

United by or Against Euroscepticism?

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*An Assessment of Public
Attitudes towards Europe
in the Context of the Crisis*

Edited by

Alina Bârgăoanu, Loredana Radu
and Diego Varela

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-8090-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8090-9

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INTRODUCTION: UNITED BY OR AGAINST EUROSCEPTICISM?

ALINA BÂRGĂOANU, LOREDANA RADU,¹
AND DIEGO VARELA

One of the paradoxes characterizing today's European Union is that a long-lasting dream related to creating common bonds among peoples from different countries and nations has apparently been fulfilled by the crisis itself. The paradox consists of the fact that these common bonds appear to have been created by a strong criticism of the design and undertakings of the European Union. In Habermas' words, "what unites European citizens today is the Eurosceptic mindset that has become more pronounced in all of the member countries during the crisis, albeit in each country for different and rather polarizing reasons" (2013). This Eurosceptic mindset has been created by many factors – financial difficulties, unemployment, the blame game played between the North and the South of the EU, and the feeling that power is exercised without responsibility, that citizens are being left behind and all major decisions are made behind closed doors. There are definitely others. It is our view that the encompassing reason for the emergence of such a "Europeanised" Eurosceptic mindset is the issue of the future model of the EU. This issue does not concern only a small group of specialists; it has a huge symbolic impact because, as it has been said, the vision of Europe that will succeed will be that which "inspires the commitment of [EU] citizens whose faith in a European future is shaken" (Council for the Future of Europe, 2011). Leaving aside journalistic titles such as "United in Hostility" (*Financial Times*, October 2013), which one could say is an exaggeration pertaining to mass-media rhetoric, there are

¹ Loredana Radu is the beneficiary of a scholarship provided through financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project number POSDRU/159/1.5/S/134650 with the title "Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships for young researchers in the fields of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences and Sociology."

bitter observations, such as the one just quoted from Habermas, and compelling statistics, too: the Union seems to be equally divided between those who trust and those who do not trust the supranational construction. In December 2014, 50 per cent of respondents across Europe declared themselves as Eurosceptics, 37 per cent as Euro-optimists, while 13 per cent declared themselves as undecided/uninterested, possibly negatively uninterested (Standard Eurobarometer, Gallup, Fall 2014). According to the same Eurobarometer, in some Member States (notably older Member States from Western Europe, with the exception of Croatia), EU distrust remains predominant, with an absolute majority in nine countries: Greece (76%), Cyprus (68%), Spain (61%), United Kingdom (61%), Italy (54%), Germany (53%), France (52%), Croatia (51%) and Portugal (51%). If we disregard the overall percentage from Central and Eastern Europe – historically more Euro-optimistic – we find that the European Union is rife with Euroscepticism.

The 2014 European elections were marked by the extraordinary rise of anti-establishment parties. In some EU Member States, these parties won a plurality of seats. In the UK, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) of Nigel Farage won the elections, with 26.77 per cent of the vote. In France, the National Front of Marie LePen won the election, with 24.86 per cent of the vote. In Denmark, the Danish People's Party also came first, with 26.60 per cent of the vote. In Greece, the left-wing movement Syriza won the elections, with 26.60 per cent of the vote. In other Member States, anti-establishment parties or movements came short of winning the elections but harvested outstanding results. In Italy, the 5-Star Movement of Beppe Grillo did not get a plurality of votes but came second, with a respectable 21.16 per cent of the vote. In Spain, Podemos, a newcomer, came fourth but was the biggest surprise with an impressive 7.97 per cent of the vote. These parties are of two types: radical-right parties, mainly in Northern Europe (UK, Denmark, France), and radical left parties, mainly in Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Spain). These results could be interpreted as a vote against Europe since many of the anti-establishment parties that did so well in the elections can be considered Eurosceptics, although it should be pointed out that for many of them, Europe was just an excuse to go up against the mainstream parties.

Why and how did this happen? It is difficult to recognize the European Union as it is today. One notes the extraordinary dynamism and the pace of change, although the dramatic changes have not necessarily been positive. Only a few years ago, the European Union could praise itself on its eastward expansion, which could be seen as implicit proof of the viability of its economic and social model. The disparities between the

“rich” West and the newly invited Central and Eastern Europe soon faded thanks to the EU Regional and Cohesion Policy. There was no such thing as a North-South divide, and the European Commission was dedicated to overcoming the “EU democratic deficit” by investing money in information campaigns, professionally designed leaflets and appealing websites. Of course, there were some alarms when the Constitution Treaty failed in national referendums, signalling an apparent gap between the EU elite and its citizens, but the “permissive consensus” allowing the elites to do pretty much whatever they liked was still in place. Brussels was the EU capital, and in this capacity attracted some criticism regarding inefficiency and excessive bureaucracy but not enough to incite the rage of the people. Germany was self-absorbed in internal reforms while the French-German engine was enjoying turbo-power. France was starting to think about Mediterranean strategies in order to project its power and that of the European Union in that part of the world. The appearance of an economic colossus right in the heart of Europe was not menacing, and it was all quiet on the eastern front too, with no clashes at the border between the EU and the former Soviet Union. The economic situation was good overall – there was financial stability, and though the regulations of the Growth and Stability Pact were not so strictly enforced, with France and Germany being among the first trespassers, nobody was worrying about unsustainable debts. Even at the beginning of the crisis on the other side of the Atlantic, the Europeans praised themselves, once again and with a superior self-assurance, on their social and economic model. In the opinion of its leaders, it could withstand the difficult times without them having to do anything.

What has changed then in just seven years, since the beginning of the crisis? To make only a brief selection: massive unemployment, especially among the youth, in Southern Europe; massive debts and bailouts enforced by a Troika in which one major actor – the IMF – is not European; massive street protests and accusations that we are no longer building “a citizens’ Europe” but “a banks’ Europe”; the ascent of extremist parties, be they right or left, all over Europe; Greece on the brink of default; talks about Grexit, Brexit, Grexident, Nazi Germans vs. lazy Greeks, North against the South; Eastern and Central Europe trapped, once again, on the massive landmass between Germany and Russia; the eastern border of the EU is on fire; the close proximity of the Islamic State to EU borders, with EU citizens either joining the insurgents or committing terrorist attacks right in the middle of Europe; and finally, the only leader, although not an EU leader, to stand up and fight for the European dream was Pope Francis,

who, in an address to the European Parliament, emphasized that the European Union is “a precious point of reference for all humanity.”

It is not the purpose of the book or this preface to analyse the crisis as such but, before going into detail about some of these astounding phenomena, let us make only one reflection on the root causes of the crisis. No matter what we call it – Euro crisis, Eurozone crisis, sovereign debt crisis, financial crisis, banking crisis, fiscal crisis, trade imbalance crisis, competitiveness crisis, debt crisis and so on – the most severe crisis in modern times, which has swept two shores of the Atlantic, was caused mainly by intellectual poverty and erroneous economic theories, and was premised on the blind faith in the so-called capacity of markets to regulate themselves. The US and the EU did not share the same underlying conditions, morphologies, effects or recovery rhythms but the structural cause was the same: blind faith in the infallibility of the markets, a faith shared by market players and regulators alike in the hypothesis of efficient and rational markets (what George Soros calls “market fundamentalism”). In the US, the most powerful expression of this blind faith was the deregulation of everything; even war was “privatized.” In Europe, this generalized, uncritical ideological commitment in favour of the free markets and deregulation found expression in the erroneous premise underlying the creation of the Euro: only public debt can jeopardize the single currency while private debt is benign. “The [Maastricht] Treaty took it for granted that only government borrowing could produce chronic deficits and destabilize the currency union” (Soros, 2014:35).

Contrary to the widespread belief that the private sector can regulate itself, the Euro crisis was caused by the excessive debt incurred by private actors, by the unlimited expansion of private credit at the EU periphery. Only later was private debt transformed into public debt in the form of sovereign debt. In other words, the private debt was transferred to citizens (a stage that is often ignored when analysing the Euro crisis and pointing the finger at the over-indebted South). To conclude this discussion about the deep roots of the crisis, let us highlight another striking detail, what the Nobel prize-winning economist Paul Krugman calls “the strange triumph of failed ideas” (2010): the crisis and market fundamentalism worked hand in hand, but the latter element of this binomial does not seem to be in the least compromised. In the US, “market fundamentalism survived that debacle: the conservative wing of the Republican Party managed to pin the blame for the financial crisis on the government rather than the private sector.” (Soros, 2014:152). In the EU, the crisis “reactivated national egotisms, but did not undermine the neoliberal convictions of key actors” (Habermas, 2010).

Coming back to the astounding dynamism characterising this part of the world, let us dwell first on the ascent of Eurosceptic, anti-European, anti-austerity movements all across the EU. The last elections for the European Parliament saw a significant increase in the number of seats obtained by political movements capitalising on such anti-European moods, although not to the degree predicted by different analysts. The Party of European abstainers was the big winner of the EU elections, especially in some Central and Eastern European countries. The less-than-catastrophic results of the Eurosceptic and anti-European parties were a source of relief, at least temporarily – “after all, the EU is not so much hated,” or, worse, “since Eurosceptic and anti-European parties are not very successful, the EU is in good shape, criticism is not justified, and the much-awaited system innovations are not that necessary.” Few were the analysts who noticed the gap between popular Euroscepticism – among ordinary people, which can be measured through polls – and the Euroscepticism that finds a political voice and can be identified through voting behaviour. Even fewer asked how popular Euroscepticism would find its political expression, where it would be channelled, given that it did not find a strong political voice during elections.

The immediate consequence of these questions being left unasked was that the crucial decisions about the future of the EU were once more delayed. “The mother of all elections,” as the 2014 elections were dubbed, did not bring about an answer to the question “What is the future of the EU?” in spite of assessments that what citizens expected was, besides jobs, a vision for the future; a vision to inspire and unite them. Eurosceptical, anti-European, anti-austerity feelings (whatever their name) soon found expression in Greece; ironically or not, in the context of national, not European, elections. The ascent of Syriza, a far-left party, on an anti-EU, anti-austerity, anti-system platform, contradicts many analysts’ predictions on the dangers of Golden Dawn, the far-right party. The ascent of Syriza and not of Golden Dawn is worth an analysis of its own; though what is more important is that the discontent with the EU and its austerity policies has found a political voice. We should also consider that there will soon be elections in countries dominated by a Greek-type of public mood, such as Spain, which has experienced one of the most spectacular drops in citizens’ trust in the EU. To make things even more complicated, the ascent of far-right movements is also noted: Front National in France, Pegida in Germany, UKIP in UK and so on.

The result of the Greek elections brought back to the fore discussions of a possible Grexit. In this context, one must notice the lightness with which these exits are discussed – Grexit, Grexident (a disorderly exit),

Brexit and so on. What is worrying is the banality and ease in public discussions about all kind of exits. Be they from the Eurozone or from the EU, the fact is when it comes to a Grexit, such discussions are equally carried out by the Greeks and the Germans. They are now part of our everyday life as Europeans and are no longer perceived as apocalyptic scenarios. It is less important that, in the long run, these exits are technically impossible. It is more relevant that they have created cracks in the European project, in the public perception of it and its irreversible character. The mantra of the year 2005 – the irreversible character of the European integration – no longer seems so convincing.

Another subject lightly treated in public discourse refers to the new dichotomy between creditor and debtor countries, a dichotomy that has geographical underpinnings, as if incurring debt or, on the contrary, amassing wealth or surplus, reflects national traits and is a matter of culture and national identity. It supports the argument “that the northern Europeans, and Germany in particular, are at least culturally superior to southern Europeans. It may not be a matter of blood, but it is a matter of values” (Friedman, 2015:157). It may not be a matter of blood but it is still a slippery perspective, especially in the context of the historical awareness and guilt of the Germans, not to mention that the dichotomy creditor-debtor countries leaves little room for discussions of the accountability of private creditors, those who initially and irresponsibly lent to Greece (and the South in general). The North-South divide, which is observable along many lines (export – import, industry – services, surplus – deficit, austerity – stimulus), is also a divide of interpretation of the root causes of the crisis and the responsibility for triggering it. Moreover, perceptions and interpretations have become irreconcilable. Not only do parties favour different interpretations and perceptions (“the German grasshoppers paying for the lazy Greeks”; “the oppressive North versus the victimised South”; “Spain, capital Berlin”), but also the interpretations of the opposing side are simply demonised. This is bound to leave deep scars, irrespective of how well things might evolve in the future.

Finally, the most dramatic evolutions are taking place at the borders of the EU, in its near-abroad. By this we refer to the widening arc of instability and insecurity surrounding the EU: Ukraine, the Islamic State, North Africa, the Middle East – all, among other things, relevant for the EU’s energy needs. This is so complex a subject that it is worth a book in itself, but what needs to be mentioned in the context of this book on Euroscepticism is G. Soros’ assessment that Putin’s manoeuvre to bring Russia back to the geopolitical forefront “is paying off because of the weakness of the West.” (Soros, 2014:114). Ukraine and the arc of

instability at EU borders is an existential test for the EU as a whole. The Eurocrisis is, in the words of Angela Merkel herself, “another existential crisis.” The problem, for the moment, seems to be that the EU goes from one catastrophe to the next and calls it crisis management. Managing the crisis it may be, but it is not necessarily managing the future.

In the context of the critical developments taking place in today’s European Union, this book aims to shed light on various dimensions of Euroscepticism – understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, with many, often hard to anticipate and quantify, implications. Given its highly complex character, Euroscepticism – especially today’s Euroscepticism – cannot be analysed from a single angle; rather, there are multi-layered analytical perspectives (i.e., communication, media studies, sociology and political science) that complement one another in order to draw a comprehensive picture of the mechanisms lying behind the formation of public attitudes towards the European Union.

Euroscepticism is a term used to designate anti-EU feelings or opposition to European integration. This rather wide definition has been narrowed down by Paul Taggart, according to whom Euroscepticism incorporates both “contingent or qualified opposition” and “outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (1998:366). The vast body of research and the numerous scholarly debates dedicated to Euroscepticism has given rise to many definitions and categorisations. Among the most cited classifications belong to Szczerbiak and Taggart, who differentiate between hard and soft Euroscepticism (2002) and between party-based and popular Euroscepticism (2003). In their words, “for hard Eurosceptics, the EU may be opposed because it embodies some previously identified ‘enemy’ (e.g., capitalism for communists, socialism for the right, bureaucracy for populists, supranationalism for nationalists or neo-liberalism for socialists). For soft Eurosceptics, the EU is problematic when its development runs counter to interests, policies or issues that they support” (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2003:6). In their view, party-based Euroscepticism emanates from the public position and discourse of elites, whereas popular Euroscepticism is mainly influenced by contextual factors (i.e., the economic crisis, austerity measures, nationalistic movements) and by the media. Importantly, party-based Euroscepticism fuels – through the media – popular Euroscepticism. Conversely, based on political leaders’ reluctance to promote unpopular topics in their electoral speeches, citizens’ discontent with European integration shapes – directly and indirectly – the way elites calibrate their own discourse about EU.

Interestingly, empirical measurements of Euroscepticism have been carried out around referendums on different EU topics and elections for the European Parliament. These are arguably the occasions for Europeans to make their opinions manifest and decide on important EU-related topics. For instance, Shuck and de Vreese (2006) examined the Dutch vote against the EU Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and concluded that there is a strong correlation between the negative attitudes towards the EU and the Dutch veto. Furthermore, de Vreese and Tobiasen (2007) show the Europeans' attitudes towards the EU and their perception of European identity influenced the results of the European elections organized in 2004 in Denmark. Similar results were reported by Elgun and Tillman (2007) in a study conducted in 13 countries from Central and Eastern Europe. The authors show that negative attitudes towards others (racial, national and religious differences) are strong predictors of Euroscepticism. This is consistent with Christin and Trechsel (2002), who demonstrated that an exclusive national identity and strong nationalistic feelings determine an anti-integration attitude because European integration is perceived as a threat to national identity. McLaren's research (2007) serves as a perfect illustration of this finding as he concluded that the migration of Turkish citizens towards EU Member States is one of the main reasons many Europeans oppose Turkey's accession to the EU.

In a more utilitarian perspective, De Vries and van Keerbergen (2007) identified correlations between pessimism towards individual economic situations and exacerbated nationalistic feelings. The more economically disadvantaged an individual, the more nationalist the inclination. Furthermore, Mahler et al. (2000) show that there is a strong relationship between net budgetary transfers from the EU to a Member State and the level of its citizens' support for the EU.

Van Spanje and de Vreese (2011) identified five predictors of the Eurosceptic vote in the 2009 parliamentary elections. The authors describe the citizens' tendency to vote for members of Eurosceptic parties or for candidates who are renowned for their anti-European stance in the European Parliament. The five predictors are: 1) the EU's democratic performance (the more inaccessible, opaque and insufficiently democratic the EU and its institutions are perceived to be by the citizens, the more Eurosceptic the latter will be); 2) negative evaluations of EU membership (the more negatively people evaluate EU membership, the higher the probability for a Eurosceptic vote); 3) negative feelings towards the EU (the more negative the citizens' feelings towards the EU, the higher the probability for a Eurosceptic vote); 4) opposition to EU enlargement (the more inclined the citizens are to opposing European integration, the higher

the probability for a Eurosceptic vote); and 5) lack of European identity (the more inclined the citizens are to identify themselves with the EU, the higher the probability that they will vote for a pro-European politician). The two authors have established correlations between the EU's legitimacy deficit and Euroscepticism. According to them, EU legitimacy has the following key components: trust in the EU's institutions, people's capacity to identify with the European project and their trust in the European decision-making process.

A broad goal of this book is to explore the relationship between Euroscepticism and the EU's crisis (or lack) of leadership. It illustrates the fact that public support towards European integration is no longer tributary to "permissive consensus" – even though some European leaders seem to continue to act upon this obsolete belief. This book builds on the generous body of research available on Euroscepticism, and advances – through its multidisciplinary team of contributors – a new means of approaching EU-related attitudes in the context of the crisis. It dwells on a major differentiation between EU-scepticism (opposition to the EU per se) or the so-called hard Euroscepticism, and current EU-scepticism (scepticism of its current political direction, actual policies and decisions) or soft Euroscepticism.

The book critically examines what appears to be a unified "Europeanised" or Eurosceptic mindset and expands the view, which has already been captured by Jurgen Habermas' observation, that the reasons underlying Euroscepticism vary greatly across the European Union. The very idea of a "single Eurosceptic mindset" (Habermas) is put under close scrutiny, based on recent research indicating that Euroscepticism has become a corollary of popular discontent with recent numerous financial and social shortcomings. "When people hold the EU responsible for poor performance, but cannot hold it accountable for that performance, they become less trusting of its institutions as a whole" (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014:147). In a nutshell, the EU has become a symbolic scapegoat for political leaders, the mass media and citizens. Thus, Euroscepticism should be approached cautiously for it seems to have become a panacea or an umbrella-concept capturing a full array of attitudes, starting from mild Euro-apathy and ending with fierce anti-Europeanism. In line with this, defining the scope of our book has proved to be challenging since we had to attentively differentiate between Euroscepticism – as defined and approached in scholarly debate – and other types of EU-related attitudes. Another challenge was posed by the reasons underlying Eurosceptic attitudes, which are almost as diverse as the Member States.

This book presents critical perspectives on Euroscepticism as they have been documented through empirical research done in Western Europe (i.e., The Netherlands, Italy, United Kingdom, Spain), as well as in Eastern Europe (i.e., Romania, Slovenia, Poland) or in countries aspiring to become EU Member States (i.e., Turkey). This book is structured in four sections: 1) Euroscepticism – cross-national perspectives, 2) Western Europe: growing discontent and placid Euro-apathy, 3) Eastern Europe: de-mystification of Europe, and 4) Euroscepticism and the future of the European Union.

The first section comprises two cross-national studies on EU-related attitudes in times of crisis. The chapter “The Transformations of Euroscepticism: A Cross-Country Analysis of Eurobarometer Results 2007–2014” sets a generic framework for analysing the relationship between the turmoil in the EU on the one hand, and the citizens’ eroding trust in the EU on the other. In line with our argument above, the author concludes that Euroscepticism is only the tip of the iceberg, and that the reasons “beneath” should be carefully considered so that we are able to draw a meaningful image of EU-related attitudes. Labelling a certain community as Eurosceptic does not say much; labelling only gives birth to stereotypes, which have a poor explanatory power. In the chapter “Euroscepticism and Economic Crisis: Assessing the Role of Domestic Institutions,” Danilo Di Mauro and Fabio Serricchio propose another cross-national analysis, this time focusing on EU citizens’ trust in domestic institutions. They hypothesize that “when people trust national policies and institutions – especially in their actions to limit the effects of the economic crisis – the impact of utilitarian views on their attitudes towards Europe is lower; on the contrary, a high level of distrust within a country implements utilitarian reasons to oppose EU policies and institutions.”

The second section focuses on EU-related attitudes in Western Europe; more specifically in Spain, the United Kingdom and The Netherlands. Francisco Seoane Pérez treats Euroscepticism as the cumulative effect of failed domestication (Europe is always “out there,” even in the most pro-EU countries) and politicisation (technocracy, diplomacy and corporatism subdue political debate, replacing antagonism not with agonism but with depoliticisation). The chapter “Evoking Resilience against Euroscepticism” is more concerned with finding solutions to anti-EU attitudes. By drawing on extensive research implemented in the Twente Region (the Netherlands), the authors think that one potential “remedy” to Euroscepticism could be European citizenship in its intrinsic dimension, understood as a means of

empowerment and popular commitment to the very idea of the European Union.

The third section sheds light on some recent developments in four Eastern European countries: Romania, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine. Is the utilitarian dimension itself able to legitimize the idea of European integration? As a recipient of many tangible benefits of European integration, Romanians seem rather fond of European integration, even though austerity measures have given rise to important dilemmas regarding the sustainability of the European project and its associated benefits. In the chapter “The Instrumental Nature of the EU Identifications and Euroscepticism,” the authors demonstrate, based on quantitative data, that the very nature of EU identification is utilitarian. Hurriye Toker examines patterns of Euroscepticism in Turkey – a country very closely linked to the European Union, and one that aspires to become a Member State. Oleg Aronson and Tetiana Havlin examine the myths and values of the European Union in Ukraine during the *Euro-Maidan* movements.

The final section approaches the future of the European Union through the lenses of current EU-related attitudes. While Josef Niznik examines the most important cognitive factors behind Eurosceptic arguments, Paul Dobrescu and Flavia Durach probe into the future of the EU, remarking that “in the following years, we will be witnessing a more vicious form of Euroscepticism, based on similar references to the functioning and performance of the EU, thus expressing, unifying and channelling discontent. It will be a new era of Euroscepticism that should be addressed right now, in order to be prevented.”

To conclude, this book is premised on the belief that Euroscepticism – although a phenomenon to be feared – is not so bad after all, since such a stance reflects genuine interest, worries, concerns and even commitment. One can talk about a genuine “disunity in diversity” regarding these underlying reasons for Euroscepticism: elites vs. citizens, North vs. South, West vs. East, Euro vs. non-Euro, Schengen vs. non-Schengen, creditor nations vs. debtor nations, virtuous vs. vicious, belt-tightening vs. profligate and so on. Do Eurosceptics speak with one (European) voice? Apparently not. What is more dangerous is the emergence of related phenomena such as Eurocynicism, Europopulism and Eurodenial. In other words, the real worry is that anti-European battles or battles having little to do with Europe are being fought at the expense of Europe.

Our pro-European position is self-understood and has unequivocally shaped our decision to coordinate this book. We are critical pro-Europeanists and we believe that criticizing the EU does not equal contesting the European project. In other words, debating Euroscepticism

is not to be taken as a more subtle type of Euroscepticism; instead it helps build a genuine space for fertile discussions – an academic public sphere, very much connected to the political and social ones. In our view, today's European Union should have less to do with technicalities, such as complying with directives and regulations, and concentrate more on publicly standing for and defending its underlying values of solidarity, security, peace and prosperity. If Member States are not committing to these anymore, then the EU is very close to losing its symbolical appeal and, thus, its reason for being. As idealistic as this might sound, the EU founding states' commitment to these ideas contributed to half a century of political stability and economic wellbeing. However, many analysts that link the two key ingredients to European success – political stability and economic wellbeing – seem to systematically forget that there has been a third “ingredient” that made the first two possible in the first place, and that was the visionary leadership of the key stakeholders involved in the process of European pacification.

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EUROSCEPTICISM: CROSS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF EUROSCEPTICISM: A CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSIS OF EUROBAROMETER RESULTS 2007–2014

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Abstract

The Eurocrisis has drastically changed public attitudes towards the European Union. There is more to this crisis than its economic dimension; it is also a crisis of confidence in Europe as a political project. The challenge is greater than ever as in many parts of Europe nationalism and populism are on the rise, while the feeling of solidarity and sense of belonging are dwindling. Although there is huge pressure to insufflate more Europe into the European project, public opinion differs drastically from the official positions.

Key-words: Euroscepticism, Member States, Eurobarometers

1. Euroscepticism on the Map. Traditionally Supportive and Traditionally Eurosceptic Member States

The recent years of economic crisis and popular dissent across the EU have put Euroscepticism under scrutiny, transforming the concept into a fashionable word for scholars, political leaders and the media. However, this development is relatively new in the history of European integration. The original European Economic Community (EEC), the birth of which was based on the noble ideals of peace and economic progress through integration, was driven forward by elite consensus in the six founding

* Flavia Durach is the beneficiary of a scholarship provided through financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project number POSDRU/159/1.5/S/134650 with the title "Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowships for young researchers in the fields of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences and Sociology"

states (de Vries, 2013). It was not until the general wave of electoral volatility in the mid-1970s, combined with the debate about the enlargement of the EU, that “Europe” began to develop as an issue in any significant way within the domestic sphere (Usherwood and Startin, 2013:3). Nevertheless, by the mid-1980s, opposition to the principles of economic and political integration was still only marginal. The term ‘Euroscepticism’ itself was introduced in 1988 in British political discourse – in Margaret Thatcher’s Bruges speech.

Since then, the difficulties caused by the successive waves of accession and the growing tendency to consult the citizens on important issues through national referenda have led to a growing public debate on the benefits of membership and the direction the project of European integration should take. Due to this shift in public opinion, we can differentiate between traditionally Eurosceptic and Euro-supportive Member States.

Some scholars note that the countries that benefit more in financial terms from EU membership are more prone to positive attitudes, so the largest net contributing countries (i.e., Germany) are expected to be the most sceptical (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010). Also, the UK must be acknowledged as the most Eurosceptic member of the EU, as the Brits feel “in Europe, but not of Europe” (Curtice, 2012). “One important characteristic of the British public is, however, clear. They have, in truth, never really taken Europe to heart. Very few feel a sense of European identity” (Curtice, 2012: 200). Similar to the UK, Euroscepticism has existed in Denmark ever since the country joined the European Economic Community in 1973. The Danes have voted for Eurosceptic parties to represent them in the European Parliament since 1979; like their British counterparts, Danish Eurosceptics fear losing their independence to Brussels. Supporters of the EU usually cite the economic benefits that come with the removal of trade barriers (Euractiv, 2013).

The South of Europe is (or, as we will see, was) very supportive of the EU as it benefited greatly from European integration (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010). It had a reputation as the EU’s most pro-European region (Verney, 2011), with Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy ranking among the most Euro-enthusiastic in Europe for years. Findings show that ex-communist states from Central and Eastern Europe are also more supportive of the EU than average (Euractiv, 2013; Guerra, 2013). Before their accession, the relative poverty of post-communist countries influenced public opinion to create unconditional support, based on expected collective benefits. After accession, citizens view the material benefits and positive economic evaluations of their personal situation, so

economic benefit is the main determinant of pro-EU attitudes in all the Central and Eastern European countries (Guerra, 2013). France was one of the initial Euro-enthusiasts, in tandem with Germany, but now public opinion has evolved into a kind of Euro-indifference (Euroactiv, 2013). The Netherlands have long been viewed as one of the most enthusiastic supporters of EU integration. At least since the 1960s, Dutch governments have been strong supporters of the Community Model and the development of supranational institutional structures (Euroactiv, 2013).

2. Rising Euroscepticism in Unexpected Places

This familiar map of popular support for the EU has changed rapidly during the last years under the pressure of the economic crisis and the desperate efforts to rebalance the markets and public budgets. With Europe fighting the echoes of the economic crisis, criticism towards Brussels is higher than ever. Many Europeans resent the EU for continued rounds of austerity measures and for its perceived lack of democratic legitimacy. J. I. Torreblanca and M. Leonard (2013:1) emphasize:

Since the beginning of the euro crisis, trust in the European Union has fallen from +10 to -22 percent in France, from +20 to -29 percent in Germany, from +30 to -22 percent in Italy, from +42 to -52 percent in Spain, from +50 to +6 percent in Poland, and from -13 to -49 percent in the United Kingdom. What is so striking is that everyone in the EU has been losing faith in the project: both creditors and debtors, and Eurozone countries, would-be members, and “opt-outs.”

The authors describe the current evolutions as a clash not between Brussels and the Member States but between the North and South of Europe. Creditors and debtors, each with particular frustrations, are trying to promote their own interests instead of finding common solutions. Creditors are reluctant to sponsor governments with skyrocketing public deficits. Since the crisis began, citizens in creditor countries have become resistant to taking responsibility for the debts of others without mechanisms in place to control their spending. Debtors, having witnessed both despair and hope since 2009, feel crushed and humiliated by the austerity measures imposed by the Troika.

To an increasing number of citizens in southern European countries, the EU looks like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) did in Latin America: a golden straitjacket that is squeezing the space for national

politics and emptying their national democracies of content.” (Torreblanca and Leonard, 2013:1)

Economic conditions have had a great impact on public opinion across Europe. As EU-ordered austerity measures have dramatically cut Greek public spending, the patience of the Greek people is waning. Many have questioned whether austerity is the right cure for the Greek economy, saying the lack of new investment paralyses growth. Many in Greece would rather leave the EU than suffer the perceived consequences of the bailouts that are keeping the Greek economy afloat (Euractiv, 2013). Austerity is changing the perceptions of the EU among Italian citizens, too – especially among the young, 40 per cent of whom are unemployed. The recent Italian election showed that Italians have lost their faith in, and patience with, Brussels and Berlin, and no longer believe that the end of the crisis is around the corner (Torreblanca and Leonard, 2013: 4). Portugal has also been shaken by the Eurocrisis: net support for the EU has declined from +41 per cent in 2007 to -24 per cent in 2012 (*idem*). The public opinion in Spain has also shifted. The lack of a clear vision about both the national and the European future makes the sacrifices demanded of them meaningless. The Spaniards’ trust has been eroded by the fact that their voices are not being heard and their opinion has no influence on the direction chosen (*idem*).

Eastern Europe, also severely affected by the economic crisis, has been shaken in terms of support for the EU, although the evolutions are less abrupt than in the South. Greater stability in the region can be explained by the fact that the EU still represents “the ultimate guarantor of the new economic era” (Herzog and Tucker, 2010:236). In the Czech Republic, for instance, the steady decline in support for the EU is the consequence of the tainted image of the EU as a provider of prosperity and security (Torreblanca and Leonard, 2013:2). Poland is another Eurosceptic state in the making as the EU seems to have lost its reputation as the anchor of stability. In particular, the Poles are sceptical about the future of the common currency (Torreblanca and Leonard, 2013:5).

On the positive side, other clusters of states are only mildly critical or even downright optimists. The former category includes Swedes, Belgians, Luxembourgers, Finns and Austrians, who believe the European Union is not developing in the right direction but do not oppose the EU due to matters of sovereignty. The pro-EU group includes Bulgaria, Denmark, Romania, Lithuania and Malta (Bioros and Vasali, 2013: 9).

In this picture, Germany holds a very particular place. As the engine of Europe, Germany tries to handle the economic problems of members near collapse and maintain social consensus. This is not an easy burden to bear.

Germany has an overwhelming economic interest in the survival, and indeed strengthening, of the Eurozone – to protect its trade interests and because Berlin fears the political consequences of a fragmented Europe. But, as the creditor of last resort, Germany also wants to control the economic behaviour of the EU nation-states. Berlin does not want to let the European states off by simply bailing them out. If it bails them out, it must control their budgets. On the other hand, the Member States do not want to cede sovereignty to a German-dominated EU apparatus in exchange for a bailout (Bergsten, 2012; Friedman, 2013). Germany's efforts to save the euro are being increasingly perceived as being unreasonable. Against this background of accusations, Germans see themselves as the victims of the Eurocrisis. They feel they have been betrayed and fear that they will be asked to pay higher taxes or accept higher levels of inflation in order to save the euro. There is a visible tendency towards Euroscepticism, with only 30 per cent of Germans trusting the EU and 58 per cent not trusting it (EB81, Spring 2014).

3. Sources of Euroscepticism: Utilitarian Theory

The empirical observation that Euroscepticism grew during the economic crisis is supported by the findings of scholars in the field. More precisely, the utilitarian model of public support for European integration, first proposed by Gabel & Palmer (1995) apud Gabel (1998: 336), argued that EU citizens in different socioeconomic situations experience different costs and benefits from integrative policy and these differences in economic welfare shape their attitudes toward integration. Consequently, citizens' support for integration is positively related to their welfare gains from the policy. Utilitarian Euroscepticism, in a nutshell, means that the public evaluates the EU according to its achievements. It is a critique based on lack of benefits or economic inefficiency (Sorensen, 2006). Individual and cross-national variations are explained through economy-related variables such as types of welfare state or varieties of capitalism (de Vries and Edward, 2009:7–8). This perspective explains the differences in public opinion across Europe, and allows us to expect a widening of the gap between debtor and creditor countries as economic conditions worsen.

Extensive support for this theory can be found in the literature. Popular Euroscepticism seems to be better explained by economic (or utilitarian) reasons than by political ones (Gabel, 1998; de Vries and Edward, 2009; Surwillo, Henderson and Lazaridis, 2010; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010; Agapiou-Josephides, 2011; Quaglia, 2011; Guerra, 2013). Eurosceptic

outbursts have emerged with reference to specific EU policies such as the EMS and, to a lesser extent, the EMU. This is better explained by concern for the domestic economic impact of EU “output” (and hence economic Euroscepticism) than by arguments relating to national sovereignty and identity (hence political Euroscepticism) (Quaglia, 2011). As a political institution, the EU is held responsible for worsening economic conditions: slower or even negative growth of the national or regional GDP, rising national or regional unemployment and higher inflation rates are expected to increase scepticism towards the EU (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010: 791).

Utilitarian theory is improved by the concept of “political allegiance,” formally defined as “the willingness of a national public to approve of and to support the decisions made by a government in return for a more or less immediate and straightforward reward or benefit to which the public feels entitled on the basis of it having rendered approval and support” (van Kersbergen and Netjes, 2005: 11). Support for European integration translates into the evaluation of citizens of the extent supranational institutions allow national political elites to provide political, social, psychological and economic security and well-being.

The explanatory value of the utilitarian appraisal theory is highly relevant in the case of new Member States if correlated with the degree of exposure to EU policies. Elgun and Tillman (2007) posit that the effect of economic factors on public support for the EU is most visible upon exposure to the distributive consequences of EU membership. Familiarity breeds contempt, it seems. After becoming familiar with EU policies, citizens make a cost-benefit analysis, resulting in different degrees of support for the EU. Findings show that the relative poverty of post-communist countries affects patterns of support: collective benefits and mobilizing “unconditional support” are the two factors impacting public support for EU integration before accession. After accession, citizens view material benefits and positive economic evaluations of their personal situation as more salient, possibly affecting long-term patterns of behaviour (Guerra, 2013).

4. Insight into the Evolution of Public Opinion. What the Eurobarometers Teach Us

In order to better understand Euroscepticism at the level of public opinion, we turned to the most comprehensive database: the Eurobarometer surveys organized bi-annually by the European Commission. We conducted a secondary data analysis on official Eurobarometer results so our analysis is

both cross-country and multi-annual. We find this approach very useful for the investigation of Euroscepticism as a mass phenomenon because it allows us to accurately identify trends over time and make comparisons between states and/or groups of states.

The selected timeframe is between 2007 (EB67) and 2014 (the latest data available at the writing this paper – EB81). This period covers the pre-crisis disposition and the development of public opinion during the years of genuine turmoil for the European Union marked by a prolonged economic and financial crisis, the Eurocrisis, as well as social unrest, multiple bailouts and an overall mood of gloom of the European citizens. The data collected led us to the conclusion that Euroscepticism has amplified, and followed a particular pattern.

The main objective of our research is to define the particularities of recent Euroscepticism in old versus newer Member States, with an emphasis on the dichotomy between Western/Northern and Southern Member States. Other distinctions can be made between Eurozone members and non-members, and between debtors and creditors in the European Union.

We expect the following:

1. Overall, trust in the EU (and other indirect indicators of Euroscepticism) hit record-low levels in the last years, but with a tendency to stabilize in 2014.
2. Significant differences between Northern, Eastern and Southern countries as a manifestation of obvious economic and social inequalities.
3. Empirical support for the utilitarian theory.

In order to investigate these suppositions, we selected representative Member States, grouped around the axis North – South – East, respectively: United Kingdom (UK), France (FR), Germany (DE), Italy (IT), Portugal (PT), Greece (EL), Spain (ES), Republic of Cyprus (CY), Ireland (IE), Hungary (HU), Czech Republic (CZ), Slovenia (SI), Slovakia (SK), Croatia (HR), Romania (RO), Bulgaria (BG) and Poland (PL).

From a chronological point of view, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Greece, Spain and Portugal are largely referred to as “old” Member States (with accession dates ranging from 1951 to 1995), while Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia, Hungary, Cyprus and the Czech Republic (part of the 2004 accession wave), Romania and Bulgaria (members from 2007) and Croatia (the newcomer in 2013) are the “new” members of the EU.

5. The Year 2014: Current State of the Public Opinion

Signs of improvement. First, some introductory remarks on the current state of public opinion as reflected by the latest Eurobarometer data (EB81 – Spring 2014): The majority of indicators related to support and Euro-enthusiasm have improved slightly. More Europeans now have a positive image of the EU (35%, +4), while fewer have a negative image (25%, -3). Trust in the EU has stabilized at the lowest level ever recorded (31% trust the EU) but at least the declining trend of the last five to six years has halted. Continuing the positive trend observed in the Standard Eurobarometer survey of Autumn 2013 (EB80), optimism about the future of the EU has gained ground: more than half of Europeans say they are optimistic (56%, +5 percentage points (pp) since Autumn 2013) whereas pessimism has decreased (38%, -5).

Identity issues – identification with the EU. Close to two-thirds of Europeans feel that they are citizens of the EU (65% for the total ‘yes’); a six-point increase since Autumn 2013 and the highest level since this question was first asked in the Standard Eurobarometer survey of Spring 2010 (EB73). Also, the European elections held just before the survey was conducted impacted the perception that one’s voice counts in the EU. More than four in ten Europeans consider that their voice counts in the EU (42%, +13 pp since Autumn 2013), which is more than at any time since 2004.

Economic issues. The main concern of Europeans is the economic situation (39%, -6 pp since Autumn 2013), closely followed by unemployment (34%, -2) and the state of Member States’ public finances, which is mentioned by a quarter of Europeans (25%, -1). Around a third of Europeans feel there is a risk that they could fall into poverty: (32%); a feeling that has increased significantly since early 2009, probably as a consequence of the severity and length of the crisis. The leading countries in this respect are Greece (56%), Lithuania and Latvia (both 48%), Croatia (47%), Hungary (46%), Slovakia and Cyprus (both 44%) and Spain (43%).

Overall, gloom about the economy persists. A large majority of Europeans continue to say that the situation of their national economy is bad (63%, -5 pp). A very large majority of Europeans believe that their country needs reforms (88%, unchanged since Autumn 2013). Agreement with this statement is strongest in Cyprus (99%), Finland (95%) and Greece (95%), and varies between 94% and 74% in every other Member State with the exception of Denmark, where respondents are much more evenly divided (49% agree vs 44% disagree).

Most Europeans support economic and monetary union with a single currency, the euro: 55% are in favour (+3 pp since the Standard Eurobarometer survey of Autumn 2013, EB80). Conversely, 36% are opposed (-5). The support index for the euro has increased significantly since Autumn 2013 (from +11 to +19), the largest increase since the Standard Eurobarometer of Spring 2002 (EB57). Europeans living in the Eurozone are more supportive than those living outside it (67% vs 32%, respectively).

Europeans and the economic crisis. In contrast with the state of the national economy, Europeans are more optimistic about the evolution of the economic crisis. For the first time since this question was first asked in May – June 2009 – the majority of Europeans are optimistic regarding the impact of the crisis on the job market: 47% now consider that it has “already reached its peak” after a seven-point increase since the Standard Eurobarometer survey of Autumn 2013. Only a minority of EU citizens think that “the worst is still to come” (44%, -6).

When asked which actor they believe is the most effective for dealing with the effects of the economic and financial crisis, Europeans first mention the European Union (24%, +2 pp since the Standard Eurobarometer survey of Autumn 2013). The national government is then mentioned by 19% of respondents, representing a 3 pp decline. Whereas these two items shared first place in Autumn 2013, now they are separated by five points. This is the widest gap in favour of the EU since the Standard Eurobarometer survey of Spring 2010 (EB73), when it stood at seven points. However, a by-country analysis reveals sharply differing perceptions from one Member State to another. Respondents in Eurozone countries believe that the European Union is best placed to act effectively against the crisis (26%, +3 pp), ahead of their government (17%, -3). The reverse is true for those outside the Eurozone, where interviewees trust their government first (24%, -3) and then the European Union (21%, no change).

6. Trends in Time and Regional/Local Particularities

We start our analysis with the year 2007 (EB67), in order to assess the levels of Euroscepticism in the pre-crisis period, and we continue up to date, thus measuring the impact of the economic crisis on public opinion over time. However, when looking at questions directly related to perceptions on the economic crisis, the year of reference is 2009, the moment when this section was first introduced.