

# Euroscepticism: Factors, Types and Trends

Victor Turmakov<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract:* This article analyzes the evolution of the Euroscepticism among the EU countries, as well as its current condition. Today there is an increase in the influence of Eurosceptic parties at elections both at the level of the European Parliament and at local and state level. The reasons for this are the bureaucracy of Brussels, the economic crisis of 2008, the increased emigration flows and the fear of losing sovereignty and identity. Among the new member states of CEE – also the collision of value systems and the slow catching up of the West. The article attempts to classify the types of Euroscepticism as "hard" and "soft", as well as to place of Eurosceptic parties in the political spectrum. The article tracks the reasons for the growing influence of some Eurosceptic parties in countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, France, Britain, Italy, Hungary and Greece. The conclusion assesses Euroscepticism and defines its role in the political life of the EU.

Index Terms: EU, Euroscepticism, parties, value systems, sovereignty, identity, political life

JEL: F5, H5

## I. EUROSCEPTICISM: CLASSIFICATION AND MANIFESTATIONS

Nowadays the concept of "Euroscepticism" on the old continent is not a neologism – it has turned into an integral part of the scientific media and communication. The people sharing this idea are growing in number, they are establishing parties, and attracting numerous supporters. Nowadays, there seems to be no EU member state without its own Eurosceptic movement. The European Parliament election in May 2014, marked by low voter turnout and strengthening of the Eurosceptics' influence, and followed by their growing success at state and local elections, shows that the political elite of the EU should pay close attention to Euroscepticism. Events and phenomena such as the 2008 financial crisis, the growing immigration flows from the third world, the aging population, and the fears of potential blurring of sovereignty and national identities in the bloc are factors contributing to the growing scepticism towards the prospects of the EU.

## II. WHAT IS "EUROSCEPTICISM"? EVOLUTION OF THE PHENOMENON.

Euroscepticism is a sceptical, negative attitude towards the processes of European integration within the EU.

It is an ideological and political trend whose representatives oppose the current situation in the EU and the path taken by the organisation. It should be noted that there is a whole range of different shades of

Euroscepticism – apart from the general rejection of the integration some Eurosceptics oppose individual EU projects, such as the adoption of the single currency, the European Constitution, the supranational union, and the federalisation of the bloc.

Eurosceptics often base their views on positions in support of the nation states and their sovereignty and express concerns that further integration will inflict irreparable damage on these nation states and deprive them from the right to decide their own fate. Focusing on the activity of Euro-bureaucrats, the sceptics believe that Brussels adopts poorly thought-out and poorly prepared decisions and legislative texts, as well as that there is a lack of transparency and relation with the citizens and the civil society

Eurosceptic sentiments have existed since the beginning of the integration processes but the very concept in its current form appeared for the first time in the 1970s in the UK. These sentiments gained popularity due to the characteristic British conservatism and the striving to preserve the country's uniqueness. Today British Eurosceptics are concerned about the fact that the EU may turn into a superstate. The development of Euroscepticism on the continent should also be taken into account – the reluctance of some countries such as Denmark to join the EU, as well as the emergence of politicians such as Jean-Marie Le Pen and Jörg Haider on the political horizon. Euroscepticism has evolved in parallel with the development of the EU itself. In the first decades of integration it was mainly expressed in criticism against market integration, growing unemployment and slower economic growth. With the development of these processes and the deepening of political integration Eurosceptics started directing their criticism in defence of national societies and sovereignty.

At the very beginning of the new century Euroscepticism was simply a marginal phenomenon in the political life of the EU, dominated by Eurooptimistic parties. According to a survey from 2005 conducted by L.Ray, Euroscepticism is a peripheral political phenomenon concentrated in the ideological poles (far-left and far-right) and in some opposition parties. His survey showed that after Maastricht public support for the EU has decreased but this has not resulted in the strengthening of Euroscepticism in general.

The only exceptions to this rule are the Scandinavian countries where such centrist parties (Centre Party in Sweden) exist and the UK and France where there is some disagreement on the future of the bloc, too. The Enlargement of the EU stimulates the growth in the role of Euroscepticism. A proof of that is the refusal of the population and some political powers in countries such as France, the Netherlands, the UK, and Poland to accept the project of a common European Constitution. The problems

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1. Victor Turmakov is from UNWE, Sofia, Bulgaria



that the EU is facing such as the crisis, the increase in emigration flows, and the ageing of population are affecting the EU member states as well. These factors along with the signals about the blurring of sovereignty and national identity boost the growth in Euroscepticism as a trend in the modern European political process.

Euroscepticism is also present in new EU member states ten years after their accession, even though its motives differ from those of Euroscepticism in Western Europe. The initial enthusiasm for a new bright European future has faded and at present part of the population in these countries is gripped by scepticism and apathy. A proof of this is the fact that public opinion, including that of a part of the political elite of these former Soviet bloc countries, expresses dissatisfaction with the outcome of joining the European Union. Hopes that the accession to this organisation would quickly improve the living standards of the population and make these states equal in their relations with old EU members have been shattered. As a result, the rise in nationalist sentiment in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria is not surprising. The citizens of the new EU member states have soon realised that the EU is neither a panacea, nor a shield against the coming crises.

There is another factor that has cooled the relationship between the EU and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. Having broken free from communism CEE countries hope to return to Europe, the Western civilisation based on Christian values and culture. In fact, it turns out that the core values of the modern West are anti-traditional, non-Christian. The “New Europeans” refuse to accept the norms of tolerance towards same-sex marriage, abortion, etc. CEE countries considered joining the European Union as an opportunity to break with their socialist past and put an end to their status as peripheral states in European politics. This did not happen and these countries observe in the EU what they tried to escape from in the East. This fosters a truly deep Euroscepticism in these countries.

According to former Czech President Václav Klaus, amid the fading light of the nation state a new phenomenon has emerged that is dangerous to citizens but attractive for politicians – a vacuum of legitimacy<sup>3</sup>, which he calls the absence of democracy or post-democracy. If Europe wants to stand up, it must transform itself or it risks becoming a periphery for the surrounding dynamically developing world.

A solution can be found in returning to democracy in Europe where it is possible, namely at the state level. There can be no politics at a continental level. Politics and democracy need a people, and a European people does not and cannot exist. Mr. Klaus says that “although history has more than clearly proven that this is a dead end, we find ourselves walking the same path once again“. A striking example of Euroscepticism in CEE is the following excerpt from an interview given by Gábor Vona and Béla Kovács, chairmen of Hungary's second largest political party

Jobbik: “For us, the EU is not just a dead end. [...] The only country where unemployment is higher than Hungary is Greece. Soon it will be ten years since we joined the EU and we can boldly say that we have been deceived. We did not need to join the EU, the EU needed us to join. Our markets have been taken away. [...] Hungary had great opportunities in farming but is now eating Dutch cheese, Danish pork, Spanish fruit and German salami“. In Hungary, Eurosceptic sentiment has emerged in reality, as well. At the parliamentary elections in the spring of 2014, 133 MPs from Fidesz and 23 MPs from Jobbik received seats in Parliament (out of a total of 199 MPs). Viktor Orbán's ruling party uses a moderately Eurosceptic rhetoric and has not expressed any opinion in support of leaving the EU, but it often voices criticism against the EU's development and policy. The very fact that a Eurosceptic party is the sole ruling party should be a signal for Brussels.

### III. IS EUROSCPTICISM HOMOGENEOUS?

Euroscepticism, like every broad social trend, is not homogeneous in its nature. It may be classified into several groups based on various criteria. One of the explanations of the phenomenon is given by Riishj S, who describes it as a complex socio-political phenomenon. Central elements of Euroscepticism include the assumption of an EU break-up and the exit of member states from its structures, as well as criticism of the methods for the realisation of the EU integration process. According to Riishj S, there are three types of Eurosceptics.

The first group includes those who criticise European integration for nationalist and far-right or conservative reasons. They oppose the formation of a European super state, which would lead to the liquidation of the sovereignty of EU member states and their national identities in future.

Representatives of this movement are UKIP in the UK,

Law and Justice party in Poland, Jobbik in Hungary, Ján Slota's Slovak National Party, the National Front in France, Lega Nord in Italy, the Vlaams Blok in Belgium, etc.

The second group includes Eurosceptics who call for fighting corruption and the cumbersome and inefficient bureaucratic system of the European Union. Movements demanding reforms in the EU aimed at true people's rule and change in the institutional architecture of the bloc fall in this category. Usually, some of these parties are centrist.

The representatives of the third group criticise the nature of EU integration which is hostile to the public interest and fight for genuine equality between citizens. In short, these are the left-wing critics of the EU. They include parties such as the Greek KKE and SYRIZA, the Czech, French, Spanish and Portuguese Communists, the Swedish and Finnish Greens.

According to other authors, Eurosceptics can be divided into two groups based on whether they are against integration and in favour of the dissolution of the Union or

support reforms in the EU without leaving it. There are two types of Euroscepticism: hard, withdrawalist – disagreement with the very existence of the European Union or EU membership. The second type is soft, reformist – agreement with the existence of the EU or EU membership, combined with a critical attitude towards some of the rules and principles of the EU and its becoming a de facto federal state.

The different political ideologies attribute a different meaning to the concept of “Euroscepticism” and are often ideological opponents of each other. However, it may be argued that Euroscepticism finds the strongest support among the conservative and far-right parties. Euroscepticism is ideologically the basis for cooperation between a number of right-wing parties within the EU.

The most proper way to classify Euroscepticism may be to combine the above-mentioned two types of differentiation (left-centre-right and soft-hard. See the table below). A few conclusions can be drawn from the data presented. Euroscepticism accounts for a significant part of the political forces in Europe and it would be a mistake to underestimate it. It is also more typical of parties in the right-wing political spectrum and nationalist parties (106 out of 222 MEPs), although there is also a large number of Eurosceptic MEPs among the centrist parties that have entered the European Parliament in Brussels.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that the influence of hard Eurosceptics is not so pronounced – 97 MEPs, most of whom came from three specific parties (Italy's Five Star Movement, France's National Front, and the UK's UKIP). Over half of the Eurosceptics are “soft” (125 Eurosceptics out of 222 in parliament). Even parties such as Hungary's Fidesz and France's National Front can hardly be classified as “hard” or “soft” – they, especially the latter, often talk about the potential exit from the EU but at the same time they even more often call for staying within its borders and taking part in its reformation.

The left-wing Syriza, despite its radical political promises during the European Parliament elections in 2014 and the parliamentary elections in Greece in 2015, adopted a softer and more flexible stance after it came to power. A conclusion can be drawn that Euroscepticism as a whole is not directly aimed at breaking up the bloc but rather at reforming it. It would be wise to consider Euroscepticism as an alarm or even as constructive criticism against the problems of the EU and an indicator for the need for certain reforms.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The influence of Euroscepticism is growing in EU member states as a result of the crisis which is visible in social polls and election results at different levels. However, the soft version of the trend is predominant among the European electorate and this indicates mainly dissatisfaction with the Brussels bureaucracy and the need for reforms in the European Union rather than destruction

of the integration project. The tendency for parties to use firm Eurosceptic slogans during their election campaigns and then “soften” their implementation once the parties come to power in their countries should be mentioned, too.

In times of a crisis a new division along the Euroscepticism-Eurooptimism line can be noticed in the EU and this division may turn into a dominant axis of political division on the old continent. The general radicalisation of the political powers on the European political stage will increase the confrontational nature of the political process and may lead to potential structural breakdowns within the EU. The European Union can survive as an institution only if it gives up on the artificial unification of the continent and returns to the initial concept of cooperation between sovereign member states, which should turn into a cornerstone of integration rather than into its victims.

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TABLE 1

Political spectrum	Left-wing / far-left parties	Centre-left / Centrist/ Centre-right parties	Right-wing/ Far-right parties
Soft Euroscepticism	<p>Left Front (France – 4)            United Left (Spain – 4)            Socialist Party (the Netherlands) (2)            Syriza (Greece – 6)            Left Bloc (Portugal – 1)            Portuguese Communist Party (3)            Left Party (Sweden – 1)            Progressive Party of Working People (Cyprus – 2)            TOTAL – 23</p>	<p>Alternative for Germany (7)            Conservative Party (UK – 20)            Ulster Unionist Party (UK – 1)            Forza Italia (13)            Christian Union (the Netherlands – 1)            Reformed Political Party (the Netherlands – 1)            Party for the Animals (the Netherlands – 1)            Civic Democratic Party (Czech Republic – 2)            People's Party (Portugal – 1)            Swedish Green Party (4)            Centre Party (Sweden) (1)            Danish People's Party (4)            Freedom and Solidarity (Slovakia – 1)            Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (1)            Party Order and Justice (Lithuania – 2)            National Alliance (Latvia – 1)            Union of Greens and Farmers (Latvia – 1)            Croatian Party of Rights (1)            TOTAL – 63</p>	<p>Democratic Unionist Party (Northern Ireland – 1)            Lega Nord (Italy – 5)            Law and Justice (Poland – 17)            Fidesz (Hungary – 11)            Sweden Democrats (4)            IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement (Bulgaria – 1)            TOTAL – 39</p>
Hard Euroscepticism	<p>Sinn Féin (UK – 1)            Sinn Féin (Ireland – 3)            Podemos (Spain – 5)            Communist Party of Greece (KKE) (Greece – 2)            TOTAL – 11</p>	<p>Five Star Movement (Italy – 17)            Party of Free Citizens (Czech Republic – 1)            People's Movement against the EU (Denmark – 1)            TOTAL – 19</p>	<p>National Democratic Party of Germany (Greece – 1)            National Front (France – 23)            UKIP (UK – 22)            Galician Nationalist Bloc (Spain – 1)            Right Wing of the Republic (Poland – 1)            New Democracy Party (Portugal – 2)            Party for Freedom (the Netherlands – 4)            Vlaams Belang (Belgium – 1)            Golden Dawn (Greece – 3)            Jobbik (Hungary – 3)            Freedom Party of Austria (Austria – 4)            Finns Party (2)            TOTAL – 67</p>