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# RADICAL RIGHT AND RADICAL LEFT EUROSCEPTICISM: A DYNAMIC PHENOMENON

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## SUMMARY

Euroscepticism is often regarded as a monolithic, unitary political phenomenon. After all, Eurosceptic parties, movements and voters are united in voicing their opposition to European integration. This, however, is a serious misconception: Eurosceptic politics in Western Europe is heterogeneous and dynamic—both among political parties and among voters.

There is significant variation regarding the motivations to reject the European Union (EU). Radical left Eurosceptic parties oppose the EU on the basis of socio-economic concerns. Radical right parties reject EU integration on the basis of sovereignty arguments and cultural claims. Moreover, political parties' Euroscepticism is by no means static. Although radical right parties are the most forceful political opponents of the EU today, a number of significant radical right parties initially supported European unification.

Crucially, these ideological and temporal variations in Euroscepticism are not solely party-driven. Also voters oppose European integration for different ideological reasons and that the extent to which voters on the far left and far right have opposed the EU has varied over time. In particular, the era of political integration heralded by the Maastricht Treaty (1992) marked a decisive shift for radical right Euroscepticism—as the opposition to the EU significantly increased among far right voters since the Maastricht Treaty.

What is more, the impact of Eurosceptic political parties on European Union politics is also heterogeneous and dynamic. The presence and success of Eurosceptic parties can have profound repercussion for the ways in which political parties with governing experience deal with the issue of European integration. The electoral success of Eurosceptic parties and the emphasis on the EU issue by the radical right and the radical left has resulted in strategic responses from mainstream parties. This suggests that Euroscepticism does not only matter in extreme cases—such as in the case of Brexit, but has a profound impact on the functioning of EU politics, both within member states and in Brussels.

Nevertheless, despite mounting evidence of certain responsiveness of mainstream parties and member state governments to Euroscepticism, a disconnect between domestic political contestation and EU decision-making remains. This hampers an effective response to Eurosceptic politics and potentially stifles meaningful political contestation over EU integration.

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## INTRODUCTION

While anti-European Union politics was a fringe phenomenon at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is at the core of European politics today. Political parties with distinct anti-European platforms have gained considerable electoral representation in recent years.<sup>1</sup> That Eurosceptic politics is not without effect has become abundantly clear with the narrow victory of the “Leave” camp in the British referendum on EU membership in June 2016.<sup>2</sup>

In 2017, **Eurosceptic parties are major contenders in a number of national elections in Western Europe.** Most recently, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Freedom Party, PVV) became the second largest party in the Dutch national elections on 15 March 2017 gaining approximately 13% of the vote. Marine Le Pen, leader of the *Front National*, has good chances of coming out on top in the first round of the 2017 French Presidential election; like her father 15 years ago. The Federal Republic of Germany, long seen to be immune to radical right and Eurosceptic politics, will most likely witness the first entry of a radical right Eurosceptic party in the history of the Bundestag, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD).<sup>3</sup>

This Policy Paper demonstrates that Euroscepticism is a political phenomenon subject to significant variation. Not only are there important differences between radical right and radical left Euroscepticism, Euroscepticism has also evolved over time among both parties and voters. Moreover, this Policy Paper systematically reviews academic research which has demonstrated the ways in which Eurosceptic politics indirectly affects mainstream party EU attitudes and the process of EU integration as a whole.

The discussion of Euroscepticism focuses on Western Europe for two reasons. First, party competition over EU integration has unfolded very differently in Central and Eastern Europe. Instead of a prerogative of smaller parties on the margins of the political spectrum, Euroscepticism is and has been a component of major government parties’ ideologies in Central and Eastern Europe. This has produced very different dynamics of party contestation over EU integration. Secondly, the relatively recent accession of the EU has meant that European integration has very different connotations in Central and Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, which hampers effective comparison across time.

This Policy Paper is structured as follows. The next section outlines the heterogeneous ideological bases of Euroscepticism among radical right and radical left parties in Western Europe as well as their variation over time. The second section summarises the developments in Euroscepticism among West European voters. Subsequently, the paper discusses findings of recent political science research regarding the effects of Euroscepticism on mainstream parties’ attitudes toward European integration. The fifth section sheds light on the process of integration in the face of Eurosceptic politics followed by a conclusion.

1. Yves Bertoncini and Nicole Koenig, “Euroscepticism or Europhobia: Voice vs. Exit?”, Policy Paper N. 121, Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

2. Glencross, Andrew. “Why a British Referendum on EU Membership Will Not Solve the Europe Question.” *International Affairs* 91, no. 2 (2015): 303–17

3. Arzheimer, Kai. “The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany?” *West European Politics* 38, no. 3 (2015): 535–56

# 1. The Ideological Bases of Party-Based Euroscepticism

While Euroscepticism is prevalent across the party system, the main protagonists of party-based Euroscepticism in Western Europe can be found on the far left and far right fringes of the party spectrum.<sup>4</sup> Radical right and radical left parties do not only hold anti-European views, their Euroscepticism is a focal point of their ideological profiles. Indeed, although there is significant variation between parties and across countries, **almost all radical left and radical right parties believe European integration is a particularly salient policy issue, and increasingly so.**<sup>5</sup> In discussing party-based Euroscepticism, this Policy Paper therefore specifically focuses on the radical left and radical right Eurosceptic parties.

”THE RADICAL LEFT AND RADICAL RIGHT OPPOSE “EUROPE” FOR VERY DIFFERENT REASONS.”

The shared commitment of putting opposition to the EU on the political agenda, however, does not mean that radical right and radical left parties agree on the reasons to oppose “Europe” in the first place. On the contrary, as this section demonstrates, the radical left and radical right oppose “Europe” for very different reasons. In addition, this section sheds light on the important transformations the radical right’s and the radical left’s ideological dispositions toward the EU have undergone.

## 1.1. Radical Right Euroscepticism

The radical right rejects supranational integration on the basis of cultural arguments. **The rejection of European supranational unification of radical right parties is a corollary of the radical right’s nativist outlook.** Nativism is an ideological perspective which stipulates that only members of the native group, namely “the nation”, are legitimate constituents of the polity.<sup>6</sup> Only the ethnically or culturally defined nation can form the basis of popular sovereignty and endow a polity with legitimacy. As a result, the political involvement of non-native peoples, persons or political ideas are regarded as a threat to national integrity. The project of European integration is, of course, at odds with this narrow conception of popular sovereignty. Supranational integration is predicated on the idea that popular sovereignty is not limited to the nation-state, but exists beyond it—either as one “multinational people” or multiple national peoples.

However, not all radical right parties in Western Europe have been consistently against European integration. On the contrary, before the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, a number of parties now strongly associated with Euroscepticism, such as the French *Front National* or Austrian *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (Freedom Party Austria, FPÖ), were initially supportive of the EU.<sup>7</sup>

In the mid-1980s, *Front National* leader Jean-Marie Le Pen actively advocated further integration, notably in sensitive issue areas such as immigration, “anti-terrorism policy” and border controls. For the FN and a number of other parties such as the German *Republikaner* (Republicans), this initial support for European integration stemmed to large part from the belief that European nations should unite as ethnically homogenous entity.<sup>8</sup> Yet, not all radical right parties initially supportive of European unification subscribed to such an ethnic conception of European unity. For instance, the EU support of the FPÖ in the 1970s and 1980s was rather a consequence of the party’s market-liberal programme at the time.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the Italian *Lega Nord* (Northern League, LN) was in favour of European integration because it deemed the European Economic Community to be a useful vehicle for advancing greater regional autonomy.<sup>10</sup>

4. The question of what constitutes Euroscepticism is not uncontested in the political science literature. The radical right and radical left parties defined as Eurosceptic in this Policy Paper display EU support scores below 4 in the Ray / Chapel Hill Expert Survey expert survey data, which corresponds with the definition of “soft” and Euroscepticism made by Szczerbiak and Taggart. See: Szczerbiak, Aleks, and Paul Taggart. “Opposing Europe: Party Systems and Opposition to the Union, the Euro and Europeanisation.” *SEI Working Papers*, no. 36 (2000): 6; Ray, Leonard. “Validity of Measured Party Positions on European Integration: Assumptions, Approaches, and a Comparison of Alternative Measures.” *Electoral Studies* 26, no. 1 (March 2007): 159

5. Meijers, Maurits J. *Is Euroscepticism Contagious? Examining the Impact of Eurosceptic Challenger Parties on Mainstream Party Attitudes toward the European Union*. PhD Thesis: Hertie School of Governance, Berlin, 2016: chap. 2

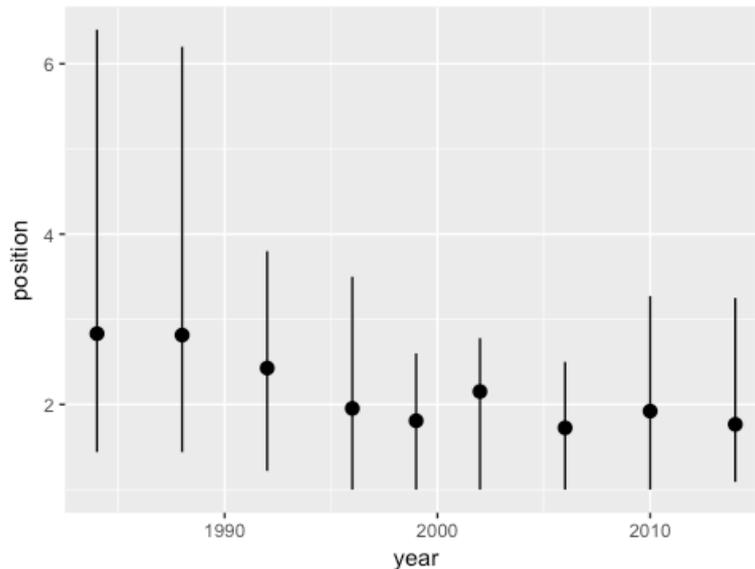
6. Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 159

7. *Ibid.*; Almeida, Dimitri. “Europeanized Eurosceptics? Radical Right Parties and European Integration.” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 11, no. 3 (September 2010): 237–53

8. Fieschi, Catherine, James Shields, and Roger Woods. “Extreme Rightwing Parties and the European Union: France, Germany and Italy.” In *Political Parties and the European Union*, 235–53. London: Routledge, 1996: 237

9. Betz, Hans-Georg. *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*. Houndmills, London: Macmillan, 1994: 11

10. cf. Keating, Michael. “The European Union and the Regions.” In *The European Union and the Regions*, edited by Barry Jones and Michael Keating, 1–22. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995

**FIGURE 1** ▶ Radical right party positions towards the EU over time

Mean and range of radical right EU positions on the basis of expert survey data by Ray and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). A party is categorized as Eurosceptic if the score of its overall orientation towards European integration is below 4.

Data source: Ray, "Measuring Party Orientations towards European Integration: Results from an Expert Survey"; Bakker et al., "1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File. Version 2015.1."

With the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, however, radical right parties came to unequivocally reject the European integration process. The Maastricht Treaty heralded a new era of political European integration as it introduced qualified-majority voting in the EU, established EU citizenship and paved the way for the European common currency. The overall development of radical right Euroscepticism is plotted in Figure 1.<sup>11</sup>

As Figure 1 demonstrates, for radical right parties there is a clear downward trend visible from 1992 onwards. The dots represent the average radical right EU position at that time, whereas the lines show the range of EU positions among radical right parties. The range of their EU positions decreased significantly signalling the development of increasingly homogeneous anti-EU positions among radical right parties. Crucially, not only did they change their positions on the EU, they came to regard the EU issue also increasingly important.<sup>12</sup> For the British UK Independence Party (UKIP), its opposition to the Maastricht Treaty was a founding principle of the party as it was set up in 1993 by members of the Anti-Federalist League, a movement formed in 1991 to oppose the Maastricht Treaty.<sup>13</sup>

Today, Euroscepticism is one of the core features of radical right politics in Europe. Not only has the integration of the EU been deepened in many respects, **the sovereign debt crisis and the ensuing Eurozone crisis allowed the radical right to combine cultural identity arguments against the EU with utilitarian objections against the pooling of sovereignty.** Nevertheless, there remain important differences between radical right parties across Europe. The Euroscepticism of Geert Wilders' PVV, for instance, is a form of unconditional, so-called "hard Euroscepticism" or "Europhobia". On the other hand, parties such

11. A party's Euroscepticism is established on the basis of a party's overall orientation towards European integration below 4 in the Ray and Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) expert survey data sets. See: Ray, "Measuring Party Orientations towards European Integration: Results from an Expert Survey"; Bakker et al., "1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File. Version 2015.1."

12. Meijers, Maurits J. *Is Euroscepticism Contagious? Examining the Impact of Eurosceptic Challenger Parties on Mainstream Party Attitudes toward the European Union*. PhD Thesis: Hertie School of Governance, Berlin, 2016: chap. 2

13. Ford, Robert, Matthew J. Goodwin, and David Cutts. "Strategic Eurosceptics and Polite Xenophobes: Support for the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the 2009 European Parliament Elections." *European Journal of Political Research* 51, no. 2 (March 17, 2012): 204–34

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as the German AfD are more nuanced and represent a “softer” variant of Euroscepticism.<sup>14</sup> Hence, whereas Wilders is a staunch advocate of a “Nexit”—a Dutch exit from the EU, the AfD rejects the European common currency and the financial transfers within Europe, but notes that only if the European institutional framework could not be reformed, it would advocate the dissolution of the EU, which would allow the re-formation of a European economic community.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, **in some cases radical right parties have moderated their Eurosceptic appeal when faced with the prospect of governing or when in government.** As part of successive Berlusconi governments, the Lega Nord did not push to enact specific anti-EU policies despite its Eurosceptic platform.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the Finns Party (“Perussuomalaiset”) have toned down opposition to European integration as they entered the Finnish government and its leader, Timo Soini, became Deputy Prime Minister in May 2015.

## 1.2. Radical Left Euroscepticism

**The Euroscepticism of the radical left, on the other hand, is guided by economic concerns regarding the integration process.** The wariness of radical left parties to the EU is more a product of their opposition to the free market economy and their quest for economic and social justice than a rejection of a polity with multinational constituents.<sup>17</sup> The radical left regards the institutional structure and the policy-making logic of the EU to be ideologically biased toward market-liberal policies. Not unlike prominent EU scholars such as Fritz Scharpf, the radical left believes there is an institutional asymmetry in the EU in favour of market-making instead of market-regulation.<sup>18</sup> Hence, the rejection of the EU accrues from the idea that the realization of egalitarian social policies is not possible in the current institutional framework. Of course, many scholars and commentators, perhaps most prominently Giandomenico Majone, reject this view of the EU as an essentially market-liberal polity as one-sided.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the lack of veritable common European social policies, serves as evidence **to the radical left that the EU is inextricably a neo-liberal polity.**

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Whereas the West European radical right gradually came to agree more or less on clear anti-European politics, the development of the radical left is less linear and more fraught with diversity. The Maastricht Treaty did not represent a clear turning point for all radical left parties. Whereas some radical left parties regarded the Maastricht Treaty and an entrenchment of market-liberal ideology in the European institutional framework, other parties carefully regarded the inception of a true European political union as a possibility to eventually reshape the EU into a vehicle for left-wing policies.

14. Szczerbiak, Ateks, and Paul Taggart. “Opposing Europe: Party Systems and Opposition to the Union, the Euro and Europeanisation.” *SEI Working Papers*, no. 36 (2000); Yves Bertoncini and Nicole Koenig, “Euroscepticism or Europhobia: Voice vs. Exit?”, Policy Paper N. 121, Jacques Delors Institute, November 2014

15. Alternative für Deutschland. “Programm Für Deutschland. Das Grundsatzprogramm Der Alternative Für Deutschland,” 2017

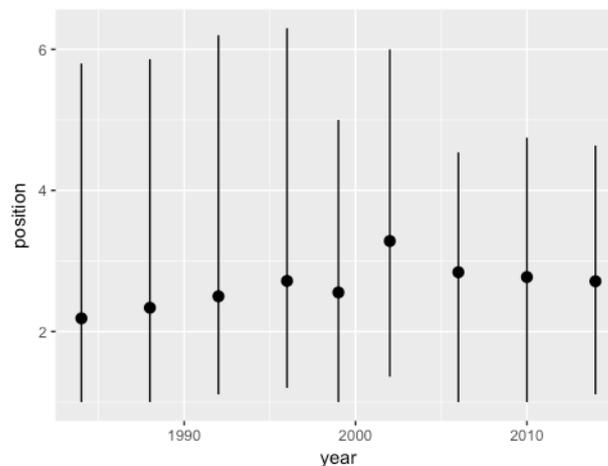
16. Tarchi, Marco. “Italy: A Country of Many Populisms.” In *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, edited by Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, 84–99. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007: 97

17. March, Luke, and Cas Mudde. “What’s Left of the Radical Left? The European Radical Left After 1989: Decline and Mutation.” *Comparative European Politics* 3, no. 1 (April 2005): 23–49; Hooghe, Liesbet, Gary Marks, and Carole. J. Wilson. “Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?” *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 8 (October 1, 2002): 965–89

18. Scharpf, Fritz W. “Negative and Positive Integration in the Political Economy of European Welfare States.” In *Governance in the European Union*, SAGE, 1996: 15-18

19. Majone 1996

FIGURE 2 ► Radical left party positions towards the EU over time



Mean and range of radical left EU positions on the basis of expert survey data by Ray and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). A party is categorized as Eurosceptic if the score of its overall orientation towards European integration is below 4.

Data source: Ray, "Measuring Party Orientations towards European Integration: Results from an Expert Survey"; Bakker et al., "1999-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File. Version 2015.1."

From Figure 2 it is apparent that the range of radical left EU positions is indeed rather large. Moreover, the radical left has shown divergent paths when it comes to the evolution of their positions on European integration. While the majority of radical left parties remain Eurosceptic, the average trend line shows that radical left EU support on average has increased from the 1980s until the mid-2000s, after which it slightly decreased. A number of radical left parties have consistently held anti-European positions. For the Dutch SP (*Socialistische Partij*, Socialist Party), for instance, fierce Euroscepticism is a consistent feature of its party identity.<sup>20</sup> Also in its campaign for the 2017 Dutch parliamentary election, the SP unflinchingly attacked the EU for its alleged facilitation of big business at the cost of the ordinary citizen. In Denmark, the fiercely Eurosceptic Red-Green Alliance, fused radical left socialist views with ecological concerns, has advocated the abolishment of the EU and has maintained an anti-European position throughout the years.<sup>21</sup>

Other radical left parties have shifted their positions on European integration over the years. The Greek SYRIZA is a case in point as it became more opposed to European integration over the years: In its early days in 1980s and 1990s, the precursor of SYRIZA was initially very supportive of European integration. However, in the 2000s they made Euroscepticism a core aspect of their programme. Its anti-EU stance in combination with its outsider status made the party a credible frontrunner of the anti-Memorandum, anti-austerity sentiment in Greece as they won the January 2015 elections. Yet, Alexis Tsípras ultimate decision to accept another bailout accompanied with a set of austerity measures in July and August 2015, has shown that SYRIZA, to a certain extent, has been willing to move beyond its principled opposition to the EU.

A similar move to less Eurosceptic, more pragmatist attitudes toward the EU when in government has been visible in the French PCF (*Parti communiste français*, French Communist Party), for instance. Although Euroscepticism had been a defining characteristic of the French PCF in the 1980s and 1990s, it moderated its opposition to Europe during its government participation in the 1997 Jospin government.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the party reverted to its anti-European platform after it severely lost in the 2002 elections and formed the joint list

20. Keith, Dan. "Ready to Get Their Hands Dirty: The Socialist Party and GroenLinks in the Netherlands." In *Left Parties in National Governments*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 164; March, Luke. *Radical Left Parties in Europe*. London: Routledge, 2011: 130

21. *Ibid.*, 105

22. Bell, David. "The French Extreme Left and Its Suspicion of Power." In *Left Parties in National Governments*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 40

Front de Gauche with Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Parti de Gauche "to fight the 'Europe of the Lisbon Treaty'".<sup>23</sup> The Danish *Socialistisk Folkeparti* (Socialist People's Party, SF), also advocated a withdrawal from the EEC until the mid-1980s, but significantly moderated its Euroscepticism in the subsequent years in order to distinguish itself from its radical left competitor Red-Green Alliance (*Enhedslisten - De Rød-Grønne*) and to appeal a more mainstream electorate and make government participation feasible.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.3. Is Euroscepticism Inevitably a Form of Nationalism?

Some scholars argue that both radical left Euroscepticism and racial right Euroscepticism are rooted in a nationalist predisposition.<sup>25</sup> **Whereas radical right nationalism relies on a nativist notion of the nation, the radical left nationalism is a consequence of their defence of the "popular class."** Equating the working class with the nation, the radical left regards the EU is not only a market-liberal construct, but also a threat to the territorial integrity necessary to conduct true "socialist policies". This attitude is, for instance, visible in the Dutch SP, which "wants to restrict the size of the EU budget and limit EU powers on social issues and foreign policy" and "criticises unrestricted migration from new member states for displacing Dutch workers and resulting in the exploitation of migrant workers"<sup>26</sup>. Yet, while some radical left parties, such as the Communist Party of Greece (*Kommunistikó Kómma Elládas*, KKE), explicitly state that egalitarianism can only be realised within the framework of the nation-state, not all radical left parties share the view that democracy and social rights are impossible beyond the nation state.

Indeed, whereas both the radical right and radical left are highly critical of the development of the European integration project, some radical left parties harbour the belief that the EU can reformed from within. **The anti-polity opposition of radical left parties is, therefore, conditional on whether they believe the institutional framework of the EU has the potential to be reformed.** Although both types of Euroscepticism are manifestations of principled polity opposition, the radical left's opposition is not an opposition to the principle of supranational governance *per se*.<sup>27</sup> It is important to note, however, that many radical right parties also state in their party manifesto's that they are in favour of some kind of European cooperation.<sup>28</sup> To be sure, this is not necessarily a contradiction, since the radical right is still fundamentally opposed to the European polity. **While most radical right parties are vague about what forms of European cooperation they envisage, the emphasis lies on collaboration between sovereign nations without the transfer or pooling of sovereignty.**

”POLITICAL PARTIES NOT ONLY CHOOSE TO OPPOSE THE EU FOR DISTINCT IDEOLOGICAL REASONS, BUT THESE STANCES ARE ALSO SUBJECT TO CHANGE WHEN THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION CHANGES.”

All in all, this overview of the dynamic and heterogeneous ideological bases of Eurosceptic parties demonstrates that political parties not only choose to oppose the EU for distinct ideological reasons, but that these stances are also subject to change when the process of integration changes. Hence, while Euroscepticism is likely here to stay, it is more than likely that for many parties its main tenets will develop as the nature of European unification changes.

23. quoted from March, Luke. *Radical Left Parties in Europe*. London: Routledge, 2011: 68

24. Ibid., 103; Christensen, Dag Arne. "The Danish Socialist People's Party: Still Waiting After All These Years." In *Left Parties in National Governments*, 121–38. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; Christensen, Dag Arne. "The Left-Wing Opposition in Denmark, Norway and Sweden: Cases of Europhobia?" *West European Politics* 19, no. 3 (July 1996): 525–46

25. Halikiopoulou, Daphne, Kyriaki Nanou, and Sofia Vasilopoulou. "The Paradox of Nationalism: The Common Denominator of Radical Right and Radical Left Euroscepticism." *European Journal of Political Research* 51, no. 4 (June 7, 2012): 504–39

26. Keith, Dan. "Ready to Get Their Hands Dirty: The Socialist Party and GroenLinks in the Netherlands." In *Left Parties in National Governments*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 165

27. de Wilde, Pieter, and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European Integration: Euroscepticism as Polity Contestation." *European Journal of Social Theory* 15, no. 4 (March 14, 2012): 537–54

28. Mudde, Cas. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 165

## 2. The Development of Public Euroscepticism

Although this Policy Paper is principally concerned with the political supply of Euroscepticism by political parties, it is important to note that not only the ideological profiles of Eurosceptic parties have evolved, but that we see a similar development in public attitudes toward European integration. This lends further support to the claim that Euroscepticism is not simply a strategic political tool used by fringe parties to bolster its anti-establishment profile. Instead, **party-based Euroscepticism and public Euroscepticism have clear ideological bases and are reactive to developments of European integration.**

A recent study demonstrated empirically that fears related to the process of European integration differ in kind among left-wing voters and right-wing voters—akin to the contrasting motivations among radical right and radical left parties to oppose the EU.<sup>29</sup> Whereas left-wing voters' fears regarding the European unification process are rooted in worries about socio-economic issues such as the loss of social security, the fears of right wing voters are grounded in concerns that European integration constitutes a loss of national identity and causes one's own country to lose power in global politics while also increasingly transferring money to the European level.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, research has shown that left and right Eurosceptic voters differ in the quality of their EU opposition. Like many radical left parties, voters on the left fringes of the political spectrum who strongly support the redistribution of economic resources tend to be Eurosceptic. For voters on the right pole of the spectrum, on the other hand, anti-immigration sentiments are related to opposition to European integration.<sup>31</sup>

The previous section established that Euroscepticism among parties is a diverse and dynamic phenomenon. In particular, for many parties, especially among the radical right, the signing of the Maastricht Treaty was a pivotal moment. A similar development is visible among European electorates. **Throughout the 1970s and 1980s opposition to the European unification process was primarily a left-wing affair.** On average, European voters with a left-wing ideological profile were more likely to hold negative positions toward the EU than right-wing voters. Remarkably, voters on the far right pole of the left-right spectrum were not particularly likely to hold anti-European views in this period. Yet, with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, public Euroscepticism was no longer an exclusive left-wing affair. **The propensity of voters on the far right to espouse Eurosceptic views has risen in both the 1990s and the 2000s.** At the same time, voters on the far left side of the spectrum toned down their Euroscepticism slightly.<sup>32</sup> This post-Maastricht shift in EU attitudes of far right voters is telling, because it can be regarded as a prelude of the rising importance of cultural and identity-based arguments in EU politics. When French and Dutch voters rejected the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, cultural anti-EU arguments played a big role—especially in the Netherlands.

”THE DEVELOPMENTS AMONG RADICAL LEFT AND RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES AND THE AVERAGE DEVELOPMENT AMONG FAR LEFT AND FAR RIGHT VOTERS ARE VERY SIMILAR.”

Of course, this brief summary of these developments in public Euroscepticism glosses over some variation across countries. Nevertheless, it is striking that the fact that the developments among radical left and radical right parties in Western Europe and the average development among far left and far right voters are very similar. The heterogeneous and dynamic nature of both party-based and public Euroscepticism suggests that Euroscepticism is not merely “a touchstone of dissent”, as Paul Taggart<sup>33</sup> noted in 1998, but that this is, and has been, a broad political phenomenon for which there is both political supply and political demand.

29. van Elsas, E., and W. van der Brug. “The Changing Relationship between Left-Right Ideology and Euroscepticism, 1973-2010.” *European Union Politics* 16, no. 2 (2015): 194–215

30. Ibid.

31. van Elsas, Erika J, Hakhverdian, Armen and van der Brug, Wouter. “United against a Common Foe ? The Nature and Origins of Euroscepticism among Left-Wing and Right-Wing Citizens.” *West European Politics* 39, no. 6 (2016): 1181–1204

32. van Elsas, E., and W. van der Brug. “The Changing Relationship between Left-Right Ideology and Euroscepticism, 1973-2010.” *European Union Politics* 16, no. 2 (2015): 194–215

33. Taggart, Paul. “A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems.” *European Journal of Political Research* 33, no. 3 (April 1998): 363–88

### 3. The Effects of Euroscepticism on Mainstream Parties and Domestic Politics

Following the Brexit referendum it is clear that anti-European politics can have serious consequences for individual member states as well as for the course of the European integration. Yet, also beyond such extreme and rare cases of Eurosceptic success, Eurosceptic parties have been able to influence party competition over EU attitudes in many countries. Especially given the fact that Eurosceptic parties rarely achieve national office—and when they do, as in the case of SYRIZA or the Finns Party, they moderate their anti-EU appeal—it is important to examine the **indirect effects of Euroscepticism**.

How does Eurosceptic politics affect the ways in which mainstream parties (i.e. parties with governing experience) have dealt with EU issues? On average, between 1984 and 2010, mainstream parties shift their positions toward less pro-EU positions whenever Eurosceptic challenger parties were successful in the national elections.<sup>34</sup> Differentiating between the impact of radical left and radical Eurosceptic challenger success, research found that **radical right Euroscepticism affected both centre-left parties and centre-right parties, whereas radical left Euroscepticism only affected centre-left parties**. The substantive explanation for this is, is that the cultural logic of radical right Euroscepticism resonates with many culturally conservative voters. Wary of losing the vote of lower educated, culturally more conservative voters, centre-left parties shifted toward slightly less positive positions. On the other hand, the centre-right is not threatened by the radical left, because their anti-neoliberal opposition to the EU is not likely to be attractive for centre-right voters. These findings are in line with comparative politics findings on domestic party competition over the issue of immigration, which also show centre-left parties to be sensitive to radical right success.<sup>35</sup> In a similar vein, another study focusing on Euroscepticism among voters has shown that large parties tend adapt their positions during European Parliament elections when faced with a Eurosceptic public.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, Eurosceptic politics does not only affect the positions of mainstream parties toward European integration, it also affects the importance that parties attach to the European integration issue. Indeed, **radical left and radical right Eurosceptic parties** function as so-called “issue entrepreneurs”: they **put the EU issue on the domestic political agenda**.<sup>37</sup> Particularly because mainstream parties for a long time have tried to avoid the EU issue, Eurosceptic parties were able to push it onto agenda and reap the electoral gains from doing so.<sup>38</sup> In addition, research has shown that Eurosceptic challenger parties are capable of forcing mainstream parties to increasingly emphasize the issue. A study on the parliamentary activities on European Union issues in

” EVEN IF EUROSCEPTIC PARTIES DO NOT BECOME GOVERNING PARTIES, THEY INCREMENTALLY INFLUENCE THE WAYS IN WHICH EUROPEAN UNION POLITICS IS CONDUCTED AT THE MEMBER-STATE LEVEL.”

the Danish parliament has shown that challenger parties’ parliamentary questions on European affairs motivate mainstream opposition parties to increasingly discuss the EU issue.<sup>39</sup> These mainstream opposition parties, in turn, are able to affect the attention mainstream governing parties pay to the issue. In a similar vein, research from the 2009 and 2014 European Parliamentary campaigns in France and the Netherlands have shown that radical right emphasis of the EU issue during the campaign leads mainstream parties to increasingly emphasize the EU issue in the news media.<sup>40</sup>

34. Meijers, Maurits J. “Contagious Euroscepticism? The Impact of Eurosceptic Support on Mainstream Party Positions on European Integration.” *Party Politics*, 2015, 1–11

35. Abou-Chadi, Tarik. “Niche Party Success and Mainstream Party Policy Shifts - How Green and Far-Right Parties Differ in Their Impact.” *British Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 2 (2016): 417–36; Van Spanje, Joost. “Contagious Parties: Anti-Immigration Parties and Their Impact on Other Parties’ Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe.” *Party Politics* 16, no. 5 (March 2, 2010): 563–86

36. Williams, Christopher J., and Jae-Jae Spoon. “Differentiated Party Response: The Effect of Eurosceptic Public Opinion on Party Positions.” *European Union Politics* 16, no. 2 (2015): 176–93

37. de Vries, Catherine E., and Sara B. Hobolt. “When Dimensions Collide: The Electoral Success of Issue Entrepreneurs.” *European Union Politics* 13, no. 2 (May 23, 2012): 246–68

38. Ibid.

39. van de Wardt, Marc. “Desperate Needs, Desperate Deeds: Why Mainstream Parties Respond to the Issues of Niche Parties.” *West European Politics* 38, no. 1 (2015): 93–122

40. Meijers, Maurits J., and Christian Rauh. “Has Eurosceptic Mobilization Become More Contagious? Comparing the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament Elections in The Netherlands and France.” *Politics and Governance* 4, no. 1 (2016): 83–103

Thus even if Eurosceptic parties do not become governing parties, they incrementally influence the ways in which European Union politics is conducted at the member-state level. Bonnie Meguid has noted in her study of niche parties in Western Europe that “competition between party unequals has ramifications for the long-run competition between mainstream party equals”.<sup>41</sup> In other words, **the competition between challenger parties on the fringes of the political spectrum with political parties at the centre of the spectrum is likely to influence the ways in which centrist parties interact with one another on the EU issue.**

## 4. The Effects of Euroscepticism on European Integration

The previous section pointed to research which attested that mainstream parties are responsive to the presence and success of Eurosceptic parties and a Eurosceptic public with respect to their positions on and attention to the EU issue in the domestic political arena. Yet, what does this mean for the process of European integration itself? The fact that **mainstream parties are** in such a systematic way **responsive to popular sentiment on European issues as well as to changes in their political surroundings**, might suggest that the much-discussed deficits of political representation in the EU are overstated. After all, mainstream parties do seem to approach the EU issue strategically—incorporating popular demands. Hence, one could argue that although voters lack direct policy influence, they might be able to influence the process of European integration indirectly.

In theory, this is not improbable because, as the late Peter Mair forcefully argued in 2007, ultimately the intergovernmental arena is key when it comes to making integration steps.<sup>42</sup> According to Mair, EU politics can be divided into two dimensions: the Europeanization dimension and the functional dimension. In the Europeanization dimension of EU politics, decisions are taken regarding the establishment and consolidation of authoritative supranational institutions as well as with respect to widening the territorial scope of the EU through enlargement.<sup>43</sup> Political contestation over whether the EU should have more or less competences in a certain policy area, therefore, pertain to the Europeanization dimension. In the functional dimension, political actors compete over how the EU should function and which types of policies it should enact *within the current institutional framework*.<sup>44</sup> Not fundamental questions about the evolution of the European polity are central to the functional dimension. Rather functional EU contestation revolves around ideological and interest-specific debate over policy issues on which the EU already has acquired competences.

The importance of distinguishing between these different forms of EU politics lies in Mair’s argument that there is a **crucial mismatch between the two main channels of democratic representation in the EU**—national elections and European Parliament (EP) elections—and dimensions of EU politics which are central to these channels of representation. Whereas political parties, both on the fringes and in the centre of the political spectrum, extensively discussed their visions for the future of the EU polity during European elections, domestic election campaigns, for a long time at least, tended to neglect issues concerning the Europeanization dimension. This is striking because the elected members of the European parliaments (MEPs), in effect, do not have the competences to shape the process of European integration. Instead, only member-state governments in the European Council are able to decide on endowing the EU with further competences. Mair lamented this paradox of European Union politics. The real time and place to debate European integration in meaningful way are national elections, not EP elections.

41. Meguid, Bonnie M. “Competition Between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy in Niche Party Success.” *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 3 (September 2, 2005): 359

42. Mair, Peter. “Political Opposition and the European Union.” *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 1 (2007): 1–17

43. *Ibid.*, 9.

44. *Ibid.*, 10.

”FOR A LONG TIME, THE STRATEGY OF KEEPING EU ISSUES UNDER WRAPS WORKED WELL IN MANY MEMBER STATES.”

Mair’s analysis resonates with the argument that mainstream parties for a long time purposely avoided the EU issue as much as they could, especially during national election campaigns.<sup>45</sup> For a long time, the strategy of keeping EU issues under wraps worked well in many member states. The **relative complacency of the electorates regarding European affairs** allowed member-state governing parties a lot of latitude to devise their party-political strategies toward “Europe”. Yet as the EU evolved from a common market to a form of political union, opposition to European integration among the public gradually mounted. The French and Dutch rejection of the 2005 referendums on the European Constitutional Treaty are often regarded as a turning point, as the rejection of the Constitution presented a first instance in which mass domestic politics stopped the integration process in its tracks. Moreover, the popularity of parties with distinct Eurosceptic platforms augmented—signalling a profound change in the way EU politics is conducted at the national level.

To some political scientists, the growing salience of EU politics and the growing Euroscepticism among parties and voters suggested that European Union politics was “finally” subjected to mass politics.<sup>46</sup> In other words, domestic party contestation is increasingly relevant for the future of the EU as it would affect the course of the integration process. Taking seriously Mair’s argument in 2007 that there is a mismatch between the different types of EU politics and the associated channels of democratic representation, this, of course, can be interpreted as good news.

**The growing politicization of European integration issues in the domestic arena and during national election campaigns puts EU politics on the political agenda.**<sup>47</sup> After all, the fact that political questions concerning fundamental developments of our societies are discussed within the public sphere is regarded by many, not in the least by Jürgen Habermas, as sine qua non for democratic politics.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, those Eurosceptic challenger parties, of which empirical studies have demonstrated they can pressure mainstream parties to increasingly emphasize the EU issue in the domestic arena, suggests—from a democratic theory perspective—have made an important contribution in making EU politics more of a level playing field.<sup>49</sup> Since the onset of Euroscepticism, also non-mainstream parties, which are usually side lined in supranational decision-making processes, have become important players in EU politics. This is of course not to say the cultural-nativist arguments of the radical right, or the market-liberal rejection of the radical left is well-founded. The point is that the Eurosceptic left and right made important contributions putting an important, previously neglected issue on the domestic political agenda.

Moreover, the finding that mainstream parties react to both public opinion shifts and electoral success of Eurosceptic parties, shows there is some degree of responsiveness to public concern on EU issues. Whether these shifts in mainstream party policy are, in fact, strategic or, rather, constitute profound ideological reconfigurations of the parties in question is not clear, as the next sections highlights. Moreover, it is important to emphasize that the argument made here is not that such EU policy shifts are per se laudable, or the opposite for that matter.

The key issue is that this evidence shows that **centrist parties are willing to adapt their positions on European integration in order to capture the median voter**—displaying a degree of responsiveness on EU politics that was previously not accounted for. Given that both Eurosceptic voters and Eurosceptic parties hold such anti-European positions for clearly definable ideological reasons, moreover, suggests that

”CENTRIST PARTIES ARE WILLING TO ADAPT THEIR POSITIONS ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION”

45. Steenbergen, Marco R, and David J Scott. “Contesting Europe? The Salience of European Integration as a Party Issue.” In *European Integration and Political Conflict*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004: 165–92

46. Hooghe, Liesbet, Gary Marks, and Carole J. Wilson. “Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?” *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 8 (October 1, 2002): 965–89

47. Hutter, Swen, Edgar Grande, and Hanspeter Kriesi, eds. *Politicising Europe: Mass Politics and Integration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016

48. Calhoun, Craig. “Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere.” In *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, 1–48. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992

49. Dahl, Robert. *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971

meaningful political contestation about European integration is essential. In other words, **we can no longer afford to sweep European affairs under the carpet of domestic politics, and given the growing salience of the EU issue and the heterogeneity of political positions on the EU issue within domestic political arenas, this is probably a good thing.**

## 5. Further Integration despite Responsiveness to Euroscepticism?

The question is how these forms of domestic responsiveness on EU issues translate to governments' political stances in the European Council or the Council of Ministers. Do these shifts in positions towards the EU among West European mainstream parties translate to a change of direction with respect to actual European integration process?

The answer to this question is not straightforward, particularly because we lack specific empirical studies connecting domestic European Union politics with the policy-making processes on the European level. There are a number of studies which show that societal political pressure has resulted in **changed behaviour in EU policy-making**. For instance, recent empirical findings point to the fact that member state governments engage in "signal responsiveness" in the European Council indicating that governments might oppose legislation which delegates powers to the EU in response to public Euroscepticism.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, there is evidence that the European Commission—in theory insulated from political contestation—does respond to public politicization, e.g. when devising European consumer policy.<sup>51</sup> In addition, there is evidence that member states slow down the transposition of EU legislation when faced with higher levels of public Euroscepticism.<sup>52</sup>

” EU MEMBER STATES HAVE TAKEN FURTHER INTEGRATION STEPS WHICH TOUCH UPON THE CORE OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY.”

**At the same time, however, despite the mounting of opposition to European integration and the electoral gains of Eurosceptic parties in recent years, the integration process itself has progressed significantly.** In the course of the Eurozone crisis, EU member states have taken further integration steps which touch upon the core of national sovereignty. For instance, the reduction of national autonomy in budgetary policy by means of the Fiscal Compact and the centralisation of banking supervision through the European System of Financial Supervision (ESFS) are major integration steps.<sup>53</sup> Some even argue that “at least in the short run the economic and financial crisis has created an opportunity structure for European integration rather than an obstacle”.<sup>54</sup>

Hence, mass EU politicization has not halted the process of European integration process. Yet, the observation that integration has continued despite public opposition and EU politicization does not mean that mass EU politics at the domestic level has not influenced the course of integration at all. Frank Schimmelfennig argues that mass EU contestation has led national governments to purposively shield integration steps from mass politicization at the domestic level by avoiding treaty changes which would necessitate referendums in many countries.<sup>55</sup> Thus, although mass EU contestation did not result in a complete halt to the integration process, it has constrained governments' ability to devise fundamental reforms of the EU.

These observations suggest that despite the increased salience of the EU issue and the apparent responsiveness of mainstream parties in the domestic context, the integration process and the domestic channel of representation are still decoupled. Particularly, a situation wherein **mainstream parties tone down their support** for European

50. Hagemann, Sara, Sara B. Hobolt, and Christopher Wratil. "Government Responsiveness in the European Union: Evidence From Council Voting." *Comparative Political Studies*, 2016, 1–27

51. Rauh, Christian. *A Responsive Technocracy? EU Politicisation and the Consumer Policies of the European Commission*. ECPR Press, 2016

52. Williams, Christopher J. "Responding through Transposition: Public Euroscepticism and European Policy Implementation." *European Political Science Review*, 2016, 1–20

53. Schimmelfennig, Frank. "European Integration in the Euro Crisis: The Limits of Postfunctionalism." *Journal of European Integration* 36, no. 3 (February 12, 2014): 321–37

54. Tosun, Jale, Anne Wetzel, and Galina Zapryanova. "The EU in Crisis: Advancing the Debate." *Journal of European Integration* 36, no. 3 (April 29, 2014): 208

55. Schimmelfennig, Frank. "European Integration in the Euro Crisis: The Limits of Postfunctionalism." *Journal of European Integration* 36, no. 3 (February 12, 2014): 321–37

integration and increasingly emphasize the EU issue, **while nonetheless furthering integration**, and shield the integration process from politicization, **is therefore particularly problematic for EU governance**.

A good illustration of this is a recent remark by the Alexander Pechtold, leader of the Dutch social-liberal party D66, to Mark Rutte, Dutch Prime Minister and leader of the conservative-liberal party VVD in a recent television debate for the recent 2017 Dutch national elections. With respect to European integration issues, Pechtold accused Rutte of acting like a radical right party at home, but like a pro-European in Brussels.<sup>56</sup> Rutte responded by noting that, as a governing party, one has to make compromises with 27 other member states when negotiating in Brussels.

In other words, the need for consensus at the EU level inevitably entails making in-roads in one's own party platform. And indeed, it remains an open question what such responses of mainstream parties and national governments to Eurosceptic politics actually indicate. On the one hand, they could signify opportunistic strategies for immediate domestic electoral gain to attract less EU-minded voters. It also possible, however, that the limited capacity of the EU's institutional framework to accommodate political conflict and disagreement over integration steps stifles a meaningful translation of domestic EU politics to the supranational level.

Peter Mair argued that precisely the lack of an institutional framework that facilitates the contestation over European politics makes European integration politics a zero-sum game. Either one consents to "the package deal of EU politics" or one rejects the "package" by voting for an outright Eurosceptic parties. The **consensus-**

**IF ONE BELIEVES THAT THE DIRECTION THE UNION IS MOVING TOWARDS IS CONTRARY TO ONE'S POLITICAL INTERESTS OR BELIEFS, ONE HAS NO CHOICE BUT TO REJECT THE POLITY AS A WHOLE."**

**driven logic of EU politics** in the Council hardly allows for tailor-made political solutions—as the contentious debates between the Greek government and the EU as well as the negotiations between former British prime-minister David Cameron and the EU have shown. Therefore, given the current institutional framework, it is not *per se* "irrational" or "emotional" of voters to elect anti-European representatives.<sup>57</sup> If one believes that the direction the Union is moving towards is contrary to one's political interests or beliefs, one has no choice but to reject the polity as a whole.

Therefore, if the process of European integration continues despite the fact that the success of Eurosceptic politics leads to more public debate about Europe and causes positions shifts of mainstream parties in the domestic arena, this is likely to further spur disaffection with mainstream parties' EU politics. Hence, **despite mainstream party attempts to accommodate anti-European concerns, there is a genuine risk such a strategy in combination with the consent to further integration steps will lead to even stronger support for Eurosceptic parties**. In essence, this suggests the presence of a vicious circle, wherein increased Euroscepticism inevitably leads to more Euroscepticism as governing parties struggle with translating "Eurosceptic signals" to political outcomes in "Brussels."

In other words, these observations suggest there is not much to be gained for pro-European mainstream parties in co-opting radical left and radical right positions on the issue of European integration. Instead, there might be more gained politically in the long-term with a programmatic response to Euroscepticism on which these parties, when in government, can follow suit in the European Council. This could be a staunch pro-European platform which mainstream parties advocate with conviction—proposing EU-based solutions for current defects in the fabric of European integration. Yet, this could also involve critical, but constructive proposals on how national sovereignty and European decision-making can be balanced. The key issue is, however, that governing parties formulate a clear political stance toward European integration and, subsequently, commit themselves to this stance "in Brussels". While this can come at the cost of efficiency and consensus in the Council, this will facilitate a meaningful debate on European integration "at home"—which is still the main channel of democratic representation.

56. RTL, Carré Débat, March 4, 2017.

57. de Wilde, Pieter, and Hans-Jörg Trenz. "Denouncing European Integration: Euroscepticism as Polity Contestation." *European Journal of Social Theory* 15, no. 4 (March 14, 2012): 537–54

## CONCLUSION

This Policy Paper has demonstrated that Euroscepticism in Western Europe is a rather diverse phenomenon, which has a differentiated effect on EU politics as a whole. The argument was made that Euroscepticism has to be taken seriously—both as a societal and a party-political phenomenon. Voters clearly react to the changing nature of the European Union as the surge of far right public Euroscepticism since the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 suggests. In addition, the different reasons to reject the EU among the radical left and radical right are echoed by voters on the far left and far right. This suggests that if one wants to deal with this “wave of Euroscepticism”, one has to address these substantive ideological concerns regarding the European unification process.

The paper also pointed to a number of important empirical findings demonstrating that mainstream parties react to Eurosceptic politics in a number of ways: they adapt their positions in reaction to both Eurosceptic challenger party success and public opinion and they increasingly address the EU issue when Eurosceptic parties do so as well. While this highlights a certain degree of responsiveness of national mainstream parties in EU politics, **the mode of integration “by stealth” during the Eurozone crisis in the face of greater societal opposition** to the EU likely exacerbates the key problem. In particular, the simultaneous position shifts and continued integration call the credibility of mainstream parties’ EU platforms into question.

The political parties campaigning for national elections in 2017 have decided to adopt different strategies. Rather than attempting to accommodate Eurosceptic fears, politicians such as the French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron or the progressive GreenLeft and social-liberal D66 in the Netherlands have opted for unabashed pro-European platforms. Perhaps a convinced plea for the need of European integration that specifically takes into account both socio-economic and cultural arguments against the EU, can therefore rekindle support for the project of European integration.

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