



# SECONOMICS

## Perception of Terrorism and Security and the Role of Media

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## ***Introduction***

- The existential security in contemporary Western societies is unprecedented, yet the scale of the risks (in terms of their consequences), such as nuclear radiation, global warming and terrorism, is also unparalleled;
- security risks and safety are of a large concern in today's societies and bring around profound changes of the political order, shaping perceptions, attitudes and behaviour of people, political leaders and of governments (Beck 2002; Inglehart 1997);
- following paper tackles important questions related to organized crime and terrorism by focusing on perception of various security and terrorism related threads across and outside the European Union;

## ***Structure***

- Paper first briefly outlines theoretical framework of this research, which rests on two pillars – risk perception, dilemma between freedom and security and political communication including the role of media in communicating the dilemmas between security, safety, privacy and freedom;
- second part offers general comparative overview of citizens ‘perceptions and attitudes toward terrorism and security, conditionality of these, as well as attitudes to the various trade-offs is presented using comparative analysis of existing quantitative surveys (ISSP, Eurobarometer, etc.);
- third part introduces unique SECONOMICS research on the key role of media in transmitting information and shaping opinions on key security issues (case studies include cyber terrorism – Stuxnet as an example of risk and 3D scanner and CCTV cameras as an example of security measure);
- Fourth part presents first results regarding the saliency of elected security issues in media of ten countries between 2010 and 2013.

## **1. Theoretical Framework**

### **1.1. Defining Risk Perception**

- Advanced modern societies are in many respects experiencing an unprecedented existential security compared to previous times;
- However, they are at the same time increasingly concerned about security risks and safety threats which are beyond the reach of individuals as well as of individual states (Beck 1992 and 2002, Giddens 1999, Inglehart 1997);
- While the old types of risks whose scope was limited, the effects of the modern risk are not temporally, spatially and socially circumscribed, not respecting boundaries of nation-states, having a long latency period, identification and prosecution of those responsible is difficult (Beck 2002).



## **1. Theoretical Framework**

### **1.2. Political communication**

#### ***political communication incorporates:***

1. all forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives;
2. communication addressed to these actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists; and third, communication about these actors and their activities, as contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media discussion of politics (McNair 2011).

#### **three main elements, between which the process of political communication is conceived and realized:**

1. political organizations – political parties, public organizations, pressure groups, terrorist organizations, governments - appeal to media, participate in programs, advertising, and media represents part of their PR;
2. media - reports, comments and analysis actions of political organizations to citizens;
3. citizens - through media – express their opinion in polls, letters, blogs, citizen journalism, etc.

## *1. Theoretical Framework*

### *1.2. Political communication*

In 'ideal-type' democratic societies media communication fulfills the following five functions of the:

1. **informs citizens** of what is happening around them (monitoring function of the media);
2. **educates the public** to the meaning and significance of the 'facts' (the importance of this function explains seriousness with which journalists protect their objectivity, since their value as educators presumes a professional detachment from the issues being analyzed);
3. provides **platform for public political discourse**, facilitating the formation of 'public opinion', and feeding that opinion back to the public from whence it came; this must include the provision of space for the expression of dissent, without which the notion of democratic consensus would be meaningless;
4. give **publicity to governmental and political institutions** – the 'watchdog' role of journalism;
5. **channel for advocacy of political viewpoints** – this function may be also viewed as persuasion (McNair 2011).

## Theoretical framework summary

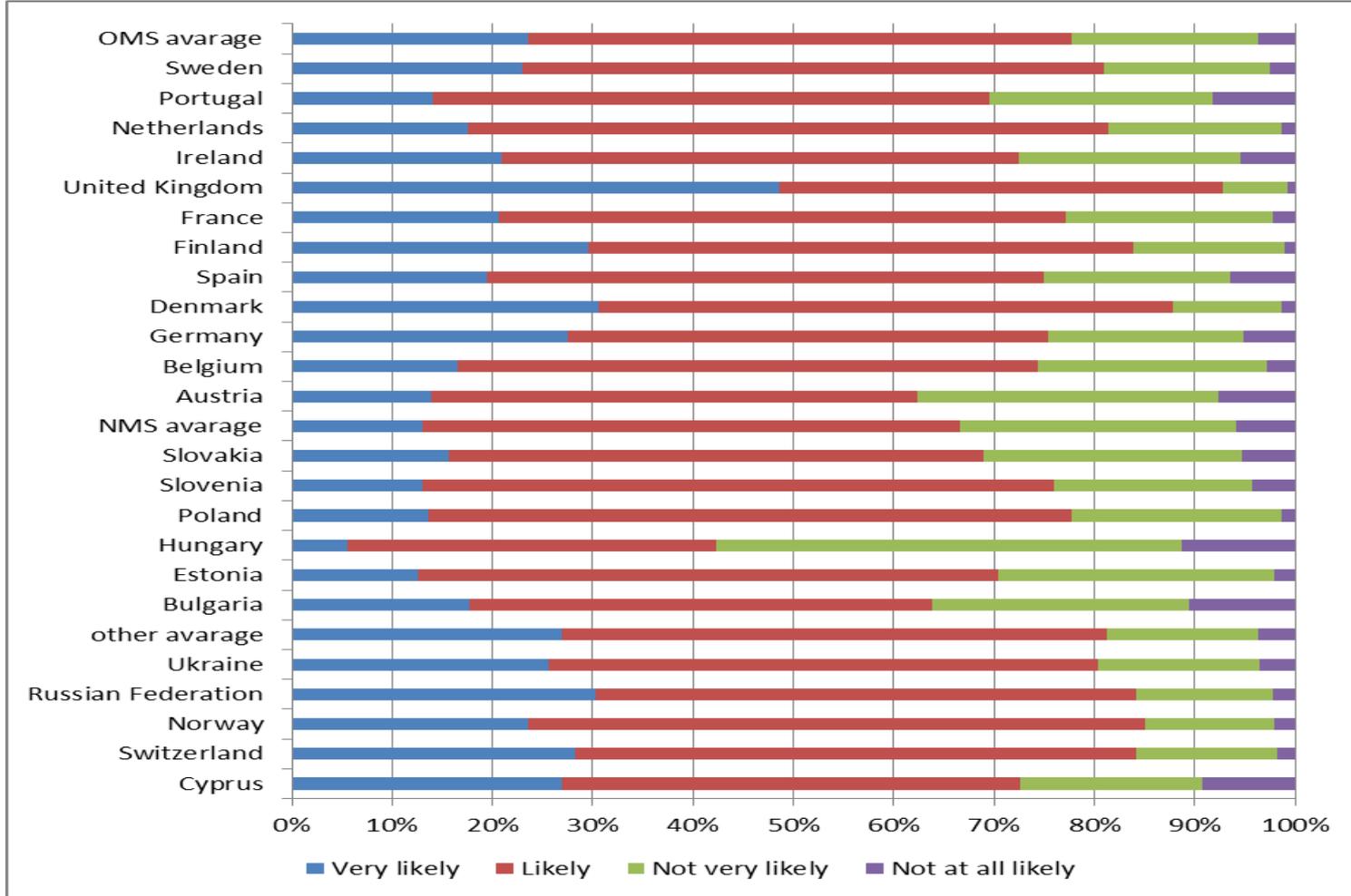
theoretical framework of this paper, is set by combining two strands of literature  
- risk perception and political communication

public opinion presented in surveys and media reporting are both forms of political communication which can yield important insights on the two guiding questions of our research:

1. How do media actually frame terrorism and organized crime?
2. Has the media coverage of terrorism and organized crime made the public more sensitive to the issue of security?

And, if so, how are the (security) threats perceived and discussed by the media?

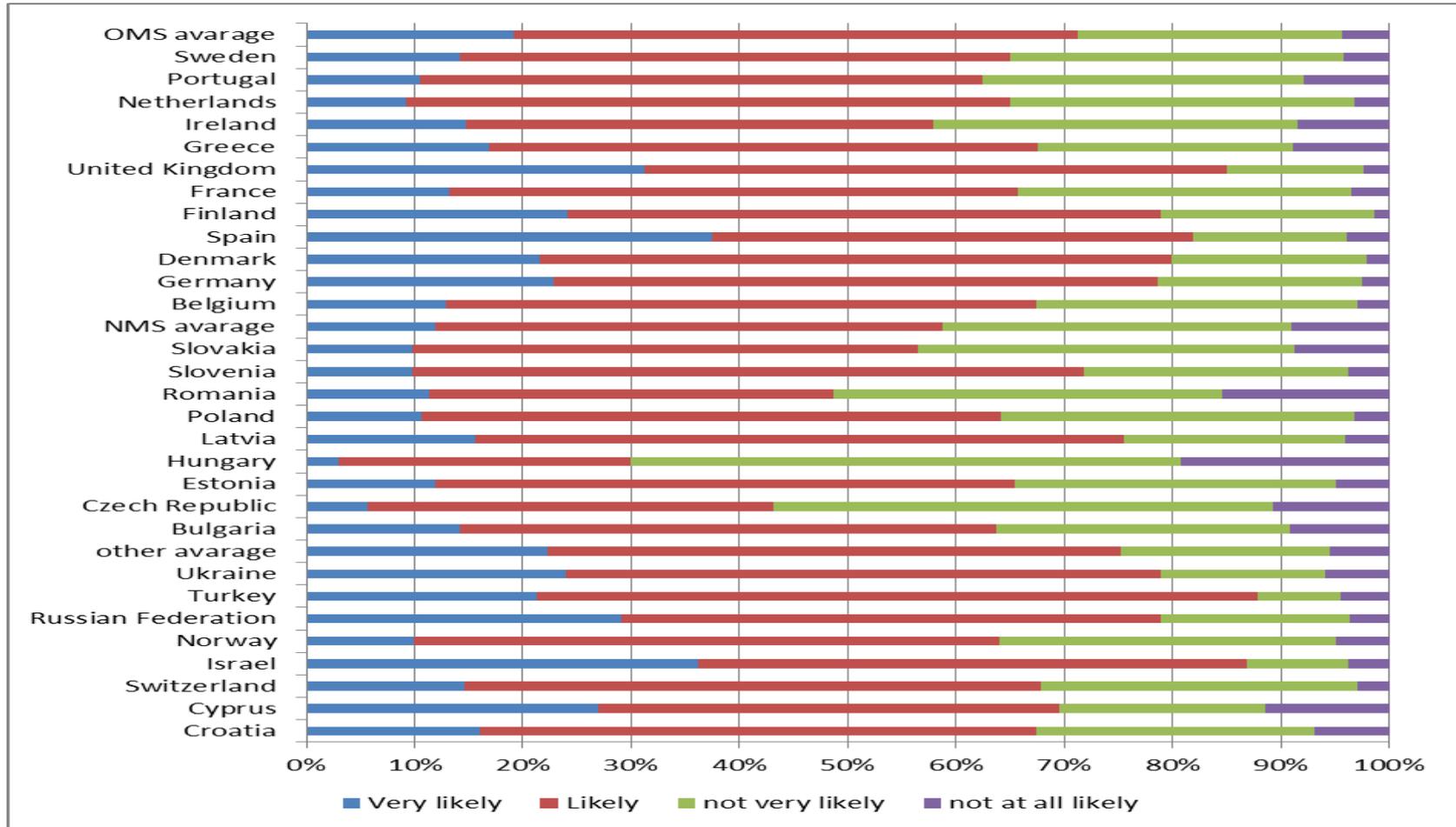
**Graph 1. Cross-country comparison of subjective likelihood of terrorist attack in Europe in next twelve months (in 2006)**



Note: Survey ESS3, the question C11 “Do you think that a terrorist attack somewhere in Europe during the next twelve months is ... Select answer: very likely, likely, not very likely, not at all likely.”

Source: European Value Survey 2006

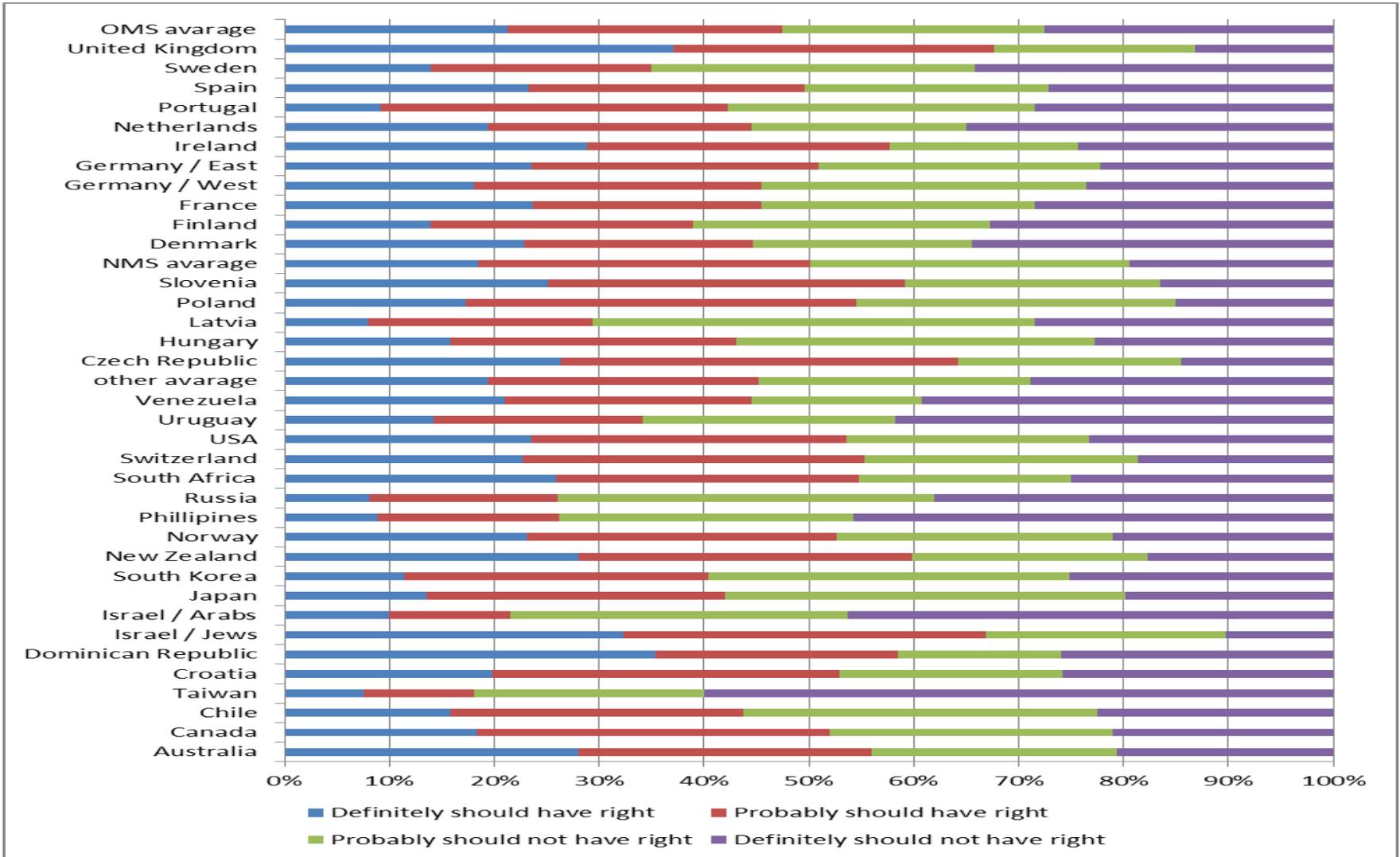
Graph 2. Cross-country comparison of subjective likelihood of terrorist attack in Europe in next twelve months (in 2008)



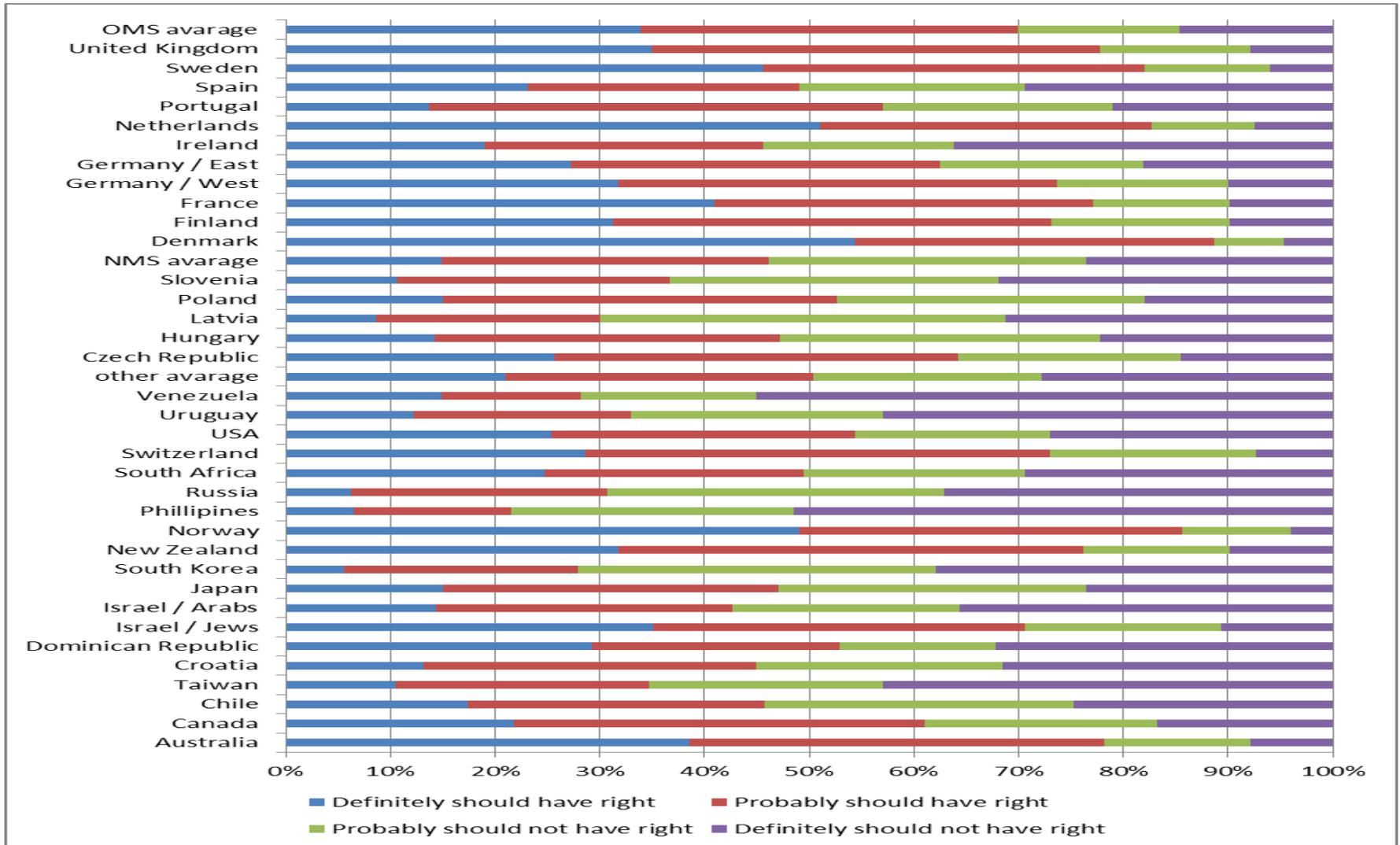
Note: Survey ESS4, Question C11 “Do you think that a terrorist attack somewhere in Europe during the next twelve months is ... Select answer: very likely, likely, not very likely, not at all likely.”

Source: *European Value Survey 2008*

Graph 3. Authorities should have the right to detain people for as long as they

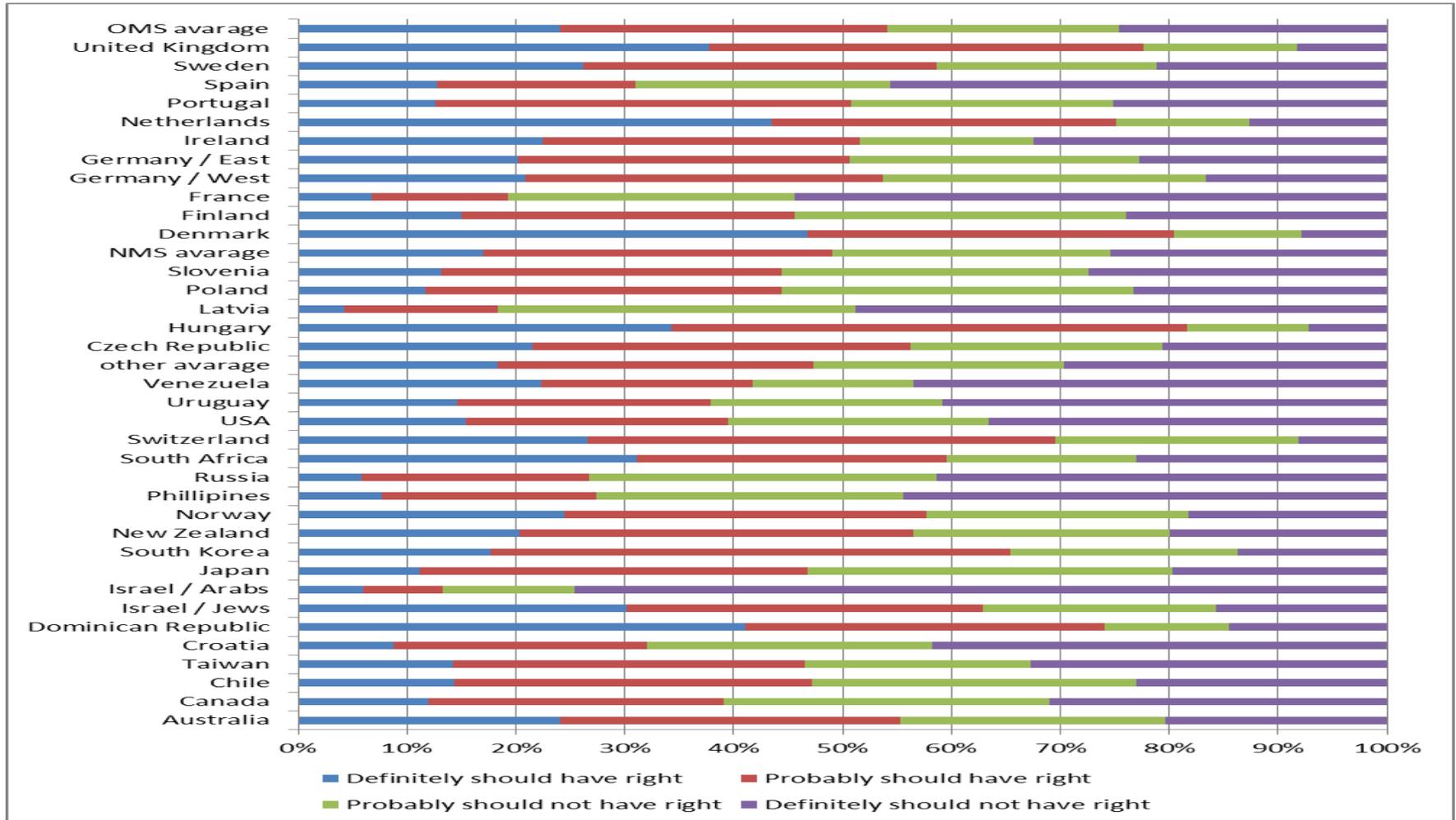


Graph 4. Authorities should have the right to tap people's phone conversations



Source: ISSP 2006

Graph 5. Authorities should have the right to stop and search people in the street at random





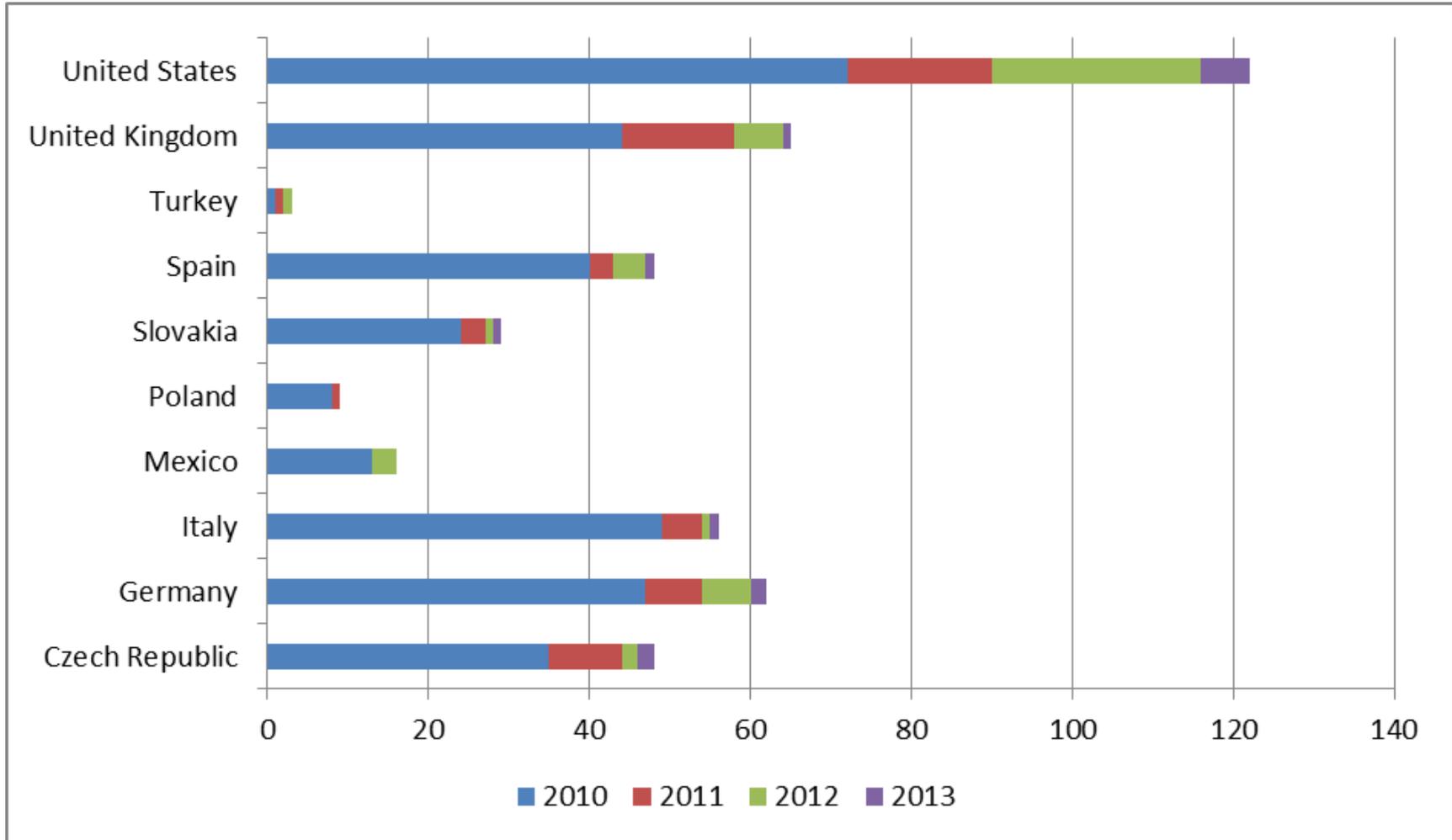
## 2. Quantitative Findings

- In this part we have demonstrated that in general EU as well as non-EU populations are rather accepting of various counter-terrorism measures;
- the main intervening variable here is the trust of the citizens, that the governments are making the right decision on the topic;
- one of the negative intervening issues related to acceptance of antiterrorism laws, however, is their poor implementation;



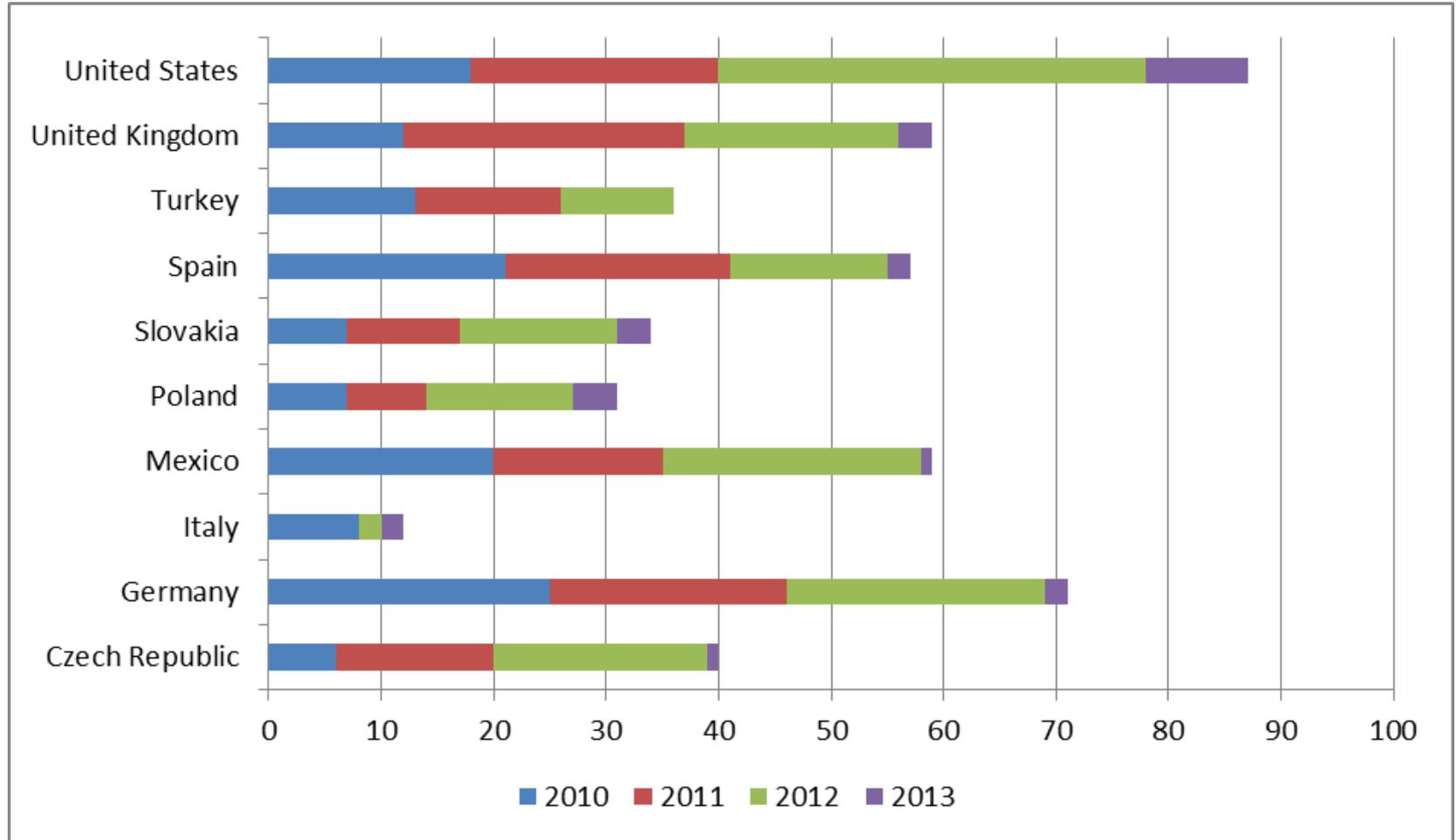
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Graph 6. The Salience of the 3D body scanner issue in the media between 2010 and 2013 (in N= number of articles)

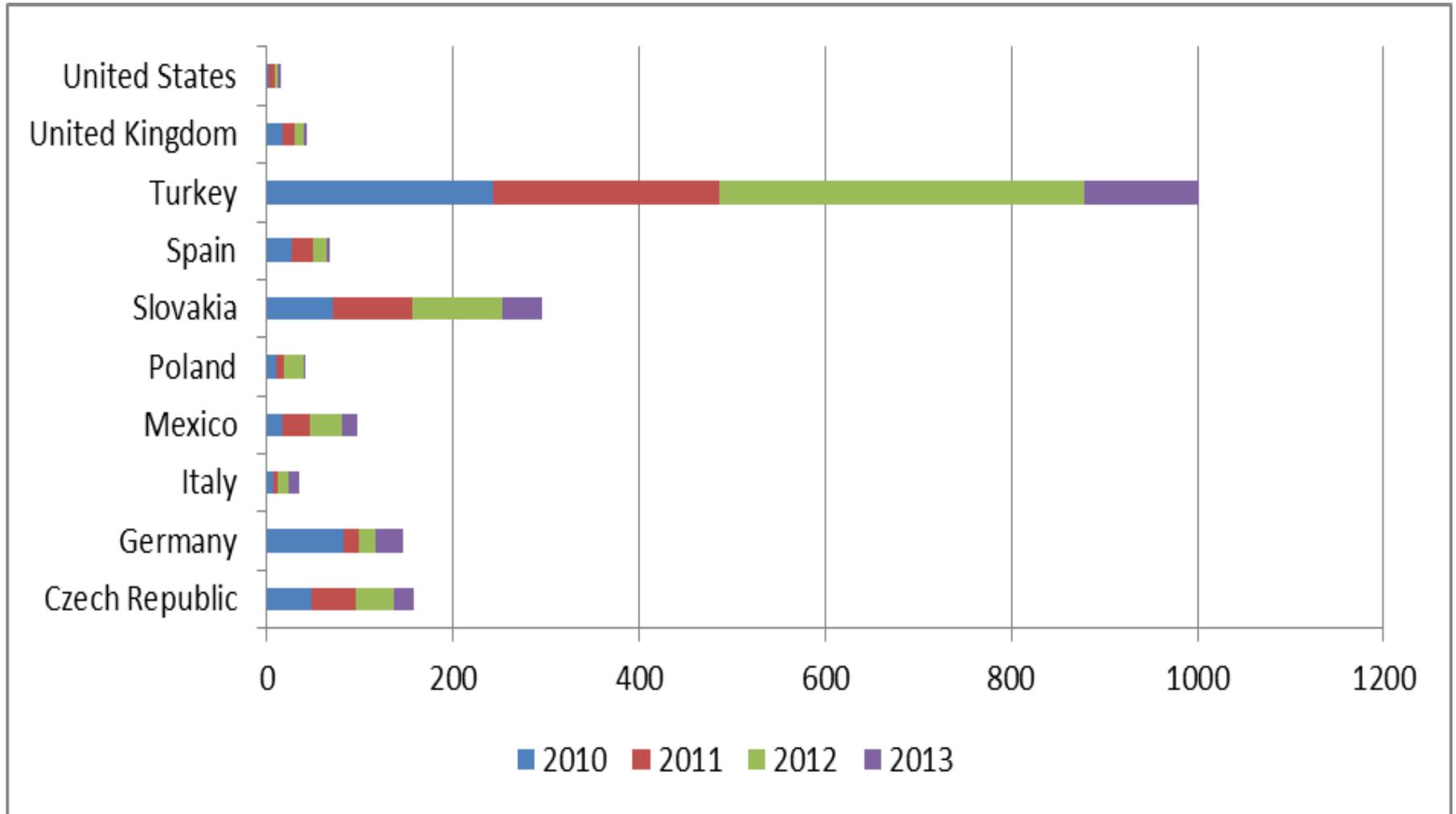


Source: SECONOMICS team, Prague

Graph 7. The Salience of the Stuxnet issue in the media between 2010 and 2013 (in N= number of articles)



Graph 8. The Salience of the CCTV camera issue in the media between 2010 and 2013 (in N= number of articles)



Source: SECONOMICS team, Prague



### 3. Qualitative Findings

- focus of the Seconomics project is on the definition and perception of risk and security in different settings: airport security and air travel, critical infrastructure, and urban transport;
- findings of our qualitative comparative analysis of media perception on terrorism threats and security measures suggest that how media portray different security risks is dependent on several factors;
- past experience with a particular security threat, as well as probability of the country being targeted in the future, account for the main differences in the extent of coverage dedicated to the issue in the domestic media.

## Concluding remarks (I)

- 1.the main focus of this paper were citizens 'perceptions and attitudes toward terrorism and security, conditionality of these, as well as attitudes to the various trade-offs, as demonstrated on the tensions between freedom and privacy on one hand and security on the other.
- 2.in cross-country comparison of these attitudes in quantitative analysis of surveys, the conflict between the degrees of freedom and security, as well as obvious prioritization of security over liberty, is demonstrated in the wide acceptance of counter-terrorism tools;
- 3.with every terrorist attack the acceptance for wide-range of privacy/liberty curbing measures grows;
- 4.the problem here is that while the risks are seen as imminent and tangible, the potential threats to freedom and privacy are often too complex for the general population;
- 5.the main factors shaping the media reporting on terrorism threats and security measures are past experience with a particular security threat, as well as probability of the country being targeted in the future;

## Concluding remarks (II)

6. we also find that the media landscape is undergoing transformation with growing importance of international context;
7. terrorism and organized crime are increasingly framed as transactional and beyond the scope of nation-states;
8. the public is becoming more sensitive not only of threats but also the costs of security and the media play key role in shaping political communication and public attitudes, fulfills its informative and educational functions, and increasingly provide platform for public political discourse, including provision of space for the expression of dissent;
9. media are also channel for advocacy of political viewpoints (need for regulation, adoption of security measures) and to a significantly lesser degree acting as a 'watchdog' or guardian of freedoms.



Thanks for your attention !!

