The project wants to contribute to the existing body of literature regarding the citizens' perception of the electoral systems, by analyzing this phenomenon in the context of the European Parliament (EP) elections. The key issue will be the acceptance for this system and specifically the assessment of the fairness of the degressive proportionality principle used in the elections for the EP. This will be tested by a survey experiment conducted in three countries (a small, a medium and a large one), where citizens will be asked to assess the outcome of the 2024 elections to the EP.

One of the key features of the democratic elections is the equal weight of the votes cast - it is widely acknowledged that every constituency should be composed of a similar sized group of citizens , as it ensures the legitimacy of the whole electoral system. Although some deviations to this rule might be accepted, exceeding it too much and creating electoral districts with significant differences regarding the ratio between their population and the number of seats in a given electoral body (malapportionment) is considered negative for the voting process. This is especially important in the case of the losing parties and their supporters - it is easier to accept such an outcome when one considers the whole process fair. This issue has been studied in the national context, but less attention has been paid to it in the context of the elections to the EP.

The EP has its very important specificity in this regard, namely - the number of the members of the European Parliament (MEPs) differs depending on the population of a given country, according to the degressive proportionality rule. It states that small Member States (MS) should have more MEPs than is proportional to their population, and that bigger ones should have fewer of them (so as not to let the bigger countries dominate the smaller ones). The attempt to balance the power of EU MS is an important element of its political system and is enshrined in Article 14(2) of the Treaty on European Union. The issue of finding the right formula to determine the number of MEPs per country is the subject of lively debate in the context of EU institutional reform, which makes this topic very relevant not only in the scientific discussion regarding electoral studies, but more broadly in the public.

The project will try to answer the following research questions:

1. How do voters assess malapportionment between the countries regarding the number of the MEPs allocated to each MS and the resulting disproportionality in the EP elections?
2. Does belonging to MS that is over- or underrepresented in the EP influence the assessment of the fairness of the electoral process to the EP?
3. Does voting for the winning or losing party affect this assessment?
4. What socio-demographic characteristics favour higher acceptance for the degressive proportionality principle used in the elections for the EP?
5. Are voters mainly interested in the outcome of the elections to the EP in their country or do they also care about the Pan-European dimension, i.e. results of the political groups to which a given party belongs (for instance the European People's Party?)

The hypothesised answers, based on the preliminary research and literature review are the following:

H1: In European elections, voters are willing to accept more disproportionate distribution of seats between countries (malapportionment, in this case related to degressive proportionality) in the elections to the EP (second order elections) than in national elections (first order elections).

H2: The level of acceptance to the malapportionment varies depending on whether the country is under- or over-represented. In the latter case, it is higher than in the former.

H3: Voting for the winning or losing party does not significantly affect the assessment of the degressive proportionality principle.

H4: Higher acceptance for the the degressive proportionality is linked mainly with the level of political sophistication.

H5: Voters are mainly interested in the results of the elections to the EP in their country, the Pan-European dimension does not play an important role

The hypotheses of the experiment will be tested using the quantitative methods. A regression technique will be chosen and it will be conducted (along with other statistical computations) in R, a programming language, which is part of the free software environment, which allows for easy verification of the whole analysis.