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Euro scepticism: Towards the Political
Reality**

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Abstract

More than two decades have passed since the publication of Taggart's landmark article on party Euroscepticism. The development of the EU has been rather fast since then: it has almost doubled in size, experienced several large-scale crises and several new institutions have been established. On the other hand, the development of theoretical concepts has lagged behind. This paper redefines the concept of party Euroscepticism so that the gap between the theory and actual political development narrows. We define party Euroscepticism as opposition to the status quo of the integration of the EU as a political system. This approach addresses several shortcomings of the current definitions, and thus increases the utility of the concept for both academic and broader public discourse.

Reconceptualisation of Party Euroscepticism: Towards the Political Reality

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Paul Taggart's seminal article (1998) providing an academic definition of Euroscepticism, which has served as the point of departure for studying party Euroscepticism ever since, has marked its 20th anniversary. Although this work referred only to the 15 states that were members of the EU in the late 1990s, subsequent work on party Euroscepticism by Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, which is still dominant in the way theorists approach the study of party Euroscepticism, also includes states that have joined more recently. However, after more than two decades, there is no consensus on a unified, clear definition, and, consequently, also no consensus on a typology of party Euroscepticism. The point holds true despite serious calls for "conceptual clarity...and a finer conceptual framework, which distinguishes between different types of opposition" (Mudde, 2012, p. 201). Looking at more recent works on party Euroscepticism (Bale, 2018; Pirro & Taggart, 2018; Vasilopoulou, 2018) there is actually strikingly little notion about redefining and reconceptualising Euroscepticism, even if Szczerbiak and Taggart (2017) themselves identify several gaps that need to be address.

Our essay presents an attempt to contribute to this debate by suggesting a new way of studying party Euroscepticism. Our aim is to provide a conceptualisation of party Euroscepticism that better fits the current state of the politicisation of the EU. In the 1980s the European Community was rarely the subject of political contention and debate within national party politics outside the UK. The transformation from economic communities (EC) to a political union (EU) only began with the Maastricht Treaty, where this exact term made its way into the Final Act, which envisaged "the achievement of political union"(Maastricht Treaty, 1992, p. 209). The most influential typologies reflect the interaction between the EU and member states in the first decade of the EU (Taggart, 1998; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2001; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002; Flood, 2002; Conti, 2003). Current academic studies that employ these typologies thus cannot capture the unprecedented politicization of the EU after the global financial crisis of 2008 and migration crisis of 2015 (Sericchio, Tsakatika & Quaglia, 2013; Verney, 2015; Pirro & Taggart, 2018).

The politicization of the EU is discernible by the presence of EU's decision making in virtually every policy area. This has consequences for both citizens' expectations of the Union, and also for the way political parties include EU issues in their daily agendas. We build on the assertion that European integration has been politicised by parties in the member states (Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2007; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Hoeglinger 2016). The fact that the EU became part of national politics in its member states has led to an increased need for voters to know the positions of political parties towards the EU, just as they know

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the positions of parties in regard to economic, social or environmental issues. In other words, political science needs to understand how heuristics related to EU issues can be used in the same way that political science studies heuristics for the socio-economic (left-right) or social (liberal-conservative) divide.

Politicisation of the EU thus caused mainstreaming, or embedment of Euroscepticism. Usherwood and Startin (2013) argued that Euroscepticism has become embedded in the political arenas of national member states. Brack and Startin (2015) also added that Euroscepticism has become “increasingly more legitimate” (2015, p. 240). Both Usherwood and Startin (2013) and Brack and Startin (2015) make a convincing point in that Euroscepticism seems to become a permanent feature of European integration, at least for the foreseeable future. We acknowledge that both articles, and the empirical studies in corresponding special issues of *Journal of Common Market Studies* (Vol. 51, no. 1) and *International Political Science Review* (Vol. 36, no. 3) are contributing to the understanding of the role Euroscepticism plays on national and European level. However, they do not elaborate definitions of Euroscepticism, and many times address phenomena without even explaining why certain parties or MEPs are included into Eurosceptic camp.

Based on Mudde’s (2012) distinction of two “schools” of Eurosceptic studies: North Carolina and Sussex, this article departs mainly from the Sussex school. Taking into consideration conceptual perspective, debates over the best definition of Euroscepticism are largely absent from the North Carolina School. Some authors refer to Taggart and Szczerbiak’s definition (e.g. Hooghe & Marks, 2007) while others leave the definition out completely (Ray, 1999; Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2007). On the other hand, the Sussex school authors devote most of their attention to conceptual issues and revisions of the typology of party Euroscepticism (e.g. Taggart, 1998; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2001; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002).

We will argue that the most commonly used typology of party Euroscepticism by Taggart and Szczerbiak’s cannot sufficiently serve the purpose because it does not help with measuring and classifying political parties. The most problematic issue with current typologies is that too broad a definition of Euroscepticism allows almost any party to be labelled as Eurosceptic. The reason is that the target of opposition has been defined too broadly both in scope (including institutions, competencies, policies or future integration trajectories) and time (including criticism of past, current or future integration steps). Recent acknowledgment of this problem can be found in Pirro and Taggart (2018), yet the authors continue using the conceptualization of Euroscepticism by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001; 2008).

Defining the target of opposition too broadly may lead to the overestimation of the phenomenon. In our view, European integration may be perceived as a process leading to political union, and thus it is helpful to define the target of opposition as the EU’s political system. Our approach is thus different in that it excludes criticism of public policies and future integration trajectories as the target of opposition. We develop our conceptualisation in detail in the main text.

The structure of the paper is as follows. We continue by introducing the debate on the conceptualisation of (party) Euroscepticism, with a particular focus on its problematic parts.

This is divided into two sections: issues with the scope and the time dimension. In the third section we introduce our conceptualisation of party Euroscepticism with the consequences it has on the classification of parties. Before concluding, we discuss the main advantages as well as limitations of the suggested approach.

Target of Criticism I: the Scope of Euroscepticism

The first conceptualization of party Euroscepticism defined it as “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition,” which may also incorporate “outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (Taggart, 1998, pp. 365–366). This was shortly afterwards refined in a series of papers in collaboration with Aleks Szczerbiak. The authors distinguished two types of Eurosceptic attitudes, hard and soft. “Hard Euroscepticism implies outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration and opposition to their country joining or remaining members of the EU” (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2001, p. 5). As the definition of soft Euroscepticism is crucial for understanding its shortcomings, we present it in a more lengthy form:

Soft Euroscepticism... involves contingent or qualified opposition to European integration and can, in turn be further sub-divided into 'policy' Euroscepticism and 'national-interest' Euroscepticism. Both types of soft Euroscepticism are contingent as they do not imply an opposition to integration on principled grounds (as in the case of hard Euroscepticism) but do imply that if there were alterations to either a policy area or a shift in national interest, European integration in its current form could be supported or even encouraged. (2001, p. 6).

The conceptualization of soft and hard Euroscepticism by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001) received a fair amount of criticism. The authors themselves point in particular to the objections raised by Kopecký and Mudde (2002) as the most elaborated and substantiated (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2008) and we agree with this assessment. Kopecký and Mudde’s (2002) criticism of the weaknesses of Taggart and Szczerbiak’s work can be summarized as follows. In Kopecký and Mudde’s view, soft Euroscepticism is “defined in such a broad manner that virtually every disagreement with any policy decision of the EU can be included.” (2002, p. 300). This strand of criticism was mainly based on the fact that any political party may voice criticism of a particular EU policy or misalignment between a policy and national interest. However, this does not mean the party would not otherwise support the European project. Kopecký and Mudde also criticized the line between hard and soft Euroscepticism as “unclear” (ibid), which potentially leads to various problems. The most important one is that opposition to EU membership should not be the key distinction between hard and soft Eurosceptics. Additionally, the authors claimed it was necessary to distinguish between European integration as an abstract form of integration of European countries that cede their competencies to a supranational body, and the EU as a specific and concrete form of such integration.

In attempt to address the identified shortcomings, Kopecký and Mudde offered their own typology based on a two-dimensional approach to integration. There are four categories of party attitudes towards European integration: Euroenthusiasts (supporting both European integration and the EU as a project), Europragmatists (rejecting European integration but willing to support the EU for pragmatic reasons), Eurorejects (rejecting European integration in principle as well as opposing the EU as the current embodiment thereof) and true Eurosceptics, who support integration in principle, but oppose its current form.

In relation to the academic debate between Taggart and Szczerbiak on the one hand, and Kopecký and Mudde on the other, we highlight two distinct aspects. On the conceptual level, Kopecký and Mudde (2002) made several valid points of criticism, which were well received by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2008), who accepted most of it, although, as well as refining own typology, the authors also provided critique of Kopecký and Mudde's work. We will discuss this later.

One of the major contributions by Kopecký and Mudde (2002) is that they distinguished between ideological and strategic drivers behind the opposition to European integration or the EU respectively. However, when it comes to the empirical classification of political parties, their categories overlap with those of soft/hard Euroscepticism. This argument was made by Henderson (2008), who pointed out that Kopecký and Mudde's Euroenthusiasts are in effect pro-European parties that Taggart and Szczerbiak did not classify (or even study). As for the negative attitudes, Henderson writes that "Kopecký and Mudde's Eurosceptics are, broadly speaking, Szczerbiak and Taggart's Soft Eurosceptics, and the 'Eurorejects' are Hard Eurosceptics." (2008, p. 119). The only category that is left are Europragmatists, who reject the idea of European integration, but for pragmatic reasons voice support for EU membership.

Szczerbiak and Taggart (2008) objected to the Europragmatist category. Their argument is rather conceptual, assuming that if the EU is one of the possible forms of European integration in general, than it presents a subset thereof. Consequently, opposing a larger set of ideas (European integration in general) that presents a superset to a narrower one (EU as the current form of integration) must logically exclude support for the subset. Szczerbiak and Taggart write that 'the fact that there will be certain parties that are difficult to fit neatly into any typology is something that we simply have to accept rather than inventing separate and illogical categories for them.' (2008, p. 244)

Henderson (2008) agrees with Szczerbiak and Taggart, although making an empirical rather than conceptual argument. She states that the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia led by Vladimír Mečiar is the only relevant party in the (Kopecký & Mudde) Europragmatist category, and a single party should not be enough to justify a separate category. Henderson suggests that it should be seen rather as "transitory phenomenon linked to the specific temporary conditions existing during the exit from communism and transition to EU membership." (2008, p. 119)

There is another theoretical issue with empirical consequences when defining the target of Euroscepticism as European integration. The term integration is too broad and thus allows

researchers to include a very wide variety of attitudes under the Eurosceptic umbrella (the deepening of integration, the institutional set-up, EU enlargement – or generally questions of membership, the introduction of new public policies, etc.). Consequently, there are two major empirical problems. First, any opposition to any particular element of integration may lead researchers to classify a political party as Eurosceptic (see also Mudde, 2012). In practical terms this creates a typology that is neither helpful nor informative. Second, it may lead to misleading and/or overlapping classification in cases where a political party advocates further integration in some areas but opposes it in others. Thus, the party could be labelled pro-integrationist or Eurosceptic, depending on whether researchers take the former or latter approach to what integration means. For example, the Christian Democratic Union, the party of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, is generally in favour of deepening EU integration, but it opposes the idea of a finance and economics minister for the EU. So the question whether or not such a party is Eurosceptic remains.

Flood (2002) has also criticized the original soft/hard conceptualization of Taggart and Szczerbiak, but on rather different grounds. In his view, the soft/hard distinction is “workable,” but “loose” (2002, p. 4). Flood highlights that “the hard category blurs the important distinction between groups which argue that their country should be (more or less) outside the EU and those which argue for a return to the status quo ante of treaty provisions which pertained prior to some modification which the groups find unacceptable” (ibid.). Flood also criticizes Kopecký and Mudde (2002) for the “reductive way” in which they use ideology, strictly limited to either opposition to, or support for, European integration. Flood offers six categories of party positions towards the EU, which are ordered along a single continuum, i.e. one-dimensional. These range from EU rejectionist parties, which is the most negative category, to revisionist, minimalist, gradualist, reformist and maximalist, the most positive category.

What is Flood’s advantage in some aspects causes practical problems in others. Flood defines a rejectionist party as one that has “positions opposed to either (i) membership of the EU or (ii) participation in some particular institution or policy.” Now take another, gradualists: “positions supporting further integration either (i) of the system as a whole or (ii) in some particular policy area(s), so long as the process is taken slowly and with great care” (2002, p.5). One would find examples of political parties in most of the member states that oppose participation in one institution or policy, while supporting further, though slow and careful, integration in other policy areas. We argue that Flood’s typology has a considerable advantage in the way it allows researchers to focus on party positions on different dimensions of EU integration. Research designs taking a particular party (comparing its positions in various policy areas), or a particular aspect of EU integration (comparing across parties) as a unit of analysis may well benefit from Flood’s approach. On the other hand, if we are to analyse party systems and want to assess where a party stands in a given party system (in regard to the EU), Flood’s typology may produce contradictory findings. In other words, Flood’s typology is not suitable for comparing political parties as units of analysis because of the overlaps between various categories.

Conti (2003) presents another important contribution to the debate on the conceptualization of Euroscepticism, although the author's focus was primarily the Italian national party system and how "patterns of party competition shape the translation of the European question into political contestation." (2003, p. 9). Conti re-elaborated Taggart and Szczerbiak's soft Euroscepticism in that "it is a reaction to one or a number of European policies, a negative evaluation of the European institutional setting whose reform is proposed, or a negative evaluation of the impact of Europe on the domestic system that can be still corrected through reforms." (2003, p. 16). The main difference between soft and hard Euroscepticism in Conti's work is that withdrawal from the EU is not a goal for soft Eurosceptics, and the EU's legitimacy is not challenged, despite possible criticism of its institutions or policies or outcomes.

Conti also discusses the role of ideology and strategy in forming Eurosceptic attitudes. A party that incorporates attitudes towards the EU in its ideological core should have positions of principle, either positive or negative, which translate either into "identity Europeanism" (Conti's category for the most positive attitude towards the EU) or hard Euroscepticism. On the other hand, if a party forms its EU positions as part of a strategic political game, this results in conditional support or rejection of the EU, i.e. "functional Europeanism" or soft Euroscepticism.

The way Conti works with the role of ideology and strategy in forming attitudes towards the EU is different from Kopecký and Mudde's work. For the latter, the ideological position of a party is understood as its stance towards the integration of the countries of Europe as an idea. Consequently, parties embracing nationalism or isolationism would reject such an idea. On the other hand, there may be parties calling for an all-European integration for ideological reasons. Strategic positions are then formed towards the current representation of European integration, which is the European Union. Parties may support or not support it for reasons related to either satisfaction "with the way it has been set up and is running" (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, p. 302), with the Eurosceptic parties claiming "the current EU to be a serious deviation from their interpretation of the founding ideas of European integration. However, because they do support these ideas, they hope to change the EU in such a way that it becomes a truer reflection of them." (ibid).

Conti's typology is problematic for two major reasons. First, in our reading, the author does not differentiate European integration from the EU in the same way that Kopecký and Mudde do. This is indicated when he writes that "in order to analyse one party's attitude to European integration, a preliminary step is to define the various attitudes to EU that parties can have." (Conti, 2003, p. 15). European integration and the European Union are clearly used synonymously. We believe that our conceptualisation of Euroscepticism solves this problem.

Second, Conti (2003) keeps EU policies and outcomes as a part of the definition. Again, it is not very clear whether a public policy is different from the outcome of integration, or whether it is its superset or equivalent. Additionally, keeping policies and outcomes included means that any opposition to any policy (or outcome) qualifies as Euroscepticism. Such a definition is, however, too broad. Applying it to the current party systems of the EU's members would

lead to a practically useless typology, as there is hardly any party that would not criticize at least one of the EU's public policies.

There is an additional argument that we should focus on the overall stances of political parties rather than their positions to particular policies and/or dimensions of EU integration. After the Brexit referendum the debate on the future of the EU has intensified and currently presents probably the most dominant topic of political discourse regarding the EU. Political scientists need to take this into account for two reasons. First, we need to be practical in terms of reflecting social reality. Second, the future of the EU is an issue that each political party in member states needs to address and can hardly avoid. The EU has not only become a part of domestic politics (Goetz & Hix, 2012; Hobolt & Tilley, 2016), but the debate on the future of the EU has become part of political contestation at national level (Hutter, Grande & Kriesi, 2016; Grande & Hutter, 2016). Also, the (most) political parties are part of the EU political space as they either operate or would like to operate in the European Parliament.

Target of Criticism II: the Time Dimension

The idea that party Euroscepticism as an object of scientific enquiry is a moving target is not new. Our reading of the work of many scholars is that they implicitly assume Euroscepticism to be continually evolving, which leads the authors to stress the importance of attitudes not only towards the current state of integration, but also future, planned extensions of EU competencies (i.e. Flood, 2002; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002). Taggart and Szczerbiak accepted this argument in their redefinition of Euroscepticism (2008). Leruth, Startin and Usherwood came even closer to stating explicitly that the target of opposition is a moving target. They write that "Euroscepticism never stands still. The target of opposition is always evolving." (2018, p. 3)

We agree that the target of opposition is in a process of continuous development, whether the target is an important public policy, a decision-making process of the EU or integration in the broader sense. Let us consider the example of the Economic and Monetary Union. If we want to go back as far as possible, one could argue that the cornerstone of EMU was laid at the 1969 summit in The Hague, which defined EMU as a new integration objective. In recent years, since the introduction of the Euro, several more treaties, pacts and compacts have been signed (i.e. Six-pack, ESM Treaty, Fiscal Compact, Two-pack), and in 2015 Juncker's Commission officially launched the debate on the future of EMU in the so-called Five Presidents' Report (Juncker, Tusk, Dijsselbloem, Draghi & Schulz, 2015) and various proposals, including for instance the banking union and the Eurozone's own budget, are in the pipeline. Since economic governance (which is the main *raison d'être* of EMU) is continuously evolving, so too must opposition to it.

The Economic and Monetary Union is an illustrative example because it does not represent just an ordinary policy (or set of policies). First, the EMU supervises and regulates an area of integration that has undergone major, multiple crises since 2008. As such, it necessarily

became the object of political discussion and criticism. Second, the EMU has also had an impact on citizens' attachment to the EU and the formation of identity, as nearly 350 million citizens in 19 countries use the currency on a daily basis. Third, EMU is an integral part of the EU in constituting the political system. The five presidents in their report (Juncker et al. 2015) rightly highlighted that the Euro is not only an economic but also a political project. Therefore, we would argue, the EMU is an illustrative example of an ever-evolving system and of integration as a potential target of Euroscepticism.

Having admitted that we consider Euroscepticism's target to be a moving one, we feel an obligation to explain in a more detail what we consider the actual target to be. Most scholars in the research field of party Euroscepticism speak of the target as European integration, whether in general terms as cooperation in Europe (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002), or as currently embodied in the EU (Flood, 2002; and also Kopecký & Mudde, 2002), or both (i.e. Taggart, 1998; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2001). European integration is a rather broad term and defining the target of Euroscepticism in this way has various disadvantages. European integration is broad enough to be interpreted as the idea of cooperation in Europe, not necessarily in the form of the EU as we know it. We argue that, taking into account the political reality of recent decades, the EU has in recent times been the only form of political integration in Europe that we can meaningfully consider. The project that comes closest to it is the Eurasian Economic Union, which in reality is hardly more than a group of three states officially claiming a will to cooperate, but which unofficially serves as Russia's "vehicle for realizing a global geopolitical agenda." (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2017, p. 24). Therefore, we use the prefixes Euro- and EU- synonymously in the rest of our paper.

Flood (2002) reflected the problem of broadness in implicitly narrowing the target of Euroscepticism, at least in the sense that he refused to view it as the general idea of cooperation and integration of European countries. Although without detailed explanation, Flood writes that names/labels in his typology should have the EU-prefix, but for practical reasons he admits using Euro- as well. However, the reduction of European integration to just EU integration would not suffice alone. We need to address the time dimension of the integration as well, so that we can distinguish a critical discussion on the future of the EU from destructive debates suggesting its dissolution, or returning to a form of integration that existed before the EU was introduced. We argue that treating the EU as a political system would be a helpful step. After all, the idea is not new, although it has been more implicit than open so far.

Flood (2002), although not explicitly, treats the target of opposition as the political system. Describing his typology Flood speaks of opposition to "the entire configuration of the EU or in relation to one or more policy areas" (2002, p. 5). Regarding positive party positions, these are "positions supporting further integration either (i) of the system as a whole..." (ibid). Put simply, one could trace various elements of a political system as defined by Easton (1957) and later, particularly in relation to the EU, developed by Hix (various editions, first in 1999). We support this optic and argue that, for the purpose of research into party Euroscepticism, it would be beneficial to look at the EU as a political system.

Solution: EU's Political System as a Target

In this section we propose our conceptualization of party Euroscepticism which, we hope, will contribute to the debate on how to improve some of the current imperfections in this field. Our key claim is that the best way how to understand and analyse Euroscepticism is to view the EU as a political system. In other words, we define the target of opposition as 'the EU as a political system'.

We conceptualise Eurosceptic parties as political parties that oppose the current status quo of the European Union as a political system and the extent of their country's integration into it. We argue (along with many others) that the political set-up of the EU meets the characteristic features of a political system as defined by Easton (1957). To identify a political system, Easton highlights two key properties. First, there are boundaries that determine a political system. Second, the system contains units that perform "actions more or less directly related to the making of binding decisions" (Easton 1957, p. 385). As for units of the political system, these are the actors that the EU is composed of, and they establish a certain structure and assume political roles. In the case of the EU, this includes the European Parliament, European Council, European Commission, European Court of Justice, Court of Auditors, political party families and others.

Simon Hix (2005) also argues that the EU's institutional set-up meets the requirements of a political system as defined by Verba (1956) and Easton (1957). Hix highlights four main elements: i) a clearly defined set of institutions responsible for collective decision making, and clear rules defining relationships among them; ii) citizens and social groups expressing their demands, either directly or indirectly (via interest groups, political parties); iii) the existence of collective decision making that distributes economic resources, and also social and political values; and iv) continuous interaction – feedback – between outputs, new demands, new decisions and so on (see Hix, 2005, p. 2).

In addition to Easton's definition of a political system, Hix adds further reasons why the EU could be seen as a political system. Among others, EU policy making covers "virtually all areas of public policy," (2002, p. 3), its legislative acts are part of the law and have direct impact on citizens, and its powers are reaching into the areas traditionally exclusive for national states, such as taxation, immigration or defence. As Hix (2005, p.4) puts it, "it is beyond doubt that EU ... determines 'who gets what, when and how' in European society". We admit that the EU does not determine it all and exclusively; however, it does so sufficiently to qualify as a political system.

Suggesting that the target of Eurosceptics' opposition is the EU as a political system, we feel under an obligation to make a clear distinction between the political system on the one hand and a national state, or international organization, on the other hand. We understand that there is a political science tradition stemming from the work of scholars such as Max Weber and Almond Verba (1956) that considers political systems to be inseparably connected to national

states because only national states have the legitimacy to use coercive, physical force. Clearly, the European Union lacks the legitimacy to use physical coercion. Therefore, it cannot be perceived as a political system from the state-centrist perspective. However, we argue that the national state is not the only possible form of political system. As there were other forms of political governance in the past, so too may new forms beyond national states emerge in the future (Badie & Birnbaum, 1983).

Second, there are convincing arguments why the EU is not a typical international organization. We will highlight just one line of reasoning at this point. In contrast to international organizations, national governments not only lack a monopoly on making political demands (Hix, 2005), but they can also be circumvented or even outvoted. Direct, binding decisions could be made not only without a government's consent, but also against their will (though admittedly not in all areas).

Defining the target of Eurosceptics' opposition as the EU as a political system has a rather significant consequence. Eurosceptic parties that oppose the status quo require a reversal of the political system-building process. In other words, Eurosceptic parties require the deconstruction of the EU as a political system.

This deconstruction may be partial, and such parties may demand the returning of competencies back to national states, the revision of one or both of the Treaties (TEU/TFEU) or withdrawing the country from one or more essential units that constitute the EU's political system (i.e. Eurozone, Schengen, Single Market). Parties that demand only partial deconstruction of the EU are Soft Eurosceptics.

In addition to demands for the partial deconstruction of the EU as a political system, parties may perceive the EU as fully unacceptable. In practice, this can translate in two different demands. Political parties may, in theory, promote either the abolition or dissolution of the European Union, or the exit of a country from the Union (UKIP in the UK, the Irexit Freedom group in Ireland, the Sweden Democrats led by Jimmie Åkesson, the Freedom and Direct Democracy party in the Czech Republic, People's Party Our Slovakia, and others).

These two practical translation of the EU's rejection are not mutually exclusive and there are political forces articulating the two goals as equally desirable. As reported by Karnitschnig (2019), the Alternative für Deutschland, German party approved at its convention the following statement: "We consider either Germany's departure or an orderly dissolution of the European Union to be a necessary last option..." Also Marine Le Pen, the French Front National leader said in an interview that "Europe is moving toward a return of nation-states, and we're part of this great political movement supporting this shift" (Deutsche Welle, 2019). Although we admit that the demand for exit from the EU is presumably more often promoted demand by political parties in the EU. Either way, this type of party overlaps with Taggart and Szczerbiak's Hard Eurosceptics or Flood's rejectionists. We consider it an accurate type, as it is the most extreme type of Euroscepticism.

Our approach to party-based Euroscepticism also has consequences for the types of Eurosceptic parties that can be identified theoretically. The category of party that demands

the total deconstruction of, or country's exit from the EU overlaps with the Hard Eurosceptic category of Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008). The category of party that demands a partial deconstruction of the EU presents a subset of the Soft Eurosceptic category as defined by Taggart and Szczerbiak (ibid). For several reasons we do not suggest our own labels but propose to continue using the Hard and Soft names. First, those names have penetrated both academic and public discourse on Euroscepticism. Second, we also believe that these labels do justice to the comparative nature of the two Euroscepticisms in the sense that the latter *is* softer than the former. However, there is a consequence of our conceptualization of the content of Soft Euroscepticism which deviates from its original meaning. We exclude opposition to the future form of the EU from being a Eurosceptic attitude. In Taggart and Szczerbiak's redefinition of soft Euroscepticism the authors rather explicitly include "opposition to the EU's current or future planned trajectory based on the further extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make" (2008, p. 248). We define the target of Euroscepticism as the status quo of the EU construction process and thus parties accepting the status quo are by definition not in opposition to the target (i.e. not Eurosceptic). The future trajectory of the EU is something that is open for debate and to be shaped in a constructive dialogue, even if critical voices are included. In our view, a critical discussion on future development cannot be considered as a criticism of status quo. In other words, there is no opposition to the EU's current political system (target of opposition) in debating future integration.

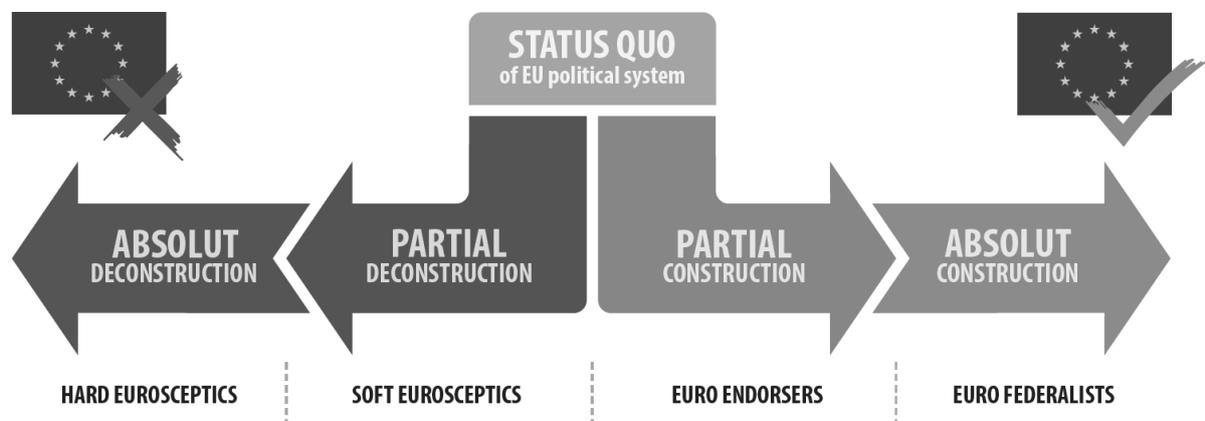
We agree with Taggart and Szczerbiak that "opposing only one or two EU policy areas is clearly not sufficient to qualify a party as Eurosceptic" (2008, p. 249). In our view, public policy is a form of output of a political system. In a political system, it is not only unsurprising but also required that public policies are supported by some, while challenged by others. However, there is a need to distinguish between a public policy and a building unit of the political system. Clear as it may seem, the boundary may be blurry sometimes. Take the example of the EMU. On the one hand, opposing the level of inflation target, or interest rates on the main refinancing operations (MRO), falls under public policy criticism and presents feedback to or demands from the political system. On the other hand, if a party opposes their country's participation in the EMU, despite the country having committed to it in the accession treaty, this presents clear opposition to participation in the system (for example, Civic Democracy (ODS) in the Czech Republic) and thus the party may be labelled as Eurosceptic.

At this point we need to state that our ambition is not to resolve the puzzle of whether the EU actually is a political system (Hix, 2005), an international organization (Pollack, 2001), an entity 'sui generis' (Dinnan, 2004), a political order (Olsen, 2007) or a multilevel administrative order (Trondal & Bauer, 2017). We argue that looking at the EU as a political system helps Euroscepticism research to address many challenges better than by looking at the EU as an administrative order or entity 'sui generis'.

Non-Eurosceptic political parties share a neutral to positive approach to the status quo of the EU as a political system. In other words, they do not require Treaty revisions or the return of

competencies back to national states. Put simply, they do not oppose the EU's current political set-up.

Diagram 1: Party Euroscepticism



Source: Authors

As we defined the characteristic feature of Eurosceptic parties as an effort to deconstruct the EU, non-Eurosceptic parties should then share an analogical goal: to continue with the construction of the EU as a political system, even if very slowly and carefully. Again, just as Eurosceptic parties may want the partial or the absolute deconstruction of the EU, the same applies to non-Eurosceptic parties: political parties which pursue the construction of the EU's political system in absolute terms advocate the EU's acquiring a federation-style political system, while political parties who pursue the construction of the EU as a political system in partial terms may want to enhance EU's the competencies only in a certain area, or to introduce a new, specific institution (e.g. a European Public Prosecutor's Office), or a new unit of the political system (e.g. an EU army). At the same time, the partial pursuit of EU construction may also mean that there are elements or alternatives of the 'future trajectory' that those parties will oppose. This, however, is not the same as being Eurosceptic. First, the opposition to some aspects of a future trajectory should not be equated to opposition to the EU per se. Second, this is the distinctive feature that separates such parties from those that pursue the construction of the EU's political system in absolute terms. In the latter case, parties would not oppose any future development that enhanced the EU.

We call parties pursuing the full construction of the EU's political system Eurofederalists, as they do not oppose the change of status quo in the direction of a federal-style political system. Parties that pursue only partial steps forward in the construction of the EU's political system are Euro-endorsers. We argue that such political parties have an approving attitude towards the status quo and are open to the possibility of the further empowerment of the EU. Therefore the pro-European label captures the essence of their generally positive attitude. Diagram 1 illustrates the typology of Eurosceptic parties following our reconceptualization.

Discussion and Conclusion

When studying party Euroscepticism, the target of opposition has so far been defined too broadly, both in scope and time. This paper offers a re-conceptualisation of party Euroscepticism that addresses several shortcomings of the previous approaches. Instead of rejecting the former typologies en bloc, we rather build upon them and adjust the definitions to improve the way party Euroscepticism could be studied. We discussed two major problems of previous conceptualisations. First, they were too broad in what kind of criticism was included as the target of opposition. Second, they included the ‘future trajectories’ of EU integration which in effect might inhibit critical yet constructive discussion on the EU’s future.

We suggest that the EU’s political system and the status quo of the country’s integration into the system are the target of Eurosceptics’ opposition. Departing from Easton (1957) and Hix (2005), only opposition to the units of the political system would qualify as Eurosceptic attitudes. This approach narrows the definition of the target as it leaves out policies and outputs. Criticism of policies and outputs should be a regular part of the democratic process and party contestation, and as such it does not threaten the political system per se. Eurosceptic attitudes should present opposition to a unit of the political system.

By limiting the definition of the target to the status quo we also narrow the content of the concept. In our understanding it only includes opposition to something that already exists, and not to something that possibly could, or might not, exist in the future. In other words, we argue that ideas on future trajectories for the EU’s development should be the subject of free and critical discussion. Opposition to ideas about future developments is fundamentally different from opposition to the status quo and the declared will to reverse the status quo. Therefore, in our approach, ideas on future development should not be a part of the definition of the target of Euroscepticism.

Our definition of party Euroscepticism thus divides political parties into two broader groups. First, Eurosceptics (both hard and soft) that are not satisfied with the status quo of the EU’s political system and would like to reverse it (in absolute or partial terms). Second, there are political parties who accept the status quo of the EU’s political system and either have cautious, and constructively critical, views on future developments (Euro-endorsers) or completely accept the need to finish the process of constructing the EU’s political system (Euro-federalists). Our approach separates political parties that may criticise the EU, but do so either in a constructive way (Euro-endorsers) or a destructive way (soft Eurosceptics). We argue that this is a strength of our new conception, as such political parties are qualitatively different. However, both types would fall into the category of soft Eurosceptics under the previous broad conceptualisations. Even Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008a) write that “the point of identifying Soft Euroscepticism is that it captures those positions that constitute real scepticism about the way European integration is currently developing.” Although there is a room for discussion about what is meant by ‘real’ scepticism, we would argue that political

parties that accept the status quo of EU integration (despite possible reservations about the speed and/or depth of future development) should not be classified as Eurosceptic.

There are three main advantages of our reconceptualization of Euroscepticism. First, it renders empirical research easier. This is partially a consequence of the narrower definition of the target of discontent. Empirical researchers need only to focus on party positions concerning the core functioning of the EU and they can avoid studying parties' attitudes towards the rather large amount of public policies. This is particularly important in making empirical research significantly easier because many parties in many member states do not have a regular party manifesto and they do not form official positions on many of the public policies subject to EU regulation. Empirical research into Euroscepticism may also be eased significantly by only focusing on the status quo of the EU's political system and not looking at attitudes to possible future changes.

Additionally, the status quo perspective offers possible avenues for analysing the change in parties' Euroscepticism over time. Since the target is a moving one, analysts can study parties over time, particularly their approach to the changing environment. Researchers can thus identify parties that became Eurosceptic because they shifted their positions to match the altered environment, or because they maintained their previous attitudes despite shifts in the EU's development.

Second, the advantage of our approach is that it can travel over time, at least for the foreseeable future. As the target of parties' discontent is defined as the status quo, empirical researchers can measure parties' positions towards the status quo, despite the probability that this will change. This means that our conceptualization is more flexible than Szczerbiak and Taggart's (2008) approach. Applying their approach, almost any political party in every single state could be classified as soft Eurosceptic (like the German CDU in our example above).

Third, ambiguity of Euroscepticism as a term caused by its problematically broad definition has had serious consequences for the "pollution" of public discourse. The term has been increasingly used in negative, sometimes even pejorative connotations to stigmatise any criticism of the EU, whether constructive or destructive. Our reconceptualization offers a way to use the term Euroscepticism more precisely. We believe that by narrowing Eurosceptic attitudes only to destructive criticism, more open debate on the EU matters might emerge. This the critical, yet constructive viewpoints on daily EU matters (typical for any other political domain) would not disqualify political parties from the debate.

Also, our approach disentangles Eurosceptic attitudes from ideological perspectives on European integration (as in Kopecký & Mudde, 2002). In our approach, ideological support or rejection of integration in general is not part of Euroscepticism's definition. We do not claim that ideology (as opposed to strategy) is not important in studying Euroscepticism, rather the contrary. However, although ideology may serve as a driver for a party in forming stances towards the EU's political system, it is not a distinguishing factor for what type of Eurosceptic attitude a party holds.

A potential problem of the conceptualisation presented in this paper is the core assumption of treating the EU as a political system. There is a broad discussion about to what extent, and whether at all, the European Union can be classified as a political system, rather than a system of governance, a supranational organization or any other model of international cooperation. We do not aim to provide a definitive answer to this debate. What we argue is that if we choose the perspective of the EU as a political system, it helps us to improve the conceptualisation of Euroscepticism in several respects.

In addition to the debate on the character of European integration, there is also a problem with the exact definition of what should constitute the political system in the case of the EU. Unlike the EU institutions that are clearly part of such system, such as the European Commission, there is no consensus on what the other constitutional parts of the Union, or the so-called building blocks, actually are. The assessment of whether the EMU or the single market are fundamental building blocks of the EU political system might be seen as more or less arbitrary. This is clearly important for our definition of soft Euroscepticism, which relates to parties that wish to withdraw their country from one or more essential units that constitute the EU's political system.

Both the limitations and the utility of our approach could be put to test in the future. Comparative analysis of political parties in EU Member States may analyse their positions and reveal the usefulness of our approach both in time and space. It would be particularly interesting to compare how many soft Eurosceptic parties there are comparing this and other definitions of Euroscepticism.

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