Mainstreaming euroscepticism in European politics

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Abstract

Anti-EU sentiment has been sweeping the continent recently. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Euroscepticism has been rising in national and European party politics, the European public opinion, national referendums as well as in the European media coverage sceptically criticising the European integration and its achievements. Under those conditions, when the EU is also suffering from an existential crisis, Euroscepticism has become much more mainstream in European politics. In this framework, this study discusses mainstreaming Euroscepticism at the levels of political parties, public and the media. It starts with the puzzle of contested meanings of Euroscepticism. Then, it unravels the complexity and diversity of opposition towards Europe by focusing on the typologies of Euroscepticism.Finally, it shows how Euroscepticism occupies a prominent space in European politics, society and media. Overall, the paper argues that Euroscepticism has become increasingly embedded in the mainstream political debates throughout Europe.

Keywords: euroscepticism, European integration, European Union, European Parliament elections

Introduction

European integration has become a great success, representing a victory in many ways. However, there are serious risks in underestimating the current difficulties, such as increasing Euroscepticism across the continent. As the European integration has accelerated and politicised, it has simultaneously given rise to contests and opposition. Eurosceptic groups have appeared against the ambitious desires of further and deeper integration. In that sense, European integration is the reason of existence of Euroscepticism and it is a futile attempt to try to understand the present European politics without paying attention to the opposition to integration. Referring to its emergence as a level of thought and its transition to the level of action, it is possible to argue that opposition takes various forms ranging from resistance to the general European values or to some dimensions of the integration to the rejection of membership or membership withdrawal.

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Since 1990s numerous academic efforts have been invested in understanding, conceptualising and explaining Euroscepticism in order to get a grip with the political, economic and social realities of the 21st century Europe. Most of the existing studies discuss and evaluate the concept by focusing either on its party-based elite dimension which covers the causes of Euroscepticism in party politics, the role of trans-national party federations, Euroscepticism in the European Parliament (EP) and national parliaments (Taggart, 1998; Ray, 1999; Kopecký and Mudde, 2002, Rovny, 2004; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002; Mudde, 2012; Skinner, 2013; Brack and Startin, 2015; Meijers, 2017); or mass-level public opinion dimension which analysesthe topic from the perspective of citizens' attitudes or electorate opinion expressed either in public opinion surveys or national referendums (Eichenberg and Daltan, 1993; Christin 2005; Krouwel and Abts, 2007; McLaren, 2007; Weßels, 2007; Sørensen, 2008; Condruz-Băcescu, 2014; Guerra, 2017; Conti and Memoli, 2017).

Differing from the traditional Eurosceptic studies with a narrow focus, this paper discusses Euroscepticism from an interdisciplinary and holistic perspective by referring to the specific benchmarks ranging from party politics to media coverage. The first part of the paper reviews existing definitions of Euroscepticism and presents the most important typologies of Euroscepticism which also reveal the diversity of sources of Euroscepticism. The second part discusses how Euroscepticism has become mainstream at the European level by specifically referring to the political parties in member states, political groups in the European Parliament, public opinion, national referendums and media coverage of Euroscepticism. In this framework, the paper adopts a qualitative approach in describing and analysing the party-based Euroscepticism as well as its media coverage, and relies on the quantitative approach to evaluate public-level Euroscepticism by referring to statistical data sourced from the Standard Eurobarometer surveys and the results of national referendums. Overall, the paper puts forward three arguments. First, Euroscepticism is a disputed concept due to the contested conceptualisation of Europe itself. Second, post-Maastricht politicisation of European integration has justified the adoption of Eurosceptic positions at both party and non-party levels. Third, Euroscepticism has moved from the margins of politics to the mainstream political debates and mainstream Euroscepticism has become a trans-national and pan-European phenomenon.

1. Euroscepticism

European integration has been an evolving process leading to the establishment of the European Union (EU) in the early 1990s, although this evolution has not always been welcome. However, opposition to the European project has been exceptional until the mid-1980s. There emerged a permissive consensus, a tacit approval at the mass level and a marginal or temporary opposition at the elite level

which confined the use of Euroscepticism to the margins of the politics in Europe. The changes started in the mid-1980s as a result of future plans for the achievement of the single market and initiation of the political integration. Initially, the UK was the strictest opponent to the further integrative projects. As the reaction of the country, in her notorious 1988 Bruges speech, Margaret Thatcher expressed her opposition specifically to the EU sovereignty which would supersede that of the Great Britain. She vocally and prominently said that „We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level, with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels" (Thatcher, 1988). The Bruges Speech was credited as a catalyst for the emergence and development of „diverging views developing among elites towards the European project" (Hooghe and Marks, 1997).

In this story the breaking point was the Maastricht Treaty which allowed a growing and increasing Euroscepticism to be seen among both the elites and citizens (Down and Wilson, 2008). Post-Maastricht developments represented a remarkable improvement in the integration process and transformed the position of the EU in the world within the existing global reconfiguration of power. When integration also involved political issues besides the economic ones, the EU had to confront with serious difficulties. The emerging gap between citizens and the political elite as well as between citizens and institutions weakened the public support for European integration. Thus, the „permissive consensus" of Europe's citizens turned into a „constraining dissensus" (Marks and Hooghe, 2009), implying a movement „from a situation where citizens were latent about the European integration to one in which politicians are confronted with an increasingly critical public" (Bijsmans, 2017, p. 74). More recently, with the advent of the multiple crisis in the EU, Euroscepticism has become not only persistent but also increasingly multifaceted and therefore turned into a complex dimension of European politics (Usherwood and Startin 2013, 1-2). Thus, since the late 1990s, Euroscepticism has spread across the continent and became a „well-established sub-field" in the EU studies (Mudde, 2012; Flood, 2009).

1.1. Contested definitions of Euroscepticism

The literature lacks a commonly acknowledged precise definition for Euroscepticism. In its simplest form, Euroscepticism refers to opposition to EU/rope. However, the exact definition of the concept is directly related to the various definitions of Europe. The lack of a clearly defined Europe leaves Euroscepticism in ambiguity. Since Europe can be interpreted as a geographical location, as a civilisation, as a political/economic project and circles of integration in this project (McCormick, 2014, pp. 23-47), the definition of Euroscepticism may also change accordingly. Thus, the depth of Eurosceptic sentiments depends on what Europe or which Europe we are addressing (Davis, 2017, p. 12). Moreover, Harmsen and Spiering (2004, p. 17) argue that Euroscepticism assumes „a meaning which must

be understood relative to the national political traditions and experiences of European integration which frame those debates". Despite some nuances in the definitions of Euroscepticism, it is commonly agreed that when the integration has developed and matured, „the rise of Euroscepticism has become a corollary of the deepening process" (Taggart, 1998, p. 363). At least since the early 1990s, different forms of Euroscepticism have gained an increasing prominence in Europe.

Initially, Euroscepticism emerged as an „English phenomenon" to reflect the country's „awkwardness" and „otherness" in relation to a Continental European project of political and economic unity (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004, p. 13). As first seen on November 11, 1985 in the British newspaper The Times, Euroscepticism was used interchangeably with the older concept „anti-marketeer", refering to those who had altogether rejected the EEC membership during the 1975 referendum (Forster, 2002, p. 11; Spiering, 2004, p. 128; Todorova, 2017, p. 406). However, at its core, „British Euroscepticism was rooted in a deeper sense of a (Franco-German dominated) continent as 'the other' to emphasise the distinctiveness of the country and people from Europe and Europeans" (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004, p. 16). In France, on the other hand, Euroscepticism has been used as a synonym of the word „souverainisme" with an emphasis on state sovereignty (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004, p. 17). In time, Euroscepticism has become a „catch-all synonym for any form of opposition or reluctance towards the EU" (Todorova, 2017, p. 406; Taggart, 1998, p. 366; Taggartand Szczerbiak, 2002, pp. 6-8); although different conceptualisations and typologies of Euroscepticism have been developed at both party and public levels in parallel to the various developments of the EU.

1.2. Euroscepticism at the party level

The general definition of Euroscepticism narrows its meaning due to the overlooking of the spectrum of attitudes towards the integration ranging from distrust and cynicism to opposition and detachment. To provide a much more specific perception, Paul Taggart (1998, p. 366) proposed an encompassing definition of Euroscepticism expressing it as „the idea of contingent or qualified opposition as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration". This definition has later become the basis of a growing literature on the subject, almost all of which suggest that Euroscepticism covers those who treat Europe and the EU in a suspicious way and put some distance between them and EU/rope. In a later analysis, Taggart and Alex Szczerbiak (2002, p. 10) compared Euroscepticism in various member states and distinguished between „hard and soft Euroscepticism", depending on the degree of distance. Accordingly, hard Euroscepticism means the „outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration and opposition to their country joining or remaining members of the EU" (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002, p. 10). In that sense, hard Euroscepticism represents a radical version of Euroscepticism as denying

integration, either at the economic or political levels, refusing the existence of the EU and rejecting membership to it and all that it stands for. On the other hand, soft Euroscepticism implies „contingent or qualified opposition to European integration", which does not refer to a principled opposition to integration but reflects national reservation on one or more policy areas of the integration (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002, p. 10). Compared to hard Euroscepticism, soft Euroscepticism represents a milder and reformist approach as supporting the European integration, the EU and its membership while opposing the integration policies of the EU or the idea of a federal Europe (Henderson, 2001, p. 20).

While Taggart and Szczerbiak's differentiation reflects the „ideological dimension" of Euroscepticism, Petr Kopecký and Cas Mudde (2002, pp. 300-303) put forward an alternative two-dimensional, „strategically driven" typology which analyses Euroscepticism referring to the types of public support, i.e. the diffuse and specific support/opposition for EU/rope. Depending on their classification, their typology gave rise to the emergence of four different attitudes towards EU/rope, i.e. Euroenthusiasts, Eurosceptics, Europragmatists and Eurorejects defined by Kopecký and Mudde (2002, pp. 300-303) as the following:

> „Euroenthusiasts support the general idea of European integration and believe that the EU is or will soon become the institutionalization of these ideas. Eurosceptics … support the general ideas of European integration, but are pessimistic about the EU's current and/or future reflection of these ideas ... Eurorejects … subscribe neither to the ideas underlying the process of European integration nor to the EU … Europragmatists … do not support the general idea of integration underlying the EU nor do they necessarily oppose them, yet they do support the EU … on the basis of pragmatic (often utilitarian) considerations decide to assess the EU positively because they deem it profitable for their own country or constituency."

Based on this classification, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008, p. 7) re-formulated their original model and argued that hard Euroscepticism is:

> where there is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their counties should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived.

On the other hand, soft Euroscepticism is:

> where there is not a principled objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that 'national interest' is currently at odds with the EU's trajectory (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008, p. 8).

Jan Rovny (2004) conceptualised Euroscepticism in a more streamlined way referring to two broad categories, i.e. magnitude of Euroscepticism referring to the established classification of hard and soft Euroscepticism and strategic/ideological motivations behind the Eurosceptic politics. Moving the debate further, Chris Flood (2002) put forward six categories seeking to capture the full continuum of possible positions on the EU. The proposed categories include (with the prefix EU-) „rejectionist, revisionist, minimalist, gradualist, reformist and maximalist" based on the position towards either the entire EU project and its structures, or towards specific policy areas. Some other typologies include Chris Flood and Simon Usherwood's (2007) „EU-rejectionist, EU-revisionist and EU-minimalist" classification and Sofia Vasilopoulou's (2009) three-types of, i.e. rejecting, conditional and compromising Euroscepticism emerging from varying positions on „the principle, practice and future of European integration".

1.3. Euroscepticism at the public level

Similar studies have also been conducted in defining Euroscepticism at the public level, albeit less frequently, (Guerra, 2017; McLaren, 2007; Christin, 2005; Hooghe and Marks, 2004; Kritzinger, 2003; Gabel, 1998; Boomgarden, *et al.*, 2011). Those alternative studies focus on the sources of Euroscepticism to understand why permissive consensus was replaced by constraining dissensus on the way of a much more developed integration. Since Euroscepticism is a complex and multi-faceted concept, it is not possible to mention any single cause of it. As one of the former presidents of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, stated in an interview with David Miliband (2012): „There are old demons in Europe - extreme nationalism, populism, xenophobia. You see that in times in crisis that extremist forces, populist forces, have a better ground to oversimplify things and to manipulate feelings." This statement of Barroso proves the arguments of Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2007) saying that „there are diverse sources of Euroscepticism". These sources range from economic reasons (Anderson, 1998; Carrubba, 1993; Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Sørensen, 2008) and societal factors (John Fitzgibbon, 2017; Usherwood and Startin, 2013; Sørensen, 2008); to the institutional and political discontent (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002; Usherwood and Startin, 2013; Gabel, 1998), democratic deficit (Sørensen, 2008, Norris, 1999; Majone 1998, Eriksen and Fossum 2000; Føllesdal 2004) as well as identity (Carey, 2002, McLarren, 2007; de Vries and van Kersbergen, 2007; Weßels, 2007) and sovereignty concerns (Sørensen, 2008; LeConte, 2010; Gabel, 1998).

Different sources of Euroscepticism have been multiplying the „potential sources of friction which may give rise to forms of Euroscepticism." (Harmsen and Spiering, 2004, p. 13). LeConte (2010, p. 9) classified them as utilitarian Euroscepticism, depending on the cost-benefit analysis of the EU membership; political Euroscepticism, mostly emerging from the side-effects of the supra-

nationalisation of integration, value-based Euroscepticism, seen in the form of imposing European values over the national ones and cultural Euroscepticism implying distrust towards Europe as a civilisation or as a cultural/historical entity (LeConte, 2010, pp. 43-61).

2. Mainstreaming

When the Eurosceptic studies started in the mid-1980s, their focus was on political parties' perceptions of European integration. However, when integration intensified further after the 1990s, „Euroscepticism has become increasingly more legitimate and salient (and in many ways less contested) across Europe as a whole" (Brack and Startin, 2015, pp. 240-242). In that sense, post-1990s meant the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism in terms of resistance or opposition to the EU and/or its policies; and proved that the concept is likely to remain an enduring phenomenon deriving its influence via the national and European party levels and non-party channels, including the public and the media (Todorova, 2017, p. 407). More importantly, Euroscepticism has become a serious widespread concern both in the sceptical late members and in the most pro-European states, including some of the founding members of the EU were represented as the most determinedly devoted to the ideal of the ever-increased European integration. Thus, emerged as „a specific British political phenomenon of intra-party division, particularly among conservatives", the meaning of Euroscepticism has been extended first in the British and then in all European „political discourse, the media and academic circles to serve as a broad, generic label which covers varying degrees and kinds of resistance to European integration from within any Member State or candidate country" (Flood, 2002).

The post-Maastricht developments, i.e. the transformation of the integration from the Community to the Union, the introduction of the Euro, the big bang Eastern enlargement of 2004, the failed attempts for the EU Constitution and the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty as its reformed version have embedded opposition to the EU at both European and national levels. The Eurosceptic parties have become much more visible and recognizable in the member states where the support for those parties was also consolidated. They gained a significant share in the EP and are expected to reach almost one third of the total seats after the 2019 EP elections. National publics have become more hostile towards EU/rope and have proved this hostility in the national referendums. Challenging media discourses have contributed to increasing criticisms against European integration. Thus, embedded Euroscepticism, both at party and non-party levels, has also contributed to causing anti-EU sentiments to become mainstream across Europe. In that sense, mainstreaming of Euroscepticism is discussed in the following part by referring to some specific reference points ranging from party politics to media coverage.

2.1. Political Parties in the member states

Eurosceptic political parties in Europe, which are politically diverse in their nature, have been on the rise with their destabilizing impacts on the European project. Although their political orientations may differ, they are all opposed to European integration, commonly capitalizing on growing frustration with the EU and trying to bring down the crumbling bloc through the Eurosceptic rhetoric they adopt. Therefore, Euroscepticism is apparent in the party systems of almost all member states where Eurosceptic parties can be categorised under four groups (Leonard and Torreblanca, 2014, pp. 5-6). The far right parties include National Rally (former National Front) in France, Northern League in Italy, the Dutch Freedom Party and the Freedom Party of Austria in West Europe. Other examples of far right Eurosceptic parties include Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary, Dawn of Direct Democracy in the Czech Republic and ATAKA in Bulgaria. Despite the heterogeneity among those parties, they commonly share xenophobic tendencies, an anti-immigration and anti-euro agenda and adopt an anti-EU approach.

Second, there are also the right-wing parties across Europe. They include United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in Britain (having some far right tones as well), Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, the Swedish Democrats, the Danish People's Party, the Finns Party in Finland, Vlaams in Belgium, Fidesz in Hungary, the Law and Justice Party in Poland and the Slovak National Party. Those parties oppose any integrative movements at the European level and all notions of an ever closer Union. Rather, they consider the EU as a threat to their national independence and sovereignty. Those parties support the return to national currency, border controls, and the end of the freedom of movement. They even demand the membership withdrawal if their demands are not met.

The third is conservative parties which mostly include the members of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) in the EP. The most prominent examples include the British Conservative Party, the Dutch Christian Union, Latvian National Alliance and the Civic Democratic Party in the Czech Republic. Those conservative parties are against stronger Europe and more integrative movements especially in the monetary and migration areas.

The last group includes left-wing Eurosceptic (and also environmentalist) parties including the Die Linke in Germany, Syriza in Greece, and the Socialist Party in the Netherlands and the Five Star Movement in Italy. They are deeply critical of the EU mostly from an anti-capitalist point of view referring to the current economic governance of the EU. They are against the Eurozone governance, trade liberalisation and single market policies of the EU. The Greens do occasionally join this coalition. It is obvious that Eurosceptic parties exist in almost all member states regardless of their status as a founding member or latecomer, a more or less democratic, a rich or poor member state, a big or small one. Moreover, Euroscepticism has become visible not only in the marginal or protest-based parties

but also in the established parties which are either „the parties of government or parties that have attempted to promote themselves as worthy of support because of their proximity to the governmental parties" (Taggart, 1998, p. 368). In that sense, the existence of the Eurosceptic political parties in the governments of some member states (at least) proves that Euroscepticism is embedded in politics. The mainstreaming of Euroscepticism in governing political parties has strengthened anti-EU sentiments.

Italy is one of the most prominent examples. As one of the founding members of the European integration, Italy is struggling with anti-EU/rope feelings that have been embodied in the coalition governments of the two Eurosceptic parties, i.e. Five Star Movement and the League. In the Netherlands, the coalition government has a strong Eurosceptic party, i.e. the Christian Union with its EU critical perceptions. The Eurosceptic tide is also rising in other founding members, i.e. France and Germany, where far right parties are moving toward an alliance through the partnership between the National Rally and Alternative for Germany as the two leading Eurosceptic forces, respectively. The Conservative Party, the governing party in the United Kingdom, is one of the strongest Eurosceptic parties on the continent. The roots of British Euroscepticism go back to the Conservative Party-based anti-market movements in the 1980s. Since then, the party has kept the issue alive and eventually opened the way for the Brexit process which is only the result of Euroscepticism embedded in the British political discourse emphasising the UK's inherent difference, separation and heterogeneity from the rest of the EU. This political discourse which emerged from the party politics is also sustained and (re)produced among the British population (Hawkins, 2012) suggesting that the public opinion also provided the background of the referendum decision to leave the EU. Using those sentiments, new Eurosceptic forces are also on the rise in the country where UKIP has alreadyrisen to national prominence referring to its critical attitude towards Europe. The recently established Brexit Party is another indication of the strong anti-EU sentiments in the UK. Thus, Euroscepticism inspired both marginal anti-Europe parties, i.e. UKIP and mainstream, as well as pro-European political parties, i.e. the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrats (Alexandre-Collier, 2015; Tournier-Sol, 2015). Under those conditions, it is possible to argue that despite over forty years of membership, a powerful and persistent Euroscepticism could entrench both in the British party politics and society (Gifford and Tournier-Sol, 2015, p. 1).[1]

In Austria, the Freedom Party of Austria, which is a partner in the ruling coalition, is a strongly Eurosceptic party and opposes all forms of an ever closer

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[1]For more details on British Euroscepticism, please see Tournier-Sol, K. and Gifford, C. (eds.), The UK Challenge to Europeanization – The Persistence of British Euroscepticism, London: Palgrave Macmillan; Sofia Vasilopoulou (2016), UK Euroscepticism and the Brexit Referendum, The Political Quarterly, 87(2), pp. 219-227.

Union. Denmark is also governed by a coalition government and a soft Eurosceptic party, the Liberal Alliance, participates in the coalition government. More importantly, amid the growing anti-EU feelings, an outspoken Eurosceptic from the Liberal Alliance, is appointed as the Foreign Minister of Denmark. The current three-party coalition government in Finland includes the soft Eurosceptic Blue Reform. The former Greek coalition government was composed of the Eurosceptic parties, Syriza and Independent Greeks, although the anti-establishment Euroscepticism of Syriza changed after the party came to power. Similarly, the current government of Hungary is composed of the stridently nationalist Hungarian Civil Alliance (Fidesz) and Christian Democratic People's Party under the leadership of Orbán who is among the most prominent Eurosceptic political personalities in Europe. In Poland, on the other hand, Law and Justice as a Eurosceptic, illiberal and authoritarian power, rules the country in a coalition government along with another Eurosceptic party, United Poland. In the Latvian coalition government, KPV-LV, as the Eurosceptic party of the country, along with the right-wing populist National Alliance, has become the representative of critical views against EU/rope.

The examples above show that the existence of the well-known Eurosceptic parties with their national and European reputation and capacity to change the course of national and European politics has mainstreamed Euroscepticism across Europe. Thus, party-based Euroscepticism has become widespread in Europe with an increase in the political parties having either a sceptical or critical attitude to the European integration (Taggart, 1998, p. 363).

2.2. Political Parties in the European Parliament

Euroscepticism has become mainstream not only in national party politics but also in the EP. First of all, the rise of Eurosceptic parties in individual member states led the numbers of dissenting voices in the EP grow significantly both after 2014 and 2019 elections. The increase in the power of Eurosceptic forces in the EP can be seen historically in Table 1.

Following the May 2014 EP elections, which is a breaking point for the Eurosceptic parties in the EP, both right and left wing Eurosceptic parties increased their seats which, in turn, resulted in a decrease in the share of most historically pro-EU groups. As seen in Table 2, the seats of two of the three pro-EU groups (EPP and ALDE) declined after the 2014 elections, although they still hold the majority. The EPP decreased its number of seats to 221 after the 2014 EP elections. This represents a 6.6% decrease for the EEP compared to its total seats in the EP after the 2009 election results. On the other hand, as one of the most sceptical political groups in the EP, the ECR increased its seats from 55 to 70, representing a 1.83% increase in the total number of seats in the EP. The number of votes for the political groups in the 2009 and 2014 elections canbe seen in the comparison in Table 2.

Table 1. Share of the pro and anti EU votes in the European Parliament

Year	Total	Anti-EU	Pro-EU	Non-attached
1994	567	25.05	70.19	4.76
1999	626	24.61	73.96	1.44
2004	732	20.08	75.35	3.96
2009	736	24.05	72.42	3.53
2014	751	29.29	63.78	6.92
2019	751	33.29	59.12	7.59

Source: European Election Results[2]

Table 2. Composition of the European Parliament after 2009 and 2014 elections

Political Groups in the European Parliament	2014		2009	
	Seats	%	Seats	%
EPP (Group of the European People's Party)	221	29.4	265	36.0
S&D (Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats)	191	25.4	184	25.0
ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists)	70	9.3	55	7.4
ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe)	67	8.9	84	11.4
GUE/NGL (European United Left/Nordic Green Left)	52	6.9	35	4.7
GREENS/EFA (The Greens/European Free Alliance)	50	6.6	55	7.4
EFFD(Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group, formerly in 2009 elections known as Europe of Freedom and Democracy)	48	6.3	32	4.0
Non-Attached	52	6.9	26	4.3
Total	751		736	

Source: European Parliament Election Results

The 2019 EP elections confirmed the results of the 2014 elections. Accordingly, Eurosceptic political parties marked gains and increased their overall strength. After the elections, the pro-European grand coalition of mainstream centrist parties (the centre-right EPP and centre-left S&D) which had held the majority of seats in the EP since the first election in 1979 lost its privileged status. Table 3 below also shows the percentages of each political group corresponding to their number of seats in the EP. Accordingly, among the pro-EU groups, the EPP has 182 seats, S&D has 154 seats and Renew Europe, founded on 20 June 2019 as the successor to the ALDE, has 108 seats. Among the others that are more critical and scepticaltowards the EU, ECR has 62 seats, Greens-EFA has 74 seats, GUE-NGL has 41 seats, Identity and Democracy, launched on 13 June 2019 as the successor to ENF has 73

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[2] Data retrieved from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/in-the-past/previous-elections; and from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/elections-press-kit/0/european-elections-results.

seats. 57 MEPs are non-attached. It is obvious that one-third of European citizens who voted in the elections turned to a Eurosceptic, radical or populist party which is a signal of popular discontent against the politics, as usual (Brack, 2019, p. 64).

Table 3. Current composition of the European Parliament after the 2019 elections

Political group	Seats	%
EPP	182	24.23
S&D	154	20.51
RENEW EUROPE	108	14.38
GREENS/EFA	74	9.85
IDENTITY&DEMOCRACY	73	9.72
ECR	62	8.26
GUE/NGL	41	5.46
Non-Attached	57	7.59

Source: European Parliament Election Results

Referring to the 2019 election results and to the post-election studies, albeit very limited so far, itis important to underline some developments in terms of the Eurosceptic victory. First, the victory of populism is a victory for the populist radical-right (Mudde, 2019, p. 24), especially by the help of those with the biggest scores of the National Rally in France, the League in Italy and the new Brexit Party in the UK. They could also score well in Spain, Germany, Austria and Belgium and win seats in the EP. Left populist parties, however, lost their 2014 momentum and suffered significantly in the elections. Second, the success of the right wing Eurosceptic parties came with a transformation of their Eurosceptic positions from a radical position to a more reformist rhetoric. Thus, soft Euroscepticism arguing that they will change the EU politics from within rather than contesting the EU as a construction, gained in the 2019 EP elections (Taggart, 2019, p. 27; Vasilopoulou, 2016, p. 63; 2019; Brack, 2019, p. 64).

2.3. The public opinion

Eurobarometer, which has been conducted since 1973, is the only tool of the EU to measure public opinion at the European level towards the EU and European integration (Signorelli, 2012, pp. 12-18). Although Eurobarometer lacks a question that directly addresses Euroscepticism, several standard questions on the people's trust level in the EU as well as in its institutions, on the performance of the EU, on the citizens' view about the image of the EU provide the opportunity to evaluate the Eurosceptic attitudes among the European public (Bârgăoanu, Radu and Negrea-Busuioc, 2014, p. 14).

By June 2019, 17% of the respondents had a negative and 37% had a neutral image of the EU. These numbers, in total, arehigher than those who have a positive image of the EU (Eurobarometer, 2019, p. 8). Around a quarter of the respondents, i.e. 36% of them, were pessimistic about the future of the EU (Eurobarometer, 2019, p. 11). Citizens have serious concerns about the efficiency and closeness of the EU. While a majority of the respondents (53%) perceived the EU as remote, 50% of the respondents said that the EU is inefficient (Eurobarometer, 2018, p. 125, 126). These numbers also reflect the concerns of the European people in terms of the EU's functioning. The results of one of the most recent surveys show that almost half of the respondents (45%) criticised the EU internally and believed that things are going „in the wrong direction" in the European Union. Only nearly one in three Europeans (31%) feel that things are „in the right direction" in the EU (Eurobarometer, 2018, p. 60). This negative feeling can be recognised in the citizens' level of confidence in the EU institutions specifically. While only half of the citizens (50%) tend to trust the EP and 46% of them tend to trust the European Commission, only 35% of them tend to trust the Council of the European Union (Eurobarometer, 2018, p. 92, 93, 97). Regarding the EU as a whole, trust is a much more serious problem. Among those who responded, almost half of them (46%) expressed their distrust in the EU as of June 2019 (Eurobarometer, 2019, p. 5).

The statistical data of the Eurobarometer surveys indicate an increasingly embedded opposition, ambivalence and scepticismamong the European citizens towards the EU. The increase in the Eurosceptic tendencies is visible not only within the traditionally Eurosceptic member states but also within the founding members (France, Germany and Italy), and the traditionally Europhile member states (the Netherlands) (Usherwood and Startin, 2013, p. 6). The citizens'attitudes, ranging from distrust in the EU and its institutions to pessimism about the future of the EU prove an entrenched Euroscepticism at the public level. As Harmsen and Spiering (2014, p. 18) further argue, European integration has resulted in strong reactions among the public. This public Euroscepticism is also multifaceted, ranging from democratic, political, ideological and sovereignty-based Euroscepticism to utilitarian and social Euroscepticism (Anderson and Kaltenthaler, 1996; Rohrschneider, 2002; Sørensen, 2008; Leconte, 2010; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010; Skinner, 2013).

2.4. National referendums

Another instrument to understand public reactions toward EU/rope and its policies is the national referendum, frequently used to ratify European Union (EU)-related propositions. In the post-Maastricht era, they have become the occasions for those who feel unrepresented to make their opinions manifest and to have a say over important EU-related topics (Bârgăoanu, Radu. and Negrea-Busuioc, 2014, p. 12). The mass European public could gain an opportunity toreveal their preferences on

European integration in national referendums. In that sense, the post-Maastricht referendums show an apparent unpopularity of the European project and termination of the era of permissive consensus (Condruz-Băcescu, 2014, p. 54).

Table 4. Referendums in the European Union since 1990

Year	Country	Subject	% of no votes
1992	Denmark	Maastricht Treaty	50.7
1992	Ireland	Maastricht Treaty	31.3
1992	France	Maastricht Treaty	48.9
1993	Denmark	Maastricht Treaty II	43.3
1994	Austria	Accession	33.4
1994	Sweden	Accession	47.7
1994	Finland	Accession	43.1
1994	Norway	Accession	52.2
1998	Ireland	Amsterdam Treaty	38.3
1998	Denmark	Amsterdam Treaty	44.9
2000	Denmark	Euro opt-out	53.2
2001	Ireland	Treaty of Nice I	53.9
2002	Ireland	Treaty of Nice II	37.1
2003	Sweden	Euro membership	58
2003	Czech Republic	Accession	22.7
2003	Estonia	Accession	33.2
2003	Hungary	Accession	16.3
2003	Latvia	Accession	33
2003	Lithuania	Accession	8.9
2003	Malta	Accession	46.4
2003	Poland	Accession	22.5
2003	Romania	Accession	10.3
2003	Slovakia	Accession	8
2003	Slovenia	Accession	10.4
2005	Spain	Constitutional Treaty	23.3
2005	Luxembourg	Constitutional Treaty	43.5
2005	France	Constitutional Treaty	54.7
2005	Netherlands	Constitutional Treaty	61.8
2008	Ireland	Treaty of Lisbon I	53.4
2008	Ireland	Treaty of Lisbon II	32.9
2012	Croatia	Accession	33.3
2012	Ireland	Fiscal Compact	39.7
2014	Denmark	Euro Patent Court	37.5
2015	Denmark	JHA opt-out	53.1
2015	Greece	Bailout	61.3
2016	Netherlands	EU-Ukraine Association	61.8
2016	Hungary	EU refugee quotas	2

Year	Country	Subject	% of no votes
2016	UK	Exit from the EU	51.9

Source: Derek Beach (2018), Referendums in the European Union, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, pp. 3-6.

As seen in Table 4 above, since the beginning of the 1990s, 38 referendums have taken place across the EU. 13 of them have produced clear „Eurosceptic results". The „no" votes of 7 referendums are above 40% (Beach, 2018, pp. 3-6) and legitimise the Eurosceptic determination emerging from different sources. These results highlighted the risk of negative public reaction and legitimised anti-EU causes. Thus, enthusiasm for the EU has been fading in member states. The strength of the opposition elements to the EU revealed that „permissive consensus of those supporting the Union is unable to compete with the louder, more passionate commitment of Eurosceptics" (Usherwood and Startin, 2013, p. 9). Thus, EU-related referendums have become a key feature of the mainstreaming process of Euroscepticism in Europe (Brack and Startin, 2015, p. 240). European political elites can no longer rely on the support of the European public. The Maastricht Treaty has become a catalyst to understand how Euroscepticism has been spreading across the EU at the public level. The higher level and more ambitious European actions have led to more suspicion and scepticism leading to a Eurosceptic mindset among the European citizens as a common uniting force among them (Habermas, 2013). Along with the Eurobarometer surveys, national referendums have also served to manifestembedded Euroscepticism in the perceptions of the European citizens.

2.5. Media Coverage

Since the media constitutes important platforms for public deliberation, there has been a lot of research on the presentation of the EU and EU affairs in various media channels. However, despite the growing literature on media coverage of the EU and a comprehensive literature on Euroscepticism, the attempts to combine the perspectives of the two separate fields are still limited (Caiani and Guerra 2017, p. 8; Usherwood and Startin, 2013, p. 10; Bijsmans, 2017, pp. 75-76). As discussed in the previous part, Euroscepticism is mostly discussed referring to political parties, party politics and public opinion. Assuming that the media plays an important role in informing, orienting and helping people understand the central aspects of integration, most existing research concentrates on the interaction between media coverage and public opinion on the EU (Vreese, 2007), representation of the EU in the media (Kevin, 2003, p. 121; Galpin and Trenz, 2017, pp. 51-53; Leconte, 2010, pp. 192-195), media impact on citizens' views (Conti and Memoli, 2017, pp. 122-125), and typologies of media regarding their positions to the EU (Startin, 2015; Anderson, 2004). Media analysis is also used to evaluate other dimensions of Euroscepticism including „party competition" (Statham *et al*., 2010) and „the role of

stereotypes" (Galpin and Trenz, 2017). These examples suggest that empirical research on the relationship between media and Euroscepticism limits itself to being for or against EU/rope discussion rather than the coverage of Euroscepticism in the media. A few exceptions suggest assumptions on the selected basis (de Wilde *et al.*, 2013) without possibility to generalize on the topic. In that sense, it is possible to argue that Euroscepticism tends to become mainstream also in the media albeit more slowly than at other levels of Euroscepticism.

Conclusions

The European integration is a continuous process which began in the 1950s and reached its recent form of the EU as the result of extensive changes, from policy areas to institutional structure and from number of members to areas of competence. Despite the fact that the positive results of this integration lead to the emergence of groups supporting integration, the same process also gives rise to the emergence of those who are suspicious and opposed to the process of European integration and/or various aspects of it. Therefore, the ideas that lie behind Euroscepticism have been existing since the beginning of integration, although they have gained different meanings depending on time and space.

Coined in Britain in the mid-1980s to show opposition to the market integration and confined to the margins of politics until 1990s, its use has currently become mainstream in the post-Maastricht era which marked the beginning of the politicisation of the European integration. Since then, Eurosceptic attitudes have progressively become prevalent in almost all members of the EU. Both European public and parties have been expressing their opposition to increased political and economic integration. Various scholarly research has been conducted to map and conceptualise the typologies of opposition to the European integration process. Thus, since the 1990s, Euroscepticism has become more prominent and justified as the main dynamic mobilizing public and political parties against the integration process. In turn, the European public has become more antagonistic towards integration. Eurosceptic civil society groups have been rising in the member states. Eurosceptic parties have become more acceptable in the national politics and they show more trans-national cooperation at the European level, most notably in the EP. National referendums have been providing opportunities for the European citizens to express their opposition towards integration.

Euroscepticism is no longer a temporary phenomenon. The negative attitude towards the EU is real, permanent and is steadily growing in intensity. Despite its emergence at the margins of politics, it has become normalised with the evolution of integration and mainstreamed recently after the repercussions of the existential crisis of the EU. It is undeniable that mainstreamed Euroscepticism at the national and European political levels has posed one of the biggest risks for the future of the European project.

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