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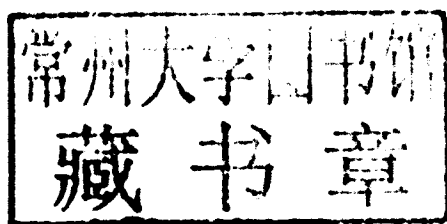
UNDERSTANDING EUROSCEPTICISM

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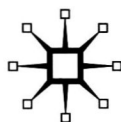


# Understanding Euroscepticism

Cécile Leconte



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First published 2010 by  
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978–0–230–22806–1 hardback  
ISBN 978–0–230–22807–8 paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10

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# Acknowledgements

I wish to thank a number of people for the assistance and support they have given me. Friends and family have been a considerable source of encouragement – notably Manuel, whom I especially thank for his careful reading and very useful suggestions. I would also like to thank the series editors, Neill Nugent and William Paterson, and my publisher Steven Kennedy, for their helpful feedback and encouraging comments and to all at Palgrave Macmillan who have contributed to the realization of this book.

The various Eurobarometer reports produced by the EU have been invaluable in compiling this book. To avoid cluttering the text, references have been abbreviated to EB for regular Eurobarometer, FEB for Flash Eurobarometer, SEB for Special Eurobarometer and CCEB for Candidate Countries Eurobarometer.

CÉCILE LECONTE

# List of Abbreviations

ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
ATTAC	Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions and for Civic Action
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CCEB	Candidate Countries Eurobarometer
CDU	Christlich-Demokratische Union
CEC	Conference of European Churches
CEO	Corporate Europe Observatory
CFP	Common Fisheries Policy
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
COMECE	Commission of the Bishops' Conference of the European Community
COREPER	Committee of Permanent Representatives
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union
EAW	European Arrest Warrant
EB	Eurobarometer
EBU	European Broadcasting Union
EC	European Community
ECB	European Central Bank
ECE	Eastern and Central European (countries)
ECHR	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EDC	European Defence Community
EEA	European Economic Area
EEC	European Economic Community
EFDG	Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group
EMS	European Monetary System
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
EPP	European People's Party
EPP-ED	European People's Party-European Democrats



ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EU	European Union
FEB	Flash Eurobarometer
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GUE–NGL	Group of the United European Left/Nordic Green Left
IGC	Intergovernmental Conference
IND–DEM	Independence and Democracy Group
JHA	Justice and Home Affairs
MAI	Multilateral Agreement on Investment
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MNP	Member of National Parliament
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Association
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEEC	Organisation for European Economic Co-operation
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
QMV	Qualified Majority Voting
SEA	Single European Act
SEB	Special Eurobarometer
SPD	Sozial-demokratische Partei Deutschlands
TEC	Treaty Establishing the European Community
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UEN	Union for a Europe of Nations
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations
WTO	World Trade Organization

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# Introduction

To anti-Europeans' regret, Henry Kissinger's prediction that the disappearance of the Soviet threat and Germany's reunification would bring about the end of European integration (1996:749) proved wrong. EU institutions' and German political elites' commitment to European integration proved much more robust than realist theorists like Kissinger thought. However, twenty years after the end of the Cold War, the political context in which European integration is proceeding has changed considerably. A telling indication of this was incidentally provided by the much-awaited ruling of the German Constitutional Court, delivered in June 2009, in which it declared that the Lisbon Treaty was compatible with German Basic Law. While this ruling was hailed in the rest of the EU as paving the way for a swift ratification of the treaty in Germany, it triggered some strongly critical remarks in the country itself. Former foreign minister Joseph Fischer, for instance, qualified it as 'Eurosceptic' and 'backwards-oriented' (2009). In fact, much of the Court's ruling is permeated by an unusually distrustful tone towards the Union, reminiscent of British Eurosceptics' hostility towards a European 'super-state'. In this ruling, the Court explicitly considered, for the first time, the possibility of Germany's withdrawal from the EU, if the EU were to develop into a federal state without reaching a corresponding level of democratic legitimacy (BVerfGE 2009:s.264). This illustrated the extent of the change in mood towards European integration that occurred in Germany and in many other EU countries during the 1990s and early 2000s. In this respect, recent developments in EU politics over the last few years have confirmed the significance of Euroscepticism and how the latter affects the different dimensions of European integration.

For a start, the EU's institutional reform, which aims at improving the EU's decision-making capacity and enhancing its coherence as an international actor, has been rejected by voters on several occasions, notably in the Dutch and French referenda on the EU Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and in the first Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty in 2008.

A second aspect has been the impact that Euroscepticism has had

in recent years on all the major EU institutions. In the first half of 2009, the Czech presidency of the Council was almost derailed by Eurosceptic forces in the main ruling party and by parochial domestic rivalries, which brought about the fall of the incumbent government. In the 2009 European elections, strongly Eurosceptic parties attracted large sections of the electorate in some countries: roughly a third of voters in Austria and the Netherlands, a quarter in the UK (without including the Tories) and a fifth in France. Above all, turnout reached a historic low (43 per cent), which was interpreted as either indifference or hostility towards the EU among large numbers of voters. This seemed to affect the representativeness of the European Parliament (EP), precisely at a time when the German Constitutional Court, as discussed above, was questioning the ability of this institution to adequately represent voters (BVerfGE 2009:s.279). As far as the European Court of Justice (ECJ) was concerned, it attracted intense criticism in 2008. Following several of its rulings involving internal market legislation, the ECJ was criticized by trade unions across the EU for undermining workers' and unions' rights. Furthermore, the authority of the ECJ was clearly contested in the German Constitutional Court's Lisbon ruling (see p.160). As regards the European Commission, the aftermath of the 2005 and 2008 referenda illustrated its difficulties in promoting the Union's general interest, in a context where any controversial proposal might fan Euroscepticism in the member states.

Furthermore, the two biggest achievements of the EU, the completion of the internal market and the eastern enlargement, have triggered backlash reactions in the last couple of years, which have been exacerbated by the financial and economic crisis that broke out in late 2008. The internal market, a core pillar of the EU, was threatened by protectionist tendencies, notably in France and the UK. While state aid to the automobile sector was made conditional upon the preservation of French jobs, British workers were demonstrating against the temporary transfer of Italian workers to plants in the UK. In parallel, surveys have highlighted the mixed feelings of public opinion towards the latest enlargements. While a large majority of citizens welcomed the resulting increased mobility within the enlarged EU, 56 per cent thought that enlargement had contributed to job losses in their country, and 50 per cent thought it had increased feelings of insecurity (FEB 257:23). Besides, xenophobic reactions against Romanian residents in Italy (in 2008) and Ireland (in 2009) have endangered the principle of the free movement of

persons in the EU. These reactions were reminiscent of French concerns over a potential 'invasion' of Polish service providers (the notorious 'Polish plumber') during the 2005 referendum campaign on the EU Constitutional Treaty.

Finally, the impact of the financial and economic crisis on the evolution of public support for continued integration is uncertain. For the time being, no uniform pattern has emerged. While the crisis seems to boost pro-European support in Sweden (to join the Eurozone) and in Iceland (for EU accession), public opinion in the UK seems to be evolving in an opposite direction. In the past, support for EC/EU membership declined after the two oil shocks of the 1970s and the economic recession of the early 1990s; today, there is uncertainty about the impact of prolonged economic recession on the evolution of support.

These different examples show that Euroscepticism is a generic and encompassing term, which applies to a large variety of actors and discourses.

## Origins and definitions of the term

Euroscepticism is a rather recent term. It was not used during the first decades of European integration, when opponents of integration were referred to as nationalists, 'anti-marketeers' (for opponents to the common market in the UK) or simply as communists, Gaullists, etc. However, some of the core concepts of Eurosceptic discourse already existed, such as 'Eurocrat' – a term which appeared in French dictionaries in the mid-1960s (during the de Gaulle era) and which conveys the idea of a gap between European elites and the average citizen. Euroscepticism is a term that originated in a specific context, that of British public debate on the EC in the mid-1980s. First published in an article in *The Times* in 1985 (Harmsen and Spiering 2004), as the completion of the common market was about to become the top priority on the EC's agenda, it initially referred to the 'anti-marketeers', who at that time comprised most of the Labour party and a fringe of the Conservatives. It was popularized later by Margaret Thatcher's so-called 'Bruges speech', given in 1988 at the College of Europe. In this speech, which was to become a 'key building block in the development of British opposition to the European Union' (Usherwood 2004:5), Thatcher outlined the core tenets of her vision of the future of the EC. From the early 1990s on, as domestic debates on the EU

became increasingly polarized in the context of the Maastricht Treaty's ratification process, the term Euroscepticism expanded to continental Europe, where it became a 'catch-all' synonym for any form of opposition or reluctance towards the EU.

This reminder of the origin of the term highlights the first difficulty encountered when trying to define Euroscepticism: to what extent does it refer to a specifically British phenomenon? As explained later in the book, Euroscepticism has a specific meaning in the British context, where it refers to a form of cultural anti-Europeanism broader than 'EU-scepticism' (Harmsen and Spiering 2004). In fact, the meaning of Euroscepticism varies according to country context. While it always refers to some form of hostility towards the EU, this hostility does not necessarily apply to the same dimensions of European integration. For instance, Euroscepticism in Austria is driven, to a large extent, by negative perceptions of EU enlargement and opposition to Turkey's EU accession. In the UK, this dimension of Euroscepticism is not significant, as most Eurosceptic discourses express hostility towards a 'European super-state' and to Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). Similarly, Swedish public opinion displays a rather positive evaluation of the latest EU enlargements, compared with other older member states (FEB 257: 32–5), while being more reluctant towards political integration, notably in the field of foreign policy.

Second, the meaning of Euroscepticism also varies across time, as it evolves in parallel to the successive developments of the EU. Opposition to European integration in 1957 mainly implied opposition to the setting up of the common market; by contrast, opposition to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 amounted to hostility towards political integration (as embodied, for instance, by the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)). In this respect, the notion of 'revisionists' can be used to refer to those Eurosceptics who oppose European integration as it evolved after the Maastricht Treaty (Flood and Usherwood 2007:6).

Third, Euroscepticism is a very plastic notion that originated in media discourse; like populism, it is compatible with any ideological position, from the extreme left to the extreme right. It is not an ideology: it does not express a single, stable set of ideas, putting forward a comprehensive worldview. Like populism, it also has a normative dimension, as it is often used in inter-party competition to disparage political competitors. Indeed, it is quite telling that even well-known Eurosceptics, such as Czech President Vaclav Klaus, do



not label themselves ‘Euro-sceptics’ but rather ‘Euro-critics’ or ‘Eurorealists’ (as in the 2001 *Manifesto of Czech Eurorealism* presented by the Czech Civic Union (ODS), of which Klaus is a former leader). In this respect, the flurry of terms that have emerged in order to refer to different forms of Euroscepticism (Eurorejects, Europragmatists, Eurorealists, etc.) does not contribute to a clear understanding of the phenomenon.

Perhaps a useful starting point is the literal meaning of the term ‘scepticism’. Historically, scepticism is a philosophy that developed in ancient Greece in the fourth century BC. Initially outlined by Pyrrhon, scepticism is a mindset: sceptics do not accept the validity of any belief or opinion *a priori*, without submitting it to a free and critical examination. The sceptic abstains from judgments and advocates distancing oneself from one’s own opinions and beliefs. Scepticism developed in opposition to any form of dogma or theoretical thinking, to which sceptics opposed practical experience and common sense. In this respect, scepticism is a safeguard against intolerance and against the possible subversion of idealism into fanaticism. However, this mindset has its downsides. Indeed, sceptics have been accused of discrediting any form of universal truth or ethics, as their reliance on practical common sense has led them to emphasize the respect of local norms and traditions. The insistence of sceptics on respect for diversity against uniformity may lead to a form of moral relativism and conservatism.

If one retains this definition, Euroscepticism does not necessarily mean hostility towards European integration. Literally, Eurosceptics are those who submit the issue of European integration to a sceptical examination: support for European integration should not derive from any theoretical or normative belief (for instance, the belief that an ever closer union between the peoples of Europe is necessarily a good thing) but must be assessed on the basis of practical cost/gains analysis and according to its respect of national (political, cultural, normative) diversities. In this sense, the Eurosceptic opposes, to the ‘dogma’ of an ever closer union, a pragmatic stance, evaluating European integration on its merits.

However, in today’s political and academic discourse, Euroscepticism has come to be equated with different forms of opposition to European integration. A seminal early definition proposed by Paul Taggart, and initially applied to Euroscepticism among political parties, equated Euroscepticism with ‘contingent and conditional opposition to European integration as well as total