

# Euroscepticism, Europhobia and Eurocriticism

The Radical Parties of the Right and Left  
*vis-à-vis* the European Union

Cesáreo Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat



P.I.E. Peter Lang



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Euroscepticism has become a generic catch-all term that is not always useful in capturing the nuances of the different types of political opposition to the current process of European integration. This book analyses in detail the electoral manifestos and programmes presented by twenty-two parties during the European Parliamentary elections in 2009. The research indicates that radical right-wing parties usually have Europhobic impulses – their rejection being not only of methods, but also of principles. In contrast, radical left-wing parties are, in theory, favourable to European integration, but dispute the direction currently imposed by the EU authorities.

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Bruxelles · Bern · Berlin · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Oxford · Wien

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This book was originally published in Spanish by Huygens Editorial, Barcelona, 2012.

Translated to English by John Marten Barnard.

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© P.I.E. PETER LANG S.A.  
Éditions scientifiques internationales  
Brussels, 2013  
1 avenue Maurice, B-1050 Brussels, Belgium  
pie@peterlang.com; www.peterlang.com

ISSN 0944-2294  
ISBN 978-2-87574-041-0 (paperback)  
ISBN 978-3-0352-6347-3 (eBook)  
D/2013/5678/22

Printed in Germany

*CIP available from the British Library, UK and from the Library of Congress, USA.*

“Die Deutsche National Bibliothek” lists this publication in the “Deutsche Nationalbibliografie”; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at <<http://dnb.de>>.



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## Prologue

It is a pleasure and honour to preface this book by Cesareo Rodríguez-Aguilera which you are now reading. Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera, Professor of Political Science at Barcelona University, is a first class reference in the study of comparative politics in our country and this book does nothing but confirm this. This work makes an extremely significant contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon called “Euro-scepticism” for at least three important reasons.

It does this, firstly, at a critical time for European integration, when the process of integration is going through one of its deepest crises, a crisis, no doubt, with such existential overtones that its survival is in question. It is well known, what was at first was a peripheral shadow in the system, British euro-scepticism in the early 1990s, introduced and encouraged by Margaret Thatcher in the UK, ended up spreading to continental Europe. The Maastricht Treaty, with the victory of “no” in Denmark and the narrow victory of the “yes” in France marked a turning point in European integration. Although the EU believed in extricating itself from that first encounter between elites and electorates, the failed referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005 not only threw the draft European Constitution overboard but, as noted by Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera, European integration suffered a fracture (a cleavage) that since then has run transversely across European policy. The so-called “permissive consensus” by which the construction of Europe was governed during its first fifty years of history was swept from the stage, leaving the European Union to face a very dangerous spiral. It is increasingly difficult for the EU to legitimise itself through effectiveness, as “losers” or “victims” have appeared that call into question the official narrative presented by the EU as a process where everyone always wins. Nor can it completely legitimise itself with its procedures because ultimately, democracy continues to reside at the national level and neither the public nor the politicians have wanted or have known how to democratise the EU (hence the poor results of the elections to the European Parliament and the paradoxical emergence of euro-sceptical parties within the European Parliament itself). Nor, in the final instance, can it legitimise itself through identity, because precisely European integration has not only failed to create the support for identity it needs to survive, but, as this book shows, is perceived by some as a threat, not as a guarantee of these identities. So, Euro-scepticism is here to stay – we

must live with it, it becomes essential to understand it better, it is what this book shows us and which, at the same time, constitutes its second substantial contribution.

This second contribution comes from the fact that both the term and the phenomenon of Eurocepticism are, despite their validity and current visibility, complex realities, hard to handle, difficult to capture and explain. What better claim for the task of social scientist and the utility of political science than the commitment Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera offers us here in observing reality, stopping the clock, reviewing, analysing problems, breaking down complexity, understanding the relevant variables that explain a problem, developing concepts that account for the observed and building explanations that account for that reality. This is a rigorous, well structured, intensive yet extensive piece of work, whose ambition is to cover the entire scope of Eurocepticism, from right to left, in all its rich and varied hues. Eurocepticism is a polysemous term, almost a cliché or catch-all concept under which are grouped, without much rhyme or rigour, in a superficial analysis phenomena that seem alike, but which reveal themselves to be different when examined in more depth. Here the work of Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera seems like that of an entomologist, who patiently dissects the 22 objects of study (in this case, eurosceptical parties) to offer a taxonomy that allows us to understand what we mean when we speak about Eurocepticism. It does this, moreover, despite the difficulty of obtaining the data underpinning his study because, as he surprisedly points out, parties pay so little attention to their manifestos, that are supposedly their contract with voters; that they do not even bother to save them, send them to the citizens who request them or deposit them in the library of the European Parliament.

The third reason why the contribution of this book strikes me as very relevant relates to the specifically Spanish context in which it is published. Spain is a country with a long tradition of European thought. For historical reasons that are well known to readers (Francoism and the transition to democracy), national and European interests have merged in such a way that it has generally been impossible to separate and distinguish between them. From Spain, the criticism of the alleged “democratic deficit” of the EU has always been misunderstood and mismatched, partly with good reason, because certainly our country was almost certainly more democratic, in some ways less democratic, merely because of being a member of the EU. This structural inability to understand the EU as a threat to identity, prosperity and democracy is what led to Spain, of all the countries of southern Europe, being the only one where the consensus on accession was total. While in Portugal or Greece communist parties were always critical of European integration,

which for them already felt like a product of commercial and financial capitalism, that is, an advance of what later would be called “globalisation”, in Spain there was not only unanimity, but unanimism, i.e. assent to Europe became the unquestioned ideology. Not surprisingly, and as proof, the Spanish United Left party (Izquierda Unida) broke apart in 1991-1992 over the decision on whether to vote in favour or abstain in the parliamentary vote on the Maastricht Treaty, leaving a leading group of leaders, the PCE and the coalition at that time, standing alone. From the sidelines, it was not without its logic that a Communist Party would vote against a monetary union such as that established in Maastricht – it would also happen with regard to the European Constitution, where again the radical Spanish left would take a critical stance, Spanish Eurosceptics never took such a position. As Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera rightly asserts, these facts fully justify the need to design categories that help us understand not only the phenomenon of Euroscepticism but its nuances and in many cases, the enormous differences between parties and attitudes that, out of laziness or a need for simplification, are usually grouped under the same conceptual umbrella.

Therein lies ultimately the last and most significant merit of this book. To the timely, analytical and contextual relevance of his research, the relevance of his results must be added. The exhaustive review of the existing literature that Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera carries out is helpful, though also extremely demoralising at first sight. Eurocritics, Europhobes, Eurorealists, Europragmatics, gradualists, rejectors, revisionists, minimalists, reformers, maximalist Euroenthusiasts, Eurooptimists, Euro pessimists, “hard stance”, “soft stance”. Having overcome the initial instinct to throw in the towel, Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera gets down to work and using the scalpel of the political scientist, gives us the keys to reconstruct and understand the material. For this he analyses the different dimensions and demands on which these parties pronounce their Euroscepticism: left-right, more or less integration, sovereignty, identity, immigration, globalisation.

His conclusions are clear and far reaching. Firstly in taxonomic terms, his findings are robust while elegant and leave us with a much more accurate route map than we had when we started reading. As he indicates, we can even see the horizon, at least in analytic or academic terms, where we could dispense with the term “Eurosceptic” having then found substantially higher analytical alternatives.

Second, in substantive terms or content, his conclusions allow us to separate right-wing Euroscepticism very precisely, clearly more directly anti-European and focused predominantly on immigration (i.e.,

identity), from that of the left, which maintains an integrative predisposition, but is openly critical of the economic design and orientation (of neoliberal persuasion) of the European project. They clearly share, with different nuances, democratic and sovereigntist concerns, but by finalising substantially different understandings of the meaning and purpose both of sovereignty and democracy, this rhetorical mechanism structured around the concepts of sovereignty and democratic deficit is not solid enough to force a common stance.

Beyond the differences and similarities between them, this distinction between “Europhobes” on the radical right and “positive Eurosceptics” on the radical left is very useful not only in itself but because it allows us to understand how this fracture is configured in Europe when we add the two remaining categories: on the one hand, the “Europhiles” parties represented by the parties of center-right and center-left, supporting European integration today which are generally in line with both the concept of integration and its main results and secondly, the “negative Eurosceptics” or conservative and agrarian parties, that reject the principle of integration but live with its results in a pragmatic way. So, with the author as a guide and with rigour and elegance, readers can immerse themselves in the forest of complexity that the phenomenon of Euroscepticism represents, coming out the other side with a much clearer picture than at the outset. It is for this reason, returning to the beginning of this prologue, that we must thank Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera and congratulate his work in giving us a much needed contribution to the study of Euroscepticism.

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## Introduction

The initial idea for this book came about due to a certain personal dissatisfaction that made me see a systematic categorisation of all the parties that criticise the current EU as “Eurosceptic”, with no differences and no regard to their ideology. The term is often used as a catch-all concept not only in the media, but also in academic forums (in this case, with nuances) and this led me to investigate the issue in depth, especially bearing in mind that my main object of scientific interest is precisely political parties in their European projection. In analysing the types of criticism of the radical right and left in the EU today, apart from some objective coincidences, I quickly discovered the different proposals of each group (to reject further integration in the first case and advocate another type of integration in the second, always with some exceptions) and that is what prompted me to start this research three years ago, now presented here in completed form.

The first chapter is not intended to provide new types or unpublished empirical contributions, but to review and organise the vast material available today with regard to the issue. The objective is to provide the main descriptive and analytical elements of the eurosceptical phenomenon in its various dimensions in a systematic way, both conceptual and empirical. In this sense, this *overview* addresses the problems of a multi-purpose term that semantically includes two possible dissimilar attitudes: complete rejection or specific reservation.

This book analyses the more significant theoretical and empirical contributions made by qualified specialists in the study of Euroscepticism. The following outlines the root causes of the same, both in its social and partisan dimension: more specifically it looks at the main instrumental socio-economic theories, the focus on political legitimacy and linkage to national identity. Since this research focuses on parties, we especially look in depth at this area with regard to the appraisals and attitudes the groups of left and right have had.

At the outset of the second chapter, we analyse the recent historical background of the parties under research to highlight the main *items* of criticism of the EU, both deducible from their programme documents and their political action. It reviews the main arguments of both ideological groups of parties and their internal variations in the three principal selected critical dimensions: national sovereignty / democracy

deficit / neoliberalism (higher to lower in the case of the radical right and reverse for that of the radical left). Following on from this, there is a specific presentation of the criticisms these parties make in these areas, with occasional collateral reference to other similar formations not included in this research. I should point out that, in this section of the second chapter, the parties are usually grouped by some kind of affinity (on the radical right: classic *extreme*/postmodern populist; on the radical left: orthodox communist/postcommunist). The characteristics of the EP elections of 2009 are then set out, given that the election manifestos analysed correspond exclusively to this election and a cursory study of the national context of the campaign and the results of this type of party in the countries selected. In this case, the analysis of election results is done according to the alphabetical order of each country.

The third and final chapter deals with the comparative and transversal analysis of the election manifestos of political parties selected – which are the most representative of both ideological groups – in the three important dimensions indicated and the exposition of the different ways for right and left, given the different intensity that they both attribute to the above factors, have been organised. Therefore the ideological and programmatic centrality of the doctrine of national sovereignty in every one of the radical right parties selected is brought into focus. In this sense, it highlights the clear rejection of the possible federalisation of EU policy, and denial in assuming a multicultural society, hence the xenophobia against non-EU immigration or exclusion of Turkey as a possible member of the collective. On the other hand, the main factor of EU criticism for the radical left focuses on the objection to its neoliberal socioeconomic policies exclusively favouring big business and detrimental to workers and people in general. The last dimension considered is the EU's “democratic deficit” where the objective coincidence of criticism of both ideological groups of parties is high. This chapter does not follow the alphabetical order of countries or parties for the exposition of these parts (political/economic/cultural) of their respective manifestos, but of the electoral and parliamentary strength of each party in their respective state or territory (in the case of subnational parties), from highest to lowest. For operational reasons only the parties EFD and GUE/NGL integrated into EP eurogroups have been considered, together with some outstanding members of the radical right who are in the EP as “unregistered” entities. So well known eurosceptical parties of the conservative right (ERC) or a few of the green left (present in the EFA) are not included in this research.

Of the 27 current EU states, I have selected 17 of the 22 theoretically possible for study (in the remaining five, radical parties of the right or left of the two researched eurogroups did not achieve representation). I