

# **Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon**

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## **Abstract**

In the two decades since the emergence of the European Union at Maastricht there has been a concerted attempt to build a European political space, typified by the debates on constitutionalisation and democratisation. Much less noticed, but no less important, has been the mobilisation of publics, interest groups and political parties against the integration process. In the light of the failure to realise the Laeken objectives, the stabilisation of an anti-integration bloc in the European Parliament, recurrent 'no' votes in national referenda and the emergence of an increasingly coordinated movement of critical interest groups, we argue that this opposition has become embedded and persistent, at both European and national levels. This will have considerable consequences for the Union itself and the way it has chosen to largely ignore sceptical voices to date.

# **Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon<sup>1</sup>**

## **Introduction**

Over the last two decades the EU has attempted to build a European political space as exemplified by the debates on constitutionalisation and democratisation. In recent years, in particular since the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty, the European integration process has been increasingly beset by obstacles, partly as the Union has been forced to face up to significant opposition to closer integration: the recent, piecemeal approach to reforming economic governance with the European Stability Mechanism and the Fiscal Compact typify the overall lack of strategic vision. This opposition – most commonly labelled Euroscepticism – has been exemplified by the EU's failure to realise the Laeken objectives of bringing the Union closer to the people and of definitively allocating competences between European and national levels, the stabilisation of an anti-integration block in the European Parliament, recurrent 'no' votes in national referenda and the emergence of an increasingly coordinated movement of critical interest groups. Opposition to the EU has become increasingly embedded both at European and national levels and highlights the urgent need for the EU to engage constructively with dissenting voices and to consider alternative views about paths towards further European integration. This situation has become more critical as a result of the global economic and financial crisis and the continuing Eurozone crisis, as well as prospective enlargements towards the Western Balkans, Iceland and potentially Turkey. These developments have not only helped to further undermine citizen support for the EU but have also led to significant policy implications for both the EU and the member states within the Union. Challenges to free movement and the single market in France, Denmark and the Netherlands, the ever more pointed intrusion into member states' fiscal and budgetary policy and the seeming inability of European Council meetings to produce comprehensive solutions to the Eurozone crisis, have all propelled the EU into an unprecedented phase of uncertainty, contributing to deeper and more embedded Euroscepticism with the potential to cause irreparable damage to the EU's quest for legitimacy and stability.

Opposition to the EU has often historically been portrayed as a passing phenomenon, the inevitable 'grit in the system' that occurs when political systems are built and develop. A case in point was one of the earliest significant works on Euroscepticism, by Benoit (1997), which portrayed the situation in France as

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essentially temporary and conditioned solely by endogenous circumstance within the country. Even the dominant theoretical model in Eurosceptic studies – that of Szczerbiak & Taggart’s ‘hard/soft’ approach (2003) – does not acknowledge any *a priori* reason for the existence of Euroscepticism, except as a means of policy differentiation from centrist parties, an approach underlined by Sitter’s (2001) work on government-opposition dynamics. While this is certainly not a universal understanding of Euroscepticism (see Flood, 2002), it has coloured debate and has reflected elite understanding as well. We argue however that this is a misleading frame of reference and that it is necessary to engage with Euroscepticism in a fundamentally different manner.

This article argues that while the European Union has made a conscious decision to shift towards a more popular and inclusive form of integration since the Maastricht Treaty, this has been of questionable success to date. This shift is doubly ironic, given that the persistent (even growing) gap between elites and publics has long been identified and targetted through ever-increasing communication programmes from the European institutions and national governments (Bijmans & Altides, 2007). The failure of these programmes has usually been understood as a failure to communicate the Union’s values, since the literature points towards increasing knowledge being associated with increasing support (e.g. Gabel, 1998), but it is also grounded in the emergence of a block of active opposition within both public opinion and political action, a block that has been prepared to spend its political capital in raising its concerns and fears. When confronted with an elite establishment that has been unwilling to do the same – for reasons of low interest across the public as a whole – this has resulted in the embedding of opposition, effectively giving it a structural role in the integration process.<sup>2</sup> To explore these ideas further, the article starts by discussing how opposition has emerged, particularly since the early 1990s. It then offers an overview of the spread of opposition across the EU’s political system, at both national and European levels, before offering some thoughts on the implications of this for the EU’s development and the future study of Euroscepticism.

### **The Emergence of Opposition**

While there was some disagreement within the six states who formed the original European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957 (for example French communists) in practice the elite consensus of the era, which concentrated on the benefits of economic integration and the need to bind previously hostile states together, bound the six together. This prevailing mood was largely accepted by the general public in these

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<sup>2</sup> We used the term ‘embedded’ here in the sense of Ruggie (1982) to mean pervasive and enduring, but not necessarily permanent.

countries eager to modernise after the strains of the Second World War. It was not until the general wave of electoral volatility of the mid-70s, 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. In the three states which joined the EEC in 1973 (the UK, Ireland and Denmark) the debate about whether to join (and the referendums that took place on this issue) ensured that 'Europe' emerged as an issue, impacting on the domestic arena and causing division in and between parties. Norway's rejection of EU membership by referendum in 1972 also ensured that the issue would remain on the political agenda outside as well as inside the EU.

By the mid to late 1980s a broad consensus seemed to emerge at elite level among the EU member states about the value of economic integration as personified by the Single Market project. The successful marketing of the 1992 project ensured that even Greece and the UK (potential doubters) ratified the Single European Act (SEA) with relatively little public opposition manifested. Even the rump of French *Front National* Assembly members, temporarily promoted to the top table following President Mitterrand's decision to introduce Proportional Representation in an attempt to split the mainstream right, did not vote against the SEA, choosing instead to abstain (see Startin, 2005, p.80). What opposition that existed against the European economic consensus tended to be small and marginal. For example, the Danish *Folkebevægelsen mod EU* (People's Movement) which was founded in 1972 had some success in European elections but struggled to make any significant, permanent impact on the debate surrounding the direction of European integration.

It was not until Margaret Thatcher's Bruges speech (1988) which came as a response to Jacques Delors's ambitions for closer economic and political cooperation, that opposition to the EU started to crystallize in any meaningful, mainstream way. The speech had a significant impact on the discourse surrounding the EU as she became the first leader to fundamentally challenge directly the direction in which it was progressing. It was around this time, as the emerging agenda surrounding the Maastricht Treaty was increasingly called into question by politicians, public and media, that the term Euroscepticism started to be deployed in media and political circles in the UK (see Flood, 2002). There is no doubt that Maastricht marks a step-change in public awareness due to the nature of the proposals (see Flood, 2002; Startin, 2005; Mudde, 2011; Verney, 2011; Vasilopoulou, this volume) and is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, Maastricht signalled a new politicisation of European integration, with the name change from Community to Union and the creation of a new political order. Secondly, it marks the moment when divisions between European and domestic policy begin to become increasingly blurred in the areas of political, economic, social, legal, environmental and foreign affairs. Post-Maastricht, opposition to

‘Europe’ changed from being a straightforward question concerning the pros and cons of EU membership to one that was couched much more in terms of the rationale of the route that the European project is taking. As Ray (1999, p.86) points out succinctly: ‘The exact meaning of European integration does vary over time’ and ‘across national political contexts’ and this becomes more evident as a result of Maastricht. Flood (2002, p.75) notes that primarily as a result of these changes ‘opponents of European integration are constantly chasing something of a moving target’ which complicates analysis of the European dimension for practitioners and academics alike. Post Maastricht the EU as an issue drifts in and out of salience within domestic political debate as issues like The Amsterdam Treaty, the Euro, enlargement, the (failed) Constitutional Treaty, the subsequent Lisbon Treaty and currently the crisis in the Eurozone replace each other as the main focus of debate for opponents of European integration. Thirdly, Maastricht acts as a watershed, a key turning point in the debate surrounding the development of the EU as it marks the moment when referenda become a regular occurrence in certain countries to ratify changes to EU treaties, serving to galvanise Eurosceptics in their bid to derail the process of European integration. In June 1992 the Danes rejected the Maastricht Treaty and in September the French narrowly voted in favour – a far from ringing endorsement given that current, previous and future Presidents (representing France’s three major parties) all campaigned for a ‘yes’ vote. Finally, Maastricht acted as a pivotal point as the raised profile and salience of the EU allowed opportunistic politicians and leaders willing to mobilize public opposition to obtain national draw from the European issue. Pan-European cooperation begins between nationally-organised sceptical interest groups, springing from shared adversity and common threats, drawing in groups where opposition might have previously been only latent and/or inopportune. In short, Maastricht acted as a catalyst as Euroscepticism spread across the EU, both in terms of political parties and in terms of public opinion.

### **The Persistence of Opposition**

In this paper we argue that opposition to the EU has become increasingly embedded post-Maastricht both at European and national levels across a range of contexts and environments, no more so than in the day-to-day existence of political parties within the Union’s member states. It is in this area of academic enquiry that the majority of studies have focused. There have been numerous works on Euroscepticism and comparative political parties (see Taggart, 1998; Ray, 1999; Hooghe *et. al.*, 2002; Kopecky & Mudde, 2002; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2003, 2008; Marks *et. Al.*, 2006; Vasilopoulou, 2011) as well as individual party case studies targeting countries within and beyond the EU (see Raunio, 1999; Conti, 2003; Startin, 2005; Skinner, 2010; Stojic, 2011). Many studies have adopted this narrow focus on political parties (and to a lesser extent public opinion), even though it is apparent that since Maastricht

Euroscepticism is now embedded at various other levels such as non-party groups, within governments and within the media. At the same time referenda and European Parliament elections have re-enforced this sense of embeddedness as Euroscepticism has taken on new levels of salience. We have now entered an era where Euroscepticism has become an increasingly transnational and pan-European, phenomenon. These developments have been somewhat neglected by the academic community which has over-focused on divisions in the literature based largely around the role of political parties. Mudde's (2011) recent, worthy discussion of the divisions in the literature between the so-called Sussex (primarily country-based cases highlighting strategic concerns) and North Carolina schools (primarily cross-national studies, focusing on ideology) is a case in point, with its main focus on party classifications. While the role of political parties and their relationship with Europe's citizens are central to our understanding of Euroscepticism and its overall reach within states' political systems, we argue that a more holistic, nuanced and inter-disciplinary approach is required in order to obtain a full understanding of the way it has become increasingly embedded across the Union, as typified by the content of this special edition with contributions not uniquely focusing on parties (e.g. FitzGibbon; Startin & Krouwel; Guerra; Serricchio *et al* this volume). In the next section of the article we therefore look not only at political parties and public opinion, but focus as well on the embedded nature of Euroscepticism within governments, within the anti EU block in the European Parliament, within non-party groups as well as the crucial role played by referenda and European elections.

### ***Political parties***

Building on Taggart (1998) and Szczerbiak & Taggart's (2003; 2008) seminal works in the area of Euroscepticism and political parties it is clear that 'hard' and 'soft' Eurosceptic parties exist in almost every member state and that - contrary to Taggart's (1998) original analysis - some increasingly exist in government. Broadly speaking it is possible to identify four different classifications of Eurosceptic parties: Firstly, single-issue pro-sovereignty parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the Danish *Folkebevægelsen* (People's Movement) that are opposed to European integration *per se*. These are parties that adopt a 'hard Eurosceptic' discourse, which have made no significant electoral impact beyond the context of European elections but which are embedded within the domestic party systems within the context of elections for the European Parliament (see Usherwood, 2010). The second type of Eurosceptic party identifiable within this overview are Radical Right parties (RRPs) for whom opposition to the EU has become a central policy plank as they have sought to widen their domestic appeal beyond their traditional 'bread and butter' anti-immigrant discourse. The extent of opposition to the EU varies from party to party and country to country – contrast the British National Party's (BNP's) vehement opposition

to the EU with the Flemish *Vlaams Belang*'s more measured approach - but there is no doubt that opposing Europe has become an increasingly embedded part of RRP's and their overall policy packages (see Mudde, 2007, Hainsworth, 2008). Parties like the French *Front National* (FN) and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ: Austrian Freedom party) which have a long history of Eurosceptic dialogue and rhetoric, have been joined in recent years by parties who have made significant electoral breakthroughs, such as Geert Wilders' *Partij Voor de Vrijheid* (PVV: Party for Freedom) and *Perussuomalaiset* (True Finns) where opposition to the EU and the Eurozone is closely linked to the issues of immigration and globalisation. Added to this we have also witnessed the emergence in recent years among some RRP's (like the French FN) of what Lecoœur (2007) describes as *Euromondialisme* where a strong link is made in terms of rhetoric and discourse between opposition to Europe and opposition towards globalisation; the former being portrayed as a 'half-way house' or 'stepping stone' towards the perceived perils of the latter. In the wake of the crisis in the Eurozone the *Euromondialist* discourse adopted by some RRP's looks set to become increasingly fertile ground in electoral terms, as recently evidenced by Marine Le Pen's score of 18 per cent in the first round of the 2012 French Presidential elections.

A third category of Eurosceptic party are left-wing parties beyond the mainstream left, opposed to the neo-liberal direction in which they see European integration progressing and who believe that the EU is increasingly being run as a capitalist club on behalf of capitalists (see Milner, 2004). Such parties have enjoyed quite significant electoral success in recent years, deploying an alternative vision of a more social Europe with a clearer global vision. Parties such as the Danish *Socialistisk Folkeparti* (Socialist People's Party), *Die Linke* in Germany, The Swedish *Vänsterpartiet* (Left party) and the *Bloco de Esquerda* (Left Block) in Portugal are becoming increasingly established parties within their own party systems (see Keith, 2010). Eurosceptic Green parties in Scandinavia and the UK can also legitimately be included in this category.

The fourth and final classification of Eurosceptic parties which are becoming increasingly embedded in European states' party systems are those mainstream parties who are increasingly adopting a 'soft Eurosceptic' discourse on issues like the EU budget, the future of the Euro and further enlargement. These are usually (but not exclusively) mainstream right parties who appear to respond to volatile and negative public opinion on the issue. While in the past such discourse has been primarily associated with parties in opposition (see Taggart, 1998) the goal posts have shifted as there are clear examples of government parties adopting the rhetoric of *juste retour* over traditional communitarianism. An obvious example is the UK Conservative party which withdrew from the European People's party (EPP) European

Parliament grouping in June 2009 and launched the ‘soft Eurosceptic’ European Conservative and Reformists group (ECR) with The Polish *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice) and the Czech *Občanská Demokratická Strana* (Civic Democratic Party), along with smaller parties from Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania (see Bale *et. al.*, 2010). Euroscepticism is also becoming slowly embedded in some aspects of governmental policy and rhetoric beyond parties in the ECR group with even founding EU member states showing themselves susceptible (see Taggart & Szczerbiak’s discussion in this volume). Thus an element of ‘soft’ Eurosceptic discourse has crept into the governing parties and governments in France and Germany with the *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) adopting a tough line on issues like Turkish enlargement and the *Christlich Soziale Union* (CSU) questioning the economic burden of bailing out other members of the Eurozone. Even Liberal parties like the UK Liberal Democrats and the German *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP) have in recent years been forced to rein in their euro-enthusiasm when faced with the realities of coalition government and the need to juggle a range of disparate public opinion.

### ***Public Opinion***

Drawing largely on Eurobarometer data a number of studies have charted the volatility and increased negativity of public opinion post-Maastricht with regard to attitudes towards the EU (see Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Gabel, 1998, 2000). It has become clear that opposition and ambivalence towards the EU have become increasingly embedded among a growing number of European citizens across the EU 27 and in certain candidate countries. Based on the much-cited attitudinal questions in the biannual Eurobarometer surveys it is apparent that negative attitudes towards the EU have not only increased in countries with traditionally high levels of Euroscepticism such as the UK and Denmark, but also in founding states (Germany and France), in traditionally Europhile nations such as Ireland and the Netherlands and in new members such as Poland and the Czech Republic. In short, public attitudes have never recovered to the highs of 1991 where 72 per cent of respondents stated that membership of the EU was a good thing and 59 per cent stated that their country had benefitted from EU membership (Eurobarometer, 1991). By the end of 2011 (Eurobarometer, 2011), 26 per cent of respondents had a negative image of the EU, compared to 31 per cent with a positive image, with nearly as many pessimistic (46 per cent) about the EU’s future as were optimistic (48 per cent). The sense of disconnection is very strong: 65 per cent of respondents felt that their voice did not count in the Union and 51 per cent felt their country’s interests were not taken into account. Moreover, 51 per cent felt they didn’t understand how the Union works. Thus, it is unsurprising that trust in EU and its institutions has fallen markedly in recent years. Never has McCormick’s (2005, p.131) statement that ‘it sometimes seems as though the work of the EU goes on despite public opinion, which is often confused, sometimes doubtful, and in some cases



actively hostile’ seemed more pertinent. With the current global economic crisis putting the Eurozone under increasing strain Euroscepticism looks set to become increasingly embedded at the level of public opinion.

### ***The anti-EU block in the European Parliament***

Another area where we have witnessed a further embedding of Euroscepticism is in the European Parliament where the rump of Eurosceptic MEPs and transnational political groups have grown in size and stature at each European election, in particular in those elections post-Maastricht. Prior to Maastricht, Eurosceptic MEPs remained largely unattached or in informal groupings such as the Rainbow Group. After the 1994 election the soft Eurosceptic grouping Union for Europe emerged, later to become the Europe of Nations group for the duration of the two parliaments between 1999 and 2009. The Group for a Europe of Democracies and Diversities (a hard Eurosceptic group) was set up in 1999, then relaunched as the Independence/Democracy Group in 2004. In terms of left-wing Eurosceptic groups, the Confederal Group of the European United Left was created in 1994 and has developed steadily, both in terms of numbers and influence. In February 2007 Radical Right MEPs set up a short-lived and ill-fated transnational group - Identity Tradition Sovereignty - which disbanded in November the same year, comprising MEPs from seven countries, including the FN and the FPÖ (see Startin, 2010). The experiment illustrated the potential for transnational cooperation around the theme of Euroscepticism from the most unlikely ideological bedfellows.

The 2009 elections yielded more Eurosceptic MEPs than any of the previous contests and resulted in the emergence of the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group, a ‘hard’ Eurosceptic group comprising 27 MEPs from 8 different parties, under the leadership of UKIP’s Nigel Farage and the *Lega Nord*’s Francesco Speroni. It also saw the UK Conservatives push the formation of the ‘soft’ Eurosceptic grouping, the European Conservatives and Reform group (ECR) with 56 MEPs. The Radical Right failed to form a group in 2009, although there are currently 29 unattached MEPs (mostly Radical Right) in the current European Parliament. The Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left now comprises 41 members. With over a tenth of the Parliament now representing critical voices – admittedly of very varying kinds – there has been the scope to establish a critical mass, where ideas and practice are shared: as Costa and Brack (2009) and Brack (this volume) have noted, despite differing conceptions of their role, sceptical MEPs have built a framework of relations within the institutions that constitutes a base for leveraging their profile and influence.

### ***Non-party groups***

While parties have developed considerably in their expression of Eurosceptic views, it is important to remember that they are not the only way in which opposition has been articulated and become increasingly embedded. Most notably, there has been an extensive formation of non-party groups across Europe (and one which remains under-researched among the academic community; a recent exception is FitzGibbon, 2009) forming what might reasonably be termed an anti-EU movement. This collection of assorted groups has created an ever more complex ecosystem to sustain and develop Eurosceptic discourse and action. This ecosystem operates primarily at the national level: groups can be found in every member state, as well as in neighbouring countries (see FitzGibbon, this volume). In almost every case, there are several groups within a country, partly because of some functional specialisation, partly through ideological or strategic differences: it is of some note that the only country to have retained one dominant grouping is Norway (*Nej til EU*), the only country to have rejected EU membership. More typical is Ireland, where two main groups – the National Platform and the Peoples’ Movement – have developed a range of actions, building on the Nice and Lisbon referenda campaigns, supported by the Peace and Neutrality Alliance, a pacifist organisation. Together these groups were able to provide a range of perspectives and critiques in public debates beyond that possible within the party political system (see Tonra, 2009).

The shape and structure of national non-party movements is primarily structured by the national political opportunity structure (see Usherwood, 2006). Such groups are more common where it is more difficult to access the party political system. When combined with the relatively high levels of public opposition in the country, it should not be surprising to find the fullest development of anti-EU groups is found in the UK. At its height, around 2000, there were approximately 30 groups in operation, ranging from think tanks (the European Foundation) to ginger groups (the Bruges Group), from single issue groups (Trade Unions Against the Single Currency) to grassroots organisations (the Democracy Movement) (Usherwood, 2002). While this has fallen in recent years, with the diminishing political heat over the Euro and the Laeken process, there still remain a sizeable number of organisations, each typically working on a specific issue or aiming for a specific audience.

Also of increasing note is the development of trans-European networks of contact and exchange. Here the primary body is the European Alliance of EU-Critical Movements (TEAM), which links some 50 national groups in 18 states. TEAM works on the basis of shared information and practice, rather than attempting to regularize or introduce a common platform, an approach that has been the standard for

trans-national interaction between groups. The proliferation of Eurosceptic websites and the emergence of a sceptic community in Brussels have also both contributed to increasing levels of contact at a bilateral level.

### ***The Role of Referendums***

Although referendums have historically been viewed as a means of bringing EU citizens closer to the EU, the stark reality is that they have served to further embed Euroscepticism in terms of the perception of EU citizens. As Dinan (2000, p.397) elucidated over a decade ago: ‘Referenda have become an integral and important part of the European integration process. Whether constitutionally mandated or politically inspired, they have been used to decide whether or not to join or stay in the EC/EU and to ratify major treaty revisions.’ However, since Dinan’s observation, outcomes have increasingly gone against the wishes of EU elites and national governments. Of the 21 EU-related referenda that have taken place in the new millennium, six have produced ‘no’ votes (see Table 1) and in countries where voters have experienced membership (i.e. not including those in candidate countries prior to enlargement) only four of 11 votes have resulted in a ‘yes’ vote, two of these being re-runs of previously negative mandates in Ireland (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

There is no doubt that referenda have served to increase the salience of EU related issues at crucial moments in the development of the EU, allowing a Eurosceptic triumvirate of political parties, non-party groups and media to galvanise support and to gain legitimacy for the anti-EU cause. Whereas the Maastricht Treaty and the Euro made the EU a high priority for mainstream politicians who put effort into selling the EU’s benefits (and succeeded in shifting some opinion) any such enthusiasm has now faded in most states (e.g. Eurobarometer, 2011 does not list integration as an important issue for respondents). Opposition elements are clearly left as the most active participants in the debate as the quiet, permissive consensus of those supporting the Union is unable to compete with the louder, more passionate commitment of Eurosceptics. Following the ‘no’ votes in France and the Netherlands in 2005 (see Krouwel & Startin (this volume) for the continuing impact of these) and in Ireland in 2008, the use of referenda looks set to continue to decline (except where constitutionally mandated in countries like

Denmark and Ireland), particularly as a result of the increased ‘scapegoating’ of Brussels faced with the management of the Eurozone crisis. De Gaulle’s observation as articulated in 1960 that ‘Europe will only truly be born’ through the validity of ‘popular referendums.....in all countries concerned’ (as quoted in Hug, 2002) seems a long way from reality 50 years on.

### ***The Role of the Media***

It is clear that national media have played a key role in shaping attitudes towards the EU and contributing to the increasingly embedded nature of Euroscepticism in various states. Much focus in this area has been centred around the UK where the press have been forthright in their opposition towards the EU and its perceived threat to UK sovereignty. In a seminal piece Anderson (2004, p.54) observed of the tabloid *Sun* newspaper that it is ‘vigourously and virulently Eurosceptic, conjouring up the image of the EU as a corrupt and untrustworthy predator, driven by a Franco-German plot to damage British Economic interests, British security and British Sovereignty.’ Anderson (2004, p.170) also observed that ‘the current *modus operandi* of much of the London-based Eurosceptic press is a serious problem for UK democracy for which no effective voluntary or compulsory regulatory solution seems seriously to be on the table as far as policy makers are concerned.’ The situation with regard to the UK has, if anything, become even more one-sided, the Murdoch Press, the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* have been joined by a strongly Euro-critical *Daily Express* which runs regular front pages in virulent criticism of the EU and was instrumental in galvanising the 100,000 strong *Have Your Say* petition in 2011 which led to a parliamentary vote in the House of Commons over whether there should be a referendum on UK membership.

While the situation in other countries is not as one-sided there are clear examples of Eurosceptic discourse prominent in other member states’ media such as Ireland, Denmark, Austria and Sweden, to name but a few (c.f. Harmsen & Spiring, 2004; de Vreese, 2007). Ireland is a clear example of how the Eurosceptic press has taken on a clear trans-national dynamic with British owned red-tops like *The Sun* running pro-‘no’ vote campaigns in their Irish editions during the campaigns for the two Irish referendums in 2008 (see Holmes, 2008 and 2009). While we should clearly acknowledge what Anderson (2004) succinctly labels the age-old sociological ‘debate within the literature as to what extent people actually believe what they read in the newspapers’ there is no doubt that anti-EU media discourse has contributed to the increasingly embedded nature of Euroscepticism as a phenomenon in certain EU member states (e.g. Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2010). This is particularly the case in countries like the UK where the other side of the argument is largely not transmitted to the public at large.

### **The Papers in this Special Issue**

The special issue brings together a wide range of approaches and examples to illustrate the way in which Euroscepticism has become pervasive, embedded and persistent. Together, they seek to offer a fuller, more nuanced understanding of how this has come about, present the dimensions along which we might explore Euroscepticism and start to fully address the question of what consequences this has for the European Union and the future of European integration more generally.

Taggart and Szczerbiak build on their seminal works (2003, 2008) by revisiting and challenging earlier models of Euroscepticism, which pitched it primarily as a strategic device used by parties outside of government. By considering how Eurosceptics have been able to become parties of government in countries across the Union, they offer new insight into this maturation and mainstreaming of the phenomenon. In a similar vein, Guerra considers the shift in popular attitudes that has taken place in the past decade, specifically in new member states. While this is partly a factor of accession, Guerra's work points towards the increased importance of economic and utilitarian considerations in popular evaluations, a development that is likely to be strengthened further by the eurozone crisis. This latter point relates well with the findings of Serricchio, Tsakatika and Quaglia, who conclude that while the global financial crisis of 2007-8 did not necessarily result in increased Euroscepticism at the level of public opinion, this is not necessarily the case for the subsequent eurozone crisis. They argue that the reason for this is that the former crisis was conceptualized by publics as having primarily national solutions, while the latter places member states more clearly within the EU framework, with the consequence that the Union is under pressure to be seen to be an efficient political and economic actor. Indeed, Startin and Krouwel's work suggests that it might be necessary to look to an earlier critical juncture – the 2005 referendums in France and the Netherlands on the Constitutional Treaty – to find the roots of the heightened profile and increased scope of Euroscepticism. The challenge to the permissive consensus that these votes represented, albeit partly conditioned by attitudes towards politics and politicians more generally, has opened up new discursive spaces for critical perspectives on the integration process.

As we have argued in this article, it is also important to move beyond the 'usual suspects' of political parties and public opinion when analysing Euroscepticism. Brack's contribution is a case in point with its examination of Eurosceptics within the European Parliament, an institution normally conceptualized as intrinsically pro-European. Brack's extensive fieldwork highlights the various ways in which

Eurosceptics have used the platform of the EP to gain political leverage or profile, in both European and national arenas, as well as reinforcing their resource base through collective collaborative activity. This links in to FitzGibbon's work on civil society groups in three member states, each of which has seen groups become consequential political actors, leading or shaping public debate on the EU. This increased traction for Eurosceptic voices can only partly be understood by media environments, since it also speaks to the unwillingness of more pro-EU voices to fight a cause that struggles to find much resonance with citizens. In the case of countries outside the Union – as Skinner-Sundlisæter discusses – these voices can often be dominant, particularly when considering cases where membership is a live political issue. Skinner-Sundlisæter suggests that in recognising that Euroscepticism is not purely a function of membership, it is important to bring that understanding into our modelling of the phenomenon.

In the final section of the special issue, we look beyond the present to consider the ramifications of an embedded and persistent Euroscepticism. By bringing in the arguments of Andrew Duff and his reflections on the need for active debate, it is hoped that this might stimulate a new space for debate that has thus far been lacking. While Duff makes clear his disagreement with the positions that are adopted, his willingness to engage in discussion, as we argue below, represents a step towards the identification of common ground. In narrower academic terms, Vasilopoulou's review of the debates within the literature points towards a new historiography of Euroscepticism and the emergence of a new phase of Eurosceptic activity. In so doing, it pulls together many of the debates discussed in the rest of the special issue and provides a springboard to future research agendas in this field.

### **The Consequences of Opposition**

In this article, we have argued for an understanding of Euroscepticism as an increasingly embedded and persistent phenomenon within the integration process. Voices of dissent and opposition are to be found throughout national and European political systems and debates. This raises the key question of what consequence this might have and how it should be addressed, if at all.

Notwithstanding the embedding of Euroscepticism, opposition (certainly of the outright kind) remains marginal and heterodox behaviour, in the sense that it has not been able to achieve its objectives of stopping, reversing or fundamentally redirecting the development of what is now the European Union. The breadth and depth of the elite consensus in Europe around the value of integration after the Second World War ensured that by the time significant voices of doubt and dissent were raised, there was a strong wellspring of support that could contain, and to a large extent ignore, those voices. The

realignment of many elite groups to the realities of an increasingly intertwined and interdependent economic and political project, both at a material and an attitudinal level, has produced a strong position for further development of that project, or at least the *status quo*. We do not make any particular claims here, but such realignment can be understood either as a consequence of a path-dependency, as in the historical institutionalist perspective (see Pierson, 1996), or as a stage in a functionalist realignment of loyalties to the European level (see Haas, 1968): in either case, it has been largely successful in keeping scepticism and opposition in a structurally weak position.

Despite this strong *status quo*, it is nevertheless important to recognise that the EU is moving into a different (and more difficult) phase of its existence (see Vasilopoulou, this volume). No longer does the Union find itself in a period of major advances in terms of its development, in the way that it did in the 1950s and again in the 1990s. The protracted and painful unwinding of the Laeken process through the 2000s resulted in a Lisbon treaty that essentially reaffirmed the process to date, rather than a truly ‘ground-up’ reappraisal of the system. The difficulties in reaching even this modest consolidation suggest that there is no longer a widespread desire for major structural reform in the short and medium term. This trend is further reinforced by the severe impact of the global financial crisis since 2007, with all of its implications for national financial and economic retrenchment and for its impact on weaker economic growth, the latter historically having been associated with slowing in integration (see Dinan, 2005 for an historical perspective and Tsoukalis, 2011 for a recent view). The creation a fiscal compact outside the EU treaties highlighted the reluctance of some member states to use the EU itself as a vehicle for further integration, while the continuing eurozone crisis has become an important factor in the survival of governments from Greece, to the Netherlands, to Ireland. With this slowdown in integration in mind, from the sceptic camp’s perspective, it becomes ever easier to find shortcomings in existing EU practice, knowing that major resolution is not likely to be forthcoming at any great speed. As the periodic ‘relaunches’ of integration have demonstrated, the system needs to be constantly reviewed and updated if it is not to be overtaken by events.

Coupled to this slowdown in integration is the historic stance that elites have taken towards sceptic views, namely one of ignoring them, or at least of giving that impression. This was most vividly seen in the ‘re-runs’ of the referendums on Maastricht in Denmark and on Nice and Lisbon in Ireland, where there was a clear impression that people were being told to ‘vote again and get it right’ (Economist, 8 October 2009). Likewise, the inability or unwillingness of the Convention on the Future of the EU to engage with the alternative draft presented by sceptic delegates (Usherwood, 2007) was emblematic of the difficulties that oppositional voices have been faced with when given such opportunities. Even in the environment where

they have carved out the most noticable space (the European Parliament), the choice for sceptic MEPs is either to absent themselves completely or risk socialisation into the institution's practices and norms (Costa and Brack, 2009).

We would argue that notwithstanding the prepondence of *communautaire* views within the EU (and particularly its institutions), it is ultimately damaging to the Union to persist in ignoring sceptics. A central claim of the EU in the post-Maastricht era has been its transformation into a democratic and popular construction, where publics are listened to, engaged with and served: a task set out once again at Laeken. If the Union is to claim to be of relevance to publics, through the provision of effective and legitimate outputs, then perforce it must overtly engage with the full range of public opinion, a point explored at more length by Tambakaki (2011). The longer that this situation is left to persist, especially when there is no *grand projet* to focus attention, the more likely it becomes that opposition will become ever more normalised and stronger: it acts as another part of the sceptics' critique of the Union that it does not even attempt to open a dialogue with them.

In the much longer term, this risks challenging the status quo that has protected the EU so far. As the events of the Euro crisis have shown, it is possible to mobilise popular attitudes against the Union within a country in a relatively short period of time, as evidenced by the marked drops in support and trust in the EU with the latter falling from 57 per cent in spring 2007 to 34 per cent in autumn 2011 (See Eurobarometer 2011). The currently open-ended nature of the crisis would seem to point towards further difficulties for both the Union and for national governments, be they member states that need support, or ones shouldering the responsibility of that support. As Euroscepticism becomes increasingly embedded at the various levels identified in this paper, it is ultimately in the European Union's interest to engage with sceptics, if it is ever to secure its overall legitimacy and future success. A failure to do so as Europe enters an uncertain economic phase could have serious consequences for the European project as a whole.



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**Table 1: Referenda on the EU since 2000**

<u><b>Year</b></u>	<u><b>Country</b></u>	<u><b>Issue</b></u>	<u><b>Per cent of ‘No’ votes</b></u>
2000	Denmark	Join euro	53
2001	Ireland	Nice Treaty	54
2002	Ireland	Nice Treaty	37
2003	Malta	Accession	46
2003	Slovenia	Accession	11
2003	Hungary	Accession	16
2003	Lithuania	Accession	10
2003	Slovakia	Accession	7
2003	Poland	Accession	22
2003	Czech Republic	Accession	22
2003	Sweden	Join euro	58
2003	Estonia	Accession	33
2003	Latvia	Accession	33
2005	Spain	Constitution	23

2005	France	Constitution	55
2005	Netherlands	Constitution	62
2005	Luxembourg	Constitution	44
2008	Ireland	Lisbon Treaty	53
2009	Ireland	Lisbon Treaty	33
2012	Croatia	Accession	34
2012	Ireland	Fiscal Compact Treaty	40

