



HAL
open science

Is Populism a Side-Effect of European Integration? Radical Parties and the Europeanization of Political Competition: Introduction

Stéphanie Dechezelles, Laure Neumayer

► **To cite this version:**

Stéphanie Dechezelles, Laure Neumayer. Is Populism a Side-Effect of European Integration? Radical Parties and the Europeanization of Political Competition: Introduction. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 2010, 11 (3), pp.229-236. 10.1080/15705854.2010.503030 . hal-03160234

HAL Id: hal-03160234

<https://hal.science/hal-03160234>

Submitted on 5 Mar 2021

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Stéphanie DECHEZELLES
Laure NEUMAYER

Is Populism a Side-Effect of European Integration? **Introduction**

Political radicalism has generated a large scholarly interest in recent years, both in Western and in Central Europe. Two series of explanations have been used to account for the success of radical parties in the scientific literature. The first one analyzes the rise of far right political actors in a context of decline of traditional political affiliations (i.e. Communist, Social-Democratic and Christian-Democratic parties), of transformation of the welfare state and of opening of national political fields to single-issue parties denouncing what their leaders call “the immigration threat” (Ignazi 2006; Merkl and Weinberg 2003). The phenomenon is labelled *populism* or *radical politics* and studied through an analysis of electoral behaviour and/or radical groups’ strategies at the national level of government. The second perspective, focusing on the European dimension of radical politics, links the rise of extremist parties to a broader reflexion on the constitution of a multi-level European polity composed of subnational, national and supranational arenas of political representation. Under the generic term *Euroscepticism*¹, it focuses on critical attitudes regarding European integration expressed by politicians that either oppose the Europeanization of national policies (Taggart 1998) or reject acceding to the EU in candidate countries (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2005).

These two approaches to political radicalism have developed simultaneously but in an isolated way from each one other. Yet regardless of their different terminologies, they both rely on the implicit or explicit assumption that political games have become influenced by European dynamics since the 1980s. Research on populism underlines the European dimension, in the geographical sense, of the populist phenomenon which spread over the continent since the late 1980s, while the Euroscepticism perspective analyses the creation of arenas of political competition that are more and more distinct from national political games. The EU is portrayed as an autonomous and differentiated political field, where actors are involved in specific activities. This field of research sheds light on the process of *Europeanization*, i.e. the inclusion of European issues into domestic politics which blurs the distinction between national and European political competitions and provides political actors with new constraints and new opportunities (Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Goetz 2000).

This volume aims at bridging the gap between these two fields of research in order to analyse the potential links between the Europeanization of political competition on the one hand, and the rise of radical parties on the other hand. It takes into consideration Western but also Central Europe, where comparable processes have taken place between the fall of communism in 1989 and the accession to the European Union in 2004. To what extent are positions on European integration the basis for the classification of political organisations as

¹ The first public use of this term dates back to an article published by the *Times* on June 30th, 1986 on the position of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher regarding the development of the European Community (Harmsen and Spiering 2004). Hooghe and Marks (2007) also note that the word ‘Eurosceptic’ became more commonly used after 1992, first to describe the negative reactions of the German people after the EU asked Germany to revise its ‘purity rules on beer’, and more generally to underline the changes in public opinion on European integration after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty.

either ‘government’, ‘democratic’, ‘mainstream’ parties, or ‘protest’, ‘radical’, ‘populist’ parties? Do European issues restructure political games and deeply impact domestic political cleavages? Is the distinction between populist and non-populist parties the result of the emerging European political field, at a moment in time (the late 1980s) when the Western populist parties got their first electoral successes in national and European elections?

The various papers offer a qualified answer to these questions: although radical parties use European issues in political competition to a greater extent than mainstream parties, the rise of populism is not always linked to European integration. In addition, the cleavage between ‘populist’, ‘Eurosceptic’ parties on the one hand and ‘mainstream’, ‘pro-European parties’ on the other hand is constantly being shaped and reshaped by political actors². Uses of ‘Europe’ in political competition vary in space and in time. This volume contributes to the debate about the impact of European integration on national party systems by giving credit to the thesis of ‘absorption’ of European issues into national political cleavages. Indeed, no specific cleavage on Europe has emerged and changed the terms of national competition because political actors address European issues within domestic political structures, symbols and divisions (Hix, 1999; Mair 2000; Bartolini, 2001; Harmsen, 2005; Neumayer, 2006). However, because European integration transcends the distinction between national and transnational political fields, domestic politics is not completely immune from the influence of European dynamics.

Taking issue with the populist and the Eurosceptic hypotheses

According to the populist hypothesis, the Europeanization of radicalism is the result of social or political processes which are specific to each country (Kitschelt 1995; Mudde 1999; Taggart 2000; Mudde 2007). European integration is only a secondary factor in this development.

Most of this research takes into account the various social changes that recently occurred in European societies: the cultural liberalisation brought by post-materialist struggles in the 1960s and 1970s (Ignazi, 2006), the opening of the economies through globalisation, migration pressures from Southern countries, difficulties of financing welfare systems, the fall of communism and, lastly, supranational integration in the European Union. These social transformations are seen as weakening post-war parties' because they are less and less able to provide goods such as jobs, healthcare or education (Katz & Mair, 1995). This undermines the stability of national political systems, leading to the crisis of consociative systems (in Belgium and the Netherlands) or to deep institutional problems (several ‘cohabitations’ in France since the mid-1980s and profound changes in the Italian party system in the 1990s). Extremist parties benefit from this deteriorating social context: criticizing the ‘elites’ and advocating ‘the revitalisation of politics through the people’ is an easy way to electoral success (Canovan 1981; Mény and Surel 2002).

In this perspective, Europeanization is nothing but the result of the accumulation of national political situations which have enough in common to allow for generalisations. Although this literature offers thorough analyses of specific national cases, ‘Europe’ is not considered as an explanatory variable for the rise of populist parties because domestic political fields remain the main level of analysis. The Europeanization of this type of political mobilisation is implicitly considered as a consequence of nationally-driven phenomena, according to a mere cumulative logic (Ivaldi 2004). The construction of a political space structured by specifically European issues is neglected; so is the impact of this new European level of

² The expression ‘pro-European parties’ should of course be specified in order to distinguish between party leaders, party supporters, party voters and party programs.

representation on national politics. However, showing concretely how EU institutions are used by populist politicians to illustrate the opposition between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ allows for a better operationalization of the ‘European factor’ in the rise of various forms of political populism.

The study of Euroscepticism, on the other hand, is one of the main bodies of a growing literature on parties’ attitudes towards European integration in old and new EU member states (Taggart 1998; Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Harmsen and Spiering 2004; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2005; Neumayer 2006; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008; Neumayer, Roger and Zalewski 2008; Fuchs *et al* 2010). This rapidly growing literature has given a rich empirical account of the diversity of critical discourses on European integration and shown that each national political system has incorporated European issues in a specific way.

Academic work has long centred around a ideology-versus-strategy dichotomy to explain Eurosceptic party positions: some authors consider that critical approaches to European integration mainly derive from the parties’ origins, ideologies and identities (Kopecký and Mudde 2002), while others stress positions in the party system, electoral strategies and coalition tactics (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2005; Sitter 2001). Although scholars on both sides of the argument accept that both set of factors interact in reality (Batory 2002; Batory and Sitter 2004), they often fail to grasp the relationship between the ideological and the strategic variables in Euroscepticism. This ‘blind spot’ can be filled by adopting a research design that focuses on the usages of European issues in political competitions. In an interactive conception of politics, party positions on European integration are explained through their relational dimension. Ideology is created through inter- and intra-party competitions, by political actors seeking to differentiate themselves from their rivals in order to gain political capital, i.e. legitimacy and voters’ support (Bourdieu 1981).

This is the reason why linking Euroscepticism and populism helps understand political extremism. Be they positive, negative or neutral, views on the EU are crucial in defining a party’s position in the domestic political field. Thanks to its normative dimension as a symbol of democratic and liberal values, European integration is used by politicians to establish themselves as ‘legitimate’, ‘mainstream’, ‘democratic’ political actors, as opposed to their ‘illegitimate’, ‘protest’, ‘populist’ competitors (Neumayer 2008). Parties with governmental ambitions are expected to tone down their criticisms of the EU and Eurosceptic political organisations are stigmatised as ‘populist’. Therefore, positions on European issues are one of the tools allowing political actors to classify, to exclude or to disqualify opponents. The complexity of these uses of European issues calls for in-depth case studies, in order to show under which conditions European integration can provide politicians with these new resources for competition.

However, most studies on Eurosceptic parties or movements incorporate any form of resistance to Europeanization in general taxonomies that are often based on the variable intensity of opposition to the European project, to the EU institutions or to its policies (Taggart 1998; Sitter 2002). Although these taxonomies have become more sophisticated, their ideal-types remain quite similar (Conti and Verzichelli 2002; Mudde and Kopecký 2002): they often underestimate the flexibility of positions towards Europeanization and overlook the fact that party positions as well as coalition strategies change over time (Flood 2002). In contrast, the papers in this volume try to explore these changing Eurosceptic positions by taking into account party lines not only in the short term, but also in the medium term in order to understand the reasons for these changes. In other words, it is useful to consider and to compare party trajectories in a diachronic perspective.

Moreover, many studies focus exclusively on the positions of party elites through an analysis of electoral programs or speeches that are made by and for national leaders. The example of

the French Socialist Party, which officially supported the EU's Constitutional Treaty in 2005 although some party leaders as well as the majority of its voters rejected it, shows that it is necessary to distinguish the national leaders' attitudes towards Europeanization from those of second-tier officials or mere party supporters (Gaffney, 1996). In addition, parties are never homogeneous: they are made of conflicts, dissidences and defections at the local, the national as well as the European level. Their voters or militants can hold very different positions from the line expressed by the party's headquarters (Dechezelles, 2007; Dechezelles, 2010). Unfortunately some studies do not open the 'black box' of political parties and neglect internal oppositions about Europeanization. To reach a better understanding of this phenomenon, scholars of Euroscepticism should articulate different levels of observation, going from local politics to central party circles. Such a study of 'Euroscepticism from below', that combines qualitative research with quantitative methods (Abelès 1997; Johansson and Raunio 2001) helps link together the various levels of resistance to Europeanization.

Radicalism in the emerging European political space

Using various sociological approaches and empirical data, the papers presented in this volume aim at shedding new light on Euroscepticism and populism in Europe. We argue that in order to understand the causal relations between the rise of populism and European integration, it is necessary to single out the European factor and analyse the political resources created by the Europeanization of political competition - since the late 1980s in the Western, and since 1989 in the Central parts of the continent. This investigation of the articulation between the European political space and national political fields focuses on radical political organizations along two main lines of thought: the uses of European resources by radical parties acting at the European or the national level; the structuring of European political competitions around a 'populist-Eurosceptic' vs. a 'non populist-pro-European' cleavage.

The first two papers focus on radical parties' attempts to benefit from European integration at the European and/or at the national level. Dimitri Almeida analyses the impact of European integration on radical right parties represented in the European Parliament (EP) by examining the adaptive strategies that they deployed in order to operate within a multilevel polity. The study builds on a qualitative analysis of radical right's ideological responses to the European Union and on quantitative data on the parliamentary activity of radical right MEPs during the EP's sixth legislature. It explains their unsuccessful attempt to influence parliamentary activity at the European level by divergent domestic party strategies that made it impossible to create stable political groups in the EP. Dorota Dakowska shows to what extent references to European integration have enabled radical Polish political parties also situated on the right of the political field – the Law and Justice (PiS) and the League of Polish Families (LPR) – to modulate their position in relationship with other parties, both in the transnational and the domestic political field. In line with Almeida, Dakowska demonstrates the prevailing influence of the domestic context on the definition of party positions on Europe: the probability to enter into government coalitions is the main factor behind the changes in official party lines, despite transnational affiliations in the EP. Both papers suggest that although European resources can be successfully used at the national level of government, the multiplicity of domestic political arenas makes a coordination of radical politics at the European level extremely unlikely.

The last three articles question the structuring of domestic political competition around a cleavage opposing 'pro-European mainstream parties' to 'anti-European populist parties'.

These empirically grounded case studies help understand under what circumstances politicians will make this distinction or will on the contrary tone it down and allow mainstream parties to criticise European integration. Contrary to most studies of Euroscepticism that focus exclusively on right and far right movements, these papers also take into account left-wing organisations in different national contexts.

John FitzGibbon and Simona Guerra use a most different system of case study analysis on Ireland and Poland in order to show that the Europeanisation of party competition is just part of the explanation for the emergence of populism for parties such as Self-Defense in the Polish case and Sinn Fein in the Irish case. Their analysis suggests that political culture and the perception of a crisis represent stronger factors, although both studies indicate that an increasing salience of European issues before EU accession or before a Treaty referendum can lead to populist actors using Euroscepticism. Emmanuelle Reungoat provides a quantitative study of populist appeals in pro- and anti-EU parties' Euromanifestos in the 1999 and 2004 European elections across the entire French political field. Her study shows that there is no systematic link between a party's position towards the EU and its use of populist argumentation but a variety of relations, linked to the party's position in the party system as well as to the right/left cleavage. European issues are integrated in parties' ideologies and identities and produce only moderate effects on populist discourse, even in the case of the far right National Front party. Lastly, Sophie Heine analyses the radical left's 'resistances' to the European Union in France and Germany through a qualitative analysis of the ideologies of five political organisations and social movements (the French Communist Party, the Communist Revolutionary League and ATTAC-France in the French case and Die Linke and ATTACT-Deutschland in the German case). Heine argues that this left-wing Euroscepticism is partly Europeanized, since these organisations exhibit similar conceptions of European integration and see the process of opening up of borders as simultaneously the target and the causes of their protest. Their pro-European orientation illustrates that protest parties are not always Eurosceptic. Contrary to approaches which are exclusively focused on strategic factors, Heine underlines that ideology matters in the criticism of European integration: even if it the criticism of the EU is motivated by strategic elements, research still has to explain why politicians select some arguments for their criticism while disregarding others.

Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of this volume were presented at the Workshop 'Is Populism a Side-Effect of European Integration?' organized by Stéphanie Dechezelles and Michel Perottino at the ECPR Joint Sessions in Rennes in April 2008. We thank all the participants for their input and their willingness to engage in constructive discussions about their papers.

References

- Abelès, M. (1997) De l'Europe politique en particulier et de l'anthropologie en général, *Cultures et Conflits*, 28, pp.38-58
- Bartolini, S. (2001) La structure des clivages nationaux et la question de l'intégration dans l'UE, *Politique européenne*, 4, pp.15-45.
- Batory, A. (2002) Attitudes to Europe. Ideology, Strategy and the Issue of European Union Membership in Hungarian Party Politics, *Party Politics*, 8(5), pp. 525-539.
- Batory, A. & Sitter N. (2004) Cleavages, competition and coalition-building: Agrarian parties and the European question in Western and East Central Europe, *European Journal of Political Research*, 43, pp. 523-546.

- Bourdieu, P. (1981) La représentation politique. Eléments pour une théorie du champ politique, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 36-37, pp.3-24.
- Canovan, M. (1981) *Populism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).
- Conti, N. & Verzichelli, L. (2002) The European dimension of political discourse in Italy: a longitudinal analysis of party preferences, *Circap*, Siena, www.gips.unisi.it/circap/file_download/4.
- Dechezelles, S. (2007) Entre révolution et gestion. L'engagement des jeunes militant(e)s de la Ligue du Nord et d'Alliance Nationale face à l'expérience du pouvoir en Italie", in Delwit, P. & Poirier P. (eds.), *The Extreme Right Parties and Power in Europe* (Brussels, Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles), pp.225-246.
- Dechezelles, S. (2010) Renouncing Violence or Substituting for it? The Consequences of the Institutionalisation of *Alleanza Nazionale* on the Culture of Young Neofascist Activists in Italy, in Leaman, J. & Wörsching M. (eds.), *Youth in Contemporary Europe: Converging Cultures?* (London, Routledge), pp.268-281
- Eatwell, R. & Mudde, C. (Eds) (2003) *Western Democracies and the New 'Extreme Right' Challenge* (London: Routledge).
- Featherstone, K. & Radaelli, C. (Eds) (2003) *The Politics of Europeanization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Featherstone, K. & Radaelli, Claudio M. (2003) *The Politics of Europeanization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Flood, C. (2002) The Challenge of Euroscepticism, in Gower, J.(ed), *The European Union Handbook* (London: Fitzroy Dearbon Publishers), pp.73-84.
- Fuchs, D., Magni-Berton, R., & Roger A. (eds) (2009) *Euroscepticism. Images of Europe among mass publics and political elites* (Opladen & Farmington Hills, MI: Barbara Budrich Publishers).
- Gaffney, J. (ed) (1996) *Political Parties and the European Union* (London: Routledge).
- Goetz, K. H. & Hix, S. (2000) Introduction: European Integration and National Policy Systems, *West European Politics*, 23 (4), pp. 1-26.
- Harmsen, R. & Spiering, M. (Eds) (2004) *Euroscepticism: Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi).
- Harmsen, R. (2005) L'Europe et les partis politiques nationaux : les leçons d'un 'non-clivage', *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 12(1), pp. 79-94.
- Hix, S. (1999) Dimensions and Alignments in European Union Politics: Cognitive Constraints and Partisan Responses, *European Journal of Political Research*, 32 (2), p.69-106.
- Hooghe L. & Marks G. (2007), The Sources of Euroscepticism, *Acta Politica*, http://www.unc.edu/~hooghe/downloads/acta%20politica.2007_introduction.pdf
- Ignazi, P. (2006) The Silent Counter-Revolution. Hypotheses on the Emergence of Extreme Right-Wing Parties in Europe, *European Journal of Political Research*, 22 (1), pp.3-34
- Ignazi, P. (2006) *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Ivaldi, G. (2004) *Droites populistes et extrêmes en Europe occidentale* (Paris: Editions de la Documentation Française).
- Johansson, K. M. & Raunio T. (2001) Partisan responses to Europe: Comparing Finnish and Swedish political parties, *European Journal of Political Research*, 39, pp.225-249
- Katz, R. & Mair, P. (1995) Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy : the Emergence of the Cartel Party, *Party Politics*, 1(1), pp. 5-28.
- Kitschelt, H. (1995) *The Radical Right in Western Europe: a Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press).

- Kopecký, P. & Mudde, C. (2002) The Two Sides of Euroscepticism: Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe, *European Union Politics*, 3(3), pp. 297-326.
- Mair P. (2000) The Limited Impact of Europe on National Party Systems, *West European Politics*, 23 (4), pp. 27-51.
- Mény, Y. & Surel, Y. (Eds) (2002) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (London: Palgrave).
- Merkl, P. H. & Weinberg, L (eds) (2003) *Right-Wing Extremism in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge).
- Mudde, C. (1999) The Single-Issue Party Thesis: Extreme Right Parties and the Immigration Issue, *West European Politics*, 22(3), pp. 182-197.
- Mudde, C. (2001) In the name of peasantry, the proletariat, and the people: Populism in Eastern Europe, *East European Politics and Societies*, 15 (1), pp.33-53.
- Mudde, C. (2007), *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press).
- Neumayer, L. (2006) L'enjeu européen dans les compétitions partisanes en Europe centrale, *Revue française de science politique*, 56 (5), pp. 789-812.
- Neumayer, L. (2008) Euroscepticism as a Political Label: the Use of European Union Issues in Political Competitions in the New Member States, *European Journal of Political Research*, 47, pp. 135-160.
- Neumayer, L., Roger, A. & Zalewski, F. (Eds) (2008) *L'Europe contestée. Espaces et enjeux des positionnements contre l'intégration européenne* (Paris: Michel Houdiard Editeur).
- Szczerbiak, A. & Taggart, P. (2005) *Opposing Europe: the comparative party politics of Euroscepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, vol. 1).
- Szczerbiak, A. & Taggart, P. (2008) *Opposing Europe: the comparative party politics of Euroscepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, vol. 2).
- Sitter, N. (2001) The Politics of Opposition and European Integration in Scandinavia: Is Euro-Scepticism a Government–Opposition Dynamic?, *West European Politics*, 24(4), pp. 22-39.
- Taggart, P. (1998) A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems, *European Journal of Political Research*, 33(3), pp. 363-388.
- Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism* (Buckingham: Open University Press).
- Taggart, P. & Szczerbiak, A. (2001) Parties, Positions & Europe: Euroscepticism in the EU Candidate States of Central and Eastern Europe, Sussex European Institute, Working Paper No 46.