This category of districts is characterized by (Fig. 6) slightly below average support for EU accession (−3.51 *pp*) and mildly higher support for Eurosceptic parties in EU elections (+2.15 *pp*).

The last group consists of districts characterized by the notable degree of Euroscepticism ("districts with mild or significant elements of Euroscepticism"). Of the total number of 149 districts, 25 fall into this

category, with 22 (88%) from Czechia. Most are located in the Ústí nad Labem Region (7 of 7), the Plzeň Region (4 of 7) and the Moravian-Silesian Region (3 of 7). Most of them, mainly from the Ústí nad Labem Region and the Moravian-Silesian Region, have certain socio-economic problems (relatively high unemployment, and low wages), favouring left-wing, far-left and recently protest parties to some extent. The most visible concentration is located in the northwest of Czechia, encompassing the regions of Liberec (Česká Lípa), Ústí nad Labem (Děčín, Ústí nad Labem, Teplice, Litoměřice, Most, Louny and Chomutov), Central Bohemia (Rakovník and Kladno), Karlovy Vary (Sokolov and Cheb) and Plzeň (Domažlice, Tachov, Plzeň-sever and Rokycany). In the historical regions of Moravia and Silesia, there are six such districts, namely Znojmo, Vyškov (South Moravian Region), Přerov (Olomouc Region), Jeseník, Bruntál and Karviná (Moravian-Silesian Region). Within Slovakia, districts of this type are located exclusively in the northwest of the territory in the Žilina Region (Bytča, Čadca, Kysucké Nové Mesto), where they formed a compact concentration. This area is known for its traditional support of nationalist parties, and the values of etatism and egalitarianism. Compared to the national average (Fig. 6), this cluster of districts is characterized by a markedly below average approval for EU accession (−6.44 *pp*) and an outstanding support for the Eurosceptic parties in EU elections (+8.25 *pp*).

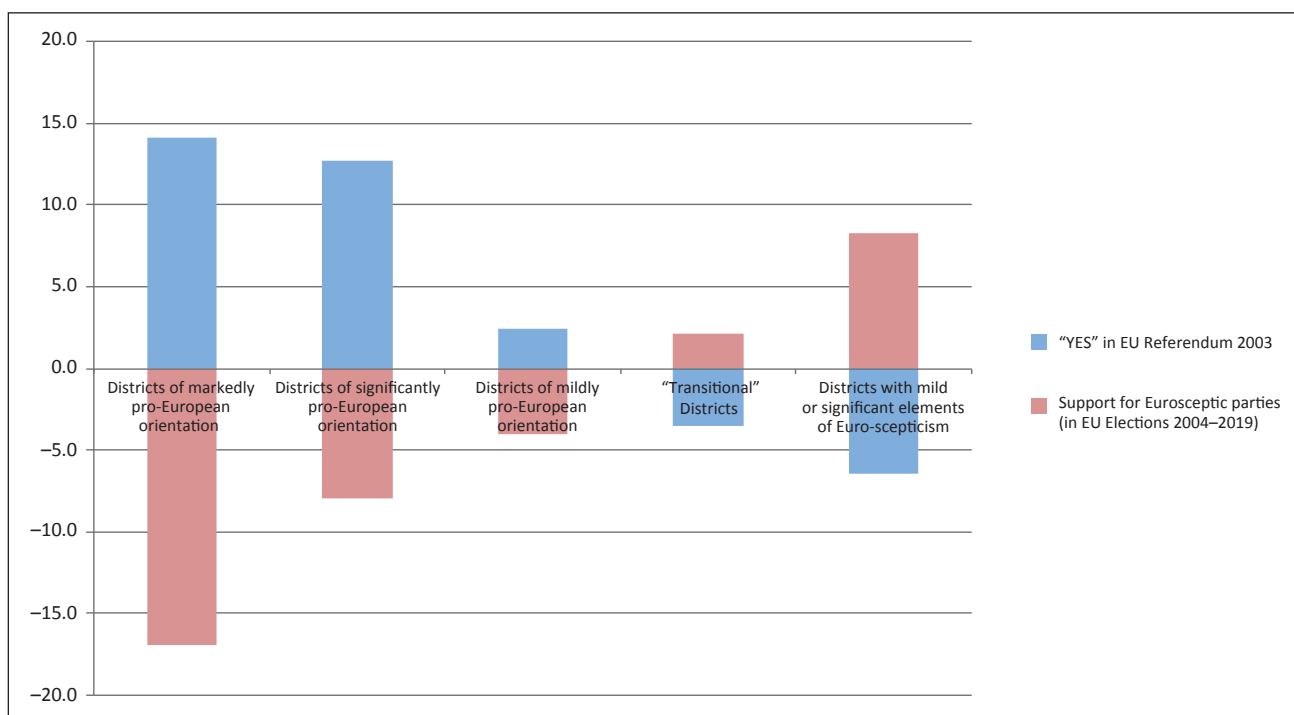


Fig. 6 Categories of districts in Czechia and Slovakia clustered by Index of Pro-Europeanness – selected EU electoral characteristics.
 Note: Difference from average value for Czechia and Slovakia, difference is measured by percentage points.
 Source: Czech Statistical Office, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2019), author's research.

5. Discussion

Some regions of Czechia and Slovakia are characterized by increased turnout and low level of Euroscepticism in the case of European issues (referendum, elections), while others are more passive in voting or support Eurosceptic parties to a great extent. The most frequent reasons for not participating in European parliamentary elections include disappointment with politics, non-alignment with the electoral program of any of the parties, and a lack of political commitment as such (Greffet 2007). In the debate on interest in voting in European elections as well as support for Eurosceptics, it is also important to mention the voter's relationship to the idea of Euro-citizenship (Frognier 2000), the project of European integration, Europeanism, the degree of awareness related to the role of the EU and the benefits of membership (Blondel et al. 1997) and the visibility of the EU in ordinary life (Irwin 1995). Voters of regions benefiting more from EU membership, e.g. through structural funds, have a higher tendency to participate in the European Parliament elections and support Euro-optimist parties (Jesuit 2003). In the case of Czechia, reasons for voter (non)participation were investigated by Linek (2013), in Slovakia by Gyárfášová (2019).

It turns out that the current wave of Euroscepticism or populism is better understood by the far-right subjects (in Czechia in particular by SPD and in Slovakia by ĽSNS). They are able to attract manual workers who previously almost unreservedly supported

the left (Bale 2010). Nevertheless, in Czechia, the far-left KSČM has been enjoying significant support in the case of elections to the European Parliament, though currently of declining trend. Economic problems and migratory pressures are causing uncertainty in Europe and create a breeding ground for populists (Charvát 2007). Quite a number of authors have recently addressed the causes of support for far-right parties in Czechia and Slovakia (e.g. Kluknavská 2012, 2013; Gregor 2015; Mikuš et al. 2016). In general, increase in Euroscepticism can be linked to ongoing globalization (Salo 2014). It has created a group of "bereaved" who are losing certainty and feeling vulnerable to the current liberalization, worrying about their economic future and growing cultural diversity. Eurosceptics does not necessarily have to be a result of populism, but also as a legitimate part of the political arena that represents those "bereaved" by globalization (Salo 2014). It is said about the new European cleavage of social polarization based on the existence of various life and material opportunities (in our research, especially socio-economic status, civil and minority rights) perceived by different actors with different interests depending on the process of territorial integration (Bartolini 2007).

6. Conclusions

Considering the NUTS 3 regions of both countries (14 in Czechia and 8 in Slovakia) in terms of the final index

of pro-Europeanness and regional cleavage, the highest values were achieved by the regions of the largest cities (Prague in the Czechia, Bratislava and Košice in Slovakia) typical of a more educated, urban population with a higher socio-economic status, more economically efficient and more successful in post-socialist transformation, with a higher concentration of large, especially foreign investment, and a predominant right-wing (or central/liberal) electorate. The second case of a pronounced tendency towards the EU project is represented by regions using EU subsidies under its largest agricultural policy, also dependent on the supranational policy securing the rights of ethnic minorities (especially the Trnava Region and the Nitra Region in Slovakia) or known for values of Christian Democracy (the Zlín Region in Czechia and the Prešov Region in Slovakia). On the contrary, the lowest values of the pro-Europeanness index were registered in the socio-economically and geographically peripheral regions of Czechia, with increased support for far-left, far-right and protest parties (the Ústí nad Labem Region, the Karlovy Vary Region and the Moravian-Silesian Region) and parts of Slovakia with a population traditionally close to the values of egalitarian, etatism and nationalism (the Trenčín Region).

At the district level (149 districts in total, 77 from Czechia and 72 from Slovakia), it was found that in the top two categories ("*districts of markedly pro-European orientation*" and ("*districts of significantly pro-European orientation*"), with the highest values of the index of pro-Europeanness, the Slovak districts (mainly from the southwest) dominated over Czech districts. On the contrary, 88% districts of the last category ("*districts with mild or significant elements of Euroscepticism*") came from Czechia, with the absolute lowest values being registered for districts from Ústí nad Labem Region (northwestern Bohemia).

By using the cluster method, we derived five categories of districts across the countries based on the values of the pro-Europeanness index. The first three "*evidently pro-European*" groups ("*districts of markedly, significantly or mildly pro-European orientation*") consists of 51 spatial units, 86% of them located in Slovakia. The districts of these clusters are characterized by a clear support for accession to the European Union and low support for Eurosceptic parties in European Parliament elections. Several districts of this type are urban (districts of Prague, Brno-město in Czechia, and Bratislava, Košice and Prešov in Slovakia), while others are located in southwest Slovakia (Senec, Dunajská Streda, Komárno and Nové Zámky) where there is relatively significant agricultural production and a strong concentration of the Hungarian minority. On the opposite side, there are districts with mild or significant elements of Euroscepticism, with significantly lower support for EU accession relevant support for Eurosceptic parties when EU elections take place. Of the 25 spatial units in this category, 22

are from the Czechia. The highest concentration was found mainly in the Ústí nad Labem Region, the Karlovy Vary Region and the Moravian-Silesian Region, i.e. in regions with relatively significant socio-economic difficulties (relatively high unemployment and low wages), with increasing support for radical (left-wing or right-wing) and protest (anti-system) parties. Within Slovakia, districts of this type are located in the northwest of the territory in the Žilina Region (Bytča, Čadca, Kysucké Nové Mesto), which traditionally support nationalist parties and espouse values of etatism and egalitarianism.

In general, ideas of European integration and Euro-optimism as such in Czechia and Slovakia are more common among the urban electorates (Prague, Brno, Bratislava, Košice), areas with a higher concentration of a particular ethnic group, with significant agricultural production (southwest of Slovakia), which in this case is probably related to the status of the EU as a guarantor (higher instance for protection) of civil and minority rights, and a provider of agro-subsidies. In the case of Euroscepticism, the Czech districts and regions prevail, especially from the peripheral northwest and the Moravian-Silesian border areas. In this context, relatively important socio-economic problems (in comparison with the national average high unemployment and low wages) can be mentioned. Part of the electorate can "blame" the EU (membership) for them (or at least in the form of a penalty for their failure to solve them) and thus, on a practical level, can prefer populist (radical, anti-system) and Eurosceptic parties. In the case of Slovakia, regions located to the northwest without significant socio-economic problems, but with the traditional vote for (ultra)nationalists (ĽSNS, formerly voting for SNS), egalitarian and etatist-minded political movements (SMER-SD, formerly voting for HZDS), were shown as least pro-European oriented. The obtained results are in accordance with the findings of previous studies from the Czech (Pink 2012; Voda 2015; Kostecký et al. 2016; Koubek 2019) and Slovak literature (e.g. Krivý et al. 1996; Plešivčák 2011; Madleňák 2012; Przybyla 2019) on the historical and socio-economic causes affecting the spatial distribution of election results.

This study provides new insights into the "geography of pro-Europeanness" over a relatively long period of time (2003–2019), at the sub-national level of regions and districts of two countries that in the past formed a single state, applying a methodology not used before to assess the territorial context of EU integration support. This work also provides information for policy- and decision-makers on the regions in which EU assistance should be targeted to sustain (restore) the meaningfulness of both the idea of European integration and EU membership in those parts of the countries that are currently most critical to the EU project, and thus to stop encouraging Euroscepticism across the EU, starting with its partial regions.

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