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From pathology to mainstream phenomenon: Reviewing the Euroscepticism debate in research and theory

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Abstract

When taking stock of the now vast literature on Euroscepticism, one cannot but notice the often deeply normative character of much of the academic research on this topic. This article argues that it is as a result of the pro-integration bias in mainstream EC/EU studies that Euroscepticism has been conceptualized as a 'phenomenon of the periphery' – be it the periphery of party systems, the periphery of domestic societies or the geographical periphery of the EU, epitomized by the UK and the Nordic countries. However, since the early 2000s, the spread of Euroscepticism at public opinion and party levels across the EU has contributed to changing academic understandings of Euroscepticism, from a quasi-pathology to a mainstream and enduring phenomenon in European domestic societies and democracies. Considering the risk of conceptual overstretch ensuing from this 'mainstreaming', the article puts forward some theoretical and methodological proposals for future research on Euroscepticism, by drawing lessons from comparable academic debates on the notion of populism, and by recasting debates on Euroscepticism in the light of the current financial and Eurozone crises.

Keywords

Euroscepticism, populism, European Union, theories of European integration

Introduction

Initially limited to the small world of scholars working on the European Union (EU), who started to address this phenomenon from the mid-1990s onwards, the notion of Euroscepticism is now traceable in the official discourse of EU institutions and (pro-European) national decision-makers. Indeed, after the derailment of the EU constitutional process in 2005,[1] both policymakers and researchers have set themselves the explicit aim of fighting this phenomenon. Beyond the apparent consensus on the non-desirability of Euroscepticism, however, few have engaged in the difficult task of genuinely unpacking this notion.

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While pro-European politicians may wish to avoid exposing their own internal divisions on the potential finalities[2] of the EU in public, academics have struggled to go beyond the seminal definition given by Paul Taggart, who defined Euroscepticism as encompassing both 'contingent and conditional opposition to European integration as well as total and unconditional opposition to it' (Taggart, 1998: 364). This initial definition, which covers a broad range of attitudes towards the EU, was later broken down into two different forms of opposition by Taggart and Szczerbiak. Whereas 'hard Euroscepticism' refers to 'principled opposition to the EU and European integration' (as it is being articulated by those parties or actors advocating a withdrawal out of the EU or opposing EU accession), 'soft Euroscepticism' expresses a 'qualified opposition' to the EU reflecting dissatisfaction with 'core' EU policies or with the current EU trajectory, perceived to be contrary to the 'national interest' (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002).

Other typologies have been put forward, outlining different degrees of opposition to European integration, such as Kopecky and Mudde's distinction between Euroscepticism as such (expressing principled support for membership but dissatisfaction with the EU's current development) and Europhobia (expressing principled opposition and dissatisfaction) (2002); or Flood and Usherwood's six-point continuum of party positions, ranging from simple rejection of the EU to a maximalist position advocating a federal Europe (2007: 6).

Confronted with this diversity (which also reflects the absence of a commonly agreed definition of the EU itself), this article shows that like research on the EU, research on Euroscepticism is starting to break away from its previous EU-centrism, and is increasingly drawing insights from existing research on another contested notion (populism).

The article starts by examining the widespread perspective that Euroscepticism is a non-issue or an irrational, marginal phenomenon. It suggests this initial understanding of Euroscepticism might be due to the fact that EU-related research has long neglected the issue of contestation of the integration project. It then shows how this widespread understanding, never accepted by all researchers, had to be further nuanced in view of the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism from the early 2000s onwards. While the ensuing overstretch of the concept, together with its initial flaws, led some researchers to suggest alternatives to the use of this term, the article illustrates how research on Euroscepticism is usefully drawing inspiration from research on the notion of populism. In line with previous typologies, which understand different attitudes towards the EU as an integrated whole, it illustrates how Euroscepticism is being re-conceptualized in recent research as a manifestation of the wider, global phenomenon of populism.

Euroscepticism as 'non-issue' or peripheral phenomenon

During the first four decades of European integration, opposition or hostility to the European project was not on the agenda of scholars in the field of EU studies. While one early observer of the EC,[3] Gerda Zellentin (1967), deplored the lack of any structured opposition at the EC level (thus foreshadowing future debates on the EU's democratic deficit), resistance to the integration process was largely ignored by academics. In fact, Euroscepticism appeared on the agenda of researchers from the second half of the 1990s onwards, in parallel to the emerging debate on the EU's 'democratic deficit' (Kaniok, 2012). This parallelism is no coincidence; Euroscepticism was considered, among other things, to be a consequence of the EU's democratic deficit and was studied to the extent that many scholars working on the EU were attempting to analyse the latter. In this initial phase, hostility towards the EC tended to be conceived as a phenomenon of the (political, geographical) periphery, or as the expression of something other than attitudes towards the EU (Euroscepticism as a 'proxy').

The peripheralist approach

As far as political parties are concerned, Euroscepticism has, since the late 1990s, been analysed as a 'touchstone of dissent' (Taggart, 1998). In a context where most mainstream and/or governing party leaderships (at least in continental Europe) advocate a pro-European stance, hostility to the EU is a way, for protest-based parties, to distinguish themselves from the so-called political establishment. Here, Euroscepticism is mainly conceived as the 'politics of opposition' (Sitter, 2001). At the same time, as the EU itself is characterized by centrist politics, party-based Euroscepticism has been analysed as an offshoot of ideological (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, 2002; Ray, 2007) or religious[4] (Madeley and Sitter, 2005) extremism.

In the same vein, authors have argued that popular Euroscepticism (as it is expressed during EU-related referenda, or during elections) should be seen as a mere proxy, as voters, ignorant of most EU issues, vote against further integration in order to sanction incumbent domestic governments (see Anderson, 1998; Franklin, van der Eijk and Marsh, 1995). In parallel to this, public hostility to European integration has been analysed as the expression of parochial (Inglehart, 1977), if not outright 'anti-universalist' (Grunberg and Schweisguth, 2002)[5] attitudes. Certainly, the actual socio-economic profile of Eurosceptic voters (characterized by comparatively low levels of education and income), lent support to this view of Eurosceptics as the losers in Europeanization processes, unwilling or unable to adapt.

Finally, this peripheralist approach also characterized many country-specific studies, ranging from Britain as the 'usual suspect' and mainstream Euroscepticism as being a typically British phenomenon (Smith, 2005), to 'Anglo-French exceptionalism' (Harmsen, 2005), and/or Nordic Euroscepticism (Hansen and Weaver, 2002). Thus, be it British or Nordic, Euroscepticism has long been seen as a phenomenon mainly located at the geographical margins of continental Europe. In that respect, results from the Eurobarometer surveys, suggesting that domestic public opinion in specific member states continuously displayed levels of scepticism well above the EU average, supported the view that Euroscepticism was more present in some countries (e.g. the United Kingdom, Nordic countries, Austria, Hungary) than others, while being virtually absent in a few of them (mainly the Benelux and Southern countries).

Opposition to the EU as a blindspot of EU-related research?

Certainly, this representation of Euroscepticism as a marginal phenomenon rightly reflects resistance towards the EU until the late 1990s. However, this theorization of Euroscepticism might also be, at the same time, the consequence of the implicitly normative approach underlying much EU research. It was argued elsewhere, for instance (see Robert and Vauchez, 2010), that EU studies have long been influenced by the proximity between many EU experts and EU institutions or, at least, by the shared belief in the durability of the integration process. Indeed, even recent research on Euroscepticism tends to present it as something that has to be 'responded to' (Leconte, 2010: 264) or 'confronted' (Usherwood, Startin and Guerra, 2013). This implicitly normative orientation is present at least in the two main disciplines from which most EU students emanate: political science and history.

Among political scientists, early EC/EU theorists, be they neofunctionalists[6] or intergovernmentalists,[7] have tended to rely on the assumption that the integration process would continue without any major 'spill back'.[8] This explains why the scenario of a possible disintegration of the EU remained a 'blind spot' in terms of mainstream theories (Faber and Wessels, 2005: 355), at least until the 2008 sovereign debt crisis in the Eurozone. Neofunctionalists, especially, considered the possible emergence of conflicts around EC issues, possibly leading to a 'mass politicization' of the integration process, as a distant option, unlikely to happen in the near future (Lindberg and

Scheingold, 1970). Apart from Philippe Schmitter's revision of early neofunctionalist postulates in the wake of the 1965 'empty chair' crisis[9] (Schmitter, 1971), which envisaged the possibility of a 'spill back' scenario, the assumption that the EC and its core policies (Internal Market, later Economic and Monetary Union) would endure remained intact. Certainly, the frequent focus on political elites in early research on Euroscepticism did not dispel this assumption as, except for the UK, those elites were, on the whole, pro-integration. Even liberal intergovernmentalism, which attributes a key role to domestic interest groups in the integration process (via their leverage on national governments), relies on the assumption that potentially critical groups are not likely to mobilize around EU issues (Moravcsik, 1993: 484). Thus, resistance against the EC and further integration at society level remained long under-researched.

This statement also applied, until recently, to historians' works on European integration. The fact that the historiography of the EU has tended to gloss over conflicts and social movements (Crespy and Verschueren, 2009: 380) was due, notably, to the proximity between early historians of European integration and EC institutions (Kaiser, 2006). Within the discipline of history, the privileged relationship between international relations historians – who focused on the perspective of the 'founding fathers' of the EC – and EC officials (in terms of financing, access to archives, etc.) at the expense of those historians with a more sociological approach, also explains the relative neglect of resistance against the EC at society level (Le Boulay, 2010). The dominance of an international relations perspective, together with the focus on the history of ideas about European unity, explains that the history of European integration has hitherto been 'a history without society' (Kaelble, 1988). It is only relatively recently, since the late 1980s, that historians have started analysing sources of ambiguity and/or resistance to the integration process, especially among domestic political elites (see for instance Loth, 1989; Milward, 1992).

In a similar vein, recent research has shown that the main tool hitherto used by researchers in order to investigate popular attitudes towards the EC, namely the Eurobarometer (EB) surveys,[10] was initially fashioned by and for European Commission officials. The unofficial aim of the creation of the EB was to prove the existence of a European public opinion, to which the Commission could refer in order to legitimize its initiatives in the eyes of domestic governments. As a result, the methodology used in these surveys, as well as their results, should be considered with appropriate caution (Aldrin, 2010). In this respect, it should be noted, that, even in the eyes of the most prominent neofunctionalist theorist of the EC, Ernst Haas, the notion of the 'permissive consensus', that allegedly characterized the early decades of European integration, neither equated with support, nor enthusiasm for the EC on the part of the public. It referred rather, to toleration of the EC (Haas, 1968: xxix). In that sense, Euroscepticism as indifference, or as apathy towards European integration, was indeed always widespread among European publics.

Euroscepticism: mainstream phenomenon and contested notion

This mainstream dimension of Euroscepticism came to the fore in 2005, as a majority of voters in France and in The Netherlands rejected, via referendum, the ratification of the European Constitutional Treaty. In the wake of these referenda, researchers have started to investigate the mainstream dimension of Euroscepticism among political elites, citizens, and even within EU institutions.

Uncovering the mainstream dimension of Euroscepticism

Going beyond the analysis of party-based Euroscepticism as the privilege of protest-based parties, researchers have come to analyse the articulation of Eurosceptic positions within mainstream

political parties (for instance Ray, 2007). Indeed, in the course of the 1990s, the latter have become increasingly internally divided on EU issues (Hooghe and Marks, 2006), while having to cope with the electoral competition of Eurosceptic/anti-European single-issue parties or movements.

As for popular Euroscepticism, post-materialist theories (Inglehart, 1977) have progressively been revised (e.g. Janssen, 1991), as the widespread perception of Eurosceptic voters as being simply parochial nationalists has been questioned. Certainly, the positive correlation between nationalism, negative views on immigration and Euroscepticism seems to be quite robust across countries (McLaren, 2006). At the same time, other attitudes, such as lack of trust in elected institutions and political parties, also play a crucial role in the emergence of Eurosceptic orientations (McLaren, 2007: 249). Moreover, the 2005 referenda results in France and The Netherlands have shown that opposition to further integration reaches well into theoretically Europhile segments of domestic electorates – notably younger voters and those with relatively high levels of education (see Cautrès, 2005).

In the same vein, the view of a basic dichotomy between Europhile and Eurosceptic countries has given way to a much more nuanced understanding of collective perceptions of the EU. Studies of countries usually considered as largely pro-European, like Spain, have not only identified more complex attitudes towards the EU, such as indifference (see Leconte, 2010: 187), they have also pointed to the diffusion of Euroscepticism in hitherto Europhile countries, such as Italy (Quaglia, 2003) and Belgium (Abts, Heerwegh and Swyngedouw, 2009).

Finally, researchers have come to question the widespread view of EU institutions themselves as pro-European strongholds (Brack and Costa, 2012), even in the case of the European Commission. Hooghe (2012), for instance, has shown that less than 40% of administrators[11] stand for a federal EU. Similarly, Dehousse and Thompson (2012) found that a sizeable minority (8%) of Commission officials thought that the leadership role in the EU should belong to the member states (rather than to the Commission or the European Parliament (EP)). This suggests that, contrary to widespread views, there always was a plurality of different – and even diverging – views as to the finality of the EU, even within EU institutions themselves.

Euroscepticism: An outdated notion?

Indeed, since the early 2000s, a number of works have stressed the limits of the term 'Euroscepticism', leading to a debate about its relevance. To begin with, authors have stressed the non-scientific origin of the term, which originated in media discourse, as well as its polemical use in politics, where it is used as a rhetorical device in order to dispel political adversaries (Crespy and Verschueren, 2009: 383; Flood, 2002: 2). Besides, the term itself relies on the (often implicit) assumption that 'the only correct integration is Community integration' (Kaniok, 2009: 163). Moreover, authors stress the diversity of existing definitions of Euroscepticism (Crespy and Verschueren, 2009: 381). Indeed, whereas Euroscepticism tends to be defined negatively (as opposition or hostility to various dimensions of European integration), there is no consensus on the definition of *what* Eurosceptics oppose. The undefined nature of 'pro-Europeanism' (Kaniok, 2009: 163) and the lack of academic consensus on the very nature of the EU itself, make it difficult to reach an agreement on what Euroscepticism actually is. Here, researchers working on Euroscepticism find themselves trapped in a theoretical deadlock, because any definition of Euroscepticism presupposes a (necessarily subjective) definition of the EU 'that takes into account the finality of European integration and its structures' (Kaniok, 2012).

In this context, authors warn against the conceptual overstretching and fuzziness of the term (Flood, 2002). Being much too general, it ignores the diversity of attitudes associated with European integration and their evolutionary nature; it is a much too substantial and static notion

(Crespy and Verschueren, 2009: 385). As constructivist approaches to European integration have shown, the EU is indeed a 'multi-perspectival polity'[12] *par excellence*, as it means different things to different observers in different cultural and political contexts. Consequently, recent works suggest going beyond the much too simplistic pro-/anti-EU cleavage, and replacing the study of Euroscepticism with the study of *resistances* against European integration (Crespy and Verschueren, 2009: 385) or, as is explained below, re-conceptualizing Euroscepticism as a discourse (Trenz and de Wilde, 2009: 8).

Re-conceptualizing Euroscepticism: some insights from research on populism

The idea of linking theories of populism and theories of Euroscepticism is not new. For some years now, scholars have shown that, for the most part, Eurosceptic attitudes are underpinned by the same logics as populist ones: the defiance towards mainstream political parties, as well as the perception of 'losing out' as a result of Europeanization and globalization processes. Scholars like Hanspeter Kriesi, for instance, have analysed Euroscepticism as part of wider, global trends affecting European party systems, as the latter are being transformed by a new cleavage between losers and winners of Europeanization and globalization processes. This cleavage is indeed a key component of the discourse of the new, populist Right in Europe,[13] which combines anti-immigration stances, Euroscepticism and opposition to cultural liberalism (Kriesi, 2005: 7). In that respect, this final section tries to further articulate models of populism and models of Euroscepticism from a theoretical point of view, and shows that tools hitherto applied to the study of populism are being used to analyse Euroscepticism.

Populism, Euroscepticism and the 'democratic deficit' of the EU

Like Euroscepticism, populism is a polemical notion. Populism has indeed been seen, since the end of the Second World War, as a threat to democracy or as the pathology of democracy (Canovan, 1999: 6; Laclau, 2005a: 19). Similarly, as mentioned earlier, Euroscepticism has often been seen by academics, even implicitly, as a phenomenon that has to be confronted. Nonetheless, rather than being seen as irrational phenomena, populism and Euroscepticism can also be analysed as expressions, as symptoms of the same democratic 'malaise'.

Experts in the field of populism like Margaret Canovan argue, for instance, that, instead of being 'the other' of democracy, populism is consubstantial to it. She argues that it is one of the two core dimensions of democracy, namely its 'redemptive' dimension ('politics of faith'), as opposed to its 'pragmatic' dimension ('politics of scepticism') (Canovan, 1999). When democracy is reduced to its 'pragmatic' dimension, when the distance between representative and participative democracy is perceived as too wide, populism emerges as a warning, as a catharsis of democracy. In the same vein, Ernesto Laclau considers that populism emerges when politics has been reduced to mere administrative governance. In that sense, populism is 'about the perceived degeneration of representative democracy'. To the extent that it reintroduces political conflict in the public sphere, it is 'politics as such' (2005a: 18). This point of view is shared by Mény and Surel (2002), who analyse populism, among other things, as a reaction to the perceived limits of the non-majoritarian logics[14] of constitutionalism.

Similarly, as one of the numerous expressions of populism, Euroscepticism can be seen as a reaction to the 'democratic deficit' affecting the EU and its member states.

The EU has been described as a form of governance without government, where there is no authority clearly responsible for policy outcomes and where a government–opposition division

does not exist as such (see Neunreither, 1998). Indeed, authors have identified lack of political conflict as the main reason for the perceived weak legitimacy of the EU (Lord and Magnette, 2004). A de-politicized technocratic type of legitimacy permeates the communication of EU institutions. Thomas Diez, for instance, shows how the very language dominant at EU level, that of neofunctionalism, with its reliance on technocratic legitimacy and its widespread use of technical terms like 'directives' or 'regulations', conveys the idea of a non-democratic EU: '[…] the institutional language of neofunctionalism has prevailed until today, and provides the ground to continuously reconstruct the EU as a monster bureaucracy concerned with technical matters' (1999: 7).

In this context, Euroscepticism actually re-injects politics into a largely de-politicized polity. Here, the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism can be interpreted as a process of politicization of the EU irrespective of political parties' discourse, as EU issues become a relevant dimension of public debates at the national level (see Trenz and De Wilde, 2009). From this perspective, the emergence of grassroots, social mobilizations against core EU policies contributes to a process of 'normalization' of EU issues, which become subsumed within pre-existing cleavages at the domestic level. Further research could investigate to what extent Eurosceptic criticism has contributed, even indirectly, to a gradual democratization of the EU by pushing its agenda such as more frequent use of referenda (in relation to EU issues) and the necessity to give a right of legislative initiative to the European Parliament (see Leconte, 2010: 38).

It can also be argued that European integration contributes to the emergence of populism – and hence, to the rise of Euroscepticism as a form of populism – by destabilizing domestic party systems. Initially, authors convincingly argued that European integration had no direct impact on domestic party systems; voters' electoral behaviour remained driven by the left/right cleavage, rather than by their views on the EU. Moreover, it has been argued that, until recently mainstream political elites have been able to maintain the illusion of internal unity on EU issues (Mair, 2000). However, at the same time, the same authors have pointed out the indirect and destabilizing consequences of integration for mainstream political elites.

First of all, the disjunction between, on the one hand, the gradual emergence of a pro-/anti-EU cleavage among voters and, on the other hand, the non-politicization of this cleavage by mainstream political parties, can be compared to a 'sleeping giant' (Eijk and Franklin, 2004: 47). It creates a strong potential for political entrepreneurs articulating a protest-based, anti-EU discourse. As was noted already 15 years ago, the EU could thus open up a promising opportunity structure for political entrepreneurs who, combining different ideological perspectives, might 'appeal to voters on nationalistic plus protectionist plus solidaristic plus security issues cemented by a common distrust for [the EU]' (Bartolini, 1999: 11).

Second, as was noted by Peter Mair 20 years ago, European integration has a strong impact on voters' perceptions of mainstream political parties. It exacerbates the perception of a relative blurring of differences between Left and Right, by reducing the range of policy choices available to domestic governments and contributing to the lack of clearly discernible alternatives. By shifting power upwards to the EU level, it enhances the widespread perception of powerless and irrelevant domestic political parties (Mair, 1995: 47). Thus, European integration contributes to the weakening of domestic party systems, without giving rise to a discernible alternative at the EU level. Indeed, authors agree that representative, parliamentary democracy based on a robust European party system is unlikely to emerge for the time being (Eijk, van der and Franklin, 2004: 47; Mair, 2000). In this context, European integration might contribute to furthering populism as a protest-based, anti-elite discourse, and as 'partyless', unmediated politics between strong leaders and their followers (Mair, 2000).

This is especially true in the context of the financial and sovereign debt crises that erupted in 2008, leading, in debtor countries, to the further disempowerment of national parliaments, to the

coming to power of non-elected, technocratic governments supported by the EU (in Greece and Italy), and to the perceived lack of any alternative to current austerity policies (Habermas, 2012).

Populism and Euroscepticism as discourses: Should we use similar tools of analysis?

As far as tools for analysis are concerned, the discursive approach, initially applied to the study of populism, can also fruitfully be used to analyse Euroscepticism.

Regarding populism, authors have recently suggested moving beyond substantive definitions. Indeed, beyond the 'dichotomic vision of society into two camps' (the elites v. the people) (Laclau 2005a: 19), which makes up its core message, populism, like Euroscepticism, is compatible with any ideological position along the Left/Right cleavage. Besides, the extreme diversity of the political, socio-economic and cultural contexts in which populism has emerged across time and space makes any attempt at giving a substantive definition of the term irrelevant. Consequently, Laclau (2005b) pleads for a 'strictly formal' conceptualization of populism, which he defines as 'a mode of political articulation of social, political or ideological contents'. In sum, researchers should not investigate the content, the ideas that populists put forward; rather, they should analyse how populist leaders succeed in aggregating a number of unfulfilled requests, by reshaping the political and social space on the basis of the elites/people cleavage, with the people as an underdog. Here, the research question formulated by Laclau seems particularly relevant to the current EU context: why, in a specific context, does populism as a specific mode of mobilization, come to be viewed, by vast segments of voters, as the only way to express alternatives to the existing political and socio-economic status quo (Laclau, 2005b: 17)?

Like populism, Euroscepticism cannot be defined as an ideology (Flood and Usherwood, 2005: 8) but it can be reconceptualized as a discourse. Recent developments in the broader field of EU studies have prepared the ground for such a reconceptualization.

First, EU studies in general have witnessed the emergence of a sociological turn leading to an enlargement of research agendas to include European societies, and how they react to the European integration process (see Saurugger and Mérand, 2010). Similarly, scholars working on Euroscepticism have broadened their research agendas, beyond political parties, to new actors such as the media, grassroots movements and civil society organizations (including those existing beyond the 'Brussels bubble'). This has moved research agendas away from ideological content and party politics, leading researchers to investigate 'ordinary' citizens' perceptions of the EU. An example of this is the research on letters to the Editor written by 'ordinary' French citizens during the referendum campaign on the EU Constitutional Treaty (Gaxie et al., 2011).

Second, the 'constructivist turn in EU studies' (see for instance Christiansen, Jorgensen and Wiener, 1999) has led to the introduction of a discursive approach to the study of the EU. This has allowed researchers to critically investigate some aspects of European integration. For instance, the study of EU institutions' discourses on a European identity shows that the latter often rely on the implicit exclusion of an 'Other', just like processes of identity-building at the national level. Similarly, researchers have highlighted the ambiguity of key concepts in EU discourse and EU integration theories. For instance, the widely used notion of 'Europeanization', which aims to depict the impact of integration on domestic societies, implicitly conveys the idea of a 'top-down', rational norm or standard, to which societies and citizens have to adapt. In EU official jargon itself (especially in the context of accession processes or during the current crisis), there is a predominance of expressions conveying the idea of domestic backwardness versus EU modernity, such as adaptation, screening and supervision (Vetik, Nimmerfelt and Taru, 2006). In the same vein, discursive approaches have also contributed to deconstructing EU official discourse or

EU jargon (the so-called 'Euro-speak'), as a way to de-politicize crucial policy choices like the launching of Economic and Monetary Union or the so-called 'big bang' enlargement.[15]

Working from a discursive theory perspective, Thomas Diez was the first to use tools and concepts taken from research on populism, in order to analyse discourses on the EU in domestic public spheres. Studying British debates on European integration, he shows how core notions of the EU, like that of 'liberal economic community (LEC)' convey a set of meanings and narratives which do not fit nicely with a simple pro-/anti-integration cleavage (2001: 26). The notion of LEC, relying on a dichotomy between politics and economics is, indeed, compatible with deep economic integration (albeit not with political integration) and with a flexible understanding of domestic parliamentary sovereignty (2001: 23). In a similar vein, recent contributions have suggested replacing existing typologies of Euroscepticism with a redefinition of Euroscepticism as 'particular discursive formations within the battlefield of collective identities that are opened by European integration' (Trenz and de Wilde, 2009: 2). In a context where the EU is understood as a 'discursive battleground' (Diez, 2001), Euroscepticism is analysed as 'counter-narratives' trying to put forward their own understanding of collective identities, against pro-EU discourses trying to legitimize the EU in the eyes of the public (Trenz and de Wilde, 2009: 7–8).

Several characteristics of the EU make this understanding of Euroscepticism as a form of populist discourse especially relevant. While designing a methodology to study discourses about the EU, Flood and Usherwood, for instance, suggest paying attention to two aspects. First, the EU is a good subject for myths (Flood and Usherwood, 2005: 7). Good illustrations of this are the so-called horrific 'Euro-myths' propagated by the British tabloid press, which depict the EU as a regulatory 'monster', mingling in every possible aspect of citizens' ordinary life. By the same token, populist discourse relies on a mythological logic, as it identifies a single cause for the multiple frustrations it tries to aggregate: the presumed betrayal of the 'people' by the elites. Second, as the two authors point out, discourses that are hostile to the EU lend themselves to the 'us vs them' perspective that is central to populism (Flood and Usherwood, 2005: 9).

Such an identity-based perspective is especially relevant in the case of the EU, as an organization which challenges exclusive definitions of national identity, without succeeding in constructing a new European *demos.* As mentioned earlier, the key concept in all populist discourses is that of the 'people', either ethnically, socially or politically defined. Now, one of the touchstones of the debate on the 'democratic deficit' of the EU relates to the fact there is no European people or demos. This makes the EU a perfect target for populist discourses. This is especially the case in the context of the financial and economic crisis affecting the EU since 2008. Indeed, within the Eurozone at least, where countries are supposed to come up with a unified, solidaristic response to the sovereign debt crisis, the crisis puts on the agenda the central question of the boundaries of collective solidarity.[16]

The debt discussion is certainly a very interesting context to analyse how collective identities are being (re)framed and how different narratives about the crisis compete. As analysts of European politics note, the debt discussion in domestic public spheres is mainly framed in terms of opposition between different member states (for instance, 'Germany versus Greece'), rather than as a confrontation between the interests of citizens and the logics of financial markets; this provides a structure of opportunity for populist discourses, pitting different nationalities against each other (Streeck and Schäfer, 2013). Counter-narratives, which compete with the official EU narrative of a mutually-supportive community and articulate their own story of the crisis, and their own logic of blame-attribution, are interesting inasmuch as they succeed in framing the crisis in a certain way. In that respect, the current crisis certainly opens up avenues for further research on Euroscepticism. Further research could analyse, for instance, how successful Eurosceptic leaders, like Nigel Farage (of the UK Independence Party) or Tim Soini (of the Finns Party) 'spin' the crisis, by presenting

themselves as the advocates of the interests of ordinary EU citizens from both the North and the South, against the Europe of bankers. Are these leaders, contributing to the emergence of the long-awaited European public sphere, as the transnational success of Nigel Farage's speeches on YouTube seems to suggest?

Finally, analysis of Euroscepticism as a specific form of populist discourse could also investigate how the current crisis affects domestic debates. How is the 'us v. them' discourse being applied in this context? Public discourses about the so-called 'troika'[17] in the Southern countries attest to changing perceptions of the EU. A pertinent example is the newly coined expression of 'being *troïkado*' in Portugal, which is supposed to mean 'being cheated on'. Here, the study of common parlance seems equally valid as analysis of Eurobarometer surveys when trying to analyse changing perceptions of the integration process.

Conclusion

The most recent trends in research on Euroscepticism, reconceptualizing it as a discourse or as a specific, populist mode of mobilization, certainly contribute to a welcome 'normalization' of EU studies in two ways.

First, the current economic crisis largely blurs the (already fragile) border between domestic and European politics. Indeed, decisions taken at EU level now imply redistributive policy choices on key issues such as fiscal and pensions' reform, the indexation of wages for inflation, etc. In this context, the study of Eurosceptic discourses and mobilizations cannot be separated from the realm of domestic politics, where the notion of populism has long been used. This is the case most crucially in the Southern EU states, where discontent with the policies of technocratic governments combines with a strong disapproval of those policies advocated by the so-called troika, and with dissatisfaction with the EU's ability to manage crises such as the treatment of refugees. Politicians like Beppe Grillo in Italy protest against both mainstream domestic parties and EU institutions. The notion of populism allows us to make the link between the domestic and European dimensions of protest-based politics. Increasingly, the perceived democratic deficit at the EU level and dissatisfaction with democracy at domestic level, reinforce each other. In this context, it is problematic to use the term 'Euroscepticism' as if attitudes towards the EU were of a totally different kind than attitudes towards domestic politics.

Second, placing the study of resistances against European integration within the broader literature on populism, as a discourse or as a mode of mobilization, makes it easier for researchers to engage in comparative studies. Whereas the use of the term Euroscepticism tends to perpetuate the idea of the EU as being totally *sui generis*, its replacement with notions such as 'resistance' or 'counter-narrative' facilitates comparison with other cases of opposition or contestation. Indeed, other regional agreements or treaties, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) project are the targets of critical social mobilizations. Useful comparisons could be drawn with EU contestation. Thus, research on resistances to European integration could pursue the research agenda initiated by Niedermayer and Sinnott (1995), with their work on public opinion and regional/international governance. It would also contribute to the wider agenda of a 'normalization' of EU studies, as concepts and methodological tools belonging to comparative politics are used to make sense of the European Union.

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Notes

1. Signed by 25 Heads of State and Government in 2004, the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe aimed at giving the EU a proper constitution. However, it was not ratified, because a majority of voters in France and The Netherlands voted against its ratification in a referendum.
2. The 'finalities' of the EU refer to the ultimate goals and nature of the organization; for instance, should it remain a mere common market (with a common currency for Eurozone members) or should it develop into a political community of a federal type?
3. The term 'European Community' is deployed in this article until the period of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. After this, in conjunction with convention, it is replaced by the term 'European Union'.
4. Mainly in the case of non-mainstream, evangelical parties.
5. For these authors, 'anti-universalist' attitudes include hostility towards minorities, high value placed on social conformism and hostility towards contemporary understandings of fundamental rights, as expressed, for instance, in support for the death penalty.
6. Neofunctionalists hold that supranational institutions, together with transnational interest groups, are the main actors driving the integration process; the latter proceeds according to a spill over logic, as initial integration in one sector logically leads to integration in other, connected sectors.
7. Intergovernmentalists hold that domestic governments, not EC institutions, are the key players in the integration process.
8. A 'spill back' refers to a disintegration scenario implying, for instance, the repatriation of EU powers to the domestic level.
9. In 1965–1966, the EC was confronted with its first major crisis, when French President Charles De Gaulle recalled France's Permanent Representative to the EC.
10. EB surveys are based on polls conducted in all member states on the behalf of the EU; they aim at measuring the level of public support for the EU and its core policies.
11. In the European Commission, administrators are civil servants who play an important role in the EU legislative and budgetary processes.
12. The expression is borrowed from John Ruggie, quoted by Thomas Diez (1999: 2).
13. The radical Left also articulates the elite/people cleavage typical of populist discourses but neither expresses anti-immigration positions, nor principled opposition to European integration.
14. Non-majoritarian logics refer to the functioning of public institutions which, while fulfilling a public function, are independent from elected politicians (typically, constitutional courts, central banks or technocratic agencies).
15. The 'big bang' enlargement occurred in 2004, as ten new countries joined the EU.
16. Indeed, faced with the difficulties of some countries, the Eurozone is being confronted with the question of mutualizing or not the public debt of all its members.
17. Comprising the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

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