

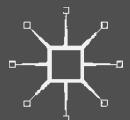
Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology

# Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media

Communicating Europe, Contesting Europe



Edited by  
Manuela Caiani and Simona Guerra



# Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology

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Manuela Caiani • Simona Guerra  
Editors

# Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media

Communicating Europe, Contesting Europe

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## List of Abbreviations

AfD	<i>Alternative für Deutschland</i> , Alternative for Germany
BNP	British National Party
CAWI	Computer Assisted Web Interviewing
CDA	<i>Christen-Demokratisch Appel</i> , Christian Democratic Appeal
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
C2G	Citizens to Government
CU	<i>Christen Unie</i> , Christian Union
DG	Directorate-General
DIGIT	EU Commission's Directorate-General for Informatics
EC	European Commission
ECT	European Constitutional Treaty
EES	European Election Study
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
eID	(unified) Electronic identification
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
ER	Extreme Right
ERC	European Conservatives and Reformists
EU	European Union
F	France

FN	<i>Front National</i> , National Front
FPÖ	<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreich</i> , Freedom Party of Austria
GER	Germany
G2C	Government to Citizens
G2G	Government to Government
GUE/NGL	European United Left/Nordic Green Left
HCI	Human-Computer Interactions
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
KCL	King's College London
LP	British Labour Party
LPF	<i>Lijst Pim Fortuyn</i> , Pim Fortuyn List
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
M5S	<i>MoVimento 5 Stelle</i> , Five Star Movement
NP	<i>Nowa Prawica</i> , New Right
NPD	<i>Nationaldemocratic Party of Germany</i> , National Democratic Party of Germany
PL	Poland
PP	Partido Popular, People's Party
PRRPs	Populist Radical Right Parties
PS	<i>Parti Socialiste</i> , Socialist Party
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party
PvdA	<i>Partij van de Arbeid</i> , Labour Party
PvdD	<i>Partij voor de Dieren</i> , Party for the Animals
PVV	<i>Partijvoor de Vrijheid</i> , Party for Freedom
RFID	Radio Frequency Identification
SGP	<i>Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij</i> , Reformed Political Party
SLD	<i>Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej</i> , Democratic Left Alliance
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> , Social Democratic Party of Germany
TTIP	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party

UMP	<i>Union pour un Mouvement Populaire</i> , Union for a Popular Movement
UN	United Nations
US/USA	United States/United States of America
VVD	<i>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</i> , People's Party for Freedom and Democracy



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# Communicating Europe, Contesting Europe: An Introduction

Manuela Caiani and Simona Guerra

## Introduction

This volume explores attitudes of various types of political actors (citizens, political parties, social movements) towards the EU and Europe, focusing on the potential role of old and new media on them. In a context of contested legitimacy of the European democracy, the media are crucial either as an arena for political actors where to express their discontent and to contest the EU. The media represent an instrument for citizens to

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both get informed about European matters and, eventually, increase their interest in European politics and, possibly participation. Hence, the role of traditional mass media and the new ones in an increasingly ‘politicized’ EU can be manifold: agenda setters, catalysers (and amplifiers) of critical situations, as well as bottom-up channel for the voice of citizens (Hobolt and Tilley 2014). In this book, we shall address these issues, framing the current situation of Europe and the positions towards it in the context of ‘mediated’ politics. Therefore, this book will be guided by the following questions: *How is Euroscepticism emerging in the current European turmoil? Are the (traditional and new) media, facilitators or obstacles to European democracy and the development of (pro) European citizens?*

Trust in European institutions and support for the integration process have steadily declined (Guerra and Serricchio 2014), as the results of the British referendum have showed on 23 June 2016, with 52 per cent of British citizens voting to leave the EU (see Guerra in this volume), along with, in many countries, decreasing voter participation in European Parliament (EP) elections (41.62 per cent at the 2014 EP elections, it was 61.99 per cent at the first EP elections in 1979). Also, the image of the EU across public opinion has been viewing increasing negative evaluations, since the economic and financial crisis hit its peak, in 2010 and 2011. About 48 per cent had a positive image of the EU in 2009, down to 31 per cent in 2011, according to the Eurobarometer data, which discontinued the question on the evaluation of EU membership for the country. In addition, tendencies of a ‘renationalisation’ of politics are observable in many member states, in particular in the form of increasing support for Populist Radical Right parties (PRRPs) and nationalistic or xenophobic movements, which usually also have a strong anti-European profile and who skilfully use the media and Internet to spread their virulent anti-Brussels propaganda. In particular, the last European elections mark a clear advancement of PRRPs all over Europe, and 51 MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) of Eurosceptic forces now seat in the EP. As Cas Mudde (2016) underlines, about 6.8 per cent of Europeans voted for Radical Right parties, within lowering turnout, an East-West divide and a challenging economic situation. The *Front National* (FN) in France gained 25 per cent of the votes and 24 seats (against 6.4 per cent in 2009); in the UK, UKIP (*United Kingdom Independence Party*) had 37 per cent

of votes and 22 seats (more than 10 per cent compared to 2009); in Denmark, the *People's Party* triumphed becoming one of the most powerful right-wing populist party of Northern Europe, doubling its number of MEPs from two to four. In Hungary, the neo-fascist formation *Jobbik* maintained the support it had in 2009, with 15 per cent, and in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' Europhobic Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*: PVV) gained four MEPs, with about 13 per cent of votes.

The current economic and financial crisis has increasingly exacerbated the crisis of political representation within European democracies. Together with the right-wing nationalistic reaction, also alternative forms of citizen participation in EU politics emerged, in the forms of pan-European protests against austerity measures or related debates and consultations on the social media. The mobilization of the new Left in electoral and protests arenas (Kriesi et al. 2008) has given birth to many 'movements-parties', as they have been called (Kitschelt 2006), like *Podemos* in Spain, the Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*: M5S) in Italy and *Syriza* in Greece, which further enrich their initial agenda, which focused on economic mismanagement of national governments and the EU, by interpreting the economic crisis as a symptom of a flawed democracy. At the domestic levels, the common protest against austerity took different colours, in Greece against the 'Weimarisation' of the country, while in Germany, the Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*: AfD) party raises the protest against the 'euro-rescue' and the role of Germany during the crisis (Guerra, forthcoming), and was the second most voted (24.3 per cent and 25 seats) at Saxony-Anhalt, while still doing well (15.1 per cent and 23 seats) at Baden-Württemberg at the German State elections on 13 March 2016.

Although opposition towards the EU has been pitched as a temporary phenomenon, it has now become a distinctive characteristic of the EU integration process, described by Simon Usherwood and Nick Startin (2013) as 'embedded', pervasive and enduring, within an active opposition that links public opinion, civil society and political action, with a narrative on the EU that remains encapsulated within a negative articulation. In sum, as Peter Mair argued some years ago: 'one of the principal reasons to address the issue of political opposition in the context of the European Union is that there seems to be a lot of it about' (Mair 2007,

p. 1) and this will be even more significant in the next few years, we can assume, in the after-‘Brexit’ scenario. The recent ‘politicization’ debate around Europe (see De Wilde 2011) warns that the ‘permissive consensus’ of European integration in many public opinions has changed into a ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe and Marks 2009), leading to increasing conflict and lack of legitimization. This volume sheds new light on such emerging forms of political opposition vis-à-vis European institutions. By discussing and problematizing the theoretical debate on the definition of Euroscepticism, it examines the role of the media, political parties and other civil society actors in framing and communicating their positions on the EU.

In this book, we refer to Euroscepticism as ‘contingent or qualified opposition’ and ‘outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration’ (Taggart 1998, pp. 365–366). Further research distinguishes between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ party Euroscepticism, where the former defines when there is no opposition to EU integration or EU membership, but scepticism emerges on the basis of specific policies or against the national interest; and the latter defines ‘principled opposition to the EU and European integration’, which may support leaving EU membership or opposing EU integration or further developments (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002, p. 7). De Vries and Edwards (2009) interpreted it as a continuum between these two positions, as done qualitatively by Flood and Usherwood (2005), from (i) ‘maximalist’, most supportive in their categorization to (ii) ‘reformist’, improving current plans, (iii) ‘gradualist’, for an integration at a slow pace, (iv) ‘minimalist’, accepting the EU, but opposing further integration, (v) ‘revisionist’, going back to a pre-Treaty situation and (vi) ‘rejectionist’, opposing both the EU and its policies.

An alternative explanation, based on a ‘two-dimensional conceptualization’ (Kopecký and Mudde 2002), which includes also support for EU integration, provides an interesting theoretical exercise, although it is not supported by strong empirical evidences. Based on David Easton’s *A Framework for Political Analysis* (1965), the research design proposed examines only Central and Eastern European countries and distinguishes ‘diffuse’ and ‘specific’ support for European integration, indicating support for the ‘general ideas’ and support for the ‘general practice’ of the EU integration



process. All the analyses provide definitions for party-based Euroscepticism, while a first attempt to move beyond Euroenthusiasm and Euroscepticism has been provided by Szczerbiak (2001) and Guerra (2013), addressing the category of public Euroneutrality, generally represented by the ‘don’t know’ answers. Further research has led to examine the affective side of public Euroscepticism. Similarly to Thomas Patterson’s analysis (2002), Guerra suggests considering Euroneutral (apathetic) category in the definitions of attitudes at the EU level, and splitting mass Euroscepticism into further categories, based on emotions. These can represent, as the UK case indicates, also in Daddow’s analysis (2011), what is described as ‘disenchanted’ and ‘Passive Euroscepticism’, ‘spawned by ... negative news’, affected by uncertainty, and an ‘alienated’ attitude, as ‘Angry Euroscepticism’, subject to contingent issues emerging from the domestic context, showing anger or bitterness towards the EU, at both the political or economic integration levels or any of the types of integration.

More recent studies focusing on the civil society level (della Porta and Caiani 2007; FitzGibbon 2013) suggest a distinction between ‘Euroscepticism’, considered as qualified or outright opposition to the EU (see Szczerbiak and Taggart 2003; Taggart 1998), and ‘Euroalternativism’, defined as a ‘pro-systemic opposition’ that supports alternative policies and institutional reforms, contesting the current mode of EU integration and arguing that ‘another Europe is possible’. Similarly, della Porta and Caiani (2009) elaborate the category of ‘critical Europeanists’ to refer to those social movements and civil society groups in Europe, that support the project of the European integration per se, but criticize the policies of the EU (for instance, in terms of lack of ‘social Europe’). An example of alternative Europe was the support for the Greek bailout referendum in 2015, or the European movement DiEM25, launched by the former Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis early in 2016. Its manifesto stressed that the movement seeks to ‘bring about a fully democratic, functional Europe by 2015’ to counterpose the current ‘common bureaucracy and a common currency’ dividing Europeans, the demos that was ‘beginning to unite despite our different languages and cultures’. Varoufakis has spoken of the EU as a ‘monster who needs civilization’ (BBC, March 2016), with the referendum on British membership that has further stretched a contested narrative.

As Erick Jones (2015) observed at the time of the Greek referendum, the European integration process is broken. Further, European integration has now become an 'empty signifier' signalling what could come next with the British referendum. This led to a fundamental dilemma of the European integration process and in general of the EU, that could already be observed with the French and Dutch referendums in 2005 (Taggart 2006; Harmsen 2005; Marthaler 2005). General support for EU integration is likely to correlate with a positive attitude on referendum choices, but non-voting and the 'No' vote at the referendum does not necessarily seem to show the same eurosceptic attitude. This would also resonate with results (Schmitt and van der Eijk 2008) from studies on EP elections, where there is no eurosceptic voting at EP election and abstention does not necessarily show alienation from the domestic political system and the EU. Social-structural reasons are generally explanatory in comparative perspective (Schmitt and van der Eijk 2008), but low levels of turnout give evidence of the perceived lack of influence of remote governance and the second-order dimension of these elections. Remote governance is certainly more difficult to be understood and Franklin's thesis (2002) may still prove its validity in a few years' time. As noted by Hermann Schmitt and Cees van der Eijk (2008), there is definitely a dark side behind abstention that may provoke further apathy in a vicious circle of low interest and understanding of the relationship between domestic politics and the EU.

If Euroscepticism, as a concept thoroughly studied in the social science literature, has therefore received several definitions and classifications, mainly seen through the public opinion attitudes and party system analytical lenses, this book seeks to link different contributions on party-based, public and civil society Euroscepticism in order to provide a comprehensive exploration and understanding of the increasing contestation of the EU. These can contribute to further accrue research on Euroscepticism and opposition to the EU, and shed a light on the phenomenon from different angles. In this volume, we shall address these questions, around the increasing opposition to the EU, locating the complex relationship between various types of political actors and Europe, in the broader scenario of challenges and opportunities provided by traditional and new media (such as the new information and communication technologies).

The debate on the democratic deficit of the EU is often discussed in terms of institutional design and reform, or with regard to lack of interest in the EU and identification with it among European citizens. While the importance of these factors is not denied, in this book, we wish to deal with the relationship between the media (and their use by new and traditional actors) and European democracy, as an important factor of EU legitimacy. Indeed, on the one hand, the media—either the traditional ones and the information and communication technologies (Internet and social media)—may play a crucial role in making European governance accountable, namely more transparent and open to the public; on the other hand, the media can act as an intermediate link between the citizens and their elected and unelected representatives (input legitimacy), hence ascertaining the quality of representation (Koopmans and Statham 2010).

There is a general understanding among scholars that media play an important role in democratic societies: in particular, how the media cover the EU has a profound effect on political debate and public opinion. This is reflected in the increase in academic attention on different aspects of media coverage of EU affairs (see among others Michailidou and Trenz 2015). The media can influence (with their negative or limited representation of European affairs) individual attitudes towards the EU. In fact, research on the reasons behind the weak media presence of the EU's institutions and policies often point to characteristics of the EU decision-making process that do not match the news value criteria journalists use in selecting news (see Meyer 1999; de Vreese 2001). One of the reasons media have difficulties in covering EU affairs is that negotiations and consensus-building processes—which are at the basis of many important decisions in the EU—are often kept outside the media columns in order not to endanger compromise solutions. And this often entails that EU policies do not receive much media attention at all. Most existing studies on media coverage stress that newsworthiness is promoted by such factors as the possibility of clear attributions of responsibility for policy problems and solutions, the presence of pronounced conflict lines, or opportunities for personalisation and dramatization—all things that are often lacking in the case of many EU decisions (Statham 2013). European Governance remains obscure and it is not clear who is responsible, the main conflicts

remain invisible, and the emphasis in the EU consensus and collegiality offers few possibilities for personalisation and dramatization. In general, it has been argued that media boost negative attitudes towards the EU. Yet, specific research that combines the perspective of these studies with that of Euroscepticism literature hardly exists.

The volume seeks to make a significant contribution to the scientific and practical knowledge regarding EU legitimacy, by looking at the development of an intermediary public sphere of political communication and mobilization that can help bridge the gap between European policies and institutions and the European citizenry. The analysis aims at focusing on public spheres (as those represented by traditional media and the Internet) both as channels for citizen participation and expression of citizenship identities and as arenas in which EU policies and institutions can be held accountable and where their contested legitimacy is at stake (Koopmans and Statham 2010).

Moreover, in the digital era, the new information communication technologies (ICTs) have added an extra spotlight for the politicisation or downplaying of EU issue. The Internet and Web 2.0 technologies (such as Twitter, Facebook, etc.) have become a crucial channel today and new spaces for political communication of parties and social movements, which increasingly use them to recruit members, make political propaganda, spread information about their electoral programmes and views, as for the coordination of collective action, also at the transnational and European level (Petit 2004). Citizens, on the other hand, can access a great mass of political information through the Web. In sum, new media provide great efficacy as a form of dissemination of political information, and as an emergent forum for public debate and exchange, at times interactively with political institutions.

Ever since social scientists began exploring the role of the Internet in politics, about 10–15 years ago, the debate has focused on many effects of the Internet on society, including its impact on participation and pluralism (Mosca 2007, p. 1). Optimistic commentators on the new technologies have stressed several positive effects arising from them, such as their capacity to overcome the one-to-many character of the once-dominant mass media in favour of unmediated connections among the new global citizens, as well as their potential to ‘revive a dormant public sphere by creating new networked spaces for participation and de-territorialized

domains for deliberation' (Bruszt et al. 2005, p. 149). In particular, at the level of voters and elections, it has been argued that new ICTs and especially the Internet would encourage citizens alienated from institutions of representative democracy to become involved in new types of political activities and to become re-engaged with traditional forms of participation (Russo and Smets 2012), and therefore also with European institutions and politics. Indeed, as new means of communication, these technologies would provide to a larger portion of the population with information on politics, which had previously limited to the few, thereby improving the possibilities for the public to become more interested in politics and consequently more engaged with it. Also pluralism, in terms of different horizontal 'views' populating the political discourse and the increasing of universalism and public deliberation, were expected to increase with the Internet (see Emmer and Wolling 2010). The presence of self-managed resources, such as websites, might also reduce the 'filtering' function of journalists on political issues. Regarding the participation in politics, the Internet would therefore allow an expansion of not only the 'users' but also the producers of (political) information, increasing the channels of participation. Being horizontal, bidirectional and interactive, communication via the Internet should reduce hierarchies, by increasing participation from below (Warkentin 2001). In addition, as noted, by increasing the channels of information available to citizens, and facilitating in this way the participation of those who do not normally have a voice, the Internet would also reduce political inequalities at different levels (Ayres 1999; Myers 2000; Cotta et al. 2004, p. 256). However, some scepticism has emerged on the quality of information available on the Internet as well as on the capacity of Internet communication to overcome social and/or ideological barriers (Sunstein 2001; Rucht 2005, quoted in Mosca 2007, p. 2). Shulman (2009, quoted in Karpf 2012, p. 171), for example, argues that online mobilization results largely in 'comments by the public of low quality, redundant and generally superficial'. The virtual Net is not exempt from limitations, simplifications and manipulations (Ceccarini 2012, p. 90). Thus, it will depend on the aims and content of the political communication and mobilization spread through this new medium, the quality of the virtual public sphere created and the consequences on democracy.

Beyond general citizens, when looking at parties' communication in times of growing Euroscepticism, studies stress the changes in party communication due to media landscape change. Several studies have therefore pointed out at the increasing relevance of the Web (and in particular Web 2.0 technologies) for electoral and political events (Hooghe and Vissers 2009; Strandberg 2009; Koc-Michalska et al. 2014a, b) as well as single candidates' websites and blogs (Stanyer 2008). Several analyses focus on the contents of parties' websites (Gibson et al. 2003; Larsson 2015), others on party 'profile' on the Internet (Hooghe and Teepe 2007), or on more specific topics such as party networks and hyperlinks. However, whereas it is known that the Internet and other social media are used by political parties in their communication activities, there are still fewer studies on how these possibilities impact on the quantity and quality of (their) political communication.

This book is located within this new scenario of 'mediated' politics and both positive and negative aspects of new communication and information technologies vis-à-vis communication and mobilization on Europe will be addressed in the present volume. The analyses of the following chapters shall enter into this debate (Euroscepticism, European legitimacy and the role of the media), by investigating the opposition to Europe from different perspectives and in a comparative fashion, looking at Euroscepticism and EU contestation raised by different types of actors that compose the political system (individual citizens, political parties from the Left and the Right, movements and media themselves) and communicated through different kinds of media (traditional media and the Internet).

The book is divided into three sections. The first is a theoretical introduction, which examines increasing widespread levels of Euroscepticism, the contemporary European crisis and the relationship with the media. The second section presents up-to-date empirical studies, which problematize, using different methods of data gathering and focusing on different cases (e.g. different countries in Europe), the role of (traditional) media coverage on EU attitudes and positions in details. In this section, works also compare traditional and new media in their influence on Euroscepticism. The third and final sections examine the Internet and social media as new arena where Eurosceptical claims and positions can be made visible. It addresses the use of this new medium by political parties and left-wing and

right-wing populist movements, which contest Europe and its politics and policies skilfully using the Internet and social media to this end. On the basis of these contributions, in the conclusion, the book provides new avenues for scholarly research and policy recommendations to enhance active citizen participation and strengthen the EU. Each chapter offers an original contribution to the scholarly and current debate about Euroscepticism, democracy and the media by offering an empirical analysis based on the theoretical concepts introduced in the first two chapters of the volume.

In the second chapter, Simona Guerra introduces the most pressing questions of the current research agenda on Euroscepticism. The literature has not yet investigated Euroscepticism beyond political parties and where and when countries view the lack of success of eurosceptic parties at the domestic level. This chapter addresses the understanding of the phenomenon, what it seeks to represent and manifest. Euroscepticism is multifaceted, it changes its colours, it moves its targets and its study requires tackling those issues it tries to represent, how the EU is communicated and how perceptions of the EU are formulated. Nearly a decade ago, Taggart (2006) suggested the analysis of the domestic politics of European integration, and this becomes even more urgent now that the EU is more and more contested due to its perceived lack of legitimacy. Further, as stressed, it is not possible to understand contestation at the EU level without knowing the dynamics at the domestic level. If Cas Mudde (2011) points to a mixed-method approach in order to answer the lack of validity on one side and the lack of reliability on the other, the goal for scholars could be to take a step backwards and reconcile two fields of studies, political science—and a focus on domestic politics—and European studies, as this analysis seeks to address. This chapter examines public Euroscepticism, as not only apathy towards politics in general, manifesting itself as an uninterested attitude towards the EU (see Guerra 2013), but also a more emotional dimension of the phenomenon, when the role of the media or contested debates can further trigger anger. It is in the different nuances and messages (or lack of messages) at the domestic and EU levels together that we can understand Euroscepticism and, within the process of EU integration, the empirical and theoretical study can be addressed to respond to Euroscepticism as a legitimate manifestation within the EU political process.

In the third chapter, Charlotte Galpin and Hans-Joerg Trenz insight about media framing studies for an explanation of Euroscepticism as an effect of negative learning through media inputs. Based on a review of the media scholarly literature to the analysis of EU legitimacy, Galpin and Trenz argue that Euroscepticism is, at least partly, media-driven. When considering the role of the media in shaping negative attitudes of the citizens about the EU, the focus is often laid on single actors' media strategies, for instance, the mobilization potential of eurosceptic parties, the emergence of new extremist movements or the media skills of particular leaders to spread anti-Brussels propaganda. Against this body of literature, they wish to emphasize the need to attribute a more independent role to the media and specifically to the role of news journalism. Instead of considering media as an arena that is strategically occupied by political parties, they therefore suggest in this chapter to take media autonomy seriously and to understand how media internal logics and selective devices contribute to the shaping of public discourse about the EU.

In the fourth chapter, Patrick Bijsmans, by means of a qualitative comparison of media coverage in 2009 and 2014, will explore if Euroscepticism has indeed become mainstream. The focus will be on quality newspapers in two countries, Britain and the Netherlands. Britain is the archetypical example of a eurosceptic member state and is not part of the Eurozone. The Netherlands is a Eurozone member in which criticism towards the EU has been on the rise, especially since the 2005 referendum on the Constitutional Treaty. Interestingly, both have been largely in favour of further Eurozone integration. If the mainstreaming thesis is correct, we should find forms of Euroscepticism and opposition in mainstream quality newspapers. This chapter takes a more detailed look at the topic of media and Euroscepticism at a time when the Eurozone crisis has made many headlines. Starting in 2009, the crisis saw a Eurozone on the verge of collapse, stringent austerity measures in several member states and new steps towards further economic and monetary integration. It has been argued that this crisis has resulted in a more political EU and an increase of opposition to the EU and its policies. Euroscepticism, so it is argued, has become mainstream.

In the fifth chapter, Benjamin Leruth, Yordan Kutiyski, André Krouwel and Nicholas Startin move from similar reflections and address if information source can matter on anti-European and anti-elitist sentiments. The



analysis focuses on voters in the UK, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and France: countries in which radical right, populist eurosceptic parties have had a favourable electoral performance in the 2014 European elections and received ample media attention. In this study, they relate media use to political preferences by utilizing a cross-national large-N data set collected during the European elections in 2014 through an online opt-in sample and the European Election Studies (EES), in order to test whether individuals with negative attitudes towards the EU and the political elites get informed via media that have similar stances. Following the notion that radicals and cynics are ‘epistemologically crippled’, in the sense that the main sources of information about political issues they trust also communicate eurosceptic (or at least Euro-ambivalent) positions, whereas they avoid or ignore more nuanced and EU-positive news, they assess what media outlets were most frequently used by euro-ambivalent voters. By using their own large non-probability sample in combination with the probability samples from the EES—both containing information on the media usage of different voter groups—they chart possible differences between euro-ambivalent and Euroenthusiastic voters in terms of the media channels they use to obtain political information. They argue that euro-ambivalent voters differ considerably from moderate and pro-European voters in terms of their daily media use. In addition, getting informed via left-wing- or right-wing-oriented mainstream media matters, when explaining voter’s policy preferences.

Moving towards a comparison of traditional and new media in their influence on Euroscepticism, Nicolò Conti and Vincenzo Memoli, in the sixth chapter, investigate the impact of the media on citizens’ attitudes towards Europe. If traditionally the empirical research on the topic has often favoured the descriptive approach in the analysis of media representation of Europe, the authors take a step forward and through an explanatory approach to investigate the impact of the media on citizens’ attitudes. All the EU member states are considered in the analysis as well as the traditional and the new media. The results show that the media play an influence on citizens’ opinions on the EU, specifically the new media promote more critical attitudes and channel disaffection for the EU. The new media often take a critical posture on many issues and the same is true with respect to Europe. The two authors argue that their use

makes citizens more inclined to Euroscepticism. However, this does not happen in the same way in every country but different patterns are visible within the EU. The chapter presents a cluster of countries based on public attitudes towards the EU and use of the media.

On a similar theme, but by the use of different methods and units of analysis, Lorenzo Mosca and Mario Quaranta, in the seventh chapter, compare 'news diets', electoral choices and EU attitudes in Germany, Italy and the UK in the 2014 EP elections. In particular, based on three original post-electoral surveys held after the 2014 European elections on representative samples of citizens with Internet access in Italy, Germany and the UK, they explore the relationship between the exposition to different sources of information and the degree of support towards EU institutions. A classification of news diets is elaborated by the two authors, who distinguish among occasional media users, prevalently traditional (frequent users of TV and newspapers), prevalently digital (frequent users of Internet and/or social network) and 'omnivores'. The last EU electoral campaigns in the three countries demonstrate the presence of relatively strong euro-ambivalent parties, such as *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* or the *Lega Nord* in Italy and the UKIP in the UK. They argue that the 'styles' of consumption of political information, together with party preferences, can have a multiplicative effect on citizens' EU attitudes. In particular, it could be possible that citizens with preferences for eurosceptic parties have particular news diets, which can, in turn, 'boost' their negative orientations towards the EU institutions. The study takes into account political and media systems characteristics, and control for cross-national differences in framing the EU.

Moving to the study of social movements (from the Left and the Right) and the use of the Internet in relation to Europe, Elena Pavan and Manuela Caiani, in the eighth chapter, address the issue of extreme right groups and their Euroscepticism, locating this complex relationship in a broader scenario of new challenges and opportunities provided by the new information and communication technologies to civil society organizations (also the radical ones). With the help of social network analysis and digital methods for the study on online environments, in this chapter they reconstruct the cyber communities of the extreme right in six European countries (France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Spain and

Great Britain) and analyse their structural properties. All extreme right organizations with an online presence (i.e. website) are mapped and their relational characteristics are examined in order to understand if they represent a cohesive or a fragmented 'movement sector'. Thus, a Web content analysis is performed, showing the anti- and pro-European discourses transmitted online by these organizations through their respective websites and the recurring (anti)European topics are found. The main idea is to determine under which conditions these extreme right communities are able to elaborate a unified (and coherent?) discourse nationally and cross-nationally around the new and increasingly significant new European cleavage, which can form, eventually, the basis for the development of genuine European political parties in the future.

With a focus on Web 2.0 technologies, in the ninth chapter, Annett Heft, Sophia Wittwer, Barbara Pfetsch propose a comparative analysis of Twitter networks of pro- and anti-EU parties. To address the issue of EU politicization, they examine Twitter networks of pro- and anti-EU parties from four European countries (France, Germany, Poland and the UK). Considering following and interaction networks, they ask to what degree party networks from both sides of the political spectrum are interconnected and what their connections actually mean. In addition, they analyse which types of actors follow and interact with the respective parties and which functions (e.g. support, criticism) these connections perform. They argue that eurosceptical parties show a higher degree of interconnectedness across countries than Eurofriendly parties. Also they find that networks of eurosceptical parties are more exclusive in terms of ideology while the networks of Eurofriendly parties entail more connections to the opposing camp.

In the tenth chapter, Donatella della Porta, Hara Kouki, Joseba Fernández present an analysis on left-wing social movements and Europe, by looking at *Syriza* and *Podemos* and Euroscepticism during the crisis. They start from the assumption that particularly in the South, austerity policies imposed by international and European institutions and adopted by national governments have provoked a strong wave of protests and generated new political actors challenging neo-liberalism. In this chapter, they explore *Syriza's* and *Podemos'* ambivalent stance towards Europe by tackling three dimensions: First, they analyse their discourse on both

European institutions and the European project in an attempt to explore what is the idea of Europe put forward by those leftist parties. Secondly, they compare *Syriza's* and *Podemos'* approach to European integration with 'hard Euroscepticism' defended by the European radical right. Finally, they reflect upon Europe in terms of political activism: is the European perspective relevant for the political activity of those parties' members?

In the eleventh chapter, Evangelos Fanoulis and Anasol Peña-Ríos look at 'EU u-Government' as a solution for more citizen participation in EU policy-making. If EU democracy has been traditionally practised through representation, in this chapter they argue that more civic participation in EU policy-making is plausible thanks to ubiquitous computing, mixed reality technology and virtual spaces. Current technology and IT services can remedy problems of time and space, which have been the biggest obstacles for active civic participation in EU governance. An examination of advantages and disadvantages of applying ubiquitous government (u-Government) in policy-making is conducted with an investigation on how practising democracy at the EU level can be facilitated through u-Government, enhancing the democratic quality of the EU representative model, whereas the fourth part proposes a conceptual model for the use of mixed reality technology in policy-making scenarios.

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# Eurosceptic Voices: Beyond Party Systems, Across Civil Society

Simona Guerra

## Introduction

It is uncontested that a key theme emerging from current debates in the literature in European Studies is that the concept of Euroscepticism needs to be challenged and refined (Usherwood et al. 2013, forthcoming). Scholarly research is developing to take into account and in-depth examine the multi-varied contestation at the EU level that has increased in the post-financial crisis years (Caiani and Guerra 2017, this volume; Stefanova 2014; Guerra and Serricchio 2014). Studies have generally focused their analysis on Euroscepticism and political parties (see among others, Conti 2014; Sundlisæter Skinner 2013; Taggart and Szczesbiak 2002, 2004; Ray 2003; Taggart 1998), and attitudes towards the EU

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(Guerra 2013; McLaren 2006; Christin 2005; Hooghe and Marks 2004; Kritzinger 2003; Gabel 1998). Recently, contributions have examined the salience of Euroscepticism, and how it shifted its position from the margins to the mainstream of domestic politics (Brack and Startin 2015). Further studies could now move to answer questions addressed by Simon Usherwood (2013) and Cas Mudde (2011) in the light of persistent crisis (Jones 2015).

The former noted that the study of Euroscepticism requires attention not only to the *different actors* but also to the diverse ‘objectives, strategies and tactics’ in their ‘evolutionary development and adaptation of those involved’ (Usherwood 2013, p. 280). The latter stressed the weaknesses emerging from the lack of communication between the Sussex European Institute and the North Carolina School (Mudde 2011), where studies on Euroscepticism applied qualitative and quantitative methodologies separately. Keeping in mind that the term Euroscepticism is the label we use and may be always using for clarity, we should pay attention to the different types and positioning of opposition towards the EU.

Euroscepticism still remains under-examined in its meanings and manifestations across the public, with some notable exceptions investigating the European public sphere or lack of it (Bijsmans 2014; Eurosphere 2013). A few studies focus on the media and the public, with publications emerging from the Amsterdam School of Communication and Claes de Vreese’s work (e.g. see 2001; with Boomgaarden et al. 2011; and his current ERC Consolidator Grant, ‘EUROPINION’) and recent publications on the politicization of Europe (Statham and Trenz 2012) and old and new media (this volume; Michailidou), where the interest mostly centres on the explanation of attitudes by suggesting different frameworks (party cues, rational utilitarianism, identity, government and domestic perceptions) and analyses of the Eurosceptic discourse in order to examine its outcome (e.g. studying Euroscepticism as dependent variable), as also Chris Flood (2002) noted 22 years ago.

Further, civil society remains the theme of only a few analyses (exceptions are FitzGibbon 2013a, 2013b; Usherwood 2013; della Porta and Caiani 2009), which have attempted to address the understanding of citizens’ dissatisfaction and civil society proposals. Recent contestations addressed the idea of the EU in the Treaties, and John FitzGibbon suggests

a new term, 'Euroalternativism', to indicate 'pro-systemic opposition' that proposes alternative policies and institutional reforms, while arguing that 'another Europe is possible' (2013a; see also Bijsmans 2017, this volume). Further, comparative analyses stress the possible 'diverse' and 'contradictory' results through cross-national and cross-temporal studies (Henjak et al. 2012).

It is critical to note, as recently done by Simona Guerra (2017, forthcoming), that public opinion presents a different case study, where disengagement may show not only neutrality but also disinterest. If political parties necessarily need to take a position on the EU, citizens may feel the EU as too far from their life and remote governance can be difficult to be understood.

Some of the most pressing research questions, emerging by Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart's main study on Euroscepticism (2008), have been examined, looking at the role and influence of Eurosceptic parties in government (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2013) and to the analysis and understanding of Euroscepticism at different levels (Leconte 2010). Yet, there are pressing questions that have not been fully explored, for example, (i) the lack of Eurosceptic parties (and Euroscepticism) at the domestic level; (ii) its understanding—whether the emergence of Euroscepticism actually represents Euroscepticism, or protest against political institutions/ domestic situation/economic recession and how this is linked to the lack of knowledge of what the EU is (explored by della Porta et al. 2017, this volume); (iii) how this opposition across public opinion and civil society emerges—what the drivers are (see Taggart and Szczerbiak 2014)—and if it remains embedded (as pervasive and enduring, without being necessarily permanent, see Usherwood and Startin 2013), and when that happens, whether it changes its colours or shifts its focus (the time span here covered is from 2004 to 2017); (iv) how Euroscepticism is articulated and manifested and what actors, institutions and ideas it addresses.

Euroscepticism, as noted (Guerra 2017, forthcoming), is multifaceted; it changes its colours and shifts its targets. Hence, its study would require tackling those issues it tries to represent, how the EU is communicated and how perceptions of the EU are made up. Almost ten years ago, Taggart (2006) suggested proceeding by analysing domestic politics. This is even more urgent now that austerity measures have reinforced debates

on the lack of legitimacy of the EU, the economic versus democracy contestation and the outcome of the Brexit referendum, on 23 June 2016. Dynamics at the domestic level are critical to understand Euroscepticism. Thus, this analysis seeks to suggest taking a step backward and reconcile two fields of studies, European domestic politics and European Studies (see Guerra 2017, [forthcoming](#)), using a mixed-method approach, as stressed by Cas Mudde (2011), and a comparative research design, bearing in mind that public and civil society Euroscepticism is not likely to be explained by party models.

This chapter presents a state of the art of Euroscepticism and addresses new directions for research, while underlying those different *actors, tactics and forms* that may help explore the in-depth understanding of its manifestation, articulation and impact at the domestic level. As Paul Taggart (2006) suggested ten years ago, it is worth to reconcile the domestic politics dimension with the analysis of the EU policy-making process and the study of its institutions. It is in the different nuances and messages, and lack of messages, at the domestic and EU levels that we can understand Euroscepticism. The ‘debate on Europe is complex, but... [I]t is coherent, not chaotic. It is connected to domestic political conflict, not *sui generis*’ (Hooghe and Marks 2009). It is in this conflict at the domestic level that we can understand Euroscepticism, its emergence, its drivers and its success, also in comparative perspective, without losing the depth of the case study (Lijphart 1971). Within the process of EU integration, the empirical and theoretical study are here addressed to examine Euroscepticism as a legitimate manifestation within the EU political process and where next in its study.

## Studying Euroscepticism After the Financial Crisis

The recent financial and economic crisis, austerity programmes and the slow pace towards further integration process have affected increasing opposition to the EU that is, as Usherwood and Startin (2013) observed, pervasive and enduring. This is even more acute across the

post-Communist new member states (Ágh 2014), with studies that focus on an ‘illiberal consolidation’ and a ‘democratic malaise’, limited cultural change and ‘elite collusion’ (Dawson and Hanley 2016), and the impact of the crisis on still very young democracies (Krastev 2016; Guerra 2016a).

An overview on the news and communication on the EU and European affairs (Galpin and Trenz 2017, this volume) shows some patchy results, differently from the analysis in Western member states (Bijsmans 2017). In the Czech Republic, news on the EU can sometimes refer to ‘foolish’ and ‘useless’ regulations and directives (‘e.g. ban on classic light bulbs, parameters for chicken cages etc’) reinforcing the idea that the European Parliament (EP) works on useless debates and is an inadequate institution (Guerra 2017, forthcoming; see also Bijsmans 2017, this volume; Leruth et al. 2017, this volume).

This analysis suggests studying Euroscepticism with an eye to the context in which it arises and its forms, with a focus on our primary concern (Taggart 2012), similarly to the study of populism. Euroscepticism and contestation towards the EU ring a bell, and it is important to understand what Euroscepticism signals in order to understand it. As Usherwood (2014) writes, ‘the greatest danger is... the risk that the Parliament (and the Union) can continue to function as if nothing has happened’. Euroscepticism may not have an impact of the policy-making process at the EP level, because Eurosceptic Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) may be ‘split among themselves and poorly organised’ (Usherwood 2014), but the EU is definitely more contested, ‘they still form a legitimate part of the body politic and deserve as much attention as any other section of society’ (Usherwood 2014). Eurosceptic MEPs’ presence at the heart of the EU ‘is an issue and an asset for its legitimisation’, they represent EU citizens, and opposition and resistance to the EU ‘should not be routinely viewed as an obstacle to EU integration, but also as a resource for the affirmation of the EU as democratic political system’ (Brack 2014). The study of Euroscepticism can further develop, not just moving from dependent variable to independent variable—for example and study its influence and impact—but also examining its understanding, drivers and different manifestations.

The study of Euroscepticism has developed from the 1990s and has established itself as a main field of research across the European Studies discipline. The analysis has mainly examined party-based Euroscepticism and developed looking at Euroscepticism as the dependent variable, seeking to explain it. Recent research also underlines its embeddedness and persistence across party system (Usherwood and Startin 2013), but the recent outcome of the Brexit referendum, with the victory of the Leave 52 per cent versus 48 per cent, addresses the salience of the study of opposition to the EU beyond political parties, across the public and civil society, and through the media. The suggestion formulated here, in order to understand the phenomenon, is that Euroscepticism has different nuances and shades at the public level. Further, as noted by John FitzGibbon (2013b), although we may apply the same analytical tools, civil society organizations use different channels and means to contest and represent opposition to the EU integration process. In addition, following on Schmitt and van der Eijk's (2008) analysis, low levels of turnout at EP elections may have an impact on engagement at the EU and political levels, as Hanley (2014) suggest, '[n]on-voting... could prove the real long-term threat to sustainability of the EU's troubled democratic institutions'.

If the concept of Euroscepticism is challenging, the debate on the democratic deficit should include a debate on whether such deficit exists and its definitions to then examine sources of legitimacy, as in this volume. Its debate is described as similar to the case when a group of blind men touch an elephant. As they all touch a different part, when they try to guess what animal they have touched, they come to different conclusions (see Jensen 2009). Back in 1957, concerns on the democratic nature of the EU did not represent a salient issue, but the first-voted EP in 1979 did not halt debates, further touching upon input and output legitimacy, accountability and representation (Majone 1998; Eriksen and Fossum 2000; Schmitter 2000; Meny 2002; Zweifel 2002; Føllesdal 2004; Føllesdal and Hix 2006; Majone 2006; Moravcsik 2006; Thomassen 2009). The EU is not an international organization similar to the United Nations, or any other existing project, but a unique supranational polity 'in-the-making'. As such, it needs to tackle on continuous challenges of its policy-making process. A research approach would then address the

questions of its nature linked to Moravcsik's (re-defined) question, 'what can we learn from the financial and economic crisis and from the contesting voices emerging from public opinion and civil society?' This would lead us to understand actors, tactics and forms of Euroscepticism after the economic and financial crisis.

## Euroscepticism: Definition and Measurements

The definition of Euroscepticism commonly used is provided with reference to political parties, as 'the idea of contingent or qualified opposition', which may also incorporate 'outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration' (Taggart 1998, pp. 365–366). The development of contested debates, in the run-up to the eastward enlargement, led to the distinction between 'soft'- and 'hard'-party Euroscepticism. Soft Euroscepticism would indicate opposition to one or more policies, as in the case of perceived threat to 'national interest'; while hard Euroscepticism would express principled opposition, as in those political parties aiming to withdraw their country from the EU or opposing EU integration or further developments (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2002, p. 7, in Guerra 2017, forthcoming).

Further definitions have explored party-based Euroscepticism (see Conti 2012; Flood and Usherwood 2005; Kopecký and Mudde 2002), while the operationalization of scales into the 'hard' and 'soft' categories challenges the changing nature of the manifestation of this phenomenon, where the two hard and soft do not seem to indicate the different degrees of Euroscepticism, in particular with regard to the 'soft' dimension and its application at the public level. A Euroneutral category, generally neglected in the literature on Euroscepticism (with notable exceptions, in particular Szczerbiak 2001; see also Guerra 2013; Schmitt and van der Eijk 2008), is flattened on a Eurosceptic category, while 'no idea on the EU' and 'no interest in the EU' do not necessarily represent contingent or principled opposition to EU integration, in particular across public opinion (see Guerra 2017, forthcoming).

The literature has had limited scope for widespread expansion, beyond the study of party-based Euroscepticism, preferring the reference to the

taxonomic approach offered by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2002). As analysed in the *Journal of Common Market Studies* Special Issue, 'Confronting Euroscepticism' (Usherwood et al. 2013), Euroscepticism has become more and more embedded at both the EU and national levels and persistent across domestic debates (Usherwood and Startin 2013). The 'so what' question in Mudde's work (2011), that could still find validity in recent years (Mair 2000), would need to be re-visited, in 'a more holistic, nuanced and interdisciplinary approach... in order to obtain a full understanding on the way it has become increasingly embedded across the Union' (Usherwood and Startin 2013, pp. 4–5), as this book seeks to offer, moving beyond the study of party-based Euroscepticism.

At the public opinion level, frameworks of analysis started by examining the relationship with levels of education. Ronald Inglehart offered 'cognitive mobilization' (1970) as a theoretical framework indicating the case of those citizens, with a higher level of education, able to process remote pieces of information and more likely to support the EU. Inglehart also indicated benefits from the EU and rational explanations, with positive opinions on the EU, linked to 'predominantly favorable coverage in the mass media' (Inglehart 1970, p. 48; see Guerra 2017, forthcoming).

A changing political Union, with the Treaty of Maastricht, brought to the study of rational utilitarian and affective dimensions of attitudes (Gabel 1998). In Gabel's volume, emerging from the determinant role that public opinion was currently playing, the utilitarian changes according to the benefits and is shaped by domestic politics. For these reasons, it could be to a certain extent unstable. The affective dimension, embracing abstract values and commitments to an idea, generally correlates with the length of membership and results more stable. The analysis is contingent to the post-Maastricht EU policy development, but well describes how the different national dynamic relations between the utilitarian and affective dimensions could change (1998, p. 103) and impact levels of support. Support for the EU is also explained through domestic proxies (Anderson 1998), as citizens may have a limited knowledge on the EU political system, because of its complexity and abstractness, and results show that national considerations cannot be underestimated and can guide citizens' orientation towards the EU (see also Kritzinger 2003).



As Liesbeth Hooghe argued, in the introduction to a special issue on drivers of EU integration, EU politics and integration have increasingly become more controversial and explanations found empirical evidence based on different frameworks and dynamics (2007). Nonetheless, none of these studies attempted to define public attitudes to understand and define the different degrees and characteristics of citizens' view about the EU. The use of quantitative analyses explains general patterns and voting behaviour at EP elections (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; van der Brug and van der Eijk 2007), while qualitative analyses are rare (for some of them, see Kucia 1999; Szczerbiak 2001; Díez Medrano 2003), and none of them provides a similar definition to Taggart and Szczerbiak's taxonomic model (2002).

This study would suggest the role of emotions and a Euroneutral (Szczerbiak 2001; Guerra 2013) attitude. In the case of the UK and the New Labour government, 'positive European values would have meant currently apathetic or sceptical members of the public becoming comfortable with the idea of multi-level identities as British *and* European, and beginning to think "European"' (Daddow 2011, p. 34). This study takes into account the characteristics of the current phenomenon of Euroscpticism, and the different connotations of Euroscpticism and the qualitative differences at mass level, where both negative and neutral views can be traced, as not only uninterested, apathetic, but also uncertain or angry (Guerrina et al. 2016) and move forward towards a model for mass Euroscpticism. It is further critical to note the role of the media, the UK case study shows (Daddow 2012) that the media can channel and perpetuate the image of the EU as framed in the news in the public debate, although Patrick Bijsmans (see 2017, this volume) stresses there is likely a critical positive attitude, supporting the polity but opposing policies and debates (Euroalternativism) (also Leruth et al. 2017, this volume; Conti and Memoli 2017, this volume). In the post-Communist region, during the process of EU integration, a decrease in the levels of support can be observed after the opening of the negotiation process, while there generally exists a low level of interest in knowing more about the EU during the first stages of the post-Communist transformation (Guerra 2013). This can lead to three main types of attitudes towards the EU: Euroscptics, who oppose the EU and would oppose it also in the

accession referendum; a second category that is in favour without enthusiasm or a solid opinion and is not very interested in seeking out more information, and defined as Euroneutral; and Euroenthusiasts, supporting EU integration and seeking out more information (Guerra 2013). Mass Euroscepticism could take into consideration the emotional dimension of public attitudes, based on emotions in order to explain steady increasing levels of public-contested debates.

## Different Patterns of Opposition Towards the EU

As aforementioned, Euroscepticism emerges from domestic conflict. However, recent research on patterns of attitudes across the EU member states shows that there are not salient differences across west and east member states at first glance. In both regions, support for the EU is decreasing and positive attitudes dipped in 2004, when the EU opened to ten new member states, and, in 2009, after the financial crisis hit its peak (Guerra and Serricchio 2014; see also de Vries 2013).

Across the years, Poland has represented the outlier, as it is the only country where attitudes have been increasing and stabilized between 80 per cent and 89 per cent (in March 2014), after a few years of membership, when also benefits materialized (see Guerra 2013), even during the financial and economic crisis years. The quantitative analysis (Guerra and Serricchio 2014) shows there were common characteristics and differences in the two regions: the cost/benefit ratio, named as utilitarian model, is most explanatory in the Eastern case, while identity and political cues are the most significant factors across the Western member states. In particular, in our analysis (Guerra and Serricchio 2014), we found that engaging with EU citizenship is a common determinant factor (see also Mitchell 2012, 2015), and it could affect attitudes towards the EU positively and negatively (Kuhn 2015; Guerra and Serricchio 2014; also Sigalas 2010). On one side the EU four free movements, and working and studying abroad, can reinforce EU identity, on the other identity can also refer to the performance of the EU institutions, and the impact

of the financial crisis may further affect attitudes towards the EU, trust and turnout at European elections and referendums (Serricchio et al. 2013). Although the Eurobarometer study has temporarily discontinued the study on the question asking citizens an evaluation of their country's membership to the EU, it is undeniable that dissatisfaction and contestation are increasing.

Further, while examining different frameworks to explain attitudes (Guerra and Serricchio 2014), European citizenship 'in the practice' is the main determinant factor, but still remains contingent to a limited group of Europeans. As both political and economic drivers affect attitudes, the political discourse may seem to affect opposition; on the other hand, the economic framework seems to be linked to future perspectives (Guerra 2013). In Croatia, the majority of citizens see the EU as an economic organization (Guerra 2014), and the financial crisis can affect citizens' opposition.

This analysis would suggest taking into account the role of emotions. Among further categories, Euroneutrality, which can be described as apathetic and not interested, without opposing the EU and its policies, due to the distance between citizens and the EU system of governance and low interest towards its institutions, could describe attitudes when the salience of the EU is low. Contemporary forms of public Euroscepticism, after the crisis, would require a more detailed in-depth study at the mass level, as lack of knowledge and lack of interest, with increasing intense public debates, can affect attitudes towards the EU, while contingent factors at the domestic level can further impact on frustration and critical attitudes (see also Flood 2002). Also, if in the 1990s there existed a general correlation between levels of education, socio-economic factors and support for the EU (Flood 2002), levels of education and age do not seem to hold true in the case of France (see Startin and Krouwel 2013), Croatia (Guerra 2014) and Poland (Szczerbiak 2014) any longer. A Euroneutral category is important to understand the high levels of neutrality in the image of EU among citizens (EB79 2013) and can indicate further critical voices (EB data). Categories indicating anger and rejection of the EU (Angry Euroscepticism) and disenchanting attitudes dependent on contingent factors (Passive Euroscepticism) are useful to

understand citizens' attitudes, while a 'neutral' category may capture a large share of attitudes across public opinion (see Guerra forthcoming).

In addition, when embedded within a populist discourse (see FitzGibbon and Guerra 2010) the emotion driving Euroscepticism could be attached to paranoia and social anxiety. When it stresses paranoia, it would see the EU as a threat, it shows distrust, belief that the EU would change things towards worse and things may go towards the wrong direction at either the sociotropic or egocentric levels. In the case of social anxiety, these can emerge due to the negative economic situation and possible neglected expectations in the short term. Before joining the EU, Polish citizens asserted that that EU membership represented 'hopes and fears', their 'unconditional support' already crashed against the social costs of the transformation process after 1998 (Guerra 2013) and discontent is now widespread across EU member states, following further heated debates on the refugee crisis. Citizens' dissatisfaction and perceptions of the EU are multifaceted and the examination of their perception as dependent variable opens to understand the nature of their Euroscepticism and Euroneutrality, as these affect and become determinant at referendum and EP elections times. As addressed by Paul Taggart's analysis on the French and Dutch referendums (2006), those who voted 'For' in the Constitutional Treaty referendum in 2005 generally supported the EU integration process. On the contrary, those who voted against had different reasons based on the domestic debates. If the majority of Dutch citizens (61.5 per cent voted 'No' on a 63.3 per cent turnout) (Harmsen 2005) perceived they did not have sufficient information, in France (54.68 per cent voted 'No' on a 69.34 per cent of turnout) (Marthaler 2005), the first three main reasons behind the opposition to the Treaty concerned the possible economic implications on employment (31 per cent), the high rates of unemployment in France (26 per cent) and because the Treaty was too economically 'liberal' (19 per cent) (Taggart 2006: 15; see also Startin and Krouwel 2013 and Guerra 2017, forthcoming).

Therefore, although support for EU integration generally correlates with positive attitudes on referendum choices, non-voting and the 'No' vote may not necessarily indicate Eurosceptic attitudes. This would be in line with the analysis (Schmitt and van der Eijk 2008) on EP elections,

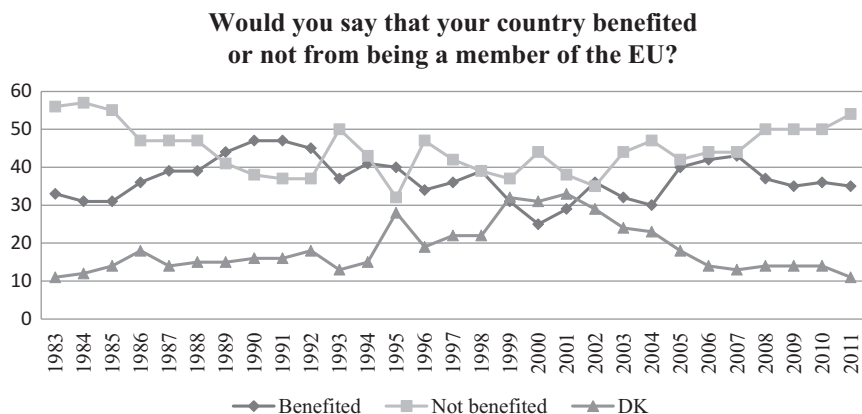
where there may be no Eurosceptic non-voting at EP elections. This chapter suggests that mass Euroscepticism can show more emotional attitudes and studies could incorporate emotions that can be linked to multiple crises lived by Europeans. Further, John FitzGibbon (see also chapter by della Porta et al. 2017, this volume) suggests viewing civil society organizations within Jürgen Habermas's approach, as the tools to communicate preferences, enhance legitimacy and moving towards a European demos (2013b). He addresses the content of civil society's contestation and, drawing from the No campaigns in the 2005 French EU Constitutional Treaty referendum (see also Startin and Krouwel 2013) and the 2012 Irish Fiscal Compact referendum, proposes an alternative explanation. The contestation focused on the idea of EU integration in the Treaties, but further to not opposing the EU, leaders of the campaigns framed and argued that 'another Europe (was) possible' (see also della Porta and Caiani 2009). For this reason, FitzGibbon proposes a model for civil society Euroscepticism that can be labelled 'Euroalternativism', where an alternative vision of Europe is proposed (2013a). That emerges also from Bijsmans's study (2014) and can be seen, while reading the news in the research design he selected, where Euroscepticism is not salient, but it is possible to identify critical comments to some EU policies, with proposals of different policy options (see Bijsmans 2017, this volume). On the one hand, Euroscepticism can emerge across the media, which view pervasive and controversial online debates on the EU and can reflect a climate of aversion and hostility (Michailidou et al. 2015; De Wilde et al. 2014), on the other, alternative ideas can emerge across civil society. In this analysis, 'Passive Euroscepticism' does not necessarily translate into abstaining from voting, and is not necessarily against a possible EU referendum. 'Angry Euroscepticism' would, instead, show its opposition to the EU and its bitterness by voting for hard Eurosceptic parties at EP elections, or 'No' in a EU referendum, in particular in a EU accession referendum or in favour of withdrawing from the EU. In both cases and in the cases of the Euroneutral category, it is worth noting and examining the lack of knowledge, possible frustration and lack of interest (Guerra 2013). At the civil society level, the distinction between Euroscepticism, as described by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2002) and Euroalternativism (FitzGibbon 2013a) could shed a light on current and persistent (Usherwood and Startin 2013)

forms of Euroscepticism. Public Euroscepticism can show apathy towards politics in general, as an uninterested attitude towards the EU (see Guerra 2013), but the role of the media or contested debates can further trigger anger (see Galpin and Trenz 2017, this volume; della Porta et al. 2017, this volume; Daddow 2012), while alternative ideas can emerge across civil society (FitzGibbon 2013a).

## Emotions and the British Referendum in Comparative Perspective

This chapter was written before and after the British referendum. The campaign, leading to the vote of 23 June 2016, has been often described as nasty, and was definitely intense, while it definitely impacted on citizens' emotions. In a study carried out with Guerrina, Exadaktylos and Guerra (2016), we examine citizens' attitudes and emotions after the referendum on the basis of a survey, conducted by YouGov (6–7 July 2016), as part of the research project 'Brexit or Bremain: Britain and the 2016 British Referendum'. As written (Guerra 2016b), the EU has recently lived multiple crises, the financial and economic crisis and the refugees' crisis, ongoing debates on austerity programmes, and rising social inequalities are still high in the agenda, while the Greek referendum is just a year away. As noted by Erik Jones in 2015:

The Greek referendum not only reveals that Europe is broken but it also gives Europeans an excuse to ignore their own failings. Indeed, that is the most postmodern characteristic of this whole process. The referendum is an empty signifier that everyone can fill with the worst of themselves and so create an artificial feeling of distance from their own problems. What the Greeks and the rest of Europe need to do is exactly the opposite. European leaders have to 'own' this problem — where by 'this' I mean not just the financial situation in Greece but the whole broken nature of European integration. If they refuse to accept that challenge, this will not be Europe's last postmodern referendum. Just look to the United Kingdom and you will see that much worse is yet to come. (Jones 2015)



**Fig. 1** Britain and benefits from EU membership (1983–2011) (Data: Eurobarometer)

The Greek referendum represented a turning point in the process of European integration, but the underlying call for a new leadership in order to tackle the challenges has remained unanswered. On the other hand, in Britain, attitudes towards the EU have always remained rather lukewarm.

According to Eurobarometer data, at the question whether Britain benefited from EU membership, values generally showed a sustained predominance of negative answers (see Fig. 1). The Single Market years, between 1989 and 1991, were the only ones when positive views were more widespread, but the impact of the political Union afterwards did not receive much support and negative views remained quite high. Hence, the 2016 referendum took place at a time when the EU was called to answer multiple challenges and Britain showed increasing negative perceptions towards benefits from EU membership.

The referendum campaign further added concerns on immigration and sovereignty, and lacked a neutral image of the EU. Among some of the answers given on the reasons for their vote, British citizens voted ‘Remain’, because ‘[We are] Stronger together’; ‘Worker’s rights’; ‘Agree with the principles of the EU, freedom of trade and movement’; ‘I trust the EU government more than the UK government’; ‘I want to be part of Europe’; ‘Saw no real evidence from the leave campaign that could

be backed up or was credible'; 'The UK needs Europe economically, socially and culturally'; 'No clear information. Blatant lies and confusion. Felt it was more about our dissatisfaction with our own government. Think it was wrong to put this vote to the public certainly without more understanding'; 'Why let the Germans run the show?'; 'Peace in Europe through cooperation, trade and tackling climate change'; 'Job opportunities'; 'Leaving would be madness/suicide'. While among the reasons to vote 'Leave', answers are as follows: 'Immigration'; 'Transport problems in London'; 'Unwanted mass immigration'; 'Sovereignty'; 'TO GET BRITAIN BACK FOR THE PEOPLE AND TO DEFEND OUR BORDERS'; 'Immigration and independence'; 'cost, regulation and immigration'; 'lack of UK control over our finances'; 'bring back control'; 'immigration out of control'; 'Control of our own country, borders and laws'; 'To get away from a European super state'; 'Regain sovereignty. Have the ABILITY to control boarders'; 'To get away from a European super state'<sup>1</sup> (Guerrina et al. 2016).

The referendum campaign unfolded with a focus on the themes that are repeated by the answers provided by voters, as an overview on the headlines from the *Daily Express* covers in the days nearing the referendum can show, 'Britain has too many migrants'; 'EU opens door to 79m from Turkey'; 'Britain faces migrant chaos'; 'Britain's 1.5 million hidden migrants'; 'Soaring cost of teaching migrant children'; 'Migrants cost Britain £17bn a year'; 'Migrant worker numbers surge'; 'EU migrant numbers soar yet again'; 'Migrants pay just £100 to invade Britain'; 'Proof we can't stop migrants' (Guerra 2016b). The EU was charged by the worrying impact of migrants and the challenging impact of the EU on British politics. This polarized the EU narrative in the country, which often lacked any positive or neutral image of the EU. The heated debate had an influence on those who felt uncertain, 'I did not understand enough to put my opinion forward', 'I felt extremely let down by both sides and all the untruths they were telling', 'Not sure anymore!!!', 'DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WAS VOTING FOR' (Guerrina et al. 2016). Taken in-between a campaign addressing taking back control and the uncertain economic situation in the case Leave could win, a few citizens have clearly answered that they could not think of a possible rational choice, while they perceived that neutral facts were missing from the debates and lies were widespread.



We also then asked about their feelings on the future of the country after the referendum and we gave a choice of 22 different emotions (and the options for alternative answers). It may not be surprising that the most cited emotion is 'uncertainty'. About 56 per cent of those who identify with the Labour party and 51 per cent of the Liberal Democrats voters answered that they feel uncertain. Among age groups, young people (aged 18–24 years) are the most uncertain. The referendum campaign based on fears and uncertainty clearly impacted on citizens' attitudes and their vote. The most cited eight emotions are: uncertainty, apprehension, anxiety, hope, disappointment, annoyance, fear and anger. Positive feelings are expressed by the UK Independence Party (UKIP) voters, 56 per cent feel hopeful and 39 per cent are proud of their vote. The happy ideal type is a male who is 65 or older, of a lower social status living in the Midlands, Wales and the North of England, but young people are the saddest and Liberal Democratic voters are the most disappointed. Overall, we found that anger characterizes the perceptions after the referendum among those who voted 'Leave' and uncertainty is widespread across the sample, but emerges in particular among those who voted 'Remain' (Guerrina et al. 2016).

As expected, different age groups can show different attitudes, with young people generally more positive towards the EU integration process (see Di Mauro and Fraile 2012). Nonetheless, the case of Croatia can show that young people can become the most negative. In the 2012 accession referendum, young voters (up to 30 years old) were the ones who disproportionally voted against EU membership (Čović 2012, p. 9). The voice of the young generation can address protest and opposition towards the EU, as it happened in the case of the 2015 Polish general elections (Guerra 2016a) and the vote for the Five Star Movement since 2012 (Guerra and Pirro 2014). The EU is not delivering benefits and the high costs of unemployment for the so-called Generation Y (well educated, but unemployed) can lead to frustration and the perception, at the domestic and European levels, of being challenged by an apparent 'glass ceiling' of vested interests and corrupt networks stifling their opportunities (Szczerbiak 2014). Youth unemployment is one of the most salient problems across the EU and the quality of life, in perspective, can affect citizens' attitudes. The Eurobarometer data noted (EB81 2014) that EU

citizens still perceive the current national and European economic situation as negative, but they feel in general more optimistic and think that the peak on the EU market has already been reached and has reversed its negative trend. The main fears emerging regard the falling into poverty and social exclusion; at least a third of EU citizens are concerned with the possibility of falling into poverty (EB81 2014), which may impact on perceptions of threat (paranoia) or social anxiety, fears for the future and passive and angry attitudes, more dependent on emotions. Studies, as the analysis on the British referendum show, can further enrich research on attitudes towards the EU beyond political parties.

## Conclusion

This chapter seeks to present an overview on the literature on Euroscepticism, in particular covering recent studies on new forms of opposition towards the EU and a focus on public opinion, civil society and the media. Although salience may still be low, Euroscepticism persists at the domestic level of the 28 member states, it ‘has come in from the cold... (and) is now part of the mainstream’ (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2013, p. 34) and has achieved permanent representation at the EP (Usherwood 2014). As seen, in government it does not have much impact on policy choices, but there are conditions when it can put forth changes towards more Eurosceptic positions, as in the case of Britain and the British referendum.

Therefore, this analysis has presented the different definitions and approaches to study Euroscepticism after the financial crisis. It is here suggested to adopt a new approach that would examine the different connotations of Euroscepticism, the institutional factors and political culture and how these can inform the articulation of opposition towards the EU at different levels. In addition, when studying public level Euroscepticism, the British referendum clearly shows that the role of emotions cannot be neglected. The increasing role of the social networks and the media, as this book is going to illustrate, impacts on a variety of critical opposition towards the EU. As such, this chapter and volume suggests refining the concept of Euroscepticism in order to articulate its understanding and

manifestations across different actors, after the economic and financial crisis. The scope is to offer an original contribution that would enable to understand how the EU integration process can change in relation to public contestation and how this may create a sustained form of opposition at the public level.

## Note

1. The answers cited here are as written in the data set file.

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# The Spiral of Euroscepticism: Media Negativity, Framing and Opposition to the EU

Charlotte Galpin and Hans-Jörg Trenz

## Introduction

Research on Euroscepticism has primarily focused on agency and opinion; it has either analysed the activities of political parties and the mobilisation of claims by political actors or analysed the passive attitudes of citizens and their readiness to support and/or oppose European integration. Euroscepticism research has, in turn, only paid little attention to the intermediary processes of communication, interpretation and framing through which knowledge and attitudes are shaped by political agency and the latter is conditioned, in turn, by opinions of citizens. To open this ‘black box’ of intermediation, we need to analyse Euroscepticism in relation to the media. In the

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internet and social media age, the relationship between Euroscepticism and media reporting becomes ever more important not just with regard to traditional media but also social media as citizens turn away from print journalism and access information and news online. In June 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union in a national referendum. Following this unprecedented vote, the EU now faces the uncertainty and challenge of maintaining unity among the remaining 27 member states. However, Eurosceptic parties have been gaining more ground not just in the UK but also across the EU—most notably in Germany where the *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany - AfD) has increased its share of the vote and recently boosted the number of seats it holds in regional parliaments. Central to the contestation, and ultimately the rejection, of the EU's legitimacy are, however, not just Eurosceptic parties and their supposedly direct impact on voter choice but also the media and public sphere dynamics that surround them. Given that a 'Brexit' vote was supported by most British national tabloid newspapers and one broadsheet, the role of the media in delegitimising the EU becomes paramount. The electoral success of Eurosceptic parties is thus often related to their successful media strategies and campaigns. To understand whether the media are facilitators or obstacles of an emerging EU democracy (see introduction to this volume), it is therefore necessary to attribute a more independent role to the media and specifically to the role of news journalism. In the social media age, however, the role of reader feedback in escalating Eurosceptic attitudes is also key to understanding these dynamics. This chapter will draw in part, but not exclusively, on research from the UK context that can shed light not just on the mechanisms that led to a vote against EU membership in Britain but also to identify ways in which similar circumstances can be avoided in other EU member states.

Media scholars who have discussed the changing role of the news media in generating democratic legitimacy have found that a systematic negativity bias applies to political news-making (see e.g. Patterson 2000; Kepplinger 1998; Cappella and Jamieson 1997). Instead of being devoted to fair judgement and substantive critique, journalists often prefer polemicism, excessiveness and general negativity, leading to a 'spiral of cynicism' (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). In this chapter, we argue that this spiral of cynicism in EU news results in a 'spiral of Euroscepticism'

(De Vreese 2007). The form this negativity bias takes and the causal relationship with political behaviour is, however, unclear, and warrants new research programmes that investigate linkages between media framing strategies, social media engagement and opposition to the EU. Instead of considering media as an arena that is strategically occupied by political parties, we suggest taking media autonomy seriously to understand how media internal logics and selective devices contribute to the shaping of public discourse about the EU. In the following, we will review the existing literature on Euroscepticism, EU legitimacy and the media and present evidence that supports the thesis of a 'spiral of Euroscepticism'. This can account for the salience of Eurosceptic statements and opinions in the public sphere that then push political parties to contest the EU in predominantly negative terms and limit citizens' options for constructive engagement in EU democracy.

## Journalism and Media Negativity

When considering the role of the media in shaping citizens' negative attitudes towards the EU, the focus is often laid on the media strategies of political parties, civil society organisations and individual actors. This includes, for instance, the mobilisation potential of Eurosceptic parties, the emergence of new extremist movements or the media skills of particular leaders to spread anti-Brussels propaganda (see other contributions in this volume; Adam 2009; de Vries and Edwards 2009), or the insufficient communication tools utilised by the EU Commission and its limited capacities to reach out to the relevant segments of the public (van Brussel 2014; Brüggeman 2010). The high salience of Eurosceptic actors in the news media also relates to media logics and potential media biases. The existence of a negativity bias in journalistic news coverage is an almost universal finding in journalism studies. In general, news selection is found to be value driven, one consequence of which is a tendency towards negative news over balanced or positive reports. In the tradition of Galtung and Ruge (1965), media scholars have drawn a list of different criteria, such as relevance, familiarity, negativity, that journalists apply when they select and frame political news (Bohle 1986). The theory of news values argues

that journalists classify events according to these criteria that then need to be balanced. These values have been found to apply across different cultures, but there are specific ways of balancing them that apply to particular news formats or cultures. One consistent finding is that bad news is more newsworthy than good news. Media negativity is also found to correlate with distance from the events covered, while proximity in local news, for example, creates demand for good news. The media negativity bias therefore applies, in particular, to foreign news coverage where other criteria for news selection (like familiarity, personalisation, unambiguity or cultural proximity) are less readily available (see de Vreese and Kandyla 2009; Entman 2004; Cappella and Jamieson 1997). Attention to distant events outside the familiar national context is more easily drawn when they convey drama and conflict, when serious repercussions can be emphasised, when the integrity of particular actors and institutions can be undermined or when the news can be related to feelings of fear and scepticism. Media negativity can therefore have serious repercussions for the extent to which EU politicians are presented as honest and trustworthy, whether EU politics is seen to be plagued by crisis or by consensus or whether the EU is reported as a legitimate political authority at all.

Furthermore, media scholars who analyse journalistic practices of EU news-making found evidence that the objectivity rule applies less to coverage of EU politics than it does to domestic politics (Örnebring 2013). While the extent to which this objectivity rule applies at all can be questioned, especially with regard to the strongly partisan British newspapers, in domestic news coverage, journalists are generally expected to report about politics in a balanced way. 'Distorted' news that often results from the application of news criteria such as sensationalism, singularity, negativity or crime can then be identified and, if necessary, corrected in accordance with this template of objective and truth-oriented journalism. In the case of EU news, two important qualifications need to be made. Firstly, journalists are expected to be more balanced in party positioning during election campaigns than they are in foreign policy or national interest conflicts. Journalists are thus allowed or even expected to be nationalists when they defend



national interests and sovereignty, which are often at stake in the discussion of EU policies (Hannerz 2004). Secondly, the objectivity rule of journalism often applies to politics in terms of partisan contestation but is not equally applicable to the more fundamental form of 'polity contestation' that is often at the heart of Eurosceptic party campaigning (de Wilde et al. 2013). In that latter case, journalists are, on the one hand, expected to be more critical and negative with 'extremist' parties at the fringes of the political spectrum, but might, on the other hand, feel attracted by the very negativity promoted by the Eurosceptics or consider their messages more newsworthy for their readers.

In light of this, we should consider the implications of media negativity for the democratic legitimacy of the EU. Just as cynicism and civic disengagement are seen as likely by-products of media negativity, Euroscepticism is often interpreted as systematically related to the negativity bias of EU news-making (de Vreese 2004). Negative news coverage about the EU, Eurosceptic campaigning by political parties, and cynicism about EU politics can therefore be seen as causally related. This causality assumption raises the question about the (causal) mechanisms involved in diffusing Eurosceptic attitudes through the media, in particular the question of whether negativity is initiated by the media or whether the media mainly filter and disseminate negativity as produced by Eurosceptic parties. In the first case, we would attribute negativity to inherent media logics, with Eurosceptic attitudes resulting from media consumption. In the second case, we would attribute media negativity to the presence of Eurosceptic parties who have a prime interest in undermining EU legitimacy, which is then reflected and amplified by journalists. As emphasised by Lengauer et al. (2011, p. 182), this analytically fruitful question about the causal mechanisms of media negativity is however difficult to methodologically disentangle. In the following, we explore the potential effects of a negativity bias in relation to the EU's legitimacy in several respects: information and political knowledge of the EU which affects the extent to which citizens can engage with EU politics, media framing which may limit options for constructive participation in EU democracy and the role of social media.

## Media Negativity and Knowledge of the EU

Media negativity can potentially play a constructive role in democracy by informing readers and encouraging critical engagement with politics. Some scholars have argued that media negativity is an important element of a healthy democracy, as it subjects governments, politicians and other elites in positions of power to scrutiny. In this sense, media negativity can be interpreted as a form of democratic accountability (Soroka 2014). Research on the existence of a negativity bias in political news in fact originated in the USA, where the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal changed established routines of news-making. With a journalistic culture of the 1960s that involved reporting hard facts, the events of the 1970s led journalists to believe they had failed to properly scrutinise the country's political leaders (Patterson 2000, p. 9). Kepplinger also attributes a gradual increase in negative news reports about politicians in West Germany in part to the 'more critical and democratic' 1968 generation entering the profession (1998, p. 144). Negativity in political news therefore has its origins in a desire to challenge power structures and hold politicians more effectively to account.

Studies have also shown that negative stories can better inform readers. In study of US campaign news, Dunaway et al. (2015, p. 783) find that 'slanted coverage', that is, reports that are biased towards one candidate over the other, contains higher quality information than more balanced news. Moreover, Scheufele found that people became more aware of a problem when they read an article that criticised the ability of politicians to solve it than those who read other articles (2008, p. 56). Media negativity and its effect on EU legitimacy can thus be discussed in quantitative terms regarding the extent to which EU politics is communicated in national public spheres and the quality of information provided to EU citizens, which will have a knock-on effect for EU legitimacy. Negative news in the form of critical reports can further lead to better quality information and better informed voters when it comes to the EU elections. In the case of a negativity bias, we might therefore hypothesise that citizens feel more inclined to participate in EU politics, vote in EU elections and engage in political debate—either offline or online on forums, social media platforms and newspaper comment sections.

However, studies into the effects of media negativity have also demonstrated that negativity can lead to a lack of political knowledge or awareness of the news. Patterson demonstrates that people became less interested in politics and public affairs as the news in the USA became more negative after the 1970s (2000, p. 10). Ninety-three percent of people who said they paid less attention to the news than they did previously were found to believe the news to be mostly negative. Negative news thus creates a vicious cycle, with people becoming less interested in politics as the news becomes more negative, which in turn makes them less interested in reading the news (2000, p. 11). The situation is likely to be worse when it comes to the EU, as media generally devote less attention to EU politics compared with national news which further aggravates the EU's 'information deficit' (Clark 2014). While the direct link between Eurosceptic attitudes and EU information is not clear, a lack of knowledge of the EU limits the extent to which European citizens can engage in EU democracy.<sup>1</sup> If negative news discourages interest in reading the news, it raises questions about whether citizens have the required level of political knowledge to fully participate in democratic politics.

What matters, however, is not just the quantity of information about the EU but also the quality of information news readers receive. Poor knowledge of the EU can contribute to creating a public not just uninformed about EU politics but also deeply sceptical. British newspapers, for example, have been found to demonstrate severe factual deficiencies in their reporting of the EU (Leveson 2012). They frequently report myths about EU rules and regulations (Daddow 2012, p. 1224) along with a consistent conflating of the EU institutions with the European Court of Human Rights. The Leveson Inquiry, an investigation into the culture, practices and ethics of the press launched following a phone-hacking scandal at Rupert Murdoch's News International, found that reporting about the EU 'accounted for a further category of story where parts of the press appeared to prioritise the title's agenda over factual accuracy' (2012, p. 687). In his testimony to the inquiry, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair explained that inaccurate information about the EU in the press determined what kinds of policies he was able to pursue in the EU (Leveson 2012, p. 688). The UK case raises

the important role of media ownership and market competition in the development of Eurosceptic attitudes and constructive engagement in the EU. Daddow (2012) attributes hard Eurosceptic media coverage in British newspapers to the development of the Murdoch media empire since the 1960s (for a definition of dimensions of Euroscepticism see Guerra, this volume), which is not just responsible for the hostility in the British press towards the EU but also has exercised significant pressure on British governments to oppose European integration (see also Rowinski 2014). It is not just the Murdoch press, however. Startin also notes that Richard Desmond, the owner of *The Daily Express*, the tabloid that has been at the forefront of a campaign for a referendum on EU membership, is a donor to UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the newspaper's deputy chair Lord Stevens is a UKIP peer (2015, p. 320). Krouwel et al. (this volume) find that there is a clear link between reading 'Eurosceptic' newspapers and negative attitudes towards the EU. The relationship between media ownership and Eurosceptic coverage could therefore be one avenue of media research on Euroscepticism. The quality of information readers receive is, however, not solely a question of factual accuracy but also the effects of framing.

## The Role of Media Framing in EU Democracy

As we have argued in the previous section, negative news about the EU can have either a positive or a negative effect on information and knowledge of EU politics. What matters for engaging people in EU politics is, however, also the framing of news stories. Originating in social movement research, frames are key to mobilising collective action by diagnosing problems and defining possible solutions (Caiani and Della Porta 2011, p. 182, see also Entman 2004; Snow and Benford 1988). Frames are a way of making sense of the world and providing simple and easily grasped analysis of complex issues (Caiani and Della Porta 2011). With regard to the media, frames are used 'to simplify and give meaning to events, and to maintain audience interest' (Valkenburg et al. 1999, pp. 550–551). Framing studies thus analyse the processes of shaping political knowledge through the news and how different framing devices

in political news stories shape degrees and forms of mobilisation and citizen engagement (see e.g. de Vreese and Tobiasen 2007). Framing has proved important in the contestation of the EU since the crisis; Della Porta et al. in this volume demonstrate, for example, how left-wing parties frame positive yet alternative visions of European integration to mobilise opposition to austerity. Studies into the effect of negative campaigning have demonstrated that different kinds of negative campaigning produce different responses—Crigler et al., for example, differentiate between attacks on candidates, cynical news and fear-arousing messages (2006), but as Lau et al. find, the empirical evidence is ambiguous (2007). De Vreese and Tobiasen argue that political news framed as conflict can provide ‘mobilizing’ information for voters and improve the functioning of democracy by presenting voters with a choice (2007, pp. 90, 104). Conflict-centred negativity can also contribute to making the EU more ‘marketable’. Eurosceptic reports and actors are more eye-catching and add drama to EU news stories that otherwise would be considered as irrelevant by the audience.

While media negativity heightens problem awareness and the need for a political solution, fear might also inhibit critical attitudes and makes readers more likely to approve proposed solutions offered by Eurosceptic parties (Soroka et al. 2015; Scheufele 2008; Gale 2004). Given the recent turn to the use of social media by news outlets, the effect of the use of fear in news for the purposes of ‘clickbait’ becomes an important question when simple but fear-provoking messages can be transmitted easily through linking on social media. As noted above, frames serve to simplify complex issues into easily understandable calls for action. Frames can be used by pro-European actors and media to promote critical engagement with the issues, but, as Caiani and Della Porta (2011) note, can also be engaged by populists and the extreme right. In the context of EU politics, messages that elicit or convey fear may prevent Europeans from engaging critically with the solutions put forward by those who challenge the legitimacy of the EU. Eurosceptic parties construct ‘fear stories’ about the EU and count on the high media salience of such stories. Even if opposition parties and quality journalists find it easy to deconstruct such stories, these appeals to fear ‘make people talk’—they are likely to be shared through social media where they rouse momentary emotions

and indignation, while the trustworthiness of the plot is rarely put at test (Tandoc 2014).

Fear-based stories are also often related to identity frames, which relate to ideas about community values—‘who we are’ (see e.g. Díez Medrano 2003; Koopmans and Statham 2010). Such frames delimit the boundaries of a community between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Caiani and Della Porta 2011, p. 182). The UK’s EU referendum campaign was described as ‘Project Fear meets Project Fear’ (see also Daddow 2016; Ruparel 2016). Both sides have put forward scare stories, either about the impact of an ‘influx’ of EU migrants and asylum seekers or about the potential economic disaster Brexit will precipitate. Precisely how this fear-based campaigning impacts on Eurosceptic voting behaviour is unclear. What this framing does do, however, is construct boundaries that promote distrust amongst Europeans. In the UK, the EU is generally seen as a threat to the nation (Rowinski 2014; Díez Medrano 2003 and Startin in this volume; see also Anderson and Weymouth 1999), and the tabloid press in particular has been key in linking the issue of European integration with migration (Startin 2015, p. 317). As Startin notes, the framing of the EU in the UK tabloid press ‘has become submerged by the weight of the emotional argument drawing on notions of sovereignty and identity’ (2015, p. 317). In other countries, recent crises in the EU have also been reported using identity frames that construct ‘out’ groups, especially through stereotyping of the Greeks and ‘southern Europeans’ in Germany and anti-German sentiment in Greece and a number of member states during the Euro crisis (see also Risse 2014; Galpin 2015, [forthcoming](#)). This kind of framing promotes fear of the ‘Other’ and limits solidarity amongst EU citizens through the politics of blaming (Galpin 2015; Ntampoudi 2013; see also Triandafyllidou 1998).

While the negative framing of EU news stories through conflict might motivate Europeans to engage critically in EU politics, framing in terms of fear and identity can therefore promote attitudes that undermine EU legitimacy. Negativity in the form of strategy framing can, furthermore, lead to general cynicism with the political system, which leaves democratic institutions further susceptible to legitimacy challenges from populist movements. Cynicism involves the belief that politicians primarily work for their own self-interest rather than for the common

good. Cappella and Jamieson (1997, p. 19) argue that there has been a 'spiral of cynicism' in US politics, finding that people feel more cynicism towards politics when exposed to political news that is primarily framed in terms of the strategies of candidates and conflicts over who is 'winning' or 'losing' instead of substantive policy issues. When portrayed as motivated by self-interest, politicians are attributed negative rather than positive qualities (1997, pp. 166–167). Experimental designs in audience research also indicate that such repeated exposure to strategic news coverage produces political cynicism and decreased readiness to support the EU (De Vreese 2004). Kepplinger finds evidence of an increase in political apathy (*Politikverdrossenheit*) towards the elite, political institutions and political participation (e.g. electoral turnout) in Germany (1998, p. 31) which can be attributed to a rise in the number of articles highlighting problems with a more and more negative tone and pessimistic outlook (1998, p. 137). Furthermore, politicians were often presented as incapable of solving an increasing number of problems in the political system. A pre-occupation with the negative qualities of politicians can therefore lead to a lack of interest in politics, distrust of politics and political cynicism and consequently undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

In the EU in particular, we can expect that the dominant media negativism leads to systematic misrepresentations of the EU governance system's performance. In the 'spiral of cynicism', journalist preferences for negative news is seen to correspond to public preferences and a demand for sensational stories (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). The 'spiral of cynicism' is turned, under these conditions, into a 'spiral of Euroscepticism' (De Vreese 2007), which is driven by the supply and demand of negative news about the EU. If EU politicians are regularly portrayed as Machiavellian figures, unconcerned with the public good, such strategic news framings would unilaterally stress the power game aspects of EU politics—winning and losing, self-interest, manoeuvres and tactics, performance and artifice—and misrepresent the common good orientation that is often at the focus of EU policies (Trenz 2008). Anderson and Weymouth, for example, find that stereotyping and xenophobia underlies British press reporting of the EU institutions, which are portrayed as corrupt and dysfunctional (1999; Gavin 2001). In the end, the media audiences would expect to get only negative news from Brussels and automatically associate the EU with dysfunction and corruption.

These effects of media negativity and the implicit distrust in democratic politics underlying negative news stories can in this sense become self-defeating, undermining trust not only in representative democracy but also in journalism and the media which produce such stories. Research so far on media negativity shows that certain kinds of negativity—framing in terms of strategy and political problems—promotes a high level of distrust in the media, politicians and political cynicism more broadly. This general distrust promoted by negative news has been clearly linked to Eurosceptic and populist parties and therefore feeds challenges to the EU's legitimacy. As such, media negativity can be linked to the rise of these populist movements and the electoral success of parties which fundamentally challenge the legitimacy of the established system of representative democracy. Populist actors not only highlight the failings of democratic systems to fully engage their citizens but also pose challenges to democracy, particularly through xenophobic discourse and scapegoating of immigrants and minority groups. For example, Pegida ('Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West'), an anti-Islam and anti-immigrant populist movement in Germany that emerged in October 2014, expresses a strong distrust towards political institutions and the media, what they call the *Lügenpresse* (liar press) (Dostal 2015, p. 529). Furthermore, Ford et al. find that significant indicators of support for UKIP include the belief that politicians are corrupt and dishonest, that there are no differences between the main political parties and reading Eurosceptic newspapers (2012, pp. 204–234). Distrust towards politicians and the media in general therefore challenges democracies and decreases the legitimacy of political institutions.

Media frames can therefore often be made responsible for negative cues about the EU. This type of coverage in turn incites particular cognitive and emotional reactions from audiences, which lean towards hostility regarding the European project. Euroscepticism can thus be partly explained as an effect of negative learning through media inputs. The negativity bias of media news coverage of EU politics is not, however, entirely independent from audience demands and responsiveness. News audiences often receive information from different sources and process media content selectively on the basis of collective interpretations



and emotional reactions (Kepplinger et al. 2012). These public judgments and emotions can equally be made responsible for the negative bias in news coverage, in turn informing the media frames and content. Negative learning through media discourses is thus a complex process in which providers of media content (journalists and political actors) and audiences interact and contribute equally to structuring public debates and expectations. In this regard, it is important for media scholars to keep an eye on the dynamic transformation of political journalism in interaction with changing audiences' demands and responsiveness. This relates, above all, to the new interactive environment of news-making, distribution and interpretation as facilitated by digital media technologies. The role of new and social media in amplifying the negativity bias of democratic politics in general and of EU news in particular therefore warrants exploration.

## The Role of Social Media: Better or Worse?

The internet and social media now has an important role to play in journalism. How we consume news has fundamentally changed, with print newspaper circulations falling significantly in recent years and the internet becoming an important source of news. A recent report by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism states that over half of those surveyed obtain news from social media and more young people than ever now consider social media their primary source of news (Newman et al. 2016). The role of social media in driving or challenging the forces of Euroscepticism are therefore of great importance in the internet age, but the question whether such new digital media practices play also a more constructive tool for democracy remains unanswered (Couldry 2012; Loader and Mercea 2012). Media scholars disagree in this regard on the potential of the internet and social media for overcoming inherent deficits and biases of political journalism. On the one hand, the internet is turned into an important source of political information where journalistic inputs can be more easily balanced by the information of independent news providers, often including the citizens. Citizen journalism is in this sense not only supplementary but also often provides a corrective to the

news stories of professional journalism (Bruns 2010). Cyberoptimists have further heralded the digital media as a democratising force, which allows ordinary people to have a greater voice. With regard to EU news, social media and online discussion forums also offer the opportunity to engage Europeans in EU politics as part of a Europeanisation process of European public spheres (Michailidou et al. 2014). Politicians are now communicating directly with the public during election campaigns via social media and party websites (Haßler 2015, p. 2). Online news in particular has the potential to reach wider audiences and to engage citizens in political debate, providing the ‘opportunity for active communication that is easy and accessible for ordinary users’ (Weber 2013, p. 942). Numerous incentives for online user feedback on EU policy initiatives are also provided by EU actors and institutions, most prominently by the European Parliament, which runs a highly visible Facebook page with more than 2,000,000 followers, organises regularly online meetings and chats with Members of the European Parliament, candidates and EU top politicians (Tarta 2014). During the EU referendum in the UK, a number of organisations have been publishing myth-busting and fact-checking articles online, such as King’s College London’s The UK in a Changing Europe ([ukandeu.ac.uk](http://ukandeu.ac.uk)) and Full Fact ([fullfact.org](http://fullfact.org)) amongst others, which are then shared on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

On the other hand, findings on the potential of the internet to engage citizens more actively in debates and improving political participation remain ambivalent (Fuchs 2014). Cyberpessimists have pointed out how online discussions on popular news sites often lack many of the qualities of deliberative discourse. On most popular online political news websites, the spectrum of political opinion remains restricted, negative news stories become selectively amplified and often turn into magnets for the expression of popular discontent (Tandoc 2014). Studies suggest that online discussions are representative of a small number of people from particular demographics, and women especially are likely to feel excluded from actively participating in debates. For example, Quinlan et al. (2015) find that, while debates about the Scottish referendum on a BBC discussion forum were largely civil, there was little debate between commenters and users primarily used the forums to express opinion instead of exchanging information (2015, p. 193). A study by the Engaging News Project at

the University of Texas at Austin, moreover, finds that half of Americans do not read or leave comments on news articles. Furthermore, 53 per cent of those people who say they left comments did so monthly or less frequently (Stroud et al. 2016, p. 3). They also find that commenters 'tend to be more male, have lower levels of education, and have lower incomes compared to those who read news comments, but do not comment' (Stroud et al. 2016, p. 5). Studies from Europe have produced similar findings; Quinlan et al. find further that the Scottish referendum debate on the BBC was dominated by a small number of users with a predominance of male commenters (2015, p. 193). We can also expect that there is generally likely to be less participation debates about EU news than national issues. For example, Weber finds more engagement on articles relating to institutions at the regional level than international or national institutions (2013, p. 950). With regard to EU news, we can expect lower participation in online debates because EU news is likely to be viewed as 'foreign' and distant and because readers generally have less knowledge about EU politics and policy. As issues cycles of EU news tend to be short, readers are rarely given the necessary time to develop the knowledge that is necessary for engagement.

Audience surveys have also found that the detailed information that is available online is consumed mainly by the few who are already information-rich, whereas the majority of online users receive only a very narrow and personalised selection of news (Brundidge and Rice 2009). This means that online news consumption all too often only reproduces the opinions of like-minded people. Facing the mass commodification of online news by global players such as Google News, such online participatory forums in which foreign or EU news are debated interactively can therefore be described as 'niche publics' at best. On relevant online discussion forums, Eurosceptics are only likely to meet other Eurosceptics and mutually reinforce their views. Heft et al. (this volume) find that despite the fact that Eurosceptic parties are highly active on Twitter, they tend to communicate with those who hold similar views and do not exchange views across ideological camps. Usherwood and Wright (2016) similarly find that, in a study of the UK referendum campaign groups' Twitter use, communication between the various campaign groups takes place mostly between those on the same side of the campaign. Studies

suggest that social media debates about the EU are also more dominated by Eurosceptic groups. Usherwood and Wright find that the Leave campaign groups have significantly more Twitter followers than the Remain groups, while Cram finds that the referendum debate is overwhelmingly dominated by pro-leave hashtags (2015). What's more, Pavan and Caiani show in this volume that extreme right groups mobilise particularly well online by developing linked networks and in doing so can influence public Eurosceptic discourse. The mobilisation of Eurosceptic and extreme right groups online means that a small number of people with extreme views often dominate online spaces which excludes people with alternative views from participating in debates and shaping online media discourse. Stroud et al., for example, find that avoiding arguments, conflict and uncivil commenters are major reasons for avoiding the comment sections (2016, p. 12) meaning that we might expect that pro-European users are discouraged from commenting. Research so far therefore suggests that the social media debate about the EU is likely to be disproportionately dominated by Eurosceptic voices.

As a result, we can expect that EU news articles online amplify xenophobic or racist discourse on social media. Studies of comments sections have generally been found to demonstrate high levels of racism and xenophobia. In a study of the 'Birther' discourse surrounding Barack Obama after his election as US President on major US quality newspaper websites, Hughey and Daniels show that racist discourse is often mobilised not just through explicit hate speech (which are often filtered out by moderators) but also through 'subtle and coded language' as well as through appeals to political correctness and principles of free speech (2013, pp. 337, 339). In discussing the Greek bailouts in Germany, Michailidou et al. (2014, pp. 140–42) find that journalistic inputs online were often outright negative on the question of solidarity with Greece and made frequent use of nationalist and xenophobic slogans. Such tabloid-style xenophobic stereotypes found resonance and were even amplified in the newspapers' commenting section, even though the spectrum of opinion expressed by the users was often wider than the narrow views expressed by the journalists. Other readers expressed more balanced views, brought up counterarguments or sometimes even silenced the xenophobes. Michailidou (2016) shows how increasingly mainstream

Euroscepticism paired with anti-German stereotypes spreads in social media in Greece. Beneath the surface of Eurosceptic and xenophobic stereotypes, her analysis of news and social media content from the period 2008–2013 also reveals, however, a more deep-rooted concern with the state of democracy. Online commenting sections should therefore not be ignored by political elites or discarded as xenophobic (see also the contribution of Heft et al. in this volume). The resurfacing of nationalist stereotypes is often rather a consequence of the dismay of the people who find no better way to give expression to their deep discomfort with representative politics (Michailidou 2016). These findings on social media as a sensor of popular discontent require us to reconceptualise how we study online social spaces and what the benchmarks are for online democratic debate. This regards, in particular, the role of emotions, which often seem to dominate online debates (e.g. Haßler 2015), but are not automatically contrary to deliberative debate.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we reviewed the evidence on the amplification of media negativity in EU news and its relationship with EU legitimacy. We argue that Euroscepticism is at least partly explained as the result of the negativity bias of political news and not simply triggered by the campaigns of Eurosceptic political parties. A media perspective on Euroscepticism helps to understand this crucial role played by journalists in amplifying and framing negative news stories about the EU in traditional media as well as the important effect of the internet and social media in driving Eurosceptic attitudes. We have shown how media negativity can have negative consequences for knowledge about the EU and awareness of EU politics, as well as the way in which the framing of news stories can hinder critical engagement with the EU's political process by strengthening support for Eurosceptic parties. Framing of news stories through fear and exclusive identities can drive opposition to the EU whilst framing in terms of strategy—presenting EU politicians as self-interested or corrupt—can promote apathy and political cynicism towards not just the EU but also democracy more broadly which, in turn, also drives support for populist

parties. We have also discussed the potential of the new media in amplifying media negativity and driving Euroscepticism online. Negativity towards the EU is no longer mediated, or even mitigated by journalists, but given expression in the direct voice of the people against the political elites and representatives. This unmediated voice of the people on the web risks being increasingly detached from the intermediate representative procedures and institutions of civil society and government. Understanding the influence of new and social media sheds light on the active role played by media audiences who create a demand for news stories that challenge EU legitimacy and, through news commenting and social media platforms, increasingly contribute to the negative framing of the EU. We argued that in online news formats, such Eurosceptic audiences are offered a forum where they can directly react to political news by commenting and sharing. Social media and news commenting forums therefore amplify the negativity bias of EU news with citizens/users primarily expressing their critique, discontent or frustration with the EU (see also the chapter by Caiani and Pavan in this volume).

The negativity bias of political news coverage has important repercussions for the design of democratic government and the routine ways political representatives seek publicity and interact with journalists. For the case of the EU, media negativity correlates with a double misrepresentation of democratic politics in terms of both output and input legitimacy. Within the output dimension, legitimacy is constrained to the extent that journalists predominantly focus on overregulation, failure and crisis. Within the input dimension, journalists apply a predominantly nationalist perspective on democratic will-formation that often privileges the Eurosceptic voice over others. Media negativity is thus a useful interpretative framework to understand the systemic constraints on EU legitimacy, especially with regard to the numerous attempts of EU actors and institutions to launch a more pro-active media and communication strategy to 'sell' a more positive image to the public (Brüggemann 2010). From the vantage point of media negativity, it may well be that such strategic communication efforts achieve opposite effects: the more publicity, the less legitimacy. Being constantly exposed to media negativity, we have observed a new post-Lisbon protective attitude of many EU actors and institutions designed to shield

themselves from the negative effects of mediatisation (Michailidou and Trenz 2014). Withdrawal from the media stage and the turn towards depoliticised technocratic governance (Schimmelfennig 2014) is, however, equally risky and might create even more negative news in the long run. EU institutions can therefore remain highly vulnerable to negative events, especially in moments of heightened public attention such as the current crises (economic-financial, institutional-constitutional and humanitarian). Entrapped in the ‘spiral of Euroscepticism’, EU actors and institutions need to learn to account for the imponderables of mass media communication and the biases of political journalism, for which online and social media do not provide a corrective.

## Note

1. On the relationship between the type of political information that voters receive, their attitudes towards the EU and their choice for Eurosceptic parties, see also the Mosca and Quaranta and Conti and Memoli in this volume.

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# EU Media Coverage in Times of Crisis: Euroscepticism Becoming Mainstream?

Patrick Bijsmans

## Introduction

Common understanding has it that media play an important role in democratic societies. This is one of the reasons for the emergence of an extensive body of research on different aspects of media coverage of EU affairs (see Risse 2015; Kevin 2003). Some scholars have argued that the misrepresentation of European affairs in national media is an important source of Euroscepticism (see Leconte 2010; Anderson 2004). Yet, surprisingly, despite the growing body of literature on EU media coverage and the extensive literature on Euroscepticism, there has been little dedicated research that combines both perspectives.

This chapter takes a more detailed look at the topic of media and Euroscepticism at a time when the Eurozone crisis has made many

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headlines. The crisis saw a Eurozone on the verge of collapse, stringent austerity measures in several member states, and new steps towards further economic and monetary integration. Following Brack and Startin (2015, p. 240), these events have resulted in Euroscepticism becoming mainstream ‘in the sense that it has become increasingly more legitimate and salient (and in many ways less contested) across Europe as a whole’.

By means of a qualitative comparison of media coverage in 2009 and 2014, this study will explore if Euroscepticism has indeed become mainstream in public debates. This would entail changing mediated debates in which Eurosceptic rhetoric has not just increased but also become more hostile towards the whole idea of European integration and not just to certain characteristics of the EU. The focus will be on quality newspapers in Britain and the Netherlands. Britain is the archetypical example of a Eurosceptic member state and is not part of the Eurozone. The Netherlands is a Eurozone member where criticism towards the EU has been on the rise for some time now.

If the mainstreaming thesis is correct, Euroscepticism should certainly no longer be confined to Britain. Moreover, while the focus on quality newspapers may come with a certain bias towards an elite readership that is more likely to be interested in EU affairs (Conti and Memoli, this volume; Risse 2010), it is exactly in such newspapers that we should also expect critical and Eurosceptic discourses to have become more embedded for the mainstreaming thesis to hold.

## The Rise of Euroscepticism

As Caiani and Guerra explain in the introduction to this volume, Euroscepticism and opposition towards the EU and its policies have become more prominent than ever before. As a result, there has been a shift from a ‘permissive consensus’ to what Marks and Hooghe (2009) have called a ‘constraining dissensus’; from a situation in which the European citizens were latent about European integration, to one in which politicians are confronted with an increasingly critical public. The opposition raised in this context is, however, ‘multi-faceted’, takes different forms and its advance is far from uniform across member states (Guerra, this volume). Hence, the importance of expanding the scope of Euroscepticism research to areas such as media.

## Media and Euroscepticism

Most work on Euroscepticism is concerned with political parties and public opinion, whereas there has been relatively little attention for other related issues such as media and Euroscepticism (Usherwood and Startin 2013). This is quite surprising given the fact that media play such an important role in modern societies. Public debates are represented in media, which play an important role as sources of information for many citizens. They also shape debates through both their reliance on news values for selection and their active contribution to debates through, for instance, editorials (see Galpin and Trenz, this volume).

This does not mean that there has not already been some work that takes a more detailed look at this relationship. These existing studies have opted for different perspectives. Some scholars have looked into the extent to which media are Eurosceptic (see Anderson 2004), whereas others have examined the effects of media coverage on opinions about the EU, in general, and the spread of Euroscepticism, in particular (see de Vreese 2007). Media analysis has also been used as a means to explore other aspects of Euroscepticism, such as party competition (see Statham et al. 2010) and the role of stereotypes (Grix and Lacroix 2006).

These studies often focus on positions in favour of or against the EU, thereby overlooking the rich variety of opinions referred to in existing literature on Euroscepticism (see Guerra forthcoming2016). Yet, there are some exceptions to this. For instance, Startin (2015, p. 321; Leruth et al., this volume) proposes to distinguish between 'Euro-positive', 'Eurosceptic' and 'Euro-ambivalent' newspapers, which are 'generally in favour of the European Union per se, not being clearly partisan either way with regard to ongoing measures designed to foster closer European cooperation and not necessarily covering EU-related issues with any great regularity and as a matter of priority'. De Wilde et al. (2013) devised a more elaborate new typology consisting of six possible positions towards European integration. These range from 'Affirmative European', which entails a positive assessment of European integration, to 'Anti-European', which represents a complete rejection of integration.

Other scholars have also drawn attention to the variety of possible positions towards the EU. Karner's (2013) analysis of Austrian Euroscepticism reveals that a plurality of positions can be found in Austrian media,

including alternative pro-European evaluations of European affairs, particularly in quality media. Based on a claim-making analysis of political party positions as covered by the media, Statham et al. (2010) argue that integration as such is hardly questioned, though there are instances of constructive critique focussing on specific elements. In fact, most criticism concerned 'the substance of Europe'. Similarly, in their analysis of debates about the European Constitutional Treaty (ECT), Statham and Trenz (2013) refer to so-called 'Eurocritical claims': positions towards the EU that are based on alternative visions of Europe, rather than an outright rejection of European integration.

## Britain and the Netherlands in the EU

This chapter combines perspectives from media and Euroscepticism research by exploring to what extent Euroscepticism has become a mainstream phenomenon in mediated debates on EU affairs in the British and Dutch public spheres.<sup>1</sup> Britain and the Netherlands differ not only in terms of size but also in terms of political and media system and their stance towards the EU.

The 'awkward partner' (George 1990) Britain has always had a rather complicated relation with the EU and its predecessors, often following concerns about sovereignty and identity. Initially reluctant to take part in the European Economic Community, the country eventually joined in 1973, only to hold a referendum on continued membership in 1975. Startin (2015) believes that today a 'tipping point' has been reached in Britain's relations with the EU, with rational arguments having been surpassed by emotional ones. As a result, Britain 'could well be set on a path to becoming an "ex-partner"' (rather than just an 'awkward' one) (Startin 2015, p. 312).

British newspapers are generally seen as being very susceptible to Eurosceptic arguments, employing a rhetoric that, according to Daddow (2012), stresses 'destructive dissent' based on perceived 'threats to British sovereignty and identity' originating from a German-run continent. However, other scholars have shown that Euroscepticism is more vehemently pursued in some media than in others. Popular tabloids are usu-



ally most outspoken, whereas quality newspapers have allowed for a more diverse set of opinions (e.g. Startin 2015; Anderson 2004).

In contrast to Britain, the Netherlands has long been viewed as a pro-integrationist country, partly due to the fact that it was one of the EU's founding members (Schout and Rood 2013). The negotiations in the run-up to the Maastricht Treaty—when a far-reaching Dutch proposal for a new Treaty on European Union was rejected by all member states except Belgium—have played a key role in the rise of a more critical attitude towards the EU. Since then, the Dutch have grown more hesitant towards the EU, culminating in a rejection of the ECT in a referendum on 1 June 2005. This irreversibly made Eurosceptic arguments part of the national EU debate (van Holsteyn and Vollaard 2015).

Media coverage of EU affairs in the Netherlands is said to have been limited compared to coverage in other member states, such as Britain (see de Beus and Mak 2009; Kevin 2003). The little work that exists on Dutch media and Euroscepticism mostly deals with European elections. For example, fuelled by the 2005 referendum, there was rather substantial coverage of the 2009 elections (de Wilde et al. 2013) in which many identified Europe as a threat to the Netherlands.

## Varieties of Opposition to the EU in the Quality Press

Four quality newspapers have been selected for this study: the centre-left newspapers *The Guardian* and *De Volkskrant* and the centre-right newspapers *The Times* and *NRC Handelsblad* (see Leruth et al., this volume). Each of these has influential op-ed pages through which they play an important role in public debates. The focus on quality newspapers stems from the assumption that the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism should also be reflected in newspapers that are known to present a more balanced and elaborate image of politics than popular and tabloid newspapers.

Political orientations tend to be more visible in the British press than in many of their continental counterparts (see Hallin and Mancini 2004). Yet, *The Times* and *The Guardian* represent a more diverse set of politi-

cal beliefs than some of the other British quality newspapers and, hence, can be compared to the less outspoken Dutch newspapers. For instance, the centre-right *Daily Telegraph* could have been an option, if it were not for its consistent support for the *Conservatives* (hence its nickname ‘The Torygraph’) and its more one-dimensional approach towards European integration (e.g. Anderson 2004; Watts 1997).

Newspaper coverage of EU affairs in 2009, the year in which the economic and Eurozone crises really hit Europe, is compared with coverage in 2014, when the European economy slowly started to recover. Both countries experienced an economic slowdown during these years and, interestingly, both essentially pushed for further Eurozone integration, despite Britain not signing the 2012 Fiscal Pact (Mather 2015). Instead of looking into coverage of events or specific policies, this chapter takes a broader focus, taking into account all aspects of EU affairs. Yet, European elections took place during both years; elections which saw a rather substantial number of votes for Eurosceptic parties, such as the *UK Independence Party* (UKIP) in Britain and Geert Wilder’s *Freedom Party* in the Netherlands.

The analysis zooms in on the assessment of EU affairs as put forward by actors in the mediated public sphere—including national, European and international (representatives of) citizens, media, political actors (cf. Koopmans and Statham 2010).<sup>2</sup> This type of claim-making analysis tends to be used in more quantitatively oriented studies, but here a predominantly qualitative approach has been adopted. This allows for a more in-depth analysis, which can help to more precisely uncover the objects and nature of arguments (Hardy et al. 2004).

Constructed week sampling (e.g. Riffe et al. 1993) has been employed to select a manageable amount of articles for analysis. This form of stratified random sampling takes into account differences between weeks (mainly due to the impact of events on news coverage) and within weeks (more attention to, for instance, culture or sports on some days). Two weeks have been constructed for each year, meaning that for the first half of 2009 one random Monday, Tuesday and so on was selected, and so on for the second half of 2009 and for the first and second half of 2014. Since the two Dutch newspapers do not have Sunday editions, the constructed weeks cover Monday to Saturday (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Constructed weeks

Year	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2009-1	2 February	9 June	22 April	7 May	30 January	11 April
2009-2	27 July	22 December	23 September	12 November	23 October	5 September
2014-1	24 March	28 January	12 February	3 April	27 June	31 May
2014-2	18 August	15 July	22 October	28 August	3 October	13 September

Articles were retrieved from the newspaper database LexisNexis employing the search key 'eu' (which retrieves all articles with words starting with 'eu'). Additionally, the search key 'Brussels' was used to find articles that may not specifically refer to Europe, European Union and so on. The focus was on news, background and analysis, as well as columns, opinion articles, readers' letters and editorials in national editions of the four newspapers. Claims were put forward directly by actors in the debate or indirectly, when newspapers referred to actors' claims or when, for instance, interviewed actors referred to claims put forward by others. They appeared in articles that were fully dedicated to EU affairs and in articles that discussed different issues, but did include at least one claim concerning EU affairs.

The challenge is how to conceptually approach the issue of media and Euroscepticism. Several detailed conceptual understandings of Euroscepticism have been put forward (see Guerra [forthcoming](#), 2017). Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2008) seminal distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' Euroscepticism has played a key role in this exercise. Yet, their work has been criticised for presenting a somewhat oversimplified view of what Euroscepticism might entail (Krouwel and Abts 2007; Kopecký and Mudde 2002). As highlighted before, despite these attempts to broaden our understanding of Euroscepticism and other forms of criticism towards the EU, empirical research on media and Euroscepticism tends to confine its focus to a pro-con EU discussion.

Some of the research that does apply a more extensive categorisation, limits itself to the issue of integration and does not cover policy (de Wilde et al. 2013) or is based on typologies that are useful for analysing overall positions of media towards the EU, but are less suitable for analysing specific positions taken up by a variety of actors in mediated debates (Startin 2015). Following these considerations, this chapter employs the

categories of soft and hard Euroscepticism, but contrasts these with pro-EU positions. In addition, it introduces what FitzGibbon (2013) has called ‘Euroalternativism’, which, as seen (Guerra, this volume) rather than being ‘rejectionist’ in nature, concerns expressions of ‘pro-system opposition’. Here, actors support the EU and European integration, but aim for alternative policies or institutional reforms. These four categories have been further refined to also distinguish between:

- (I) positions concerning the idea of European integration, including institutional design, EU membership and core elements of the EU (such as the Euro or Schengen) and;
- (II) policy fields and policy choices, including choices related to stricter budget norms versus more spending (i.e. related to the Euro) or choices related to whether or not to (temporarily) allow for internal border controls (i.e. related to Schengen).

Taken together, this results in the positions listed in Table 2 (Bijsmans forthcoming 2017a, forthcoming 2017b).

In this context, mainstreaming would entail a changing rhetoric in mediated debates, with actors putting forward soft and hard Eurosceptic

**Table 2** Possible positions on European integration and EU policies

Position	Aimed at	
	(I) Polity	(II) Policy
Support	Support for European integration and the existing institutional design	Support for the policies currently being pursued
Euroalternativism	Support for European integration, but arguing for a more supranational institutional design	Support for EU involvement in a new policy or arguing for a different approach in an existing policy field
Soft Euroscepticism	Support for a form of European integration, but arguing for a more intergovernmental institutional design	Opposition to EU involvement in a policy field or to a specific EU policy
Hard Euroscepticism	Principled opposition to integration and aiming for withdrawal from the EU <sup>a</sup>	

<sup>a</sup>Here, there is no distinction between claims aimed at polity or policy, as actors argue against the EU in all its facets

arguments (including rejection of the whole idea of European integration) at the expense of supportive positions and pro-system opposition. With a 'tipping point' apparently having been reached in Britain (Startin 2015), it can be expected that Eurosceptic arguments have not only gained more prominence but also become 'harder', even in the generally more pro-European *Guardian*. At the same time, the embedment of a more Eurosceptic discourse in the Netherlands (van Holsteyn and Vollaard 2015) can be expected to also be reflected in a more critical debate in the two Dutch newspapers.

## Findings

A total of 555 articles were selected, covering a variety of issues, with references to elections, institutions, directives and so on. They yielded a total of 1508 claims that were coded for analysis. More articles were analysed for 2014 (302) than for 2009 (253), as were more claims coded for 2014 (836) as compared to 2009 (672). The number of articles particularly increased in the British newspapers, but on average they contained slightly fewer claims. The increase of articles was more moderate in the Dutch newspapers, but here the number of claims per article increased. This suggests that not only has attention for the EU and its policies increased but also that Europe has become a more contested issue. As we will see below, this is matched by an increase of hard Eurosceptic arguments in the British media and an increase of soft Eurosceptic arguments in the Dutch media, with pro-system opposition being present in both.

## EU Affairs and Euroscepticism in the Press in 2009

Table 3 presents an overview of coded positions on European integration and EU policies in 2009, put forward by a wide range of actors. Supportive claims are in the minority when compared to critical and Eurosceptic claims, whether they concern pro-system opposition or opposition that raises more fundamental questions about the EU. In the British newspapers, 30 per cent of claims are supportive of the polity or its policies, whereas in the Dutch newspapers this concerns 41 per



cent. Yet, whereas most oppositional claims in the latter newspapers are of a Euroalternativist nature, soft and hard Eurosceptic claims outweigh Euroalternativist criticism in the British newspapers. Arguments for less integration or even withdrawal outweighed arguments supportive of the current situation in both *The Times* and *The Guardian*. Supportive polity-related claims may have been more visible in *The Guardian* because this more pro-European newspaper may feel a need to defend European integration in a country where many newspapers are seen as taking a more sceptical position.

A substantial part of claims put forward concerns policies rather than polity. In all newspapers but *The Guardian*, over 50 per cent of coded claims concerned EU policies, most of which asked for pursuing different policy options or for the EU to step up its efforts. However, in some cases, this does concern the question whether the EU should deal with a specific policy at all; in other words, a form of soft Euroscepticism in which there is a call for 'less Europe' or 'no Europe'. For instance, the working time directive and its consequences for patient safety were heavily criticised by the British medical profession (*TG* 11 April 2009),<sup>3</sup> whereas *Volkskrant* journalist Kim van Keken called the EU ban on incandescent light bulbs 'symbolic politics' (*VK* 5 September 2009).

It is when looking at polity-related claims when we gain a better insight into the debate about European integration in general and the EU in particular. Part of the related claims concerned issues in which we see the newspapers referring to actors in or from other member states. For instance, in light of the debate on possible Icelandic accession to the EU, *The Guardian* (30 January 2009) notes that Icelandic voters are not very supportive of membership, but 'see the euro as a safe haven to protect Iceland from a battering by the markets' (cf. *NRC* 7 May 2009).

Claims regarding the EU polity were very prominent in debates about events, such as the 2009 European Parliament (EP) elections and the second Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty on 2 October 2009. For example, *NRC Handelsblad* (9 June 2009) and *The Times* (9 June 2009) featured articles about the rise of populist right-wing parties. *The Guardian* (9 June 2009) asked a number of leading historians to discuss whether 'fascism [is] on the march again'. One of them, Norman Davies, distinguished between Britain's leading anti-EU party, *UKIP*,

which ‘thrives on the notion that the EU is the new Third Reich’, and the far-right *British National Party* (*BNP*), which ‘is much more Anglo-centric; it wants to reclaim an imagined Albion dominated by white nationals’. *BNP* leader Nick Griffin himself claimed that the government was ceding freedom and sovereignty to Brussels, which the Brits fought so hard to defend during both world wars (*TT* 23 October 2009).

Many of the arguments put forward against the EU in the British newspapers focused on what Leconte (2010) has called political Euroscepticism, related to concerns about democracy and sovereignty. While European leaders ‘ritually declared that the Lisbon Treaty will make the EU more democratic, more open and more accountable’ (*TG* 23 October 2009), several actors in the British public sphere questioned the democratic nature of the EU. One reader wrote that

Britain’s strength, which justifies her sense of separateness from the Continent, has always involved rejecting European models of absolutism. The EU is the most recent of these antidemocratic models. (*TT* 30 January 2009)

The *Conservatives* were against the Lisbon Treaty, with David Cameron being ‘on a collision course with the EU’ (*TG* 30 January 2009). References to calls for a referendum on British EU membership appeared several times (*TG* 7 May 2009).

Brits who argued in favour of EU membership often talked in terms of its benefits (cf. utilitarian Euroscepticism; Leconte 2010). Reader Brian Hughes (*TG* 9 June 2009) mourned about the fact that ‘there’s no organisation in Britain willing and able to articulate the many benefits of the flawed but remarkably successful experiment in cross-border cooperation called the EU’. *Guardian* columnist Martin Kettle (*TG* 30 January 2009) argued that Britain would benefit from a stronger, more effective EU on the world stage.

In the Dutch debate, the solution for more democracy actually was not necessarily less EU, but rather a reformed EU, which could include Commissioners elected through national referendums (*VK* 30 January 2009). Still, there are also those who call for less Europe. For instance, *De Volkskrant* (11 April 2009) explained that Geert Wilders and his



*Freedom Party* aimed to limit European integration to economic cooperation—though *NRC Handelsblad* (9 June 2009) also labelled Wilders as ‘anti-Europe’, which suggests a hard Eurosceptic position. *Volkskrant* columnist Martin Sommer (9 June 2009) called the EU an ‘elite project’<sup>4</sup> and wrote that the Lisbon Treaty would not give member states more control, but simply meant more Europe and more European regulations. Yet, just like policy issues seemed to have been more important, overall most polity-related soft and hard Eurosceptic claims actually were put forward by non-Dutch actors. However, in this respect, we should not forget that media do select and may therefore include claims by actors that are seen as representing the broader debate about the EU and that tap into national EU debates.

## EU Affairs and Euroscepticism in the Press in 2014

A broad range of topics featured in the newspapers in 2014, with over half of the coded claims in the Dutch newspapers still pertaining to policy issues. At the same time, there was a more prominent exchange of arguments on integration and institutional issues (Table 4). Over 50 per cent of claims in both British newspapers concerned polity issues, but compared to 2009 the Dutch newspapers also paid more attention to such issues.

The increased attention for arguments for or against the EU seems to be related to attention for a number of issues that touched directly on European integration and EU institutions. These include EU enlargement, the referendum on Scottish independence, the growth of the Eurosceptic caucus in the EP, the debate about the *Spitzenkandidaten*, and, closely linked to the aforementioned points, British Prime Minister David Cameron’s EU membership referendum pledge. Cameron had made clear that he did not wish to leave the EU, but was expecting reforms.

Naturally, the Brexit debate featured prominently in the two British newspapers. Interestingly, hard Eurosceptic arguments appeared more in *The Guardian* in 2014 than they did in 2009. Yet, *The Times*, which tends to be seen as a more Eurosceptical newspaper than *The Guardian*,



displays an increase of supportive arguments. Its editorial positions were mostly supportive of the principle of cooperation between European countries, even though the EU is seen as being ‘over-regulated’ (*TT* 28 August 2014) and the British parliament had lost ‘too much power’ (*TT* 3 October 2014).

Once again, political arguments related to issues such as sovereignty and identity played a key role in the debate. The House of Lords supported a system by which national parliaments and governments could more easily propose and veto legislation (*TG* 24 March 2014; *TT* 24 March 2014). In a debate with *LibDem* leader Nick Clegg—generally seen as the most pro-European politician—Eurosceptic *UKIP* party leader Nigel Farage warned for violence in case the EU would not be dismantled democratically:

We are already, in some countries, beginning to see the rise of worrying political extremism. If you take away from people their ability, through the ballot box, to change their futures because they have given away control of everything to somebody else, then I’m afraid they tend to resort to unpleasant means. (*TG* 3 March 2014)

MP Mark Reckless (*TG* 28 January 2014) combined economic and political arguments when he claimed that ‘we would be better off as an independent country trading with Europe but governing ourselves’. Yet, economic arguments were more often employed by those who argued for EU membership, such as the Confederation of British Industry (*TG* 28 January 2014) and British carmakers (*TT* 3 April 2014).

The appointment of a new Commission President played an important role in the debates about the future relationship between Britain and the EU. Following the elections in May 2014, the European People’s Party again became the biggest group in the EP, yet its *Spitzenkandidaat* Jean-Claude Juncker was a controversial figure, especially in the UK. *The Times* (31 May 2014) dubbed Junckeran ‘arch-federalist’, whereas *The Guardian* wrote that Britain viewed Juncker as ‘a baby-eating federalist monster’ (27 June 2014). David Cameron wanted a Commission President who would be open to reforms and to carving out a new Britain-EU relationship (*TG* 31 May 2014; *TT* 3 October 2014). Quoted in *The Guardian*,

Jan Jansen, a retired Dutch civil servant, criticised the British position and called a possible Brexit a disaster:

It's crazy. In the First World War English people came here to defend Europe. The churchyards are full of young men who died for Europe. Now Cameron doesn't want Europe. (...) Then we'd just have France and Germany. The Dutch would never get a say. Cameron isn't such a bad guy. We always have sympathy for the UK. (*TG* 27 June 2014)

This sentiment resonated in the Dutch-mediated debate. Just like in the British newspapers, the appointment of Juncker was connected to the Brexit debate. Juncker was criticised for being the wrong person for the job; someone who stood for more integration at a time when European citizens were becoming increasingly critical about the EU. In *De Volkskrant* (27 June 2014), EU correspondent Bert Lanting suggests that the appointment of Juncker may result in a Brexit and professor Ton Nijhuis of the University of Amsterdam asks if we 'really want to lose Britain over Juncker'.

Whereas hard Eurosceptic arguments seem to have become more salient in the British-mediated debate (partly at the expense of soft Eurosceptic arguments), soft Eurosceptic arguments became more prominent in the Dutch debate, as did Euroalternative arguments about the EU polity. Soft Eurosceptic arguments often still concerned policy issues and especially gained importance in *NRC Handelsblad*. Part of this debate was about making sure that the EU would not be able to get involved in certain policies, such as social benefits (*NRC* 28 January 2014). However, many of these remarks were actually issued by actors from other European countries. Once again, media make choices based on news values and this may still be seen as representing an increased sensitivity to criticism about and opposition to the EU; in other words, criticism becoming a normal feature of debates.

Yet, generally the Dutch were identified as having become more critical, in particular in the aftermath of the European elections (*VK* 31 May 2014). *NRC Handelsblad* editor Hans Steketee (31 May 2014) argued that the good results for Eurosceptic parties in the EP elections showed that Europe had to change. Even though Wilders actually lost votes, he was still seen as the leading Dutch Eurosceptic politician; not just in the

Netherlands but also in Europe where he was planning to create a parliamentary group with Marine Le Pen's *Front National*.

Reflecting the increasingly critical stance of the Netherlands, Prime Minister Rutte, speaking in Berlin, argued in favour of a more influential role of national parliaments and claimed that the EU's chief role should be to stimulate prosperity (NRC 3 April 2009). When Dutch actors discuss European integration, costs versus benefits rather than identity and sovereignty seem to be most important. Rutte stresses this in the aforementioned speech when he argues that the Dutch people's uneasiness with the EU 'is largely due to the results of European cooperation'. As one interviewed citizen put it:

I am pro-Europe. But we should see how we can make the best of it. (NRC 31 May 2014)

## Discussion and Conclusion

Quality media are often said to represent a conventional, elite opinion, ignoring other currents of opinion. Yet, the findings presented below show that Euroscepticism and criticism are also becoming mainstream in these elite discourses, with the EU and its policies no longer being taken for granted, but increasingly being the focus of debate. This is reflected in the fact that hard Euroscepticism has become more important in the British debate and that in 2014 over 50 per cent of claims in both British newspapers concerned polity issues. The increase of supportive arguments in *The Times* could be interpreted as a reaction to this—and, hence, as further evidence of the fact that a more critical debate has emerged. In the Netherlands, mainstreaming was rather along the lines of an increase of soft Eurosceptic arguments calling for less EU, although there was also a reverberation of worries about the prospective Commission President's agenda for Europe.

Yet, the approach adapted here also calls for a more nuanced perspective and shows the limitations of opting for a more straightforward conceptualisation (cf. Vasilopoulou 2013, p. 156). First, despite popular views that media fuel Euroscepticism, we have seen a more nuanced picture, with many claims concerning policy instead of polity and with

soft and Eurosceptic claims occurring less frequently than supportive or Euroalternative claims. The latter may be critical arguments—of polity or policy—yet they are based on a generally positive stance towards European integration. Second, British quality newspapers appear to be more balanced in their coverage of EU affairs than one may expect (cf. Daddow 2012). This concurs with the cautious conclusions drawn by Touri and Lynn Rogers (2013), who assert that the British quality press' coverage of the financial crisis in Greece was less stereotypical than usual.

Even when specifically looking at policy discussions, we can see that arguments in favour of the current form of integration or institutional set-up and arguments calling for even further integration still outweigh arguments for less integration or even withdrawal from the EU. The debate in *The Times* was more balanced in 2014 as compared to 2009. In fact, the debate about 'Brexit' could have not just emphasised critical opinions but also increased the importance of pro-Europeans speaking out (de Wilde et al. 2013).

Supportive and Euroalternative claims are important and policy debates matter in Europe's public spheres. This is in line with other research too, such as the studies by Karner (2013), Statham et al. (2010) and Statham and Trenz (2013) referred to before. Moreover, this is also consistent with findings presented by scholars who have looked into attitudes towards the EU in crisis-struck member states (Katsourides 2016; Clements et al. 2014). Their studies reveal a nuanced picture, with criticism usually concerning qualified opposition to certain policies, institutional arrangements and so on, rather than opposition against the EU as. We should therefore be careful not to conclude that soft and hard Euroscepticism are becoming the mainstream, but should remain open towards a broader perspective and a richer understanding of criticism about and opposition against the EU (Leruth et al., this volume).

Generally, the British debate seems to provide better context as to what Euroscepticism actually entails. For instance, *UKIP* tends to be identified with an anti-EU stance in British newspapers, wanting to withdraw from the EU and, hence, is clearly seen as being hard Eurosceptic. A softer version of Euroscepticism is to be found in an anti-federal criticism of the EU, a position taken by quite a few *Conservatives*. In contrast, in the Dutch debate it is less well defined. Actors are identified by the media as

being Eurosceptic, suggesting that they are against the EU, yet without clearly stating this (cf. VK 3 April 2014).

Scholarly work has widely discussed the fact that terms like ‘Euroscepticism’, ‘Eurocriticism’ and ‘anti-European’ are often used interchangeably—almost randomly even—in academic, public and political debates (e.g. Leconte 2010). While some have argued that a more critical EU discourse is actually a welcome development (Vasilopoulou 2013; Leconte 2010), the ambiguousness of Euroscepticism, combined with the tendency of media to at times misrepresent EU affairs, may actually obscure genuine political and public debates.

Media have to make choices and we cannot be sure that we are really witnessing a rise of Euroscepticism or rather media paying more attention to Eurosceptic parties and opinions (Galpin and Trenz, this volume). However, since quality media are important sources of information and platforms for debate for many in modern society, we may assume that the overview presented here does at least partly represent national debates. In addition, earlier work suggested that there is relatively little difference between coverage of EU affairs by quality and tabloid media (see Bijsmans forthcoming 2017a; de Beus and Mak 2009, p. 118). Yet, research on EU contestation in the online public sphere reveals a higher degree of opposition, with citizen contribution in particular being much more critical about the EU (see de Wilde et al. 2013). Hence, it is clear that more research is still necessary, because, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, studies combining insights from European public sphere research and Euroscepticism research are still rare.

## Notes

1. Part of the British debate on Europe also concerns the European Court of Human Rights and its jurisdiction (Startin 2015), yet this chapter focuses exclusively on the EU.
2. The approval of new legislation as well as opinions about policy implementation were included. Criticism from EU officials was also included, but their policy proposals were not as the latter tend to represent the topics being discussed in the public sphere.

3. From here onwards, references to articles will appear in this form, where *TG* stands for *The Guardian*, *TT* for *The Times*, *VK* for *De Volkskrant* and *NRC* for *NRC Handelsblad*, followed by date, month, year.
4. All translations are the author's.

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# Does the Information Source Matter? Newspaper Readership, Political Preferences and Attitudes Towards the EU in the UK, France and the Netherlands

Benjamin Leruth, Yordan Kutiyski, André Krouwel,  
and Nicholas J. Startin

## Introduction

From the Maastricht Treaty onwards, opposition to the EU has become increasingly embedded across Europe's nation states as measured by public opinion and a growth in Eurosceptic political parties and civil society groups (Usherwood and Startin 2013). The 'big bang' enlargement in

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2004 when eight Central and Eastern European states, along with Cyprus and Malta joined the EU, further galvanised Eurosceptics in the existing member states and provided the backdrop for the Freedom of Movement to become an increasingly contested focus of their opposition. On the back of the economic crisis in the Eurozone, the pressure on the EU, in terms of its perceived overall legitimacy, became more intense. The situation has become more difficult for the EU with the current refugee crisis with its political repercussions being felt across Europe, from the southern Mediterranean and Eastern European borders to Calais and beyond. With the outcome of the UK referendum (23 June 2016), some commentators have even predicted the potential demise of the EU itself (see e.g. *Financial Times* 2016; *Newsweek* 2016; *The Washington Post* 2016).

While these 'crisis' issues are obvious, demand-side explanations for a rise in opposition to the EU are generally addressed due to the EU's slow pace of reform in terms of democratisation and greater transparency, but it is also necessary to consider supply-side explanations such as the role of leadership and political parties in influencing citizens' attitudes towards the EU. In this respect, one area that has still received relatively little attention in terms of how supply-side variables account for changing public perceptions towards the EU is the role, influence and general impact of print, broadcast and social media in this process. Much of the focus on the role of the media in terms of analysing the Eurosceptic debate has focused on the UK, a country notorious for its tabloid press which is largely hostile to the EU (see Startin 2015; Daddow 2012; Anderson 2004). While it is crucial to acknowledge what Anderson (2004, p. 170) calls 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 the EU is becoming increasingly contested in media circles in many nation states. While the degree of contestation varies from country to country it is clear that across the member states, the media plays a role in contributing to a mainstreaming of Euroscepticism.

Following the study of the previous chapter, by focusing on the print media and more specifically the role of daily newspapers, the purpose of this chapter is to explore further the debate surrounding traditional media impact and influences over attitudes towards the EU by relating traditional media readership to political preferences in three countries,

the UK, the Netherlands and France. Previous research has indicated that Eurosceptic voters tend to obtain information from like-minded sources and are 'epistemologically crippled' in the sense that the main sources of information about political issues they trust also communicate Eurosceptic or Euro-ambivalent views. The chapter charts possible differences between Eurosceptic and Euro-enthusiastic voters in terms of the type of daily newspaper they read to obtain political information and measures the radicalism and attitudes of voters on a number of EU-related issues. The first section offers a background analysis of Euroscepticism in the media and among political elites in the three country case studies, reflecting on the existing literature and on an expert survey conducted by the authors. The second section constitutes the core of the chapter by analysing the correlation between newspaper readership, political preferences and Eurosceptic attitudes in the UK, France and the Netherlands. It is then concluded that even though newspaper readership does influence voting preferences and Eurosceptic attitudes, the results significantly vary between the three countries mostly because of the lack of Eurosceptic media in France, as emphasised in the expert survey.

## **Theoretical Background: The Impact of Traditional Media on Public Opinion**

There are many gradations with regard to EU support and scepticism (Sorensen 2006; Krouwel and Abts 2007). Flood (2002, p. 73) argues that degrees of distrust towards European integration range from the moderate 'European integration has gone as far as it should go' to extreme 'outright rejection of membership of the EU'. Regardless of their degree of Euroscepticism, critical individuals towards the EU tend to use like-minded information sources. As de Vreese (2007, p. 42) posits, 'Euroscepticism is, at least partially, a function of the diet of information that citizens consume about European affairs'. Several studies have shown that the role of news media in shaping public opinion is conditional (Spanje and de Vreese 2014). In a study assessing media effects on public opinion about EU enlargement, de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006, p. 430) demonstrated that news media mattered 'only in a situation in

which citizens were exposed to a considerable level of news coverage with a consistent evaluative direction’.

Hence, our hypotheses are twofold, linking (1) newspaper readership to political preferences; and (2) newspaper readership to attitudes towards the EU, as follows:

*H1a* Individuals who read and source political information from left-wing newspapers are more likely to vote for left-wing political parties;

*H1b* Individuals who read and source political information from right-wing newspapers are more likely to vote for right-wing parties;

While it has been shown that political radicals adopt very conspiratorial world views combined with rigid self-conviction and a ‘black-and-white’ style of thinking (van Prooijen et al. 2015; Greenberg and Jonas 2003), we argue that also more moderate partisans and politically opinionated individuals primarily use information sources that best suit their own belief-system. Van Spanje and de Vreese (2014, p. 341) find that media evaluations of the EU influence vote choice, in the sense that ‘the more negative the evaluations of the EU a voter is exposed to, the more likely she or he is to cast a vote for a Eurosceptic party’. Studying radicalism, in particular, Hardin (2002) notes that these attitudes are ‘epistemologically crippled’, in the sense that the main sources of information about political issues citizens would trust and use, come from their own milieu, whereas outside sources that offer more nuanced perspective tend to be ignored. In this study, we test whether this holds for moderate and more radical individuals in general, on both sides of the political spectrum.

*H2a* Individuals who are more positive towards the EU are informed via newspapers that adopt a Euro-positive position;

*H2b* Individuals who are more negative towards the EU are informed via newspapers that adopt a Eurosceptic position.

There is considerable evidence that media framing influences public attitudes towards the EU. Vliegenhart (et al. 2008) finds that the positive or negative presentation of EU-related news determines whether an individual would consider the union favourably or critically. Particularly in the UK, Carey and Burton (2004) find that newspaper coverage affects EU attitudes, with articles mirroring the stances of political parties on the topic (Hawkins 2012). Therefore, it is logical to assume that the causality runs both ways: Eurosceptic individuals are likely to seek information from sources that would respond to their personal opinions, and that would in turn fuel their negative attitudes towards the EU.

Our methodological framework, which combines data from the 2014 European Election Study (EES) and an expert survey conducted by the authors to determine newspapers' political orientation and stances on key European issues, is further discussed in the next section. With regard to case study selection, the UK was chosen for three main reasons. Firstly, because of its obvious relevance as the historic 'awkward partner' (George 1990). Secondly, it was selected because of the uniqueness of its tabloid press given its general opposition to the EU (see Startin 2015). Finally, the backdrop of the June 2016 referendum on EU membership gives the British case added salience and pertinence. The logic of including France was based around the fact it is both a founding member of the EU and one of the three key European players. It was also chosen as the *Front National*, with its 'hard' Eurosceptic views was the leading party in France at the 2014 European election. Given the similar electoral performance of the *UK Independence Party* (UKIP) in the same electoral setting, this was another salient justification for selecting these two cases. The Netherlands, as another founding member of the EU, was selected as the third case, as it has witnessed a rise in opposition to the 'permissive EU consensus' in recent years, further epitomised by the clear majority of 'no' votes at the 2005 referendum on the EU Constitution and by the influence of Geert Wilders' *Party For Freedom* (PVV) on the Eurosceptic debate. Also, as the French voted 'no' on the same question in 2005 (see Startin and Krouwel 2013), this commonality was viewed as another intriguing matchup in terms of case selection. Added to which, following the Dutch citizens' initiative to hold a referendum in April 2016 on the EU's proposed partnership with Ukraine, the referendum factor was viewed

as another strong argument for visiting the case of the Netherlands. A final reason for the choice of cases was the contrasting electoral systems deployed in each country in their national electoral arenas with the UK's first-past-the-post, the French semi-presidential and two-round majoritarian system and the Dutch proportional system allowing for any differences to be observed with regard to the nuances of the electoral system. In terms of the daily newspapers chosen for our comparison, three were chosen for each country: *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and *The Sun* for the UK; *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde* and *Libération* for France; and *de Telegraaf*, *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* for the Netherlands. These were based on those used in the EES survey questionnaires.

## Elites, the Media and Euroscepticism in France, the Netherlands and the UK

This section focuses on contextualising the chapter by offering a descriptive analysis of party-based Euroscepticism (based on the existing literature) and Euroscepticism in the media for the three countries. In order to determine the level of Euroscepticism in the media from a comparative perspective, we constructed an expert survey that was sent out to political and communication science experts, currently employed by prominent academic institutions. The survey was sent to 355 scholars in the UK, 157 in France and 290 in the Netherlands. We have collected the responses of 54 experts for the UK survey, 37 for France and 38 in the Netherlands, making up a total of 129 respondents (a response rate of 16.1 per cent). The experts were asked to assess the political orientation of each newspaper on an 11-point scale (from 1 for 'Extreme-left' to 11 for 'Extreme-right') as well as their level of support for European integration on a 7-point scale (from 1 for 'Strongly opposed' to 7 for 'Strongly in favour'). In addition, they had the opportunity to include some thoughts in an open question related to Euroscepticism and the media in the country studied. Based on the work of Startin (2015), a three-dimensional attitudinal scale is used in order to measure support for European integration: 'Euro-positive', where newspapers tend to be supportive of the integration project as a whole and are broadly supportive



of ongoing measures designed to foster closer European co-operation; 'Euro-ambivalent', where newspapers are generally in favour of the EU per se without being clearly partisan either way with regard to ongoing measures designed to foster closer European co-operation, and/or are not necessarily covering EU-related issues with any great regularity and as a matter of priority; and 'Eurosceptic', where newspapers are opposed to further measures designed to foster closer European co-operation and/or are openly critical of the EU in general. Table 1 summarises the results of this expert survey in comparative perspective.

**Table 1** Expert survey on British, French and Dutch newspapers

	Name	Circulation <sup>a</sup>	Political orientation	Position on European integration
United Kingdom	<i>The Guardian</i>	179,146	Centre left (4.22)	Euro-ambivalent to Euro-positive (5.64)
	<i>The Sun</i>	1,978,324	Right (8.59)	Eurosceptic (1.67)
	<i>The Telegraph</i>	498,484	Right (8.31)	Eurosceptic (1.81)
France	<i>Le Figaro</i>	325,459	Right (8.31)	Euro-ambivalent to Euro-positive (5.00)
	<i>Le Monde</i>	298,529	Centre (5.51)	Euro-ambivalent to Euro-positive (5.91)
	<i>Libération</i>	97,933	Centre left (4.16)	Euro-ambivalent to Euro-positive (5.42)
Netherlands	<i>de Telegraaf</i>	456,927	Right (8.37)	Eurosceptic (2.53)
	<i>de Volkskrant</i>	220,091	Centre left (4.74)	Euro-ambivalent to Euro-positive (5.42)
	<i>NRC Handelsblad</i>	174,673	Centre right (6.21)	Euro-ambivalent to Euro-positive (5.49)

<sup>a</sup>Sources: Audit Bureau of Circulations (UK 2014); Alliance pour les Chiffres de la Presse et des Médias (France 2014); Stichting Nationaal Onderzoek Multimedia (the Netherlands 2015)

Note: the values between brackets represent the average score for each newspaper

As mentioned above (see Bijsmans 2017, this volume), the UK is often pictured as the EU's 'awkward partner'. Three main historical reasons are often mentioned in the literature in order to explain the UK's special place in the EU. Firstly, Britain's geographical position has ensured that an 'island mentality' has developed (Daddow 2012). Secondly, the UK's historical link with other parts of the world through the Commonwealth could explain the country's reluctance to strengthen ties with the EU (Wellings and Baxendale 2015). Finally, the country's experience of the Second World War differs from continental Europe and as a consequence, 'Britain did not share the post-war compulsion of closer European cooperation as a means of binding previously hostile nations together' (Startin 2015, p. 313).

The role and influence of the tabloid press is a key feature of the British media landscape. In the UK, Euroscepticism is advocated by most tabloids, which are also the most influential newspapers in terms of daily circulation. Such tabloids frequently use headlines bashing the EU for the depth of its political project or the loss of national sovereignty. As Daddow (2012, p. 1235) summarises, '[t]he rise of the Murdoch empire and especially the style of reporting is an essential—perhaps the essential—explanation for the broader media drift from permissive consensus to destructive dissent on the question of British relations with Europe'. With the notable exception of *The Mirror* (which had a daily circulation of 936,577 in 2014), the majority of popular tabloids are right-wing. *The Sun* is no exception, with experts ranking the tabloid as strongly right-wing (with an average score of 8.59 on the 11-point scale) and Eurosceptic (average score of 1.67 on the 7-point scale).

Broadsheet newspapers are less popular in terms of daily circulation than tabloids in the UK. The most read broadsheet is *The Telegraph*, which had a daily circulation of below 500,000 in 2014 according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation. Experts ranked *The Telegraph* as right-wing and Eurosceptic, with its scores quite similar to *The Sun*. *The Guardian*, on the other hand, is ranked as a centre-left newspaper that tends to support the EU with a score of 5.64 ranging between 'somewhat in favour' and 'in favour' of European integration.

As a direct result of its first-past-the-post electoral system, the UK political landscape is dominated by the *Conservative* and *Labour* parties, while the European elections, taking place under proportional representation, generally offer the opportunity for smaller parties to gain more influence

and media coverage at the national level. The 2014 European elections saw a dramatic victory for UKIP, which polled 26.6 per cent and won a total of 24 British seats out of 73 in the European Parliament. The *Labour Party*, which is broadly supportive of the European integration process, gained a total of 20 seats, 7 more than in 2009. The *Conservative Party*, which founded the 'soft' Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists parliamentary group in 2009, lost 7 of the 26 seats gained in the previous European elections.

In general, existing studies of Euroscepticism in the media do not include France as a case study. Even in the context of the 2005 European constitution referendum, the vast majority of the French media was strongly in favour of a 'yes' vote (Startin and Krouwel 2013). The rise in popularity of the *Front National*, which won the majority of French seats in the 2014 European Parliament elections did not seem to have a significant effect on newspapers positions on Europe. However, in recent months, the French media started to criticise the direction of the European integration process, especially with regard to the management of the so-called migration 'crisis'<sup>1</sup> and negotiations surrounding the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, there has been a noticeable, recent switch from an overwhelming pro-European stance to a more critical attitude towards the EU in the French media. Due to these recent developments, it seemed timely to ask experts in French politics and society about newspaper positions towards the EU. The three newspapers included in the present analyses, namely *Le Figaro* (right-wing), *Le Monde* (centre)<sup>3</sup> and *Libération* (centre-left), are daily newspapers in France with the highest circulation. Experts ranked all three newspapers as Euro-ambivalent to Euro-positive, illustrating the lack of 'hard' Eurosceptic argument in the French media landscape.<sup>4</sup> As an expert put it, Euroscepticism in the French media 'is less an opposition to the EU itself than an approval of the principle of the EU but a criticism of the way it functions'. As far as party-based Euroscepticism is concerned, the two main extreme parties are the most EU-critical for different reasons: while the radical left *Front de Gauche* is strongly opposed to the politics of austerity and neo-liberalism imposed by European authorities, the radical right *Front National* is committed to national sovereignty and pleads for a withdrawal from the Eurozone and Schengen. Though other mainstream parties criticised certain aspects

of the EU in their 2014 European election manifestos (including the two largest parties—*Parti Socialiste*, PS, and the then *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*, UMP), they were very supportive of the European integration project as a whole. While the *Front National* became the largest party in the 2014 elections with 24.85 per cent and 24 seats (21 more than in the 2009 European elections), UMP (20 seats, −7), PS (13 seats, −1) and the *Greens* (6 seats, −9) made significant losses.

Eurosceptic voices are much rarer in the Dutch media. Both print and broadcast media outlets are predominantly pro-European, with Eurosceptic messages only emerging in the early 2000s, particularly in the light of the rejection of the European constitution in a 2005 referendum (Startin and Krouwel 2013), which coincided with the rise of prominent Eurosceptic parties such as the *Pim Fortuyn List* (LPF) and PVV. Nevertheless, Dutch media has remained predominantly pro-EU, with Eurosceptic messages appearing mainly in tabloid press such as *de Telegraaf*, online platforms as *GeenStijl* and TV programmes of *Wakker Nederland* (Awoken Netherlands), particularly in the run-up to the referendum on the EU Treaty with Ukraine in 2016.

Anti-EU positions in the Netherlands are often described as a ‘wedge issue’ (van de Wardt et al. 2014): economic positions of Dutch parties on the left-right axis do not necessarily correspond to their stances towards the EU, with centrist (*Christian Union*), radical right (PVV) and radical left (*Socialist Party*, SP) parties opposing different aspects of European integration. Pro-European stances dominate in Dutch politics, with the Netherlands being one of the founding members of what is now the EU. Coalition governments are usually led by relatively pro-EU parties, such as the centre-right *Christian Democratic Appeal* (CDA), the liberal conservative *People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy* (VVD), and the even more pro-European centre-left *Labour Party* (PvdA). In recent decades, however, polarisation on the moral-cultural dimension—including the EU—occurred with the rise of the Eurosceptic parties of Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders (PVV), the latter even campaigning for a unilateral Dutch exit from both the Eurozone and the EU. The EU is, in fact, with immigration, and integration of (Muslim) minorities, one of the most contested issues in the Netherlands, as the country has become more deeply divided over cultural issues. In both the 2005 referendum on the Constitutional Treaty and the more recent referendum

on the EU treaty with Ukraine, Euroscepticism has become mainstream (see Brack and Startin 2015). The confessional fundamentalist Christian parties, the *Christian Union* (CU) and the *Reformed Political Party* (SGP) have adopted Eurosceptic stances, while the radical left SP consistently opposes deepening European integration. Additionally, the *Party for the Animals* (PvdD) has also developed a highly critical stance towards the EU. In the last parliamentary elections in 2012, the combined vote share for Euro-critical parties (the PVV, the *Socialist Party* and the fundamentalist confessional *Christian Union and State Reformed Party*) amounts to no less than 2.3 million voters—a quarter of the Dutch electorate.

Literature on the dimensionality of the Dutch political space reveals that voters' positions towards the EU also do not match their stances on the left-right dimension (Krouwel 2012; Kriesi et al. 2008; Hooghe et al. 2002; Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2001). It is therefore worthwhile to assess whether Dutch news consumers relying on distinct information sources will have differing opinions towards the EU.

Taking this into account, we include three of the largest and most popular national Dutch newspapers in our analysis: the right-wing tabloid *de Telegraaf*, the centre-left *de Volkskrant* and the liberal, centre-right *NRC Handelsblad*. The results of our expert survey (see Table 1) reveal that, on average, experts consider *de Telegraaf* to be a Eurosceptic newspaper; while *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* are both regarded as rather Euro-positive.

In order to test our hypotheses and determine the correlation between newspaper readership, political preferences and Eurosceptic attitudes in the UK, France and the Netherlands, the following section analyses data from the 2014 EES.

## Party Preference, Newspaper Readership and Attitudes Towards the European Union

In order to offer a comprehensive comparative analysis of British, French and Dutch voting preferences and attitudes towards the EU based on newspaper readership, three categories of readers have been constructed: *regular readers*, who read a specific newspaper at least on a weekly basis; *casual readers*, who claim they read the newspaper once a week to once a

month; and *rare readers*, who read the newspaper less than once a month. Attitudes towards the EU are measured based on responses to the following question: 'At the present time, would you say that, in general, things are going in the right direction or in the wrong direction, in the EU?' Other variables, such as respondents' attitudes towards their country's EU membership, could have been included in order to measure attitudes towards the EU, but the low response rate in the EES makes such variables statistically insignificant.

## UK

As mentioned in the previous section, the UK press portrayals of the EU are strongly influenced by the dominance of British tabloids. Table 2 summarises party preference based on newspaper readership, using data from the 2014 EES. In line with our expectations, left-wing voters are more likely to read *The Guardian* than right-wing voters. According to this survey, *Labour* (17.1 per cent), *Liberal Democrats* (15.8 per cent), the *Northern Irish Social Democratic and Labour Party* (SDLP) (15.8 per cent) and the *Green Party* (14.8 per cent) sympathisers read *The Guardian* more than once a week. Only 37 per cent of *Green* voters claimed they never read *The Guardian*, suggesting that this newspaper is particularly popular among *Green* supporters. In contrast, UKIP (87.9 per cent) and *Conservative* (84.1 per cent) voters are among the largest groups claiming they never read this newspaper. Strikingly, none of the 82 respondents who voted *Conservative* in the 2014 European elections claimed to be regular *Guardian* readers.

*The Sun*, as the UK's most popular tabloid, attracts a majority of right-wing supporters. A noticeable proportion of *Conservative* (13.5 per cent) and UKIP (10.3 per cent) voters also read *The Sun* on a regular basis. This tabloid is particularly popular among Northern Irish voters from all sides of the political spectrum, except for SDLP voters. As expected, centrist and left-wing party supporters are also less likely to read *The Sun*. The highest proportion of respondents claiming they never read *The Sun* is among *Green* voters (85.2 per cent).

**Table 2** UK Newspaper readership per vote choice in the 2014 European elections (in percentage)

	The Guardian				The Sun				The Telegraph			
	Regular readers	Casual readers	Rare readers	Never readers	Regular readers	Casual readers	Rare readers	Never readers	Regular readers	Casual readers	Rare readers	Never readers
Conservative	0.0	2.4	13.4	84.1	13.5	3.6	1.2	81.7	16.1	18.5	11.1	54.3
DUP	0.0	0.0	14.3	85.7	23.5	8.8	0.0	67.6	2.9	8.6	11.4	77.1
Green Party	14.8	25.9	22.2	37.0	7.4	7.4	0.0	85.2	3.7	14.8	14.80	66.70
Labour	17.1	11.5	11.4	60.0	5.7	4.8	11.5	77.9	2.9	6.7	13.3	77.1
Liberal Democrats	15.8	10.5	5.3	68.4	5.3	5.3	5.3	84.2	10.5	0.0	10.5	78.9
Other (Northern Ireland)	0.0	10.0	5.0	85.0	10.0	15.0	5.0	70.0	0.0	5.0	15.0	80.0
SDLP	15.8	5.3	0.0	78.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	100	0.0	0.0	21.1	78.9
Sinn Féin	4.8	19.0	0.0	76.2	19.0	23.8	0.0	57.1	4.8	19.0	4.8	71.4
UKIP	1.9	1.8	8.4	87.9	10.3	10.3	3.7	75.7	14.2	8.5	7.5	69.8
UUP	14.3	4.8	19.0	61.9	15.0	15.0	10.0	60.0	14.3	14.3	14.3	57.1

Source: European Election Study 2014

Note: The number of respondents who voted for the *Scottish National Party*, *Plaid Cymru*, the *British National Party*, other smaller parties or void is statistically insignificant. Data for these voters is thus not included in this table

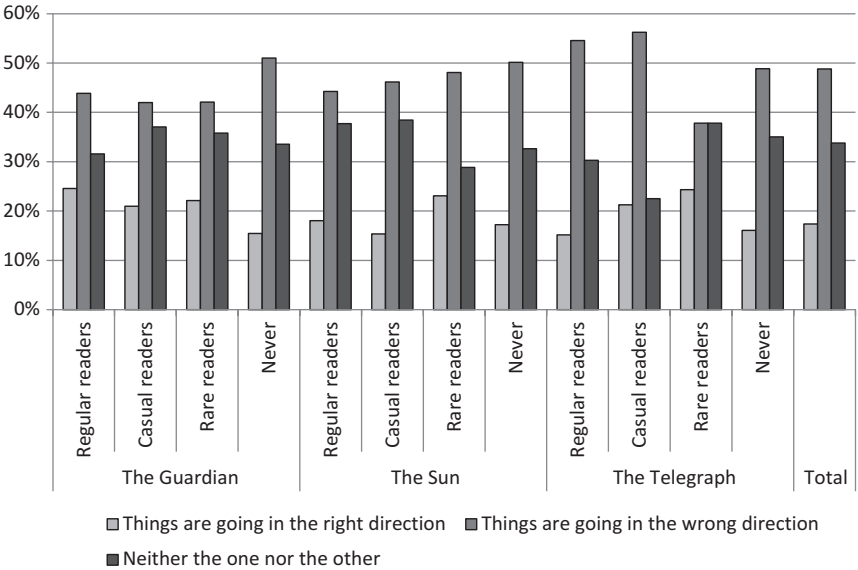
Unsurprisingly, *The Telegraph*, as a right-wing broadsheet, is mostly read by right-wing supporters who voted for the *Conservative Party* (16.1 per cent), the *Ulster Unionist Party* (14.3 cent) or *UKIP* (14.2 per cent) in the 2014 European elections. Interestingly enough, a significant proportion of *Liberal Democrat* voters (10.5 per cent) also read *The Telegraph* more than once a week, meaning that in total, a quarter of *Liberal Democrat* voters either read *The Guardian* or *The Telegraph* on a regular basis. This demonstrates the ambivalence of *Liberal Democrat* voters when it comes to the source of political information.

Overall, these findings confirm hypotheses 1a and 1b, as left- and right-wing voters are more likely to read like-minded newspapers. Centrist *Liberal Democrat* readers, however, tend to be divided between centre-left and right-wing broadsheets.

As far as attitudes towards the EU are concerned, Fig. 1 shows that the majority of readers of all three newspapers believe that in the EU things are going in the wrong direction (48.8 per cent), while only 17.4 per cent consider that things are going in the right direction. Even though experts ranked *The Sun* as the most Eurosceptic newspaper in our survey, the largest proportion of respondents who believe that things are going in the wrong direction are regular and casual readers of *The Telegraph* (respectively 54.5 per cent and 56.3 per cent) as well as those who claim they never read *The Guardian* (51 per cent). In contrast, the highest proportion of respondents who believe things are going in the right direction in the EU are regular readers of *The Guardian* (24.6 per cent; against 18 per cent for *The Sun* and 15.2 per cent for *The Telegraph*).

These findings are in line with our expectations (H2a and H2b), even though a majority of respondents believe that things are going in the wrong direction in the EU (which was expected as a result of the economic and financial crises), readers who are more negative towards the EU are more likely to read Eurosceptic newspapers, while people who have the most positive opinion of the EU, even at times of crises, are more likely to read Euro-ambivalent and Euro-positive sources.





**Fig. 1** British attitudes towards the EU per newspaper readership (Source: European Election Study 2014)

## France

As mentioned in the previous section, Euroscepticism is an uncommon feature in the French media landscape (despite a recent change due to TTIP negotiations and the refugee question), and tabloids are not as popular as in the UK. The three mainstream broadsheets covered in this analysis (namely the right-wing *Le Figaro*, the centrist *Le Monde* and the centre-left *Libération*) are all classified as Euro-ambivalent to Euro-positive by experts, with *Le Monde* being considered as the most Euro-positive newspaper.

Table 3 portrays the correlation between vote choice in the 2014 European elections and newspaper readership in France, based on the newspapers' political alignment as assessed in our expert survey. As a right-wing broadsheet, *Le Figaro* is mostly read by UDI/Modem (18.2 per cent of regular and casual readers) and UMP (17.6 per cent) voters. An even larger proportion of *Front National* voters claim they read *Le Figaro* on a

**Table 3** French newspaper readership per vote choice in the 2014 European elections (in percentage)

	Le Figaro				Le Monde				Libération			
	Regular readers	Casual readers	Rare readers	Never readers	Regular readers	Casual readers	Rare readers	Never readers	Regular readers	Casual readers	Rare readers	Never readers
Union des Démocrates et Indépendants/Modem	6.1	12.1	15.2	66.7	0.0	24.3	15.2	60.6	0.0	6.0	30.3	63.6
Front de Gauche	0.0	0.0	10.3	89.7	3.4	31.0	6.9	58.6	0.0	17.2	6.9	75.9
Parti Socialiste/Parti Radical de Gauche	2.4	2.4	4.8	90.4	12.0	12.0	14.5	61.4	4.8	14.4	16.9	63.9
Europe Ecologie	3.2	3.2	6.5	87.1	19.4	25.8	12.9	41.9	9.7	6.4	19.4	64.5
Union pour un Mouvement Populaire	8.8	8.8	12.3	70.2	8.8	5.3	5.3	80.7	1.8	3.6	3.5	91.2
Front National	14.3	8.6	0.0	77.1	11.4	5.8	0.0	82.9	8.6	5.8	0.0	85.7

Source: European Election Study 2014

regular or casual basis (22.9 per cent). As expected, left-wing voters are much more unlikely to read *Le Figaro*, the highest proportion of respondents claiming they never read this broadsheet include PS (90.4 per cent), *Front de Gauche* (89.7 per cent) and *Green* (87.1 per cent) voters.

Data for *Le Monde* readers shows some slightly contrasting results. While experts categorised it as a centrist newspaper, *Le Monde* tends to be read by a majority of left-wing voters, mostly from the Green *Europe Écologie – les Verts* (45.2 per cent of regular and casual readers) and PS (24 per cent). Thirty-one per cent of *Front de Gauche* voters also admitted reading the newspaper on a casual basis. A significant percentage of *Front National* voters also read *Le Monde* regularly (11.4 per cent), but the majority claim they never read it (82.9 per cent). The study shows similar results among UMP voters: 8.8 per cent read *Le Monde* on a regular basis, and 80.7 per cent claim they never read it. The fact that no voters from the centre-right UDI/Modem list admitted to read *Le Monde* on a regular basis is also quite surprising, though 24.3 per cent of them read this newspaper on a casual basis.

In a similar vein, *Libération*'s readership is also mostly composed of left-wing voters, but a significant proportion of FN voters also claim to read it on a regular basis (8.6 per cent), suggesting that *Libération* also attracts a wider audience. Interestingly enough, *Libération* attracts fewer *Front de Gauche* voters than *Le Monde*. However, in line with our expectations, UMP sympathisers are the least likely to read this newspaper (91.2 per cent).

Two factors can explain these somewhat surprising results. The first one is that *Le Monde* and *Libération* are able to reach out to a wider audience, cutting across the traditional left-right political spectrum, as a significant proportion of *Front National* voters read both newspapers on a regular basis. The second one is that in the 2014 European elections, the *Front National* seemed to confirm its position as a radical right party able to reach out to traditional left-wing voters by adopting a hard Eurosceptic and anti-globalisation discourse in the context of the Eurozone crisis (Brack and Startin 2015) (Fig. 2).

As far as public attitudes towards the EU are concerned, much like in the British case, French results differ depending on newspaper readership. While 64.82 per cent of all respondents (including those who never read

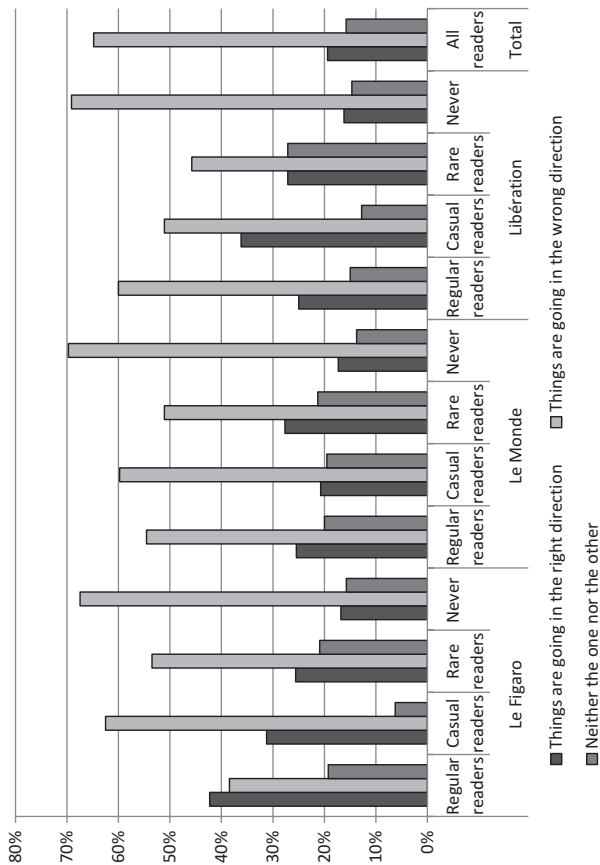


Fig. 2 French attitudes towards the EU per newspaper (Source: European Election Study 2014)

any of the three newspapers analysed) believe that things are going in the wrong direction in the EU, regular readers of *Le Figaro* tend to have a more positive attitude towards the Union (42.31 per cent). In contrast, regular readers of *Le Monde* and *Libération* tend to believe things are going in the wrong direction (respectively 54.55 per cent and 60 per cent).

Yet, experts categorised all three newspapers as Euro-ambivalent to Euro-positive, reflecting the absence of a 'hard' Eurosceptic media in France as discussed in the previous section. As a result, the second hypothesis explored in this chapter related to newspaper readership and attitudes towards the EU cannot be confirmed for the French case. It is however interesting to note that even though experts ranked *Le Figaro* as the least Euro-positive newspaper (see Table 1), the 2014 EES data shows that its readers are by and large the most Euro-enthusiastic.

## The Netherlands

As described above, the Dutch media was traditionally very positive towards European integration, yet with the rise of LPF and particularly with the rise of the PVV on the national political stage, Eurosceptic opinions have permeated mainstream national media. *De Telegraaf*, the largest Dutch daily morning tabloid, has particularly voiced consistent anti-European messages. In accordance with our expectations, Table 4 reveals that the largest proportion of regular *Telegraaf* readers are to be found among the right-wing section of the electorate. PVV, VVD, CDA and *50-plus* voters are among the most frequent readers of the newspaper. On the other hand, voters that support the most Europhile parties, as the PvdA, the Green Left (Groenlinks) and *Democrats 66*, as well as the radical left SP, are least likely to read *de Telegraaf*. This falls in line with the profile of the paper, as portrayed by the country experts.

Readership of *de Volkskrant* is made up primarily of supporters of the most culturally progressive and pro-European integration parties. Particularly, Green Left voters are very likely to read the left-leaning *Volkskrant* regularly, followed by D66 and PvdA voters. In short, the readership of *de Volkskrant* is the exact opposite of those who read *de Telegraaf*: namely centrist and left-wing pro-EU voters. Right-wing

**Table 4** Dutch newspaper readership per vote choice in the 2014 European elections (in percentage)

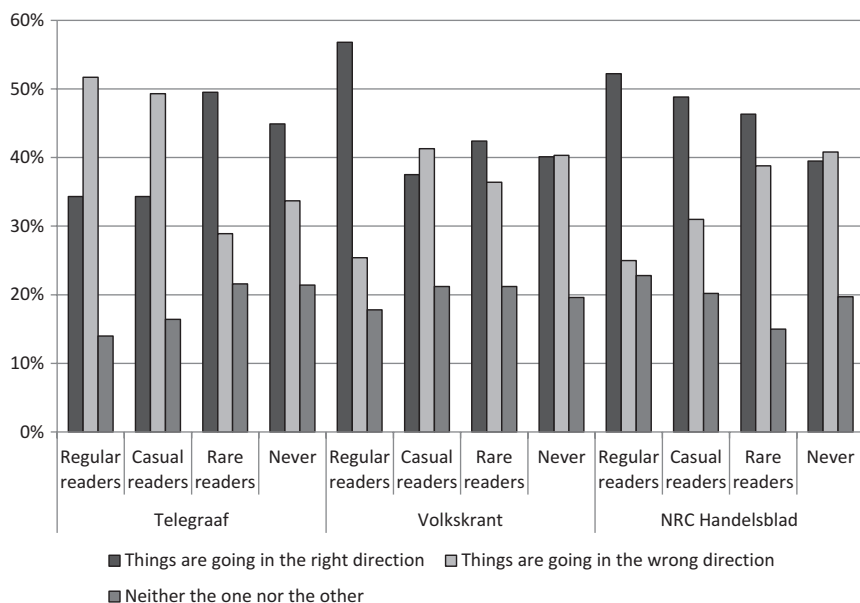
	De Telegraaf				De Volkskrant				NRC Handelsblad			
	Regular readers	Casual readers	Rare readers	Never	Regular readers	Casual readers	Rare readers	Never	Regular readers	Casual readers	Rare readers	Never
CDA	17.2	3.4	16.1	63.2	8.0	4.6	8.0	79.3	8.0	8.0	6.9	77.0
PvdA	9.3	6.7	14.7	69.3	20.0	10.7	20.0	49.3	20.0	10.7	10.7	58.7
SP	10.1	8.9	8.9	72.2	10.1	11.4	16.5	62.0	10.1	6.3	11.4	72.2
VVD	34.7	6.7	13.3	45.3	5.3	12.0	9.3	73.3	13.3	12.0	10.7	64.0
GroenLinks	4.3	5.8	5.8	84.1	37.7	11.6	20.3	30.4	21.7	13.0	18.8	44.9
PVV	40.6	18.8	0.0	40.6	9.4	3.1	0.0	87.5	0.0	6.3	3.1	90.6
CU-SGP	10.0	6.0	8.0	76.0	2.0	2.0	8.0	88.0	2.0	8.0	8.0	82.0
D66	8.5	7.6	11.9	72.0	23.7	13.6	12.7	50.0	25.4	16.9	5.9	51.7
PvdD	5.0	5.0	25.0	65.0	20.0	15.0	15.0	50.0	5.0	15.0	15.0	65.0

Source: European Election Study 2014

voters, Eurosceptic PVV supporters and particularly supporters of the smaller confessional parties CU and SGP are least likely to read *de Volkskrant*. Again, the readership of the newspaper is in line with its profile in the expert survey. The readership composition of the centre-right *NRC Handelsblad* is very similar to that of *de Volkskrant*. However, in this case, it is centrist D66 voters, who are most likely to read the newspaper regularly. Interestingly, no PVV voters in the EES sample have stated that they read the newspaper regularly. This is in line with the profile of the paper, which is primarily targeting higher educated Dutch citizens. Christian voters, SP and PVV voters are least likely to read *NRC Handelsblad*.

Overall, the results from the representative EES data confirm the expert opinions presented in Table 1.

As far as attitudes towards the EU are concerned, Fig. 3 reveals that, overall, a similar proportion of Dutch respondents believe that in the EU, things are going in the right direction (39.5 per cent) as well as in the



**Fig. 3** Dutch attitudes towards the EU per newspaper (Source: European Election Study 2014)

wrong direction (40.8 per cent). This might appear as quite surprising from a comparative perspective, as the proportion of Dutch respondents who have a positive vision of the EU is significantly larger than in France (19.41 per cent) and the UK (17.4 per cent). However, results strongly vary depending on newspaper readership. Regular and casual *Telegraaf* readers are much more critical than those who rarely or never read the tabloid. Conversely, regular *Volkskrant* readers are most likely to agree that things in the EU are going in the right direction. Interestingly, those who read *de Volkskrant* casually are slightly more likely to have a negative, rather than a positive opinion on the direction in which the EU is going. *NRC Handelsblad* readers are consistently more positive. Respondents who read the newspaper regularly, casually and also rarely are all more likely to consider that the EU is moving in the right, rather than the wrong, direction.

## Conclusion

This chapter investigated the relationship between party preferences, attitudes towards the EU and newspaper readership in three countries where Eurosceptic political parties gained significant influence over the past decade. It highlighted some key differences between the UK, France and the Netherlands. While the UK is known for its tabloid culture, criticising the European integration project and campaigning for a 'Brexit', the Dutch media tend to be more supportive (see also Bijsmans 2017, this volume), with the notable exception of *de Telegraaf*. In contrast, the French traditional media tend to be more 'Euro-positive', as highlighted in the expert survey, despite a recent noticeable change in the newspapers' narrative due to the context of the refugee crisis and TTIP negotiations.

The results of this study significantly vary between the UK and the Netherlands on the one hand, and France on the other. While our hypotheses, according to which individuals read like-minded newspapers as far as political ideology and attitudes towards the EU are concerned, are confirmed in the British and Dutch cases, the analysis of the French media and political landscape show contrasting results. This is due to



two factors. Firstly, as mentioned above, none of the major French newspapers (and the media more generally) advocates a ‘hard’ Eurosceptic stance, unlike the two other countries analysed in this volume. Secondly, as highlighted in Table 3, *Front National* voters tend to read *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde* and *Libération* on a regular basis. This suggests that this party is able to attract voters informed via the media from both sides of the political spectrum. Furthermore, the most recent changes in the dynamics of European integration are likely to trigger significant changes in the relationship between newspaper readership and Euroscepticism in France. This could well work to the advantage of the *Front National* towards the 2017 French Presidential elections. More generally, there is no doubt that the EU is becoming increasingly contested in media circles across the EU. With the refugee crisis, the recent Paris and Brussels attacks, and Brexit, this tendency is likely to become more rather than less accentuated in the three countries chosen in this study. The consequences of this are likely to be of benefit to parties that are opposed to the European integration process.

## Notes

1. This is illustrated by an editorial from *Le Monde*, published on 26 February 2016: ‘[w]ith 28 member states, [the European Union] became unable to adopt a collective action, besides the management of the Single Market. The refugees tragedy divided Europeans politically, and Eastern Europe does not feel the need for a collective solidarity action’ (*Le Monde* 2016).
2. For instance, an editorial from *Libération* published on 25 April 2016 heavily criticised TTIP: ‘The French government and the European Commission should adopt a triple “no” to this obsessive, dogmatic and dangerous attempt’ (*Libération* 2016).
3. It is worth noting that some scholars consider *Le Monde* as a centre-left newspaper (see e.g. Gattermann and Vasilopoulou 2015).
4. Three experts stated that French magazines tend to be more Eurosceptic than daily newspapers. The main French Eurosceptic magazine is perhaps *Minute*, published on a weekly basis and ideologically close to *Front National*.

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# How the Media Make European Citizens More Eurosceptical

Nicolò Conti and Vincenzo Memoli

## Introduction

Starting from the assumption that the media influence in many ways the stance of public opinion, in this chapter we analyse how much media use increases (or reduces) Euroscepticism among citizens. Most studies that focus on the relationship between media and the EU normally describe media attitudes towards the EU, or the way media discursively represent Europe,<sup>1</sup> while our analysis considers their use by and impact on citizens' attitudes. This approach is rare in the literature, the most relevant contributions with a similar approach are small in number and they often

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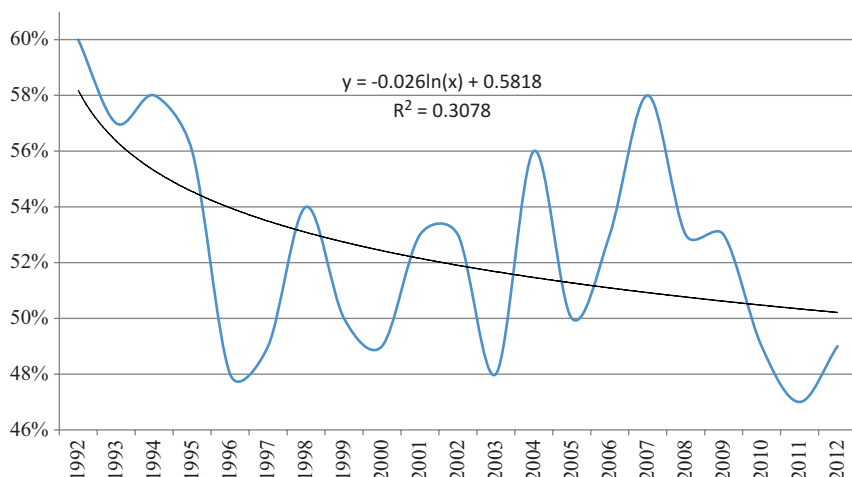
reflect situations that are not updated to the most recent developments in use of the media (see Lubbers and Scheepers 2010; De Vreese 2007). Our analysis covers all EU member states and controls for use of traditional and new media; this allows us to illustrate a situation that is closest to reality and representative of the EU at large.

In the chapter, we show that a prevalent use of new media determines more Eurosceptical attitudes among citizens. On the contrary, we do not find the same evidence for use of traditional media, arguably because they have narrated the EU over several decades and thus they have become more supportive of the EU process. We argue that taking this tendency into serious consideration is important, as the increased use of new media—especially among the younger generations—may create the conditions for widespread pessimistic views among the Europeans and an even more reduced popular legitimacy of the EU in tomorrow's Europe.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the next section, we review the relevant literature on the topics of citizens' attitudes towards the EU and on media influence on citizens' attitudes and we generate some hypotheses based on this literature. Then, in the following section, we define our dependent variable. In the remaining section, we present our analysis linking citizens' attitudes towards the EU and use of the media. The conclusion sums up our main findings and their implications for EU legitimacy and points to avenues for further research.

## Media as Predictors of Attitudes

A tendency to growing Euroscepticism among the European citizens has characterised the past 20 years. Citizens have become increasingly unhappy with the outcomes of European integration, particularly with the advent of the economic crisis, the EU is increasingly negatively perceived, especially in those countries with high public deficit and where the austerity measures have been more severe (Roth et al. 2011). As a matter of fact, it is not a mere coincidence that during the same period the sense of national belonging has also strengthened among citizens (Polyakova and Fligstein 2013). This phenomenon is exemplified in Fig. 1, where we show that citizens' attitudes towards the EU have become more



**Fig. 1** Citizens' perceptions about EU membership (mean of all EU member states)

*Note:* Percentage of respondents who considered membership of their own country a positive thing

*Source:* Eurobarometer (different years)

pessimistic over time (until 2012 when the relevant question was discontinued), especially after the outbreak of the economic crisis. After a dramatic negative peak in the years immediately after the Maastricht Treaty and the establishment of a monetary union, there was a timid improvement after the accession of new member states in 2004, but a more dramatic decline occurred again after the outbreak of the economic crisis.

In the absence of a theory linking citizens, media and the EU, in this section we elaborate some working hypotheses speculating on the two different literatures on media and on citizens' attitudes towards the EU. Starting with media, some authors maintain that their role in the political process is a virtuous and constructive one because they contribute to bringing citizens closer to the democratic institutions; moreover, they stimulate interest in and disseminate knowledge about politics among the public which is, in turn, more politically engaged (Scheufele et al. 2006; Norris 2000; Dalton 1996). However, other authors contend that media can also play a role that is more 'vicious' (Cappella and Jamieson 1997), as they encourage social tensions and public cynicism towards politics

(Cappella and Jamieson 1997) along with disillusionment, suspicion and distrust towards political institutions (Robinson 1976). From both perspectives, media appear relevant actors in the process of formation of citizens' attitudes towards the political system in general (Floss 2010), possibly also towards the EU (Trenz 2008; Hooghe and Teepe 2007).

Traditional media in general have been found to forward a broad positive image of the integration process together with more specific support for the EU (Bayley and Williams 2012, see also fourth chapter in this volume). In the limited number of studies that are available (Bruter 2009; De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; De Vreese and Semetko 2004; Karp, Banducci and Bowler 2003), it is shown that there is an influence between media use and attitudes towards the EU. This influence tends to be of a positive kind when the EU and the integration process are not represented as either a threat or leading to an uncertain future, those who receive a more constructive information about the EU tend to be more pro-European (Schuck and De Vreese 2006; De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; Norris 2000). By building on arguments of media influence on citizens' attitudes and of optimistic posture of traditional media on the EU, we can now generate the first of our working hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1* To acquire political information predominantly through traditional media makes citizens more pro-European.

In recent times, the use of the web has grown enormously together with its capacity to influence the political discourse (Lawrence et al. 2010), as well as the way citizens learn about politics (Kleinberg and Lau 2009). Although internet media have not replaced the traditional media entirely (Gaskins and Jerit 2012), their use has spread within society at a very fast pace, especially among the younger generations. Information through internet is often characterised by a tendency to exacerbate confrontation and to create a climate of fierce criticism towards the political system. The internet is an ideal place for sharing information and organising participation and political contestation in both conventional and non-conventional ways (Michailidou and Trenz 2010). However, in many cases, it can play as a vehicle of political disaffection and apathy (Aarts and Semetko 2003). With respect to the EU process, several authors stressed the tendency of internet media to nourish different types of anti-European populism



(de Wilde et al. 2013) and to emphasise Eurosceptical contents (de Wilde and Trenz 2012).<sup>2</sup> Consequentially, mirroring Hypothesis 1, we can formulate another hypothesis about a supposed negative influence of internet media on attitudes towards the EU:

*Hypothesis 2* To acquire political information predominantly through internet media makes citizens more Eurosceptical.

In general, audiences have progressively shifted the focus of EU representative politics to systemic opposition that challenges the very legitimacy of the EU (Trenz 2014). For example, this was found to be the case in political blogs on the internet during the European elections, in which Eurosceptic evaluations have dominated the online debates (de Wilde et al. 2014). There is reason to believe that the shift in representative politics towards a pessimistic view could be amplified by social media, where communication tends to be collective and bottom-up rather than orchestrated and top-down and more impermeable to the established political elites and the actors of the traditional media. Communication in the social media should reflect the societal mood more than in other media. In this respect, the social media may reproduce the widespread systemic opposition to the EU of the citizens and, in turn, induce more scepticism within society.

*Hypothesis 3* A frequent use of social networks makes citizens more Eurosceptical.

In the following sections, we test the above hypotheses and systematise the results of our analysis in patterns of causality that could serve as a foundation for the development of a general theory on the impact of the media on citizens' attitudes towards the EU.

## **The Operationalisation of Attitudes Towards the EU**

The declining popular backing of the EU in the member states is an important phenomenon that raises many issues. Today, the EU is a layer of the European multi-level governance system (Piattoni 2010; Hooghe

and Marks 2004) consisting of increasing power and capacity to constrain the member states. The EU is a polity in the making that has evolved from a pure common market into a political union. The Maastricht Treaty and the following treaties have attempted to introduce the notions of popular involvement in the EU and of specific citizens' entitlements through the concept of a European citizenship (Hansen and Williams 1999). Subsequent European treaties have also attempted to balance the legitimacy crisis within the EU by reinforcing the co-decision procedure, meaning that the European Parliament (the only popularly elected institution) and the Council of Ministers jointly adopt legislation, this gives the Parliament a greater role than ever before within European decision-making. However, the EU remains difficult to understand by citizens; the executive and legislative power dynamics are unclear to most and definitely arduous to understand if compared to the way democracy works in their home countries. The recent institutional arrangements have not solved the problem of the democratic deficit of the EU while the massive abstentionism in the European parliament elections does not favour the legitimacy of either the European Parliament or the broad EU decision-making process. The EU institutional system remains one lacking citizens' scrutiny and for this reason cannot be equated to that of any other liberal democracy (Weiler et al. 1995). Indeed, some scholars (see Karp et al. 2003) associate the lack of support for the EU with the scarce accountability and responsiveness of the EU itself and to a consequent inability of citizens to influence its decisions.

Along these lines, in this work, we measure public Euroscepticism with respect to the EU institutions and democratic process. Through the analysis of pooled Eurobarometer data (2011–2014), we have examined citizens' responses to several questions and processed a factor analysis<sup>3</sup> based on a sample of the whole EU population aggregating the data of four different years (Table 1). Results show that citizens associate confidence in the EU, in its institutions and satisfaction with democracy in the EU. These variables co-vary in a way consistent with their being part of a sole dimension reflecting representation processes in the EU. The variance explained by this dimension is rather high and this is proof of its relevance. In the attempt to capture public Euroscepticism against the representation

**Table 1** Factor analysis of citizens' responses

	<i>Representation</i>
Confidence in EU <sup>a</sup>	0.779
Confidence in European Parliament <sup>b</sup>	0.892
Confidence in European Commission	0.901
Confidence in European Central Bank	0.828
Satisfaction with democracy in the EU <sup>c</sup>	0.686
Eigenvalue	3.369
Explained variance	67.4
Reliability analysis (Cronbach's Alpha value)	0.877
N	74,148

*Source:* Eurobarometer 82.3 (2014); 80.1 (2013); 78.1 (2012); 76.3 (2011)

<sup>a</sup>For Confidence in EU, the question is: 'I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain media and institutions. For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it'

<sup>b</sup>For Confidence in European Parliament, European Commission and European Central Bank, the question is: 'And please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust these European institutions'

<sup>c</sup>For Satisfaction with democracy in the EU, the question is: 'On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU'

arrangements at the EU level, in the following section we consider as our dependent variable the index that has emerged from the factor analysis.

## Analysis

Making use of Eurobarometer pooled data, we tested the above hypotheses on a representative sample of citizens from all the EU member states.<sup>4</sup> In line with De Vries and Edwards (2009), we consider Euroscepticism not as a category but rather as a continuum of stances, from positive to negative, where Eurosceptical positions are simply those holding a negative sign in the representation index. We are aware of the fact that this kind of measurement brings under the label of Euroscepticism many attitudes along a continuum of stances, as well as many different motivations, still we maintain our strategy can produce an acceptable approximation of popular disaffection for the EU in the relevant dimension of representation.

In order to test our working hypotheses, we made use of three linear regression models, where the dependent variable is the index<sup>5</sup> built with the factor scores of the latent factor in Table 1. The independent variables that we have inserted into the three models are the following:<sup>6</sup>

- An additive index of *national political information via traditional media* that aggregates those respondents who declare that they gather information on national politics from TV, radio and newspapers, predominantly.
- An additive index of *European political information via traditional media* that aggregates those respondents who declare that they gather information on European politics from TV, radio and newspapers, predominantly.
- An additive index of *national political information via new media* that aggregates those respondents who declare that they gather information on national politics from the web and online social networks, predominantly.
- An additive index of *European political information via new media* that aggregates those respondents who declare that they gather information on European politics from the web and online social networks, predominantly.
- Frequency in use of different media outlets (television, press, radio, internet, social networks).
- Change in use of internet between 2011 and 2014 at country level

We introduced as control variables some factors whose influence on attitudes towards the EU has been discussed many times in the literature. Gender and age reflect the arguments that women show less supportive attitudes (the ‘EU gender gap’, see Liebert 1999) and that the older generations are more supportive than the younger ones (Boomgaarden et al. 2011). Education relates to the cognitive mobilisation theory that points to individual educational resources as drivers of opinion formation on the EU with those who are more educated being more supportive of the EU (Inglehart 1970). Individual calculations about the economic costs and benefits of European integration can also be relevant, as economic motivations are influential given the economic and trade coordination focus of the EU from its early days (Gabel 1998). In the regression models, we added interaction terms for the variables about media use.

The presence of a significant interaction indicates that the effect of one independent variable on the dependent variable is different at different values of the other independent variable. We suppose that the attitudes of citizens towards the EU may vary depending on whether they get information via traditional/new media about national politics, about the EU or about both national politics and the EU. As a matter of fact, media may represent the national arena as separate from the EU, or they can be represented as harmonised or conflicting. A statistically significant interaction means that the effect of one independent variable is different for different values of the other independent variable. In this case, attitudes towards the EU would not only depend on what kind of (traditional or new) media citizens use to gather information; they would also depend on whether citizens use the same media to gather information on both national politics and the EU. We have also added an interaction term for use of internet and social networks to test whether those who are most exposed to social media sites hold more negative attitudes towards the EU. Finally, in order to avoid possible problems of heteroscedasticity, we employed cluster-robust standard errors (see Wooldridge 2009; Stock and Watson 2008; Arellano 2003).

The models in Table 2 show that for citizens who acquire information via the new media, primarily, the interaction between information on national and EU politics is statistically significant; hence, the response variable is dependent on use of the new media to gather information on both national politics and the EU. In model I, the interaction coefficient displays a negative sign ( $b = -0.080$ ) that can be interpreted as evidence of the fact that citizens' exposure to information channelled by new media (internet and online social networks) determines more negative attitudes towards the EU as a political system. Moreover, this result could also be interpreted as indirect evidence of the fact that new media represent the national and the EU as conflicting arenas. This is exemplified in Fig. 2, where we show the average marginal effects of national political information via new media on representation. When the value in the horizontal axis is one (European information acquired predominantly via new media), positions on EU representation are negative.

Beyond the use of media to gather information, the simple broad use of new media is also associated with more negative attitudes. When we interact use of internet with use of social networks, we find that those

**Table 2** Linear regression with the representation index as dependent variable (only statistically significant coefficients shown)

	Coeff.	Robustr. St. Err.	Coeff.	Robustr. St. Err.	Coeff.	Robustr. St. Err.
National political information traditional media	0.074****	0.012			0.041***	0.013
European political information traditional media	0.101****	0.017			0.070****	0.017
National political information traditional media *	-0.020**	0.009				
European political information traditional media						
National political information new media	0.074****	0.019			0.051***	0.018
European political information new media	0.115****	0.022			0.093****	0.022
National political information new media *	-0.080***	0.029			-0.067**	0.028
European political information new media						
Use of television			0.135****	0.023	0.117****	0.023
Use of press			0.138****	0.016	0.112****	0.017

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	Coeff.	Robustr. St. Err.	Coeff.	Robustr. St. Err.	Coeff.	Robustr. St. Err.
Use of radio			0.079****	0.013	0.054****	0.013
Use of internet			0.063***	0.019	0.052***	0.019
Use of online social network			0.175***	0.055	0.161***	0.056
Use of internet * Use of online social networks			-0.176***	0.053	-0.164***	0.055
Countries where use of the internet increased between 2011 and 2014	-0.187*	0.105	-0.179*	0.107		
Education (no full-time education) still studying <15	0.321****	0.088	0.319***	0.092	0.302***	0.092
16–20 years						
20+ years	0.310***	0.094	0.288***	0.098	0.271***	0.098
Age (18–24)						
25–39	-0.044*	0.024	-0.050**	0.024	-0.053**	0.024
40–54			-0.071***	0.022	-0.077***	0.022
55+						
Gender (1=man; 2=female)						
Current European economy (0=bad; 1=good)	0.506****	0.019	0.507****	0.018	0.506****	0.019

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	Coeff.	Robustr. St. Err.	Coeff.	Robustr. St. Err.	Coeff.	Robustr. St. Err.
Expected European economy (0=worse/same; 1=better)	0.409****	0.024	0.409****	0.024	0.406****	0.023
Constant	−0.408****	0.090	−0.536****	0.100	−0.582****	0.099
Sigma_u	0.179		0.222		0.208	
Sigma_e	0.881		0.88		0.878	
Rho	0.039		0.06		0.053	
R-square	0.173		0.174		0.177	
Wald (sig.)	0.000		0.000		0.000	
Number of observation	63,602		63,602		63,602	
Number of countries	27		27		27	

Source: Eurobarometer 82.3 (2014); 80.1 (2013); 78.1 (2012); 76.3 (2011)

Note: \*\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.10$

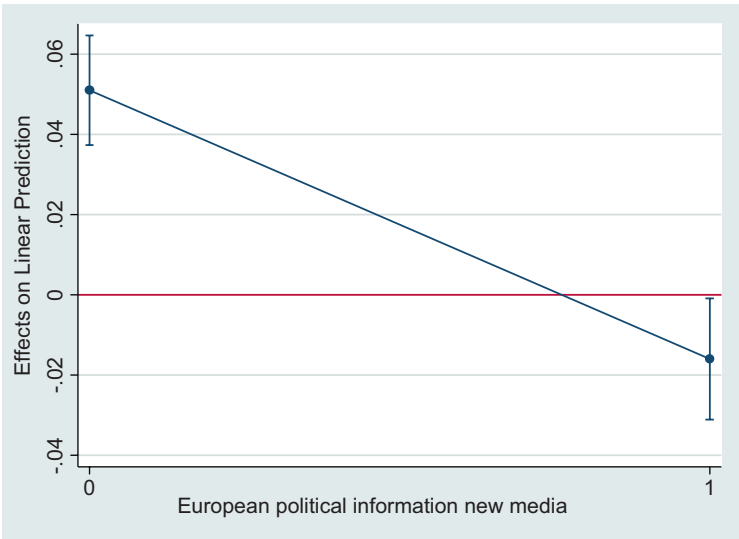
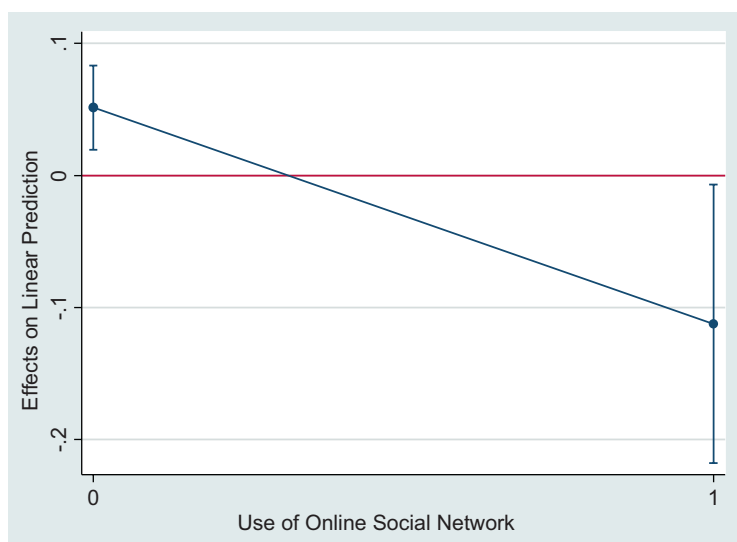


Fig. 2 Average marginal effects of National political information on representation as European political information varies (with 90 per cent CIs)



citizens who are more involved in new media consumption (including social media) are more opposed to the EU ( $b = -0.176$  in model II). This is exemplified in Fig. 3, where we show the average marginal effects of use of internet on representation. When the value in the horizontal axis is one (frequent use of social networks), positions on EU representation are negative.

The use of new media is uneven among member states, the percentage of digitally active citizens (who declared making use of internet and/or social networks at least once a week) varies enormously within the EU: in 2011, it varied from 34.6 per cent in Portugal to 90.9 per cent in the Netherlands. The situation has improved over the years, and by 2014 the use of new media in Portugal had increased to 50.3 per cent; this was still very far from the situation in the Netherlands (92.3 per cent), while in the same year the country with the lowest consumption of new media was Romania (49.7 per cent). Between 2011 and 2014, the EU average in use of new media increased from 60.1 per cent to 68.6 per cent. We found that in precisely those countries where the use of the internet



**Fig. 3** Average marginal effects of use of internet on representation as use of online social networks varies (with 90 per cent CIs)

has grown the most, Euroscepticism has also increased in public opinion ( $b = -0.187$  and  $b = -0.179$  in model I–II, respectively).

Finally, the negative impact of the online communication on attitudes towards the EU is corroborated in model III where all variables of models I–II are considered. Negative attitudes are here confirmed, both for specific use of new media to acquire national and European information ( $b = -0.067$ ) and for their broad use ( $b = -0.164$ ). The new media have clearly emerged as a determinant of negative attitudes to the presumably (un)democratic EU system.

When we examine the impact of traditional media, we find different results. The interaction of national and political information through traditional media is only significant and negative in model I ( $b = -0.020$ ), but not in model III where we control for all variables. On the contrary, the effect of the single variables about use of traditional media is positive and statistically significant throughout. In the absence of a robust and negative relationship (and in presence of some counter-evidence) between use of traditional media and attitudes towards the EU, we can now argue that when information is acquired predominantly through traditional media, we do not find the same lack of trust for the EU that we find for new media.

As to the control variables, most of those considered in the two models are significant, but their relationship with attitudes towards EU representation needs to be specified with respect to theory. The relationship is confirmed for education: those who are more highly educated or are still receiving an education are also more pro-European. The younger generations (below 39 years old) are pessimistic about the EU, but looking at the other cohorts of respondents we do not find strong evidence in support of the argument that experience plays in favour of support for the EU. We do not find strong evidence of a more negative predisposition on the part of women as compared to men either. Finally, those who optimistically evaluate the (present/future) state of the economy are also more pro-European.

The results presented in this section suggest a number of considerations. In order to be able to estimate the impact of the media on citizens' attitudes towards the EU, it is important to separate new and traditional media. This is particularly relevant when we consider the differential impact of political information. Usage of traditional media to acquire political information stimulates more optimistic views on the EU among citizens (Hypothesis 1), while usage of internet media in general and of

social media in particular encourages more cautious views and even open Eurosceptical stances towards the EU institutions and political system (Hypotheses 2 and 3). This is very much in line with what was found before by the literature on media and the EU: traditional media channel more optimistic views (Bayley and Williams 2012) which their users tend to reflect, while new media are a vehicle for more critical views on the EU (de Wilde et al. 2013) that *netizens* also tend to replicate. Thus, through our analysis based on public opinion data, we were able to confirm for consumers the same pattern found for media by other works.

The history of political communication in the new media has been characterised since its origins by a remarkable tendency towards *politics of opposition*, either to regimes, governments, the status quo or to broad socio-economic paradigms (Kahn and Kellner 2004). The most radical political projects find in the web unprecedented, unmediated and cost-free access opportunities compared to the traditional arenas of political communication (Downey and Fenton 2003). In general, in this arena even within mainstream politics the communication activities of the opposition tend to prevail with respect to those of the government (Vergeer et al. 2013). On the whole, the genesis and first steps in the history of new media in mass communication are very much characterised by political antagonism. The same is true with respect to the EU, as its representation (especially that of the EU institutions) as a threat is indeed very common in the web (de Wilde et al. 2013); we show that this has played an influence on citizens as well. Our analysis based on public opinion allows us to integrate results from different strands of research and to advance our knowledge of the way citizens elaborate the different messages launched by the media. From the picture that we were able to produce, it is possible to argue a good match between media stances on the EU and the attitudes of media consumers. This evidence should be taken into greater consideration in the future as the growing use of new media may prove insidious for the development of the EU integration process, at least if to enjoy a popular backing is considered a priority for this process.

## Conclusions

Over the last decades, Euroscepticism has become one of the main challenges to the process of European integration. The decline in support rates for this process is certainly alarming and it is particularly worrisome that

the EU is a nascent polity that lacks widespread popular legitimacy. We examined public Euroscepticism pertaining to representation because Eurosceptical citizens are critical about the EU representation system, which is notoriously affected by the problem of democratic deficit. In this context, in the chapter, we have analysed the influence of the media in creating a problematic relationship between citizens and the EU institutions.

In the past, the literature has produced only limited knowledge about the role of the media in creating support for European integration and in relation to Euroscepticism. Actually, we show that the media should be considered an important driver of citizens' attitudes towards the EU. The politicisation of Europe has developed over time through the contrasting channels of traditional and new media; these tend to put forward opposed representations of the EU process that, in many ways, balance each other. The traditional media are more devoted to the European integration process that they have narrated over several decades, while the new media tend to have a more context-driven vision of the EU that is particularly rooted in the difficult years of the economic crisis and embedded in stories of an uncertain future (see Mosca and Quaranta in seventh chapter of this volume). We show that the media matter for the EU process, as citizens are influenced by their use when they cultivate their attitudes towards the EU. Those who are most exposed to traditional media to acquire political information are also more benevolent to the EU process: they tend to trust the EU institutions more and to support an extended EU competence in policy. On the contrary, the citizens of the net tend to be more pessimistic about the EU process, particularly about its institutions and current political trajectory.

The community of social media users made of young, urbanised and highly educated Europeans is the group that nowadays corresponds better to the profile of the digital Eurosceptical citizen. Considering the spread of social media among the young generations, this phenomenon may determine their negative socialisation to Europe and may constitute a major challenge to future steps in the integration process. Indeed, due to a negative media impact, the following decades might be characterised, for the first time, by opinion makers raised in a climate of antagonism with respect to the EU.

Therefore, it would be very important for the EU to give more attention to the web and the role it can play in building a public image of the EU process. This can be particularly critical among the young generations who are more exposed nowadays to internet media. The web is

certainly not only a vehicle of Euroscepticism; all nature of information can be found here. However, the argument for a convergence towards Euroscepticism on the internet (de Wilde et al. 2013) finds confirmation also with respect to internet users. This convergence not only on the internet but also between new media and their users can make any hope for a more legitimate EU more problematic. On the other hand, however, Euroscepticism in the media could simply be the representation of a lack of representation at the EU level, a normalcy not a pathology given the current structure and the state of the democratic process in the EU. The critical thinking that is emerging from new media may not be necessarily detrimental for the EU but could prove crucial for creation of a public sphere the primary function of which should be to give visibility to a collective will. It remains to be seen what kind of impact this is going to play in the Europe of tomorrow on major choices about EU integration.

## Notes

1. Among others, see Bayley and Williams (2012) on traditional media and de Wilde et al. (2013) and Michailidou (2015) on new media coverage.
2. A Pew Research Center (2014) analysis of the conversation on Twitter leading up to the European Parliament elections found that citizens' views of the EU are often more favourable than what is reflected in the Twitter conversation.
3. Factor extraction applies the method of maximum likelihood. The eigenvalues of the latent factors shown in Table 1 are  $>1$ .
4. We included 27 member states in the analyses (Croatia was excluded because information was not available for all the analysed years). With the exception of Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta, in all other countries samples are of at least 1000 citizens every year.
5. The index has a range between  $-1.362641$  (lowest level) and  $1.427531$  (highest level).
6. Each is an additive index. While the two indices on national political information range between 0 (respondents who do not get most of their news on national political matters via TV, radio and newspaper) and 3 (those who do), the other two indices that focus on information about the EU have a range between 0 (respondents who do not get most of their news on national political matters via internet and online social networks) and 2 (those who do).

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# Comparing News Diets, Electoral Choices and EU Attitudes in Germany, Italy and the UK in the 2014 European Parliament Election

Lorenzo Mosca and Mario Quaranta

## Introduction

Most of the citizens' knowledge on the European Union comes from the media. However, different information sources provide diverse representations of Europe as a polity, of European policies and European politics. In this chapter, we address the relation between different news diets and EU attitudes in Germany, Italy and the UK. These countries

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have been chosen to compare political systems that share similar features at the systemic level (e.g. parliamentary forms of government and EU membership).<sup>1</sup> However, they are different with regard to their media systems that vary in terms of structure of media markets, political parallelism, development of journalistic professionalism and state intervention (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Therefore, this chapter addresses a question in line with the general goal of this book (see the Introduction of this volume): how do news diets relate to electoral choices and attitudes towards the EU? We expect that the styles citizens have to gather political information will be differently associated with three variables we assume measuring how they feel and perceive the EU institutions, and their mechanisms of representation. Different media sources provide different *stimuli* about the EU, in particular across countries with varying EU histories and media systems. Thus, our analysis attempts showing the cross-national differences in media use in terms of confidence in EU institutions, abstention at the European Parliament (EP) elections and vote for Eurosceptic parties. These three objects, in fact, can be seen as three signs of Euroscepticism. Weak confidence in EU institutions represents a form of Euroscepticism at an attitude level in particular with regard to the functioning of such institutions. Abstention and vote for Eurosceptic parties regard Euroscepticism at a behavioural level. EP election abstention can be seen as a form of 'passive or disenfranchised Euroscepticism', while vote for Eurosceptic parties as a form of 'angry or alienated Euroscepticism' (Guerra 2013; Daddow 2011; see also the Introduction and the chapter by Guerra in this book).

It is well known that positive attitudes towards political institutions represent a bond between them and citizens, reinforcing the political process. However, when citizens do not express favourable evaluations for actors, institutions and principles, and when they do not express feelings of attachments towards them, it is a sign that the relationship with the state (in this case the EU) is flawed and the public is looking for some sort of change (Dalton 2004). As a matter of fact, longitudinal data show that support for EU institutions has gradually decreased, clearly pointing at discontent for their functioning.

To complement the data already shown in Guerra's chapter, we can add that abstention increased from 38.1 per cent in the first EP elections

in 1979 to 57.5 per cent in 2014 elections. Despite indisputable raising trends, turnout in European elections greatly varies across countries. Abstention was 14.3 per cent in Italy, 34.3 per cent in Germany and 67.6 per cent in the UK in 1979 and reached respectively 42.8 per cent, 51.9 per cent and 64.4 per cent in 2014. As such, while such an option has been chosen by two-thirds of British people since 1979, it became a viable alternative for half of Germans and over 40 per cent of Italians.

Regarding Eurosceptic vote, the last EU electoral campaigns in the three countries have demonstrated the presence of relatively strong Eurosceptic parties. However, we limit our analysis to those parties that voiced their criticism against Europe and obtained the highest share of votes and seats in the EP in the three countries: Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AfD) in Germany, the Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, M5S) in Italy and the *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP) in the UK. These parties compete in diverse national contexts characterized by different cultural factors and institutional incentives. They display different longevity and varying orientations towards Europe although they all share criticism of the EU. While the UKIP exhibits rejecting Euroscepticism by opposing EU cooperation in principle, in practice, and in prospect, the other parties can be labelled as advocating 'conditional' types of Euroscepticism by not opposing EU cooperation *per se* but its practice and future development (see Vasilopoulou 2009). Confirming in part their adherence to varying types of Euroscepticism (see again the Introduction of this book), the three parties joined different groups in the EP: the UKIP and the M5S are part of the group of *Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy* (EFDD) while AfD joined the *European Conservatives and Reformists* (ECR) group with the *British Conservative Party*.

Thus, using three original post-electoral surveys held after the 2014 European elections on representative samples of citizens with internet access in Italy, Germany and the UK, we will explore the relationship between the exposure to different sources of information and varying EU attitudes and electoral behaviours.<sup>2</sup> We will distinguish respondents according to their news diets: occasional media users, prevalently traditional, prevalently digital and 'omnivores'.

To better interpret our findings, we will first illustrate the changes in the attitudes towards the EU in the three countries over time. Second,

we provide an overview of the 2014 EP election campaign, and we show how the media represent Europe in the three countries. Third, we assess how news diets are associated with confidence in the EU, abstention in the 2014 EP elections and Eurosceptic party vote. Eventually, we discuss the findings and conclude.

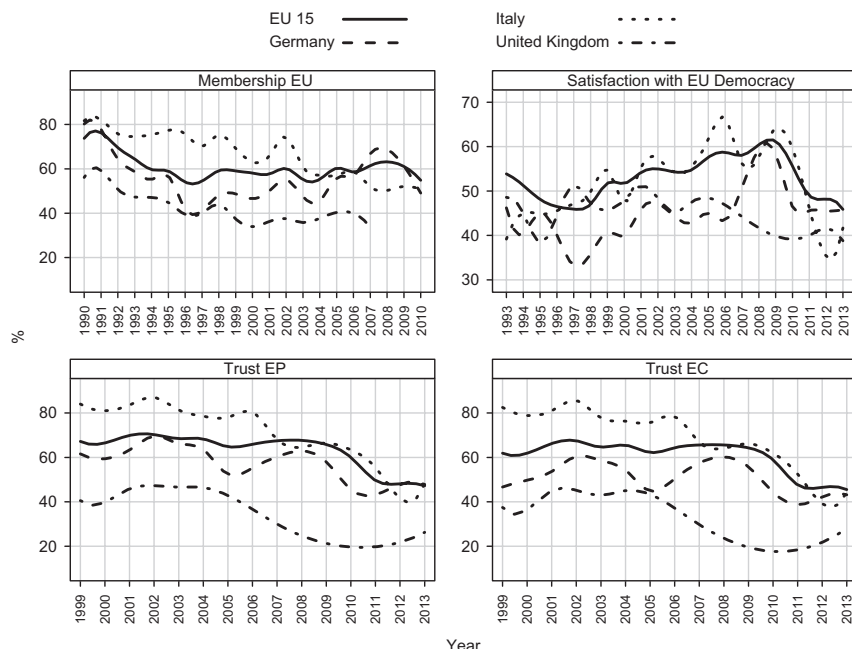
## Attitudes Towards the EU

The topic concerning attitudes towards the EU has been framed within the larger debate on the ‘democratic deficit’ (Hobolt 2012). In fact, the lack of support for European institutions and its project in general has been attributed to the scarce accountability and responsiveness of the Union, and to the inability citizens have to influence decisions at the European level (Karp et al. 2003).

The question about the dynamics of public support for the EU has spurred a large debate. Among various explanations, there are those arguing that attitudes towards the EU are the product on national cues (Hooghe and Marks 2005). Being citizens generally not aware of supra-national mechanisms, the information about the EU comes from the national context. Hence, it might depend on media diets, indirectly on the media context and more directly according to how different media outlets represent EU issues.

The three countries present quite specific ‘profiles’ regarding citizens’ (and also ‘political actors’) attitudes towards the EU (see Medrano 2003), with the UK being the more Eurosceptic, Italy the most enthusiastic (although gradually disenchanted), and Germany in an in-between position. Relying on the literature on political support (see Dalton 2004), we could frame support for the EU, as for national states, as ‘diffuse’ or ‘specific’. The first refers to affective orientations about general objects and principles, while the second concerns evaluations of institutions or actors.

Figure 1 (top-left panel) shows the percentage of respondents who think that own country’s membership in the EU is a good thing. This is an indicator of diffuse support as it expresses a general indication about affective attachments towards the Union. Support for EU integration



**Fig. 1** Attitudes towards EU membership, satisfaction with EU democracy, trust in the EP and Commission, in Germany, Italy, the UK, the EU 15, from 1990 to 2013

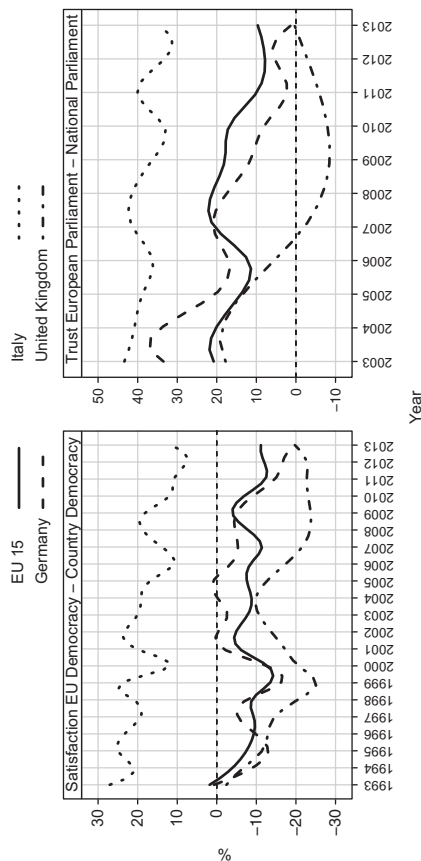
(Note: percentage of respondents who say that membership is a 'good thing'; who are 'very' satisfied or 'fairly' satisfied with democracy in the EU; who 'tend to trust' the European Parliament and Commission; Source: Eurobarometer)

starts declining from the beginning of the 1990s, right after the Maastricht treaty and the Economic Monetary Union (EMU) (Hooghe and Marks 2008). However, there are some differences across countries. Italy shows the highest percentage of supporters up to the mid-2000s, well above the average of the EU 15. Germany follows a similar trend, yet with lower percentages. Nonetheless, after 2005 support for EU integration becomes higher than in Italy. The UK, as expected, presents the smallest percentages over the period analysed.

The top-right panel shows percentage of respondents who feel very or fairly satisfied with the way democracy works in the EU. This indicator has been argued to measure diffuse support for the political system in general (see Karp et al. 2003). Although the three countries show positive trends up to about 2005, some differences emerge. Support drops importantly right after the beginning of the Euro crisis, given that often citizens have blamed the EU for the bad performance of national economies (see Braun and Tausendpfund 2014), with a rise of Eurosceptic sentiments, especially in the countries most affected by the crisis.

The bottom panels in Fig. 1 show trust in the EP and in the European Commission (EC). These are indicators of specific support, as they presuppose an evaluation of the functioning of these institutions (see Dalton 2004). Italian respondents tend to trust the EP and the EC more than German or British respondents, with the three countries showing very clear differences. The interesting point is that the trends in trust for the two institutions are quite identical. This seems to indicate that respondents are not able to differentiate among the two and that therefore see them as 'generic' European institutions. Trust in the two institutions declines steadily over the time range analysed. However, while the overall trends in the three countries are similar, Italy displays a very remarkable drop compared with the other two countries moving from one of the most supportive countries at the end of the 1990s to below EU average. If we look at the same indicators for other southern European countries, such as Greece, Portugal or Spain, we notice that they do not show particular differences with Italy. The drop happens right after the onset of the economic crisis in Europe. These countries have all suffered, to different degrees, the effects of the economic recession, which has had a relevant impact on citizens' attitudes (see Quaranta and Martini 2016).

As argued, the national context might play a role in determining EU attitudes. Orientations at the national level may translate onto the supranational level, since the performance and the attachments towards domestic institutions are not distinguished from that on European ones (see Hobolt 2012). Figure 2 shows the differences between the percentage of satisfied respondents with the EU and with the way democracy works in their countries and between the percentage of respondents



**Fig. 2** Differences between satisfaction with EU democracy and country democracy, and between trust in the EP and national parliament, in Germany, Italy, the UK, the EU 15, from 1990 to 2013  
(Note: percentage of respondents who are 'very' satisfied or 'fairly' satisfied with democracy in the EU and with democracy in own country; who 'tend to trust' the European Parliament and national Parliament; Source: Eurobarometer)

who trust the EP and the national parliament. In Italy, respondents are more satisfied with European democracy than with national one. This is quite expected given the long tradition Italy has of widespread dissatisfaction for its institutions, distrust and political alienation (see Martini and Quaranta 2015), while seeing European ones as possible solutions of national difficulties (see Isernia and Ammendola 2005). In Germany and the UK, respondents are instead more satisfied with domestic democracy than European one for the whole period analysed, as well as in the EU 15. If we look at the right panel (trust in institutions), a different situation can be noticed. Overall, in the three countries respondents trust more the EP than the national legislative assembly, with Italy having the highest surplus. Nevertheless, in the UK there are some periods in which trust in the national parliament is greater than in the EP.

To conclude, support of European identity or integration is clearly related to long-term national cultural factors (Medrano 2003). Indeed, in several European countries (such as Germany and Italy) the integration process has been perceived as an opportunity to break with authoritarian and humiliating national pasts. Moreover, in Southern Europe, Europeanization has often been equated to modernization (Featherstone and Kazamias 2000). Particularly distinct is instead the understanding of the European integration process in Britain, presenting strong feelings of national identity and cultural uniqueness (Medrano 2003). Consistently, representations of Europe in the British media conceptualize the EU in terms of (loss of) sovereignty, questioning its democratic qualifications and stressing the defence of national interests (Medrano and Gray 2010).

## The 2014 European Electoral Campaign

Two elements marked the 2014 European electoral campaign: on the one hand, the nomination of the lead candidate (*Spitzenkandidat*) by the main political groups in the EP (Hobolt 2014); on the other hand, the feared rise of Eurosceptic parties in reaction to austerity policies against the economic crisis (Treib 2014).



Despite this, the 2014 European elections confirmed a limited ability to involve European citizens—on average, participation stopped at 42.5 per cent—and a character of second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980). With the exception of a few countries—especially the home countries of the lead candidates—the indication of the future president of the Commission by the main party families does not seem to have significantly increased the interest of citizens in the campaign nor their participation (Hobolt 2014).

However, distinct was the salience of the campaign in the different national contexts, as also reflected in participation rates: compared to 2009, while in Germany turnout has increased (from 43.3 to 48.1 per cent) and in the UK remained almost stable (from 35.4 to 34.7 per cent), Italy experienced a significant decline (from 65.1 to 57.2 per cent), though in line with long-term participatory trends in national elections (Bressanelli 2015). The vote for Eurosceptic parties has grown considerably in the three countries: the UKIP reached 27 per cent in the UK, AfD 7 per cent in Germany and the M5S 21.2 per cent in Italy. Both M5S and AfD were completely newcomers in the European electoral arena. The electoral campaign was focused on different issues in the three countries, mostly addressing domestic topics. Overall, the 2014 European elections were perceived as rather unimportant from the electoral point of view, and the discussion on European issues and policies has been extremely limited (Hobolt 2014).

Until recently, in Germany Euroscepticism has always remained latent (Lees 2008). In the 2014 elections, two of the five candidates for the leadership of the EC were Germans: the Social Democrat Martin Schulz and the Green Ska Keller. They both ran as leaders for their national party as well as for the European ones. Schulz's closest rival, however, was the candidate of the European People's Party (EPP), Jean-Claude Juncker, supported by the CDU of Angela Merkel. A significant part of Schulz's campaign, especially concerning European institutions, was also shared by Juncker. As a result, conflict between the two main presidential candidates and between the two major German parties that supported them was almost missing. The campaign was marked by a quiet and not very confrontational tone, building a common front against Euroscepticism and, in particular, a sanitary cordon around the AfD, an anti-euro party that emerged shortly before the federal elections in September 2013 (Grimm 2015).

During the campaign, Alliance 90/Greens (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*) was the German party that paid the most serious attention to European issues (Rüdig 2015), while *Die Linke* (The Left) focused the campaign on the need to give the EU a new course based on issues such as social cohesion, peace and solidarity. While supporting the Greek Alexis Tsipras as a presidential candidate of the *European Left Party*, *Die Linke* was in a difficult position because of criticisms he directed against the Chancellor Merkel and, indirectly, to Germany, in managing the crisis and imposing austerity policies.

Despite efforts for marginalization, AfD emerged as a key player of the campaign, being the first German party of a certain weight to question, at least in some respects, the process of European integration (Arzheimer 2015). While focusing the 2013 federal election campaign mostly against the euro, in the 2014 campaign AfD defended national sovereignty and stressed the need to return the state powers devolved to the EU. AfD's anti-establishment profile also included topics such as immigration control and the values of the traditional family.

Regarding Italy, European elections—held three months after a non-electoral change in government and one year after the shocking results of 2013 general elections—were presented as a referendum on the newly formed centre-left executive of Matteo Renzi (Segatti et al. 2015) that obtained the highest percentage of votes (40.8 per cent) in all elections held since the inception of the 'second republic'.

Italian parties' electoral programmes were extremely differentiated on European issues (Bressanelli 2015). The three main parties presented different positions on the EU: while the Democratic Party appeared openly European (although Renzi employed a rhetoric mimicking Eurosceptic cues), *Forza Italia* was critical expressing doubts on the euro and its benefits for the Italian economy and asking for a renegotiation of the fiscal compact, and the M5S voiced strong criticisms against the EU and its policies, proposing a referendum on the euro. The electoral manifesto of the M5S did not include arguments against European integration but its key targets—abolition of the Fiscal Compact, investments in innovation excluded from the constraints of the Maastricht Treaty and abolition of balanced budget as a constitutional requirement—were austerity policies. On the fringes of the political spectrum, the leftist Tsipras' list criticised the neoliberal turn in European policies which were seen as a

betrayal of funding fathers while the rightist *Lega Nord* and *Brothers of Italy* openly campaigned for leaving the euro.

Two domestic issues were particularly prominent during the campaign: the government's fiscal bonus to face the economic crisis and corruption scandals regarding public works for the 2015 Milan Expo (Segatti et al. 2015). Reference to European parties and candidates has been noted in posters embedding logos of Euro-parties (i.e. the Party of European Socialists for the Democrats) or including the name of the lead candidates (i.e. the very name of the Tsipras' list and an explicit reference to Verhofstadt by the centrist 'European choice') within domestic party symbols (Bressanelli 2015). However, an analysis of the national press found a limited visibility of the *Spitzenkandidaten* in the Italian campaign, receiving only one-fifth of the quotations compared to national leaders and coalitions (Pritoni 2014).

The 2014 European elections have received limited attention in the UK as testified by turnout, traditionally displaying the lowest levels across EU member states. Despite this, such elections were rather important as it was the first time since 1906 that a political party other than the Labour or the Conservatives—the UKIP—won them (Parau 2014).

Since 2010, for the first time in over 80 years, a coalition government between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats was in office when the European elections were held. The two partners were clearly divided on Europe. To curry favour with the more anti-European wing of his party, the premier Cameron had brought Conservatives out of the EPP in 2009, founding the ECR group, which includes (among others) Eastern Eurosceptic parties. Then, he promised a referendum on the EU to be held after renegotiating the relationship with Brussels. Clegg headed instead the only clearly pro-European party in the country. During the campaign he invited the leader of the UKIP, Nigel Farage, to partake in live public debates to discuss British EU's membership (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015). The two leaders discussed twice about Britain's role in Europe on radio and TV. The debates—which were intensely followed and attracted a large TV audience share—allowed discussing European issues, almost completely ignored by the two main parties. Two issues mostly characterized the campaign: the ability of the UKIP to become the first party and the prospects for the Labour party to win 2015 general election. In the TV coverage

of the campaign, the dominant issues were tougher immigration control and withdrawal from the EU—both policies central to UKIP’s political identity (*ibid.*). However, despite media’s fascination with Farage rather than straightforwardly delivering party’s ideas, TV journalists strongly criticised the party leader and reframed UKIP’s campaign agenda (Cushion et al. 2015). According to Hix and Wilks-Heeg (2014), the British press engaged in virtually no discussion of the two main *Spitzenkandidaten* in the two months preceding the election while Juncker’s mentions significantly increased after the election because of Cameron’s efforts to prevent him from becoming Commission President.

## Representation of the EU in the Media

The EU being a supranational polity, intangible and far from citizens’ everyday life, people tend to form their opinions about it mostly from the mass media. Research has proved in fact that news media reports on European topics influence attitudes on the EU and its policies (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006).

Overall, however, national media provide only limited coverage of EU news, and EU officials as well are generally poorly visible during phases of routine politics. Their prominence tends to increase in the occasion of summits or other major and sporadic events such as the installation of a new European Commission, the rotation in the EU presidency, EU Council summits, EP elections and referenda (Boomgaarden et al. 2010; Norris 2000). As shown by de Vreese (2001), coverage of European affairs tends to be cyclical, peaking during key events but hardly visible before and after them.

A comparative research focusing on the content of EU news coverage in national media found that attention to European issues in the press has increased over time (Vliegthart et al. 2008). Other studies confirmed that visibility of European topics and actors steadily augmented between 1990 and 2002, especially in issue fields where the EU acquired greater supranational competencies while the national political arena was strongly predominant in areas where the EU owns only limited prerogatives (Koopmans et al. 2010a). Despite this growth in visibility, however, scholars have noted that EU news tends to be dominated by

national political actors (de Vreese et al. 2006). As such, the increase of coverage of EU news does not necessarily translate into more coverage of European actors.

Research stressed that positive coverage of EU enlargement resulted in greater support for EU integration and that coverage of EU affairs presents interesting variance across countries (Schuck and de Vreese 2006). At the same time, criticism towards the EU might increase its accountability and responsiveness and, in turn, favour its legitimacy (see the chapter by della Porta et al. in this book). With reference to national differences, a comparative study highlighted that while British and German news focused on the EU contained high shares of conflict frames, Italian coverage most often comprised benefit frames. Contrary to the latter, generally related with greater backing for the EU, conflict frames tend to be associated with less support for the EU (Vliegthart et al. 2008). According to another study, cross-national differences in evaluating EU integration and institutions were also relevant: Italy displayed the greater amount of Europhile claims (51 per cent against 45.3 per cent of Germany and 35.1 per cent of the UK), Germany showed a barely prevalently Europhile framing with however a larger share of critically Europeanist claims (12.5 per cent), mixing opposition towards specific European policies and institutions with positive evaluation of the integration process, while the UK presented the higher ratio of Eurosceptic claims (61.2 per cent against 42.2 per cent of Germany and 40.4 per cent of Italy), with a reduced presence of actors from the European level and from other European countries, but high levels of domestic contestation over Europe (Koopmans et al. 2010b).

Whereas EU coverage displays a high number of neutral articles, their tone is dominantly and routinely more negative than positive (Norris 2000; see also the chapter by Bijsmans and the chapter by Trenz and Galpin in this book). Studies focused on the coverage of 2009 EU elections stressed that countries where Eurosceptic parties increased the most their votes during the campaign were those where the EU was most negatively portrayed in the news (Schuck et al. 2011).

Over time, however, debates on domestic and European issues have become similar. As noted, 'instead of anti-European biases, our data

document a gradual normalization of public debates over European integration characterized by both higher levels of attention and higher levels of controversy, bringing public debates on European issues ever closer to the usual pattern found in domestic public debates' (Koopmans et al. 2010b, p. 95).

More recently, Kriesi and Grande (2014) analysed the debate on the Eurocrisis from December 2009 to March 2012 in six European countries. Their findings indicate that the mediated discussion was especially salient in increasing the visibility of Europe in European nation states. Supranational executive agencies and national executives dominated the discussion vis-à-vis political parties and civil society actors (see also Koopmans et al. 2010a). Notwithstanding, great variance was found between the two poles of Germany (with an extension of the debate beyond the narrow circle of executive actors) and the UK (with scant presence of non-executive actors in the discussion).

Much has been speculated with regard to differences in characteristics of political communication in traditional and digital media. Despite expectations of greater visibility and inclusivity of online media outlets, existing researcher pointed to very similar mechanisms of selection bias in offline and online information environments. Europeanized communication on the internet faces analogous barriers to those found in offline media being characterized by dominance of governmental and executive actors and the marginalization of civil society (Koopmans and Zimmermann 2010, 194; see also Michailidou 2015). Most studies demonstrated that professional journalism news sites play a key role as online outlets for political communication in general (Chadwick 2013) and EU debates in particular (de Wilde et al. 2014).

Online media outlets, particularly social media, appear prone to the intensification of EU contestation and popular discontent. A comparative study on online media platforms in 12 EU member states during the 2009 EP elections found a strongly negative tone in the debates on the EU (de Wilde et al. 2014). Despite a higher intensity of the debate in the UK, the content of evaluations was not found to vary significantly among countries but converge. Resembling political debates in general, online media favour critical over supportive frames. Building on the same research, Michailidou (2015) shows that diffuse Euroscepticism

dominated the debate on the EU irrespective of sources (professional journalism news websites vs political blogs), actors (institutions, political parties, civil society, etc.) and scopes (national, foreign and EU). As such, a generalized, underspecified dissatisfaction or even disaffection with the EU polity represents a key element of the EU online public spheres.

## Media Diets, Attitudes and Electoral Choices

This section discusses if and how the way citizens get political information is associated with confidence in the EU, voting abstention at the 2014 EP elections and their choice for Eurosceptic parties, relying on three surveys held after the 2014 EP elections in Germany, Italy and the UK. Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) with e-mail contact was used to collect information on stratified samples of the population with internet access, selected according to age, gender, geographical area, working condition and educational level. The surveys, which were administered by Ipsos, include 5250 respondents, 1750 for each country.<sup>3</sup>

The first dependent variable measures confidence in the EU on a four-point Likert scale (not at all confident, not very confident, confident and very confident). We use this indicator as a measure of 'diffuse' support for the EU, also taking into account that measures of specific support present a degree of overlap with the chosen measure (see Sect. Attitudes Towards the EU).

The second dependent variable measures voting abstention at the 2014 EP elections (1 = did not vote; 0 = voted). EU (lack of) support can be also accounted for using voting abstention at EU elections. Being the individual determinants of national vote similar to those of EU vote (Reif and Schmitt 1980), abstention can be considered an indication of weak trust towards EU institutions (van der Eijk and Schmitt 2009).

The third dependent variable measures Eurosceptic party choice at the 2014 EP elections (1 = voted for AfD, M5S or UKIP; else = 0). Backing such parties can be seen as a clear reflex of distrust for the EU. These parties, of course, provide citizens, and their followers, with highly critical framing towards the EU (de Vries and Edwards 2009). Besides, it is interesting how these parties use the internet to vehicle their political

messages. AfD has a relevant presence on the internet, with well-organized and updated social media pages, which have the ultimate objective to direct the attention to media contents that support the party's stances, in order to reinforce the readers' or supporters' backing (Arzheimer 2015). The UKIP is also very present on the web, ranking among the highest positions for Google searches and social media interactions during the 2015 elections (Wring and Ward 2015). The M5S, compared to other Italian parties, is characterized by its reliance on the web as a tool for organization, decision-making, communication and identity-building (Mosca et al. 2015).

The literature on political support is divided on how news media may affect supportive attitudes. On the one hand, it is argued that media have a negative effect on such attitudes as they negatively depict politics and its actors (Cappella and Jamieson 1997). On the other hand, media may provide opportunities for collecting political information, which in turn eases access to politics, increases knowledge and interest (Norris 2000). Nevertheless, it has been underlined that the *medium* matters. Research has found differences in the levels of trust according to the type of sources used to get political information, be them traditional or digital media (see Bailard 2012; Norris 2011; see also the chapters by Krouwel et al. and Conti and Memoli in this book). In the end, citizens may have different preferences over media outlets used to get political information, and this may be in turn associated with trust, voting abstention or Eurosceptic party choice (see de Vreese and Semetko 2002).

We measure news diets classifying respondents according to their media use to acquire political information. We define: 'occasionals/intermittents' as those who do not use more than once or twice a week television or printed newspapers and social networks/social media platforms or the internet; 'traditional univores' as those who do use more than once or twice a week television or printed newspapers but do access social networks/social media platforms or the internet less frequently; 'digital univores' as those who do use more than once or twice a week social networks/social media platforms or the internet but access television or printed newspapers less frequently; 'omnivores' those who do use more than once or twice a week television or printed newspapers as well as social networks/social media platforms. This classification is therefore based upon the



fact that the media taken into account are clearly different—traditional or digital—and they can define different types of usage (see Mosca and Quaranta 2015). Moreover, we control for socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, age-squared and education.

Table 1 reports the estimates of ordinal logistic regression predicting trust in the EU. Omnivores display higher levels of confidence in the EU, compared to those who have an occasional/intermittent news diet. However, the highest levels of confidence are not always found among the omnivores. In fact, the probability of being confident or very confident is highest in Germany (0.37) and the UK (0.31) among the omnivores, while in Italy among the traditional univores (0.32). A tentative explanation to this difference can be found in the image that major Italian newspapers convey of the EU. It has been found, in fact, that they do not generally frame Europe in negative terms, in particular regarding the role of the EU in the financial crisis (Mazzoni and Barbieri 2014). Similarly, the lack of confidence in the EU by traditional univores in the UK might be due to the fact that British tabloid press is often characterized by clear

**Table 1** Ordinal logistic regressions predicting confidence in the EU in Germany, Italy and the UK

	Germany	Italy	UK
	Est./sig.	Est./sig.	Est./sig.
News diet (r.c. Occasional/ intermittent):			
Traditional univores	0.680***	0.652***	0.287*
Digital univores	0.441*	0.203	-0.018
Omnivores	0.987***	0.609***	0.694***
Woman	0.121	0.040	-0.050
Age	-0.035	-0.046*	-0.030
Age-sq./100	0.009	0.040	-0.016
Education (r.c. low):			
Middle	0.379**	-0.045	-0.308
High	0.796***	0.183	0.120
<i>Thresholds</i>			
Not at all   Not very	-1.478**	-1.628***	-2.169***
Not very   Fairly	0.686	0.283	-0.183
Fairly   Very	3.213***	2.657***	2.032***

Note: based on five multiply imputed datasets, for each country. N = 1750, for each country. Sig.: \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001; \*\*p ≤ 0.01; \*p ≤ 0.05. Estimates are log-odds

anti-EU stances (Startin 2015). Digital univores, instead, have not higher levels of confidence, except in Germany, where they come third after omnivores and traditional univores. It is interesting that in only one country we found a significant difference, as other studies have argued that internet or social media use for political information seeking may have a positive or negative effect on political trust (Bailard 2012).

Table 2 reports the logistic regression models predicting voter abstention. Omnivores are those with the lowest probability of voter abstention in the three countries. In fact, respondents belonging to this category have a probability of not casting their vote of 0.22, 0.17 and 0.19 in Germany, Italy and the UK, respectively. Conversely, the occasional/intermittent news diet corresponds to the highest probability of voter abstention. This is not surprising as these are respondents who are seldom exposed to political information (de Vreese and Semetko 2002). Although intermittents present the highest abstention rates, also digital univores have high probabilities of not casting their vote. Indeed, in two cases—Italy and the UK—they do not have different probabilities compared to the occasional/intermittent respondents. As seen, internet and social media use more likely expose citizens to more critical contents with respect to EU issues, which might lead to discontent and, eventually,

**Table 2** Logistic regressions predicting voter abstention in Germany, Italy and the UK

	Germany	Italy	UK
	Est./sig.	Est./sig.	Est./sig.
News diet (r.c. Occasional/ intermittent):			
Traditional univores			
Digital univores			
Omnivores			
Woman	0.067	0.106	0.288**
Age	0.038		
Age-sq./100		0.012	
Education (r.c. low):			
Middle		0.089	
High			
Intercept		0.074	0.685

abstention. Like omnivores, traditional univores are less likely to abstain from voting in the EU elections in the three countries analysed. This is more pronounced in Germany, and it might be the (indirect) result of the stronger stances of traditional media towards, for instance, further Europeanization (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königsłow 2009).

Eventually, Table 3 reports the logistic regression models predicting the vote for Eurosceptic parties. The effect of news diets appears to vary among countries and, therefore, parties. The digital diet is associated with a higher probability of voting for AfD in Germany (0.09), M5S in Italy (0.31) and the UKIP in the UK (0.19). According to Bartlett et al. (2011), the rise in popularity of parties challenging the establishment has gone hand-in-hand with the advent of social media. Furthermore, others have argued that Eurosceptic contents are more likely to be found in the online news media (see Michailidou 2015). These parties have been quite able to mobilize citizens using the internet and social media as they create direct links with their supporters and bypass traditional media outlets which not always provide positive images of their positions (Arzheimer 2015; Wring and Ward 2015). The omnivore diet, instead, is positively

**Table 3** Logistic regressions predicting vote for Eurosceptic parties in Germany, Italy and the UK

	Germany	Italy	UK
	AfD	M5S	UKIP
	Est./sig.	Est./sig.	Est./sig.
News diet (r.c. Occasional/ intermittent):			
Traditional univores	0.452		0.263
Digital univores	0.959*	0.886***	0.673*
Omnivores	0.910**	0.139	0.529***
Woman			
Age	0.138*	0.156***	0.121***
Age-sq./100			
Education (r.c. low):			
Middle			0.611*
High			
Intercept			

associated with vote choice for the AfD and the UKIP, while not for the M5S. Indeed, it has been found that the supporters of the M5S are more connected to the internet and the main social media, more eager to obtain political information on the web and more likely to engage in various online political actions than the rest of the Italian population (Mosca et al. 2015)

## Summary and Conclusion

This chapter analysed three large EU member states—Germany, Italy and the UK—finding different levels of citizens' support for the EU, different levels of salience of the 2014 EP campaign, and different representations of the EU in the media. Abstention at the EP elections is confirmed as a clear sign of low salience of this electoral competition. However, citizens increasingly turn their attention to parties that challenge EU institutions and their legitimacy, as a form of 'protest politics' (Kriesi 2008). As we have shown, dissatisfaction for the EU increased over time, and voting Eurosceptic parties becomes an instrument to use citizens' 'voice' against it.

Italy epitomizes the most Europhile country in terms of attitudes, while the UK is the least one, with Germany placed in the middle (Medrano 2003). Italy has been defined a Europhile country as citizens have often seen the EU as the cure for (most) domestic problems (see Isernia and Ammendola 2005). The UK is traditionally a country that has strongly defended its independence and sovereignty, and which did not go through all stages of European integration, negotiating several aspects of its membership in the Union (Gifford 2010). Germany is instead a relatively strong supporter of EU integration that is the result of a combination of pragmatism, due to the economic benefits of the EU, a preference for multilateralism and similarity in the constitutional order (Dyson and Goetz 2004). The (dis)favourable attitudes towards the EU are reflected in the turnout rates in the countries analysed and in the rise of Eurosceptic parties displaying, however, some differences. Although Germany remains in-between as far as the 2014 EP elections turnout is concerned, in this country electoral participation increased compared to the 2009 election. In the UK, turnout remained stable, while in Italy

it dropped considerably. Instead, what the three countries share is the success of Eurosceptic parties. In spite of the difference in votes, AfD in Germany, the M5S in Italy and the UKIP in the UK played a significant role in the electoral campaign. All parties had to confront with their stances on Europe. AfD was the first party in Germany to clearly oppose the process of European integration (Arzheimer 2015); the M5S vehemently attacked EU institutions and its leaders, asking for the renegotiation of economic constraints and launching a referendum to leave the euro (Franzosi et al. 2015); the UKIP was able to attract great media attention focusing on European issues, which were quite ignored by the other major parties, proposing stricter immigration policies and departure from the EU (Goodwin and Milazzo 2015).

Beyond providing an overview of how citizens can detach from the EU and express dissatisfaction, we focused our attention on how media represented the EU, in order to link forms of Euroscepticism to the way citizens get political information. Indeed, media are the only instruments citizens have to know far away institutions, such as those of the EU, which they do not directly experience in everyday life. Although media attention towards EU issues has often been seen as cyclical or irregular (de Vreese 2001), the last EP elections and campaign resulted in a greater visibility of the EU. Again, differences emerged in the three countries, which mirror evidence provided above.

Nevertheless, we tried to address the question regarding the connection between media use and three dimensions of detachment from the EU. By relying on original surveys held right after the 2014 EP elections, we built a typology of media use we called ‘news diets’ to classify respondents according to their preferences for traditional or/and digital media to get political information, and we tested the association between these diets and confidence in the EU, voter abstention and Eurosceptic party vote. We found that news diets seem to matter for the three dimensions analysed. Yet, there are some differences among the countries that may reflect how national media frame the EU. In fact, we found that traditional media are associated with higher levels of confidence in Germany and Italy, while not in the UK, which may point to the negative way British press represents the EU (Startin 2015) and to the generally positive framing of such media in Italy and

Germany (Mazzoni and Barbieri 2014; Brüggeman and Kleinen-von Königslöw 2009). These differences can also be found if we look at the association between news diets and abstention, confirming a parallelism between (lack of) confidence and (decreasing) turnout. Eventually, we found that a digital diet is associated with Eurosceptic party choice in the three countries. Research has shown that populist and Eurosceptic parties are very skilled in using digital media to attract supporters and consolidate their following (Bartlett et al. 2011), with online media more likely to deliver Eurosceptic content (Michailidou 2015; de Wilde et al. 2014). Indeed, the selected Eurosceptic parties are among those that have demonstrated to be able to build their support through the internet and social media (Arzheimer 2015; Mosca et al. 2015; Wring and Ward 2015). Future research might take into account how these three dimensions of Euroscepticism interact. For instance, it could be possible that media diets might further stimulate (or contain) feelings of distrust towards the EU, which eventually lead to behaviours, such as voting abstention or vote for Eurosceptic parties. In other words, attitudes might play an important role for behaviours, if it were possible to disentangle their effects. In fact, this is problematic because of risks of endogeneity. Nevertheless, theoretical and, eventually, empirical works should try to pursue this path.

Confirming our general expectations, we found that since different media outlets provide diverse representations of the EU, different news diets are associated with diverse outcomes in terms of attitudes and behaviours in the last EP elections. While omnivores are linked with more trust and less electoral abstention, digital univores tend to be coupled with more Eurosceptic vote. Nonetheless, our data show that differences do not limit to different media outlets as domestic peculiarities matter too. Consistently with long-term cultural differences, the same type of medium provides different images of the EU in diverse countries. In fact, traditional univores are associated with more trust in Italy where traditional media have been found to be more supportive of the EU, less so in Germany where such media comparatively provide mild criticism of the EU, and none in the UK where they present the highest share of Eurosceptic claims. Despite this, however, our findings also confirm

an ongoing convergence towards Euroscepticism in online media outlets beyond national differences.

## Notes

1. At the time of writing. On 23 June 2016, the UK held a referendum about its membership in the EU.
2. These surveys are part of a broader research project focused on internet, social media and political participation in the three countries mixing quantitative and qualitative methods (<http://webpoleu.altervista.org>). Regarding the quantitative part of the study, between 2013 and 2015 the online population has been surveyed in the occasion of European and national elections as well as in 'peace time' collecting data on digital literacy, news diets, political attitudes, political behaviours and the political use of the internet and social media.
3. Given the presence of missing values, we applied multiple imputation to our data creating five imputed datasets for each country, on which the analysis is based on. See Rubin (1987).

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# 'Not in My Europe': Extreme Right Online Networks and Their Contestation of EU Legitimacy

Elena Pavan and Manuela Caiani

## Introduction

In this chapter, we address the issue of European contested legitimacy in the digital era, by mapping extreme right (henceforth, ER) online networks and unveiling the frames they propose to criticize and reform ongoing projects of European political and social integration. Several sources stress the importance of the Internet for right-wing extremists,

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This chapter is the result of the joint effort of the authors, who contributed 50% each to the realization of the conceptual and empirical work hereby presented.

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as a tool for communication and coordination, recruitment and even the rise of transnational solidarity forms (see Bartlett et al. 2011; Chase-Dunn and Boswell 2004; Whine 2012). For the neo-Nazi far-right ‘videos and music are the number one instrument of propaganda’ ([Jugendschutz.net](http://Jugendschutz.net)) and the possibilities that the Web gives them to spread their messages are ‘without any boundaries’ (*Sddeutsche Zeitung*, August 14, 2009). In parallel, the specific literature on right-wing political parties indicates that they are increasingly using the Internet to attract new voters, by appealing websites and contained animations, interactive elements (such as surveys, chats, forums and guest-books) as well as invitations to concerts, midsummer celebrations or party meetings.<sup>1</sup> Although in the last two decades, the relation between Internet and politics has become the object of an increasing number of studies (Chadwick and Howard 2009), the use of digital media by ER groups has been partially neglected, when not underestimated, and comparative works remain rare. In addition, with specific reference to the topic of this book, we can notice that the ER appears on the rise all over Europe (Mudde 2013) while European integration, and the European institutions seem increasingly to attract the attention of right-wing forces. In fact, Europe is gaining prominence in far-right discourse, and the Eurozone crisis has spurred anti-EU stances on the far right, linking ideas of national sovereignty with dismissal of weaker states (such as Greece) and revitalizing ‘welfare chauvinism’.<sup>2</sup>

As noted, ‘racial-nationalist leaders are able to exploit the new political conditions and widespread fears to their advantage (...). By advocating white-European privilege and heritage, racial-nationalists can effectively formulate a troubling but potent transnational message’ (Caiani and Kroel 2014, p. 21). In addition, in many European countries as well as at the European level, an increasing intensity of extremist right-wing electoral mobilization can be observed. Since 2009, in European as well as national and local elections, radical right Eurosceptic parties gained more than 10 per cent of votes in 11 European states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Netherlands and Switzerland (Ferrari 2012). For example, Marine Le Pen, after succeeding her father, Jean Marie Le Pen, gained nearly 18 per cent of the ballots cast for the National Front in the first round of the 2012 French presidential election (success repeated in 2014 local elections), and the Norwegian Progress

Party is represented in the government for the first time in its history after the right-wing coalition victory at the 2013 parliamentary election. In Greece the neo-Nazis and fascist Golden Dawn entered parliament for the first time in 2012, and in 2015 it received 6.3 per cent of the popular vote, becoming the third most important party of the country. Finally, the last 2014 European elections confirmed a favourable trend for radical right-wing and Eurosceptic forces all over Europe, from East to West (e.g. the English Independence Party, UKIP, came top of the poll, with 26.6 per cent of votes).

Against this background, it becomes therefore important to investigate how ER organizations build networks of coordination online and diffuse through them their (anti) European discourses. In this chapter, we engage precisely in this research effort by looking at six European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK) as well as at different types of ER organizations (political parties and non-party groups), examining how they organize on the Web and what do they want from the EU.

The main underlying goal is to explore under which structural conditions these ER communities, which traditionally constitute a 'plural family' (Caldiron 2001) within the same country, are able to elaborate nationally a unified and coherent discourse of opposition to and reform of Europe. Theoretically, we will address these issues by taking inspiration from key concepts and theories of social movement research (see della Porta and Diani 2006) that only seldom have been applied in the study of ER (for an exception, see Caiani et al. 2012; but also Koopmans 2005; Rydgren 2008). On these bases, we take an exploratory standpoint, and we employ a mixed-method approach to investigate empirically the structure and the contents of the online networks formed by ER organizations in the six countries under investigation.

In the first part of the study, we trace and analyse the structures of hyperlinks established between ER organizational websites. More in particular, we characterize the structural features of these six ER online communities, looking at how dense, segmented and centralized they are. We do so in order to identify the overall configuration of power within which the various actors operate and to assess the extent to which the different networks entail a potential for a common (issue) mobilization. In

this sense, in this study we treat the Web links between organizations as 'potential means of coordination' (Burris et al. 2000, p. 215). Consistently, we expect that the development of a common discourse will be easier in the presence of dense social ties, which facilitate the exchange of resources and the construction of a common identity, whereas weak links can lead to processes of pacification or laziness (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008). We also expect that the overall configuration of the ER network will vary across the six countries under study offering a different mobilization potential for the emergence of a common discourse on Europe.

In the second part of the analysis, we address the way in which the critiques to Europe and alternative visions of it are 'framed' by these networks of ER parties and movements in the six countries, trying to relate them to the structural characteristics that emerged in the first part. Indeed, if networks of collective actors have been largely explored in social network analysis, often the content and meanings transmitted by these networks are understudied (for an exception, see Pavan 2012). In order to do so, we shift the focus on individual organizations and, more particularly, on right-wing actors that occupy a central and, therefore, potentially influential position in their network. Central actors are those who control the flows of communication within a network, acting as 'opinion leaders' (Diani 2015). It becomes then important to know what do they think and say about the EU. By focusing on central actors, we aim at providing analytical insights that contribute to answer to relevant research questions that have so far largely remained unaddressed: How important is Europe and European integration in the online political discourse of the ER in the six European countries? To which specific aspects do they refer to when they talk about Europe (e.g. cultural, economic, political)? What is the Europe criticized and the Europe desired by these groups?

We will address these empirical questions by performing a frame analysis on the websites of central ER organizations in the six countries. 'Frames', defined as the cognitive instruments that allow making sense of the external reality, are often produced by organizational leadership and provide the necessary background within which individual activists can locate their actions (Snow and Benford 1992). As it is the case for any collective actor, ER organizations have to motivate individuals to action, providing actual and potential followers with rationales for participating



and supporting their organizations (Caiani and della Porta 2011). In particular, 'diagnostic frames' allow for the conversion of a phenomenon into a social problem, potentially the object of collective action, while 'prognostic frames' involve the suggestion of future developments that could solve the identified problems (Snow et al. 1986).

Different from most of the studies on the ER, which focus on radical right political parties, in this chapter we also include non-party organizations and juvenile groups. Similarities and differences in the 'framing strategies' of Europe between different types organizations (ER political parties vs political movements) and the six different countries will be showed. In what follows, after having presented our methods and sources (section 'Data and Methods'), in the section 'Cohesive or Segmented? The Structure of Right Wing Networks on the Web', we illustrate the main structural features of the six online ER networks we considered. In section 'Pro and Anti-EU Frames in the Online ER Networks: The Role of "Programmers"', after commenting on the type of right-wing actors occupying a central position in the six networks, we present the findings of the frame analysis, showing the features of the ER's anti- and pro-EU discourses and trying to relate them to the characteristics of the networks. In the concluding section we will link the results with our more general question on the ER and the EU in the digital age.

## Data and Methods

In this study, we rely on digital methods, namely a set of research techniques that were developed precisely to analyse digital objects (e.g. the link, the search engine) in order to maximize their informative potential about social dynamics (Rogers 2013). In the first part, we trace all hyperlinks among ER websites using an automated crawler called *Issue Crawler* (<http://www.issuecrawler.net>). Certainly, as Heft, Wittwer and Pfesch show in their chapter, social media platforms provide an unprecedented space for political communication, in which citizens can engage in complex communication networks and even reach out to political representatives. Moreover, the use of digital communication tools such as Facebook or Twitter appears on the increase among right-wing extremist groups

in Europe (see Bartlett et al. 2011). However, in this study we focus on ER organizational websites because we are mainly interested in the meso-organizational level of the use of the Internet for ER propaganda and coordination. Starting from a list of URLs of ER organizations in each country, the programme performs an inter-actor mapping activity—i.e., it traces patterns of hyperlinks among websites in the list by considering the availability of the specified URLs as well as the presence of outgoing links.<sup>3</sup> We thus consider these links as proxies for online conversational patterns among ER organizations and potential for common mobilization. Indeed, links can be considered as an expression of acknowledgement from a website/organization to another with relation to a topic discussed (Rogers 2013). We then analyse these networks by looking at their levels of internal heterogeneity as well as through some of the most common measurements of social network analysis (Borgatti et al. 2013).

Our initial list of ER URLs comes from the ‘dark web collection’ (see Caiani and Parenti 2013). Against this initial list, we considered for this study the organizations that had an active URL in the period in which research activities were conducted (July 2015–February 2016, the lists of ER URL mapped and used for the analysis in this chapter are available upon request).

In the second part of the chapter, we explore what type of discourse is conveyed through these online networks by looking at the adoption of a set of anti- and pro-EU frames. We begin by identifying the actors that occupy most ‘powerful’ positions within our online networks, and, more in particular, those who enjoy a higher level of recognition from other members in the network (i.e. show higher indegree values). Indeed, following existing approaches (see Padovani and Pavan 2016), we claim that these widely recognized actors, by virtue of their central position, are able to ‘set the tone’ of the overall discourse deploying within online hyperlink networks. After identifying the most central actors within each online network, we investigate which anti- and pro-EU frames they endorse and are thus recognized by the rest of ER organizations via hyperlink. To this aim, for each country considered, we draft a list of keywords in the corresponding language by distinguishing between keywords representing anti- and pro-EU frames (the codebook is available on request). Subsequently, we

employ a tool belonging to the digital methods suite called Googlescraper (<https://tools.digitalmethods.net/beta/scrapeGoogle/>), which queries for each keyword the websites included in each online hyperlink network. Ultimately, the Googlescraper returns the number of web pages that contain every keyword—a number that can be considered a proxy for the 'amount' of attention given to specific anti-EU and pro-EU frames.<sup>4</sup> In this way, we set the bases to explore the levels of 'popularity' of each EU-related frame as well as to compare differences and similarities across countries.

## **Cohesive or Segmented? The Structure of Right Wing Networks on the Web**

In order to assess if the online constellation of the ER in the six countries under study can be described as a united or fragmented 'community', we look at two elements. First, we explore the 'level of heterogeneity' of each network, in terms of its composition (namely presence of different categories of ER organizations). The online ER communities in the six countries under study are indeed composed by very different types of organizations, which vary in terms of ideology, tradition, level of institutionalization and, most importantly, which are more or less predominant and integrated in the different country context.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, we expect that communities characterized by higher levels of homogeneity are also easier to organize around common frames given the narrower range of agendas and perspectives that are to be coordinated.

Second, we rely on some of measurements in social network analysis to characterize the overall level of cohesiveness of each online structure. We begin by considering the 'density' of the network (that is the proportion of ties that are present on the total possible number of ties possible), whose values can vary between 0 and 1, where 0 and 1 represent the two ideal situations, namely a network without any links, and a network where every actor is linked to every other. Together with density, we also consider the 'compactness' of the network, which measures the distance-based cohesion and varies from 0 to 1, where greater values imply greater cohesiveness.<sup>6</sup> In relation to this first aspect, we expect that denser and

more compact structures facilitate the emergence of coordinated frames. Moreover, we consider the level of ‘centralization’ that indicates the extent to which a network ‘converges’ around a handful of prestigious actors—whether they receive or send a great deal of links within the online network. We expect that networks revolving around few actors provide spaces that are more favourable to the coordination of frames and visions. Finally, we examine our networks by measuring their ‘average degree’, which shows the average number of links established by ER organizations. In this regard, we expect that groups being part of networks with a higher average degree are more likely to collaborate, surmounting the distances by which they are separated (Cinalli and Füglistner 2008).

When looking at these six virtual communities in terms of their composition (see Table 1), we see that the most heterogeneous network is the Spanish one, whose membership is scattered along nine categories of ER organizations—from commercial sites, which sell ‘militaria’ from the Second World War, to subcultural organizations,<sup>7</sup> to political parties and neo-Nazi groups. Importantly, no organizational category seems to predominate over the others. Quite heterogeneous are also the UK and the Austrian networks, which present ER organizations belonging to six categories. In the British case however the network shows a predominance of ER political parties<sup>8</sup> (such as the British People’s Party and the British National Party), followed by neo-Nazi groups<sup>9</sup> (such as the Blood & Honour group). Conversely, the Austrian network is mainly grouped among right-wing nationalist groups, political movements<sup>10</sup> and

**Table 1** Composition of the ER online communities, by type of organization

	Austria	France	Germany	Italy	Spain	UK
Cultural organization	3	6			2	3
Nationalistic	7	7	2		1	3
Political movement	7	21	6	7	2	1
Political parties	1	1	1		3	9
Subcultural		1	5	6	3	
Commercial	2		2	3	4	
Nostalgic revisionists				8	2	
Neo-Nazi				1	3	4
Other	7				1	2
Total	27	36	16	25	21	22

single-issue groups and campaigns (collected in the category 'other', such as the Akademische Burschenschaft Teutonia).

A higher level of homogeneity in terms of composition seems instead to characterize networks in France, Germany and Italy, where only a limited number of organizational types (5) can be found and where, in terms of composition, no clear pattern of predominance seems to emerge. Among these three, the French network is the most homogeneous, as it is largely dominated by political movements—such as, for example, the portals *Synthèse Nationale*, *Nouvelle Droite Populaire* or *Novopress*. In Germany, instead, besides political movements, there is a relatively big number of subcultural organizations—as, for example, the *Nationaler Widerstand Berlin Brandenburg*. Finally, the presence of nostalgic revisionist groups is relevant in Italy.<sup>11</sup>

When looking at measures of cohesion of these six communities (see Table 2), the more cohesive ER online milieus appears to be the French, the English and, partly, the German ones. Conversely, the Italian and the Spanish networks provide a more fragmented environment, with the Austrian one occupying an intermediate position. In particular, the French and the British networks tend to be both densely connected (respectively, 10 per cent and 9 per cent of possible ties are activated) and more compact than others ones (respectively, 0.244 and 0.159). Similarly, also the German network shows moderate to high level of density and compactness in spite it is shaped by two components. The Italian network appears instead as the more fragmented community, where

**Table 2** Measures of cohesion of the European (online) right-wing networks

	Austria	France	Germany	Italy	Spain	UK
Size	27	36	16	25	21	22
No. ties	44	133	21	34	26	42
Density	0.0627	0.1056	0.0875	0.0567	0.0619	0.0909
No. components	2	1	2	5	1	1
Compactness	0.105	0.244	0.118	0.091	0.079	0.159
Average degree (normalized)	11.11	18.41	16.67	8.33	11.90	14.72
Indegree centralization	9.47%	24.41%	26.22%	7.12%	9.25%	20.41%
Outdegree centralization	21.45%	47.92%	33.33%	24.48%	30.25%	45.35%

besides a giant component, four disconnected components of organizations are carrying on specific pieces of dialogue. Such fragmentation mirrors in the low-density score (5.7 per cent of ties of possible ties are actually present) as well as in the limited level of compactness (0.091), which gives the impression of a significant distance (or barriers to communication) among organizations. As far as Spain is concerned, instead, in spite of the overall connectedness into one sole component, levels of internal density and compactness (respectively, 0.62 and 0.079) are low. Finally, the Austrian network can be located at an intermediate level, as it is formed by one giant component and a disconnected dyad. Thus, the Austrian density and compactness scores suggest the presence of a medium-level cohesive environment.

Also looking at the scores of centralization and average degree, on the one hand, there are three 'active' networks: the French, the British and the German one. These three communities couple high average degree scores with high centralization levels (both indegree and outdegree), an element that suggests that these structures provide rather lively online conversational environments that aim both at the construction of the network (outdegree) but that are also characterized by the presence of common points of reference (indegree). However, in comparison to the French and the British cases, the German ER sector remains hampered by its fragmentation and medium density. On the other hand, the Italian (in particular) and the Spanish networks, as well as the Austrian one, show, according to these measures, lower levels of activity and a less neat propensity to identify common 'points of reference' in the online discussion.

To summarize, the French and English networks emerge as the 'strongest' far-right sectors, having the possibility to profit from a cohesive, quite homogenous (especially in the case of France) and rather active milieu that also tends to concentrate around few ER actors. Differently, the ER online networks in Italy and Spain appear to be more fragmented, showing a greater variety of organizations that act (more or less) independently from each other and lower levels of activity within the network. The Austrian and the German networks provide instead intermediate situations, where, especially in Austria, a relatively fragmented network structure meets with varying levels of activity and heterogeneity among actors.

## Pro- and Anti-EU Frames in the Online ER Networks: The Role of 'Programmers'

What are the criticalities and the desiderata that ER organizations prompt from their webpages? Do these visions form online discourses that are homogeneous or heterogeneous within and across countries? Can we infer any pattern of association between the features of online networks we just examined and the potential for an issue-based mobilization within and across the six countries under consideration?

As mentioned above, in order to begin answering to these questions, we do focus on the most central actors within each of the six networks we examined. In this vein, it is argued that 'incumbents of a certain structural position, can exert different levels of control over the discursive dynamics of meaning construction in online networks' (Padovani and Pavan 2016, p. 360). In particular, among the various ways to conceptualize the centrality of an actor in a network and, therefore, its potential influence (Freeman 2002[1979]), the number of acknowledgements received from other nodes (in this case, in the form of hyperlinks) can be considered as a way of identifying nodes that are more 'prestigious' (Diani 2003, p. 307) than others. For the peculiar position they occupy, actors with higher indegree can thus be considered as network 'programmers', that is, as points of reference in the construction of the online conversation (Padovani and Pavan 2016). Starting from this background, for each of the six ER online networks we first proceeded to identify the websites functioning as programmers and thus evaluated how homogeneous is the 'core group' they form within the network. Subsequently, we explored the extent to which they endorse specific anti- and pro-EU frames by looking at how much they use specific expressions within their web pages. In general, we expect that networks where programmers tend to belong to the same category (hence, with a homogeneous core) are more likely to vehicle a more unified discourse by converging on specific anti- and pro-EU frames. Conversely, we expect that networks characterized by heterogeneous cores do also host a higher range of frames and, therefore, vehicle a more diversified vision against and for the reform of the European Union.

When it comes to assess who are the programmers in the six online networks under examination, we can notice a certain level of variation among countries. As Table A.1 in the Appendix shows, in the French networks, the most central organizations are all political movements like, for example, the organizations Polémia and Novopress (with respectively an indegree of 12 and 9), whereas in the British one, political parties, like the England First Party (indegree 6), stand for their high centrality in the network. Also in Austria, most of the prominent organizations belong to the political movement category (indegree between 4 and 3), together with the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich, which shows an indegree of 3. In Germany, we found instead a more pluralistic environment, which represents as prominent actors political movements, subcultural organizations (such as the Autonome Nationalisten Ostfriesland) and the main German political party, the NPD (Nationaldemocratic Party of Germany). Finally, the Italian and the Spanish networks distinguish themselves for having the most heterogeneous cores of central actors. In these two cases, not only almost half of the actors have high level of centrality but also most central actors belong to very different categories.

Figures 1 and 2 summarize, in the form of a tag cloud, the results of the automated content analysis by presenting the overall frequency (i.e. number of webpages per country found) for each keyword queried on programmers' websites, distinguishing between 'diagnostic frames' (Fig. 1) and 'prognostic frames' (Fig. 2). On the overall, what our results suggest is that the topic of European integration is present and discussed with a richness of nuances in the online discourse of the ER. Indeed, all of our frames on Europe are actually present in the ER network cores we analysed and some of them are extremely recurring even across countries. For example, the political and institutional design aspects of European integration provide rather hot topics, especially when it comes to the relationship between the nation states and the Union. Just to make an example, the keyword *European dictatorship* is found in 447 webpages in Austria, 725 in France and 107 in Germany. Also, across countries there seems to be a concern for the political (mis)behaviours of European politicians (e.g. the keyword *Brussels Politicians* recurs in 323 webpages in the British ER milieu and in 205 in the French one). Moreover, a problem of legitimacy is raised, in particular with reference to the distance of EU institutions from citizens and





Fig. 1 Anti-EU frames in the six online networks



Fig. 2 Pro-EU frames in the six online networks

their overall non-transparency. This problem is often presented recurring to the old ‘conspiracy theories’ typical of the ER ideology (see Caiani and della Porta 2011), as suggested by the diffusion of the keyword *Eurocratia* in Germany and Austria webpages (respectively, 251 and 232).

However, our results also suggest the presence of cross-countries specificities. In particular, in the French case, programmers do tend to converge on a diagnostic frame of EU seen as *European Dictatorship*, which can be considered as playing a role as ‘master frame’ (i.e. a collective action frame that is sufficiently elastic, flexible and inclusive to be adopted by multiple and diverse collective actors, see Snow and Benford 1992; Benford 2013). Indeed, according to French programmers, European integration not only leads to the ‘loss of identities of the peoples’, but it also brings ‘limitations to the sovereignty of the national states’. Marine Le Pen talks of a ‘catastrophic experiment’ about the euro. The political party Front National, for example, sees the European institutions (especially the Commission) as ‘centralizing’ institutions and criticize their weak legitimacy (they are often indicated as ‘not elected’), by proposing instead to give more power to the European Parliament and the Council representing national governments. French programmers show even greater convergence when it comes to the prognosis they propose to ‘reform’ the European project. There is indeed an overall agreement on the fact that the only solution to the centralized *European Dictatorship* is a return to a *Europe of Sovereign States*, where authority is spread and state authority is re-established. In fact, in spite of its opposition to the EU, the ER does not reject the ‘idea’ of Europe. Quite the opposite, it unanimously calls for the rebuilding of a ‘new Europe’, ‘based on its traditional glorious history’ (i.e. the Roman imperial one), and a Europe which is ‘big and strong’.

Convergence on diagnoses and prognoses can be found also among British programmers. However, because of the specific nature of organizations standing at the core of the British network (that is mainly political parties), the online opposition to Europe takes here a different form. Whereas in France the main oppositional target was the EU as an institution, in the UK it becomes the officials and the policy makers, largely defined *Brussels Politicians*, stressing their (mis)behaviour and their lack of commitment and fairness in comparison to national British politicians. As much as British central actors agree on the diagnosis of the problem, they converge also upon possible solutions, which consist of moving

towards a *Europe of People* (usually seen as genuine and uncorrupt) and away from unprofessional officials located in the EU headquarters.

In the other four countries, where, as seen, the structure of online networks tends to be more heterogeneous/fragmented, programmers tend to interpret the 'EU problem' in a more heterogeneous way. Looking again at Fig. 1, we notice that, in Austria, as much as in Germany, Italy and Spain, programmers target as problematic *both* the EU as an institution and European officials and policy makers. In this context, two master frames seem to emerge: on the one hand, the idea that the EU as an institution is better seen as a *European Dictatorship*, and, on the other, that politicians working within it are *Brussels bureaucrats*.

In general, however, further distinctions among these four countries can be drawn starting from the variations upon these master frames. In Austria and Germany where, as we have seen above, the network is characterized by a moderate cohesion, we can notice that the idea of a *European Dictatorship* is coupled with that of *Eurocratia*. Consistently, EU policy makers are depicted also as *Eurocrats*, that is, as employees of inefficient and centralized institutions. In Italy and Spain, instead, where the overall configuration of the networks tends to be rather fragmented/heterogeneous, no particular implementations on the master frames are to be found, with the sole exception of the *Brussels politicians* frame adopted in Spain more extensively than the bureaucrats one.

If ER organizations in these countries do not converge on their diagnosis, they differ even more on the proposed solution. Indeed, when it comes to the outline of a prognosis to the 'EU problem' no master frames are to be found and a wider and more variegated discourse on possible alternative scenarios for Europe emerges from the ER websites. However, also in this case it is possible to find some commonalities. Indeed, as Fig. 2 suggests, in the Austrian and German ER sectors there is a certain degree of convergence around the idea of a decentralized *Europe of Sovereign States*. Conversely, in Italy and Spain we find an even wider range of alternative visions for Europe: a *Europe of Nations*, enriched also by a vision of a *Europe of People* and *United States of Europe*. In this sense, a 'Europe of the European peoples', a 'Europe of sovereign states' and a Europe 'new and different than the EU, which unites nations only economically with the free trade and a stateless coin!' is envisaged. The general call for action that we find in many documents is to 'save, with any mean, the millennial history, culture and tradition of Europe against the foreign interferences'.

In conclusion, our results suggest that more homogeneous and cohesive network communities tend to vehicle a more unified discourse, converging on similar anti- and pro-EU frames. Conversely, networks characterized by heterogeneous and fragmented structures host a higher range of frames and, therefore, vehicle a more diversified vision against and in support of the EU. Indeed, within such types of structures, programmers have more difficulties in diffusing their frames on Europe. In sum, as we expected by relaying on social movements mobilization and network studies (Diani 2015), greater levels of cohesiveness, activity and convergence translate into more consistent anti- and pro-EU discourses.

In addition, if we look for frames that could serve as a base for the construction of potentially transnational ER identities and solidarities, we notice that in all countries examined there is a common endorsement of two diagnostic dimensions. On the one hand, European institutions are interpreted with the master frame of 'dictatorship'. On the other, there is a more personalized criticism elaborating upon the master frame of *Brussels politicians/bureaucrats*. Conversely, we find much less coherence in the elaboration of a common alternative vision of Europe. This is not surprising since these right-wing political forces are still very different, coming from very different 'political cultures' (Caiani 2014), which in their discourses on European integration find an easier convergence on the critiques rather than on the elaboration of concrete common proposal for another Europe.

## Conclusion

So far, the nexus between Euroscepticism and right-wing radicalism has largely remained overlooked (differently than left wing opposition to Europe, see also the chapter by della Porta, Kouki and Fernández in this volume). In response to this situation, our chapter has shown that critiques and reform proposals directed towards the EU are a common concern of different types of radical right-wing formations (political parties, cultural right-wing associations and even youth subcultural movements). Thus, we proposed to treat websites as a useful entry point to begin investigating it. Indeed, we considered that if the Internet is assuming a growing important role for civil society organizations (including the radical ones),

for the greater freedom offered to express political claims and ideas and for organizing mobilisation, then a crucial subject for scientific enquire, as well as for policy analysts—in a context of contested legitimacy of the European democracy—is to investigate empirically, with systematic and formalized analyses, the role of this medium for social and political processes.

In the first place, our analysis of online hyperlink networks showed that ER organizations, in all the six European countries under study, use intensively the Web in order to build and maintain contacts among them and therefore reinforce their relations. In fact, as argued, hyperlinks do not have to be interpreted just as a technical 'virtual' aspect. Instead, they can 'help extremist groups to forge a stronger sense of community and purpose', persuading 'even the most ardent extremist that he is not alone, that his views are not, in fact, extremist at all' (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003). Beyond this general picture, our results showed that the overall configurations of the ER online (in terms of density, network centralization, diversity of organizations, etc.) differ from one country to another and some of them seem to favour fewer cooperation within the sector. Thus they entail a different potential for the development and activation of a unified anti-EU discourse. Indeed, we have found that network 'programmers' tend to converge and provide a unified leadership (at least at the symbolic level) mostly when they are located within 'communicational infrastructures' that are more cohesive and structured.

Secondly, the various organizations skilfully use the Internet to spread their ideas on Europe. Their shared negative attitude towards European integration, as emerged from our content analysis of radical right websites, is related with a series of perceived threats to the national community—exacerbated by the current European economic, political and immigration crisis—including among others, the loss of national sovereignty and traditional values, as well as the perception of a politics far from citizens. This broad pessimistic orientation may be reinforced by the fact that parties 'at the extremes' are often Eurosceptical as part of an anti-system posture that they adopt in order to challenge the mainstream parties (see, for example, Hooghe et al. 2004). These are all core and traditional myths of the radical right (see also Caiani and della Porta 2011) but also resonate with attitudes increasingly spread across European societies.

As mentioned also by Caiani and Guerra in the introduction of this volume, according to many European surveys, over the last ten years the trust in European institutions has dropped dramatically (with only 31 per cent of people trusting them ‘enough’ or ‘a lot’, in 2013, Eurobarometer). Thus, positive views of the European Union are at or near their low point in most EU nations, even among the young (Pew Research Center 2013). In addition, it has been noted (e.g. De Vries and Edwards 2009) that the Eurosceptical rhetoric of radical parties has contributed to shaping widespread discontent in public opinion.

Against this background, starting from the analysis of how extremist groups use digital communications can help us to better understand the groups themselves. It does also provide us with a new and interesting starting point to get systematic insights on the potentials as well as on the difficulties they encounter to act collectively and efficiently (online) with regard to key strategic issues as, in our case, the opposition to the EU.

## Appendix

**Table A.1** Indegree of ER websites in the six countries

<b>Austria</b>	<b>InDegree</b>	<b>NrmInDeg</b>
unzensuriert.at	4	15.385
oelm.at	3	11.538
fpoe.at	3	11.538
zurzeit.at	3	11.538
teutonia.at	2	7.692
neue-ordnung.at	2	7.692
wkr.at	2	7.692
ares-verlag.com	2	7.692
rfs.at	2	7.692
vloe.at	2	7.692
buecherquelle.at	2	7.692
schuetzen.com	2	7.692
sudeten.at	2	7.692
olympia.burschenschaft.at	2	7.692
suedtiroler-freiheit.com	2	7.692
andreas-hofer-bund.de	1	3.846
moschee-ade.at	1	3.846
youthforlife.net	1	3.846
brixia.at	1	3.846

(continued)

Table A.1 (continued)

hli.at	1	3.846
vermaechtnis.at	1	3.846
gesamttirol.de	1	3.846
gegenstrom.wordpress.com	1	3.846
iboesterreich.at	1	3.846
wiener-beobachter.at	0	0
redegefahr.com	0	0
rfj.at	0	0
<b>France</b>		
polemia.com	12	34.286
fr.novopress.info	9	25.714
synthesenationale.hautetfort.com	8	22.857
rivarol.com	8	22.857
terreetpeuple.com	7	20
alsacedabord.org	7	20
lagrif.fr	7	20
reseau-identites.org	5	14.286
reflechiretagir.com	5	14.286
frontnational.com	5	14.286
egaliteetreconciliation.fr	5	14.286
present.fr	5	14.286
m-n-r.fr	5	14.286
national-hebdo.net	4	11.429
solidarisme.fr	4	11.429
voxn.com	4	11.429
generation-identitaire.com	4	11.429
liguefrancilienne.com	3	8.571
nouvelledroitepopulaire.hautetfort.com	3	8.571
udn.hautetfort.com	3	8.571
bloc-identitaire.com	3	8.571
chretientesolidarite.org	3	8.571
renouveaufrancais.com	3	8.571
franceculture.fr	3	8.571
europe-identite.com	2	5.714
nissarebela.com	2	5.714
siel-souverainete.fr	1	2.857
soleil151.free.fr	1	2.857
patrioteproductions.com	1	2.857
oeuvrefrancaise.com	1	2.857
jeune-alsace.com	0	0
gud-lyon.blogspot.it	0	0
grece-fr.com	0	0
lheritage.net	0	0
clubdelhorloge.fr	0	0

(continued)

Table A.1 (continued)

indignations.org	0	0
<b>Germany</b>		
logr.org	5	33.333
aktionsbuero.org	2	13.333
freies-pommern.de	2	13.333
npd.de	2	13.333
jungefreiheit.de	2	13.333
fn-jena.info	1	6.667
nwbb.org	1	6.667
dielunikoffverschwoerung.de	1	6.667
widerstand.info	1	6.667
web.archive.org	1	6.667
globalfire.tv	1	6.667
nordsachsen-versand.com	1	6.667
jn-buvo.de	1	6.667
ab-rhein-neckar.de	0	0
bgd1.com	0	0
support-wear.com	0	0
<b>Great Britain</b>		
efp.org.uk	6	28.571
bpp.org.uk	4	19.048
aryanunity.com	4	19.048
civilliberty.org.uk	3	14.286
imperium-europa.org	3	14.286
bnp.org.uk	3	14.286
ab4ps.com	2	9.524
bppmanchester.blogspot.com	2	9.524
seanbryson.com	2	9.524
europeanaction.com	2	9.524
faem.com	2	9.524
vivamalta.net	1	4.762
perpetualdiversity.com	1	4.762
leaguestgeorge.com	1	4.762
bnpforcleveland.blogspot.com	1	4.762
lancashirebpp.webs.com	1	4.762
righttolife.org.uk	1	4.762
bloodandhonourworldwide.co.uk	1	4.762
dspace.dial.pipex.com	1	4.762
majorityrights.com	1	4.762
redwatch.co.uk	0	0
birminghambnp.blogspot.com	0	0
<b>Italy</b>		
italia-rsi.org	3	12.5
fncrsi.altervista.org	3	12.5

(continued)



Table A.1 (continued)

tabularasa.altervista.org	3	12.5
littorio.com	2	8.333
orientamenti.altervista.org	2	8.333
noreporter.org	2	8.333
decima-mas.net	2	8.333
casapounditalia.org	2	8.333
legionetagliamento.com	2	8.333
raido.it	2	8.333
xoomer.alice.it	2	8.333
bloccostudentesco.org	1	4.167
militariasouvenir.com	1	4.167
militariacollection.com	1	4.167
luomolibero.it	1	4.167
vho.org	1	4.167
ilduce.altervista.org	1	4.167
popoloditalia.it	1	4.167
lealta-azione.it	1	4.167
rinascita.net	1	4.167
casaggi.blogspot.it	0	0
foroitalico.altervista.org	0	0
ilras.altervista.org	0	0
aclorien.it	0	0
fascismoeliberta.info	0	0
<b>Spain</b>		
grupoedenia.com	3	15
msr.org.es	3	15
libreriaeuropa.es	3	15
libreopinion.com	3	15
nuevorden.net	2	10
sindicatount.es	2	10
falange.es	2	10
keltibur.com	2	10
velsas.com	2	10
hermandadnacionaldivisionazul.es	1	5
lafalange.org	1	5
labanderanegra.wordpress.com	1	5
inmigracionmasiva.com	1	5
skinsburgos.blogspot.it	0	0
asaltaelfuturo.blogspot.it	0	0
viejaguardia.es	0	0
angelfire.com	0	0
mragallaecia.blogspot.it	0	0
democracianacional.org	0	0
celenovidades.blogspot.it	0	0
asociacionalfonsox.blogspot.it	0	0

## Notes

1. <http://www.inach.net/content/jgs-annual-report2004.pdf>: 4.
2. <http://www.enar-eu.org/>.
3. Tracing hyperlinks through Issue Crawler instead of manually allows to retrieve much more links among organizations and reduce the possible biases introduced by the researcher during the coding procedure. However we have to notice that Issue Crawler might encounter problems of websites accessibility (i.e. websites protection, URL not more active), as well as with Javascript (i.e. dynamic pages), that reduce its capacity to extract links from some websites (Bossetta and Dutceac Segesten 2015). This happened also for some of our countries.
4. Although a powerful tool for the systematic analysis of the content of a large number of websites, GoogleScraper is particularly sensitive to the availability of webpages as much as to Google attempts to block bots. Therefore, it is always possible that the software encounters difficulties in scraping contents from pages. Since we used GoogleScraper for all the countries under study, the possibility to incur this bias was randomly distributed across all countries and types of ER organization. Therefore, we can consider our findings as valid proxy of discursive trends about the ER and Europe in our countries.
5. The classification of the ER organizations has been based on the self-definition of the group and the predominant nature of the message conveyed through the Website (see also Caiani et al. 2012). Some common topics and issues of 'extreme right' websites are: White supremacism, explicit racism, racialism, negationism, conspiracy theory, xenophobia; nostalgia for a past prior to immigration; anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism; anti-Americanism; ethno-nationalism (Mudde 2007).
6. 'A measure that weights the paths connecting nodes inversely by their length' (Borgatti et al. 2013, p. 154). They recommend the use of compactness instead of geodesic distance to bypass in particular the problem of measuring average nodes distance on disconnected networks.
7. These youth organizations present often Celtic and neo-Nazi symbols on their websites, borrowing also icons from the extreme left. They distinguish themselves from the more traditional ER formations for their interest in history and their focus instead on music and expressive events. In addition, some of them have a strong attention on social issues.
8. In this category, we inserted the main important ER parties in our selected countries.

9. These organizations refer to the Third Reich and are apologists for Hitler and the German National Socialist ideology. Their sites contain Nazi symbols, references to the purity of the Aryan race and racial hatred.
10. In this category, we included those groups defining themselves as political movements and that openly partake in political and civic activities (such as public demonstration, political debates, organizing public marches). Here we also included youth organizations related to the ER parties or movements and party or movement media in the form of journals, magazines or reviews. We also included the information portals and other media such as magazines or radio that might not have the official status of movement or party but disseminate ER or nationalistic ideas and serve as a channel for gathering information and opinions that are of ER nature.
11. For these revisionist and holocaust denial groups, the main characteristics are historical revisionism and the denial of the holocaust; the proposal to re-write history; and the documentation of the crimes of communism.

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# Divided They Tweet? A Comparative Analysis of Twitter Networks of Pro- and Anti-EU Parties

Annett Heft, Sophia Wittwer, and Barbara Pfetsch

## Introduction

European integration is marked by an unprecedented degree of politicisation, which results from the polarisation and contestation between Eurosceptical and Europhile positions on EU policies, between diverging views and interpretative frameworks. Political parties are important actors of EU politicisation, since they strategically address or silence discussions on EU issues in national political arenas. To address the issue of EU politicisation, which is closely linked to matters of EU legitimacy, therefore means

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to consider the interplay between Eurosceptical and Europhile parties. In the light of constant fundamental crises of the EU and the amplification of anti-European parties in several European countries, the question whether Euroscepticism will grow into a serious transnational political cleavage is pressing. Among the indications for such a development are the structures and channels of communication.

The politicisation or downplaying of EU issues takes place in a mass media environment undergoing dramatic changes through digitalisation. Along with the Internet and other Web 2.0 technologies, Twitter has become an important new space for political communication. Political parties may use this channel to communicate directly to their electorate, to raise their public visibility, for the diffusion of information and the mobilisation of support as well as for the coordination of collective action.

Regarding the political system as a whole, the new communication venues entail, on the one hand, a potential for a higher plurality of actors, issues, and frames as well as their mutual exchange. They can, on the other hand, equally foster increasing polarisation between existing cleavages and 'sphericals' of public debate (Dahlgren 2005). Important in this regard are the structures of the emerging communication networks and the connections between the different types of actors therein. They indicate whether parties' online communication networks foster mutual exchange either within or across country borders, or rather enhance the separation between existing cleavages.

Inspired by the 'divided they blog' metaphor of Adamic and Glance (2005), in our chapter, we analyse Twitter networks of pro- and anti-EU parties and individual politicians from these parties in four European countries which display quite different stances on the EU (Germany [GER], France [F], United Kingdom [UK], and Poland [PL]). Methodically, we combine the analysis of automatically collected data on interactions in the four countries with findings from a manual content analysis of interaction networks in Germany and the UK.

Considering their social media communication, we ask to what degree party networks from both sides of the political spectrum and from different countries are interconnected and what their connections actually mean. In general, we assume that Eurosceptical and Europhile parties display only sparse connections amongst each other and that the networks of

both party groups are clustered according to nationality instead of showing wide international connections. Comparing both political camps in more detail, we scrutinise differences and commonalities in the connective behaviour of the Eurosceptical and Europhile parties.

Our chapter is divided into four sections. We firstly set up the theoretical framework of our study by reviewing the literature on party communication and its use of social media. Then, we reflect on how the general patterns may apply in the context of the politicisation of Europe and how the pro-European and Eurosceptical parties may use Twitter networks to raise support for their position and/or to form coalitions. The discussion of communication functions and conditioning factors of parties' social media networks allows us to formulate hypotheses about the Twitter connections of the pro-European and Eurosceptical parties, which will be subjected to a test in the empirical study. The design and methods section is devoted to introducing our selection of party cases and countries and the reconstruction of Twitter networks for analysis. The findings addressed in the fourth section reveal a strong separation of ideological cleavages and country clusters as well as traces of transnational and cross-ideological interactions and their strategic functions.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Parties' Communication in Times of Growing Euroscepticism**

The politicisation of EU issues and political contention in national and transnational spaces of political communication must be assessed against the changes in party communication due to media change. The new and constantly progressing digital technologies fundamentally affect the political communication environment of parties and individual politicians alike. Several studies point out that Web 2.0 technologies, especially their interactive features, have gained increasing relevance for parties throughout Europe during election campaigns (Jürgens and Jungherr 2011; Lilleker and Jackson 2011; Koc-Michalska et al. 2014a, b). They also have intruded into the everyday online practises of parties and EU politicians



in the time between election periods (Larsson 2015). At the same time, we have far less knowledge about how, in particular, social media changes political parties' communication networks and how these possibilities impact on the quantity and quality of political communication.

Since the very beginning, hopes were high that the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies would bring more participatory and communicative potential for political actors and citizens alike. On the level of the electorate, a diversification of the political discourse and the promotion of public deliberation were among the positive expectations (for an overview Emmer and Wolling 2010), whilst more sceptical voices worried about drawbacks, such as a higher segmentation of public political debates (Dahlgren 2005). For parties and other collective actors, online communication and social media expanded the toolbox for communication and scope of activities and outreach as they have created new possibilities and leeways for the intensification of information, interaction, participation, and particularly mobilisation of supporters (Emmer and Bräuer 2010). For instance, political parties could use social media to directly approach their supporters, to disseminate information and collect feedback, to mobilise for political action, and to coordinate party activities. Of particular strategic importance are those functions which allow parties to build political coalitions by virtual connections with other organisations, stakeholders, or specific groups of supporters. Thus, the particular innovation potential of digital media lies in the possibilities to build up and to stabilise political networks as an infrastructure of mobilisation, action, and support. These networks may appear around particular issues or policies or centre on ideological positions, social groups, or values. Due to the nature of digital communication, these online networks must not be restricted to national publics, as is the traditional mass media. They are particularly conducive to reach beyond the traditional boundaries of ideological camps, national publics, or media formats. To what degree these possibilities are used and manifest themselves in the actual interconnections between political parties' networks in Europe is at the centre of our investigation.

In current European politics, the question of coalition building between parties has come up particularly with respect to the advent of Euroscepticism. In the light of fundamental crises of the EU and of the amplification and increase of adversarial and anti-European parties in sev-

eral European countries, the question has been whether Euroscepticism will grow into a serious transnational political cleavage. Among the indications for such a development are the structures and channels of communication. One would assume that if a transnational anti-European cleavage is to emerge, it would be visible in internal and transnational communication activities with the help of digital media.

Talking about Eurosceptical and Europhile parties requires defining the rather diffuse concept of Euroscepticism (for an overview, see the chapter by Guerra in this book). In this chapter, following the understanding of Taggart, Euroscepticism can be understood as ‘contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration’ (Taggart 1998, p. 366). This opposition can be related to the ideals and principles of the EU, the EU’s contemporary regime and institutional structure, and to the actions and decisions of EU authorities (Fuchs et al. 2009, p. 22). It follows from this view that evaluations of the EU can be conceptualised as a continuum between positive and negative attitudes towards the EU, with Euroscepticism denoting the negative pole and support of the EU on those dimensions indicating the positive, supportive pole (Fuchs et al. 2009, p. 24). Pursuing this logic, party-based Euroscepticism can be understood as ‘a continuum of party stances on European integration ranging from extreme opposition to tremendous support’ (De Vries and Edwards 2009, p. 11). In our study, we include those parties which take a significantly more critical stance on the EU than the mean of all parties of a particular country (similarly De Vries and Edwards 2009, p. 11). Parties which traditionally take a more supportive stance on EU integration we label as Europhile parties.

## **Social Media, Online Networks, and the Meaning and Constraints of Connections**

Social media platforms such as Twitter have increasingly gained importance as channels for communication used by parties, politicians, and citizens (Vergeer 2015; Maireder et al. 2014). The advantages are not limited to the rapidness of the communication and the possibility to reach younger audiences. Of importance are the different possibilities

to interact. The variety of actors, themes, and opinions, however, does not imply that the user automatically comes in contact with a diversity of actors and opinions. In fact, users have to follow other users or have to be integrated into other interactions in order to establish connections (Himmelboim et al. 2013, p. 158).

These connections, in the form of links, can be described as network structures and specified with the methods of network analysis. Through network analysis, we observe the systematic arrangement of relations between units of a population (Hummell and Sodeur 2010, p. 575). Network analysis differentiates between ‘edges’ and ‘nodes’. Nodes are the individual elements of networks, such as actors. The links between particular nodes are called edges (ibid.: 581). We can differentiate between undirected edges—for instance, actor A and actor B follow each other—and directional edges, in which actor A follows actor B, but not vice versa. In the latter case, one can differentiate between source and target. In this respect, the source is the actor that initiates the relation, whilst the target is the passive receiver (Hummell and Sodeur 2010: 575ff.).

In political online networks, hyperlinks can serve three basic functions: (1) the expression of endorsement or support for a certain party, issue, or opinion; (2) the multiplication or expansion of one’s own online presence and the bundling of forces; and (3) the rejection of a political opponent by using links serves to criticise and create negative affects towards others (Ackland and Gibson 2013, p. 231). In addition, Twitter offers the possibility of neutral observation. Journalists especially can observe the Twitter activities of parties and politicians to gain information for news coverage (Plotkowiak et al. 2012; Neuberger et al. 2010).

In order to hypothesise about the network structures of Twitter, we can draw on earlier research: hence, the ‘homophily principle’, which implies ‘the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people’ (McPherson et al. 2001, p. 416) was confirmed for social media as well. Referring to networks, ‘homophily implies that distance in terms of social characteristics translates into network distance’ (McPherson et al. 2001: 416). But which context factors are crucial in structuring the new political spaces? We will illustrate them in the next sections.

## Political Orientation

Quite a few studies provide evidence for ‘value homophily’ (McPherson et al. 2001, p. 419), meaning that similarity is based on values, attitudes, and beliefs. Also, for retweet and mention networks on Twitter, it is valid to assume that users would rather interact with users with whom they agree (Conover et al. 2011, p. 92f.). Research on hyperlinks of liberal and conservative bloggers in the USA reveals a high degree of separation of both groups (Adamic and Glance 2005, p. 40f.). Another study on linking structures of conservative and liberal bloggers finds that more than 90 per cent of links remain in the same ideological camp (Hargittai et al. 2008, p. 76). The same pattern can be observed for political parties which tend to link within their own ideological cleavage (Ackland and Gibson 2013). Marginalised or extreme parties, however, link more strongly amongst each other to strengthen their online presence, whilst networks of other parties also feature links to the other camp. For more extremist parties, the ‘force multiplication role’ (Ackland and Gibson 2013, p. 234) of links is more important, because they receive much less media coverage than the larger, established political actors (Ackland and Gibson 2013, p. 236ff.). A study of the exposure to cross-ideological political views on Twitter shows that political orientation leads to a separation of political camps online and to only a few linkages between them (Himmelboim et al. 2013).

## Language and Nationality

Besides political orientations, similarity in Twitter networks can be established via language and nationality. Maireder et al. (2014) found in their study of the European election in 2014 nationally structured clusters of Twitter users representing the Twitter spheres of single countries and clusters including users from different countries but featuring one language, such as Germany and Austria (Maireder et al. 2014). Also, Bastos et al. (2013) confirmed that linguistic barriers are visible in clusters of Twitter users, whilst the intersection between different linguistic groups is relatively sparse. However, the authors also found users who tweeted in more than one language and topics which brought together different linguistic

subcommunities. Regarding politics and activism-related events, connections between users are also determined by the content transferred. Thus, political hashtags also can transcend linguistic communities (Bastos et al. 2013, p. 168). Although some actors and groups seem to be more willing to engage in cross-national or cross-language interactions, connections are generally more likely between actors of the same language and nationality.

## Function of Connections

Whether and to what end parties and party supporters use Twitter also depends on the establishment and the resources of a political party. For minor parties, and especially parties on the far right—as it is also shown in the chapter by Pavan and Caiani in this book—linking to one another could be particularly conducive to amplify their message and to foster in-group identities and a sense of community (Ackland and Gibson 2013; Caiani and Parenti 2013). Research on the linking structures of right-wing extremist groups on the Internet suggests that international linking might be of special importance for them to strengthen cross-country alliance building and to escape intra-national restrictions (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003). Burris et al. found a high proclivity among white supremacist movements to create links to sites in other countries (Burris et al. 2000). In contrast, for right-wing political parties, Ackland and Gibson (2013, p. 236–238) assumed they would be more likely to link to domestic sites of nationalist groups, whilst parties with a left-wing orientation would be more eager to entertain international links and therefore link to foreign sites. Their assumptions hold true for parties on the far right, right, and far left, whilst mainstream left, centre, and right parties are quite similar in their likelihood to link to other national actors.

## Connections of Pro- and Anti-EU Parties on Twitter: Expectations

In our study, we analyse Twitter as a proxy for digital social network communication within Web 2.0. In Western Europe, on average, 18 per cent of the population subscribed to Twitter in 2013 (eMarketer 2016). Twitter is

a viable tool for individual and party communication because the messages are promptly visible for users and since a connection can be established to other users by mentioning the @username. By way of retweeting, it is possible to spread the post of another user among one's own followers. Moreover, one can also directly reply to a message. Through hashtags, certain themes (with #theme) can be marked and put up for discussion with others (Vergeer 2015, Conover et al. 2011, p. 90; Neuberger et al. 2010, pp. 21–23). Regarding the possibilities of connective action, we can elaborate the following hypotheses about the Twitter networks of Europhile and Eurosceptic parties:

a) *Interactions between pro- and anti-EU parties and their functions*

Based on the homophily principle, we may assume that Eurosceptical and Europhile parties only display sparse connections amongst each other and therefore interact primarily with their own supporters. If online connections indeed entail a higher value for the Eurosceptical parties, we would furthermore expect their networks to be more exclusive in terms of ideology than the networks of Europhile parties, which should entail more connections to the opposing camp.

For both party groups, we assume that the interaction within their own camps displays supportive functions, whilst connections amongst opposing camps are taken to entail criticism. Interactions between actors without open alignment to either the Eurosceptical or the Europhile parties are expected to serve information and observation needs.

b) *Interactions across countries*

Following the homophily principle, we also expect the networks of both party groups to cluster according to nationality. Regarding the ideological camps, we expect the Eurosceptical parties to display a higher degree of interconnectedness across countries than the Europhile parties. Particularly for those Eurosceptical parties which gained considerably during the last European Parliament (EP) elections, international linking might be especially important to strengthen cross-national alliances in EU politics. However, their heterogeneity and their nationalist orientation might restrain such transnational alliances.

## Study Design and Method

### Selection of Countries, Parties, and Party Actors

Parties' political communication efforts and Euroscepticism, above all, are constrained by their national political contexts. Analysing the digital connective behaviour of parties on social media platforms such as Twitter thus requires comparative designs which include diverse countries. If we then observe similar patterns of internal and transnational digital communication activities across countries, we can assume singular effects on the mobilisation in favour of or against European integration.

For the first part of our empirical analysis, we include four countries with quite different stances on the EU amongst the general public: Germany, France, Poland, and the UK. In Germany and France, the proportion of Europeans who see the EU in a positive light represents almost the mean of the EU 28 (total positive in Germany is 45 per cent, France 37 per cent, EU 28 41 per cent). Poland represents a country with above-average positive perceptions of the EU (53 per cent). The UK, on the contrary, is amongst the countries with the most critical stances (total positive is 32 per cent, total negative is 28 per cent) (European Commission 2015, p. 114).

Taking the European elections in 2014 as a starting point, within each country, we selected one party representing either a more Eurosceptical or a more Europhile position and one individual representative of that party. Social democratic parties were chosen to stand for pro-European parties. They are a relatively homogeneous party family with a long tradition, and with respect to EU politics, they are classified as integration friendly (Jun 2012, pp. 69–71). For our analysis, we chose the German *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD), the French *Parti Socialiste* (PS), the *Polish Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* (SLD), and the *British Labour Party* (LP).

Eurosceptical parties, in contrast, do not have a unifying agenda. They are regarded as strongly heterogeneous (Hartleb 2012, p. 321) and do not act as a common Eurosceptical parliamentary group in the EP (as is the case with the *Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats*). Although Eurosceptical tendencies are salient within the

broader scope of the political spectrum (especially with regards to ‘soft’ Euroscepticism, as Guerra underlines in her chapter) (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008, p. 7ff.), our analysis focuses on right-wing Eurosceptic parties which were able to gain considerably in the latest European elections: the *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP) and the *Front National* (FN) of France were similarly successful. *UKIP* won the election with about 27 per cent, and the *Front National* gained about 25 per cent of the vote, relegating the conservative *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) to second place. With regard to Germany and Poland, we included the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and the *Polish Kongres Nowej Prawicy, or Nowa Prawica* (NP), respectively. They were established quite recently and, compared to *UKIP* and *Front National*, they were not doing well in their first European election. However, both parties were able to join the EP (both with about 7 per cent) (see Stöss 2014; for election results and classification of parties see also Stöss 2013).

For each of the selected parties, we included the official national Twitter account of the party. As individual party representative, we analysed the individual account of the Member of the European Parliament (MEP) with the most followers on Twitter (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup>

Table 1 Study design

Country	Europhile parties and party Actors		Eurosceptic parties and party Actors	
Germany	SPD	@spdde	AfD	@afd_bund
	Martin Schulz	@martinschulz	Bernd Lucke	@berndlucke
France	PS	@partisocialiste	FN	@fn_officiel
	Emmanuel Maurel	@emmanuelmaurel	Marie Le Pen	@mlp_officiel
Poland	SLD	@sldpoland	NP	@nowaprawica
	Lidia Geringer	@lidiageringer	Mikke Korwin	@korwinmikke
UK	LP	@uklabour	UKIP	@ukip
	Richard Howitt	@richardhowitt	Nigel Farage	@nigel_farage



## Measurement of Interaction Networks

To analyse the interconnectedness on Twitter, we included different kinds of relationships in our interaction network, such as linkages between parties, individual party actors, and other sources and targets. For the purpose of simplicity, the term ‘party’ in the following is used as a collective term for the respective organisation and the individual party representative.

*Interaction networks* are composed of actors and tweets about the actor (marked by reference to the actor with @actorname) and the tweets of the actor himself. The source is always the actor, who sends a tweet and may or may not mention other users by their usernames. The targets are the mentioned users. One tweet (or interaction) therefore can contain multiple targets. Moreover, several kinds of relations (or edges) are included: the first type is *tweets*. Here, the party stands for both the source and the target; because the interaction commences here, the party interacts within their own organisation. The party posts a tweet in which no other actors are mentioned. In *mentions*, the second type, the party can be the source or target. In the respective tweet, several actors can be mentioned. Finally, we looked at *replies*. In this mode of interaction, the party can be both source and target as well. This occurs when the source answers a tweet of another actor. Here, the respective actor and possibly other actors are mentioned.

The interaction networks were analysed in two steps: first, we conducted an *automatic data retrieval* using NodeXL, an open source plug-in that can survey two different networks for Twitter, including the user network consisting of outgoing interactions of the respective user as well as the search network which is composed of those interactions addressing the user. It should be noted that NodeXL limits the number of available tweets in the user network to 200 during the prior seven days. The search network, which is generally substantially larger, is limited to 1800 interactions during the same time span.

Since our study focuses on the on-going networking of political parties in times of growing EU politicisation and Euroscepticism, we selected a routine period of politics for analysis. Our data collection occurred in three of the countries from 7 to 11 January 2015. Due to technical restrictions, data collection for Poland took place from 6 to 9 February.<sup>3</sup> The data allow several analyses: for existing edges, the data include the

account names of users, the type of relation, the date and exact wording of a tweet as well as possible links and hashtags. Moreover, for all existing nodes, we are able to collect, for example, the self-description of users, their number of followers, the quantity of tweets of a user, and the time zone and location of a user. However, since the open source tool we used allows extraction of a restricted number of reports per day in a narrow time span, our study provides only a first snapshot of the network.

In the second step, we deepened our analysis by conducting a *manual content analysis*. For this part of the study, we selected only two countries. We analysed the Twitter network in the UK, which features an established and highly successful Eurosceptical party in the latest European elections (UKIP), and in Germany, which displays a relatively new party eligible for the first time and with comparably less support at the time (AfD).

From the data collected via our automatic data retrieval, we drew a random sample of 100 tweets for each party.<sup>4</sup> In sum, 400 tweets (in which actors interact in one way or another) were analysed in a standardised content analysis.<sup>5</sup> To gather the scope of the network, we coded the variables scope and country. Scope was differentiated into the categories ‘international—outside Europe’, ‘European’, and ‘national’. For the country variable, the country of origin of an actor was identified. The information for both variables was derived from the self-descriptions of users in their profiles. For all actors in interactions, the affiliation with the Eurosceptical, Europhile, or neutral position was analysed. Statements conveying a rejection of the EU in general or its principles and ideas, the Euro, or single policies served as markers for the Eurosceptical camp, whilst supportive statements in this regard were used as criteria to assign an actor to the Europhile camp. Statements such as questions or observations signified the neutral stance, and actors, who could not be classified, were coded as ‘don’t know’.

To assess the function of a link (relating to the respective party referred to), we coded the function of the respective tweet using the categories ‘support’, ‘observation’, and ‘critique’. Positive statements towards the respective party or party actor, its positions or members, as well as networking and publishing by or on behalf of the party, were coded as ‘support’, negative and ironic statements regarding those topics as ‘critique’, and neutral statements or questions as ‘observation’.

The manual content analysis was conducted in summer 2015, mainly by one coder. A second coder was trained intensively, and both participated in reliability tests. Inter-coder reliability tests resulted in reliability coefficients of 0.8 for the identification of scope and country of sources and targets (all on average), 0.75 for the coding of the ideological position of an actor, and 0.98 for the function of links (Holsti reliability coefficient).

## Findings

### Interactions Between Pro- and Anti-EU Parties and the Function of Connections

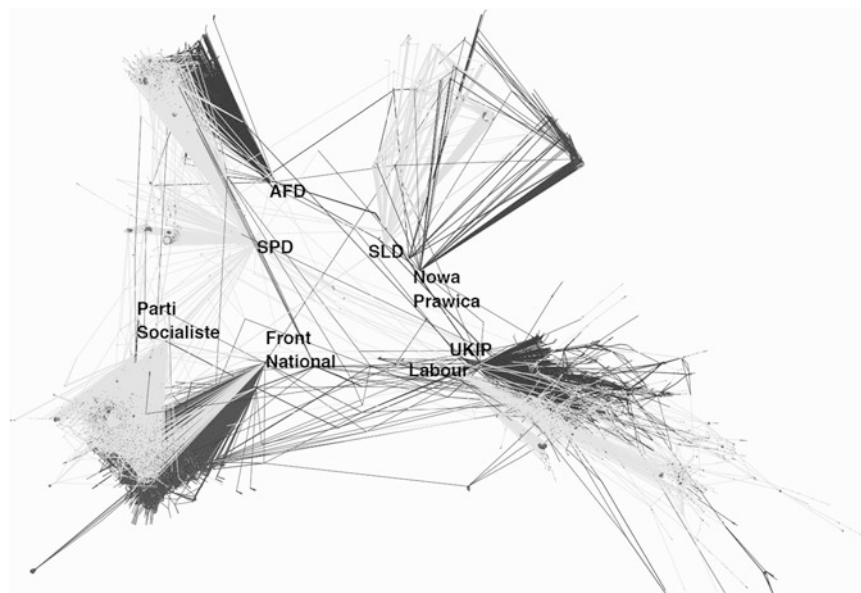
The presentation of findings follows our two-step approach: first, discussing the results of our explorative analysis for all four countries under study, then focusing on our in-depth analysis of Germany and the UK. Since homophily is expected to structure digital social network communication, we assumed that Eurosceptics and Europhiles alike prefer networking amongst their own supporters. Table 2 shows to what degree actors from our eight party networks interact with any other party.

**Table 2** Total interactions compiled per party and proportion of interactions between networks (shared sources and targets)

Party	Total interactions (=total sources) <i>n</i>	Shared sources		Shared targets		Total targets
		<i>n</i>	% of total sources	<i>n</i>	% of total targets	
SPD	652	116	17,79	49	1,35	3637
Parti Socialiste	636	142	22,33	142	4,19	3385
SLD	134	18	13,43	0	0,00	437
Labour Party	1068	102	9,55	61	2,21	2765
Total Europhile	2490	378	15,18	252	2,46	10224
AfD	249	79	31,73	48	4,63	1037
Front National	855	141	16,49	144	2,47	5822
Nowa Prawica	121	13	10,74	0	0,00	317
UKIP	955	115	12,04	60	1,56	3839
Total Eurosceptic	2180	348	15,96	252	2,29	11015
Total	4670	726	15,55	504	2,37	21239

The proportion of interactions crossing the boundaries of a specific party network by either sharing a source and/or target<sup>6</sup> of another party is rather small—between 10 (LP) and 32 (AfD) per cent of the sources identified and below five per cent of the targets addressed. Thus, interactions rarely take place between party networks, but mainly stay in the realm of one particular party. Although parties and countries vary, we find hardly any differences between Europhile and Eurosceptical parties in this respect.<sup>7</sup> Figure 1 illustrates the interaction networks of our parties, highlighting the clustering around single parties and the small proportion of interactions across ideological camps.

Comparing the *shared sources* criterion reveals only slight differences between the ideological groups. Eurosceptical party networks share 89 per cent of their collective sources with the Europhiles. In the Europhile party networks, 82 per cent of the shared sources belong to the Eurosceptics and 18 per cent to the networks of fellow pro-EU parties. Thus, the networks of our Eurosceptical parties are not more exclusive than the



**Fig. 1** Interaction networks within and across Europhile and Eurosceptic parties, all interactions

networks of the opposing camp. The proportion of *shared targets* is in general very low, and they entirely connect to the respective opposing camp. Thus, Eurosceptics and Europhiles on Twitter link mostly around their favoured party, and the Eurosceptical party networks seem not to be more ideologically closed than their counterparts.

To obtain a more reliable picture of the permeability of Eurosceptical and Europhile party networks, we further concentrated on the German and UK networks and analysed in more detail the self-descriptions of actors in addition to the content and context of their tweets. Our 400 tweets involved 1378 actors (either as source or as target) overall, from which 1077 could be assigned to a Eurosceptic, Europhile, or neutral position on the EU (see Table 3).

Our findings clearly indicate that in the Eurosceptical (70 per cent) and in the Europhile (78 per cent) party networks, the large majority of Twitter users interact with users of the same political camp. If connections cross ideological lines, the Eurosceptical party networks stand out by showing more interactions with users from the opposing camp (20 per cent) than the Europhile networks (10 per cent). Thus, the interaction networks of the Eurosceptic parties appear less closed than those of the Europhile parties. This finding holds up for both countries, although we also observe some national idiosyncrasies. The Twitter network around the German *SPD* assembles an ideologically homogeneous crowd, whilst the actors connected with the *AfD* are more diverse. The British *LP* and *UKIP*, in contrast, appear rather similar with respect to the heterogeneity of the network.

**Table 3** Party networks and ideological position of connected actors (%)

Party/Camp	Europhile			Eurosceptic			Total <i>n</i>
	SPD <i>n</i> = 350	Labour <i>n</i> = 230	total <i>n</i> = 580	AfD <i>n</i> = 290	UKIP <i>n</i> = 207	total <i>n</i> = 497	
Eurosceptic	6,3	16,1	10,2	66,6	74,4	69,8	37,7
Europhile	81,1	74,3	78,4	22,1	18,4	20,5	51,7
Neutral	12,6	9,6	11,4	11,4	7,2	9,7	10,6
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Diff. four parties:  $\chi^2 = 437,195$ ,  $df = 6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0,451$ ,  $p < 0.001$

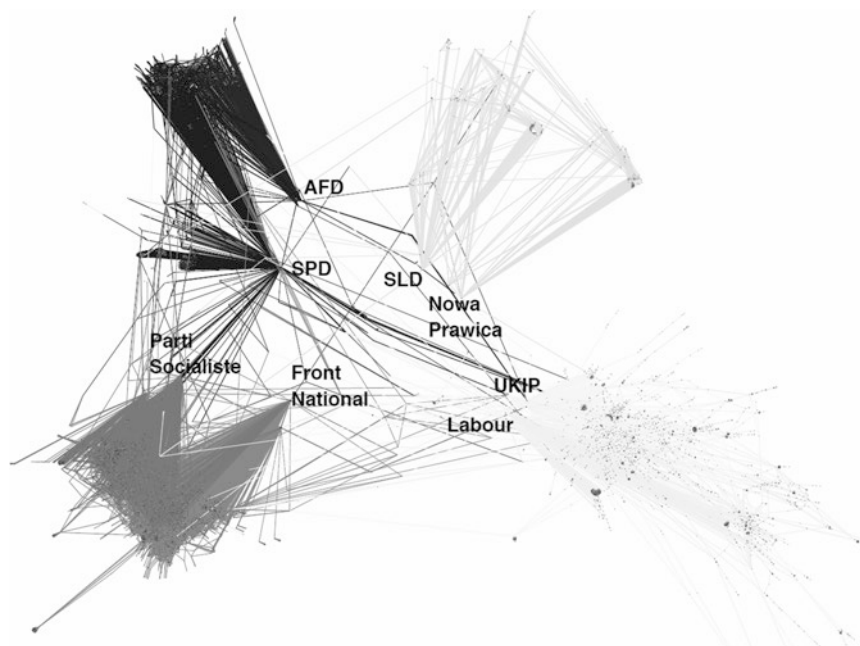
Diff. Eurosceptic vs Europhile parties:  $\chi^2 = 426,99$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0,630$ ,  $p < 0.001$

Since the cross-ideological interactions between party groups, albeit sparse, are of special interest for our study, we take a closer look at the functions of interaction. Tweets in which Eurosceptic actors engage in the networks of the German *SPD* or the *British Labour Party*, either as source or as target, mainly express criticism (72 per cent *SPD*, 92 per cent *LP*), whilst tweets coming from Europhile sources or targets convey either support (73 per cent *LP*, 38 per cent *SPD*) or observation and neutral information (46 per cent *SPD*, 19 per cent *LP*). In contrast, Eurosceptic actors interact in the networks of *AfD* and *UKIP* mainly to support those parties (69 per cent *AfD*, 89 per cent *UKIP*). Here, the Europhile actors either tweet in a neutral way (*AfD* 45 per cent, *UKIP* 26 per cent) or appear in tweets criticising the parties (42 per cent *AfD*, 63 per cent *UKIP*).

Interestingly enough, in the networks of both camps, we find at least some tweets including actors with opposite ideological position, which somehow support the party from the opposing camp. For example, 17 per cent of the Eurosceptic actors of the *SPD* network support the party or its individual representative, and 12 per cent of the Europhile actors connected with the *AfD* network do so. Likewise, *UKIP* is supported by the tweets of 12 per cent of the Europhile actors in its network, whilst Eurosceptic actors in the British *LP* network only observe (8 per cent) or criticise the party.

## Interactions Across Countries

Although digital communication easily reaches beyond national boundaries, we expected the party networks to cluster nationally, with our Eurosceptical parties entertaining more international connections than the Europhile parties. For the four countries of our study, we are able to reveal whether an actor of a specific party network also links to another network and whether this network transcends ideological or national borders. Figure 2 shows quite nicely the clustering in country groups, with only sparse interactions across countries. Thus, we observe a network structure which is confined within national boundaries.



**Fig. 2** Interaction networks of German, British, French, and Polish Europhile and Eurosceptic parties, all interactions

If we look at the interactions in which *shared sources* are visible, we recognise that the vast majority refer to actors from the same country (overall, 86 per cent). In the Eurosceptic party networks, the share of domestic actors is slightly higher (90 per cent) than in the Europhile party networks (83 per cent). *Shared targets* in both camps are almost entirely actors from the networks of the same country (99 per cent).

The parochial nature of the party networks is also detailed for Germany and the UK by using data from the manual content analysis. We coded the scope of actors included in interactions in more detail based on the location provided in the self-description of users and were able to record the geographical location of 74 per cent of the networked actors (total actors  $n = 1378$ , classified actors  $n = 1026$ ).

The results confirm the general patterns that—except for the German SPD (Table 4)—parties interact primarily on the national level and the interaction networks of the Eurosceptical parties are slightly more closed

**Table 4** Party networks and scope of connected actors (%)

Party/Camp scope	Europhile						Total n =
	SPD n = 310	Labour n = 279	total n = 589	AfD n = 286	UKIP n = 151	Eurosceptic total n = 437	
National scope corresponding to party-scope	46,1	86,0	65,0	88,8	81,5	86,3	74,1
Other EU country	50,3	7,5	30,1	6,3	3,3	5,3	19,5
Non-EU European country	0,3	3,2	1,7	2,4	0,0	1,6	1,7
Non-European country	2,6	2,2	2,4	1,0	13,9	5,5	3,7
International scope	0,6	1,1	0,8	1,4	1,3	1,4	1,1
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100

Diff. four parties:  $\chi^2$  not applicable (test requirements)

Diff. Eurosceptic vs Europhile parties:  $\chi^2 = 101,590$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.315$ ,  $p < 0.001$

nationally than the Europhile networks. However, whilst the proportion of domestic actors is highest for both Eurosceptic parties, the two Europhile parties (SPD and LP) show considerable differences. In particular, the *SPD* network stands out by a high share of European actors, which can be attributed to the prominent role of Martin Schulz, who is not only acting as MEP but as president of the EP. Comparing the *Labour Party* with the two Eurosceptic parties, transnational connections within Europe are less often found in the networks of the *AfD* and *UKIP*.

## Conclusion

In the light of increasing politicisation of EU politics and growing Euroscepticism, we analysed the interaction in Twitter networks of pro-European and Eurosceptical parties from four countries to assess their connective communication and its conditioning factors. In the light of digital technologies and their potential to build up coalitions and structures of mobilisation, we were anxious to see whether Eurosceptical parties' networks transcend national borders, thereby



stabilising a transnational anti-European cleavage. We also aimed to assess whether these parties stay in their own ideological camp or reach out to the parties with opposite positions, even if only in a critical or observational manner.

Our findings indicate that the vast majority of interaction networks include actors only from the same political camp. Interactions between networks are quite sparse. However, they appear to some degree among Eurosceptic parties, which seem to entertain less ideologically closed networks than Europhile parties. But a closer look reveals that the cross-ideological interactions of Eurosceptical parties mostly represent criticism of EU-friendly positions. Yet, whilst interactions within ideological camps mainly function to mobilise support and convey information, the cross-ideological interactions by the majority involve criticism of the opposing party. To some degree, they also fulfil observation and information functions.

Interactions across countries are also rare, as we find a strong clustering in country groups and only a few transnational connections. Interactions mainly connect actors from the same country. Here, the Europhile parties stand out with more transnational connections than the Eurosceptical parties, which feature a more parochial scope. Thus, the Eurosceptical party networks prevent efforts of cross-national alliance building and mobilisation.

All in all, our study indicates that even though Eurosceptical parties have become a salient and successful political power in many European countries, they are quite self-centred and divided in their communication and mobilisation structures across ideological lines. Their organisations appear to use social media to cultivate their positions and to hold together their supporters within their own country. Since Eurosceptical parties do not yet use social media to build up larger networks of communication, they obviously abstain from forming sustainable transnational coalitions on the ground. However, since our findings must be treated as a spotlight on party communication at only one point in time, further studies and longitudinal accounts are necessary to confirm this interpretation and prove that the communication is not yet ready for large and solid transnational networks of Euroscepticism.

## Notes

1. Question: 'In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?'
2. We checked for all members of the European Parliament of the respective parties if they operate one or more Twitter accounts. Then we selected the MEPs and the accounts of single MEPs that had the most followers in comparison to their colleagues. We perceive the individual party actors in their function as party representatives. While selecting and merging individual and party accounts allowed us to extend our data basis and to capture more lively interactions, this procedure might produce some bias as will be discussed in the results section.
3. The automatic data retrieval was performed by Sophia Wittwer, Lisa Paul and Götz Kadow during the research seminar 'European Public Spheres and the Politicization of Europe'. We are grateful for their commitment. See also Wittwer (2015).
4. We aggregated our data for parties and individual party actors and eliminated accounts with missing user descriptions.
5. The complete code book is available upon request from the authors. In general, we used the factually retrieved information: the self-description and profile data of users and the information available from the content of tweets. In case tweets were incompletely retrieved or not comprehensive, we included the context of the tweet via the posted link to Twitter into the coding procedure.
6. In this analysis, the base of an interaction is one single tweet irrespective of the number of targets an interaction contains.
7. To get a rough picture on shared sources and shared targets, the belonging to the network of either a Eurosceptic or Europhile party has been used as a proxy for the ideological position of an actor in the automated analysis. We aggregated actors located in the networks of our pro-EU parties and labelled them as Europhile, actors retrieved from the accounts of our Eurosceptic parties we labelled as Eurosceptics. The view on party groups doesn't account for peculiarities of single parties (data not weighted per parties). Those become visible in the

more detailed analyses for German and British parties in the second step of our analyses.

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# Left's Love and Hate for Europe: Syriza, Podemos and Critical Visions of Europe During the Crisis

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and Joseba Fernández

## Introduction

The economic and financial crisis has particularly hit the European periphery. In the South, austerity policies imposed by international and European institutions and adopted by national governments have provoked a strong wave of protests. Particularly in Spain and Greece anti-austerity mobilizations dominated public life building upon outrage at the political elites at both domestic and European level. At the same time, in both countries, political actors emerged fuelled by or, even, directly

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out of these popular protests. *Syriza* in Greece has become a ruling party, while *Podemos* in Spain a real alternative to traditional bipartisanship: both parties challenge neoliberalism as promoted by national and international political institutions and elites, while promising to deal with the critical situation of national economies in alternative, more just and more democratic, ways. Notwithstanding the dramatically increasing distrust towards the EU in both Greece and Spain, these left-wing parties did not reject the EU project, but adopted instead a critical pro-European stance.

As already examined in the introduction of this volume by M. Caiani and S. Guerra, social science literature has extensively dealt with Euroscepticism providing a series of definitions and classifications based upon its nature and drivers, mostly seen at the level of party system, civil society and public opinion attitudes. Yet, this phenomenon has been until recently understood as marginal and located at the periphery of society and party system (Brack and Startin 2015). The Eurozone crisis, however, has proved a game changer as the increasing crisis of legitimacy that was already on the rise has dramatically affected also the EU institutions. This has been especially the case in the countries of the EU periphery, which not only were the most shaken by the financial crisis starting in 2008 but also became increasingly dependent from external actors, having to forfeit their residual national sovereignty in exchange for some material supports (or the threat of sanctions). The illusion of a federation promoting prosperity and democracy recognizing the rights of weaker states was challenged by neoliberal monetary policies imposed. The so-called protracted crisis of neoliberalism reflects, thus, the non-responsive and non-responsible nature of contemporary democracy that the anti-austerity movements have criticized (della Porta 2015).

Since 2008, thus, Euroscepticism has moved to the mainstream transforming European integration into a fundamental issue in domestic and protest politics across Europe (Verney 2015). Against this background, we bring social movements centre stage in the understanding of criticism of the EU by focusing our attention to the 'movement parties' that rose in popularity in Southern Europe. After presenting the research on which this chapter is based (see della Porta et al. 2016), we analyse how *Syriza* in Greece and *Podemos* in Spain framed European institutions and the European project in the context of broad grassroots mobilizations that vehemently challenged EU policies and against a

pro-EU and pro-austerity narrative promoted by mainstream media. By juxtaposing these parties' discourses with media narratives on Europe, we suggest that these two political actors that were closely, or even inherently related with grassroots grievances and major transformations underway in the European periphery have developed a very similar and dissenting approach to Europe, which cannot be perceived through the over-stretched term of Euroscepticism. Against binary divisions between Europhile versus Eurosceptic actors, as suggested, for instance, by Heft et al. in this volume, we claim instead that these actors, while reflecting a legitimacy crisis of EU institutions, they articulated a critical Europeanism that is much in continuity with the one for a social and democratic Europe developed by the global justice movement. Notwithstanding their differences in origins, organization, membership or ideology, *Syriza* and *Podemos* managed to put together a framing of Europe that, while critical of the EU politics and policies, defended the vision of 'another Europe' as the polity to be constructed from below. Through this case study, we suggest that social movements are quintessential also in the field of 'Euroscepticism' so as to perceive changing understandings and critiques of Europe taking place on the ground, during an era that the EU itself is changing.

## The Research

During austerity policies and the cycle of protest against them, while the downward trend in party movement relations had pushed towards an expectation of further separation between institutional and contentious actors, a new wave of parties emerged in the periphery of Europe fuelled (to a greater or lesser extent) by social movements. The way to examine the genesis and development of these 'movement parties' (Kitchelt 2006) is to focus on the complex and contingent dynamics developed when party politics meets with protest politics with unexpected outcomes during critical junctures. Within the scope of the present chapter, our research is based on an analysis of fundamental documents issued by *Syriza* and *Podemos* from 2010 to 2015 (party statutes and manifestos, political and organizational principles, and leaders' statements and interviews) and qualitative, semi-structured interviews with party and social movement activists. In order to shed light to how people perceive



and challenge the EU, we interviewed both movement activists and party members, including also people with overlapping membership so as to explore the space in-between institutions and movements during an era of acute legitimacy crisis of democratic institutions and more in particular of the European project. Following a number of questions on *Syriza*, *Podemos* and anti-austerity movements in Greece and Spain as related with the pro-austerity political establishment in each country, we addressed a series of open-ended questions on feelings, understandings and visions about Europe with the aim to explore the interplay between austerity, change and Europe in each country.<sup>1</sup>

For the Greek case, we collected information on the ways *Syriza* framed Europe that is published or/and available online. Given the limited availability of material and the scarce academic research done so far on the issue, a fundamental source of information were the qualitative interviews with *Syriza* members. Thirty interviews were carried out between June and September 2015, in Athens, in Thessaloniki, in Halkida and at Halkidiki. Regarding *Syriza* members, 15 interviews (4 with women and 11 with men) were carried out with people from different layers of the party, representing different factions and with varied socio-demographic features. In what concerns the broad anti-austerity movement developed in the country since 2008, we interviewed 15 members (6 women and 8 men) of movements preceding the crisis, of mobilizations that emerged during austerity and of ad hoc movements that have acquired a special symbolic role within the country.

Regarding the case of *Podemos*, the data included in this chapter have been collected relying on secondary sources and original texts published by the party. We have analysed several official *Podemos* documents and statements, including electoral programmes and the official documents of the party related to the organizational structure, funding model and political manifesto. These documents were mostly approved in the Constituent Assembly of *Podemos* in 2014. Additionally, we have analysed articles by and interviews with the main leaders of *Podemos*, where the major issues and political ideas on the party strategy are developed. Between May and July 2015, we also conducted 15 in-depth interviews with activists representing different profiles of *Podemos*, including two

dimensions: the territorial scope and also the role in the organization. Some are elected representatives at different territorial levels, while others are local participants in different circles (local assemblies) of the party. At the same time, some of them had previous political/activist experiences. With this variety, our aim was to incorporate different discourses, experiences and political ideas and backgrounds.

We analysed these materials through frame analysis, a particularly fruitful approach when the aim of the study is to uncover the process through which different actors interpret the issue at stake, propose ways out and set goals. As Lindekilde observes, frame functions 'like a picture frame that accentuates certain things, hides others, and borders off reality in a certain way' (2015, p. 200). In the working definition set out by Snow and Benford, the frame is described as 'an interpretive schema that simplifies and condenses the "world out there" by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of action' (1988, p. 37). Especially during the current critical context, against a national political establishment in need to defend austerity policies and a broad and massive anti-austerity protests, decisive for the salience of both parties under examination was the way they participated in the 'battle for meaning' and provided their own interpretations of change and power, especially in relation with Europe and against the mainstream media narratives that have systematically promoted in both countries a pro-EU and pro-austerity stance.

First, we will briefly provide the context by examining the way movements in Europe developed during the last few years in terms of trust towards European institutions, while also mapping the diverse mobilizations and electoral shifts in each country during austerity. This way, we will explore how anti-austerity mobilizations have opened new opportunities for alternatives discourses on Europe, which have at the same time been promoted by new contender parties. In the main body of the article, we examine the alternative ways *Syriza* and *Podemos* framed Europe challenging the pro-austerity narratives that were promoted by major political parties and media conglomerates. In the conclusion, we reflect upon *Syriza* and *Podemos*' Euro-critical approach.

## Context

### Social Movements' Growing Criticism Towards the EU

Social movements have been the first to reflect and voice critical positions about Europe as it is (or is perceived to be). The global justice movement was certainly critical of the institutions of representative democracy portraying the EU as non-responsive and even repressive, but ultimately a model to be changed rather than destroyed. Along a strong criticism of existing policies at the EU level, the European social forums and counter summits expressed hopes for an inclusive and fair Europe and generated a process of Europeanization from below, which also contributed to the growth of EU-wide networks and identities (della Porta and Caiani 2009). Such hopes were shattered during the first decades of the new century as the financial crisis proved at the same time the driver of the neoliberal visions of Europe of the EU institutions, as well as their weakness in delivering what was promised.

In this line, the recent wave of anti-austerity protests that tuned in 2011 across Europe reflects the dramatic loss of trust in both national and EU institutions. The conditionalities imposed upon the weaker states of the periphery hampering national sovereignty and increasing territorial inequalities were directly associated with the EU, as reflected in the modes and claims of anti-austerity grassroots mobilizations. While citizens in Southern Europe became increasingly aware that they experience a 'democracy without choices' (Mair 2011), anti-austerity protests started to target EU policies and Troika institutions (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission). At the same time, disruptive protests within the context of European Councils have dropped from the repertoire and have been replaced instead with the *acampadas* (what have come to be known as the *Indignados* and *Occupy movements*), which have been read as spaces for living out and building real democracies at the local level as opposed to engaging with a system no longer capable of implementing democracy (Kaldor and Selchow 2015; della Porta 2013, 2015). In Greece, protestors through a variegated anti-austerity movement expressed their total distrust in the post-1974

political system and frustration over the dictatorial way the EU implemented austerity upon the Greek populace. General strikes, marches and confrontational protests, *Indignados* gatherings and assemblies in squares all over the country were followed after 2012 by less visible, alternative economic and political initiatives at the local level and by a broad solidarity movement. As for Spain, the anti-austerity movement built upon the *Indignados* demonstrations that started in May 2011 in central squares across cities calling for real democracy and raising their voices against banks and financial markets. The national and EU institutions' refusal to incorporate the movement demands provoked a turning point in the contentious cycle: from a de-stituent process (based on protest and unconventional repertoires) to a constituent process (based on the 'assault on institutions') with a shift from a more 'movementist' pre-15M cycle to a post-15M cycle with a stronger focus on electoral politics (Subirats 2015).

Movements' growing criticism of the EU reflects a dramatic shift in public opinion attitudes: the results of the last European elections of 2014 point at the rising trend of Eurosceptic parties across the EU, while trust in the EU has been falling drastically among its citizens since the eruption of the financial crisis—going from 57 per cent in the Spring of 2007 to 31 per cent in the Autumn of 2013<sup>2</sup> and experiencing a sharp decline again in 2016.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Greece and Spain, this is even more dramatic. In 2013 and in almost a decade, distrust raised from 69 to 94 per cent in Spain and from 77 to 95 per cent in Greece reaching a distance of 15 percentage points from the European average.

## Parties Challenging National Party Systems

Massive protests in both countries vehemently challenged EU institutions and their unelected officials leading to a radical redefinition of the meaning of Europe in its periphery. Both the emergence of *Podemos* and the electoral victory of *Syriza* are to some extent by-products of this wave of protests, as these parties managed to express in the electoral arena the main claims of the anti-austerity mobilizations and to re-align the political systems of both countries.

The austerity measures implemented in Greece generated a recession that was the most severe ever experienced by an established democracy in the post-war era, generating a proper ‘humanitarian crisis’. Throughout those years, already existing political dissatisfaction was turned into strong criticism towards the political elites which was coupled with a broad delegitimation of both national and European institutions and representative democracy in general (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014; Teperoglou 2016). The ascendance of power in 2015 of the left-wing Syriza dismantled totally the party landscape in the country. After its transition to democracy in 1974, Greece had been governed by its two mainstream parties, *New Democracy* (ND), on the centre-right, and the *Panhellenic Socialist Movement* (PASOK), which dominated the centre-left, which were both pro-EU. The electoral appeal of the EU-critical Communist Party (KKE) has always fluctuated around 10 per cent, representing a stable but marginal force. The centre of the political spectrum was captured by pro-EU integration actors, while Euroscepticism was the monopoly of minor opposition forces (Verney 2015). The euro-communist *Sinaspismos* (SYN), formed in 1991, was a lesser pole within the Greek left traditionally struggling to enter the parliament (Panagiotakis 2015). In 2004, Sinaspismos allied with left and radical left-wing parties and networks forming *Syriza*, the *Coalition of the Radical Left*, so as to create a political space between PASOK and KKE by addressing the youth and the movements. This was defined as a ‘soft Eurosceptical’ political actor. By the time the crisis hit Greece, ND and PASOK had converged to such an extent towards the neoliberal centre that in 2011 they formed a pro-austerity governmental coalition, allegedly the only pro-EU political agent in the country, as daily propagated by mainstream media. This unholy alliance brought about a steep downward trajectory for ND, the complete collapse of PASOK (from 44 per cent in 2009 to 5 per cent in 2015 elections) and the entrance, for the first time, in the Greek parliament of the far-right *Golden Dawn*. It was within this context that *Syriza* rose from 4 per cent (in 2009) to 26 per cent (in 2014) and managed to take power in 2015 by gaining a 36 per cent of the national vote.

The economic crisis that hit the Eurozone had enormous consequences for the Spanish economy, as well. This crisis quickly became

also in Spain a political crisis affecting the political establishment and the party system. The socio-political consensus established in the political transition and the 1978 Spanish Constitution experienced a breakdown, particularly since the eruption of the so-called 15-M movement in 2011 and the wave of anti-austerity protests. Since then, what looked like a stable political regime and party system entered in a deep crisis, which opened the opportunity for new discourses and the emergence of new political options, favoured also by successive cases of corruption that were directed against some central institutions, such as the monarchy, and the two main political parties, the *Partido Popular* (PP), allegedly on the centre-right, and the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE), allegedly on the centre-left. This caused a loss of trust in major institutions of the country and a crisis of representation of the two major parties. Meanwhile, a favourable environment was created for the emergence of 'outsiders' and anti-establishment political actors. It is in this context that *Podemos* was established in the aftermath of the 15-M movement in January 2014, thanks to the strategic use of mass media and the charismatic figure of its leader, Pablo Iglesias. The rapid growth and expansion achieved by *Podemos* was reflected in its first surprising and unpredictable success in the European elections of May 2014 (5 seats out of 54 and the 7.9 per cent of the national vote). Currently, for the national elections of 2016, *Podemos* (and the other political parties and actors acting as electoral allies) is trying to get the second position overcoming the PSOE as the main force in the left.

In both Greece and Spain, pro-austerity political forces through mainstream media narratives promoted a hegemonic discourse hostile to protests and parties critical to EU. *Syriza* and *Podemos* rose electorally in opposition to them, thanks to their links with the contentious political culture that emerged during those crisis-ridden years in both Greece and Spain. While posing a most crucial challenge to bipartisanism and its pro-EU stance, these parties' success was fuelled by a broad de-legitimation of the EU and widespread denunciation of EU policies and a total distrust in the existing political personnel, both national and European, as we will examine below.

## Critical Pro-European Movement Parties

### Syriza Framing Europe

Since the outcome of its sovereign debt crisis, the dominant, pro-memorandum discourse that has been propagated by the political establishment and mainstream media in Greece interpreted the crisis as a crisis of Greek identity: the reason the country failed to reform where necessary was that a traditional political culture dominated over a 'modern' one (Triandafyllidou et al. 2013). All Greek citizens were to blame for colluding to practices of corruption and clientelism. The country had to implement the austerity policies as dictated by European and international institutions so as to catch up with and become like the other European countries. Implicit in this discourse was an orientalist (and self-orientalizing) assumption that the Mediterranean countries of the periphery were inferior to the liberal market economies of Central and Northern Europe (Agnantopoulos and Labriri 2015). From 2010 to 2015, daily media coverage condemned anti-austerity protests presenting austerity as the only solution by pointing at the imminent danger of bankruptcies and a 'Grexit': do Greek citizens wish to reject Troika policies and exit the Euro? Will Greece remain a part of the EU or become a third-world country? Mainstream Greek media magnates—owned and controlled by big conglomerates—have been accused during the crisis of allowing their own business interests influence editorial decisions to limit coverage to pro-Troika agendas and to censor alternative opinions as detrimental to the country's EU membership.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, public anger and feelings of injustice were however intensifying, along with increasingly massive protests, as the politicians who blamed the Greek citizens for corruption absolved themselves of responsibility in cases of scandals and extended immunity of prosecution to business and media elites, as well as to neo-Nazi Golden Dawn criminals (Xenakis and Cheliotis 2015). Considering mainstream media part of the problem, people gradually turned towards alternative sources of information and social media networks that were not aligned with the government.<sup>5</sup> A shift in public opinion

was gradually perceived when *Syriza* started to introduce an alternative framing of the crisis, one which was in line with what was simmering underground in an informal way around the country.

At first, *Syriza* challenged the diagnosis of the crisis: it was not the Greek citizens who were to blame, but rather the 'pro-austerity' establishment, which included the neoliberal policies dictated by the 'memoranda' and the national governments implementing them, along with their allies, business actors and media conglomerates. As an 'economic and social system' of 'globalized capitalism' can survive only through profit and speculation (Syriza 2012), Greek, European and international elites made profits through private banks, ships, commercial and industrial enterprises with the aid of the pro-establishment media. Pro-austerity politics were producing the crisis; they were unjust, destructive and leading to a dead end. At the same time, the party stopped appealing (only) to 'the youth', to 'the movements', or to the 'Greek citizens', and launched its campaign with a universal call to 'the people' (Katsampekis 2015). Syriza aimed in fact at giving voice politically to 'all those repressed and being exploited' (Syriza 2013) structuring its discourse around the antagonism between 'us, the people' hit by the austerity—an all-inclusive understanding of who 'we' are—and 'them, the establishment', which also included the media magnates. In terms of prognostic framing, its 2013 Founding Charter insisted explicitly on its clear left-wing ideology endorsing as lines of action the claims of the anti-austerity struggles. The 2014 National Reconstruction Plan set four goals (dealing with the humanitarian crisis, restarting the economy and promoting tax justice, regaining employment, and transforming the political system to deep democracy) which were, as a 40-year-old male party member and human rights activist observed, 'social democratic, really, really moderate. But faced with this attack by the capital, nowadays, these even seem radical'.

Most importantly, these plans were built upon from a different understanding of the crisis, national sovereignty and Europe and EU institutions. The party did not remain trapped in debating 'Grexit', which created the dilemma of either suffering austerity within Europe or exiting Europe and becoming a 'failed state'. Against the hegemonic framing promoted by the media 'austerity as an EU member' or 'anti-austerity as non EU member',



the left-wing coalition put forward the dilemma between ‘unfair austerity implemented by the elites’ and ‘anti-austerity demanded by the people’. A 52 year-old female *Syriza* member declared, ‘We were pro-European ... we could not deal alone with austerity. Europe was a favourable platform within which to create solidarity’. At the same time, the emphasis on a social Europe and ‘the people of Europe’ (Syriza 2013), as both a 23-year-old member of the *Youth Syriza* and a 62-year-old party member and unionist noted, was a tool against ‘nationalistic exceptionalism’—until then, media represented resisting austerity as Eurosceptic and isolationist. However, such critiques and the stigmatization of *Syriza* as fomenting protests and being ‘anti-EU’ actually had a reverse effect, as two female activists from Athens suggest: according to the 36-year-old teacher unionist ‘we all stopped reading newspapers and watching TV, the hatred against media is uniting people more than anything else!’, while a 32-year-old base unionist not supporting *Syriza* notes that ‘all of us taking part in resistance, we were labelled “syrizaioi” (Syriza supporters) . . . it was them (the elites and media) that led people to ally with Syriza, not Syriza!’ What the party actually did was to provide a broad frame of interpretation that brought together numerous fragmented protests and different people around the country: a 43-year-old male party member working for the social media committee comments that ‘the attack by the media was so fierce, that you couldn’t do otherwise!’ While Mosca and Quaranta in this volume examine what kind of EU representations are provided through different media outlets (traditional vs digital), this reading would be misleading in the Greek case, for which social media have been the main available platform to articulate a critical EU stance—even if *Syriza* made little, if any, use of alternative media strategies. *Syriza* changed the terms of the debate: the issue was not the country’s participation in the EU, but the EU itself, a ‘social’ versus a ‘neoliberal’ Europe. Echoing grievances and popular claims, the party defended social justice, solidarity and equality, democracy and rule of law, democratic accountability and decency, as both domestic and European foundations to be restored. The party’s 2014 pre-electoral slogan was ‘We are voting for Greece, we are voting for another Europe’.

In 2011, the young 36-year-old leader of *Syriza* called in a political declaration for a ‘unity of the left’ so as to ‘govern the country’.<sup>6</sup> This appeal, even if it sounded utopian at the time, generated a remarkable

shift in framing by shifting attention from resisting to claiming power. It is as if *Syriza* recognized and addressed itself to all those people suffering from an unjust (understanding of) austerity, to this 'broad alliance of this new social majority' (Syriza 2013), by providing them with agency and hope: this is how this fringe coalition was transformed from a protest to a ruling party. The party came to power in 2015 with the slogan 'Hope is Coming, Greece is Moving Forward, Europe is Changing'. This was echoing the broad anti-austerity movements which attributed the roots and the disastrous handling of the crisis to a political (domestic and European) establishment, which, however, was not rejected. Public opinion developed into 'Euro-critical' rather than 'Euro-rejectionist' directions representing 'a move away from the norm of consensus governance and depoliticisation of the content of EU policies to one of conflict and politicisation' (Clements et al. 2014, p. 262). In April 2013, the party's leader said: 'We are euroscepticists. Exactly because we believe in the idea of pure Europeanism, in the Europe of solidarity, social needs and its peoples'. But a year later they stated: 'We are not euroscepticists. We are denying their Europe, the one that belongs to banks and signifies austerity and authoritarianism. This Europe is dangerous and repulsive.'<sup>7</sup> Contradictory at a first sight, this discourse signals that those who are actually criticizing Europe are the unfair austerity policies and the autarchic domestic and European elites. In wanting more Europe and challenging hegemonic framing, Euroscepticism proved irrelevant.

More than ten among the interviewees suggest that during its first months in power, *Syriza* shifted the terms of the debate on the crisis at a European, if not international level: a national problem was proved European and 'another Europe' entered the social imaginary. But negotiations with the lenders reached a dead end and Alexis Tsipras announced a referendum on 5 July to decide whether Greece would accept the bailout conditions proposed jointly by the European Commission (EC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB). Through a fierce 'pro-yes' campaign waged by political and business elites and launched through all mainstream media, this was soon turned into a vote for/against the country's EU membership. Still, against all the negative media coverage, the 'No' won an impressive 61.3 per cent following a massive grassroots horizontal campaign, also through alternative media platforms.

This notwithstanding, three days later, the Greek delegation signed a new Memorandum of Understanding that passed sweeping austerity measures demanded by lenders in order to receive a new euro-bailout package. Since then, *Syriza* implements austerity. This development has increased criticism of EU politics and policies and contributed to even more frustration towards Europe: 'It is not a matter of opinion anymore ... After the 12th of July, this is a given fact. Who can possibly believe in Europe anymore?', comments a 41-year-old male party member, who resigned after the summer 2015 developments. Respondents are critical towards *Syriza*, but also self-critical, as evident in the case of the 31-year-old member of the *Youth of Syriza*, which collectively resigned from the party: 'Eurozone cannot be transformed. We believed in the people of Europe, but we had not calculated that the a-symmetrical development of capitalism meant also non-identical political struggles. We were wrong'. For a short period of time, *Syriza's* framing challenged austerity and inequality, not only for Greek people but also for people around Europe, which had emerged as an opportunity for creating solidarity and combatting xenophobia. A 52-year-old female activist comments: 'Now we all know what Europe is about'. After the summer of 2015, the idea of Europe triggers resignation and deep disillusionment.

## Podemos Framing Europe

Traditionally, Spain has been characterized as one of the countries where main political parties are in favour of the European integration process (Sánchez-Cuenca 2000). In fact, Spain has traditionally been presented as a case of consensual Europeanization (Vázquez 2012). Therefore, divergences between parties have not emerged as in other countries (Vázquez et al. 2010), and, at the same time, hard Euroscepticism (Szerbiak and Taggart 2003) has not been a characteristic of Spanish parties' discourse. In fact, no significant opposition to European integration has been promoted, except for very minoritarian right-wing parties. Moreover, Euroscepticism has not been used as a direct framing by main political parties in Spain (Benedetto and Quaglia 2007). Only a soft Euroscepticism in Spanish parties has been noted. In the case of PP, this soft euroscepticism

is oriented against a federal model of the EU. In the case of centre-left and, especially, of the left, the critique is towards the underdevelopment of social policies and the democratic deficit of European institutions (Vázquez et al. 2010; Jiménez and Egea de Har 2011).

To begin with, the European framework was extremely important in the general framing of *Podemos* during the first months since the launching of the party. As Pablo Iglesias, *Podemos*' leader, observes: 'the strategy we have followed is to articulate a discourse on the recovery of sovereignty, on social rights, even human rights, in a European framework' (2015). At the same time, in the initial party Manifesto 'Mover ficha: convertir la indignación en cambio político' (Making a Move: Turning Indignation into Political Change), criticism is addressed against the 'crisis of legitimacy of the EU' with references to the 'financial Coup d'Etat against Southern European countries'. In addition, the Programme for European elections particularly underlines the lack of democracy of EC institutions. In this sense, *Podemos*' framing on Europe might be allocated in a kind of leftist soft euroscepticism, very similar to the one developed by *Izquierda Unida* (IU). This ambiguity is explained by a *Podemos* activist in Madrid:

There is a paradox on this because most of *Podemos*' voters are the most Eurosceptic ones in Spain. However, *Podemos*' discourse on Europe has been very pro-European but critical. For me this has been very interesting and similar to the one displayed by *Syriza*. We are against the EU as it is constituted but we are in favor of a new type of relations in Europe, we need more Europe to overcome the crisis, we are against a Europe of two speeds, the center and the periphery, etc. It is true that even the discourse was not Eurosceptic. The perception was that *Podemos* was the party challenging more the neoliberal order in Europe, maybe because *Podemos* put much emphasis on the issue of sovereignty. That is, to exit the crisis, overcome austerity and restoring democracy we need to recover the national sovereignty that has been taken from us within the EU and globalization. And this, I think it's an interesting balance. We need to recover the ability and the power to decide, but we do not want to be isolated (I12S).

This ambivalence towards Europe is reflected in the European election results. According to the post-European elections analysis of CIS,

*Podemos'* supporters were more interested than the average in the EU (62.4 per cent vs 42.9 per cent) and were much more opposed to it, being in fact the most eurosceptic party voters: 23.4 per cent are 'quite or very much against' EU, compared to the 13.4 per cent of the average. For instance, the voters of *Podemos* are more Eurosceptical than the ones of IU who, traditionally, were the most opposed to the EU (Ramiro and Gómez 2016). *Podemos'* voters blame EU for the Spanish economic situation more than the Government and they do this more than other citizens (CIS June 2014). However, *Podemos* has always tried to appear ideologically different from the rightist and eurosceptic populist parties. The defence of a leftist populism has meant in the case of *Podemos*, a deep critique to the EU but also a defence of Europe, migrant population, refugees, democracy and social rights.

In this sense, the reform of the article 135 of the Spanish Constitution was one of the main critiques made by *Podemos* towards PSOE and PP, as a symbol of austerity policies adopted in Spain but launched by the EU. This reform, applied by the Zapatero's government in 2011 under the pressure of EU institutions was oriented to ensure the payment of the public debt. It was used by *Podemos* during the electoral campaign as a perfect example 'of the lack of sovereignty and the dictatorship of the debt in Europe'.

The intensive and strategic use of social media by *Podemos* was oriented to strengthen the main points of this critique towards the neoliberal model of EU. This orientation has been used by mainstream media to compare the politics of *Podemos* with the evolution of *Syriza* in Greece and trying to discredit the political manifestos of *Podemos*. Furthermore, some of the Spanish mainstream media have tried to associate *Podemos* with the far-right positions towards the EU. However, *Podemos* has (more and more) to present itself as pro-European party, as a kind of a new social democracy in Europe and as an attempt for a new social and democratic contract.

In the same vein, the strategy of the party was focused on the idea of creating alliances with other alternative political forces, such as *Syriza* in Greece, in order to negotiate in better conditions with European institutions. In this sense, *Podemos* has repeatedly shown its support to *Syriza*, also in the last Greek general elections (September 2015). This support was broadly shared by the activists of *Podemos* who, according

our interviews, observed the electoral success of Syriza as a 'chance for another Europe'. However, the 'political defeat' of *Syriza's* government after the referendum in July of 2015 was also a real political problem for *Podemos*. The mainstream media in Spain tried to use this situation to undermine the idea on 'political change' developed by *Podemos*. Even though this did not provoke a declining electoral support it had a clear effect on the party: the references about Europe and *Syriza* did disappear from the main discourses of the leaders of *Podemos*. In fact, the issue 'Europe' was mostly absent from the electoral debates in the Spanish general elections in December 2015. This issue (Europe) was in fact a problem not only for the majoritarian parties but also for *Podemos* due to the agreement on a new memorandum in Greece. This situation worsened in the general elections in June 2016, when the Spanish mass media hold that a victory of *Podemos* might lead to a similar scenario to that provoked by the 'Brexit' in the UK. Even if *Podemos* actively participated in the 'Remain' campaign, the triumph of the Brexit and the other parties and media' discourse of fear and uncertainty might have affected the electoral results. In this sense, the moderation of the electoral manifesto of *Podemos* was visible in some issues related to Europe, such as the problem of the public debt. Thus, if in the 2014 European elections the party defended 'not paying the debt', in the national elections the proposal was to restructure and negotiate the debt with European institutions.

Regarding the party's alliances in the European parliament, *Podemos* decided to join the group of the GUE/NGL with the parties of the European Left in what was considered as a clear signal of *Podemos'* ideology, its specific idea on Europe and the intention to create a political coalition in order to overcome austerity policies at the European level. At the same time, recently, Iglesias has also stated his support to Jeremy Corbyn's victory in the primary election of the British *Labour party*, stressing the parallelisms between the evolution of PSOE and labour's 'third way' and the need for a new social democracy capable to challenge the current model of EU.

In this line, some of the most representative politicians of *Podemos* have repeatedly claimed that 'EU is the problem, (more) Europe is the only solution'. Moreover, some representatives of the most radical wing of *Podemos* have launched the initiative for a 'Plan B' in Europe and have also joined the '*DIEM25*' movement led by Varoufakis. In the same vein,

*Podemos* has launched a public campaign against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the trade negotiated between EU and USA. Around this campaign, *Podemos* is seeking to denounce the neoliberal project of the EU and also to incorporate the demands of some of the most active social movements in Spain claiming for another Europe.

## Conclusion

In sum, the economic crisis and, especially, the austerity policies imposed on some countries in order to address it, have triggered a socio-economic and political crisis that has strongly affected trust in EU institutions. As we have shown, anti-austerity protests did not evolve around the dilemma 'pro-EU' or 'against-EU', as presented by mainstream media, but rather as a criticism, or even opposition, towards EU politics (considered as undemocratic) and policies (considered as supporting the interests of the few). At the 'polity' level, mobilizations stressed instead the need for some form of supranational governance. Departing from this anti-austerity wave of protests, movement parties like *Syriza* and *Podemos* claimed 'another Europe' fuelled to a certain extent by 'Euro-enthusiast' visions referring to a 'positive' integration model based on social and inclusive policies and democratic institutions. In the present era of increasing and pervasive contestation of the EU, mistrust towards European institutions, their politics and policies can be based on very different frames and imply different solutions. Against this background, the present volume attempts to bring together and bridge different approaches to and subcategorizations of the term 'Euroscepticism' in the context of challenges and opportunities provided by traditional and new media (see Caiani and Guerra, this volume). Within this context, *Syriza* and *Podemos* are considered as Eurosceptic parties of the 'soft' type: still, on the one hand, these are among the few critical parliamentary voices that claim a return to the visions of the founding fathers of Europeanism, seen as a project of solidarity and peaceful development. On the other, they indeed locate themselves within the critical Europeanism promoted by the global justice movement in general and the European social forum in particular, which called for a social Europe and a Europe from below

(della Porta et al. 2006; della Porta 2009). At the same time, a remarkable shift is that the trust of the social movements in the possibility to push for changes from the inside of EU institutions drastically declined, particularly where the 'memoranda' of doubtful democratic quality have dramatically reduced the capacity by (and even pretention of) national governments to be accountable to their own electorate. As for the role of media, in both Greece and Spain, mainstream media have adopted a pro-EU discourse aligning themselves with pro-austerity, delegitimized ruling parties, political elites and EU institutions. It is exactly this constellation of actors that gave shape to the establishment harshly attacked by anti-austerity mobilizations and movement parties in both countries. *Syriza* and *Podemos* rose in popularity during the crisis by criticizing this power apparatus, including the media, for reproducing inequality and injustice and by putting forward a critical vision of Europe based upon solidarity.

## Notes

1. Both the list of interviewees and the questionnaire are available from the authors upon request.
2. Eurobarometer no. 80, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb80/eb80_en.htm).
3. Pew Research Center, *Euroscepticism beyond Brexit*, 2016, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/06/07/euroskepticism-beyond-brexite/>.
4. See Hara Kouki, "European Crisis Discourses: The Case of Greece," in *Crisis Discourses in Europe: Media EU-phemisms and Alternative Narratives*, ed. Tamsin Murray-Leach, London School of Economics, 2014, 16–20, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/CSHS/pdfs/Crisis-Discourses-in-Europe.pdf>.
5. Opinion poll by VPRC, at <http://goo.gl/B01Qje> (in Greek).
6. Alexis Tsipras, *Statement after the Meeting Between Political Leaders*, May 27, 2011, <http://goo.gl/BIFTma>.
7. Alexis Tsipras, *Press Conference*, April 3, 2013, <http://goo.gl/1u6X9P> / and 2014, *Statement in Support for Alexis Tsipras' Candidacy for the EC*, May 8, 2014, <http://goo.gl/5oFsdN>.



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# EU u-Government: A Solution for More Citizen Participation in EU Policy-Making

Evangelos Fanoulis and Anasol Peña-Rios

## Introduction

The Lisbon Treaty established a system of governance with its actors to be the EU institutions, the member-states (MS) and the citizens. These three groups of political actors are entangled in a model of representative democracy as mentioned in Article 10 of the Lisbon Treaty. However, in the very same article, the Treaty talks about a decision-making process that remains open to the citizen through direct civic engagement. There is a controversy here that associates with the quality of representation and legitimacy of EU governance, central themes of this book;

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and it also relates to a *how* research question of strong normative nature, which appears particularly crucial for a book focusing on EU democracy and legitimacy: How can citizens take full advantage of their right to get directly involved in EU policy-making procedures when EU governance is based on multi-level representation?

A lot of academic ink has been spilled on the above question. On the one side, scholars have supported that democracy is the business of nation-states and not easily feasible for a group of countries (Miller 1994); that the EU is adequately democratic as it is, *id est* an aggregation of liberal democracies (Moravcsik 2003); and that forms of participatory governance are more suitable for geographically small and nationally homogenous political entities such as the city-states in ancient Greece or the cantons in Switzerland (Dahl 1998; Saward 1998). The EU consists instead of a number of different countries, with different political and democratic cultures and traditions. Such variation can only be supported by representative democracy, which remedies problems of time and space related to supranational governance. Direct democracy necessitates political, cultural and democratic harmonisation that is not the rule but the exception in the EU.

On the other side, scholars of deliberative democracy (Habermas 2012; Bohman 2007) and EU democracy experts (Eriksen and Fossum 2000, 2008, 2011; Schmidt 2006; Kohler-Koch 2007, 2011) have argued that more citizen participation in the formation of EU policies is still feasible and beneficial for the quality of EU democracy. Citizens can actively engage in politics by participating in open public fora where they can freely discuss EU politics and policies (Bohman 2007; Warren 2009a). Their feedback can then be transferred through civil society groups to the EU institutions. The open and transparent citizen participation in EU affairs is expected to result in more civic trust in EU politics, leading to more active citizens, to sentiments of civic proximity and eventually to the consolidation of an EU *demos* (Dryzek 1999; Bohman 2007; Habermas in McCormick 2007).

In reality, citizens' voice is not uncompromisingly heard by practitioners and legislators at the EU level because it is filtered through the civil society organisations (CSOs) (Friedrich 2011; Kohler-Koch and Quittkat 2011) and the media, as we see in the previous chapters of this book and Caiani

and Guerra mention in the Introduction. In particular regarding the CSOs, the accountability mechanisms to supervise whether these groups adamantly transfer the citizens' voices to EU institutions are lacking. Moreover, due to the absence of a unified and integrated EU public sphere, any civic attempts to participate more actively in EU politics are framed within national borders and can draw back to discussions on how national politics are led, hence bypassing the EU dimension.<sup>1</sup> And of course there are factors downgrading citizen participation in EU governance, which flow from the very own operation of the EU. If the voice of citizens eventually reaches the EU institutions, it may be distorted due to bureaucratic procedures since another round of discussions, often less visible and less transparent, occurs within the intra-institutional European order.

The problems described here should not be tagged to civic engagement with governance but to representation and its paradoxical nature according to which, as Runciman (2007, pp. 94–99) notes, citizens in representative democracies are expected to be simultaneously present and absent in their own governance. It is at the stage of transferring the demands—from individuals to CSOs and national representatives, from the latter to EU institutions—that the distorting effect on the civic voice happens. Quoting Hirst, Chryssochoou (2001, p. 249) talks about 'the institutional limitation of liberal representative democracy'. For correcting such limitations in EU, one may have to proceed towards radical institutional re-design (new EU Treaties, new rules of how EU institutions work, radical changes in the supranational legislation) (Warren 2009b). Or one can intervene in how civic engagement in EU politics is organised and conducted, trying to fix as many as possible of the cons of the present mixture of civic participation, consultation and representation, without affecting the value-added of direct civic engagement for legitimacy. To achieve this, we argue that *based on mixed reality technology, digitalised citizen participation in EU policy formation can address objections against participatory democracy and remedy ineffective perspectives of participatory governance*.

There are three basic parameters contextualising and narrowing down the argument. First, the narrative of this chapter adopts a perspective of how EU democracy could be in the future. This does not mean providing a surreal claim but implies instead a normatively informed argument that

is feasible, thanks to the technological reality of the twenty-first century. Second, the argument depends on the progress of political integration in the EU. We presume that despite the crises that the EU currently faces and despite the rising and evolving nature of Euroscepticism that Guerra describes in the second chapter, political unification of the MS will continue (without being able to predict its timeline). Thirdly, the suggested technical model aims at effectively increasing citizens' input during the initial, brainstorming phases of 'policy-shaping' in the EU. It is not about totally bypassing the elected representatives, bestowing upon citizens the authority to make final decisions.

There have already been a few efforts to apply digital technologies in order to increase civic participation in policy-making. In 2014, we saw the *European Green Party* organising an e-voting procedure for the Green Primaries, allowing citizens to choose the leading Green candidates for the European elections (OneEurope [undated](#)). Further, Moreno-Jiménez et al. (2013) have elaborated on a cognitive perspective of e-democracy ('e-cognocracy'), where online consultations ensure open public access to the policy design and free flow of knowledge between policy end-users. Whereas Ferro et al. (2013) have suggested a broad use of social media for a more transparent, inclusive and participatory policy-making. Both groups of researchers have shown empirical applications of their ideas, the former in Spain the latter in Italy. One cannot dismiss, though, that these applications have a primarily *localised* character—Moreno-Jiménez et al. apply their model in a Spanish municipality, Ferro et al. in an Italian tele-medicine project. In contrast, this book chapter sets the conceptual foundations for a *transnational* application of participatory policy-making with the aid of digital technologies. In addition, whereas e-government and open data applications in governance are nowadays frequently met, academic studies on the use of u-government in democratic politics are extremely rare and in the EU context almost non-existent (see references below to the pioneering +Spaces project).

Along these lines, our overall objective is a technologically applicable proposal for increasing citizen participation in EU governance in the long run. In addition, the suggested institutional engineering can increase the transparency of EU policy-making—allowing more robust accountability mechanisms. It also gives equal opportunities on the one

hand to Eurosceptic voices to be expressed in the context of the political opposition to the direction that European integration has taken during the last decades (see Introduction by Caiani and Guerra), and on the other to Euroenthusiasts to encounter the Eurosceptic arguments by drawing their own case.

## **u-Government: Basic Notions, Principles and Existing Efforts**

It is undeniable that nowadays information and communication technologies (ICTs) are everywhere, changing the way people interact between themselves and with their environment in everyday tasks (see also the chapter by Heft et al. on the interactions among political parties and the EU in this volume). The computational evolution has changed human-computer interactions, creating new forms of communication and transaction between individuals, between governments, and between individuals and governments. Riley (2001, p. 125) has defined electronic governance (e-governance) as ‘the commitment to utilize appropriate technologies to enhance governmental relationships, both internal and external, in order to advance democratic expression, human dignity and autonomy, support economic development and encourage the fair and efficient delivery of services’. Thus, e-governance refers to regulations and procedures involved in the use of technologies during interactions between citizens and governments (C2G, G2C), and governments to governments (G2G). e-Governance comprises electronic government (e-government) and electronic democracy (e-democracy) (Okot-Uma 2001). e-Government can be understood as the electronic delivery of information and services using ICTs, providing access to government agencies and institutions, whereas e-democracy involves the active participation of citizens in matters of public concern using the mechanisms created by e-government developments (Norris 2010; Freeman and Quirke 2013). Clift (2000) highlights that e-democracy enables participation in democratic procedures at different granularity levels (communities, states/regions, countries, global), allowing access to government information and interactivity.



Anticipating that one day technology would be everywhere, Mark Weiser (1991, p. 95) defined Ubiquitous Computing as ‘the age of calm technology’ in which computers are ‘so embedded, so fitting, so natural, that we use them without even thinking about it’. This has been majorly experienced with the increasing use of mobile devices, which have enabled access to e-government mechanisms for the population (m-government), providing greater opportunities for social impact (Anttiroiko 2006; Poblet 2011), with 24/7 availability, thanks to the advances of pervasive networks and services (Ridgway 2006). This is known as Ubiquitous Government (u-government). u-Government aims to integrate ubiquitous emergent technologies seamlessly into everyday smart environments consisting of embedded and interconnected devices, providing citizens with smart services in the era of the ‘Internet of Things’ (Oja and Schrader 2008). A generic u-government service should be constantly available, context-aware and seamlessly integrated into the environment of the users (Oja 2008).

Different technologies can be used to create u-government services.<sup>2</sup> The chapter focuses mainly on mixed reality technology, which is the product of merging real and virtual worlds to produce new environments and visualisations where physical and digital objects co-exist and interact in *real time* (Milgram and Kishino 1994). A virtual world or virtual space is a technology-simulated environment that enables users to simulate physical presence or displacement in another location (Ellis 1994). Videoconferences, traditional phones, chat-rooms represent connections into a different (remote) reality, where users can be simultaneously in both local and remote realities (with physical and virtual data co-present), embedding themselves into the activity they perform and able to switch between different realities.

Using mixed reality technology in policy-making is still at pilot and experimenting stage. The EU-funded + Spaces project (Positive Spaces—POlICY SIMulaTION in Virtual Spaces) explored the use of mixed reality technology to estimate the impact of prospective changes in legislation for more effective and more inclusive policy-making, and to measure public opinion on a large scale (Tserpes et al. 2010). This pioneering project utilised online polls, debates and structured role-play activities to act out in the virtual world simulation scenarios of policy consultations

(Gardner and Horan 2011). The fact that one of the participants in the +Spaces project was the Greek Parliament could be seen as a sign of political willingness to empirically apply the results of the project.

The use of digital technologies, especially of the Internet, in governance has not been without criticisms (Caiani and Parenti 2013). Previous studies on user acceptance (BMRB International 2002; Zalesak 2002) raised concerns about the lack of technology skills, about the engagement and openness of prospective users to digital technologies and about socio-cultural barriers.

On technological dexterity, levels of engagement and openness, and socio-cultural barriers, the EU's Digital agenda for Europe has aimed to create a single digital market based on fast or ultra-fast Internet, common platforms, interoperability and data exchange (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2012). Some of the goals of the Agenda were to provide broadband access for all EU inhabitants by 2010 and to enable access to much higher Internet speeds in European households by 2020 (European Commission undated 1).<sup>3</sup> Hilbert (2007, pp. 79–81) notes that the application of digital technologies for increasing citizen participation in governance still has to deal with the 'digital divide', with some of the citizens being more able than others to use digital technologies to engage in their governance, hence resulting into potential discriminations and distorting effects on citizen representation. However, if we consider the increasing number of 'digital natives', individuals who have always been surrounded by, and interacted with new technologies (Prensky 2001) versus the number of 'digital immigrants', the potential use of technology in different ambits of people's lives, including citizen participation, keeps growing. The future-oriented discussion of this chapter capitalises on this gradual increase of Internet penetration in our daily lives and the effort to render it more affordable and inclusive, as registered by the examples above and by the EU's e-Inclusion policy which 'ensures that no one is left behind and promotes the use of ICTs to overcome exclusion' (European Commission undated 3). Now, with regard to the more specific application of emerging technologies and paradigms in functions of the public sector, the EU Commission already uses e-government services for getting public feedback on EU policy-making. Yet, as Badouard (2010) notes, online platforms for e-participation inspired by e-government such

as the ‘European Citizens’ Consultation’ and ‘Your Voice in Europe’ are primarily used by CSOs and to a lesser degree by individual citizens. Contrastingly and as it will be shown below, u-government can open up EU participatory governance towards the individual citizen.

An additional, technical, factor discouraging citizen participation in online consultations is authentication and identification; both also associate with the production of valid results. The European Commission makes efforts to create a unified electronic identification (eID) for all European citizens. The EU-led STORK project (Secure idenTity acrOss boRders linKed 2.0) aims at establishing interoperability of different approaches at national and EU level, creating eIDs for persons and legal entities, and constructing the facilities to authorise such electronic identities (European Commission [undated 1](#)). Investing in all these efforts, EU institutions take note of data safety and protection of basic freedoms of citizens (e.g., privacy, freedom of expression) when the latter choose to interact online with EU governance. Therefore, any technical initiatives have been developed according to EU legislation protecting the citizen/end-user such as the Data Protection Directive and the ePrivacy Directive (European Commission [undated 2](#)).

Mixed reality technology combined with the eID STORK project and the pan-European databases (e.g., Schengen Information System) do provide the essential technical elements for the creation of a digital and secure platform to support more civic involvement in EU governance. The examples of EU-led projects and studies demonstrate that the EU institutions have already applied e-government in EU public administration. What is still virgin ground, though, is the application of u-government as a tool serving EU democracy.

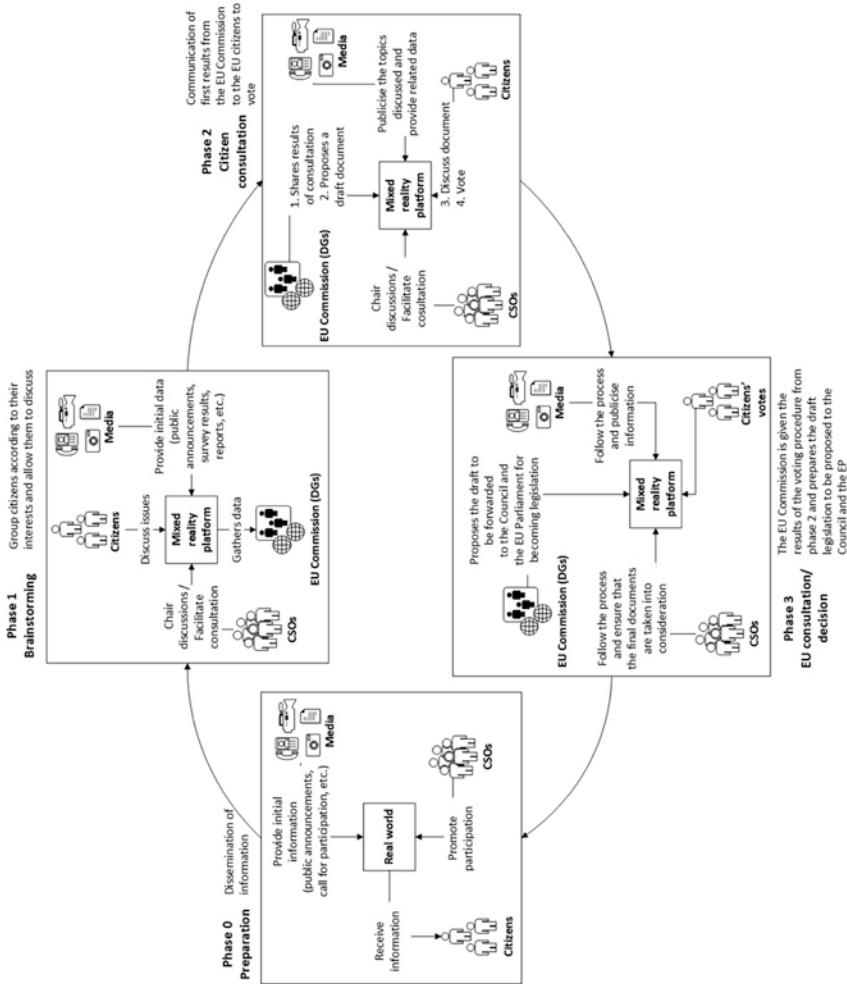
## Democratic Practices and u-Government at EU Level

u-Government affects both the time needed and the spatial limitations that restrict direct citizen participation in EU governance. Virtual spaces fundamentally reduce the time required for participating in policy-making procedures. This is because the time political actors need to consult with

each other and agree on a matter is less if their physical presence is not required. Consultations in the virtual world do not demand participants to physically gather at a specific venue for debating. Further, virtual spaces can compensate for the fact that some civic participation activities (e.g., voting practices) are by definition temporally asynchronous (see Fig. 1). A third asset is that discussions can be structured within the cyber-space to avoid temporal transaction costs, defined here as the time needed for the different opinions to be accumulated and transferred to the next level of EU policy-making procedure.<sup>4</sup> We expect temporal transaction costs to be significantly less in the virtual world because computational power compiles data more quickly than any human agent.

Regarding space limitations, u-government is what the term says: ubiquitous. It reshapes the understanding of space in governance. With u-government applications it is no more important where the political actors are as long as they can access the technological platforms. In addition, surpassing spatial limitations has an impact on the variety of political actors that can be potentially involved in EU policy-making. To date, it has been mostly the representatives of citizens who are available for public discussions. In virtual spaces, though, CSOs, the media and individuals from all MS can bypass where they physically are and participate in the making of EU politics and policies. This allows the development of large platforms of public discussion; it also limits the role of civil society groups as intermediaries in the policy design, yet without minimising it (see Fig. 1).

An application of u-government for fostering broader public consultations on EU questions is not without disagreements. The main counter-view is that both time and physical presence of political actors are necessary in policy-making to make sure that they do not reach forced outcomes. Yet, technology does not force policies to be quickly formulated. The asset of mixed reality technology is that it can significantly minimise the temporal transaction costs of brainstorming at initial phases of policy-shaping. Put more succinctly, u-government platforms and tools can reduce the time necessary for citizen-to-citizen consultations and can more quickly transfer the results from citizen debates to national and EU statesmen, while allowing greater public input during the initial stage of policy-shaping.



**Fig. 1** Proposed process flow  
(Source: Designed by the authors)

According to a second counter-argument, face-to-face interactions offer flexibility in discussions thus avoiding stalemates in taking decisions. The physical interaction between participants leads to confidence building and bonds of collegial trust, which in their turn facilitate the decision-making process. The point is valid as long as one refers to high-level consultations among policy-makers. It is not valid for broad citizen participation during the initiation of a policy. In this case, the quality of the democratic dialogue depends less on the socialisation of high-ranking officials and more on the capacity of citizens to have some sort of say in the policy-making procedure. It can then be said that existing linguistic barriers will not allow citizens to experience extensive interactions with fellow European citizens from other MS. To a certain extent, this point is valid and it might well be that discussions should be at first place technically filtered so that citizens interact in the virtual world in a language they feel comfortable with. Yet, as translation software develops, the question may eventually be solved by setting in-built translation programmes in the mixed reality environment.

A third objection is that the virtual world itself cannot judge whether citizen dialogue proceeds in a democratically balanced manner. How can one be sure that the media or civil society groups do not try to promote their own agendas instead of the EU public interest? By exposing citizens simultaneously to information coming from the media, the civil society representatives and the practitioners, a system of checks and balances is gradually constructed within the virtual world. This guarantees that the above actors who feed the virtual world with input information will not be able to hegemonise the public debate. Thanks to the mixed reality technology citizens could triangulate information coming from different sources (both the virtual and real worlds) in a transparent environment, and consequently define their own stances towards the discussed matter. As we show below, a safety valve of democratic checks and balances within the virtual world can be technically installed by dint of modelling parameters.

A final counter-view relates to ethical dimensions such as intellectual property rights and the question of ownership. Who owns the online platform and the opinions expressed in its context? The virtual spaces will be created by software engineers, web-developers and ICT experts who will

themselves be accountable to EU institutions, answering to counter-views that the creators of the software are given disproportionate power over governance (Hilbert 2007). The minds behind a pan-European application of u-government will not be deprived of democratic responsibility. On the contrary, they will be recruited by the EU Commission's Directorate-General (DGs) for Informatics (DIGIT), working closely with and scrutinised by other DGs of the EU Commission (Communications Networks, Content and Technology; Joint Research Centre; Research and Innovation), and the results of their work will be presented to both the European Parliament and the Council of EU. The resultant software thus becomes corporate property of EU institutions and ideally and by extension belongs to all European citizens. The latter retain ownership of their ideas in the virtual world, and it is due to this reason that a process of accreditation described below is significant.

In sum, a mixed reality environment allows for more interaction with other participants in a public debate and with real-world data. Citizens can virtually approach fellow citizens and converse with them, no matter where they are physically stationed. True, an equal capacity to participate in the democratic dialogue does not mean equal leverage in policy-making. However, the democratic value-added of holding policy consultations in virtual spaces does not lie in equalising all voices of end-users. It is more about allowing everyone to have a say in policy-making if they wish so (Tully 2008), and also about increasing the transparency of the procedures and the openness of information.

That said, data security policies and user validation methods should be applied in order to enable the engagement only of individuals with permission to participate in virtual spaces (e.g., of minimum age, EU citizens). An example of user validation could be the use of a key-code handed in to European citizens as part of their identity cards. Without forcing them to frequently participate in EU policy consultations, at least citizens would know they can always do so.

Regarding civil society representatives, they will have three key responsibilities in the suggested model as depicted in Fig. 1. The first, which ideally already takes place and refers to the real world, is to be responsible for informing the citizens about EU policies debated in the virtual spaces (Phase zero). Information campaigns as well as training on how

to register, use and interact within the virtual spaces can become a central task for CSOs. Secondly, CSOs should participate in virtual spaces as Coordinators/Moderators of debates, ascertaining that discussions remain focused (Phases one and two). They thus contribute to the limitation of the 'information overload', without imposing their own agendas on discussions. A third duty for civil society groups will be to check how elected representatives cope with citizens' reactions, granting transparency to policy-shaping and functioning as an accountability mechanism (Phase three). In addition, CSOs should report proceedings from Brussels back to the citizens and keep them updated concerning policy formation, showing whether EU institutions are adequately responsive to the civic views (Phase zero). Last but not least, civil society groups are expected to look out for each other, ensuring that none of them is monopolising and hegemonising the virtual spaces.

A number of decisions need to be taken in the context of online debates and between end-users to unravel the most prevalent civic views on discussed matters, consequently avoiding an 'information overload'. Any necessary decision-taking by dint of voting is facilitated in the virtual world. Some users may be eager to be involved in discussions at very early stages of policy-making (active users—Phase one) while others may prefer only to vote on already determined proposals (passive users—Phase two). Does the model introduce a discriminatory factor since some of the users may be more informed than others before the virtual ballot box? Mixed reality technology, in collaboration with the real-world media, ensures flow of information in both real and virtual worlds, increasing the awareness and information levels of both active and passive users and hence weakening the above concern. Consequently, users can participate in voting procedures under equal premises, regardless of the phase they decide to join the proposed process flow. On the details of voting, the end-users should be allowed to favour, object to or abstain from a vote. Both principles of simple majority and proportionality should be guaranteed so that the opinions reaching the elected representatives are supported by a considerable number of citizens coming from a considerable number of MS. This is not a radical point for EU politics. Similar rules have already been applied for the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI).



An example can help comprehension. Supposing that this innovative participatory platform is employed for a public consultation on the EU budget, at first place CSOs in cooperation with the real-world media would organise information campaigns to raise awareness about the online consultation and augment both interest and participation in it (Phase zero of Fig. 1).

The input from citizens would be accumulated, taxonomised and transferred to EU institutions (Phases one and two).<sup>5</sup> CSOs, most preferably those active as Coordinators/Moderators during Phase one, would ensure that practitioners take into account the digitalised voice of citizens. And with the aid of real-world media, civil society groups should broadly inform citizens about the progress of consultations both in real and virtual worlds (Phase three). By using both aspects of reality, civil society groups could stimulate interest for more civic participation in future policy-making procedures.

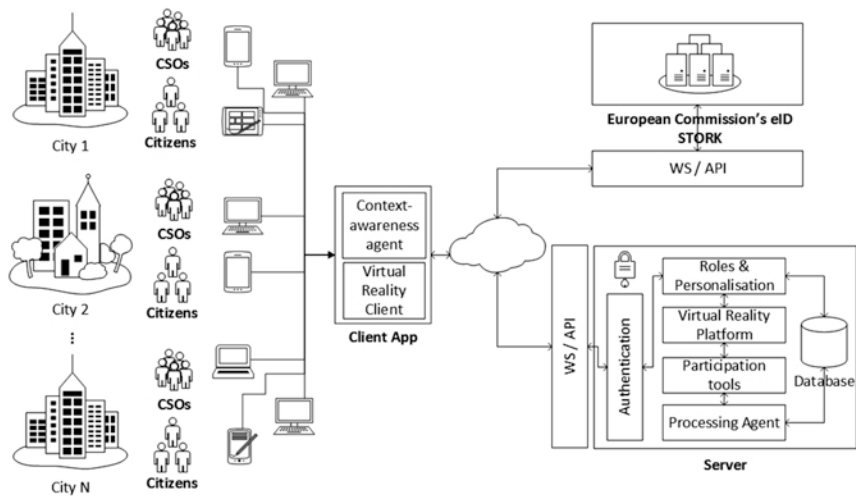
From their corner, the EU institutions could use the mixed reality technology to inform initial drafts of policy-making (Phase three). They could even set an elementary draft of the main aspects of EU budget at the voting discretion of citizens, asking for their opinion on the general content. The options for citizens to choose from could be demarcated as 'generally in favour', 'generally against' or 'please amend'. End-users should be able to modify their vote within a limited time-span, allowing for a change of mind due to the constant interaction with fellow citizens in the virtual spaces. The idea here is to introduce a pan-European direct practice for citizens to show initial approval or disapproval about EU questions of great concern such as the EU budget. Understandably, the process described above cannot occur for every piece of secondary EU legislation. This is not because it cannot be technically supported by the mixed reality technology but because the necessary information and awareness campaigns as well as post-consultation updates on behalf of CSOs need time to materialise.

It can be counter-argued that all the aforementioned points not only sound normatively good but also look like a science fiction scenario. To reply to this important objection, we proceed by further specifying the conceptual model for an EU policy consultation to take place in the virtual world with a large-scale participation of EU citizens.

## Mixed Reality as a Platform of EU u-Government: Technical Feasibility

We propose here a ubiquitous public collaborative conceptual model as an example of potential use of mixed reality technologies to allow more participation and better representation of citizens in EU governance. Our conceptualisation is mandatorily limited as there has been no actual application of mixed reality technology in questions of governance but as an experiment. Figure 2 outlines a proposal for the conceptual architecture. As stated before, the proposal includes participation from citizens and from civil society groups, where both are considered end-users but with different roles and permissions inside the mixed reality platform.

The functioning is as follows: first, the end-user utilises her device (PC, mobile device) to connect to the digital platform. In the case of a citizen, the authentication module will allow two different types of processes, anonymous participation or accredited participation. In the case of anonymous participation, a one-time password can be supplied to the user. In the case of accredited participation, user identification utilising



**Fig. 2** Conceptual model  
(Source: Designed by the authors)

multi-factor authentication is suggested to minimise security issues and identity impersonation. In the case of CSOs, the authentication module employed for assigning the role of a Moderator needs to first validate the credentials of the end-user; therefore, only accredited participation should be allowed. In both anonymous and accredited participation, the accrediting process will require the presentation of two or more of the three authentication factors: a knowledge factor ('something the user knows'), a possession factor ('something the user has') and an inherence factor ('something the user is'). An example could be the use of a password generated by the user along with the identification of a trusted device (a computer or mobile device previously registered), or with a Near Field Communication- (NFC) enabled device, such as a portable device or a national ID card. To grant access to the citizen, the platform can validate the data collected and stored by the Commission's eID service; if the user is a valid member, the system will allow her to access the platform. Valid member would be the user who covers either general restrictions—she is a citizen or legal permanent resident of a MS—or criteria imposed for participating in specific policy debates, for instance age and main interests. The pre-selection of main interests can be set on the 'roles & personalisation' module. In this module, citizens have the opportunity to select the topics in which they will collaborate and discuss, hence creating EU mini-publics that encourage civic interaction and at the same time minimise the 'information overload'.

Once the user is authenticated, the context-awareness agent identifies values that can range from geographical location to the type of device utilised for the session. If it detects a mobile device, then the interface switches to the mobile-based interface. From the perspective of the user, she has access to the virtual reality platform and, having her own personalised avatar, can participate in discussions, interact with the other users and Moderators of the discussions (Phases one and two of Fig. 1), and vote on proposals (Phase three of Fig. 1).

Finally once the activity is finished, the Processing Agent can send the results of the consultations to the database centrally managed by the Commission (DG DIGIT), which stores the data for later use and analysis (Phases and three of Fig. 1).

## Conclusion: Towards an EU e-Democracy?

This chapter has argued that the use of technology, specifically mixed reality, can help us enhance the democratic quality of citizen participation in EU governance. Adopting a broad definition of mixed reality, we have proposed here a ubiquitous public collaborative conceptual model to increase citizen participation in EU policy formation. Mixed reality technology defies barriers of time and space that the proponents of nation-based, representative EU democracy have put forward. It enables a more encompassing public policy debate that does not discriminate whether the citizen is a member of a CSO or not, whether she is German, Dane or Irish, and whether she is physically located in an urban centre or a rural town as long as she has access to the technological platform. Moreover, the suggested conceptual model takes into consideration issues of accountability, transparency and visibility of EU policy formation.

Certainly, there are limitations for establishing the model and make it work. Firstly, adequate political willingness on behalf of the EU and MS is necessary. This will highly depend on the profundity of EU political integration since the establishment of new modes of participatory governance imply high levels of institutionalisation of EU democratic practices, which in their turn seem plausible only in a further unified European political space. Secondly, there should be enough access to the technological tools for the population, and people should have the knowledge and willingness to use them, hence coping with the current 'digital divide'. A democratic EU u-government thus acquires a long-term perspective. Finally, a digitalised citizen participation in EU governance will be democratically productive and fruitful so far as it is constantly enriched with input data coming from the real world. The media, a principal topic in the analysis of this volume, and civil society groups should ascertain that citizens are kept aware of the occurring online debates and in addition that they are regularly updated with the latest news and developments coming from the real world. This is a core value-added of applying mixed reality technology here: it enables continuous interaction between the real and virtual worlds, rendering civic involvement both contemporary and pertinent.

There are significant democratic advantages of EU u-government that this chapter has not addressed. The first advantage relates to the notion of active citizenship. Being demarcated as an EU citizen due to rights emanating from the EU Treaties does not determine anyone as *active* citizen. In our account, the concept of active European citizenship is socially constructed through the constant engagement with EU politics, the direct involvement with EU policy formation, the engagement in direct EU democratic practices, in a nutshell through the practising of being a citizen. To a certain extent, this understanding of active citizenship overlaps with the idea of ‘citizenisation’ developed by agonistic democracy theorists (Tully 2008). The suggested application of mixed reality technology can hopefully enable EU citizens to ‘practise’ their European citizenship, to experience it and to experiment with it. Following from the latter point, being an active European citizen is a civic quality to be gradually learnt in the context of a practised EU democracy. With their focus on constant information, context-awareness and interaction with knowledge from the real world, virtual spaces can help in the education and creation of more active citizens and the gradual development of a European democratic culture. The chapter closes not with definite answers to all the problems that EU democracy faces but with a promise for future research on how to render an e-version of democracy in the EU more effective in a normative sense and more feasible in a technical sense.

## Notes

1. The few existing supranational, European platforms or pan-European public fora (e.g., ‘Your Voice in Europe’) that citizens could use to discuss EU activities are barely known to the citizens.
2. Just to name a few, RFID (Radio Frequency Identification), biometric devices, sensors, cloud technology and mobile services.
3. The 2012 e-government survey of the UN pointed an increase in mobile penetration, with a global average number of mobile subscriptions per 100 inhabitants of 88.5 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [2012]).
4. This excludes the mandatory time for processing the input data since this will be required in the virtual spaces as well.

5. The data from the online debates can be directly stored in a central server managed by the European Commission.

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# Europe Facing New Challenges of Contestation and Communication: Conclusion

Simona Guerra and Manuela Caiani

## Where We Are Coming From

We started working on this volume after a symposium held in Vienna in April 2015, where we examined the concept of Euroscepticism and the nature of opposition to EU integration, while studying the relationship between the media and European democracy. In particular, we addressed the role of ‘traditional media’, as well as ‘new media’, and whether these can be facilitator or obstacle to both European democracy

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and the development of European citizens, or *demos*, as suggested in chapter 12 of this book.

After the symposium, we started discussing moving beyond the current use of the concept of Euroscepticism, as mainly applied to political parties, and exploring opposition and critical attitudes, and the role of the media in this debate. We started from the reflection, that, although many empirical analyses, definitions and classifications of the phenomenon have been offered by political science and sociological research in the last two decades, today there are new challenges ahead that scholars interested in the topic have to deal with. On the one hand, looking at substantive aspects of EU opposition, with the Eurozone economic, political and even cultural crises, Euroscepticism is becoming a mainstream phenomenon, not anymore related to (and to be interpreted as) 'peripheral' political parties or portion of society. On the other, the increasing importance of the media, and especially new media, in politics (with related phenomena that have introduced new concepts and analytical lens in many branches of political science and political communication, for example, 'personalisation', 'disintermediation', 'news values', 'cascades effects') makes it often inevitable for scholars to consider the definition, representation and communication of opposition to the EU, as it is made on and through the media while considering the use of, and impact on, different types of political actors (citizens, movements, etc.).

From the point of view of communication spaces and tools, in the context of contested legitimacy of the European democracy, the media are crucial as an arena for political actors where to get informed, expressing their discontent, and, eventually, to contest the EU. Moreover, with the increasing relevance of political communication in social media, social science studies had to adapt to another big change, with the realm of mediated politics, previously mainly dominated by journalists, institutional actors and political elites, opening up to new actors (Chadwick 2006).

Meanwhile, the EU has been challenged by the Greek referendum, in July 2015, and the refugees' crisis, fuelling domestic debates across the EU member states. We worked on the final draft of the volume in the days of the British referendum, between June and July 2016.

The underlying questions of the book, addressing the emergence of Euroscepticism at this critical time and the role of the media between European democracy and the citizens find in the everyday experience of the EU and in this volume a wealth of theoretical and empirical evidence and answers.

## **What Is Old and What Is New: The Authors' Contribution**

The Brexit referendum, in Paul Taggart's words, has represented the 'culmination' of the relationship of the EU and the UK, but, as we stress in this volume, it has also signalled that Euroalternativism, as pro-systemic opposition, is widespread and increasing its salience. The necessity to build a supranational level of governance is often debated, as suggested by della Porta and colleagues in their contribution, however, the absence of transparency and accountability of the European institutions is denounced, while also underlying the weakness of social policies. As it has been noticed already some years ago by studies focusing on the first 'euro-critical' protests of social movements, these actors do not call for a return to the nation-state, but for a process of Europeanisation from below (della Porta and Caiani 2009). As such, we can interpret (part of) the current Euroscepticism, also confirmed by our book, adopting the suggestion of della Porta, Kouki and Fernandez in this volume, that the positions towards the EU have to be located within a crisis of legitimacy that affect also EU institutions.

The growing salience of the European integration issue in the public discourse, which has been demonstrated by different types of data of this volume, does not imply in fact increasing consensus on the EU polity or policies. The Eurobarometer 84, published in December 2015, shows that 38 per cent of citizens have a neutral image of the EU and the share of those citizens who see the EU negatively is still increasing. About 24 member states view decreasing trends and these are highest in Estonia (–13 per cent), Germany (–11 per cent) and the Czech Republic (–10 per cent), a founding member state and two new post-communist

member states. Although opposition towards the EU had been viewed as a temporary phenomenon, as seen, it has now moved to the mainstream and become a distinctive characteristic of the European integration process. More specifically, some of the contributions of this volume have confirmed what recent analyses on citizens' attitudes towards the EU underline: that a rational utilitarian dimension is at stake when looking at citizens' position towards the current Europe (Conti and Memoli 2015; Guerra 2013). EU attachment is affected by expectations towards future life expectations. In fact, what we often witness recently is that well-educated young people, generally the most positive towards the EU, perceive that their hopes towards the future are kicked back by the old generation, opportunities may not be met, and can turn towards more Eurosceptic attitudes. Against this background it is not surprising that a number of scholars from different background (law, political science, political theory, sociology) are starting to study current Euroscepticism through the lens of a crisis of solidarity (Grimmel 2017 forthcoming; Trenz 2017 forthcoming). As they claim, the European Union, although widely considered to be the world's most successful and influential regional integration project, never before in its history has been confronted with such numerous challenges, among which: the increasing terroristic attacks, the financial crisis, the refugees emergency and the consolidation of nationalist and separatist movements in many European countries. 'The gravity of the current state of affairs has reached a point where even leading Europeanists no longer consider it impossible for the EU to fall apart. It is in this time of crisis that the EU reveals a "fault line" that goes deeper than the well-known shortcomings in the EU's construction and its problem solving capacities: a crisis of solidarity' (Grimmel 2017 forthcoming). Paradoxically, as showed by Pavan and Caiani in their contribution, also the populist right-wing groups are criticising the EU for a lack of transparency, and they call for 'solidarity' among the European people(s), although they have an ethnic- based conception of 'the people' and are sympathetic of welfare chauvinism, which is in contradiction with transnational solidarity across European states.

Moving from this substantive reflection on current forms of Euroscepticism, to the related theoretical and methodological consequences for scholars which deal with it, this means that, as such, research

can and should move beyond the study of party-based Euroscepticism. Public opinion, civil society and movements and groups can provide new avenues of research that the literature has just started exploring (integrating qualitative and quantitative data and mixed methods for further disentangling the phenomenon). In fact, as some chapters have illustrated (see Pavan and Caiani), research in the field could profit from going beyond the observation of a growing scepticism, distinguishing instead the images of Europe around, which consensus and/or dissent emerges (even within 'morally' contested communities, as the right-wing populist nationalistic ones, which are growing in popularity all across Europe). For instance, the specificity of a 'critical consensus' of the radical left, exemplified in this book with the cases of Syriza and Podemos, can be explained by the characteristics of the European construction process and its inherent tension between an instrumental and identitarian vision of the EU, prevailing, the latter among actors from below (social movements, civil society, new party-movements) (della Porta et al. in this volume).

There are pressing questions on the strategies, the actors, the institutions and the articulation of Euroscepticism that we have here offered and explored, by providing the first answers within an interdisciplinary analysis, bringing together comparative politics, European studies, international relations, media studies and social movements research.

As Patrick Bijsmans addresses, we may need to refer to a more nuanced study of Euroscepticism, although the more fine grained the concept, the more challenging the measurement and definition. Yet, supporting that critical attitudes predominantly pertain alternative ideas of Europe that are pro-EU, as a system and institutional organisation, he finds that Eurosceptic claims generally refers to the policy and not to the polity, with reference to Euroalternativism. As such, this volume would invite to an in-depth analysis of the qualification of Euroscepticism, as also when it becomes more salient in the public debates, it is likely to represent qualified opposition to policies, less opposition towards the EU itself. As also supported by Leruth (et al., in this volume), we should remain attentive in order to understand the critical voices towards the EU.

## ... And the Role of the Media

Media choices as noted by Bijsmans, Galpin and Trenz, and others in this volume, play a role in this context. Our volume has showed that:

- (i) There is likely a different pattern between traditional media (that would influence more positively citizens attitudes towards the EU process) and Internet (which would tend instead to forge more pessimistic opinions about the EU process) (Conti and Memoli; Mosca and Quaranta, this volume);
- (ii) Beyond endogenous factors (e.g. media-driven factors in the words of Galpin and Trenz), media negativity or negative feelings towards the EU formed by and on the media, also may depend on external factors, such the political actors that mobilise them or the audience towards the news about the EU are addressed;
- (iii) Beyond media and the meso-level of political actors, also the country context matter in shaping the relation between the media (old and new) and Euroscepticism. In particular, consistently with long-term cultural differences, the same type of media provides different images of the EU in diverse countries and domestic political cultures. For example, as Mosca and Quaranta show, users of traditional media are associated with more EU trust in Italy, traditionally one of the most European member states, and where there is traditional media have been found more supportive of the EU, less so in other countries (as in Germany or in the UK).

The research on politics and the media, and especially the new media, has often been divided between two different and contrasting paradigms: the 'technological determinism', looking at new technologies (as well as the same can be said for traditional media and journalistic factors) as autonomous forces able to drive the social and political change and the 'social determinism', which instead, believes that social forces and political actors transform and adapt technologies (Mosca and Vaccari 2012, p. 207). For instance, with specific reference to the topic of this book (media and Euroscepticism), Evangelos Fanoulis and Anasol Peña-Ríos suggest

that the EU democracy problem would be solved relying on current technology and IT services that can remedy problems of time and space, the biggest obstacles for active civic involvement in EU governance; more citizens' participation in EU policy-making would be enhanced by ubiquitous computing, mixed reality technology and virtual spaces.

If we cannot conclude, with this volume, that old and new media are per se sufficient stimulus for a positive versus negative political activation of collective actors and citizens towards the EU and the European integration process, however the findings coming from all the contributions confirm the importance to look at, beyond, and together with, the general political and cultural opportunities, and types of actors mobilising, more specific 'media' factors for the explanation of Euroscepticism, either offline and online. Future research would be needed to integrate this aspect in the theoretical models for rethinking Euroscepticism and its articulation, and for understanding political participation and the EU in the era of mediated politics and the Internet.

Against this background, the media (old and new) may have to make choices and may pay more attention to Eurosceptic parties and actors, and insights from studies in the European public sphere and European studies with a focus on Euroscepticism can help explain how Euroscepticism emerges and remains embedded (Usherwood and Startin 2013) in the process of EU integration. Further avenue for research that some of the contributions of this book suggest (in particular Heft et al., but see also Pavan and Caiani) would address the relation between specific media use (in particular websites and social media) and the formation of transnational coalition of Eurosceptic versus Europhile actors. This may have an important impact in the future, in the light of increasing politicisation of EU politics, growing Euroscepticism and the emergence of a contested EU cleavage, around which cross-national (pro or contra) coalitions (e.g. the populist right-wing parties around Europe) establish more synergies with each other. First studies in this directions, as the chapter of Heft et al. in this volume, have demonstrated, for instance, that, as far as Twitter and its networking function is concerned, there are traces of transnational and cross-ideological interactions between the networks of Europhile and Eurosceptical parties in Europe. However, although Eurosceptical parties have become a salient political power in many European countries, they are quite self-centred and do not form (not yet?) solid transnational networks of Euroscepticism.



## Future Research Ahead: (Some) Final Remarks

A cross fertilisation between communication and European studies seems critical at this stage, when the EU seems fallen in a stalemate caused by multiple crises, and low salience of the more technical EU issues (although important for the daily life of Europeans such as for instance the current TTIP and CETA agreements), may not create any news, while ‘the negativity bias of political news’ (see Galpin and Trenz in this volume) can partly explain opposition to the EU. A preliminary analysis on data collected after the British referendum (Guerrina et al. 2016) shows that the feelings emerged after the vote are mostly negative, with uncertainty apprehension, anger and anxiety on top of the list among not just young people. Young people have often emerged in the analyses of the volume. The perception that the EU is not delivering benefits and the rising social costs of the financial and economic crisis, and austerity programmes have characterised the 2015 Polish general elections. Nicolò Conti and Vincenzo Memoli (this volume) addressed the role of information and the web in this context. As opinion makers tend to create and raise the salience of an antagonistic debate opposing the EU, they underlined the need to offer an alternative voice from the EU itself, or at least for a neutral information. The web is likely to represent a channel of Euroscepticism (de Wilde et al. 2013), and young people are generally the users of this type of information. Social media and forums can absorb frustration and discontent and magnify them through the repetition or articulation of some messages. At the same time, critical seeds of contestation can also help develop a more politicised public sphere, supporting more awareness across civil society. Nonetheless, as observed, bias across the media address the systemic constraints on EU legitimacy, where, as previously noted, the more the EU is debated, the less legitimacy. Is therefore the debate on the relationship between the media and European democracy entered a conundrum?

Definitely, as we suggest in this book, we need to pay attention to the context where Euroscepticism arises, we need to address its quality, and the form that it takes. The lack of leadership or a vision for the EU at this time has made the Spinelli Group to launch a call for a new Convention

for a political Europe,<sup>1</sup> which would partly answer this challenging stage of the EU integration process. As underlined by Leruth (et al., in this volume) 'there is no doubt that the EU is becoming increasingly contested in media circles across the EU'. This can further feed political parties and the media. Research can examine when Euroscepticism emerges, what it actually represents and how this is linked to lack of knowledge of what the EU is (see della Porta et al. in this volume), what the drivers are (see Taggart and Szczerbiak 2014), and when enduring, whether it changes its narrative or remains within the same frames, strategies and refers to the same actors. Conti and Memoli (this volume) also stress that this critical debate (that may be negative) cannot be necessarily 'detrimental' for the EU, but it may support a more aware public sphere, as auspicated by Bijsmans, in his chapter. Yet, as also invoked by Galpin and Trenz, we may need to pay attention to what kind of impact the media can play in future perspective.

As the Brexit referendum has shown (Guerra, in this volume), social interaction, networks and the role of the media are likely to influence people's choices and their cognitive thinking. Citizens are often guided by a generalised overview of the situation that is closer to them and know better (local vs national; national vs European) and subjective evaluations and the role of affect can determine their vote. Data shows, also in the open answers provided (see Guerra, this volume), that the Leave campaign was able to stir people emotions, constraining the Remain campaign to perpetuate the same narrative. Uncertainty is quite widespread, but UKIP voters feel more hopeful and are happy, while young people feel disappointed, afraid, sceptical and anxious. Rationalist perspectives may not offer the only possible explanation behind the rise of Euroscepticism and a focus on the everyday practice of EU integration beyond political parties and through citizens' perceptions on the EU can show how public discourse is constructed, in its positive or negative, anxious, angry, or uncertain, characterisations of the EU.

## Note

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