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Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon

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Abstract

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

Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon[i]

Introduction

Over the last two decades the EU has attempted to build a European political space as exemplified by the debates on constitutionalisation and democratisatio. In recent years, in particular since the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty, the pace of the European integration process has slowed, partly as the Union has been forced to face up to significant opposition to the integration process. This opposition – most commonly labelled euroscepticism - has been exemplified by the EU's failure to realise the Laeken objectives, the stabilisation of an anti-integration block in the European Parliament, the recurrent 'no' votes in national referenda and the emergence of an increasingly coordinated movement of critical interest groups. Opposition to the EU has become increasingly embedded both at European and national levels and highlights the urgent need for the EU to engage constructively with opposition and dissenting voices and to consider alternative views about paths towards further European integration. This situation has become more critical as a result of the current global economic and financial crisis and because of the prospective enlargement of the EU towards the Western Balkans (and potentially Turkey). These developments have not only helped to further undermine citizen support for the EU but have also led to significant policy implications for both the EU and the nation states within the Union. Calls for a temporary suspension of the Schengen Agreement; restrictions on work permits to Bulgarian and Romanian citizens; opposition to the second Greek bail-out and demands for an Italian austerity plan have propelled the EU into an unprecedented phase of uncertainty, one of the consequences of which is deeper and more embedded euroscepticism with the potential to cause irreparable damage to the EU's quest for legitimacy.

Opposition to the EU has often historically been portrayed as a passing phenomenon, the inevitable 'grit in the system' that occurs when political systems are built and develop. A case in point was one of the earliest significant works on euroscepticism, by Benoit (1997), which portrayed the situation in France as essentially temporary and conditioned solely by endogenous circumstance within the country.   Even the dominant theoretical model in eurosceptic studies – that of Taggart's 'hard/soft' approach (1998) – does not acknowledge *a priori* reason for the existance of euroscepticism, except as a means of policy differentiation from centrist parties, an approach underlined by Sitter's (2001) work on government-opposition

dynamics. While this is certainly not a universal understanding of Euroscepticism (see Flood 2002), it has coloured debate and has reflected elite understanding as well. We would argue however that this is a misleading frame of reference and that it is necessary to engage with euroscepticism in a fundamentally different manner.

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

<u>The Emergence of Opposition</u>

There was little disagreement within the six member states who formed the original EEC in 1957 as the common-held elite consensus of the era, which concentrated on the benefits of economic integration and the need to bind previously hostile states together, bound the six founding nations together.[ii] This prevailing mood was largely accepted by the general public in these countries eager to modernise after the strains of the Second World War. In truth it was not until the general wave of electoral volatility of the mid-70s, combined with the debate about the enlargement of the EU, that 'Europe' began to develop as an issue in any significant way within the domestic sphere. In the three states which joined the EEC in 1973 (the UK, Ireland and Denmark) the debate about whether to join (and the referendums that took place on this issue) ensured that 'Europe' emerged as an issue, impacting on the domestic arena and causing

division in and between parties. Norway's rejection of EU membership by referendum in 1972 also ensured that the issue would remain on the political agenda outside as well as inside the EU.

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

It was not until Margaret Thatcher's famous Bruges speech in 1988 which followed as a response to Jacques Delors's ambitions for closer economic and political cooperation (as typified by his Three Phase Plan for Monetary Union) that opposition to the EU started to crystallize in any meaningful, mainstream way. Thatcher's (1988) speech had a significant impact on the discourse surrounding the EU as she became the first EU leader to directly challenge the direction in which the EU was progressing. It was around this time, as the emerging agenda surrounding the Treaty on European Union (TEU) became increasingly called into question by politicians, public and media, that the term Euroscepticism started to be deployed in media and political circles in the UK (see Flood 2002). There is no doubt that the TEU marks a step-change in public awareness due to the nature of the proposals (see Flood 2002; Mudde 2011; Startin 2005; Verney 2011) and is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, Maastricht signifies the politicialisation of Europe with the name change from Community to Union; secondly it marks the moment when divisions between European and domestic policy begin to become increasingly blurred in the areas of political, economic, social, legal, environmental and foreign affairs. Post-Maastricht, opposition to 'Europe' is never the same: it moves from being a straightforward question concerning the pros and cons of EU membership to being one that is couched much more in terms of the rationale of the route that the European project is taking. As Ray (1999: 86) points out succinctly: 'The exact meaning of European

integration does vary over time' and 'across national political contexts' and this becomes more the case as a result of Maastricht. Flood (2002) points out that primarily as a result of these changes 'opponents of European integration are constantly chasing something of a moving target' which complicates analysis of the European dimension for practitoners and academics alike. Post Maastricht the EU as an issue drifts in and out of salience within domestic political debate as issues like The Amsterdam Treaty, the Euro, Central and Eastern European enlargement, the (failed) Constitution, the subsequent Lisbon Treaty and currently the crisis in the Eurozone replace each other as the main focus of debate for opponents of European integration. Finally, Maastricht acts as a watershed, a key turning point in the debate surrounding the development of the EU as it marks the moment when referenda become deployed in certain countries to ratify changes to EU treaties serving to gavlanise Euroscpetics in their bid to derail the process of European integration. In Denmark in June 1992 the Danes rejected the Maastricht Treaty and in September the French narrowly voted in favour – a far from ringing endorsement given that current, previous and future Presidents (representing France's three major parties) all campaigned for a 'yes' vote.[iv] Maastricht also acts as a pivotal turning point as the raised profile and salience of the EU allows opportunistic politicians and leaders willing to mobilize public opposition to obtain national draw from the European issue. We also see Pan-European cooperation, notably the European Alliance of EU-critical Movements (TEAM), springing up from shared adversity and common threats, drawing in groups where opposition might have previously been only latent and/or inopportune. In short Maastricht acts as a catalyst as Euroscepticism becomes embedded across the EU both in terms of political parties and in terms of public opinion.

<u>The Persistence of Opposition</u>

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

focus based around analysis of political parties (and to a lesser extent public opinion). While it is clear that since Masstricht euroscepticism has become increasingly embedded at these levels, it now exists (as already identified) semi-permanently at various other levels such as non-party groups, within governments and within the media. At the same time referenda and European Parliament elections have re-enforced this sense of embededness as euroscepticism has taken on new levels of salience. We have now also entered an era where where eurosceptics has become an increasingly transnational and pan-European, phenomonon. These developments we argue have been somewhat neglected by the academic community which has over-focused on divisions in the literature based largely around the role of political parties. Mudde's (2011) recent, worthy discussion of the divisions in the literature between the so-called Sussex and North Carolina schools is a case-in-point. While the role of political parties and their relationship with Europe's citizens are central to our understanding of Euroscepticism and its overall reach within nation states' political systems, we argue that a more holistic, nuanced and inter-disciplinary approach is required in order to obtain a full understanding of the way it has become increasingly embedded across the Union. In the next section of the paper which explores the persistance of opposition post-Maastricht we not only look at political parties and public opinion, but focus as well on the embedded nature of euroscpeticism within governments, within the anti EU block in the European Parliament, within non-party groups as well as the crucial role played by Referenda and European elections.

Political parties

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

traditional 'bread and butter' anti-immigrant discourse. The extent of opposition to the EU varies from party to party and country to country – contrast the British National Party's (BNP's) vehement opposition to the EU with the Flemish Vlaams Belang's more measured approach - but there is no doubt that opposing Europe has become an increasingly embedded part of RRPs and their overall policy packages (see Mudde 2007, Hainsworth 2008). Parties like the French *Front National (FN)* and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)* - the Austrian Freedom party - which have a long history of Eurosceptic dialogue and rhetoric, have been joined in recent years by parties who have made significant electoral breakthroughs, such as Geert Wilders' *Partij Voor de Vrijheid* (*PVV*) - Party for Freedom - and *Perussuomalaiset* - the True Finns - where opposition to the EU and the Eurozone is a central policy plank closely linked to the issues of immigration and globalisation. Added to this we have also witnessed the emergence in recent years among some RRPs, like the French *FN,* of what Lecoeur (2007) describes as *Euromondialisme* where a strong link is made in terms of rhetoric and discourse between opposition to Europe and opposition towards globalisation; the former being portrayed as a 'half-way house' or 'stepping stone' towards the perceived perils of the latter. In the wake of the crisis in the Eurozone the *Euromondialist* discourse adopted by some RRPs looks set to become increasingly fertile ground in electoral terms.

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

The fourth and final classification of Eurosceptic parties which are becoming increasingly embedded in European nation states' party systems are certain mainstream parties who are increasingly adopting a 'soft eurosceptic' discourse on issues like the EU Budget, the future of the Euro and further enlargement. These are usually (but not exclusively) mainstream right parties who appear to respond to volatile and negative public opinion on the issue. While in the

past such discourse has been primarily associated with parties in opposition (see Taggart 1998) the goal posts have shifted as there are clear examples of government parties adopting the rhetoric of *Juste retour* over traditional communitarianism. An obvious example is the UK Conservative party which withdrew from the European People's party (EPP) European Parliament grouping in June 2009 and launched the 'soft eurosceptic' European Conservative and Reformists group (ECR) with Law and Justice - *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość -* from Poland and the Civic Democratic Party - *Občanská demokratická strana -* from the Czech Republic, along with smaller parties from Poland, Belguim, The Netherlands, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania (see Bale *et. Al.* 2010). Euroscepticsim is also becoming slowly embedded in some aspects of govermental policy and rhetoric beyond parties in the ECR group with even founding EU nation states showing themselves susceptible. We have witnessed for example an element of 'soft 'eurosceptic discourse creeping into the Governing parties and governments in France and Germany with Sarkozy's UMP adopting a tough line on issues like Turkish enlargement and fringes wthin Merkyl's CDU questioning the economic burden of bailing out other members of the Eurozone. Even Liberal parties like the UK Liberal Democrats and the German FDP have in recent years been forced to reign in their euro-enthusiasm when faced with the realities of coalition government and the need to juggle a range of disparate public opinion.

Public Opinion

Drawing largely on Eurobarometer data a number of studies have charted the volatility and increased negativity of public opinion post-Maastricht with regard to attitudes towards the EU, (see Gabel 1998, 2000; Van der Eijk & Franklin 1996). It has become clear that opposition and ambivlaence towards the EU have become increasingly embedded among a growing number of European citizens across the EU 27 and in certain candidate countries. Based on the much cited attitudinal questions in the biannual Eurobarometer surveys it is apparent that negative attitudes towards the EU have not only increased in countries with traditionally high levels of Euroscepticism such as the UK and Denmark, but also in the major founding countries (Germany and France), in traditionally Europhile nations such as Ireland and the Netherlands and in CEE countries who joined in 2002 such as Poland and the Czech Republic. In short public attitudes have never recovered to the Maastricht-era highs where 71% of European citizens stated that membership of the EU was a good thing in and 59% stated that their country had benefitted from EU membership. According to the latest Eurobarometer 74 (2011) one third of EU citizens feel their country has not benefitted from membership of the EU over the last decade. There are now more people without confidence in the EU than with it and between 15

and 20% of citizens across the Union feel negatively about it. EB74 also demonstrates declining levels of trust in EU institutions. Never has McCormick's (2005) statement that 'It sometimes seems as though the work of the EU goes on despite public opinion, which is often confused, sometimes doubtful, and in some cases actively hostile' seemed more pertinent. With the current global economic crisis putting the Eurozone under increasing strain Euroscepticism looks set to become increasingly embedded at the level of public opinion.

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

The 2009 European elections yielded more Eurosceptic MPs than any of the previous contests and resulted in the emergence of the Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD) group a 'hard' eurosceptic group comprising 27 MEPs from 8 different parties with UKIP's Nigel Farrage the leader of the group. It also resulted in the formation of the 'soft' Eurosceptic grouping the European Conservatives and Reform group (ECR) very much initiated by the UK Conservative party which now comprises 56 MEPs. The Radical Right failed to form a group in 2009 although there are currently 29 unattached MEPs (mostly Radical Right) in the current Eurpoean Parliament. The Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left now

comprises 41 members post 2009. There is no doubt that MEPs with an anti-EU discourse are becoming more influential and more embedded in the EU process.

Non-party groups and the embedded nature of Euroscepticism

While parties have developed considerably in their expression of eurosceptic views, it is important to remember that they are far from the only way in which opposition has been articulated and become increasingly embedded. Most notably, there has been an extensive formation of non-party groups across Europe (and one which remains under-researched among the academic community) forming what might reasonably be termed an anti-EU movement. This collection of assorted groups has created an ever more complex ecosystem to sustain and develop eurosceptic discourse and action. This ecosystem operates primarily at the national level: groups can be found in every member state, as well as in neighbouring countries. In almost every case, there are several groups within a country, partly because of some functional specialisation, partly through ideological or strategic differences: it is of some note that the only country to have retained one dominant grouping is Norway (*Nej til EU)*, the only country to have rejected EU membership. More typical is Ireland, where two main groups – the National Platform and the Peoples' Movement – have developed a range of actions, building on the Nice and Lisbon referenda campaigns, supported by the Peace and Neutrality Alliance, a pacifist organisation. Together these groups were able to provide a range of perspectives and critiques in public debates beyond that possible within the party political system (see Tonra 2009).

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

Also of increasing note is the development of trans-European networks of contact and exchange. Here the primary body is the European Alliance of EU-Critical Movement (TEAM), which links some 50 national groups in 18 states. TEAM works on the basis of shared information and practice, rather than attempting to regularize or introduce a common platform, an approach that has been the standard for trans-national interaction between groups. The proliferation of eurosceptic websites and the emergence of a sceptic community in Brussels have also both contributed to increasing levels of contact at a bilateral level.

The Role of Referenda and the embedded nature of Euroscepticism:

Although referenda have histrocially been viewed as a means of bringing EU citizens closer to the EU, the stark reality is that they have served to further embed Euroscepticism in terms of the perception of EU citizens. As Dinan (2000) illucidated over a decade ago 'Referenda have become an integral and important part of the European integration process. Whether constitutionally mandated or politically inspired, they have been used to decide whether or not to join or stay in the EC/EU and to ratify major treaty revisions.' However, since Dinan's observation, outcomes have increasingly gone against the wishes of EU elites and national governments. Of the 11 EU related referenda that have taken place in the new millennium (apart from those in the successful candidate countries prior to the 2004 enlargement) only four have produced a 'yes' vote and two of these were re-runs of previously negative mandates in Ireland. (See **Figure 1**)

Figure 1

Year	Country	Issue	% of 'No' votes
2009	Ireland	Lisbon Treaty	33%
2008	Ireland	Lisbon Treaty	53%
2005	Luxembourg	Constitution	44%
2005	Netherlands	Constitution	62%
2005	France	Constitution	55%
2005	Spain	Constitution	23%
2003	Sweden	Join euro	58%
2002	Ireland	Nice Treaty	37%
2001	Ireland	Nice Treaty	54%
2001	Switzerland	EU accession	77%

2000   Denmark   Join euro   53%

There is no doubt that referenda have served to increase the salience of EU related issues at crucial moments in the development of the EU, allowing a eurosceptic triumvirate of political parties, non-party groups and media to galvanise support and to gain legitimacy for the anti-EU cause. Whereas the TEU and the Euro made the EU a high priority for mainstream politicians who put effort into selling the EU's benefits (and succeeded in shifting some opinion) any such enthusiasm has now faded in most states (e.g. MORI polling for UK). Opposition elements are clearly left as the most active participants in the debate as the quiet, permissive consensus of those supporting the Union is unable to compete with the louder, more passionate commitment of Eurosceptics. Following the 'no votes in France and the Netherlands in 2005 and in Ireland in 2008, the use of referenda looks set to continue to decline (except where constitutionally mandated in countries like Denmark and Ireland), particularly as a result of the increased 'scapegoating' of Brussels faced with the management of the Eurozone crisis. De Gaulle's observation as articulated in 1960 that 'Europe will only truly be born' through the validity of 'popular referendums.....in all countries concerned' (as quoted in Hug 2002) seems a long way from reality 50 years on.

The Role of the Media and the embedded nature of Euroscepticism

It is clear that national media have played a key role in shaping attitudes towards the EU and contributing to the increasingly embedded nature of euroscepticism in various states. Much focus in this area has been centred around the UK where the Murdoch Press in particular have been forthright in their opposition towards the EU and its percevied threat to UK sovereignty. In a seminal piece on the role of the UK Media Anderson (2004) observed of the tabloid *Sun* Newspaper that It is 'vigourously and virulently Eurosceptic, conjouring up the image of the EU as a corrupt and untrustworthy predator, driven by a Franco-German plot to damage British Economic interests, British security and British Sovereignty.*'* Anderson (IBID) also observed that 'the current modus operandi of much of the London-based Eurosceptic press is a serious problem for UK democracy for which no effective voluntary or compulsory regulatory solution seems seriously to be on the table as far as policy makers are concerned.' The situation with regard to the UK has, if anything, become more one-sided since as the Murdoch Press and the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* have been joined by a strongly Euro-critical *Daily Express* which runs regular front pages in virulant criticism of the EU. While the situation in other countries is

not as one-sided there are clear examples of eurosceptic discourse prominent in other nation states' media such as Ireland, Denmark, Austria and Sweden, to name but a few. Ireland is a clear example of how the eurosceptic press has taken on a clear trans-national dynamic with British owned red-tops like *The Sun* running pro-'no' vote campaigns in their Irish editions during the campaigns for the two Irish referenda in 2008 (see Holmes) and 2010. While we should clearly acknowledge what Anderson (2004) succinctly labels the age-old sociological 'debate within the literature as to what extent people actually believe what they read in the newspapers' there is no doubt that anti-EU media discourse has contributed to the increasingly embedded nature of Euroscepticism as a phenomon in certain EU nation states. This is particulary the case in countries like the UK where the other side of the argument is largely not transmitted to the public at large.

The Consequences of Opposition

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

Notwithstanding the embedding of euroscepticism, opposition (certainly of the outright kind) remains marginal and heterodox behaviour, in the sense that it has not been able to achieve its objectives of stopping, reversing or fundamentally redirecting the development of what is now the European Union. The breadth and depth of the elite consensus in Europe around the value of integration after the Second World War ensured that by the time significant voices of doubt and dissent were raised, there was a strong wellspring of support that could contain, and to a large extent ignore, those voices. The realignment of many elite groups to the realities of an increasingly intertwined and interdependent economic and political project, both at a material and an attitudinal level, has produced a strong position for further development of that project, or at least the status quo. We do not make any particular claims here, but such realignment can be understood either as a consequence of a path-dependency, as in the historical institutionalist perspective (see Pierson 1996), or as a stage in a functionalist realignment of loyalties to the European level (see Haas 1968): in either case, it has been largely successful in keeping opposition and scepticism in a structurally weak position.

Despite this strong status quo, it is nevertheless important to recognise that the EU is arguably moving into a different (and more difficult) phase of its existence. No longer do we find ourselves in a period of major advances in the Union's development, in the way that we did in the 1950s and again in the 1990s. The protracted and painful unwinding of the Laeken process through the 2000s resulted in a Lisbon treaty that essentially reaffirmed the process to date, rather than a truly ground-up reappraisal of the system. The difficulties in reaching even this modest consolidation suggest that there is no longer a widespread desire for major structural reform in the short and medium term. This trend is further reinforced by the severe impact of the Great Recession, with all of its implications for national financial and economic retrenchment and for its impact on weaker economic growth, the latter historically having been associated with slowing in integration (see Dinan 2005 for an overview). At the time of writing, an area where there might be significant potential for a significant advance in deepening integration is in respect to the Euro and its associated governance (e.g. Economist, 21 June 2011), but this is certainly nothing like a consensus view at present. With this slowdown in integration in mind, from the sceptic camp's perspective, it becomes ever easier to find shortcomings in existing EU practice, knowing that major resolution is not likely to be forthcoming at any great speed. As the periodic 'relaunches' of integration have demonstrated, the system needs to be constantly reviewed and updated if it is not to be overtaken by events.

Coupled to this slowdown in integration is the historic stance that elites have taken towards sceptic views, namely one of ignoring them, or at least of giving that impression. This was most vividly seen in the 're-runs' of the referenda on Maastricht in Denmark and on Nice and Lisbon in Ireland, where there was a clear impression that people were being told to 'vote again and get it right' (Economist, 8 October 2009). Likewise, the inability or unwillingness of the Convention on the Future of the EU to engage with the alternative draft presented by sceptic delegates (Usherwood 2007) was emblematic of the difficulties that oppositional voices have been faced with when given such opportunities. Even in the space where they have carved out the most noticable space, in the European Parliament, the choices for sceptic MEPs are either to absent themselves completely or risk socialisation into the institution's practices and norms (Costa & Brack, 2009).

We would argue that notwithstanding the prepondence of *communautaire* views within the EU (and particularly its institutions), it is ultimately damaging to the Union to persist in ignoring

sceptics. A central claim of the EU in the post-Maastricht era has been about its transformation into a democratic and popular construction, where publics are listened to, engaged with and served: this was the first task set out at Laeken, let us remember. If the Union is to claim to be of relevance to publics, through the provision of effective and legitimate outputs, then perforce it must overtly engage with the full range of public opinion. The longer that this situation is left to persist, especially when there is no *grand projet* to focus attention, the more likely it becomes that opposition will become ever more normalised and stronger: it acts as another part of the sceptics' critique of the Union that it does not even attempt to open a dialogue with them.

In the much longer term, this risks challenging the status quo that has protected the EU so far. As the events of the Euro crisis have shown, it is possible to mobilise popular attitudes against the Union within a country in a relatively short period of time. The currently open-ended nature of the crisis would seem to point towards further difficulties for both the Union and national governments, be they member states that need support, or ones that will have to do the supporting. As euroscepticism becomes increasingly embedded at the various levels identified in this paper, it is ultimately in the European Union's interest to engage with sceptics, if it is ever to secure its overally legitmacy and future success. A failure to do so as Europe enters an uncertain economic phase could have serious consequences for the European project as a whole.

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[i] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the First Workshop of the University Association for Contemporary European Studies Collaboration Research Network on Euroscepticism, University of Surrey, 7 July 2011.

[ii] Although in countries like France the communists and sections of the Gaullist movement were opposed to membership, De Gaulle's support for the EEC ensured that opposition to Europe failed to make any initial long-lasting impact on France's domestic political agenda.

[iii] The Danish People's movement was formed in 1972 as a cross-party movement which was opposed to Danish entry into the then EEC. It has had representation in the EP since the first direct elections in 1979. Traditionally the Movement has been part of the Europe of Democracies and Diversities Group (EDD) having fought on a joint EP electoral ticket with Jens-Peter Bonde's Danish June Movement. Since 2004 the party has had one MEP Søren Søndergaard, who is a member of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left group.

[iv] Former President Giscard D'Estaing (1974-1981) of the *Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF),* then President François Mitterrand (1981-1995) of the *Parti Socialist (PS)* and future President Jacques Chirac (1995-2007) of the *Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) – later the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) –* all campaigned in the 'yes' camp.