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**'Euro-realism' in Multi-Level Party Politics:  
the rise of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)**

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*Abstract:*

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections were the first contested by what is now the European Union's (EU) third largest political party, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). The ECR parliamentary group was set up after the last elections in 2009 by conservative politicians from the United Kingdom (UK), Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere who were uncomfortable with the consistently pro-European federalist stance of 'ever closer union' adopted by the main centre-right group, the European People's Party (EPP). This paper examines that important transition from EPP to ECR five years on - a period that has corresponded with a series of dramatic events including the Euro-zone sovereign debt crisis. In particular, the paper will analyse the impact of the 2014 elections on the still developing organisational and policy structure of the ECR - including its capacity for shaping the future direction of European integration. Ought we now to consider 'Euro-realism' a coherent ideology centred around an Anglo-American political economy model or simply another form of 'soft' Euro-scepticism?

## **Introduction – the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)**

In June 2014, just a few weeks after the eighth set of European Parliament (EP) elections, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, faced a typically complex decision for a United Kingdom (UK) Conservative Party leader with regard to the European Union (EU). The new Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party had applied to join Mr Cameron's European party family group, the European Conservative and Reformists (ECR). The ECR group was set up after the last elections in 2009 by conservative politicians from the United Kingdom (UK), Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere who were uncomfortable with the consistently pro-European and federalist stance of 'ever closer union' adopted by the main centre-right group, the European People's Party (EPP). While broadly pro-European in its policy platform, AfD do not support economic and monetary union and regard the Euro as a failed currency (Alternative für Deutschland 2014). By joining ECR, AfD would make the group the third largest in the Parliament behind the EPP and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), while also reinforcing Mr Cameron's preferred position on European integration that the EU requires reform, as opposed to the complete dismantling advocated by many openly 'Euro-sceptic' parties.

Yet rather than welcome this move, Mr Cameron instead chose to try to block AfD joining his group – his Conservative Party has the joint largest number of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in ECR with 19 out of 70 seats and has very much been the driving force of the party since 2009. The Prime Minister was concerned that such a political deal would place considerable strain on his relationship with the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, the leading EPP figure in the whole of the EU – something which he appeared to regard as more important than the total number of MEPs which his wider party family has in the European Parliament chamber. Mr Cameron has already promised an 'in-out' referendum for Britain if the Conservatives wins the 2015 UK General Election, and he is clearly keen that future negotiations with Europe's most influential politician are not jeopardised in any way.

If ever we needed a reminder of the way party political behaviour in the European Union is unusual, this episode provides it. It has long been recorded that European Parliament elections are considered 'second order' due to the fact that they do not directly elect a government (see Hix et al 2007). Yet the European Parliament's wholly unique status amongst legislatures is based on more than just that fact. What really marks the EP out as unusual is the way partisan differences are frequently usurped in importance by wider questions related to 'pro-European' (or federalist) versus 'Euro-sceptic' or 'anti-European' policy positions. This can also mean the interests of national member states are placed before those of a party family or ideology – after all, the EU is not a unitary nation state. In many ways, an MEP's first loyalty can often be to his or her member state, not his or her party grouping (see Hix and Marsh 2011). We see this dynamic reaching its natural conclusion in May 2014 – the EPP, S&D and ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in

Europe) look set to form a pro-European voting bloc, or ‘grand coalition’, in the Parliament and will be in all likelihood pitted against a broadly ‘Euro-sceptic’ collection of politicians, many of whom wish to bring about an end to the EU altogether.

That fact is epitomised by Mr Cameron’s political manoeuvring described earlier. In many ways, his natural allies across Europe are the EPP and their wider European party family, the Christian Democrats (CD). CD politicians such as Angela Merkel are very much in agreement with David Cameron that public expenditure efficiency savings are a necessary policy to cut deficits and stimulate growth across Europe – they are pro-business, in favour of free trade and support the common market. At the start of July, Mrs Merkel and Mr Cameron met Mark Rutte<sup>1</sup>, the Dutch Prime Minister, and Fredrik Reinfeldt, the Swedish Prime Minister, to discuss the future direction of those type of conservative or classic liberal policies that they all broadly support and promote. Yet that natural party family grouping is upset somewhat by the existence of the ECR. The ECR is the living embodiment of a fundamental split between a federalist vision of Europe with ‘ever closer union’ and one which continues to place the most importance of the role of independent nation states.

With all of that in mind, the ECR is now a significant European political party group in its own right. It is also a relatively under-researched political movement and we can therefore ask a number of related questions about how it functions and who supports it. For example, in 2014, is the group still dominated in its leadership by the British Conservatives despite now being the European Parliament's third largest grouping involving 70 MEPs from 15 member states, including Poland’s main centre right party, Law and Justice, led by the former Polish Prime Minister, Jarosław Kaczyński, and the Czech Republic’s main centre right party, the Civic Democrats, formerly led by President Václav Klaus? Has the Conservatives' decision to hold a referendum on British membership of the EU before December 2017 created internal group tensions in relation to more nuanced policy development? Perhaps of most importance to this paper, ought we now to consider 'Eurorealism' a coherent ideology promoting an Anglo-American model of political economy (see Esping-Andersen 1990) or merely an expedient term with limited durability and effectively just another form of ‘soft’ Euro-scepticism?

Certainly, in some ways, the ECR can be described as a ‘Euro-sceptic’ political party. For example, we can say quite definitively that it is against the federalist objective of ‘ever closer union’ advocated consistently by EPP and S&D politicians and included prominently in the preamble to the Treaty of Lisbon 2009. However, if we examine the founding document of ECR - the ‘Prague Declaration’, which was also signed in 2009 - there is no mention anywhere of that term ‘Euro-scepticism’. Much is made of the need for the EU to ‘reform’ and to promote individual freedoms and small government but much less is mentioned in

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<sup>1</sup> Although we can also note that Mr Rutte is the leader of the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD) - or People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy – in The Netherlands which is aligned to ALDE, not the EPP. Nevertheless, the acrimonious nature of the UK Conservatives leaving the EPP could be said to be substantively different from the VVD choosing not to be in the same group as the Dutch Christian Democrats (CDA).

relation to respecting 'national differences' and halting European integration altogether in the way that the charter of the European Freedom and Direct Democracy group (EFDD 2014) and other more 'hard' Euro-sceptic party policy documents lay out. The full Prague Declaration follows below (ECR 2009):

'Conscious of the urgent need to reform the EU on the basis of Eurorealism, Openness, Accountability and Democracy, in a way that respects the sovereignty of our nations and concentrates on economic recovery, growth and competitiveness, the European Conservatives and Reformists Group shares the following principles:

- Free enterprise, free and fair trade and competition, minimal regulation, lower taxation, and small government as the ultimate catalysts for individual freedom and personal and national prosperity
- Freedom of the individual, more personal responsibility and greater democratic accountability
- Sustainable, clean energy supply with an emphasis on energy security
- The importance of the family as the bedrock of society
- The sovereign integrity of the nation state, opposition to EU federalism and a renewed respect for true subsidiarity
- The overriding value of the transatlantic security relationship in a revitalised NATO, and support for young democracies across Europe
- Effectively controlled immigration and an end to abuse of asylum procedures
- Efficient and modern public services and sensitivity to the needs of both rural and urban communities
- An end to waste and excessive bureaucracy and a commitment to greater transparency and probity in the EU institutions and use of EU funds
- Respect and equitable treatment for all EU countries, new and old, large and small.'

Previous research in this area has emphasised that the British Conservatives' policy platform effectively constitutes a form of 'soft' Euro-scepticism – as opposed to 'hard' Euro-scepticism which is embodied by parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP). The distinction is qualitative as opposed to quantitative, and effectively one of scale i.e. both the Conservatives and UKIP dislike the EU – the only question is 'how much?' (see Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008). The distinction has also been made between types of 'policy' Euro-scepticism and forms of 'nationalistic' Euro-scepticism that is evident in the more radical or populist parties such as Front National (National Front) in France or the Partij voor de Vrijheid – PVV (Party for Freedom) in The Netherlands (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008). In the light of the substantially 'Euro-sceptic' results of the 2014 European Parliament elections, is it possible for us to refine these definitions further still? For example, is it entirely correct to regard political parties like the British Conservatives, Polish Law and Justice, and Czech Civic Democrats who wish to 'reform' the EU as 'Euro-sceptic' when ultimately they are

attempting to create a more effective type of Union rather than halt all future developments and abandon the project of European integration altogether? According to the ECR (2014), ‘the eurorealism concept distinguishes the ECR’s agenda from the other political groups. We believe in a new direction for the EU, which does not destroy the organisation or undermine cooperation’. It is useful to start to test that claim, both by examining ECR policy content and voting behaviour related to European elections.

### **The 2014 European Parliament elections**

The eighth set of European parliamentary elections were more significant than many that had gone before – and for a number of reasons. First, the backdrop of major upheaval in relation to the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis provided an unprecedented crisis for the EU not seen at any point from the 1980s onwards. For the first time, the pro-European federalist vision of ‘ever closer union’ seemed the furthest objective from many minds in Brussels while the peculiar nature of the governance of the Euro had raised serious questions over Europe’s ongoing democratic deficit. The failure of the Euro was seen by many as a failure of decision-making by an out-of-touch political elite in the European Quarter of Brussels. Secondly, and linked to this, the Lisbon Treaty had ensured that the choices of new Commission and European Council presidents would ‘take into account’ the views of the Parliament, leading the main party groupings to propose their own leading candidates, or *spitzenkandidaten*, to fulfil the role. As a consequence, the 2014 elections for the first time saw MEPs directly responsible for electing the new European Commission president. Third, ahead of the elections, polls showed that radical right, populist, protest and ‘Euro-sceptic’ parties were looking to perform strongly in the elections, perhaps even winning in their own member states. This proved to be the case, and this section will analyse the results in some depth.

The elections were also significant for the European Conservatives and Reformists. 2014 was the first year that they fought and campaigned as a coherent party group, having only formed after the previous 2009 elections. Moreover, the group performed relatively well – going on after the election results to become the third largest parliamentary ‘Euro-party’ behind the EPP and S&D and ahead of ALDE and the Greens. Leaving aside for one moment deeper ideological questions of whether or not ECR is more than simply a convenient anti-EPP vehicle for the British Conservatives, that level of electoral success can be recognised on its own. ALDE had Guy Verhofstadt as their *spitzenkandidat* – the high-profile and charismatic former Prime Minister of Belgium yet failed to win as many seats as the ECR. ALDE is also a long-established and recognisably coherent party grouping basing itself around centrist principles of a mixed economy, yet failed to come close in either seats or voter share of the EPP or S&D. While the ECR also somewhat lagged behind these two main party families, with 70 MEPs in the Strasbourg hemisphere, they are now a centre-

right political force which both the EPP and S&D will have to work and co-operate extensively over the next five years.

Nevertheless, despite these developments, there were other elements to voting in 2014 which very much represented 'business as usual' for the EU. With a turnout of only 43%, the elections still managed to fail to attract a majority of European citizens to bother voting. The EU may undoubtedly be an important factor in European citizens lives, as various campaign posters and television advertisements in the run up to May attempted to demonstrate, but that does not translate into getting the average European to care very much about voting for MEPs. The turnout was up slightly from 2009 – thus stopping the downward spiral of turnout since 1979 - but only by one percentage point. Future European Election Study (EES) research will obviously go into more detail here, but there was also little evidence of a Europe wide election campaign, spanning the 28 member states. National campaigns reflected national issues in many European countries, although those experiencing the negative effects of the Eurozone crisis were possibly more aware than usual of the impact of Brussels on their local region – for example, in Greece. Nevertheless, with language issues still relevant, the different party groupings did not really campaign as coherent units. The televised debates between the *spitzenkandidaten* were not watched by many viewers, even in core member states such as Germany, and ended up being ideological or partisan 'non events' due to the way the candidates all agreed on a federalist vision of European integration – hardly a Europe-wide debate over policy content.

Table 1 below shows the main results of the elections – as we can see, the two main European party families continued to dominate the seats and vote share. The Christian Democrat vehicle, the EPP, won with 30% while the European Socialists came second with 25%. There is then something of a gap until we find the ECR and ALDE on 70 and 67 seats each and with around 9% of the vote share. In many ways, it is the main party groupings like the EPP and S&D who have had their vote squeezed somewhat with the EFDD making up the ground, gaining 6% and 48 seats. There are also another 52 non-aligned MEPs gaining around 6% of the remaining votes. Clearly if we put them together with the EFDD, they would have been able to form the third largest group and there was speculation about this prior to May but ultimately that has not proven possible due to the diversity of views within some of these groups - even if many of them agree on a 'hard' Euro-sceptic policy platform.

*Table 1 – The 2014 European Parliament election results*

<b>Party</b>	<b>MEPs</b>	<b>Vote share (%)</b>
EPP	221	30
S&D	191	25
ECR	70	9
ALDE	67	9
Left	52	7
Greens	50	7
EFDD	48	6
Others	52	6

In some EU member states, these radical right or populist parties performed especially well, winning the elections in terms of seats and vote share. In France, the National Front won the election outright, with 25% of the vote, while in the UK, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) also topped the poll. Meanwhile, in Greece, the Left Party won with 27% of the vote (with the extreme right Golden Dawn also performing well) and in Denmark, the Danish Peoples' Party won with a similar percentage. In Italy, former comedian Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement came second with 21%, going on to align its 17 MEPs with EFDD. UKIP's victory in Britain was much anticipated, with the party winning 28% of the vote (24 seats), ahead of the Conservatives on 25% (19 seats) and Labour on 23% (20 seats). Clearly this was a mixed result for the David Cameron's Conservatives overall – in one sense, the party in government tends not to do especially well in the European elections and to come second in vote share behind UKIP cannot be considered a complete disaster. Nevertheless, it says much about the current state of European politics when 'Euro-sceptic' parties are actually winning in some of the afore mentioned member states – even one with a history of being such an 'awkward partner' like the UK.

## Identifying 'Euro-realism' in party policy platforms

As a result of the 2014 elections, there are now effectively four distinct types of broadly 'Euro-sceptic' party groups operating in the European Parliament. There are the Non-Aligned MEPs, many of whom come from far right populist movements in member states such as France, The Netherlands and Greece that stand on anti-immigration platforms. Then there are the EFDD group – dominated somewhat by UKIP and its charismatic leader, Nigel Farage - who can be considered more mainstream in the sense they are not openly racist or xenophobic, and whose main focus is very much the breaking up of the European Union. The third group are the European United Left / Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) who are in favour of reforming the present structure of the EU to make it less capitalist and orientated toward the free market but also still broadly in favour of some type of integration. Finally, there is the ECR, the focus of the paper, which releases statements claiming that they are 'Euro-realist' rather than 'Euro-sceptic' and who want the EU to 'reform' its institutions to allow business, trade and enterprise activities to develop more freely.

It is not the key objective of this paper to question whether all these different groups can be brought together effectively under one umbrella – that of 'Euro-scepticism'. Clearly, politicians from GUE-NGL with their interest in Marxist ideology and greater state control of economics are a very different group of people from those in EFDD with their enthusiasm for exploiting global trade opportunities and emphasis on the independence of European nation states. Nevertheless, the 2014 election results have arguably crystallised these definitions in a much more pronounced way than had previously been the case. Together, these groups now represent around 30 per cent of the European Parliament's seats in Brussels and Strasbourg. 'Euro-scepticism' has become a much more mainstream ideology than a decade ago and very much now functions at the heart of the EU, as opposed to being a fundamentally fringe or peripheral presence restricted to traditionally anti-federalist member states such as the UK.

Moreover – and perhaps of even more significance - is the interesting research question surrounding what exactly the ECR group mean when they say they are 'Euro-realist'. Is this an expedient term which they have quickly thought up in 2009, in order to contradict accusations that they are merely a vehicle for the British Conservatives to cause problems for the intrinsically federalist EPP? Or is it in fact a coherent political ideology which rather neatly articulates what many Europeans believe, according to Eurobarometer data (European Commission 2007; 2011) – that while the EU ought to be reformed to make it less bureaucratic and interfering, it should still very much continue to function and develop. Both the NIs and EFDD can be said to be 'Euro-sceptic' while GUE-NGL politicians are clearly socialist or even communist in some cases. But can we say that ECR represent a coherent alternative to European federalism so prevalent across the EPP, S&D and others? It is one thing to distinguish 'Euro-realism' from 'Euro-scepticism' but perhaps of even more importance is the question of whether 'Euro-realism' is a coherent political ideology at all.

For example, can we potentially equate ‘Euro-realism’ with the type of ‘Anglo-American’ political economy model promoted by many policy makers in countries such as the UK and US. The model sees the market have much more freedom and much less state interference, and can be positioned in contrast with the Rhineland or German model advocated by Christian Democrats which advocate more of a social partnership between business, trade unions and government (see Esping-Anderson 1990).

We can start to answer such questions by looking at the 2009 Prague Declaration, more contemporary ECR campaign literature, and other similar sources. The Prague Declaration is important because ‘Euro-realism’ does appear to probably have its origins in statements made by Czech Republic politicians such as Jan Zahradil and Vaclav Klaus. It articulates a vision of European integration that is ‘anti-federalist’ – i.e. one that disputes the premise of ‘ever closer union’, and the argument that European integration is a good thing in and of itself, as well as being irreversible. Law and Justice, the Polish political party, is also a leading proponent of this type of stance. Crucially, unlike the NIs and EFDD, these politicians would regard themselves as ‘pro-European’ but against the idea of a United States of Europe. More broadly, these ECR politicians want European leaders to focus more on trade and business and less on social policy issues such as human rights and health. Hanley (2014) actually goes as far as to argue that, in the case of the Czech Civic Democrats, this effectively amounts to ‘scepticism without euro-scepticism’.

Linked to this, the Prague Declaration also outlines policy priorities that have now become familiar to those associated with ECR – greater emphasis on free trade between European states, less business regulation originating from Brussels, less money put into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for reasons linked to French national interests and obviously a reforming of the Eurozone. Interestingly, all these socio-economic policies go to the heart of what European integration is all about – and the tenets of a Christian Democratic state which balances economic growth with social cohesion. For ECR politicians, these are not simply internal market policies that can be reversed by whichever group of leaders happen to be in charge of the Commission – rather, these are policies that are part of the whole purpose of European integration as a distinct political economy project. When David Cameron opposes the Working Time Directive, he does so not just because he thinks it is a bad policy but because he disputes the premise that Brussels should tell the City of London how many hours to work when London is a global financial capital able to trade simultaneously with the United States and China. Mr Cameron has been clear on a number of occasions that Europe needs to ‘do less better’ – again, a neat way of summarising a position that is more than simply ‘Euro-sceptic’ populism but akin instead to Anglo-American laissez faire capitalism.

Meanwhile, we can also note the sort of policy actors who are associated with the ECR’s main think tank in Brussels, *New Direction: the Foundation for European Reform*. It has as its aim ‘to promote policies and values consistent with the 2009 Prague Declaration to

help steer the European Union on a different course and to shape the views of governments and key opinion formers in EU member states and beyond' (New Direction 2014). Two of New Direction's leading figures are Giles Merritt and Frits Bolkestein. Mr Merritt is also head of the pro-European think tank, *Friends of Europe*, while Mr Bolkestein is a former European Commissioner for the internal market and services from The Netherlands. Neither of these individuals could truly be described as 'Euro-sceptic' in the same sense of the contemporary term as Nigel Farage or Geert Wilders<sup>2</sup> but both clearly sign up to the idea that Europe should reform and free up the role of individual member states. Such an approach cannot really be said to be 'populist' in the true sense of 'Euro-scepticism' but in fact relatively moderate and more akin to a 'valence' politics centring around issues related to competency (see Bale 2006).

Indeed, according to Vote Watch Europe (2014), ECR has a relatively strong 'internal cohesion', particularly when it comes to policy areas such as trade and industry, energy and constitutional matters – higher than all the other different types of 'Euro-sceptic' groups mentioned above and not far behind ALDE. Therefore, it would appear that in some ways ECR not only has a clear focus on what it considers to be the main priorities for Europe but also clear policy solutions. One criticism which can be levelled at EFDD and NI members is that while they agree that the EU should be dismantled, they disagree on why and also on how. They struggle to work together because for some, Europe is merely a convenient vehicle for wider views related to immigration and sometimes race. Even GUE-NGL's far left ideology at times can appear unrelated to European integration – they would, after all, be against many free market activities regardless of whether or not the EU existed. On the other hand, there is some credibility in the idea that 'Euro-realism' does articulate a view that links together very naturally the need for independent nation states in Europe to be left alone to trade freely.

In many ways, then, ECR can be said to be the main standard holders of an 'Anglo-American' political economy model which sees the role of the state – including the European Union – as to not interfere with free trade and free movement of workers between nation states. West European corporatism with social partnerships between government, business and workers is not as effective as a more pluralistic model involving much less government intervention, according to ECR politicians. The European Union as the largest trading bloc in the world is highly attractive to ECR members but the European Union as the largest bureaucracy in the world is the exact opposite. 'Euro-sceptics' ultimately want European integration to fail because they dislike aspects of the free movement of Europeans and dispute the idea of a common European sphere or society. ECR members do not – they regard Europe as fundamentally a good thing but one which is ultimately about economic policy and not about social policy, and that policy platform can be considered to be 'Euro-realism'.

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<sup>2</sup> Although it is also worth mentioning that Mr Bolkestein and Mr Wilders were politically close in the past in Dutch politics.

## Identifying ‘Euro-realism’ in voting behaviour

So far, we have tentatively argued that there is some evidence that ‘Euro-realism’ can be considered *prima facie* to be a coherent ideology due to its emphasis upon promoting an Anglo-American-style political economy model to the wider European Union. The ECR group is neither using European integration as a way of advancing its more core aims nor is it truly ‘Euro-sceptic’ in the traditional sense of that term. However, we can go into more detail and also try to identify supposedly ‘Euro-realist’ values in ECR voters, especially voters who identify with the British Conservative Party in the UK. Ultimately, ‘Euro-realism’ has been refined and developed by the anti-federalist policy positions of the British Conservative Party – so how do British Conservative voters feel about issues related to the politics and economics of European integration? Using data taken from the most recent British Social Attitudes Survey in 2013, conducted by NatCen, we can start to analyse this question.

The 2013 survey asked respondents: ‘Generally speaking, would you say that Britain benefits or does not benefit from being a member of the EU?’. As Table 2 shows, when we cross-tabulate the response to this question with partisan identification, we can see clear differences between Conservative voters and UKIP voters. Only 10% of Conservatives think that UK membership of the EU has no benefits at all compared with 33% of UKIP voters. Meanwhile, 35% of Conservatives think that membership ‘somewhat benefits’ Britain compared with only 14% of UKIP voters. We can go further and conclude that while Conservative voters generally recognise the benefits of EU membership, UKIP voters do not.

*Table 2 – Does Britain benefit or not from being a member of the EU (%)?*

	<b>Greatly benefits</b>	<b>Largely benefits</b>	<b>Somewhat benefits</b>	<b>Benefits only a little</b>	<b>Does not benefit at all</b>
<b>Conservative</b>	1	11	35	35	10
<b>Labour</b>	6	24	32	21	8
<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	6	20	39	20	4
<b>UKIP</b>	0	2	14	37	33

Perhaps even more telling are the responses to the question: ‘How would you vote in a referendum to decide whether Britain does or does not remain a member of the EU?’. Table 3 shows that, again, Conservative voters are not at all convinced that Britain ought to leave the EU altogether, while UKIP voters are very much in favour of leaving.

*Table 3 – How would you vote in a referendum on EU membership (%)?*

	<b>Remain in the EU</b>	<b>Leave the EU</b>	<b>Cannot choose</b>
<b>Conservative</b>	34	43	22
<b>Labour</b>	49	28	22
<b>Liberal Democrat</b>	59	24	18
<b>UKIP</b>	10	82	8

Clearly, this relatively descriptive type of comparison between Conservative voters in the UK and other parties only tells us a limited amount. Nevertheless, it is up-to-date evidence of the way Conservative voters cannot necessarily be regarded as either entirely ‘anti-European’ or totally ‘Euro-sceptic’. British membership of the EU is perceived to be beneficial by a majority of Conservatives, according to this analysis of the BSAS 2013 survey data, while leaving the EU altogether would not be the favoured position of a majority of Conservative identifying respondents.

In order to make an estimation for identifying ‘Euro-realism’ in British voters’ political attitudes, recent data taken from the 2013 British Social Attitudes Survey were analysed. Multinomial logistic regression<sup>3</sup> was chosen as an appropriate model for comparing party support between Conservatives and UKIP in particular, controlling for socio-economic characteristics and political attitudes related to European integration. In order to make the analysis clearer, the paper focuses only on the four main UK political parties, with the Conservative Party compared to the other three: Labour, the Liberal Democrats and UKIP. Ultimately, the aim is as before to try and distinguish Conservative voters from other party supporters in relation to European political issues.

The results in Table 4 include equations for analysing the differences between respondents’ socio-economic characteristics as well as the differences in their attitudes towards issues related to Europe. The results show that characteristics such as age, gender

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<sup>3</sup> MNL was chosen as the dependent variable has more than two categories to be analysed; explanatory variables are both categorical and on a continuous scale.

and education, and attitudes such as appreciating the benefits of EU membership, are all significant variables for distinguishing between the party identification of respondents. As respondents get older, they prefer to vote Conservative rather than Labour or Liberal Democrat. With regard to gender, we can note fewer women voters appear to identify with UKIP than with the Conservatives. Meanwhile, respondents with post-school qualifications tend to vote Conservative rather than Labour compared to respondents with no-post school qualifications, and the same applies if we compare Conservatives with Liberal Democrats. In terms of attitudes towards the European Union, those respondents who recognise the benefits of the UK being in the EU are more likely to vote Labour than Conservative, with the same type of relationship apparent between the variables for predicting a vote for the Liberal Democrats over the Conservatives. However, crucially, when we compare party identification for Conservative with party identification for UKIP, those who see the benefits of EU membership for Britain are much more likely to vote Conservative than UKIP.

This analysis partly emphasises what has already been discussed with regard to the potential distinctiveness of 'Euro-realism' as a coherent set of political values – Conservative voters can be considered to be different from 'Euro-sceptic' UKIP voters in relation to attitudes towards European integration. The more the subject is optimistic about the role of the UK in the EU, the more he or she will be prone to support the Conservatives over UKIP.<sup>4</sup> While Labour and Liberal Democrat voters can be considered more enthusiastic about the EU than Conservatives, Conservative voters are still much more positive than UKIP supporters – on this basis, we can place Conservative voters in the middle of the spectrum of British voter attitudes towards Europe. With regard to acknowledging the benefits of immigration from other EU member states, Labour identifiers appear to be more positive than Conservative voters, although in turn, Conservatives are happier to recognise the wider benefits of free trade than Labour supporters. Finally, as we might expect, those who do not feel European are less likely to vote Conservative than Liberal Democrat, the latter being by far the most pro-European party in the UK in terms of policy proposals.

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<sup>4</sup> If a subject were to increase his or her score on the benefits of the EU by one point, the multinomial log odds of him or her preferring UKIP to Conservatives would be expected to decrease by 0.91 units while holding all other variables in the model constant.

Table 4 - Predicting party identification in the UK (MNL estimates)

	(Parameter estimates and standard errors)		
	Lab vs. Con	Lib Dem vs. Con	UKIP vs. Con
<i>Socio-economic characteristics</i>			
Age	-0.28 (0.06)***	-0.19 (0.11)*	-0.42 (0.11)
Gender	-0.03 (0.19)	0.28 (0.34)	-0.87 (0.34)***
Marital status	0.36 (0.20)*	0.46 (0.34)	-0.25 (0.36)
Education	0.71 (0.22)***	0.59 (0.39)*	0.16 (0.36)
Occupation	0.34 (0.24)	-0.43 (0.46)	0.60 (0.43)
<i>Political attitudes</i>			
Feeling European	0.34 (0.30)	-0.97 (0.40)**	-0.16 (0.55)
Benefits of EU membership	0.41 (0.11)***	0.26 (0.18)*	-0.91 (0.21)***
Benefits of EU immigration	0.17 (0.08)**	0.14 (0.14)	0.85 (0.14)
Benefits of free trade	-0.29 (0.13)**	0.49 (0.24)**	-0.25 (0.23)
Constant	-0.58	-0.37	3.53
Nagelkerke R-Sq (N)	0.24 (817)		

Notes: \*, \*\*, \*\*\* statistically significant at  $p < .1$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $p < .01$  respectively. Multinomial logistic regression presenting equations on predicting differences between respondents' party identification. The dependent variable on party identification includes five categories, with those of particular interest presented in the table above; independent variables are all coded 1 or 0, or on a continuous scale.

Source: As Tables 2 and 3

## Conclusion

When he made his first attempt to become a British Member of Parliament (MP) in 2001, the Conservative Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, was surprised by the questions he was asked at the local constituency selection meeting: 'There was schools and hospitals; and there was Europe. And Europe, and Europe and Europe and Europe' (*The Economist* 2014). Regardless of whether or not we can satisfactorily conclude that 'Euro-realism' is a coherent European ideology, we can firmly state that the modern day politics of the British Conservative Party at all its levels has always revolved to some extent around European integration. Given ECR's status as the third largest party in the European Parliament and the UK's status as the third largest European Union member state, that is a relatively significant statement in and of itself.

On the basis both of the preliminary policy analysis and the manipulation of BSAS voting behaviour data presented here, there is some evidence that 'Euro-realism' can now be considered distinctive from 'Euro-scepticism'. At the very least, we can say that 'Euro-realism' is a term which can be associated with British Conservatives and the wider European Conservatives and Reformist group – and conversely, not associated with UKIP and the more overtly 'hard' Euro-sceptic parties. For the latter, European integration is not a matter for realistic reform – it is an entirely wrong policy and should be ended as soon as is possible. In 2006, at the Conservative Party conference, and before he became Prime Minister, David Cameron stated: 'We need to stop banging on about Europe' (BBC News 2006). His aim here was to suggest that adopting an extreme approach to European integration is not reasonable or mainstream, and certainly not the way for the party to win back the keys of No. 10 Downing Street. This quote can be contrasted with the approach of UKIP and its charismatic leader, Nigel Farage – who likes nothing better than 'banging on about Europe', to use Mr Cameron's expression, and regards Britain joining the European Community in 1973 as its most negative post-war policy decision.

If we can distinguish ECR from EFDD, we can also distinguish ECR from the EPP. Despite European integration being labelled a 'conservative project', British Conservatives have always felt highly ambivalent about it. Certainly, most of the founding fathers of the EU were 'conservatives' and many of its leading figures today are also on the centre-right of politics such as José Manuel Barroso, Herman Van Rompuy and Jean-Claude Juncker. In the wake of the recent Eurozone crisis, the Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner, Olli Rehn, was dubbed 'Mr Austerity' by parties on the centre left like S&D due to his advocacy of greater restraint on public spending. Along with the other two parts of the troika, the European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund, the EU often adheres to a classical liberal conservative ideology with which British Conservatives are also entirely comfortable. Yet, they are not – for despite all the above, Europe also tries to mix economic policies with social policies in a classically Christian Democratic-style 'third way'. Public expenditure may be pursued but alongside greater government intervention into business practices and

greater state intervention in the private sector. ECR politicians would argue that the roots of the problems with the Eurozone are ultimately political – and that is why it has not been a successful economic project.

Linked to this, we see that ECR party politicians are much more keen to use the term ‘reform’ whenever possible. The term is in their title, and they clearly regard that as a vote winning strategy for many European citizens. When paying tribute to his predecessor as ECR leader, Martin Callanan, the new leader Syed Kamall stated: ‘Martin has been a strong supporter of European reform and euro-realism, and his hard work is a major part of the reason why the ECR is now growing and attracting new member parties’ (BBC News 2014). Meanwhile, on his appointment as Britain’s new European Commissioner, Jonathan Hill, was asked if he was a ‘Euro-sceptic’ to which he responded: ‘I am not a great one for looking for names or badges or boxes. I think I have a pretty straightforward view which is that we need to make reform in Europe. One should want to make reform in Europe if we want to make Europe stronger and make it better for the people of Europe’ (*The Telegraph* 2014). For ECR representatives, ‘Euro-realism’ appears to positively sum up the current party policy in relation to European integration. The question of whether that is truly for natural ideological reasons, possibly more contrived pragmatic reasons or some sort of combination requires further research beyond this paper – but the preliminary evidence that ‘Euro-realism’ taps into a wider enthusiasm for pursuing a more ‘Anglo-American’ approach to European political economy is relatively strong.

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