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Brussels and Reykjavík: Drifting Further Apart? Explaining the Icelandic Public Opposition towards EU Membership

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About the Author

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the 2008 banking crisis in Iceland, the Nordic country in July 2009 applied for membership of the European Union (EU). Yet public support for this move has always been marginal and in March 2015 Iceland's government requested that the country should no longer be regarded as a candidate country. This paper seeks to find out what the main reasons are behind the anti-EU stance in the Icelandic population. Thanks to an extensive online survey carried out by the author, it could be confirmed that the protection of the Icelandic fishing and agriculture sectors worries the Icelanders most, followed by the perception that Iceland is too small to influence decision-making in Brussels. In general, the population adopts a rational cost-benefit analysis to conclude that their country is better off outside the EU. Sentimental issues, such as the lack of an identity connection with the European mainland or the protection of (what some see as) their whaling tradition, take less prominence in this debate.

Introduction: Explaining Icelandic Euroscepticism

Iceland has always had a particular relationship with the European Union (EU). Up until 2008, it was one of the few countries that have never tried to become a member of the EU. However, after the outbreak of the Icelandic banking crisis, the time seemed ripe for the Nordic country to apply. Under the left-wing government of Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir, Iceland officially became a candidate country and negotiations opened in spring 2010. Although the Icelandic population supported the idea of holding accession talks with the EU, the 'yes' camp never took a decisive lead. On the contrary, after having had a slight advantage during the outbreak of the Icelandic financial crisis, public opposition against EU membership took over and support for the EU shrank dramatically.

Numerous surveys have been conducted over the years to find out whether the Icelanders support Icelandic EU membership or not. However, none of them have attempted to find out what the arguments were determining the people's anti-EU stance.¹ Nevertheless, the importance of this aspect cannot be underestimated. Since there is a general consensus in the Icelandic political landscape on holding a referendum if the government one day continued and concluded the accession negotiations,² research on the matter is required to better understand what keeps the Icelanders from supporting their country's bid to join the EU, and possibly to eventually overcome these issues.

This paper will look into the results of a survey conducted for the author's Master's thesis.³ It will give an overview of the main findings of this survey which collected data from 3,308 Icelanders, or 1.01% of the entire Icelandic population. The two main research questions that this paper addresses are:

1. Which arguments are most dominant in explaining public opposition towards the EU?
2. To what extent are there dominant socio-economic and demographic patterns behind people's anti-EU stance?

¹ D. Toshkov *et al.*, *The 'Old' and the 'New' Europeans: Analyses of Public Opinion on EU Enlargement in Review*, Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin, 2014, p. 33.

² Icelandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Iceland's EU Accession Negotiations 2009-2013*, Icelandic Government, 1 December 2012, retrieved 2 February 2015, <http://eu.mfa.is/negotiations/status-of-talks>.

³ T. Gemers, *I Love You, I Love You Not – Exploring the Icelandic Public Opinion towards EU Accession*, Master's thesis, Bruges, College of Europe, 2015.

It is expected that the fear of losing full control over the national fishing industry and fishing grounds will be the main argument against EU membership. Consequently, fishermen and farmers will be the people who oppose accession most. In more general terms, people living in the rural areas are expected to oppose EU membership more than people living in Reykjavík. And voters who support the two current coalition partners which had put the negotiations on hold, namely the Independence Party and the Progressive Party, are expected to adopt a negative stance as well.

The paper starts with a literature review, which will allow identifying the main arguments that scholars put forward as Icelanders' 'stumbling blocks' to EU accession. Based on the hypotheses derived from the literature review, the results of the survey will be explained. To conclude, an overview of the main findings will be presented alongside some policy recommendations.

Preparing the Survey

Six main arguments against EU accession can be identified in the scholarly debate on Iceland.

Fisheries and Agriculture: Insurmountable Stumbling Blocks?

The Icelandic economy depends heavily on its fishing industry. In 2013, this economic branch provided 40% of the country's export earning, more than 12% of its gross domestic product (GDP), and it employed 5% of the nation's work force.⁴ Many politicians and authors argue that membership of the EU, which implies a transfer of power in the field of fisheries to Brussels, will harm the interests of the nation's pivotal economic sector. Iceland insists on unrestricted control over its waters; this non-negotiable standpoint seems the biggest stumbling block for an Icelandic EU membership.⁵

⁴ "Iceland", *Forbes*, 1 December 2014, retrieved 2 February 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/places/iceland>.

⁵ B. Þórhallsson, "What features determine international activities of small states? The international approaches of Iceland until the mid-1990s", *Stjórnmal og stjórnsýsla*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2011, p. 124.

The Federation of Icelandic Fishing Vessel Owners (*Landssambands íslenskra útvegsmanna* (LÍÚ)) fiercely opposes Icelandic EU membership.⁶ The LÍÚ argues that by joining the EU and adopting the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), Iceland would lose control over one of its most important natural resources. It is estimated that Iceland will have 3 votes out of a total of 348 votes in the Council, obviously not enough to prevent an agreement that would harm Icelandic interests. The LÍÚ considers the 'Luxembourg Compromise', which calls for reconciliation where essential national interests are at stake, too weak to guard Reykjavík's interests.⁷ Furthermore, Iceland would lose its vote in the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the EU would be responsible for negotiating the management of straddling stocks, which comprises 30% of the industry's income.⁸ Jón Baldvin Hannibalsson argues that the driving force behind the fishing industry's opposition is its monopoly rights within the Icelandic exclusive economic zone (EEZ).⁹ When joining the EU, the LÍÚ fears that the Icelandic EEZ would be opened for foreign capital to buy up all the fishing rights. This argument is especially effective in the fishing communities along the Icelandic coast.¹⁰

Although the share of agriculture in the Icelandic economy is declining and the sector heavily dependent on state support, it is seen as an important issue in EU-Iceland relations as well. While it is widely expected that Iceland will be allowed to keep its state aid for agriculture in the remote areas (Finland's "Arctic agriculture" obtained a similar exemption back in 1994), public suspicion towards the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is significant.¹¹ It is also important to note that the Icelandic political system allows for an overrepresentation of the rural constituencies, such that the voice of the fishing and agricultural communities is heard rather loudly in Reykjavík.¹²

⁶ Avery, Bailes & Þórhallsson, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

⁷ K. Þórarinnsson, LÍÚ, Icelandic fishing industry viewpoint, presentation, European Parliament, Brussels, 26 January 2011.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ K. Ziabari, "Iceland Will Not Join the European Union", *Fair Observer*, 4 February 2015, retrieved 5 February 2015, <http://www.fairobserver.com/region/europe/iceland-will-not-join-the-european-union-54680>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Avery, Bailes & Þórhallsson, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

¹² B. Þórhallsson, *Iceland's contested European Policy: The Footprint of the Past*, Msida, University of Malta Institute for European Studies, p. 8.

Euro: A Burden or a Blessing?

Although public support for the euro was prominent after the collapse of the króna, opinion polls show that today the eagerness to adopt the euro as the Icelandic currency has faded away in favour of either keeping the króna, replacing it by the Norwegian krone, or even adopting the Canadian dollar.¹³ Both national and European factors play a role. The Icelandic economy started growing again, with a rate of 2.1% in 2011, 1.1% in 2012, 3.5% in 2013, and an estimated 2.7% in 2014 and 3.3% this year, a far more positive balance than that of the Eurozone.¹⁴ In September 2014, unemployment rates were at 11.5% in the Eurozone and at 4.1% in Iceland.¹⁵ Although there is not necessarily a causal link between these figures and the decreased support for adopting the euro, it is important in public perception to see how Iceland is recovering from the all-entangling banking crisis, while recovery in the Eurozone appears to be a slower process.

The financial crisis that hit several European countries also raised questions in Iceland about the possible negative impact of adopting the euro. Being a small country itself, Iceland looks towards Ireland and Cyprus as Eurozone members that are being 'dictated' and 'treated unfairly' by Brussels. These countries are largely perceived as being worse off than Iceland which has maintained its own currency and autonomy.¹⁶

EEA Membership: All We Need?

Although the country never applied for EU membership before 2009, economic ties between Iceland and the European mainland have been tight for several decades. Iceland joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in 1970 and after controversial debates the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1994 and the Schengen Agreement in 2001.¹⁷

¹³ "Iceland's Euro dreams vanish along with EU membership", *Khaleej Times*, 18 March 2014, retrieved 6 February 2015, <http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?section=todaysfeatures&x>.

¹⁴ S. Guðjónsdóttir (ed.), *Iceland in Figures 2014*, Reykjavik, Statistics Iceland, p. 24.

¹⁵ S. Guðjónsdóttir (ed.), *Statistical Yearbook of Iceland 2014*, Reykjavik, Statistics Iceland, p. 101; Eurostat, "Unemployment statistics", 30 January 2015, retrieved 6 February 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Unemployment_statistics.

¹⁶ A. Bailes & B. Þórhallsson, "Iceland and Europe: Drifting Further Apart?", *Finnish Institute of International Affairs Briefing*, vol. 20, no. 139, 2013, p. 5.

¹⁷ B. Þórhallsson, *Iceland and European Integration: On the Edge*, London, Routledge, 2006.

Interestingly, in the lead-up to the establishment of the EEA, all Icelandic political parties opposed Icelandic participation, except the former Social Democratic Party (SDP). However, the participation of the other Nordic countries in the negotiations pushed Iceland towards the EEA.¹⁸ Thanks to the EEA, Iceland managed to secure free trade in marine products, but it opposed free trade in agricultural goods.¹⁹ Despite the initial opposition, it is now generally accepted that Iceland benefits from the EEA, since it provides the country with access to the internal market, which absorbs 80% of the Icelandic exports.²⁰ The Independence Party even argues that in the EEA Iceland already attains all the benefits of EU membership without having to deal with its costs.²¹

There is, however, a lack of knowledge on the topic in the Icelandic society. Although the EEA indeed provides Iceland with access to the EU market, which is crucial for its fishing industry, there is also a loss of sovereignty. Iceland has no right to participate in EU decision-making, but nevertheless has to adopt similar legislation in various areas.²² This situation has been described as 'fax democracy', with Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway waiting for the latest EU legislation to be 'faxed' from the European Commission in order to be implemented without further discussion.²³

Sovereignty and Independence

Guðmundur Hálfðanarson emphasises the importance of sovereignty and independence by stressing "the sense that the Icelandic nation forms an organic unity and that the unified nation must not relinquish its sovereignty and independence".²⁴ It took until 1944 for the union with Denmark to be dissolved,

¹⁸ Þórhallsson, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-124.

¹⁹ Á. Einarsson, "Landbúnaður og Evrópusambandið – álitafni við aðild", in S. Ómarsdóttir (ed.), *Ný Staða Íslands í Utanríkismálum: Tengsl við Önnur Evrópulönd*, Reykjavík, Alþjóðamálastofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2007, pp. 50-51.

²⁰ Bailes & Þórhallsson, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

²¹ General Assembly of the Independence Party, 41, *landsfundur Sjálfstæðisflokksins*, Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn, 24 February 2013, retrieved 2 January 2014, <http://www.xd.is/um-sjalfstaedisflokkinn/alyktanir/utanrikismalanefnd>.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 126; I. Bache, S. George & S. Bulmer, *Politics in the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 539.

²³ J. Lindsell, "Fax democracy? Norway has more clout than you know", *Civitas*, 12 August 2013, retrieved 5 February 2015, <http://civitas.org.uk/newblog/2013/08/fax-democracy-norway-has-more-clout-than-you-know>.

²⁴ G. Hálfðanarson, "Discussing Europe: Icelandic Nationalism and European Integration", in B. Þórhallsson (ed.), *Iceland and European Integration: On the Edge*, New York, Routledge, p. 140.

whereupon Iceland became a republic. The struggle for independence is seen by many as the externalisation of national unity, based on cultural uniqueness.²⁵ Although the international environment favoured Icelandic independence, the sentiment in the country is that Icelanders managed to free themselves from Danish rule without any direct external assistance. As Baldur Þórhallsson puts it: "The image of Icelanders being able to secure self-determination without having to use multilateral co-operation within international institutions as a protection forum prepared the ground for the emphasis that Icelandic politicians have put on bilateralism."²⁶

The Lack of Connection with the European Mainland

Although closely linked to the independence issue, it is worth mentioning the distinction that Icelanders tend to make between the Nordic countries and the rest of the European continent. Iceland maintains good relations with the other Nordic states; the countries the Icelanders feel closest to.²⁷ Lee Miles argues that Icelanders have a very strong regional affinity; they prefer to be called Nordic rather than European.²⁸

An issue that severely damaged the pro-EU camp was the *Icesave* dispute with the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Following the collapse of the European branch of *Landsbanki Íslands*, the British and the Dutch requested the reimbursement of all legally required deposit guarantees by the Icelandic state, informally supported by other EU member states, including the Scandinavians. The first referendum on the issue, rejecting the loan guarantees by 98.10% of the votes, clearly showed the animosity among the Icelandic population.²⁹ Many felt that the EU stood in the way of Iceland's economic recovery (although it has to be said that the EU on several occasions stated that this was a dispute purely between Iceland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom), and the issue thus fuelled the isolationist feelings in the

²⁵ G. Hálfðanarson, *Íslenska þjóðríkið: Uppruni og endimörk*, Reykjavík, Hið íslenska Bókmenntafélag, 2001.

²⁶ Þórhallsson, *op.cit.*, p. 114.

²⁷ Ó. Harðarson, "Icelandic Security and Foreign Policy: The Public Attitude", *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 20, no. 4, 1985, pp. 297-316.

²⁸ L. Miles (ed.), *The European Union and the Nordic Countries*, New York, Routledge, 1996, pp. 3-14.

²⁹ "2010 State guarantee of the Icesave loan agreement", *Statistics Iceland*, 13 September 2011, retrieved 2 February 2015, <http://www.statice.is/?PageID=2465&src>.

country.³⁰ The British and Dutch claims “could too easily be seen as another case of innocent little Iceland being bullied by large Europeans, using legalistic European arguments”.³¹

Whaling

Another issue that hinders Icelandic EU integration is its whaling tradition. Iceland has always used its natural marine resources to the fullest and has opposed external interference. In 1992, the country withdrew from the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Although it entered the IWC again in 2002, it continues whaling under the pretext of scientific purposes.³²

The EU has adopted several resolutions calling for the protection of cetaceans (such as whales and dolphins) against hunting, capture and captivity. In September 2014, the EU led an international démarche against Iceland’s whaling policy,³³ putting even more emphasis on the fact that if Iceland one day joined the EU, it would have to cease its whaling activities. Although whaling only accounts for 2% of the fishing industry’s income, it seems as a highly symbolic issue, closely linked to the sovereignty debate and the reticence to transfer power over Icelandic fishing rights to Brussels.

Main Hypotheses

His survey allowed deducing six arguments which were suggested to the respondents in the survey:

1. The Icelandic fishing industry is better off outside the European Union, primarily since being part of the Common Fisheries Policy would open the Icelandic exclusive economic zone for foreign competition.
2. Replacing the króna with the euro cannot be seen as an improvement since the euro crisis has shown the weaknesses of the Eurozone. Furthermore, Cyprus and Ireland are seen as examples of how the EU ‘dictates’ smaller countries and pushes them into harmful deals.

³⁰ Avery, Bailes & Þórhallsson, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

³¹ Bailes & Þórhallsson, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

³² B. Þórhallsson, *op.cit.*, pp. 118-119.

³³ European Commission, “EU leads an international demarche against whaling by Iceland”, DG Communication, 15 September 2014, retrieved 3 February 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-529_en.htm.

3. Since Iceland already has access to the EU internal market thanks to its membership of the European Economic Area, there is no real added value in joining the European Union.
4. History has shown that Iceland can survive in the international arena through bilateral contacts and even by acting unilaterally. Independence and sovereignty should not be transferred to Brussels since this would not be in the interest of the country.
5. Iceland lacks an identity connection with the European mainland. The Icelanders consider themselves above all Icelandic and subsequently as Nordic because of cultural, historical, and linguistic links with these countries. Iceland does not have such close relations with other European nations and thus has no interest engaging in such an extensive way with the continent.
6. By joining the European Union, Iceland would have to give up its whaling tradition. Although its economic significance is negligible, whaling is part of the Icelandic culture and should thus be protected.

The Findings of the Survey

The survey was based on the six hypothetical reasons identified above. People were asked to rank them in order of relevance. If they wished, they had the opportunity to mention other reasons as well. In a first phase, respondents were asked to indicate their gender, age, place of living, employment situation, highest attained degree and voting pattern (non-compulsory question). Subsequently, they were asked whether they would vote for or against Iceland joining the EU, if a referendum would take place today. In a final stage, people who would have voted against EU membership were asked to rank the six statements (and provide other reasons if they wished), whereas people who would have voted in favour of EU membership were asked to rank them according to what they saw as the 'hot topics' in the no-camp.

The survey was conducted between 16 March and 16 April 2015. It was spread throughout the country by email, social media and via the student database of the University of Iceland. In total, 3,308 Icelanders completed the survey, which accounts for 1.01% of the entire Icelandic population.³⁴ For the purpose of analysis, I will make use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and its T-test to prove the

³⁴ "Population 1 January 2015", *Statistics Iceland*, 10 March 2015, retrieved 20 April 2015, <http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Population>.

statistical significance of the outcomes of this survey. For every variable I will investigate whether there is certainty on the 0.05% significance level that the outcomes are correct. When there is a statistically significant outcome, it means that the result of the survey can be generalised to the entire Icelandic population with 95% certainty. In other words: we can be 95% certain that the outcomes represent the thoughts and opinions of the population as a whole.³⁵ In the following tables with the results of the survey, the grey boxes indicate the statistically significant evidence.

General Results

In this first step I will look into the general outcome of the survey, namely the question whether people would vote for or against EU membership. I will investigate whether socio-economic and demographic patterns influence the decision to vote yes or no.

In total, 3,308 people completed the survey. 1,762 of them (or 53.3%) supported EU accession. 1,546 (or 46.7%) opposed membership. This result seems to be at odds with the overall perception, which was confirmed by many surveys in the past, that the population as a whole opposes EU membership.³⁶ This is due to the overrepresentation of respondents from the Capital Region in this survey, as will be explained later on.

The first characteristic investigated was gender (see Table 1). 57.7% of the male respondents would have voted in favour of joining the EU, whereas 50.8% of women supported EU membership. There are two statistically significant outcomes, namely that men tend to vote in favour of EU membership more often than women would, and that female voters would be more likely to vote against EU accession than men. Although on both sides there is a majority in favour EU accession, men are more pro-EU than the female Icelandic population.

³⁵ R. Craparo, "Significance level", in N. Salkind, *Encyclopedia of Measurement and Statistics 3*, Thousand Oaks, SAGE Publications, 2007, pp. 889-891; J. Healy, *The Essentials of Statistics: A Tool for Social Research*, Belmont, Cengage Learning, 2009, pp. 177-205.

³⁶ V. Harðardóttir, *Aðildarviðræður við Evrópusambandið*, Reykjavík, Capacent Gallup, 2014, pp. 1-2.

Table 1: Influence of gender on EU support or opposition

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
For	Count	678	1084	1762
	% within gender	57.7%	50.8%	53.3%
	Stat. signif.	Female		
Against	Count	497	1049	1546
	% within gender	42.3%	49.2%	46.7%
	Stat. signif.	Male		
Total	Count	1175	2133	3,308
	% of total	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%

As Table 2 shows, the age group of 19-34 years is the only category in which a (slight) majority opposes EU membership. In the youngest and the oldest group, there are no big conclusions to be drawn, due to the small number of respondents. However, there is a statistically significant pattern in the other groups. Voters between the age of 35 and 67 are more pro-EU membership than the younger generation (19 to 34 years old). There is a statistically significant result as well in the opposite direction: people between 19 and 34 years old will vote more readily against membership than those between 35 and 67 years old.

Table 2: Influence of age on EU support or opposition

		Age					Total
		18 or y.	19-34	35-54	55-67	68 or older	
For	Count	24	819	734	165	20	1762
	% within age	55.8%	49.6%	55.9%	61.6%	60.6%	53.3%
	Stat. signif.			19-34	19-34		
Against	Count	19	833	578	103	13	1546
	% within age	44.2%	50.4%	44.1%	38.4%	39.4%	46.7%
	Stat. signif.			35-54	55-67		
Total	Count	43	1652	1312	268	33	3308
	% of total	1.3%	49.9%	39.7%	8.1%	1.0%	100.0%

It is expected that people living in the rural areas (that is, every Icelandic region except the Capital Region and the Southern Peninsula³⁷) will tend to follow the no-

³⁷ Dijkstra & Poelman, *op. cit.*

camp.³⁸ According to the survey, 58% in the Capital Region and 50% in the Southern Peninsula support EU accession, whereas in all other regions a majority opposes EU membership. The EU is supported the least in the Northwestern Region (27.3%) which, with 0.58 inhabitants per km², is the least densely populated region of the country.³⁹ If we take the urban area and the rural area as two separate entities, we see that in the densely populated areas 54% of the population supports EU membership, whereas in the rural areas only 38% has positive views on the EU.

Furthermore, as Table 3 shows, there is statistical significance in the fact that respondents in the Capital Region and in the Southern Peninsula support EU membership more than in the rural regions. The opposite is also true for several rural regions; the Northwestern, the Northeastern and the Southern regions all show a higher opposition towards EU accession than people living in the two urban regions. People living in the Icelandic rural areas will oppose membership more than people living in the capital or in the Southern Peninsula, the two only Icelandic regions that have urban characteristics.⁴⁰ The overrepresentation of people living in the Capital Region (73.3% in this survey, whereas in the population it accounts for 62.3%) helps to explain why overall people seem to approve EU membership in this survey, although all previous opinion polls show a different pattern.⁴¹

Table 3: Influence of place of living on EU support or opposition

		Place of living								Total
		Capital Region	Southern Peninsula	Western Region	West-fjords	Northw. Region	Northeast. Region	Eastern Region	Southern Region	
For	Count	1406	83	50	15	18	95	30	65	1762
	% within liv. pl.	58.0%	50.0%	45.9%	34.9%	27.3%	43.6%	46.2%	30.2%	53.3%
	Stat. signif.	NE Reg. NW Reg. S Region	NW Reg. S Region							
Against	Count	1020	83	59	28	48	123	35	150	1546
	% within liv. pl.	44.0%	50.0%	54.1%	65.1%	72.7%	56.4%	53.8%	69.8%	46.7%
	Stat. signif.					C Region S Penins.	C Region S Penins.		C Region S Penins.	
Total	Count	2426	166	109	43	66	218	65	215	3308
	% of total	73.3%	5.0%	3.3%	1.3%	2.0%	6.6%	2.0%	6.5%	100.0%

³⁸ Szczerbiak, *op. cit.*; Fitzmaurice, *op. cit.*

³⁹ Guðjónsdóttir, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰ Dijkstra & Poelman, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Harðardóttir, *op. cit.*

When looking at the differences in the work situation of the Icelanders, we see that a large majority of 71.9% of the people employed in the fisheries or agricultural sectors oppose EU membership. People working in industries also tend to oppose EU accession, whereas there is no clear leading camp when we look at how students and unemployed people would vote.

The survey shows that farmers and fishermen would oppose EU membership more than people working in any other sector, with the exception of industrial workers. Another statistically significant outcome is that people working in the fisheries or agricultural sectors or as workers tend to follow the no-camp, whereas students and people working in the services sector adopt a more pro-EU stance.

Table 4: Influence of employment on EU support or opposition

		Employment							Total
		Fish or agricult.	Worker	Services	Student	Unem-ployed	Retired	No answer	
For	Count	27	138	842	541	59	32	123	1762
	% within empl.	28.1%	44.2%	57.6%	51.2%	50.9%	57.1%	58.6%	53.3%
	Stat. signif.			Fish or agr Worker Student	Fish or agr	Fish or agr	Fish or agr		
Against	Count	69	174	619	516	57	24	87	1546
	% within empl.	71.9%	55.8%	42.4%	48.8%	49.1%	42.9%	41.4%	46.7%
	Stat. signif.	Services Student Unem-ployed Retired	Services		Services				
Total	Count	96	312	1461	1057	116	56	210	3308
	% of total	2.9%	9.4%	44.2%	31.9%	3.6%	1.7%	6.3%	100.0%

It is expected that people who completed higher education would support EU accession, whereas those who did not would tend to oppose it.⁴² The survey supports this hypothesis. People who went on to higher education largely support EU accession, whereas the opposite is true for people who never attained a higher degree. There is also statistical significance in the fact that people with a higher degree support EU membership more than others, and *vice versa* that people who

⁴² E. Mikkel & G. Pridham, "Clinching the 'Return to Europe': The Referendums on EU Accession in Estonia and Latvia", in A. Szczerbiak & P. Taggart (eds.), *EU Enlargement and Referendums*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 171.

did not attain a higher degree always oppose EU accession more than people who did continue their studies.

Table 5: Influence of highest attained degree on EU support or opposition

		Highest attained degree			Total
		Secondary school or lower	Job training	Higher education	
For	Count	115	514	1133	1762
	% within degr.	43.2%	44.4%	60.1%	
	Stat. signif.			Secondary school or lower Job training	
Against	Count	151	644	751	1546
	% within degr.	56.8%	55.6%	39.9%	
	Stat. signif.	Higher education	Higher education		
Total	Count	266	1158	1884	3308
	% of total	8.0%	35.0%	57.0%	

In the survey people were also asked for which political party they would currently vote. During the period the survey was conducted, the Pirate Party was the biggest party in all opinion polls.⁴³ This was reflected in the survey conducted for this research as well. The Pirate Party obtained 30.4%, followed by the Independence Party (12.6%) and the Social Democratic Alliance (11.1%).

Cue theorists argue that people tend to follow the lines of the parties they vote for.⁴⁴ According to this stance, people voting for the Independence Party, the Progressive Party (PP) or the Left-Green Movement (LGM) would tend to follow the no-camp, whereas people supporting the Social Democratic Alliance (SDA) and Bright Future (BF) support EU accession. The survey confirms this argument: both in the IP as well as in the PP over 85% of voters oppose EU membership. On the other hand, we can see overwhelming support for EU membership on the side of the SDA and the BF, with respectively 87.2% and 74.3% of voters supporting the idea of joining the EU. The only

⁴³ K. Ingvarsson, "The Pirates are now Iceland's most popular political party", *Morgunblaðið*, 19 March 2015, retrieved 21 April 2015, http://www.mbl.is/english/politics_and_society/2015/03/19/the_pirates_are_now_iceland_s_most_popular_politica; Westcott, Lucy, "Pirate Party Is Now Iceland's Biggest Political Party", *Newsweek*, 19 March 2015, retrieved 21 April 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/pirate-party-now-icelands-biggest-political-party-315068>.

⁴⁴ L. Hooghe & G. Marks, "Calculation, Community and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration", *European Union Politics*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2005, p. 420; M. Steenbergen & B. Jones, "Modeling Multilevel Data Structures", *American Journal of Political Science*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2002, pp. 218-237.

party that does not fit into the cue theory is the LGM. The party opposes EU membership,⁴⁵ but a majority of its voters ignores the party line. It is also interesting that a big majority of the Pirate Party's electorate supports joining the EU. The Pirate Party is the only Icelandic party which has no stance on the EU issue and rather supports the idea that the people should decide for themselves in a referendum. From the survey, it can thus be concluded that the Pirate Party's electorate is rather in favour of EU accession.

Table 6: Influence of voting patterns on EU support or opposition

		Party								Total
		IP	PP	SDA	LGM	BF	Pirate	Others	No answ.	
For	Count	58	13	321	173	228	639	117	213	1762
	% within party	13.9%	11.4%	87.2%	56.4%	74.3%	63.5%	44.3%	40.6%	53.3%
	Stat. signif.			IP PP LGM BF Pirate	IP PP	IP PP LGM Pirate	IP PP			
Against	Count	359	101	47	134	79	367	147	312	1546
	% within party	86.1%	88.6%	12.8%	43.6%	25.7%	36.5%	55.7%	59.4%	46.7%
	Stat. signif.	SDA LGM BF Pirate	SDA LGM BF Pirate		SDA BF	SDA	SDA BF			
Total	Count	417	114	368	307	307	1006	264	525	3308
	% of total	12.6%	3.4%	11.1%	9.3%	9.3%	30.4%	8.0%	15.9%	100.0%

In sum, the first major conclusion of this research is that women tend to oppose EU membership more than male voters. Voters between the age of 35 and 67 are more pro-EU membership than the younger generation (19 to 34 years old). This contradicts the existent literature: it was expected that older people, who still felt closer to the struggle for independence until 1944, would be more vigilant in preserving the country's independence. However, the number of respondents over 67 years old was too low to draw significant conclusions on this subject.

When it comes to the place of living, the original hypothesis was confirmed with statistical significance: people living in the urban areas (Capital Region and Southern

⁴⁵ General Assembly of the Left-Green Movement, *Stefna Vinstrihreyfingarinnar – græns framboðs í utanríkismálum*, Reykjavík, Vinstrihreyfingin - grænt framboð, 2014, pp. 2-7.

Peninsula) support EU membership, whereas people who live in the countryside (all other regions) oppose it. Furthermore, the survey also showed evidence of the hypothesis that farmers, fishermen and industrial workers oppose EU membership, while it was also confirmed that people working in the services sector and students support it. A similar pattern emerges when it comes to the highest attained degree of education: people who obtained a university degree support EU membership, while the others tend to reject it. Finally, the cue theory was confirmed with the exception of the Left-Green Movement (where the party opposes, but its electorate supports membership); people voting for the Independence Party or for the Progressive Party oppose EU membership, while those voting for the Social Democratic Alliance or for Bright Future support it.

The following part is dedicated to explaining the reasoning behind opposing EU membership.

Explaining the No Vote

First, the population as a whole will be analysed. Subsequently, the analysis will follow the same structure as before and reveal to what extent socio-economic and demographic patterns influence what people consider to be the main reason behind their anti-EU stance.

As shown in Table 7, the idea that agriculture and fisheries form the biggest stumbling block for Iceland joining the EU has been confirmed by the survey. 38.0% of the respondents put the issue on top of their list. It is also interesting to see that the transfer of sovereignty is seen as unbeneficial for Iceland: 34.0% name this reason in the first place, which makes it the second most important issue. The third most important reason (the euro is not an added value for the Icelandic economy) only obtained 12.4% of the votes, followed by the EEA argument (10.7%), the lack of an identity connection (3.4%) and the whaling issue (1.4%).

In general, we thus see a big gap between the arguments about agriculture, fisheries and sovereignty (accounting together for 72.0%) and the rest. As stated before, the lack of a connection with Europe and whaling (because of its highly symbolic character and lack of economic importance) are seen as identity issues, whereas the other four reasons are considered cost-benefit issues. No identity connection and

whaling together only make up for 4.8%. The main conclusion thus is that a rational cost-benefit analysis prevails when people make up their mind on whether or not to support EU membership.

When splitting the results into male and female respondents, we can see that the order of relevance of the six issues did not change. However, it seems that women (40.5%) attach a greater importance to the agriculture and fisheries argument than men (32.8%). Interesting here as well is that the identity and the whaling issues are in the last two spots for both sides. This again confirms the dominance of the cost-benefit analysis Icelanders make when taking a side in the EU debate.

Table 7: Influence of gender on main reason behind anti-EU stance

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Agriculture and fisheries	Count	163	425	588
	% within gender	32.8%	40.5%	38.0%
	Stat. signif.		Men	
Euro	Count	64	128	192
	% within gender	12.9%	12.2%	12.4%
	Stat. signif.			
EEA	Count	64	102	166
	% within gender	12.9%	9.7%	10.7%
	Stat. signif.			
No transfer of sovereignty	Count	178	348	526
	% within gender	35.8%	33.2%	34.0%
	Stat. signif.			
No identity connection	Count	18	34	52
	% within gender	3.6%	3.2%	3.4%
	Stat. signif.			
No more whaling	Count	10	12	22
	% within gender	2.0%	1.1%	1.4%
	Stat. signif.			
Total	Count	497	1049	1546
	% of total	32.1%	67.9%	100.0%

With regard to age, the dominance of the agriculture and fisheries argument and of the sovereignty argument is emphasised. The idea that a transfer of sovereignty would not be in the interest of the country seems to reside more in the middle-age groups. There is statistical significance that they would give greater importance to this argument than the younger generations. As the least important argument, whaling does not catch the attention of the Icelandic public.

Table 8: Influence of age on main reason behind anti-EU stance

		Age					Total
		18 or y.	19-34	35-54	55-67	68 or o.	
Agriculture and fisheries	Count	9	330	202	40	7	588
	% within age	47.4%	39.6%	34.9%	38.8%	53.8%	38.0%
	Stat. signif.						
Euro	Count	3	119	65	5	0	192
	% within age	15.8%	14.3%	11.2%	4.9%	0.0%	12.4%
	Stat. signif.						
EEA	Count	2	89	64	9	2	166
	% within age	10.5%	10.7%	11.1%	8.7%	15.4%	10.7%
	Stat. signif.						
No transfer of sovereignty	Count	1	255	219	47	4	526
	% within age	5.3%	30.6%	37.9%	45.6%	30.8%	34.0%
	Stat. signif.			18 or y. 19-34	18 or y. 19-34		
No identity connection	Count	3	26	21	2	0	52
	% within age	15.8%	3.1%	3.6%	1.9%	0.0%	3.3%
	Stat. signif.		19-34 35-54 55-67				
No more whaling	Count	1	14	7	0	0	22
	% within age	5.3%	1.7%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%
	Stat. signif.						
Total	Count	19	833	578	103	13	1546
	% of total	1.2%	53.9%	37.4%	6.7%	0.8%	100.0%

The expected dominance of the fishing and agriculture argument in the rural areas was confirmed.⁴⁶ In all six rural regions, the fishing argument is the most popular one: 47.5% of the population puts it on top of their list, compared to only 40.9% in the Capital Region and in the Southern Peninsula. Although all regions of Iceland see fishing and agriculture as important, the value of these issues is notably higher in the rural areas.

⁴⁶ Szczerbiak, *op. cit.*; Fitzmaurice, *op. cit.*

Table 9: Influence of place of living on main reason behind anti-EU stance

		Place of living								Total
		Capital Region	Southern Peninsula	Western Region	West-fjords	Northw. Region	Northeast Region	Eastern Region	Southern Region	
Agriculture and fisheries	Count	344	40	27	16	21	53	17	70	588
	% w. liv. pl.	33.7%	48.2%	45.8%	57.1%	43.8%	43.1%	48.6%	46.7%	38.0%
	Stat. signif.									
Euro	Count	138	5	5	2	5	17	4	16	192
	% w. liv. pl.	13.5%	6.0%	8.5%	7.1%	10.4%	13.8%	11.4%	10.7%	12.4%
	Stat. signif.									
EEA	Count	115	7	6	4	2	18	2	12	166
	% w. liv. pl.	11.3%	8.4%	10.2%	14.3%	4.2%	14.6%	5.7%	8.0%	10.7%
	Stat. signif.									
No transfer of sov.	Count	373	26	15	5	19	32	11	45	526
	% w. liv. pl.	36.6%	31.3%	25.4%	17.9%	39.6%	26.0%	31.4%	30.0%	34.0%
	Stat. signif.									
No identity connection	Count	39	3	2	1	1	3	0	3	52
	% w. liv. pl.	3.8%	3.6%	3.4%	3.6%	2.1%	2.4%	0.0%	2.0%	3.3%
	Stat. signif.									
No more whaling	Count	11	2	4	0	0	0	1	4	22
	% w. liv. pl.	1.1%	2.4%	6.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.9%	2.7%	1.4%
	Stat. signif.			Capital Region						
Total	Count	1020	83	59	28	48	123	35	150	1546
	% of total	66.0%	5.4%	3.8%	1.8%	3.1%	7.9%	2.3%	9.7%	100.0%

As was expected from the literature, the highest percentage of people in a sector who put forward agriculture and fishing as the main reason behind their anti-EU stance can be found in the group of people working in that particular sector.⁴⁷ The biggest difference in the order of relevance is seen in the group of unemployed people; 42.1% of the respondents say it is not in the interest of the country to transfer sovereignty to Brussels, while fishing and agriculture comes second with only 24.6%. It is noteworthy to see how (as seen in previous analyses) the agriculture and sovereignty arguments dominate the general debate.

⁴⁷ Szczerbiak, *op. cit.*

Table 10: Influence of employment on main reason behind anti-EU stance

		Employment							Total
		Fish or agric.	Worker	Services	Student	Unem-ployed	Retired	No answer	
Agriculture and fisheries	Count	32	67	253	181	14	10	31	588
	% within empl.	46.4%	38.5%	40.9%	35.1%	24.6%	41.7%	35.6%	38.0%
	Stat. signif.								
Euro	Count	5	16	72	81	10	1	7	192
	% within empl.	7.2%	9.2%	11.6%	15.7%	17.5%	4.2%	8.0%	12.4%
	Stat. signif.								
EEA	Count	5	15	67	59	6	3	11	166
	% within empl.	7.2%	8.6%	10.8%	11.4%	10.5%	12.5%	12.6%	10.7%
	Stat. signif.								
No transfer of sovereignty	Count	24	67	200	168	24	10	33	526
	% within empl.	34.8%	38.5%	32.3%	31.9%	42.1%	41.7%	37.9%	34.0%
	Stat. signif.								
No identity connection	Count	2	5	20	21	3	0	1	52
	% within empl.	2.9%	2.9%	3.2%	4.1%	5.3%	0.0%	1.1%	3.3%
	Stat. signif.								
No more whaling	Count	1	4	7	6	0	0	4	22
	% within empl.	1.4%	2.3%	1.1%	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	4.6%	1.4%
	Stat. signif.								
Total	Count	69	174	619	516	57	24	87	1546
	% of total	4.5%	11.2%	40.0%	33.4%	3.7%	1.6%	5.6%	100.0%

When it comes to the highest attained degree of education, there are no big differences among the various groups. People who did not complete higher education seem to give slightly more importance to the agriculture and fishing argument. There is statistical evidence that lower educated people give more importance to the identity argument than others.

Table 11: Influence of highest attained degree on main reason behind anti-EU stance

		Highest attained degree			Total
		Secondary school or lower	Job training	Higher education	
Agriculture and fisheries	Count	61	260	267	588
	% within degree	40.4%	40.4%	35.6%	38.0%
	Stat. signif.				
Euro	Count	15	77	100	192
	% within degree	9.9%	12.0%	13.3%	12.4%
	Stat. signif.				
EEA	Count	12	59	95	166
	% within degree	7.9%	9.2%	12.6%	10.7%
	Stat. signif.				
No transfer of sovereignty	Count	50	213	263	526
	% within degree	33.1%	33.1%	35.0%	34.0%
	Stat. signif.				
No identity connection	Count	10	26	16	52
	% within degree	6.6%	4.0%	2.1%	3.3%
	Stat. signif.	Higher education			
No more whaling	Count	3	9	10	22
	% within degree	2.0%	1.4%	1.3%	1.4%
	Stat. signif.				
Total	Count	151	644	751	1546
	% of total	9.8%	41.7%	48.5%	100.0%

When looking only at the no-voters in every party, we see that they all put the farmers and fishermen on top, except the Left-Green Movement. With 43.5% and 43.6% respectively, the number of the IP and the PP supporters is substantially above the average of 38.0%. With regard to the second most important reason, it is worth noticing that the electorates of the SDA (23.4%) and of BF (22.8%) rate the euro argument higher than the voters of the IP (8.6%) and of the PP (8.9%), the two governing parties.

Table 12: Influence of voting patterns on main reason behind anti-EU stance

		Party								Total
		IP	PP	SDA	LGM	BF	Pirate	Others	No answer	
Agriculture and fisheries	Count	156	44	21	41	33	118	53	22	588
	% within party	43.5%	43.6%	44.7%	30.6%	41.8%	32.2%	36.1%	39.1%	38.0%
	Stat. signif.	Pirate								
Euro	Count	31	9	11	14	18	53	17	39	192
	% within party	8.6%	8.9%	23.4%	10.4%	22.8%	14.4%	11.6%	12.5%	12.4%
	Stat. signif.			IP		IP				
EEA	Count	28	7	2	21	7	49	18	34	166
	% within party	7.8%	6.9%	4.3%	15.7%	8.9%	13.4%	12.2%	10.9%	10.7%
	Stat. signif.									
No transfer of sovereignty	Count	138	38	12	52	14	118	47	107	526
	% within party	38.4%	37.6%	25.5%	38.8%	17.7%	32.2%	32.0%	34.3%	34.0%
	Stat. signif.	BF			BF					
No identity connection	Count	4	3	1	5	5	17	10	7	52
	% within party	1.1%	3.0%	2.1%	3.7%	6.3%	4.6%	6.8%	2.2%	3.3%
	Stat. signif.									
No more whaling	Count	2	0	0	1	2	12	2	3	22
	% within party	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	2.5%	3.3%	1.4%	1.0%	1.4%
	Stat. signif.									
Total	Count	359	101	47	134	79	367	312	147	1546
	% of total	23.2%	6.5%	3.1%	8.7%	5.1%	23.7%	9.5%	20.2%	100.0%

People also had the option to give a seventh explanation (or more) if they desired. From the 1546 respondents who opposed EU membership, 349 did so (22.6%). Interestingly, 91 respondents mentioned that Iceland simply is too small to have its voice heard in the EU. Since this issue is closely linked to the option that a transfer of sovereignty would not be in the interest of the country, it can be argued that the importance of this statement is being emphasised by this outcome. Another option that was often mentioned (62 times) was the fact that the EU is seen as being weak and unstable and therefore it was not desirable for Iceland to join.

Table 13: Overview of additional reasons mentioned by respondents in the no camp

Count	Reason	% of other reasons	% of total no voters
91	Iceland is too small to influence decision-making	26.1%	5.9%
62	The EU is weak and instable	17.8%	4.0%
57	Lack of transparency and corruption in EU	16.3%	3.7%
47	I want to see the final deal first before I decide	13.5%	3.0%
34	Iceland should protect its natural resources (e.g. aluminium, geoth. power)	9.7%	2.2%
17	Joining the EU leads to more immigration	4.9%	1.1%
14	The EU is being dominated by Germany and other big member states	4.0%	0.9%
12	Joining the EU leads to higher prices	3.4%	0.8%
8	Iceland would become a net contributor	2.3%	0.5%
5	I am against joining the CSDP and CFSP	1.4%	0.3%
2	Lack of human rights protection in the EU	0.6%	0.1%
		349	1546

In sum, the hypothesis put forward by the literature that protecting fish and crops are the main reason why Icelanders oppose EU membership was confirmed in the survey. 38.0% of respondents chose it as their top reason. The idea that the transfer of sovereignty would harm Icelandic interests was put in second place (34.0%). More subjective, identity-based issues (no identity connection and whales) are ranked in the last two spots. The main conclusion thus is that a rational cost-benefit analysis prevails when people make up their mind.

When looking into the socio-economic and demographic patterns, there are also visible differences. It is statistically significantly that women put more emphasis on fisheries and agriculture than men. The hypothesis that people living in the rural areas see this as the main stumbling block was confirmed on the 0.05 level as well. Respondents from the urban areas put it in first or second place too, which proves the nation-wide importance of the issue. The transfer of sovereignty is more important for people who attended higher education. Finally, the electorate of the two governing parties is dominated by the fear for the future of fishermen and farmers, although all parties emphasise the importance of this issue.

Conclusion

The main focus of this research was not finding out whether it would be beneficial or not for Iceland to join the EU, but rather to clarify why the population opposes it. The

literature review helped to establish a list of possible explanations. These were then put to the Icelandic public in a survey, which was filled out by 3308 Icelanders or 1.01% of the entire population. Thanks to this result, it was possible to establish several outcomes that, because of their statistical significance, could be generalised to the entire population. When reviewing the simple question whether or not people support EU membership, the findings from the survey are:

- Women oppose EU membership more than men.
- Voters between the age of 35 and 67 years are more pro-EU membership than the younger generation (19 to 34 years old).
- People living in the urban areas (Capital Region and Southern Peninsula) support EU membership, whereas people who live on the countryside (all other regions) oppose it.
- Farmers, fishermen and industrial workers oppose EU membership, while people working in the services sector and students support EU accession.
- People who obtained a university degree tend to support EU membership, while those who did not attend higher education tend to reject it.
- People voting for the Independence Party or for the Progressive Party oppose EU membership, whereas those voting for the Social Democratic Alliance or for Bright Future support it.

The fisheries and agriculture argument dominates the debate: 38% of the respondents chose this as their most important argument against joining the EU. With 34%, the opinion that transferring sovereignty to Brussels would not be in the interest of the country was ranked second. This argument was emphasised by the many respondents who, as an additional argument, stated that Iceland was too small to make its voice heard in the EU. The two subjective, identity-based issues (no identity connection with the European mainland and being forced to give up the tradition of whaling) are ranked at the bottom. The main conclusion thus is that a rational cost-benefit analysis prevails when people decide on whether or not to support EU accession: the fact that people do not support EU membership is primarily because it would not be beneficial for them, not because of vaguer, identity-based issues.

When looking into the socio-economic and demographic patterns of those opposing EU membership, it was possible to detect several statistically significant results from the survey that can be generalised to the entire anti-EU population as well:

- Female voters put greater emphasis on the fishing and agriculture argument than male voters.
- 35-67 years-old no-voters give greater importance to the negative impact of a transfer of sovereignty to Brussels than younger anti-EU voters.
- People who never attended higher education or vocational training put more emphasis on the fact that there is no identity connection with the European mainland than highly educated people.
- The electorate of the Independence Party finds the fisheries and agriculture argument more important than the electorate of the Pirate Party.

During the time this paper was written, many changes in the Icelandic EU story occurred. The Icelandic government decided to withdraw its application, and thus the accession of the country to the EU is indefinitely postponed. Nevertheless, some policy recommendations for the European Union can be formulated. The main issue that renders the Icelanders reluctant towards EU membership is the protection of their fish and crops. The EU should make clear that joining the CAP, and especially the CFP, should not be harmful for the Icelandic economy. It should also make clear that decision-making power is a vital difference between EU and EEA membership (that is, 'fax democracy'), and how a country with less than 330,000 inhabitants can make sure its interests are protected in a block of over 500 million people. On a wider scale, a strong and stable euro obviously would help the yes-campaign as well. However, for now, both sides seem happy with the *status quo*. The Icelandic accession prospects are back to the state they used to have before 2008, namely frozen; a situation that seems to suit a country called Iceland quite well.

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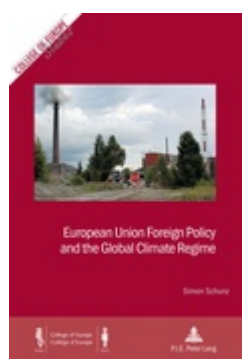
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