

# PARTY EUROSCEPTICISM AND THE CONDITIONS FOR ITS SUCCESS: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND EXPLANATION\*

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## 1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the multiple crises that have shackled the European Union (EU), Euroscepticism has emerged as a variegated front, able to challenge the very existence of the EU. Although it is now considered a political phenomenon structurally embedded in European societies<sup>(1)</sup> and remarkably present in the European Parliament<sup>(2)</sup>, Euroscepticism is a much-contested concept, without a clear and unique definition<sup>(3)</sup>. Over the years, several scholars have

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<sup>(1)</sup> Nathalie BRACK and Nicolas STARTIN, *Introduction: Euroscepticism, From the Margins to the Mainstream*, in «International Political Science Review», XXXVI, 2015, pp. 239-49.

<sup>(2)</sup> Nathalie BRACK, *Eurosceptic in the European Parliament: Exit or Voice?*, in «Journal of European Integration», XXXIV, 2012, pp. 151-68; Nathalie BRACK, *Euroscepticism at the Supranational Level: The Case of the Untidy Right in the European Parliament*, in «Journal of Common Market Studies», LI, 2013, pp. 85-104; Nathalie BRACK, *The Roles of Eurosceptic Members of the European Parliament and Their Implications for the EU*, in «International Political Science Review», XXXVI, 2015, pp. 337-50; Eugenio SALVATI, *Eurosceptic, Eurocritical or Euroconfused? An Analysis of the Five Star Movement's Voting Behaviour in the European Parliament*, in «European Politics and Society», XX, 2019, pp. 296-314.

<sup>(3)</sup> See, among others, Paul TAGGART, *A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party System*, in «European Journal of Political Research», XXXIII, 1998, pp. 363-88; Petr KOPECKÝ and Cas MUDDE, *The Two Sides of Euroscepticism: Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe*, in «European Union Politics», III, 2002, pp. 297-326; Chris FLOOD, *The Challenge of Euroscepticism*, in Jackie GOWER (ed.), *The European Union Handbook*, London-Chicago, Fitzroy Dearborn, 2002, pp.73-84; Liesbet HOOGHE and Gary MARKS, *Sources of Euroscepticism*, in «Acta Politica»,

attempted to better define Euroscepticism's borders and features, illustrating how the time factor has had an influence in the way in which the phenomenon has been interpreted and analysed<sup>(4)</sup>.

The difficulty of providing a definition is feeding the risk of falling into conceptual stretching, especially with regard to Eurosceptic parties. Financial and economic crises have amplified the problem, since the number of parties that express harsh criticism against the EU has steadily risen. The pitfall is that any party that does not express a full and unconditional support to the current functioning of the EU may be considered (potentially) Eurosceptic.

For this reason, we propose a new point of view about this contentious issue. Is it possible to define Euroscepticism in a clearer way? We suggest a narrower definition, which consistently reduces the number of parties that can be gathered into the Eurosceptic group. We consider as Eurosceptic only those parties that show a clear anti-systemic charge, with reference to the supranational political system. In this way, we will be able to distinguish between parties that want to disrupt the Union – the Eurosceptic – from those parties that are taking opposition stance but are pro-systemic. This distinction appears urgent, due to the current politicization of the EU issues and the emergence of political conflict at the supranational level<sup>(5)</sup>.

In the first part of the article, we critically review the concept of Euroscepticism and propose our definition, applying a reviewed notion of anti-system parties. We separate Eurosceptic parties from opposition parties. Subsequently, we empirically apply our definition to a cross-country comparison based on a scale of Euroscepticism derived from the Euromanifesto project. The viability of the conceptual framework is tested through a preliminary observation of the conditions of the success of anti-system parties in different national contexts within the European Union. Our analysis focuses on the 2014 European Elections. The reason is that these elections have been a watershed with regard to party competition in the EU:

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XXXXII, 2007, pp. 119-27; Alexis SZCERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism. Volume 1: Case Studies and Country Surveys*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>(4)</sup> Sofia VASILOPOULOU, *Continuity and Change in the Study of Euroscepticism: Plus ça change?*, in «Journal of Common Market Studies», LI, 2013, pp. 153-68.

<sup>(5)</sup> Swen HUTTER, Edgar GRANDE and Hanspeter KRIESI (eds.), *Politicising Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

as a result of a new wave of politicization of the EU integration project, these elections have been characterized by the first relevant success of the Eurosceptic parties<sup>(6)</sup>.

## 2. Euroscepticism as a Critical Concept

After the institutional stalemate due to the French vote on the referendum about the constitutional treaty and the Irish ‘no’ to the Lisbon treaty<sup>(7)</sup>, the economic crisis underlined further the political inertia of the EU. Such inertia strengthens those parties that consider the EU as the enemy to overthrow<sup>(8)</sup>. Accordingly, the season of the *permissive consensus* has been closed, substituted by the so called *constraining dissensus*<sup>(9)</sup>. The new phase is characterized by open political contestation of the integration process and its politicization, backed by the emergence of a fully-fledged pro/anti integration political cleavage<sup>(10)</sup>.

The politicization process of European affairs is fed by a public discourse that is actually more focused than in the past on the effort to mobilize political consent – and, where feasible, active political actions<sup>(11)</sup> – around the questions of the role of the European Union, its democratic legitimacy and also its very existence<sup>(12)</sup>. Eurosceptic are so actively promoting this process, making their idea of Europe the starting point of the political clash about EU integration

<sup>(6)</sup> Ivi; Eugenio SALVATI, *Il Parlamento Europeo. Tra crisi del processo di integrazione e politicizzazione dell’Unione europea*, Milano, Mondadori, 2019.

<sup>(7)</sup> Liesbet HOOGHE, *What Drives Euroscepticism? Party-Public Cueing, Ideology and Strategic Opportunity*, in «European Union Politics», VIII, 2007, pp. 5-12.

<sup>(8)</sup> Nicolò CONTI (ed.), *Party Attitudes Towards the EU in the Member States. Parties for Europe, Parties against Europe*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2014.

<sup>(9)</sup> Liesbet HOOGHE and Gary MARKS, *A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus*, in «British Journal of Political Science», XXXIX, 2009, pp. 1-23.

<sup>(10)</sup> Peter MAIR, *Ruling the Void. The Hollowing of Western Democracies*, London, Verso, 2013; Paul STATHAM and Hans-Jörg TRENZ, *Understanding the Mechanisms of EU Politicization: Lessons from the Eurozone Crisis*, in «Comparative European Politics», XIII, 2015, pp. 287-306.

<sup>(11)</sup> Donatella DELLA PORTA, Hara KOUKI and Joseba FERNÁNDEZ, *Left’s Love and Hate for Europe: Syriza, Podemos and Critical Visions of Europe During the Crisis*, in Manuela CAIANI and Simona GUERRA (eds.), *Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 219-40.

<sup>(12)</sup> Paul STATHAM and Hans-Jörg TRENZ, *op cit.*

path. In this process of agenda setting and politicization of public discourse, a relevant role is played by media which have helped to ‘transnationalise’<sup>(13)</sup> the structural criticism against the EU and moving it away from the margins of the political arenas in member states<sup>(14)</sup>. The sum of EU’s structural deficits and of its incapability to overthrow the multiple crises that have been affecting European member States for the last eight years are making the Eurosceptic movement a structural phenomenon embedded in European societies<sup>(15)</sup>.

Over the years, the study of the Eurosceptic phenomenon has steadily grown among scholars, but – despite the increasing importance of this concept – it is still difficult to reach a good definition of Euroscepticism. The main peril is to incur in conceptual stretching<sup>(16)</sup>. A first and not deniable element, as stated before, is that Euroscepticism is now a constitutive element of the EU integration process and a central topic of European media. Moreover, Euroscepticism is no more relegated to a niche component, but it has a mainstream dimension and a transnational dynamic<sup>(17)</sup>. The concept of Euroscepticism is extremely complicated to define because it may be related, at least, to two different dimensions: the insurgence of an opposition feeling against both a process (European integration) as well as a polity (the supranational regime) and a thin system of beliefs that supports these orientations in terms of values and identity. In this ambiguity, we can find some hints useful to detect the constitutive elements of Euroscepticism at mass and party level.

<sup>(13)</sup> Hajo G. BOOMGAARDEN, Rens Vliegenthart, Claes H. de Vreese and Andreas R.T. Schuck, *News on the Move: Exogenous Events and News Coverage of the European Union*, in «Journal of European Public Policy», XVII, 2010, pp. 506-56; Manuela Caiani and Simona Guerra (eds.), *Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<sup>(14)</sup> Simon Usherwood and Nick Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon*, in «Journal of Common Market Studies», LI, 2013, pp. 1-16; Nathalie Brack and Nicolas Startin, *op. cit.*

<sup>(15)</sup> Simon Usherwood and Nick Startin, *op. cit.*; Nathalie Brack and Nicolas Startin, *op. cit.*; John FitzGibbon, Benjamin Leruth and Nick Startin (eds.), *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon. The Emergence of a New Sphere of Opposition*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2017.

<sup>(16)</sup> Nathalie Brack and Nicolas Startin, *op. cit.*; Cecile Leconte, *From Pathology to Mainstream Phenomenon: Reviewing the Euroscepticism Debate in Research and Theory*, in «International Political Science Review», XXXVI, 2015, pp. 250-63.

<sup>(17)</sup> John FitzGibbon, Benjamin Leruth and Nick Startin, *op. cit.*

Taggart and Szczerbiak have tried to evaluate the impact of the pro/anti integration issue on national political parties<sup>(18)</sup>. According to Taggart<sup>(19)</sup>, the enforcing process of this cleavage does not happen in an undifferentiated way, but it rises in different combinations, based on the kind of the involved party. Alongside these possible manifestations of Euroscepticism, Hooghe et al.<sup>(20)</sup> considers that what could explain the political stances about Europe is the party collocation within the national political arena, particularly if a party has more or less radical positions<sup>(21)</sup>. Parties with radical political messages are more inclined to be positioned in the peripheral part of the political system, far away from the governmental area; they are freer to strongly oppose the process of European integration<sup>(22)</sup>. In contrast, the closer a party is to the governmental area, the less it is prone to assume anti-EU positions<sup>(23)</sup>. On the one hand, the spatial collocation within the national political system may account for critical positions against the EU taken by extreme right parties, which refuse the integration process as an instrument to weaken the national sovereignty<sup>(24)</sup>. On the other hand, the same could hold for extreme left parties, which consider the EU as an expression of the neo-liberal ideology<sup>(25)</sup>.

Overall, the growth of Euroscepticism represents the most evident signal of the politicisation of the European integration issue.

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(18) Paul TAGGART, *op. cit.*; Paul TAGGART and Alexis SZCZERBIAK, *The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States*. OERN Working Paper, n° 6, 2002; Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *op. cit.*; Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism. Volume 2: Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

(19) Paul TAGGART, *op. cit.*

(20) Liesbet HOOGHE, Gary MARKS and Carole WILSON, *Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?*, in Gary MARKS and Marco STEENBERGEN (eds.), *European Integration and Political Conflict*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 120-40.

(21) Liesbet HOOGHE, Gary MARKS and Carole WILSON, *op. cit.*

(22) Paul TAGGART, *op. cit.*

(23) Nick SITTER, *The Politics of Opposition and European Integration in Scandinavia: Is Euroscepticism a Government-Opposition Dynamic?*, in «West European Politics», XXIV, 2001, pp. 22-39.

(24) Piero IGNAZI, *The Silent Counter-Revolution. Hypotheses on the Emergence of Extreme Right-Wing Parties in Europe*, in «European Journal of Political Science», XXII, 1992, pp. 3-34; Catherine DE VRIES and Erica EDWARDS, *Taking Europe to Its Extremes: Extremist Parties and Public Euroscepticism*, in «Party Politics», XV, 2009, pp. 5-28.

(25) Catherine DE VRIES and Erica EDWARDS, *op. cit.*

Conflicts are mainly constructed around some key issues, such as: the idea that EU is a threat to national identity; it represents a long series of dangerous restrictions of member states' autonomy to decide fiscal and budgetary policies; the EU is unfit as a democratic system and thus it should be rejected as it negatively affects member States' democratic quality<sup>(26)</sup>. The role of (national) identity, the evaluation of democratic performances – both at national and supranational level – and the level of attachment to nation State are all variables able to explain the variations in the support to the EU<sup>(27)</sup>.

If one thinks of the incapacity of Eurosceptic parties to influence directly the EU decision-making<sup>(28)</sup>, the large influence of them in the political debate – and partially on the agenda setting – appears as a relevant success. For Eurosceptic parties, the only chance to influence indirectly EU policy-making is via national governments. This opportunity, as underlined by Leconte<sup>(29)</sup>, can occur when (1) there are strong Eurosceptic factions within mainstream parties; (2) Eurosceptic parties are part of government coalitions; or (3) governing parties decide to assume tough positions in the European Council in order to hamper Eurosceptic parties' strength within national contexts. Eurosceptic are feeding the politicization of the EU, by bringing into political agendas contentious issues, previously excluded from the debate.

According to Flood<sup>(30)</sup>, the pro/anti integration cleavage started to be politicized when the integration process increased the penetration within national political systems. For this reason, Euroscepticism became a political phenomenon, which can be measured along a *continuum*: from complete rejection to enthusiastic acceptance. The six categories individuated by Flood define six possible party positions about the EU integration. However, they are not

<sup>(26)</sup> Swen HUTTER, Edgar GRANDE and Hanspeter KRIESI (eds.), *op. cit.*; Liesbet HOOGHE and Gary MARKS, *Cleavage Theory Meets Europe's Crises: Lipset, Rokkan and the Transnational Cleavage*, in «Journal of European Public Policy», XXV, 2018, pp. 109-35.

<sup>(27)</sup> Sean CAREY, *Undivided Loyalties: Is National Identity an Obstacle to European Integration?* in «European Union Politics», III, 2002, pp. 387-413; Lauren McLAREN, *Public Support for European Integration: Cost/Benefit Analysis or Perceived Cultural Threat*, in «Journal of Politics», LXIV, 2002, pp. 551-66; Swen HUTTER, Edgar GRANDE and Hanspeter KRIESI (eds.), *op. cit.*

<sup>(28)</sup> Cecile LECONTE, *Understanding Euroscepticism*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

<sup>(29)</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>(30)</sup> Chris FLOOD, *op. cit.*

mutually exclusive. Quaglia<sup>(31)</sup> has proposed to distinguish between ideological Euroscepticism (a party's position is explained in terms of ideology and political cleavages) and strategic Euroscepticism (based on political strategies and positioning within the political space). Franzosi and co-authors<sup>(32)</sup> have followed the same perspective to explain the relationship between the Italian M5S and the British UKIP within the EP.

Taggart and Szczerbiak have proposed the most known and implied definition of Euroscepticism, that is based on the distinction between hard and soft Euroscepticism<sup>(33)</sup>. In the former category, we find parties that totally oppose the EU and refuse the integration process; in the latter, there are parties that criticize European policies and their outputs, especially when they are considered a damage for the national interest. This definition, despite it can be useful to catch two broader different attitudes, it may be conducive to conceptual stretching, because it includes a stance that it is difficult to consider as Eurosceptic. Following Taggart and Szczerbiak's approach, soft Euroscepticism can virtually embrace every critical position against the EU<sup>(34)</sup>. If we consider soft Euroscepticism as criticism towards EU's policies, it will be analytically more useful to avoid the use of the term Euroscepticism. This refers to a more radical criticism towards the political regime, its values and against the idea of a political production located in Bruxelles. The 'soft' label detects no more than a negative attitude towards policies, an opposition does not founded on a structural opposition against the political regime. What is useful about this conceptualization, is that implicitly recognizes that even in the EU's political arena, a loyal and not antisystem opposition may be present, especially if EU issues and political arena are politicized.

Kopecký and Mudde's<sup>(35)</sup> approach is instead built on the construction of a classification of different positions about the integration process. Four different categories are detected: Euroen-

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<sup>(31)</sup> Lucia QUAGLIA, *The Ebb and Flow' of Euroscepticism in Italy*, in «South European Society and Politics», XVI, 2011, pp. 31-50.

<sup>(32)</sup> Paolo FRANZOSI, Francesco MARONE and Eugenio SALVATI, *Populism and Euroscepticism in the Italian Five Star Movement*, in «The International Spectator», L, 2015, pp. 109-24.

<sup>(33)</sup> Paul TAGGART and Alexis SZCZERBIAK, *op. cit.*

<sup>(34)</sup> Petr KOPECKÝ and Cas MUDDE, *op. cit.*; Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(35)</sup> Petr KOPECKÝ and Cas MUDDE, *op. cit.*



thusiasts, Eurorejects, Eurosceptics and Europragmatists. These categories result from the interaction of two dimensions: the support or opposition to the enforcing of supranational institutions and the support or opposition to further EU's empowerments. This classification has the positive ambition to avoid the confusion between soft Euroscepticism and criticism towards the EU of Taggart and Szczerbiak's definition. However, there are structural limits. First of all, the typology aims to account for all the different attitudes towards the EU, but the categories are too broad when it comes to apply them for empirical tests. In a nutshell, Kopecky and Mudde fail in well defining those different party attitudes that are not simple rejections of EU integration (Eurosceptic category). Moreover, and most important, an illogical category (Europragmatist) should gather parties that strongly oppose the principle of European integration, but that are supportive of further integration in the future. This shortcoming has been underlined by Szczerbiak and Taggart<sup>(36)</sup>.

To sum up, we can state that the literature provides a non-univocal conceptualisation of Euroscepticism. Two are the elements that define the main tasks of Eurosceptic movements: the rediscovering of national identity as a powerful political tool and the aim to bring back at the national level power, competencies and authority devolved to the EU level<sup>(37)</sup>. According to the Eurosceptic vision, integration has impoverished a huge number of European citizens and created the 'losers' of globalisation<sup>(38)</sup>. The welfare state reduction, unemployment, economic problems, and growth of socio-economic inequalities have been strengthened by both the financial and economic crises emerged in 2008 and the way in which European institutions have managed it.

### 3. Eurosceptic Parties as Anti-System Parties

Euroscepticism cannot be considered as an ideology defined

<sup>(36)</sup> Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *op. cit.* (a).

<sup>(37)</sup> Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(38)</sup> Hanspeter KRIESI, Edgar GRANDE, Romain LACHAT, Martin DOLEZAL, Simon BORNSCHIER and Timotheos FREY (eds.), *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.



by a structured vision of the world and characterized by a well-organized supranational movement with transnational political linkages<sup>(39)</sup>. We may conceive of it more like an ‘umbrella’ notion under which various ideological attitudes towards different defining aspects of social and political life are gathered<sup>(40)</sup> and that feed the hostility against the EU political system, its technocratic arrangements and the mainstream national actors which support the process of transnational integration. With the former, we refer to the national institutions and mainstream parties that, according to Eurosceptic parties, are accomplices of EU institutions in the process of nation State’s weakening. Euroscepticism is the peripheral actors’ organization against mainstream actors, accused for their cartelization<sup>(41)</sup>.

What stick together these various attitudes is the idea that EU and the integration path are the catalyst all of those processes that are considered as by-products of globalization and that are challenging the role of nation states (i.e., weakening of national borders and social protection, unemployment, immigration, etc.)<sup>(42)</sup>.

We can define politicisation promoted by Euroscepticism as the ‘political conflict over this specific form of regional cooperation and integration, over the level and scope of its authority’<sup>(43)</sup>. This politicization may refer to functional scopes (vertical integration) and territorialisation/territorial extension (horizontal integration). These elements are all potential sources of political conflict and they actually are inherent issues of Eurosceptic parties’ hostile stances. The refusal of the EU pervasiveness of nation States’ borders (administrative and functional) is the concept that encompass-

<sup>(39)</sup> Simon USHERWOOD, *Modelling Transnational and Pan-European Euroscepticism*, in John FITZGIBBON, Benjamin LERUTH and Nick STARTIN (eds.), *Euroscepticism as a Transnational and Pan-European Phenomenon. The Emergence of a new Sphere of Opposition*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2017, pp. 14-27; Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(40)</sup> Liesbet HOOGHE and Gary MARKS, *op. cit.*

<sup>(41)</sup> Richard KATZ and Peter MAIR, *Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The emergence of the cartel party*, in «Party Politics», I, 1995, pp. 5-28; Peter MAIR, *op. cit.*

<sup>(42)</sup> Stefano BARTOLINI, *Restructuring Europe: Centre Formation, System Building and Political Structuring between the Nation State and the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005; Hanspeter KRIESI, Edgar GRANDE, Romain LACHAT, Martin DOLEZAL, Simon BORN SCHIER and Timotheos FREY (eds.), *op. cit.*; Swen HUTTER, Edgar GRANDE and Hanspeter KRIESI (eds.), *op. cit.*; Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(43)</sup> Swen HUTTER, Edgar GRANDE and Hanspeter KRIESI (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 34.

es these features.

The characterizing element of Euroscepticism is the contestation and refusal of the EU political regime and EU political competencies which limit the nation states 'capacity to take complete autonomy decision (i.e. monetary and fiscal policy, budgetary control, foreign policy etc.). With 'political competencies' we refer to authority resources that member states have devolved to the supranational level and from which the EU political production originates<sup>(44)</sup>. Eurosceptic parties radically criticise the fact that sovereign governments have decided to cede authority and competences to a political regime of which they do not recognize institutional and value legitimacy.

Furthermore the Eurosceptic criticism against EU policies is not only directed against the produced output and outcomes; EU policy making is rejected as not legitimate because it stems from a non-recognised political system, a supranational political authority that weaken national sovereignty. Within such conceptualisation, Eurosceptic parties can be identified by either their dissatisfaction with the current functioning of the EU and the hostility/refusal to future EU's strengthening<sup>(45)</sup>, rejecting the idea of a European *demos*. The definition of a supranational political regime and of a pan-European political community have been the new aims of the EU after Maastricht and the creation of the common market<sup>(46)</sup>. This paved the way to the rise of Eurosceptic parties, which firmly refuse these scenarios.

The definition of political regime is useful to understand the target of anti-system parties: 'specific type of political power organization, entailing a certain institutional organization, within which the exercise of political power is articulated; well established rules of game; and a defined set of values that guide the organizational structure of political power and rules of game.'<sup>(47)</sup> Accordingly, Eurosceptic parties are all those parties that reject the idea that the EU may have such defined political structure, overtaking the du-

<sup>(44)</sup> Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(45)</sup> Petr KOPECKÝ and Cas MUDDE, *op. cit.*; Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(46)</sup> Gary MARKS, *Conclusion: European integration and political conflict*, in Gary MARKS and Marco STEENBERGEN (eds.), *European Integration and Political Conflict*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 235-59.

<sup>(47)</sup> Mario STOPPINO, *Potere e Teoria Politica*, Milano, Giuffrè, 2001.

ties and functions of nation States. We can consider as Eurosceptic those parties that clearly refuse the ‘dominant political values’ that are authoritatively allocated in a society<sup>(48)</sup>. From these values, the European institutional organization as well as EU intervention’s fields and limits originate.

This definition allows more precise operationalization of the concept. However, this ‘minimal definition’ leaves room for manoeuvre for further more in-depth definitions. Obviously, it is worth keeping in mind what Taggart and Szczerbiak have underlined: ‘the more complex and fine grained the typology, the more difficult is to operationalize and categorize the parties.’<sup>(49)</sup> As suggested by Salvati<sup>(50)</sup>, we can profitably relate Eurosceptic parties to Sartori’s concept of anti-system party<sup>(51)</sup>: ‘an anti-system opposition abides by a belief system that does not share the values of the political order within which it operates. According to the strict definition, then, anti-system parties represent an extraneous ideology – thereby indicating a polity confronted with a maximal ideological distance.’

However, some caveats apply when it comes to use the concept for the EU. First, the EU is not a political system and a political regime similar to nation States. Second, there is no well-defined and structured competition between parties. Third, parties cannot access the government, because the EU has not an executive that is the product of elections. Moreover, veto power on legislation is an indicator of anti-system parties in national political systems<sup>(52)</sup>. This opportunity is absent in the EP, because of the constraints of the supranational arena and the type of legislative procedure. Following Sartori, we can argue that anti-system parties in the EU would not change the regime, if they could: they want to disrupt it. The main element that distinguishes anti-system parties and other critical parties is their politicization of the integration process and EU issues.

According to Sartori, the level of anti-systemness is defined by the ideological distance between parties on those issues that

<sup>(48)</sup> David EASTON, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, New York, Wiley, 1965.

<sup>(49)</sup> Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *op.cit.* (a), p. 246.

<sup>(50)</sup> Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(51)</sup> Giovanni SARTORI, *Parties and Party Systems*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 133.

<sup>(52)</sup> Giovanni SARTORI, *op. cit.*

are vital for the political regime. The opposition is the full hostility towards the political arena in which parties are acting in. It is important to stress that, in the EU arena, no party government model works. This means that our possible use of the concept of anti-system parties is not strictly related to the measurement of ideological polarisation simply related to the creation of a government coalition, but rather on the acceptability of a supranational model of governance. One aspect of Sartori's theory that is particularly useful for our purpose: 'a party can be defined as being anti-system whenever it undermines the legitimacy of the regime it opposes'<sup>(53)</sup>.

The attack against EU's political system legitimacy is properly what Eurosceptic parties do within and outside European institutions: a structured action of de-legitimisation carried on by politicizing EU integration. This behaviour forces pro-EU parties to defend the actual structure of the EU, leading to an increase of 'polarization' within the EU political arena. As a result, Eurosceptic parties appear as the only that protect national interests against EU technocracy<sup>(54)</sup>.

Moreover, this action feeds the weak legitimisation of the EU among European citizens fostered by Eurosceptic parties, which mobilize anti-systemic feelings rooted within European societies<sup>(55)</sup>.

Is it possible that, along with a systemic opposition whose goal is to stop the integration process, there is an opposition whose goal is new way to proceed towards integration<sup>(56)</sup>? Recent crises have provoked the upgrade of the opposition dynamic as embedded in EU societies<sup>(57)</sup> and pushed to distinguish between anti-system opposition and constructive opposition.

#### 4. Causes of Anti-Systemic Opposition to the European Union

As we have stressed so far, the denotative field of the concept of Euroscepticism has often proved to be too large for analytical

<sup>(53)</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 132-33.

<sup>(54)</sup> IGNACIO SÁNCHEZ-CUENCA, *From a Deficit of Democracy to a Technocratic Order: The Postcrisis Debate on Europe*, in «Annual Review of Political Science», XX, 2017, pp. 351-69.

<sup>(55)</sup> Peter MAIR, *op. cit.*; Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(56)</sup> Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(57)</sup> Simon USHERWOOD and Nick STARTIN, *op.cit.*

analyses. For this reason, we have suggested to focus on a very specific aspect of the phenomenon, that is, the anti-systemic facet displayed by some ‘Eurosceptic’ parties. We have connected the notion of anti-systemness to a very specific notion of opposition. From this viewpoint, Usherwood and Startin have underlined the persistent nature of the opposition to the European integration in European societies<sup>(58)</sup>, whereas Wessels has distinguished between opposition to authorities, regime, and community<sup>(59)</sup>. Moreover, Cotta has proposed to discard completely the concept of Euroscepticism and rely only on the concept of opposition to the EU<sup>(60)</sup>. He has posited five types of opposition: (1) to the government; (2) the policies; (3) the political establishment; (4) the regime; (5) and the polity. For our purpose, the fourth and the fifth are those of interest, since they are those characterizing anti-systemic parties.

The empirical evidence tells us that the level of electoral support towards this kind of opposition shows significant cross-country variations, both within and between Western and Eastern Europe<sup>(61)</sup>. We therefore ask why some electoral constituencies seem more prone to blame the European Union than others, albeit all represent member States involved in the European decision-making. It is worth stressing that we are not looking for causes of anti-system parties’ development, but we are interested in the sources of their electoral success at the national level. As it has been pointed out by Szczerbiak and Taggart, a precise measurement of party-based opposition to the EU needs more than simply aggregating vote shares. However, ‘vote share gives a crude indication of a party’s significance within its party system’<sup>(62)</sup>.

On this topic, the literature has provided discussions of causes of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Euroscepticism (see Section 2). We refer to this literature to single out the possible conditions for our anal-

<sup>(58)</sup> Simon USHERWOOD and Nick STARTIN, *op.cit.*

<sup>(59)</sup> Bernhard WESSELS, *Discontent and European identity: Three types of Euroscepticism*, in «Acta politica», XXXXII, 2007, pp. 287-306.

<sup>(60)</sup> Maurizio COTTA, *Un concetto ancora adeguato? L'euroscepticismo dopo le elezioni europee del 2014*, in Daniele PASQUINUCCI and Luca VERZICHELLI (eds.), *Contro l'Europa? I diversi scetticismi verso l'integrazione europea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016, pp. 233-47.

<sup>(61)</sup> Stefano ROMBI, *European Voters in the Face of Crisis: the Prominence of Unemployment*, in «Italian Political Science Review/Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica», XXXXVI, 2016, pp. 151-73.

<sup>(62)</sup> Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *op. cit. (b)*, p. 259.

ysis. We focus on parties, since we buy Taggart and Szczerbiak's assumption that national parties are 'key gatekeepers in the process of political representation' and 'they determine the way "Europe" plays out (or does not play out) as a political issues'<sup>(63)</sup>. Most of the literature does not focus on political parties proper, but on mass attitudes and opinions towards the EU<sup>(64)</sup>. In this regard, we think that an anti-EU sentiment (i.e., anti-system sentiment) may be a reliable proxy of electoral support of anti-EU parties, which finds fertile soil for own proposals. Overall, there are four clusters of factors, which account for the opposition towards the European project: economic, cultural-identity, institutional, and socio-ideological factors. These factors may affect support towards the EU at either aggregate (macro) or individual (micro) level. Here, we are interested in the former.

### *Economic Factors*

Economic explanations of anti-EU attitudes are based on the idea that people accept or refuse the integration process, based on material pros and cons in terms of economic national performances and individual benefits. As it has been observed, 'the economic considerations of citizens of the EU have been the most thoroughly examined. [...] However, *which* economic factors are the most relevant continued to be a matter of debate'<sup>(65)</sup>. Anderson and Kaltenthaler have found that national economic conditions, such as growth rate, inflation and unemployment matter: better conditions foster EU acceptance. In addition, Rombi has taken the level of social protection into account. His findings confirm the relevance of economic voting. In particular, he has shown that anti-EU parties are likely to gain more support when unemployment rate is higher, especially during economic crises<sup>(66)</sup>. However, this applies

<sup>(63)</sup> Paul TAGGART and Alexis SZCZERBIAK, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>(64)</sup> For example, Dieter FUCHS, Raul MAGNI-BERTON and Antoine ROGER (eds.), *Eurocepticism. Images of Europe Among Mass Publics and Political Elites*, Opladen & Farmington Hills, Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2009.

<sup>(65)</sup> Matthew LOVELESS and Robert ROHRSCHEIDER, *Public Perceptions of the EU as a System of Governance*, in «Living Reviews in European Governance», III, 2011, p. 9, italic in the original.

<sup>(66)</sup> Christopher J. ANDERSON and Karl C. KALTENTHALER, *The Dynamics of Public Opinion toward European Integration, 1973-93*, in «European Journal of International Relations», II, 1996, pp. 175-99; Stefano ROMBI, *op. cit.*

with caveats. Focusing on the French *Front National* and the Italian *Lega Nord*, Morini has observed that only the former has been able to increase its support by exploiting bad economic conditions. In contrast, the success of the *Lega Nord* is not significantly correlated with negative trends of the Italian economy. Moreover, Serricchio and co-authors as well as Serricchio and Bellucci have found that the financial crisis has had a negative impact on the level of support towards the EU only indirectly, by exacerbating the role of identity and institutional factors<sup>(67)</sup>.

### *Cultural-Identity Factors*

Dubé and Magni Berton have stressed the need to include cultural variables to account for sentiments towards the EU<sup>(68)</sup>. Post-material theory of values has argued that the increasing cognitive mobilization of citizens has been conducive to higher support for the abstract European integration process. In particular, income would be a good predictor of values<sup>(69)</sup>. Even if the explicative role of post-materialism has proved to be rather weak<sup>(70)</sup>, some have however shown that higher levels of knowledge of the EU project as well as cosmopolitan views positively correlate with pro-EU attitudes<sup>(71)</sup>.

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<sup>(67)</sup> Marco MORINI, *Front National and Lega Nord: Two Stories of the Same Euroscepticism*, in «European Politics and Society», XIX, 2017, pp. 551-66; Fabio SERRICCHIO, Myrto TSAKATIKA and Lucia QUAGLIA, *Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis*, in «Journal of Common Market Studies», LI, 2013, pp. 51-64; Fabio SERRICCHIO and Paolo BELLUCCI, *The Consequences of European Identity*, in Bettina WESTLE and Paolo SEGATTI (eds.), *European Identity in the Context of National Identity. Questions of Identity in Sixteen European Countries in the Wake of the Financial Crisis*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 272-90.

<sup>(68)</sup> Sébastien DUBÉ and Raül MAGNI-BERTON, *How Does Income Influence National and European Identity?*, in Dieter FUCHS, Raul MAGNI-BERTON and Antoine ROGER, *op. cit.*, p. 73-90.

<sup>(69)</sup> Matthew LOVELESS and Robert ROHRSCHEIDER, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Sébastien DUBÉ and Raül MAGNI-BERTON, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>(70)</sup> Ad esempio, Matthew GABEL, *Public Support for European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories*, in «The Journal of Politics», LX, 1998, pp. 333-54.

<sup>(71)</sup> Joseph I. H. JANSSEN, *Postmaterialism, Cognitive Mobilization, and Support for European Integration*, in «British Journal of Political Science», XXI, 1991, pp. 443-68; Alexandra MÖSSNER, *Cognitive Mobilization, Knowledge and Efficacy as Determinants of Euroscepticism*, in Dieter FUCHS, Raul MAGNI-BERTON and Antoine ROGER, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-74; Nicholas CLARK and Timothy HELLWIG, *Information Effects and Mass Support for EU Policy Control*, in «European Union Politics», XIII, 2012, pp. 535-57.



Besides the already mentioned Serricchio and co-authors, other scholars have tried to explain opposition to the EU integration through the concept of ‘national identity’<sup>(72)</sup>. For instance, Carey has related strong national identities with anti-EU feelings. Hooghe and Marks and Sanders and co-authors have argued that national identities jeopardize the acceptance of the EU project when they are exclusive or ethnic-based. De Vries and van Kersbergen have suggested that identity considerations reduce EU support only when voters perceive further integration as a threat towards their economic well-being<sup>(73)</sup>.

Finally, cultural explanations have considered the (perceived) level of corruption<sup>(74)</sup> and trust in domestic institutions as further factors for explanation, reaching ambiguous conclusions. On the one hand, Anderson has underlined a positive relation between trust in political institutions and EU support. On the other hand, Sánchez-Cuenca has asserted that higher support is likely when European citizens do not trust national institutions; the EU would in fact work as a functional substitute of their domestic institutions<sup>(75)</sup>.

### *Political-Institutional Factors*

Political institutions define the ‘political opportunity structure’<sup>(76)</sup> for anti-EU parties to prosper. Since we are focusing on

<sup>(72)</sup> Fabio SERRICCHIO, Myrto TSAKATIKA and Lucia QUAGLIA, *op. cit.*; Dieter FUCHS, Isabelle GUINAUDEAU and Sophia SCHUBERT, *National Identity, European Identity and Euroscepticism*, in Dieter FUCHS, Raul MAGNI-BERTON and Antoine ROGER, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-112.

<sup>(73)</sup> Sean CAREY, *Undivided Loyalties: Is National Identity an Obstacle to European Integration?*, in «European Union Politics», III, 2002, 387-413; Liesbet HOOGHE and Gary MARKS, *Calculation, Community and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration*, in «European Union Politics», VI, 2005, pp. 419-43; David SANDERS, Paolo BELLUCCI, Gabor TOKA and Mariano TORCAL (eds.), *The Europeanization of National Politics? Citizenship and Support in a Post-Enlargement Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012; Catherine E. DE VRIES and Kees VAN KERSBERGEN, *Interests, Identity and Political Allegiance in the European Union*, in «Acta Politica», XLII, 2007, pp. 307-28.

<sup>(74)</sup> Fabio SERRICCHIO, Myrto TSAKATIKA and Lucia QUAGLIA, *op. cit.*

<sup>(75)</sup> Christopher J. ANDERSON, *When in Doubt, Use Proxies: Attitudes toward Domestic Politics and Support for European Integration*, in «Comparative Political Studies», XXXI, 1998, 569-601; Ignacio SÁNCHEZ-CUENCA, *The Political Basis of Support for European Integration*, in «European Union Politics», I, 2000, pp. 147-71.

<sup>(76)</sup> Charles LEES, *The Political Opportunity Structure of Euroscepticism: Institutional Setting and Political Agency in European Parties*, in Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART,

cross-country variations, we do not look at the EU institutional framework, which is shared by all member States. In contrast, we pay attention to domestic institutions and their arrangements. Several authors have posited a link between EU support and evaluations of national governments; however, the empirical goodness of such relation has been persuasively criticized<sup>(77)</sup>. Rohrschneider and Loveless have focused on country characteristics. Their main finding is that, while in less affluent countries citizens evaluate the EU based on economic prospects, in more affluent nations the EU is assessed through political criteria. Moreover, well-functioning political institutions function as a basis for comparing the quality of the EU and its democratic deficit; accordingly, citizens of nations with good institutional performances are more likely to be disappointed with the EU<sup>(78)</sup>.

Secondly, Lees has argued that the degree of State centralization and strength of sub-national governments may theoretically have an impact on the rise of anti-EU behaviours. ‘However, the precise nature of its impact is unclear and needs further research’. At the same time, the nature of legislatures can be a further factor in point<sup>(79)</sup>.

Narrowing the perspective down, other authors have suggested looking at the dynamics of the party system and party competition<sup>(80)</sup>. Rombi has proposed to take anti-EU parties in government in consideration. ‘This is useful to assess whether participation in government [...] influences the way in which voters judge both the government and [...] Euroanti-system’ parties.’ Moreover, he has suggested including the number of parties in the incumbent government<sup>(81)</sup>. However, we propose to translate it into the number of

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*op. cit.* (b), pp. 28-51; Simon USHERWOOD, *Modelling Transnational and Pan-European Euroscepticism*, in John FITZGIBBON, Benjamin LERUTH and Nick STARTIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-27.

<sup>(77)</sup> Matthew LOVELESS and Robert ROHRSCHEIDER, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>(78)</sup> Robert ROHRSCHEIDER and Matthew LOVELESS, *Macro Salience: How Economic and Political Contexts Mediate Popular Evaluations of the Democracy Deficit in the European Union*, in «Journal of Politics», LXXII, 2010, 1029-45; Robert ROHRSCHEIDER, *The Democracy Deficit and Mass Support for an EU-Wide Government*, in «American Journal of Political Science», XLVI, 2002, 463-75.

<sup>(79)</sup> Charles LEES, *op. cit.*, p. 37. Si veda anche Tapio RAUNIO, *The Difficult Task of Opposing Europe: Finnish Party Politics of Euroscepticism*, in Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *op. cit.* (a), pp. 168-80.

<sup>(80)</sup> Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *op. cit.* (a).

<sup>(81)</sup> Stefano ROMBI, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

parties in the party system, as a broader proxy of the functioning of the system as a whole.

Fourth, Usherwood and Startin have highlighted a usually neglected factor, that is, the call for a referendum on EU issues. Initially thought as means to take the EU to the people, these referenda have turned to be vehicles of anti-EU sentiments in several countries. According to the authors, they have allowed anti-EU forces 'to galvanize support and gain legitimacy for the anti-EU cause. [...] Opposition elements are clearly left as the most active participants in the debate'<sup>(82)</sup>. Moreover, Anderson and Kaltenthaler as well as Milner have found that the timing of entry into the Union and the length of membership have a significant impact<sup>(83)</sup>.

### *Socio-Ideological Factors*

A fourth strand of literature has looked at social factors, in particular ideological factors and social cleavages<sup>(84)</sup>. Lubbers and Scheepers have stressed that anti-EU attitudes can cross the left-right political dimension in different ways. Moreover, they have shown that centrist voters are less likely than left- and right-wing voters to be against the EU project. Aspinwall has contradicted this findings and stressed the pitfall of tautology. According to the author, individuals' partisanship does not correlate with party positions about European integration as one may expect<sup>(85)</sup>.

Finally, one can detect a possible cause of anti-EU attitudes in the configuration of national mass media<sup>(86)</sup>. As a matter of fact, 'anti-EU media discourse has contributed to the increasingly embedded nature of the Eurosceptic phenomenon in some EU Mem-

<sup>(82)</sup> Simon USHERWOOD and Nick STARTIN, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>(83)</sup> Christopher J. ANDERSON and Karl C. KALTENTHALER, *op. cit.*; Susan MILNER, *Euroscepticism in France and Changing State-Society Relations*, in «Journal of European Integration», XXII, 2000, pp. 35-58.

<sup>(84)</sup> Gary MARKS and Carole WILSON, *The Past in the Present: A Cleavage Theory of Party Response to European Integration*, in «British Journal of Political Science», XXX, 2000, pp. 433-59.

<sup>(85)</sup> Marcel LUBBERS and Peer SCHEEPERS, *Divergent Trends of Euroscepticism in Countries and Regions of the European Union*, in «European Journal of Political Research», XLIX, 2010, pp. 787-817; Mark ASPINWALL, *Preferring Europe: Ideology and National Preferences on European Integration*, in «European Union Politics», III, 2002, pp. 81-111.

<sup>(86)</sup> Claes H. DE VREESE, *A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media's Fault?*, in «Acta Politica», XLII, 2007, pp. 271-86; Hajo G. BOOMGAARDEN, Rens VLEGENTHART, Claes H. DE VREESE and Andreas R.T. SCHUCK, *op. cit.*

ber States<sup>(87)</sup>.

This section has briefly reviewed the main contributions to the debate about the causes of anti-EU sentiments. First, the overview has provided a cumulative picture, which lacks an analytical common thread. Second, the literature has highlighted a very large range of factors, which refer to four different groups of variables. Third, many factors have resulted to be significant and it is not clear which cluster (if any) matters more; one reason is that several studies do not communicate one other. Finally, the existing researches account for the presence of contestation towards Europe, but they neglect a likewise important phenomenon, that is, the absence of opposition<sup>(88)</sup>. All these reasons call for new epistemological and methodological perspectives.

## 5. The Configurational Approach

Configurational approach has not established itself yet in comparative analyses of party-based anti-EU behaviours. However, this approach has important merits and it has been made systematic through Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) techniques<sup>(89)</sup>. It seems useful to describe the main bases, in order to have a better understanding of what a configurational approach implies.

Techniques such as QCA tackle the classic juxtaposition between qualitative and quantitative social sciences research<sup>(90)</sup> from an alternative perspective, by formalising the configurational thinking of case studies. The main epistemological difference, compared to common quantitative research, concerns the conceptualization of the factors that are supposed to have an impact on a given phenomenon (in our case, electoral support of anti-EU national parties). For quantitative scholars, these factors are variables,

<sup>(87)</sup> Simon USHERWOOD and Nick STARTIN, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>(88)</sup> For example, Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *Introduction: Researching Euroscepticism in European Party Systems: A Comparative and Theoretical Research Agenda*, in Alexis SZCZERBIAK and Paul TAGGART, *op. cit. (b)*, pp. 1-27, p. 24.

<sup>(89)</sup> Carsten Q. SCHNEIDER and Claudius WAGEMANN, *Set-Theoretic Methods for the Social Sciences: A Guide to Qualitative Comparative Analysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>(90)</sup> James MAHONEY and Gary GOERTZ, *A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, in «Political Analysis», XIV, 2006, pp. 227-49.

which are assumed to exert an independent impact on a dependent variable. The task of the researcher is thus to find out the net effect of each independent variable, assessed against each other. In this case, causal homogeneity is posited<sup>(91)</sup>. According to these methods, independent and dependent variables correlate or do not correlate: if one appears, the other will do too, and vice versa. This is why Ragin calls this approach variable-oriented or correlational<sup>(92)</sup>. In contrast, configurational approaches treat factors as conditions (instead of independent variables) of an outcome (instead of a dependent variable) and – based on Boolean algebra in QCA – assume that a condition can have an effect only in the presence or absence of other conditions (configurational approach). This conjunctural causation is conducive to multiple paths (combination of conditions and/or absence of conditions) to the same outcome of interest (equifinality). One point that it is very worth stressing is that the configurational thinking posits asymmetry of causation. In other words, to state that an outcome appears as a consequence of some ‘causal recipes’<sup>(93)</sup> does not imply that, every time we are confronted with such outcome, the same conditions will be present as well. At the same time, we would not be explaining the absence of the outcome. The configurational approach is theory-guided and allows selecting on the ‘dependent variable,’ a practice severely contested by advocates of quantitative methods<sup>(94)</sup>.

Configurational methods (e.g., QCA) look for both necessary and sufficient conditions (and their combinations) for final outcomes. QCA, for example, refers to set-theoretic methods and thus can observe how much conditions are part of a perfect outcome’s subset (consistency) as well as how much such conditions ‘explain’ or are relevant for the outcome (coverage)<sup>(95)</sup>. From a practical viewpoint, configurational analyses, when conducted via QCA, work through truth tables: ‘just like conventional data matrices, each

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<sup>(91)</sup> Mona L. KROOK, *Women’s Representation in Parliament: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis*, in «Political Studies», LVIII, 2010, pp. 886-908, p. 888.

<sup>(92)</sup> Charles C. RAGIN, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987.

<sup>(93)</sup> Charles C. RAGIN, *Redesigning Social Inquiry: Fuzzy Sets and Beyond*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 109.

<sup>(94)</sup> Gary KING, Robert O. KEOHANE and Sidney VERBA, *Designing Social Inquiry Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994.

<sup>(95)</sup> Carsten Q. SCHNEIDER and Claudius WAGEMANN, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-47.

truth table column denotes a different variable or, better, set. The difference consists in the meaning of rows. Each row [...] represents one of the possible AND combinations between the conditions<sup>(96)</sup>. Set membership may be indicated either by dichotomous crisp-sets (0=no membership; 1=membership) or fine-grained fuzzy-sets (degrees of membership are calibrated)<sup>(97)</sup>. In our analysis, we are only interested in the presence or absence of significant electoral support for anti-EU parties. For this reason, we will make crispy operationalization.

Overall, a configurational approach for the comparative analysis of conditions of success of anti-system parties should provide us with fresh systematic yet in-depth information. Picking Krook's words up, we should observe '(1) whether conditions exist in relationships of logical "and" or logical "or"; (2) whether they join together with other conditions in causal combinations; and (3) whether some redundancies can be minimized and some conditions and combinations subsumed into others'<sup>(98)</sup>.

## 6. Case Selection and Empirical Analysis

In this article, we make a medium-N analysis, focused on 15 European member States. For our purpose, we need a set of countries that display variations on the outcome of interest and where homogeneity is not a consequence of the belonging to a particular area with own historical/cultural heritage. Since it has been stressed that Central-Eastern countries are likely to constitute a separate group in terms of anti-EU attitudes and explanations<sup>(99)</sup>, we have decided to look at Western Europe only. In particular, we focus on member States before the 2004 enlargement. This allows us to avoid possible biases and expect more straightforward conditions' effects. With regard to the time of analysis, we look at the level of electoral support of anti-system national parties at the 2014 European elections. Three main reasons lie beyond our choice. First, these elections have seen the rise of anti-EU parties as never be-

<sup>(96)</sup> *Ivi*, p. 92.

<sup>(97)</sup> Ad esempio, Charles C. RAGIN, *op. cit.*

<sup>(98)</sup> Mona L. KROOK, *op. cit.*, p. 890.

<sup>(99)</sup> Matthew LOVELESS and Robert ROHRSCHEIDER, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

fore<sup>(100)</sup>. Second, voters are likely to change their behaviours based on the type of electoral system<sup>(101)</sup> and European elections are the only where European people vote according to the same proportional system (with tiny variations). Third, European elections are the proper fore for the politicization of the EU integration issue<sup>(102)</sup>. Data about the ‘explaining’ conditions of our analysis refer to the moment temporally closest to the 2014 elections.

As a first step, we provide descriptive statistics of the level of support for anti-system parties as we have defined them (table 1). In operative terms, we have considered as anti-system parties all those parties scoring 8 or more on the anti-EU integration dimension of the party Euromanifesto project<sup>(103)</sup>. The scale ranges from 1 to 10, where 10 is equal to the highest opposition. This dimension can be useful as an indicator of anti-systemic contestation to Europe. Indeed, more than simple criticisms to the EU as it is, it provides a proxy of how much national parties are for or against the loss of national sovereignty in the trade-off with the European ‘political system’<sup>(104)</sup> and its regime. We have assumed that pro-integration parties are those with a score between 1 and 3, while, from 4 to 7, we find parties that are critical, but not anti-system *tout court*.

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<sup>(100)</sup> Oliver TREIB, *The Voter Says No, but Nobody Listens: Causes and Consequences of the Eurosceptic Vote in the 2014 European Elections*, in «Journal of European Public Policy», XXI, 2014, pp. 1541-54.

<sup>(101)</sup> Gary W. COX, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

<sup>(102)</sup> Enrique HERNÁNDEZ and Hanspeter KRIESI, *The Electoral Consequences of the Financial and Economic Crisis in Europe*, in «European Journal of Political Research», LV, 2016, pp. 203-24.

<sup>(103)</sup> Hermann SCHMITT, Sebastian A. POPA and Felix DEVINGER, *European Parliament Election Study 2014, Voter Study, Supplementary Study*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne, 2015. ZA5161 Data file Version 1.0.0.

<sup>(104)</sup> Simon HIX and Bjørn HØYLAND, *The Political System of the European Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.



**Table 1 – Anti-system parties and electoral performance at the 2014 European elections**

Party	Country	Scale score	Votes (%)
Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs	Austria	10	19.72
Vlaams Belang	Belgium	8	4.26
Dansk Folkeparti	Denmark	10	26.60
Folkebevægelsen Mod EU	Denmark	10	8.10
Perussuomalaiset	Finland	9	12.90
Front National	France	10	24.86
Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands	Germany	9	1.00
Anexartitoi Ellines	Greece	9	3.46
Kommounistiko Komma Ellados	Greece	10	6.11
Laikos Orthodoxos Synagermos	Greece	9	2.69
Laikos Syndesmos – Chrysi Avgi (gd)	Greece	10	9.39
Lega Nord	Italy	8	6.15
Movimento 5 Stelle	Italy	8	21.15
Partij voor de Dieren	Netherlands	8	4.21
Partij voor de Vrijheid	Netherlands	10	13.32
Socialistische Partij	Netherlands	9	9.60
Junilistan	Sweden	10	0.31
Sverigedemokraterna	Sweden	10	9.67
British National Party	UK	9	1.11
United Kingdom Independence Party	UK	10	26.77

*Source:* own elaboration, based on Hermann SCHMITT, Sebastian A. POPA and Felix DEVINGER, *op. cit.*

As said, we refer to dummy distinctions for our analysis. In order to separate countries where anti-system parties were successful and countries where the phenomenon was less weighty, we have calculated the mean of all electoral results (in percentage). Secondly, we have added the results up by country. Those countries where the aggregate level of support was higher than the overall mean have been considered within the set of the outcome (1). All the others have been considered outside (0). This procedure seems viable for our purpose, since we are not interested in the measurement of electoral ‘successes’ in absolute terms. Rather, we want to measure relative success in a specific geographical area and at the specific time *t*. Table 2 summarises this information.

**Table 2 – Countries with successful anti-system parties  
at the 2014 European elections**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Outcome (successful anti-system parties)</b>
Austria	Yes
Belgium	No
Denmark	Yes
Finland	Yes
France	Yes
Germany	No
Greece	Yes
Ireland	No
Italy	Yes
Luxembourg	No
Netherlands	Yes
Portugal	No
Spain	No
Sweden	No
United Kingdom	Yes

The same way of operationalization has been followed with regard to the conditions, when data were on an interval scale without a clear above/below threshold. In table 3, we show how we have measured these conditions and the relevant sources of information.

**Table 3 – Operationalization of conditions and sources of information**

Condition	Operationalization	Source of information
Economic factors		
Growth (A)	Positive GDP growth	Eurostat
Inflation (B)	Higher inflation	Eurostat
Unemployment (C)	Higher unemployment	Eurostat
Social protection (D)	Higher expenditure on social protection per capita	Eurostat
Cultural-identity factors		
Income (E)	Higher disposable median net income	Eurostat
National identity (F)	Higher exclusive national identity (Moreno question)	Eurobarometer
Corruption (G)	Higher perceived level of corruption	Transparency international
Trust in national institutions (H)	Higher level of trust in national government	Eurobarometer
Political-institutional factors		
Democratic quality (I)	Higher government effectiveness	World Governance Indicators
State decentralization (J)	Federalism	Lijphart (2012); own observation
Bicameralism (K)	Bicameral national parliament	Own observation
Anti-EU parties in government (M)	Presence of anti-EU parties in cabinet	Döring and Manow (2019)
Number of parties (N)	Higher No. of parties at the European 2014 elections	Döring and Manow (2019)
Referendum held (O)	Referendum on EU issues since 2000	Usherwood and Startin (2013: 9); own update
Original CEE/EU membership (P)	Founding member of the CEE	Own observation
Long CEE/EU membership (Q)	Higher No. of years in the CEE/EU	Own observation
Socio-ideological factors		
Centre voters (R)	Mean of self-placement: 4.5-5.5 (on 0-10 scale)	Piurko et al. (2011: 547)
Anti-EU mass media (S)	Media equally or mostly advocating anti-integration	De Wilde et al. (2013: 44)

Note: for the reasons stated in Section 4, we use income as a proxy of post-materialism in a society. We are aware that an index of post-materialism exists (Ronald INGLEHART, *The Silent Revolution in Europe: Intergenerational Change in Post-Industrial Societies*, in «American Political Science Review», LXV, 1971, pp. 991-1017; Ronald INGLEHART and Paul R. ABRAMSON, *Measuring Postmaterialism*, in «American Political Science Review», XCIII, 1999, pp. 665-677), but data are not available for all countries and for the time we are interested in.

Sources: Yuval PIURKO, Shalom H. SCHWARTZ and Eldad DAVIDOV, *Basic Personal Values and the Meaning of Left-Right Political Orientations in 20 Countries*, in «Political Psychology», XXXII, 2011, pp. 537-61; Arend LIJPHART, *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries. Second Edition*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2012; Pieter DE WILDE, Asimina MICHAÏLIDOU and Hans-Jörg TRENZ, *Contesting Europe. Exploring Euroscepticism in Online Media Coverage*, Colchester, ECPR Press, 2013; Simon USHERWOOD and Nick STARTIN, *op. cit.*; Holger DÖRING and Philip MANOW, *Parliaments and Governments Database (ParlGov): Information on Parties, Elections and Cabinets in Modern Democracies*, Development version, 2019.

Table 4 provides an overall picture of our 15 countries, with indication of presence or absence of both outcome of interest and conditions.

**Table 4 – Electoral success of anti-system parties in Western Europe and conditions**

Case	Conditions																	Out.	
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	M	N	O	P	Q	R		S
Austria	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Belgium	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
Denmark	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	?	1
Finland	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
France	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Germany	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0
Greece	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Ireland	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	?	0
Italy	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	?	?	1
Luxembourg	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	?	?	0
Netherlands	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Portugal	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	?	0
Spain	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	?	0
Sweden	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
UK	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1

Note: ? means that the information is missing. According to Götz ROHWER, *Qualitative Comparative Analysis: A Discussion of Interpretations*, in «European Sociological Review», XXVII, 2011, pp. 728-40, missing information can be treated as limited diversity in configurational analyses and coded as either 0 or 1.

According to the aforementioned studies of anti-EU attitudes' causes and conditions, we can single out the most important factors for each factorial cluster. With regard to economic factors, unemployment seems the most significant<sup>(105)</sup>. The exclusive feeling of national identity seems instead prominent among attitudinal factors, together with trust in institutions<sup>(106)</sup>. Government effectiveness and the length of membership play a role in institutional terms<sup>(107)</sup>. Finally, we notice that socio-ideological factors seem to have a minor and ambiguous part. Thus, we remain confronted with five 'bigger' factors. Table 5 shows the performance of each country in this respect.

<sup>(105)</sup> Stefano ROMBI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(106)</sup> Fabio SERRICCHIO, Myrto TSAKATIKA and Lucia QUAGLIA, *op. cit.*

<sup>(107)</sup> Christopher J. ANDERSON and Karl C. KALTENTHALER, *op. cit.*; Stefano ROMBI, *op. cit.*

**Table 5 – Prominent conditions by country**

Country	Economic conditions	Cultural-identity conditions		Political-institutional conditions	
	Annual unemployment in 2013 (%)	Exclusive national identity in May 2014 (%)	Trust in institutions in May 2014 (%)	Gov. effectiveness in 2013 (%)	Years in CEE/EU in 2014
<b>Austria</b>	5.4	33	33	<b>93</b>	19
Belgium	8.4	33	<b>43</b>	<b>93</b>	56
<b>Denmark</b>	7.0	37	<b>46</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Finland</b>	8.2	36	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>	19
<b>France</b>	10.3	34	17	<b>90</b>	<b>56</b>
Germany	5.2	27	<b>47</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Greece</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>49</b>	16	67	33
Ireland	<b>13.1</b>	<b>49</b>	22	89	<b>41</b>
<b>Italy</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>45</b>	17	68	<b>56</b>
Luxembourg	5.9	21	<b>50</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Netherlands</b>	7.3	31	<b>50</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>56</b>
Portugal	<b>16.4</b>	<b>42</b>	14	86	28
Spain	<b>26.1</b>	27	10	83	28
Sweden	8.0	31	<b>54</b>	<b>99</b>	19
<b>United Kingdom</b>	7.6	<b>64</b>	25	<b>90</b>	<b>41</b>
<i>Mean</i>	<i>11.2</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>40</i>

Note: values above the mean or cases of presence are in bold. Countries in bold present successful anti-system parties.

The table tells us that there is a quite large variation among countries. This confirms the necessity for a configurational approach for the study of conditions for anti-systemness or its absence. It is worth noting that in all countries no anti-system parties were in government at the time of the elections. It seems that a long membership in the CEE/EU works as a fostering condition for the rise of anti-system parties. In addition, the absence of a strong exclusive national identity alone may undermine the chances of anti-system parties to gain votes. Finally, one main finding is that unemployment seems to matter, especially when combined with strong national identity, however depending on the length of membership. Quality of democracy (operationalised as government effectiveness) seems to have potential. Where the economic conditions

are good and there are no strong identity feelings, higher government effectiveness emerges as a factor. It could be that, without other specific conditions, in this situations citizens tend to use own institutions as terms for comparison and judge the EU as a worse institutional setting (in terms of performance). Trust in national institutions could move to the same direction in Finland, where we have only a short membership in the EU. Overall, data tell us that *combinations* of conditions and absence of conditions are at work. This is something that a correlational variable-oriented approach could not account for.

## 7. Conclusions

To wrap up, the strengthening of Eurosceptic parties is connected to the growth of the new political centre of Brussels, which has challenged the nation State paradigm and has weakened States' functions. The EU political organization is extremely difficult because of the weak level of territorial structuration and troubles in implementing loyalty mechanisms. In the EU arena, exit is easier than voice<sup>(108)</sup>. The problematic consequences of the de-territorialisation have been intensified by the economic crisis: at the national level, we have a political process (election, political participation, etc.), identity and shared values, while at the European level we have market, a relevant part of policy-making, and normative production. This situation has created a partial separation between politics and policy, enforcing lack of transparency and accountability. European citizens have been deprived of their opportunity to influence political decisions through parties and collective bodies<sup>(109)</sup>. Moreover, social protections have been weakened by austerity policies promoted by the EU and driven by new budgetary limits. Overall, the consequence has been that parts of the European citizenship have feel marginalised: economically marginalized due to the crisis and politically not integrated in this new European political centre. It is not surprising that Eurosceptic parties have proliferated.

Eurosceptic parties are accomplishing the paradoxical func-

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<sup>(108)</sup> Stefano BARTOLINI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(109)</sup> Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

tion to integrate politically alienated masses within the system, aggregating their political demands, needs and concerns. These new political actors, although under from disruptive viewpoint, are making the European cleavage an issue that creates political conflict<sup>(110)</sup>. We need to distinguish between the institutionalisation of political dissent to the more radical opposition, focused against the constitutive elements of the political regime. The former aims to put the integration process to an end. It is so important to reflect about the opportunity to differentiate among different types of opposition within the EP and to use in a proper way the concepts of Euroscepticism and opposition<sup>(111)</sup>. Some part of the literature excludes those systems where there is no alternation in government, such as the EU<sup>(112)</sup>. However, it is hard to state that the absence of alternation means, ultimately, the absence of opposition.

In this article, we have proposed a more fine-grained conceptualisation of Eurosceptic and anti-EU parties. In particular, we have linked the concept of anti-system at the EU level to the contestation of the integration process' legitimacy. Secondly, we have reviewed the main findings of the empirical literature in terms of causes of anti-EU attitudes. This step has shown us that the literature suffers from shortcomings and that a different approach could be useful to get further knowledge. In this regard, we have argued for a move from variable-oriented analyses to a configurational approach. This approach pushes to think in terms of conditions (or absence of conditions) and combinations (i.e., causal recipes). Moreover, this could be a way to explain, besides the presence of anti-EU attitudes, the absence of strong anti-system-parties.

Overall, our findings suggest that further inquiries are needed. A possible research outlook could be the extension of even the reduction

<sup>(110)</sup> Marco R. STEENBERGEN, Erica E. EDWARDS and Catherine E. DE VRIES, *Who's Cueing Whom? Mass-Elite Linkages and the Future of European Integration*, in «European Union Politics», VIII, 2007, pp. 13-35; Swen HUTTER, Edgar GRANDE and Hanspeter KRIESI, *op. cit.*; Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*

<sup>(111)</sup> Paolo FRANZOSI, Francesco MARONE and Eugenio SALVATI, *op. cit.*; Benedetta CARLOTTI, *The Odd Couple: Analyzing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and Italian Five Stars Movement's (FSM's) European Union (EU)-Opposition in the European Parliament (EP)*, in «Italian Political Science Review/Rivista italiana di scienza politica», XLVIII, 2018, pp. 197-220.

<sup>(112)</sup> For example, Peter MAIR, *Political Opposition and the European Union*, in «Government and Opposition», XLII, 2007, pp. 1-17.



of the analysis in terms of geographical coverage. Central-Eastern Europe could also be an alternative set of cases. Secondly, one may look for further possible conditions to be added to be taken into consideration. Moreover, their number could be lowered down, in order to have a more in-depth and much focused view. Finally, one could try to make a more systematic study of the conditions of successful anti-system parties, by making a QCA analysis as described. In this case, a fuzzy operationalisation could bring further precision. It is worth reminding that QCA implies a back and forth movement between theory and data<sup>(113)</sup>, and our results may be a useful starting point both to refine the theory and add bricks to our knowledge.

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<sup>(113)</sup> Carsten C. SCHNEIDER and Claudius WAGEMANN, *op. cit.*