

COST
Domain Committee “**Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health**”

COST Action IS0806
Start Date (05/05/2009)

The True European Voter: A Strategy for Analysing the Prospects of European Electoral Democracy that includes the West, the South and the East of the Continent

**MONITORING
PROGRESS REPORT**

Reporting Period: 01/05/2010 – 30/04/2011

This Report is presented to the relevant Domain Committee.
It contains three parts:

- I. Management Report*** prepared by the COST Office/Grant Holder
- II. Scientific Report*** prepared by the Chair of the Management Committee of the Action
- III. Previous versions of the Scientific Report; i.e., part II of past reporting periods***

The report is a “cumulative” report, i.e. it is updated annually and covers the entire period of the Action.

Confidentiality: the documents will be made available to the public via the COST Action web page except for chapter *II.D. Self evaluation*.

Based on the monitoring results, the COST Office will decide on the following year’s budget allocation.

Executive summary (max.250 words): The *True European Voter* was again very successful in the second year of the Action. The number of co-operating countries has been again extended during that period, and with 25 parties the Action is now integrating almost every national election study in Europe. The micro-data codebook has been finalised during a second Think Tank Meeting of the Action in Milano in December 2010. On the basis of more than twenty country-specific micro-data reports, members of the data-working group have first elaborated a harmonisation strategy for every variable that will be included in the database, and these strategies have then been revised and streamlined during the Milano Think Tank Meeting. The Action continued to integrate a great number of young scholars, both male and female, so that the proportions of Early Stage Researchers and more advanced scholars are almost equal. The second of four planned so-called “Winterschools”, conducted in February 2011 in Warsaw, provided advanced methodological training to some 35 young scholars, both from within the Action and the Marie Curie Initial Training Network (ITN) on “Electoral Democracy” (ELECDEM) funded under the 7th Framework Programme of the EC. The Action reaches out to participating national election studies and helps to institutionalise them.

I. Management Report prepared by the COST Office/Grant Holder



I.A. COST Action Fact Sheet

COST Action IS0806 “The True European Voter: A Strategy for Analysing the Prospects of European Electoral Democracy that includes the West, the South and the East of the Continent”

• **Domain: Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health**

• **Action details:**

CSO Approval: 24/11/2008

End date: 04/05/2013

Entry into force: 26/01/2009

Extension: *unknown*

• **Objectives**

The main objective of the Action is to increase the material preconditions and the scholarly competence for analyzing variations in the effectiveness of electoral democracy in Europe across countries and over time. Preconditions will be strengthened by the identification, adaption and integration of the variety of national specific data bases on electoral behaviour. Theoretical and methodological capabilities will be improved by the provision of recurring training opportunities for young scholars as well as the organisation of regular scientific exchange of all scholars involved about the findings of the comparative analyses.

• **Parties:** *list of countries and date of acceptance*

Austria (10/06/2009)	Ireland (25/11/2009)
Belgium (24/03/2009)	Italy (26/01/2009)
Bulgaria (17/03/2009)	Netherlands (03/03/2009)
Croatia (16/10/2009)	Norway (09/03/2009)
Denmark (01/04/2009)	Poland (27/01/2009)
Estonia (12/10/2009)	Portugal (23/03/2009)
Finland (25/11/2009)	Romania (30/09/2010)
France (10/06/2009)	Slovenia (31/07/2009)
Germany (26/01/2009)	Spain (26/01/2009)
Greece (11/03/2009)	Sweden (30/09/2010)
Hungary (26/01/2009)	Switzerland (30/09/2010)
Iceland (31/01/2011)	United Kingdom (26/01/2009)

• **Intentions to accept:** Lithuania

• **Other participants:** Steven Weldon (Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada)

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I.C. Overview activities and expenditure

2010-05-31 to 2011-05-30 Budget

Total Action Budget: 125,000.00 EUR

Remaining Action Commitment: 34,590.03 EUR (30,170.25 EUR: remaining science expenditure) and 4,419.78 EUR :remaining FSAC)

Meetings

Meeting Type	Date	Place							Cost	Total
Core Group Meeting (Title: "2 nd Steering Committee Meeting")	04/06/2010 to 06/06/2010	University for National and World Economy, Sofia (BG)							6667.95 EUR	
3 rd Management Committee Meeting (Title: Management Committee Meeting- Working Group Meeting)	14/10/2010 to 17/10/2010	Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Lisbon [PT]							35024.11 EUR	
										41692.06 EUR

STSM

Beneficiary	Date	Place							Cost	Total
Dr Eftichia Teperoglou	25/04/2010 to 31/05/2010	MZES (Mannheim, Germany)							2500.00 EUR	
Professor Radoslaw Markowski	21/09/2010 to 26/09/2010	Universidad Autonoma de Madrid (Madrid, Spain)							1020.00 EUR	
										3520.00 EUR

Workshops

Title	Date		Place						Cost	Total
	From	To	From	To						
										0

General Support Grants

Beneficiary	Date								Cost	Total
										0

Schools

Title	Date	Place							Cost	Total
2nd Think Tank Meeting: Integrating the Micro-Data Base of the True European Voter	13/12/2010 to 16/12/2010	Dipartimento di Studi Politici e Sociali, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milan [IT]							10891.16 EUR	
2nd Winter School on Methodological Issues in Comparative Electoral Analysis	07/02/2011 to 10/02/2011	Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Warsaw [PL]							22754.53 EUR	
										33645.69 EUR

Dissemination

Title	Date	Place							Cost	Total
										0

Others

Action Total : 78857.75 EUR

II. Scientific Report

II.A. Innovative networking

At the end of year two of our Action, what progress has been made as compared to when we wrote our first years' progress report a year ago? On the data and methods side, we are still in the process of putting our data together. This is a process that proves to be harder than all of us had expected it to be. Despite of this, we believe we have now solved most of the intriguing problems. What were those problems like? There are three general roots from which our problems of data harmonisation and integration sprang:

a. One root of problems was that study instrumentations of voter surveys vary greatly over time within the participating countries and, of course, also and perhaps even more so between them. One result of this is the Swiss Cheese Phenomenon (SCP), an acronym for the fact that there will be a lot of missing data in the resulting data structure simply because not everything has been asked all the time and everywhere. This missing data problem can perhaps easiest be handled. Another, arguably somewhat graver problem stems from the fact that the instruments that are used for measuring one and the same theoretical construct – say authoritarian values – vary within and between countries. Here we had to agree on a few routines which are capable of identifying the common meaning of disparate indicators (one of which turned out to be basic factor analysis).

b. Another root of problems was that the structure of party competition varies within and between the participating countries, as does the number of “relevant” parties participating in an election. The statistical-analytical puzzle that needed to be solved was how we would be able to analyse voter reactions to different choice sets *as if these choice sets were the same* (in order to be able to directly compare the findings). The method of our choice here is to analyse *stacked* (by party) and *pooled* (over time) and *merged* (across countries) data sets with a conditional logit algorithm (because the main dependent variable is a dichotomy (with a value of 1 if the respondent voted for that given party and the value of 0 if he or she did not vote for that party)).

One important step in our collective enterprise of national election studies' data harmonisation and integration, therefore, was the development of a tool that fulfils the function of stacking the data so that the unit of analysis is no longer the individual respondent but his or her party evaluation. This task was accomplished with the support of Lorenzo de Sio (member of the Methods Working Group) who programmed a STATA algorithm which, when applied correctly, does the stacking automatically.

c. A third root of problems, finally, was that our theoretical focus, as we explained in the progress report of the first year, is on the context dependency of the determinants of vote choices. This implies that we need to analyse the elements of the vote function in their interaction with relevant context dimensions, and posed the question how we can best add context to our observations of individual attitudes and behaviours. Here it turned out that our strategy of constructing a stacked and pooled and merged micro-database is actually quite advantageous for adding context characteristics at different levels – the party level (e.g. party size), the election level (e.g. polarization, or the state of the economy), and the country level (e.g. the electoral system).

Most of these – not least conceptual – problems are now solved, and the hard work of actual data harmonisation and integration has started (which is mostly shouldered by the young scholars involved in the Action).

Another major achievement is that the sub-group responsible for the macro-data collection has prepared an enormous set of macro indicators, specifying the social (e.g. modernization), economic (e.g. GDP growth), and political (e.g. regime support) context

dimensions which are expected to affect the “vote function” – i.e. the relative weight of micro-level predictors of electoral participation and vote choice. Only few additional indicators should be elaborated (e.g. the creation of the index of populism) and the final version of the TEV macro-data will be available. Furthermore, another topic for further discussion is the integration of the macro data to the TEV micro data set. For this aim, a small Think Tank Meeting on the macro-data will be organized in May 2011 in Trento. It will bring together the young scholars of the sub-group of the TEV macro-indicators and some other members of the data and methods working groups.

Another innovative aspect of knowledge resulting from COST networking through the Action is coming out from the Methods Working Group. The Winterschools of the COST Action ISO806 are a glaring success. Furthermore, this Working Group in collaboration with a scientific committee prepared the outline of The First Scientific Conference of the Action “*The state of the art of comparative electoral research*” and both the structure of the event and the substantive topics and sessions are further elaborated. It has been scheduled to circulate the call for papers to the wider scientific community at the beginning of May 2011.

But the Data Working Group, which often operates in close co-operation with the Methods Working Group, is not the only one. There is also the History Working Group which has made considerable progress over the year. New members have joined the group and last October in Lisbon its leaders presented the new work strategy of this WG and how to implement it. The group decided to deliver a volume and its provisional title is “Electoral Research in Europe: Is there a True European Voter?” They made considerable progress on the draft on the contents of the volume; it was agreed that this volume will contain four different sections: a) The national traditions in electoral research, b) The intellectual, theoretical and paradigmatic orientations, c) The results and, d) The conclusions on the impact of electoral research. The “lead authors” for the particular chapters have already been identified and Radoslaw Markowski and José Ramon Montero produced a background paper for this volume. A meeting of this group will be convened very soon in Madrid (27-28 April 2011) and it is devoted to the finalization of the ideas concerning both particular chapters (and preferably also selection of collaborators, co-authors of the chapters) and the volume as a whole.

With regard to tangible medium term socio-economic impacts achieved or expected from our Action, the situation of political science in general and electoral studies in particular has not changed since the last report. According to many accounts, political science is the science of democracy, not the science of economy. We would therefore expect from our Action insights in and support for the functioning of democracy rather than economic benefits (which, however, could we realise them, would be perfectly welcome).

What has changed, or rather developed, are our perspectives on spin-off research initiatives – research proposals directed to European institutions and to national research funding agencies – that may result from our TEV co-operation.

On the European level, we now consider to develop a research infrastructure proposal for the 7th framework programme, with the purpose to integrate the European Election Studies and the National Election Studies data bases. Deadline of the FP7 call is November 2011. We are currently exploring whether we – NES’s and EES’s – are eligible under the category “infrastructure”.

Also high on our agenda is the perspective of an ERIC (=European Research Infrastructure Consortium) on Electoral Research, possibly located at the EUI in Florence, which would also combine future and past research into second-order European Parliament elections and national first order elections. This one has become somewhat less promising after the ESFRI assembly seems to have closed the “roadmap” (the list of prioritised projects) and is told to rather seem to cut the number of infrastructures down than to increase it. However, members

of the ESFRI working group for the Social Sciences and Humanities, listening to our report at a meeting this February in Brussels, were very positive and willing to support our aspirations.

Another part of these infrastructural activities that aim at improving the informational basis of comparative electoral research is the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS). In the framework of this project, 24 surveys of candidates standing for office in national first order elections have been conducted over the past four and a half years, in 17 mostly European countries (the non-European members of the study are Australia and New Zealand). An application has been submitted to the British Academy to support the convening of a stock tacking and planning conference of the participants of this comparative project at the University of Manchester, in November 2011. One important part of the agenda of this meeting will be the preparation of a research agenda and the development of a micro-level questionnaire for the second wave of surveys during the years 2012-2017.

In addition, there are various national-specific spin-offs of our TEV Action under way, some of which we do know of and some of which we may not yet be informed about. What we know about is the planning of a continuous Greek national election study to be institutionalised at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the preparation of which had been greatly supported by the recruitment of the Scientific Secretary of our Action as a (newly elected) member of the political science department of that university. There is also an effort under way by members of our COST Action to “modernise” the organisation of the British Election Study (BES) and to prepare a co-operative study proposal for the ESRC regarding the 2015 election. Another effort is taken by the Belgian members of our COST Action to integrate the Flemish and Walloon datasets. Last but not least, the Swedish and the Norwegian TEV-team have indicated that they are currently preparing a national research proposal which seeks funding for the enormous workload which they in particular are facing regarding the harmonisation of their long series of election studies with the standards that have been developed by our COST Action the “True European Voter”.

I.B. Inter-disciplinary networking

We have sociologists and economists participating in our Action, which was already very helpful in particular in the process of the definition of relevant context dimensions and the identification of suitable indicators for those. The most important advice and support however comes from experts in mathematics and statistics regarding the appropriate methodology of data set preparation and data analysis. While this is a general trend in the empirically oriented social and political sciences, it is particularly true for a project that sets out to analyse of “generic” electoral behaviour in some 250 elections spread over 25 countries and roughly half a century and, moreover, analyse this in such a way that a multiplicity of relevant context dimensions are taken into account.

II.C. New networking

At the end of year two of COST Action IS0806, the total number of participating parties (countries) is twenty-five (25). Lithuania is the latest country to join the Action, increasing the number of the participant countries by one in comparison to the end of the first reporting year. With 25 parties the Action is integrating almost every tradition on national election study in Europe. Nevertheless, we continue our efforts and initiatives in order to persuade additional parties to join the Action: The Chair of the Action contacted colleagues in Luxemburg, while the Scientific Secretary did the same in Cyprus. Furthermore, the number of members participating in the three Working Groups of the Action has increased. Altogether, some 61 European electoral researchers are part of the Action in different roles (Management Committee, three Working Groups and Advisory Board). In addition, probably the same number again of junior researchers, PhD students and the like are contributing to the Actions agenda. This number of individual participants involved in the Action work will be

increased as the actual data harmonisation and integration has now started. Some specialists from other disciplines might join the Action in cases where their particular expertise will be required to achieve the research objectives. An example here is the support of a statistician in the task of harmonising datasets that have been generated by different sampling strategies. The MC and WGs members of this Action continue to encourage junior researchers to work with them on each national laborious set of variables which is collected so far from each country and which data integration work seems unique in the history of electoral studies.

Gender balance & involvement of Early Stage Researchers in the Action

This COST Action aims at a gender balance in all its activities, the Management and the Steering Committee place this as a standard item on all their agendas. Moreover, as one main objective of the Action is to increase the scholarly competence of European electoral researchers, both methodologically and conceptually through recurring opportunities for training and exchange, the Action is committed to especially involve early-stage researchers (ESRs). This item is also being placed as a standard item on all MC agendas. The percentages of female participants and of early stage researcher are as follows:

Gender balance among MC and WG members: 77 % men and 23% women;

Gender balance among ESRs: 56%men and 44% women;

Gender balance altogether: 66 % men and 34 % women

ESR participation in the Action: 59% (see annex 1 for a detailed list of all known ESRs involved in the Action, which is updated compared to last year). It should be noted that this figure denotes a fifteen percent increase in relation to last year.

Furthermore, strong emphasis is given on increasing the provision of recurring opportunities for training and exchange for young scholars (both early-stage researchers and PhD students and research assistants). It is expected to yield a Europe-wide network of well-trained and competitive young scholars. The second Winter School on “Methodological Issues in Comparative Electoral Analysis” was organized at the Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities, from 7th to 10th February 2011. At the second Winter School, some of the ESRs involved in the Action participated. Another innovative form of networking is enabled by COST in the organisational form of Think Tank Meetings. The Action convened two of them; the first took place in Mannheim from the 16th to 21st May 2010 and the second one in Milan from 13th to 16th December 2010. It is planned to convene one smaller Think Tank meeting on the TEV macro-data from 13th to 15th May in Trento.

During the second year of the Action, one Short-Term Scientific Mission (STSM) has been carried out thus far. There is an expectation that the applications for STSMs will increase in the two coming weeks (before the end of the second year of the Action) due to the recent circulation of a detailed schedule for exchange visits, which aims at those members of the national-TEV integration teams who need help and guidance on the process of the data integration. The host institutions are: MZES (Mannheim) under the supervision of Hermann Schmitt, Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca Sociale, Università degli Studi di Trento (Italy) under the supervision of Cristiano Vezzoni and the European University Institute in Florence under the supervision of Lorenzo de Sio.

Involvement of researchers from outside of COST Countries

Regarding the non-COST country participation in the framework of this Action, the Management Committee approved an application from Canada – Dr Steven Weldon (Director, Centre for Public Opinion and Political Representation and Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science Simon Fraser University) – for participation as a Non-Cost

country. Steven Weldon will contribute to the micro-data integration of the True European Voter and he collaborates with MC members of the Action. An example is that he received funding to invite Hans-Dieter Klingemann (MC member from Germany) to Vancouver for a visit and collaboration.

Publications

In addition to what we said at this point in last years' report, "TEV specific" publications have been progressing over the reporting period. One example of this is the draft of an introductory chapter for the major analytic book of the Action, to be edited by Schmitt and Segatti. However, since the integrated data set is still incomplete, publications based on empirical analyses of this dataset are still in progress. A list of related publications of members of the COST Action IS0806 is compiled in Annex 2 of this report.

The capacity of the Action members to raise research funds

The Estonian partners in this COST Action secured funding from the Estonian Science Foundation for a research project entitled "*Explaining electoral choice sets: Estonia in comparative perspective*". The main objectives of the project include fielding a post-election survey in Estonia in the framework of the CSES project in March 2011. They also secured substantial funding for a project on EU-Russia relations. The Polish TEV team managed to get a grant for conducting the next *Polish National Election Study of 2011*. The Romanian colleagues informed the Chair of the Action that they managed to raise research funds by the Romanian National Council of Scientific Research for a project entitled "*Micro and Macro Determinants of Voting Behaviour in Romania, 1990-2009*". The Slovenian partner in this COST Action secured funding by the Slovenian Research Agency, for the project entitled, '*(Pre) election campaign capital and democratic development of the state and society*'.

II.D. Self evaluation

We feel that the COST Action IS0806 in its second year has reached a breakthrough regarding the motivation of the participants and their conviction that the aims of the Action can indeed be reached. As one of the participants and MC member has put it: "The Lisbon (Management Committee and Working Groups) meeting actually made me believe that it can indeed be done." This is a big achievement in a 25 country co-operation in which not all of the participants are "switched on" all the time.

Progress is slower than expected though, particularly with regard to the restructuring and integration of European national elections studies micro data and the association of macro data to it. The whole data operation may still take one full year, perhaps even longer, and we will need to think of strategies of data analysis that do not require the full integrated and harmonised data set.

Another section of our Action, more in particular the training schools and hence the education and socialisation of young scholars, is progressing very smoothly and speedily. A stunning success are the Winterschools most of all, two of which have now been held and the reactions of participants are simply euphoric. It has become visible already now that a new generation of young electoral researchers – scholars in their late 20s and early 30s – is forming as a result of the Action. This will not only be helpful for these peoples own future careers, it will also further advance the empirical research into comparative electoral behaviour, political representation and the well-functioning of democracy.

There is, perhaps, one drawback to mention. There are one or two major election studies which participate in the Action more or less formally, without much real involvement if it comes to the preparation of deliveries and other actions to be taken. This is not difficult to understand, as these countries studies are the most numerous and comprehensive. Consequently, their harmonisation and restructuring will be the most laborious. The Steering Committee and the Management Committee of the Action is aware of this problem, and try to take appropriate steps to fully integrate these countries in the proceedings of IS0806 "The True European Voter."

III. Previous scientific report (Reporting Period: 05/05/2009-30/04/2010)

II.A. Innovative networking

Scanning the well recognised contemporary political science journals we find that articles focussing on one single election in one single country have become extremely rare. Major pieces of electoral research are nowadays comparative, either in a diachronic or a cross-national perspective or both. The reason for this development is that the motivation for, and thus the determination of, electoral behaviour is context-dependent. This is where our COST Action sets in. At the end of the first year of our existence, we are still putting together our data base. This is not an easy task. But given the lack of comparative data at this point, and judging from interim results and theoretical discussions, we expect a major breakthrough in our professional knowledge about the moderating effect of “context” for the determination of electoral behaviour, and thus for the quality of electoral democracy. This however must wait until the database of the *True European Voter* is composed.

Unlike other scientific disciplines, political science is not so much interested in the economic impact of research, but more in the quality of democracy and how it could be improved. Electoral research, as a prominent part of the science of politics, does not differ in that regard. A tangible socio-economic impact of our Action therefore is not in the centre of our attention. There is one aspect though of electoral research which has a clear economic dimension and is well recognised by the media and the public alike: electoral forecasting – i.e. the prediction of the result ahead of the election. We are confident that the findings of our Action, particularly those regarding the context dependency of electoral choices, will help to improve the quality of electoral forecasting.

The Action has helped to stimulate a number of new national programme proposals and research projects in the field of electoral research. While our list is necessarily incomplete at this stage, we can already refer to the formal establishment of an Austrian National Election Study (in 2009) and the Greek (2009) and Estonian (2011) participation in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. The long-term funding – covering three elections from 2009 on – of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) by the German Research Foundation (DFG) fits the picture. The chairman of the Action has received a call to a Chair in Electoral Politics at the University of Manchester with the prime objective to support a Manchester bid for the British Election Studies – one of the oldest and most renowned election studies in Europe. Based on all of this, the least we can say here is that our Action coincides with a boom of electoral research in Europe, and probably has stimulated a good part of it.

II.B. Inter-disciplinary networking

In the process of data integration and data matching, we are currently co-operating with economists and sociologists (and plan to co-operate with political geographers). In all those co-operations, we are actively seeking the advice of colleagues from those neighbouring disciplines in order to identify the most effective macro-indicators that are able to describe the social and economic contexts in which individual voting decisions are taken (and by which those decisions might be affected). We are confident that the level of inter-disciplinarity of our Action is sufficient to provide scientific impacts. This however can only be fully evaluated when we can start analysing the multi-level data structure that we are currently collecting and integrating.

II.C. New networking

By the time of the start of the COST Action IS0806, the total number of participating countries was thirteen (13), namely, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, UK. In the meantime, many initiatives were taken by additional parties to join the Action. As a result, the membership of the Action is developing very well, both among Western and Eastern European countries; the number of parties could be increased to now twenty-four (24). The new parties that joined the Action during its life (from May 2009 to April 2010) are: Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland. The Chair of the Action is also in contact with colleagues in Serbia and Czech Republic.

Altogether, some 50 European electoral researchers are part of the Action in different roles (Management Committee, three Working Groups and Advisory Board). In addition, probably the same number again of junior researchers, PhD students and the like are contributing to the Action's agenda. This number of individual participants involved in the Action work will be increased as specialists from other disciplines might join the Action in cases when their particular expertise will be required to achieve the research objectives. An example here is the support of a statistician in the task of harmonising datasets that have been generated by different sampling strategies.

This COST Action aims at a gender balance in all its activities, the Management and the Steering Committee place this as a standard item on all their agendas. Moreover, as one main objective of the Action is to increase the scholarly competence of European electoral researchers, both methodologically and conceptually through recurring opportunities for training and exchange, the Action is committed to especially involve early-stage researchers (ESRs). This item is also being placed as a standard item on all MC agendas. The percentages of female participants and of early stage researcher are as follows:

Gender balance among MC and WG members: 75 % men and 25 % women;
Gender balance among ESRs: 55 % men and 45 % women;
Gender balance altogether: 68 % men and 32 % women.
ESR participation in the Action: 44 % (see annex 1 for a detailed list of all known ESRs involved in the Action).

Furthermore, strong emphasis is given on increasing the provision of recurring opportunities for training and exchange for young scholars (both early-stage researchers and PhD students and research assistants). It is expected to yield a Europe-wide network of well-trained and competitive young scholars. The first Winter School on "Methodological Issues in Comparative Electoral Analysis" was organized at the Methods and Data Institute of the University of Nottingham in Nottingham, UK, from 8th to 11th March 2010. At the Winter School, some of the ESRs involved in the Action participated. Another innovative form of networking is enabled by COST in the organisational form of Think Tank Meetings. The Action intends to convene two of them; the first one will take place in Mannheim from the 16th to 21st May 2010. Its main aim is to get together young scholars from all the participating national election study teams. At this meeting, each national representative will report on the national micro-data holdings.

During the first year of the Action two Short-Term Scientific Missions (STSMs) were carried out. This small number is due to the fact that this instrument is probably best suited for ESRs, and that the first meetings that involved young scholars in larger numbers – the Training School and the Think Tank Meeting – were only convened in March and May 2010 – i.e. very late in the reporting period. It is anticipated that applications for STSMs will increase in the next year. The STSM coordinator in co-operation with the MC will prepare a schedule for exchange visits, which will aim at strengthening the existing networks.

Turning to publications that resulted from collaboration within our COST Action, there are several aspects to report on. One is the fact that national reports on the history of election studies are currently being drafted, and eventually constitute the basis for a synthesis of

European traditions of electoral research which will be published as an edited volume. Another aspect originates in the data integration and data matching agenda of the Action. Those TEV publications that are based on empirical analyses can only be elaborated when the integrated TEV database will be constructed – which according to our time table will be achieved sometime in the second year of our activities. A third aspect, finally, refers to the fact that many colleagues involved are active in the larger domain of comparative electoral research, and have been publishing extensively in this context over the past 12 months (some of these publications written in the English language are listed in Annex 2). To name but a few of the neighbouring research contexts, we can refer to the works published in the context of the European Election Study (EES), The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), the INTUNE integrated project funded under the 6th Framework Programme of the EC. There are additional outreach activities beyond scientific publications, and the Action has been very active in those fields too. Presentations of the objectives, the agenda and the workplan of the agenda have been given at national and international political science meetings, like the IPSA World Congress in Santiago de Chile, the annual conference of the American Political Science Association in Washington, or the conference of the German Longitudinal Election Study in Duisburg last year.

Additional research funds could be secured by the Action collectively and by a number of its members individually by associating with the ELECDEM Marie Curie Initial Training Network (ITN) funded under the 7th Framework Contract of the European Commission (overall budget 3,4 mio € over three years). Much as for our Action, it is the purpose of this ITN to strengthening the material preconditions of electoral research in Europe and to contribute to capacity building in that area. This is why the ELECDEM-ITN and our Action are inviting each others PhD students and ESRs to training events like the Nottingham Winterschool and the like. In addition, a number of ITN funded PhD students are contributing to the data identification and data integration agenda of our Action.

II.D. Self evaluation

Indicate in no more than 1 page what, in the opinion of the MC, were the main successes, drawbacks (if any) and the key difficulties encountered (if any).

Successes

The Action in its first year has attracted the attention and collaboration of a considerable number of colleagues from all over Europe. Twenty countries joined the Action by the end of April of 2010, four more have expressed an interest to join, and this might not yet be the end of the story. Of the currently twenty-four countries, seven are from the East of Europe, five both from the South and the North, and seven from Central Europe. It is probably fair so say that, in an unprecedented manner, the scientific collaboration in this COST Action pulls together most of what there is in terms of national election studies in Europe. There are a few known national election studies not yet included in the Action, the most important of them probably being *Serbia* and the *Czech Republic*. While the Action has extended invitations for joining to both of these data-rich national election studies, and while individual researchers in both countries actually seemed to be very interested in joining, their national bureaucratic apparatus somehow seems to stand in the way of collaboration.

Despite the large number of studies (countries) involved, the Action already in its first year was able to agree on a master-plan for both cross-national data integration and data analysis. In terms of data integration, a revised and extended version of the codebook of the European Voter project was elaborated and agreed. In addition, a macro-data codebook has been prepared specifying the social (e.g. modernization), economic (e.g. GDP growth), and political (e.g. regime support) context dimensions which are expected to affect the “vote

function” – i.e. the relative weight of micro-level predictors of electoral participation and vote choice. Regarding data analysis, a consensus was reached that the Action should aim at analysing one integrated “stacked” dataset using some sort of hierarchical linear modelling (HLM) algorithm that is suitable for dichotomous dependent variables – i.e. for estimating the likelihood of participating in an election (or not) and choosing a particular party (or not).

At the end of year one, the stocktaking of past election studies’ findings is completed in almost all participating countries. This was a very labour-intensive but necessary initial step upon which all future collaboration will be based. The results of these national election study inventories have been presented at a major Think Tank event in Mannheim, and a strategy for data integration – including the construction of “synthetic” variables and “stacked” data matrices – was agreed.

Last but not least, the first of four Winterschools (or training camps) on Methodological Issues in Comparative Electoral Research was held in Nottingham, gathering some thirty early stage researchers from all over Europe.

It is through both the Mannheim Think Tank and the Nottingham Winterschool that the Action has attracted the attention and the collaboration of some fifty early stage researchers in the domain of national election studies, among them a near majority of young women.

Drawbacks

A drawback can perhaps be seen in the fact that both Serbia and the Czech Republic are not yet listed among our member countries (but we are working on it). This is particularly problematic in the case of Serbia because of the long history of Yugoslavian studies dating back into the Communist era that are archived in Belgrade.

Key difficulties

A key difficulty is perhaps the fact that our COST Action, as any COST action, does not involve proper research funding. Work needs to be done which originates from the agenda of our Action but is not funded by it. This difficulty can be handled more elegantly in resource-rich environments than in other less well off countries/institutes.