



Euroscepticism

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Definition.

- **Euroscepticism** refers to *opposition toward the process of European integration and/or criticism of the European Union's institutions, policies, or political direction.*
- Does **not necessarily equal anti-EU**; rather, it spans a spectrum of critical attitudes.
- **Core idea**
 - Citizens or political actors question whether the EU benefits their country, community, or identity and whether authority should be delegated to supranational institutions.



Soft Euroscepticism

- Soft Euroscepticism is a vital part of EU politics. It doesn't oppose the idea of the European Union as a whole, but rather the direction it is taking.
- This is simply part of the democratic system, there are parties in government and the opposition.
- There are many soft eurosceptic parties, but they don't necessarily represent a common front. Many parties from the right, but also leftists.
- The unifying theme behind all of these parties is a desire for reform, not dissolution.



European Conservatives and Reformists

- Initially founded by UK's Conservatives and the Czech ODS party
- It stands not directly under the name of euroscepticism, but rather "Eurorealism"
- Less, but better EU institutions and more national control and directly Anti-Federalism.



Various Left-Leaning Political Parties

- The Left in the European Parliament (The Left) is the party inside the European Parliament that represents them.
- They oppose the EU because it is a neoliberal entity that supports the Elites at the expense of the common worker.
- In contrast to right-wing parties, left-wing parties are generally more in favour of integration and a theoretical federation



Cynical Eurosceptics: The “Blame It On Brussels” Mechanism

- **Main idea :**
- Use EU criticism instrumentally for domestic political gain.
- Behave as “good Europeans” in Brussels while blaming the EU at home
- National governments strategically shift responsibility to the EU to:
 - Avoid domestic accountability,
 - Manage internal party conflicts,
 - Defend unpopular policy decisions.
- **Two-level blame shifting:**
- **Vertical shift:** From national to EU institutions (e.g., “Brussels forced us to implement this policy”).
- **Horizontal shift:** Among domestic political actors (e.g., coalition partners blaming each other while invoking EU obligations).
- **Why politicians use it?**
- EU institutions are distant and opaque for many voters.
- Low political cost: domestic audiences often accept the narrative.
- Provides political cover without actually opposing EU cooperation in Brussels.



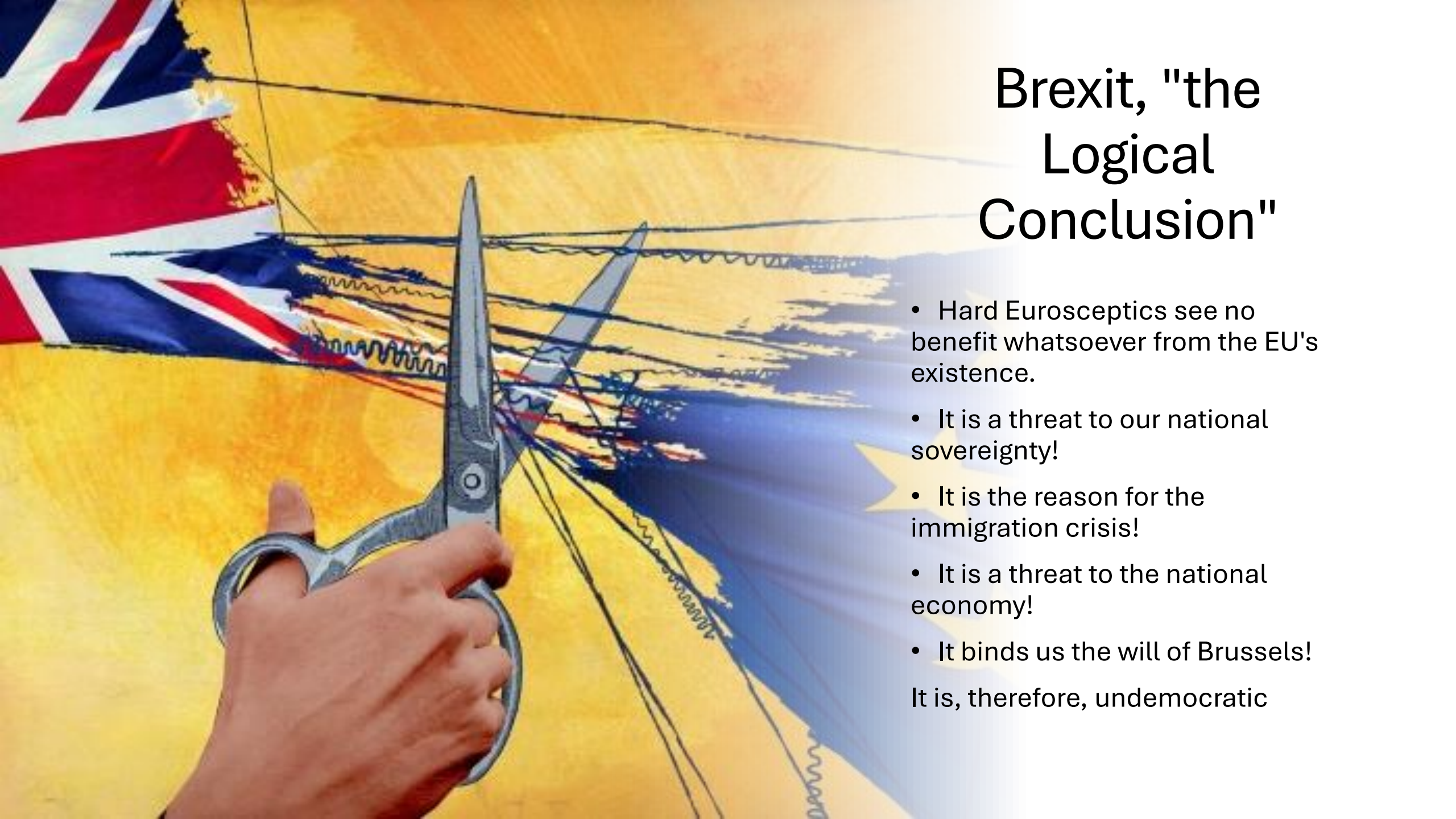
Robert Fico, Slovak pm

Hard Euroscepticism

- Hard Euroscepticism is directly in favour of the dissolution of the European Union OR the exit of their member-state of origin from it.
- There are many reasons for this. Nationalism, Contradictions within socialism and also Russophilia, Anti-Nato/Anti-Western stances in the East or the feeling of being taken advantage of in the West.
- This is a bit oversimplified. When dealing with Hard Euroscepticism there is no consensus and often a direct conflict of interest.

Cases should be looked at individually, but not in a vacuum



A hand holding a pair of scissors is shown in the bottom left corner, cutting through a yellow background. A Union Jack flag is visible on the left side, and a blue wavy line, resembling a river or a path, runs diagonally across the background. The scissors are positioned as if they are about to cut through the yellow background.

Brexit, "the Logical Conclusion"

- Hard Eurosceptics see no benefit whatsoever from the EU's existence.
 - It is a threat to our national sovereignty!
 - It is the reason for the immigration crisis!
 - It is a threat to the national economy!
 - It binds us the will of Brussels!
- It is, therefore, undemocratic

Patriots for Europe

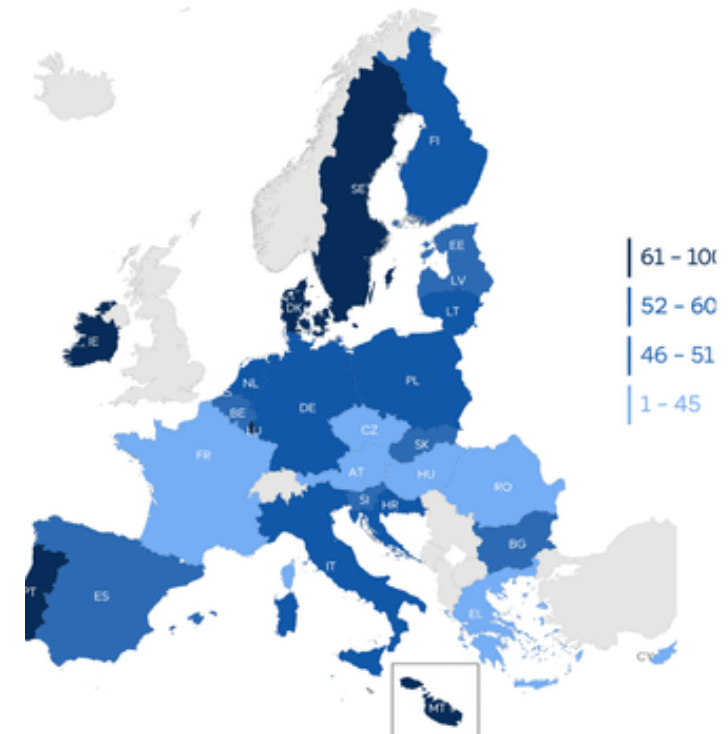
- Patriots for Europe (PfE) is a right-wing / sovereigntist group formed in mid-2024 that gathered many MEPs from formerly disparate far-right / nationalist groups and became the third-largest group in the 10th European Parliament.
- **Institutional impact:** being a formal group increases speaking time, committee representation, access to funds and influence. Even if mainstream groups still try a cordon sanitaire, a larger Eurosceptic bloc changes coalition arithmetic.
- **Coordination effect:** bringing national parties together increases capacity to coordinate narratives across states (common messaging on migration, sovereignty, energy). This aids cross-border diffusion of Eurosceptic frames.



Scale & intensity of Euroscepticism

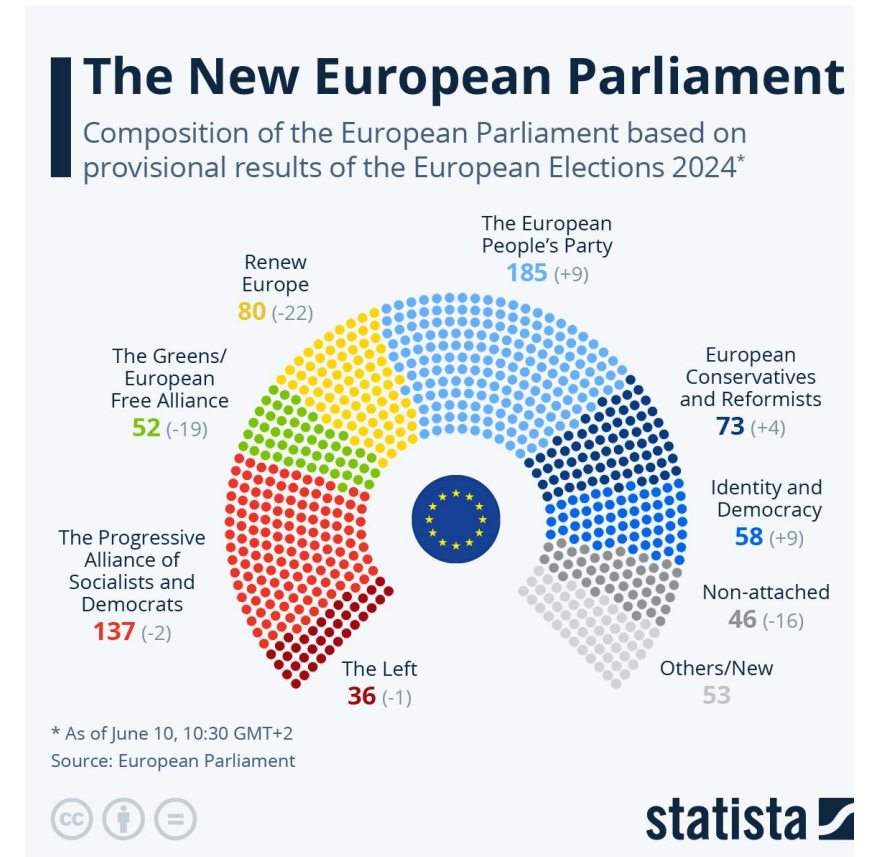
- Trust in the EU has rebounded recently — **~52% of Europeans now say they trust the EU**, the highest level since 2007 (Eurobarometer / Reuters).
- A large majority say their country benefits from EU membership (figures around **70–75%** in recent surveys). This shows that mass Euroscepticism is not uniform and that support remains substantial in many states.

How does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive or very negative image? (% - Total 'Positive')



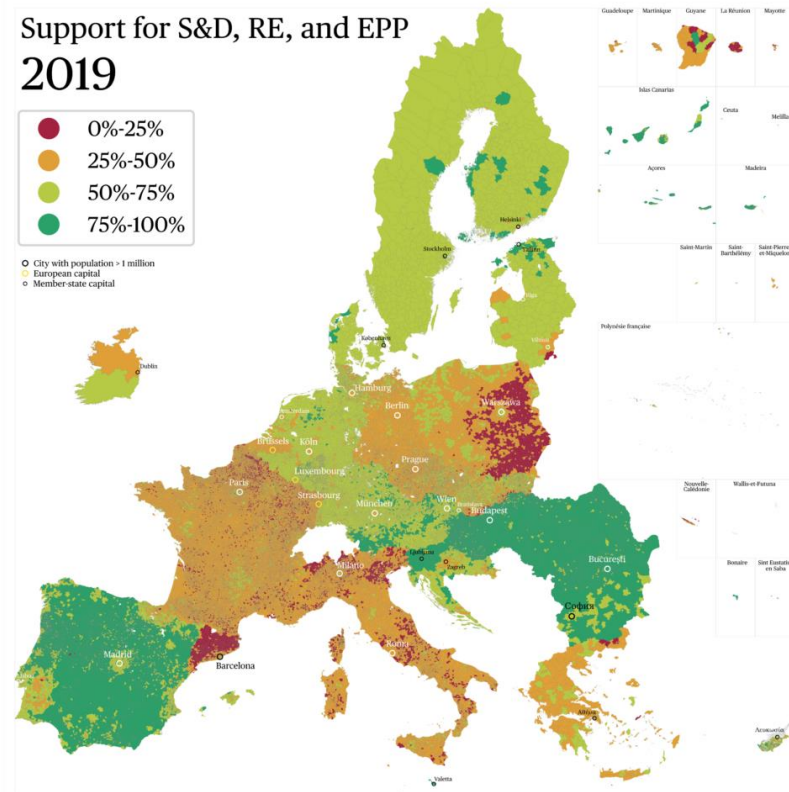
Intensity: public attitudes vs. electoral strength

- **Public skepticism (attitudinal intensity):** While many citizens express reservations about some EU policies, levels of outright rejection/exit preference are much lower than policy criticism. Eurobarometer shows rising trust and perceived benefits even as criticism of specific policies persists.
- **Electoral strength (institutional intensity):** Eurosceptic and radical-right groups made notable seat gains in the **2024 European Parliament** elections — several pro-sovereignty / anti-immigration groups increased their representation and new right-wing coalitions emerged in Parliament. That translated into a higher share of MEPs from Eurosceptic or hard-right groups (a historically large presence).

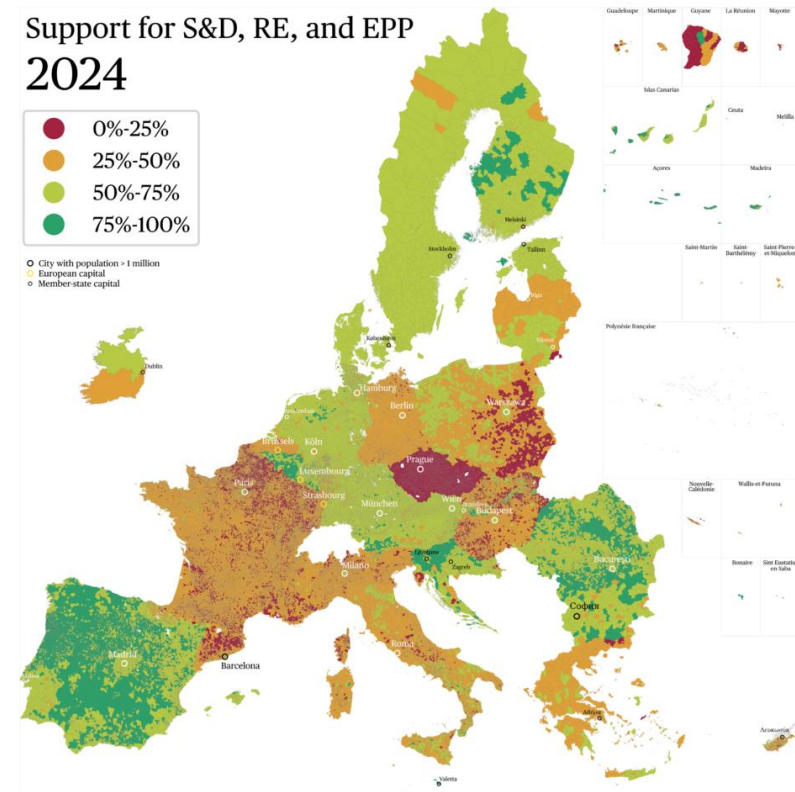


The Centrist Coalition's Shrinking Majority

Support for S&D, RE, and EPP
2019



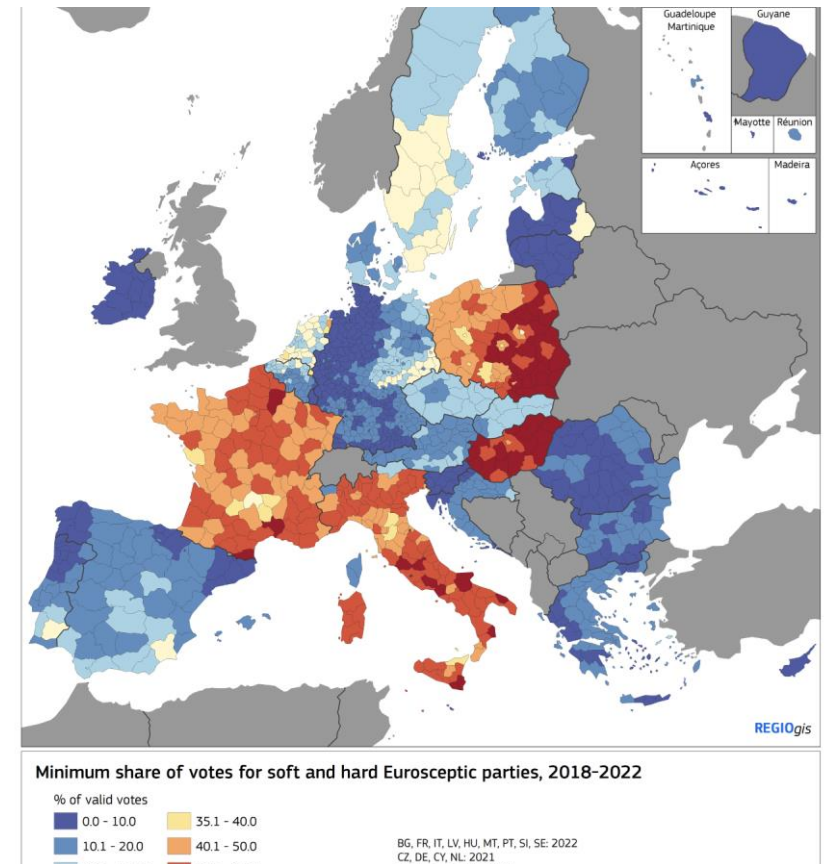
Support for S&D, RE, and EPP
2024



Données: Electoral Results of the European Union (EREU). Sources: National Statistical Offices and Electoral Commissions. © EuroGeographics for the administrative boundaries, GADM, DAF de la Polynésie Française, Gendreska Uprava Republike Slovenije.

Where Euroscepticism is stronger (regional patterns)

- **Central & Eastern Europe:** Mixed picture — some governments (Hungary, Poland) display persistent criticism of EU rule-of-law mechanisms and push for sovereignty; voters show pockets of strong nationalist sentiment. (See seat & party patterns.)
- **Western Europe:** Strong electoral presence of radical-right / sovereignist parties in France, Italy; these parties often attract urban-adjacent and rural voters concerned about immigration, identity, and economic change.
- **Southern Europe:** Mixed — relatively high stated benefits from EU membership but volatile support for Eurosceptic parties (driven by economic grievances during crises).



Drivers of euroscepticism

• Economic Drivers

- Regional inequality and development gaps (referenced research in CEPR link).
- Perception that EU policies benefit urban, educated, or mobile elites.
- Economic stagnation or decline fuels anti-EU sentiment in “left-behind” regions.

• Political / Institutional Drivers

- Belief that EU institutions are technocratic, distant, or insufficiently democratic.
- Sovereignty concerns: preference for national control over borders, taxation, and regulation.
- Discontent with domestic governments is often redirected at the EU.

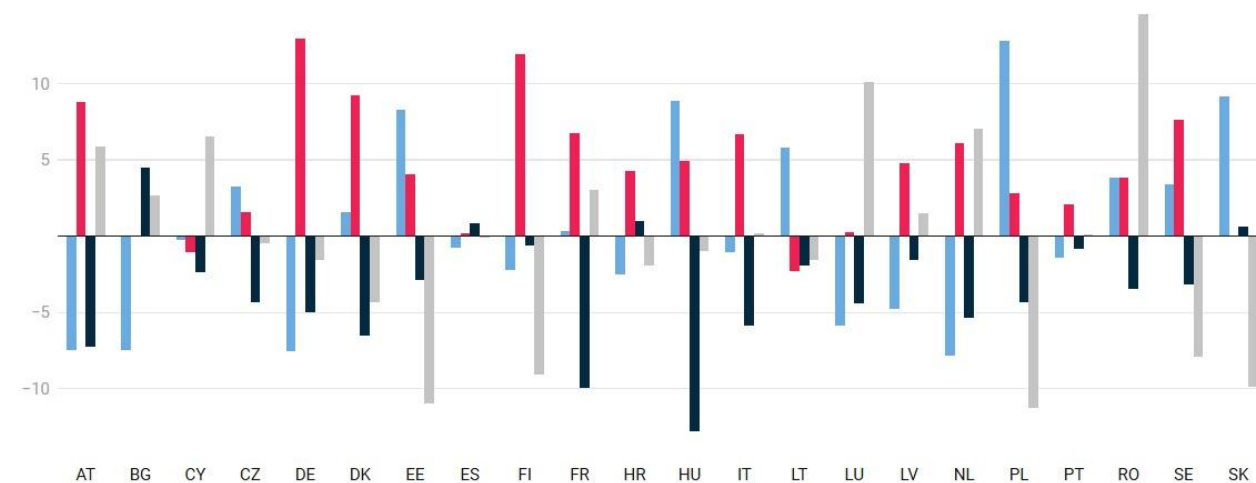
• Cultural / Identity Drivers

- EU seen as threat to national identity, tradition, or cultural cohesion.
- Immigration and multiculturalism debates often framed as EU-driven issues.

Difference in parties' vote shares in urban and rural areas

Vote(urban) - Vote(rural) in percentage points of registered voters

Center-right Left Radical right Abstention



Urban/rural classification according to the Eurostat's DEGURBA classification of Local Administrative Units.

Chart: Electoral Bulletin of the European Union (BLUE) • Source: National Statistical Offices • [Get the data](#)



Why Do People Vote for Eurosceptic Parties?

- **1. Protest Voting**
 - Citizens use Eurosceptic parties to express discontent with mainstream elites or governance failures.
- **2. Perceived Economic Disadvantages**
 - Voters who feel economically insecure or excluded often attribute problems to globalization or EU integration.
- **3. Sovereignty and Control**
 - Support for parties promising national autonomy and resistance to supranational decision-making.
- **4. Immigration and Cultural Concerns**
 - Eurosceptic parties frequently mobilize fears over migration, identity change, and perceived EU “impositions.”
- **5. Political Messaging and Blame Shifting**
 - When national politicians repeatedly blame Brussels, voters internalize negative views of the EU.
 - Creates a fertile environment for Eurosceptic electoral successes.

The Common Theme

- As previously mentioned the main reason for euroscepticism is souverainism
- the idea that a Supranational institution could make laws and regulations is simply unacceptable for some.
- Why?
There are many reasons. The common man really doesn't have an influence on this. Euroscepticism is a very top-down ideology where whatever "leader" you follow tells you why.
- In nearly all cases it is a front. All the slogans and rallies are nothing more than bread and circus politics.



The Real Reason

- Populism

Politicians don't actually care. It's a transaction. They join the Eurosceptic movement, they get easy votes from the uneducated without effort or even doing anything which allows them to push their own agenda, because people don't actually know what they vote for.

- Corruption

Either coming from foreign interference or from business interests.

- We can also see "real ideologs" like Marxists or Neo-Nazis for instance.



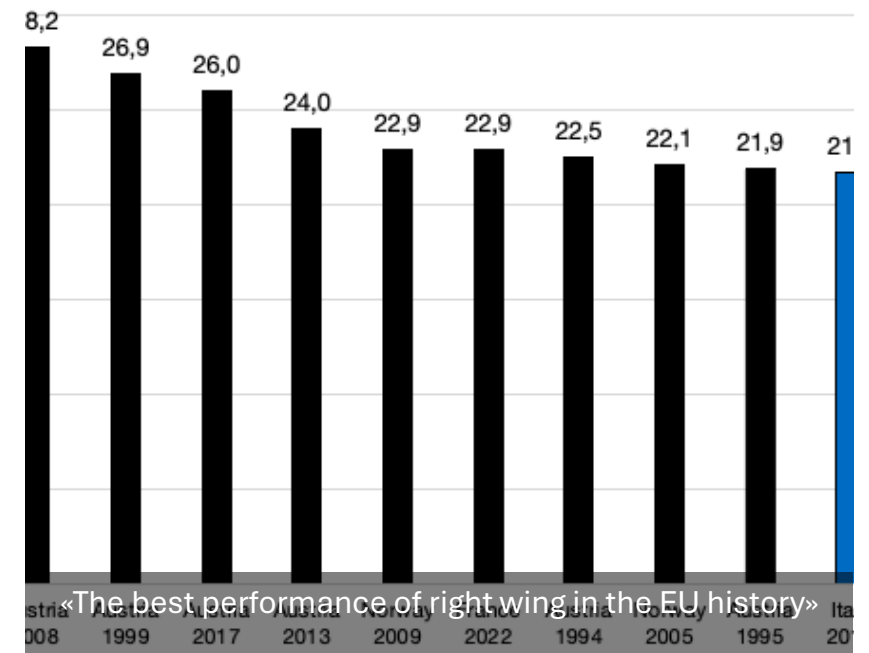


The Italian case

- “Italy will defend its sovereignty and interests within Europe.” — Meloni
- “The EU must be accountable; citizens deserve transparency and results.” — Conte
- “We will always put Italian citizens first — Brussels cannot dictate our policies.” — Salvini

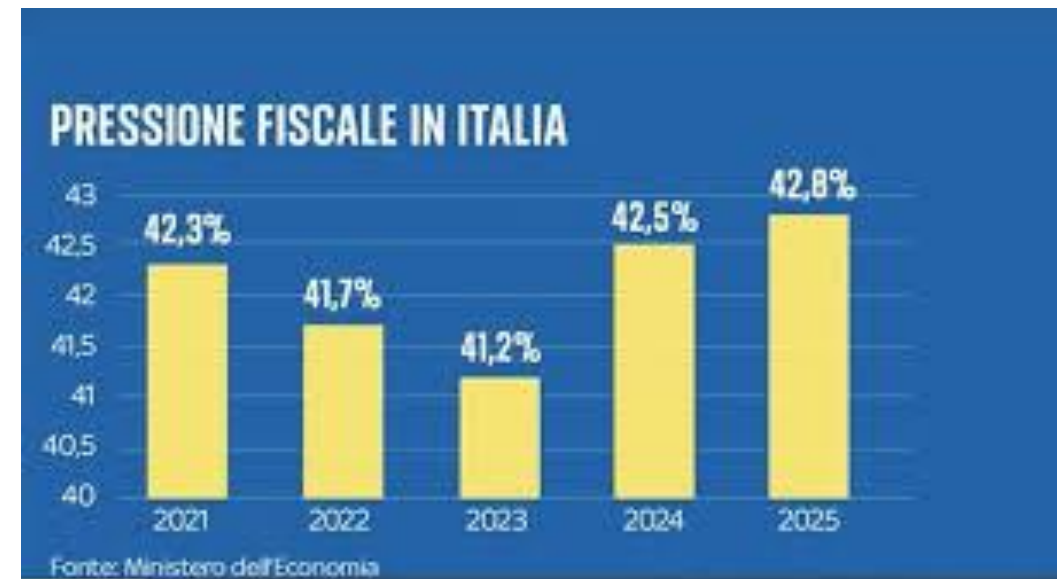
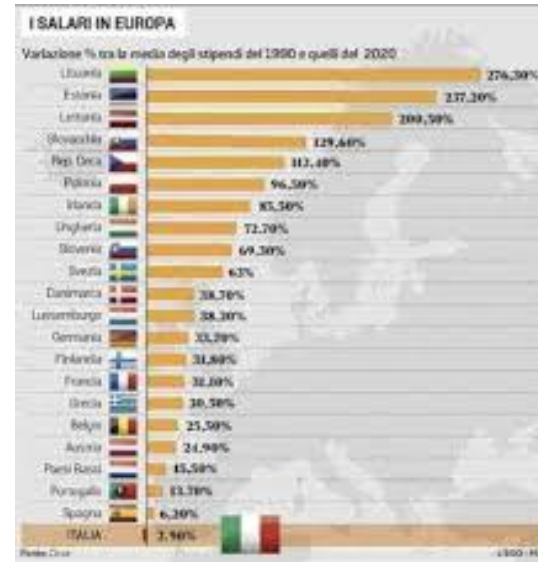
Political context: Giorgia Meloni government (2022–present)

- Giorgia Meloni became Prime Minister in October 2022 leading a right-wing coalition (Fratelli d'Italia, Lega, Forza Italia).
- Government posture: nationalist-conservative, pro-Ukraine support at international level, pragmatic EU stance domestically (mix of sovereigntist rhetoric + EU cooperation).
- Political priorities: fiscal consolidation, tax relief promises, immigration control, cultural/conservative agenda.
- Strategic messaging: blend of sovereigntist rhetoric (to satisfy domestic base) and pragmatic engagement with EU institutions (to secure funds and stability).



Economic evolution (2015–2025): headline indicators

- GDP: Long-run stagnation. 2015–2019 modest growth; pandemic shock 2020; recovery supported by EU Recovery fund. 2024: modest growth ~0.5–0.7% (ISTAT / Eurostat preliminary estimates).
- Public debt: very high and persistent. Italy public debt ≈ 135.3% of GDP in 2024 (one of the highest in euro area).
- Unemployment: improved but still structural challenges. Unemployment ≈ 6.3% in early 2025 (ISTAT/Reuters), youth unemployment remains elevated (~18–19% Jan 2025).
- Regional divide: North–South disparity persists — Southern regions show substantially lower GDP per capita and higher unemployment (South GDP per capita ~55% of Centre–North historically).



Regional divisions in Italy

- Italy remains deeply divided economically and socially: the “North-Centre” region and the “South (Mezzogiorno + islands)” show persistent and large disparities in GDP, employment, incomes and opportunities.
- In 2023, the GDP of the northern macro-regions amounted to about **€709 billion**, while the South’s GDP was roughly **€322 billion**, i.e. less than half.
- GDP per capita in southern regions is roughly **half** of that in the North (or slightly above 50 %).



IL PIL PRO-CAPITE

Così nelle regioni italiane (2021)

Valori in euro

1^a REGIONE
Trentino-Alto Adige

40.904

20^a REGIONE
Calabria

16.168

LEGENDA

1^a fascia 34.550-43.966
2^a fascia 28.333-34.549
3^a fascia 23.471-28.332
4^a fascia 19.581-23.470
5^a fascia 17.595-19.580

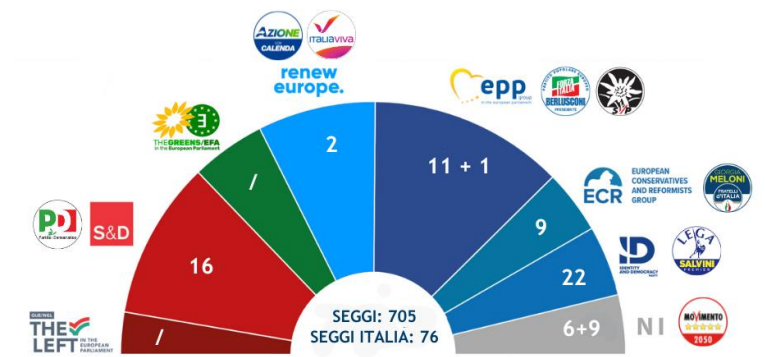
FONTE: Istat

WITHUB

Euroskepticism in Italy

- **Migration and demographic pressures:** Italy faces demographic decline, but migration is often portrayed as challenge to national identity, welfare system, and social cohesion. This intensifies anxiety in parts of the electorate.
- **Identity, culture, and national sovereignty narratives:** Political leaders frequently frame EU influence as a threat to national traditions, sovereignty, and cultural identity. Such framing resonates with voters feeling disoriented by globalization, economic change, and social transformations.
- **Distrust toward institutions — domestic and EU-level:** Given persistent economic malaise, weak growth, high debt, and perceived unequal regional / social outcomes, many citizens distrust national elites and EU institutions. This distrust fuels support for parties promising “to put Italy first.”
- **Populist / media-driven messaging:** Political communication — often populist — combines economic grievances, cultural-identity concerns, and blame toward “Brussels,” offering a simple explanatory framework for complex problems. This resonates in a context of widespread uncertainty and perceived crisis in living standards.

Trend Demopolis: la fiducia degli italiani nell'Unione Europea



Euroscepticism in the Netherlands

- - PVV (Wilders): Hard Euroscepticism; calls for Nexit.
- - FvD: Hard; anti-EU climate & judicial authority.
- - JA21: Soft; rollback EU migration & border powers.
- - BBB: Soft; critical of EU agricultural and Green Deal rules.



PVV

- **Type of Euroscepticism:** *Hard Euroscepticism* (long-term platform includes leaving the EU or reducing EU competencies; consistent hostility toward EU migration and asylum policy).
- **EU positions over time:**
 - Calls for “Nexit” referendum (especially 2016–2017, post-Brexit).
 - Frames EU as destroying Dutch sovereignty & imposing unwanted migration policies.
 - Presents the EU as a “supranational elite project” disconnected from Dutch citizens (a classic populist Eurosceptic narrative).



FvD

- More ideologically extreme; heavily libertarian–conspiracy oriented.
- Strong anti-EU rhetoric: rejects EU climate policy (“climate dictatorship”), opposes ECJ powers, calls for renegotiation or exit.
- Influence peaked around 2019 but declined after internal scandals — still relevant for discourse.



JA21 & BBB

- **Soft Euroscepticism:**
- Do not advocate leaving the EU.
- Criticize EU *overreach*, migration, agricultural regulation, and the Green Deal.
- Frames EU environmental rules as damaging for Dutch farmers (esp. nitrogen reduction policies aligned with broader EU climate goals).



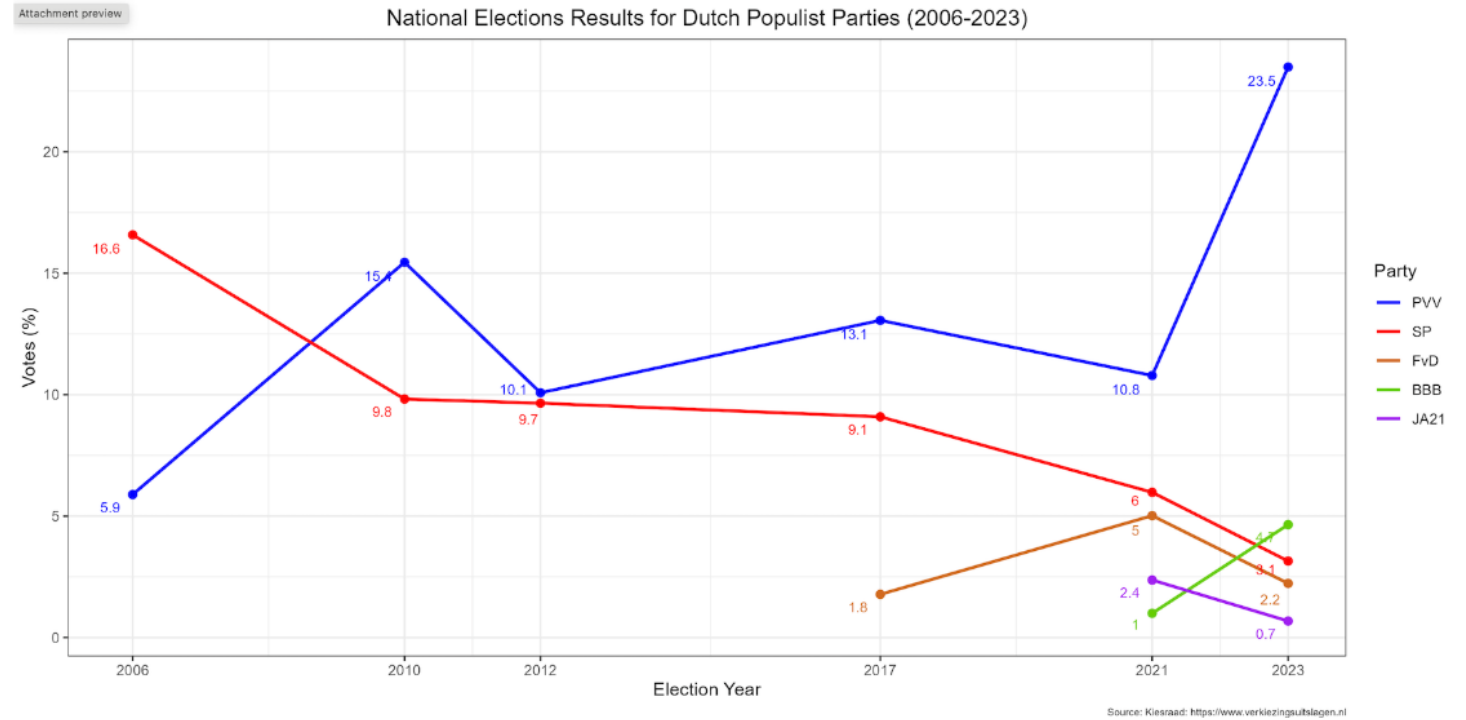
What do Dutch Eurosceptics have “against the EU”?

- Sovereignty & national identity
- Migration / asylum policy
- Green Deal & agriculture
- Democratic deficit / distance from citizens
- “Blame it on Brussels” strategy (Dutch examples)



Recent Performance and its context

- Migration and cultural threat perceptions
- Distrust of domestic & EU institutions
- Economic discontent + cost-of-living pressure
- Media framing





Hungary, Fidesz and the Fifth Columnist

And I looked, and behold, a white
horse



Europe's Outlier, Eurosceptics in Power

Victor Orban describes Hungary as an "illiberal democracy", in reality it is a Fidesz oligarchy, internal borders are redrawn to favour the party and friends become rich quick.

Initially fidesz was a liberal youth movement against communism, but by leaning further and further right and consolidating power in 2010 through a supermajority coalition it has shown itself to be highly hypocritical by adopting their former enemies' tactics.

It is also called Russia's backdoor into Europe due to frequent fraternising and economic interests as well as their stance on the Ukrainian war: "Not our war, not our business".

Fidesz owns the media nowadays so it sets the picture of worldwide happenings for the average voter, by doing this it becomes much easier to manipulate your own people.

Furthermore, Fidesz uses Hungarian nationalism/irredentism and a mistrust of foreign interests to its advantage.

The European right has always seen Hungary as an example. It spits directly in the face of the European Union and puts its own interests above the Union and, in some cases like Ukraine and Immigration directly against it. Orban has a "Strong Man" image which further entices right wingers which seek strength.

Recently we have also seen a lot of American bootlicking coming from Hungary which matches, or perhaps inspires the European right's slow shift towards Maga and the American right.

Romanian Elections and Euroscepticism

- Romanian Euroscepticism is an interesting case study of Hard and Soft Euroscepticism. It can be separated in two.
- The AUR party, which preys on the uneducated -Soft
- and the "Suveranist" movement which preys on those in intellectual default -Hard



The AUR party, Grifters who made it big

- Led by a former hooligan, the AUR party is well known for always screaming the loudest and never doing anything.
- They derive legitimacy by saying that they are against the establishment while being part of it.
- They make false promises because they bank on the fact that their voters don't understand what they are talking about.
- They have no real agenda whatsoever except for getting votes and, as such participate only in slogan politics.



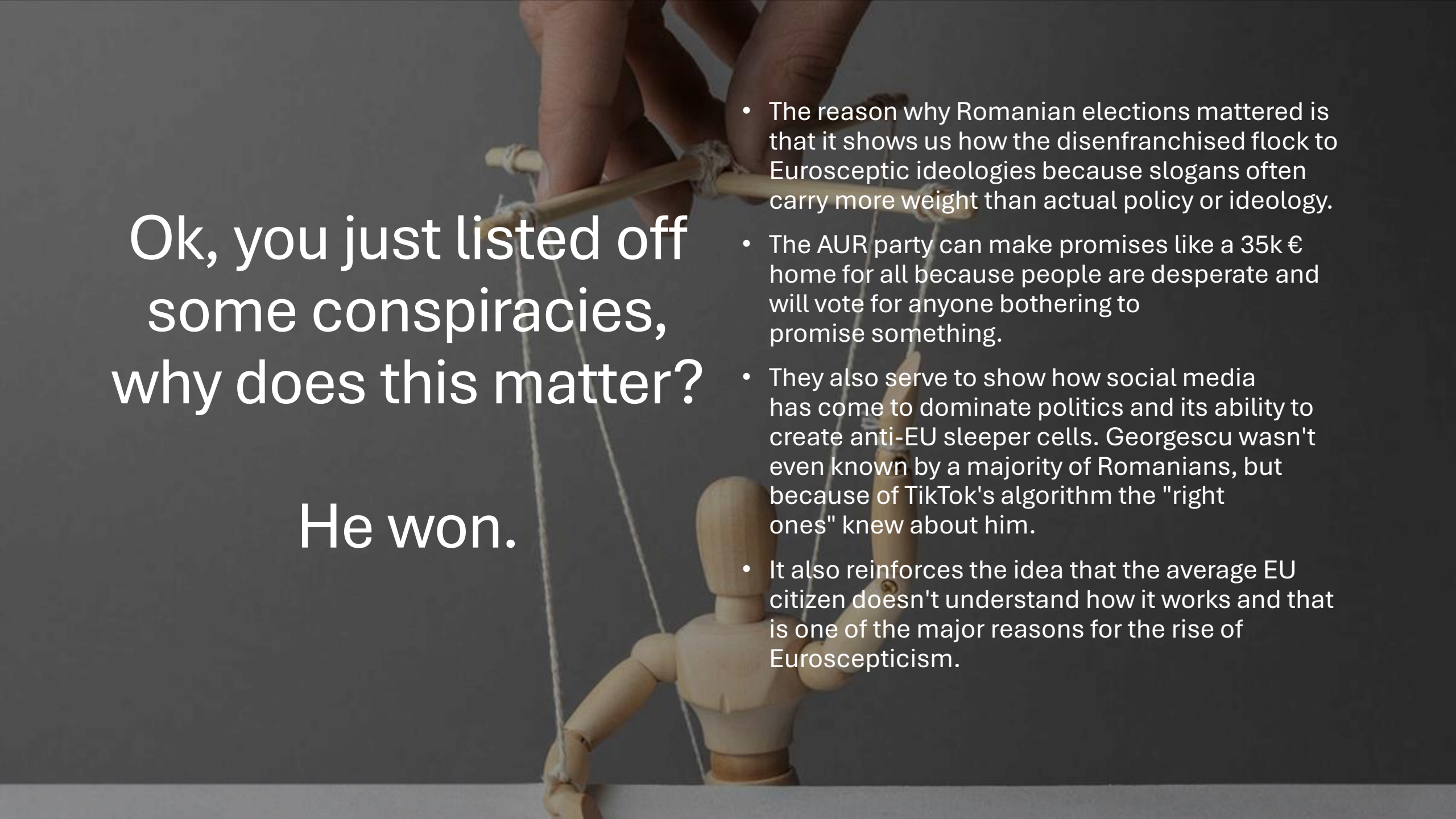
Planul SIMION —

Șofer pentru
toți bărbații
frumoși

The "Suveranist" Movement

- The Suveranist movement spearheaded by Russian agent Călin Georgescu is the natural involution of the AUR party. He ran as an independent in the presidential election with a TikTok campaign based on, among other aberrations:
- 1 the idea that the EU has never helped anyone
- 2 the idea that Water companies are stripping it of the primordial information when it is bottled
- 3 the idea that Ukraine is an invented state
- 4 the idea that the gays are taking over the world
- 5 the idea that horses are the future of the economy
- 6 the idea that Russia is better than the west
- 7 the idea that the Soros foundation has taken over Romanian politics and that they are paying off everyone in disagreement





Ok, you just listed off
some conspiracies,
why does this matter?

He won.

- The reason why Romanian elections mattered is that it shows us how the disenfranchised flock to Eurosceptic ideologies because slogans often carry more weight than actual policy or ideology.
- The AUR party can make promises like a 35k € home for all because people are desperate and will vote for anyone bothering to promise something.
- They also serve to show how social media has come to dominate politics and its ability to create anti-EU sleeper cells. Georgescu wasn't even known by a majority of Romanians, but because of TikTok's algorithm the "right ones" knew about him.
- It also reinforces the idea that the average EU citizen doesn't understand how it works and that is one of the major reasons for the rise of Euroscepticism.

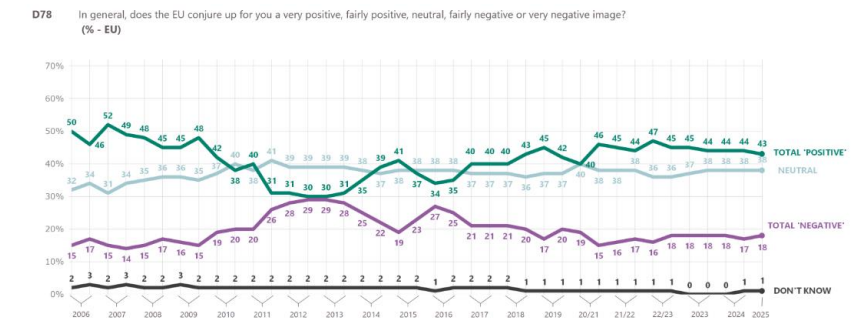
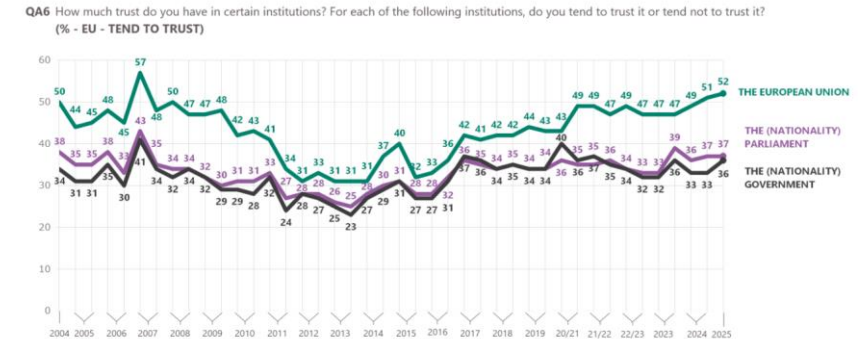
Euroscepticism trends

- Mixed picture: public support for EU membership rising, but Eurosceptic parties gaining in some elections.



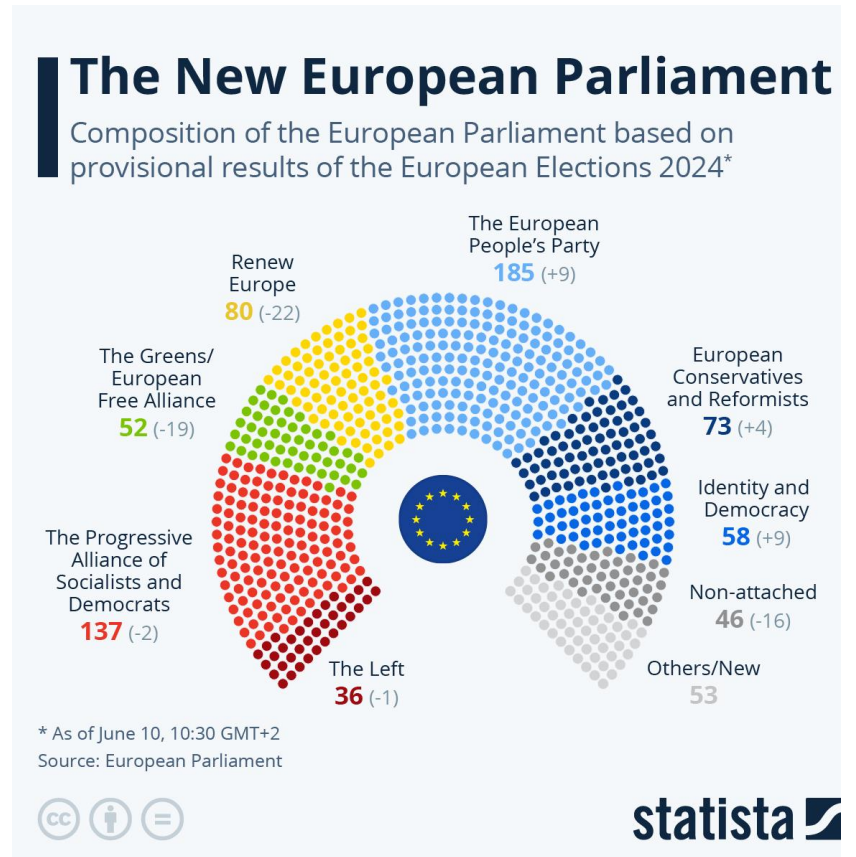
Rising Public Support Amidst Mixed Trends

- 74% of citizens think that their country benefits from EU membership. This is the highest result ever recorded in a Eurobarometer survey for this question since it was first asked in 1983.
- 52% of Europeans tend to trust the EU, the highest result since 2007.
- 52% of Europeans say they trust the European Commission, the highest result in 18 years.
- 43% of EU citizens continue to have a positive image of the EU, while 38% have a neutral image and 18% have a negative image of the EU and 62% of EU citizens are also optimistic about the future of the EU.
- Defence and security (36%) as well as competitiveness (32%) are considered the top policy priorities
- Nine in ten (89%) EU citizens say that EU Member States should act more united to face current global challenges



Rise of Eurosceptic Parties

- Mixed trend — aggregate public support for the EU has increased (2024–25), but electoral strength of Eurosceptic / far-right parties increased in several member states and consolidated in the EP in 2024
- 2024 EP results: populist/far-right parties made gains in multiple countries; formation of P/E consolidated several groups into a larger parliamentary bloc.
- Security, migration or economic shocks can strengthen pro-EU sentiment (e.g., Russia's aggression → support for common security), but the same shocks also provide narratives for Eurosceptics to mobilize (blame EU or elites).
- Proportional representation in EP elections plus lower turnout can amplify smaller / protest parties. Scholarly work on EP voting shows the partisan payoff differs across party types.



Combating Euroscepticism

- Strengthen economic and regional cohesion
- Improve democratic legitimacy, participation and transparency of EU
- Increase civic education and media literacy
- Communicate concrete successes, benefits and policies of the EU clearly



A conceptual image showing two hands, one on the left and one on the right, holding a circular arrangement of European Union flags. The flags are blue with yellow stars, and they are held together to form a ring. The hands are positioned at the top and bottom of the ring, with the fingers interlaced. The background is a plain, light gray.

Thank you for your time!

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