

Euroscepticism in the 2009 European election in France and French-speaking Belgium

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1. Introduction

France has a very paradoxical status as a member state of the European Union. While it has made a major tribute to integration, the French population and elites have manifested hostility towards the actual process of integration on several occasions in the history of the European unification. At the origins of Europe, the federalist project was opposed by two very powerful political movements in the country: the Communists and the Gaullists. Both were very concerned about preserving the French sovereignty and they are responsible for the failure of the European Defence Community treaty's ratification in 1954. In the context of the cold war, the Communist Party was the main eurosceptic political force in France. In the 1990s', Europe divided the French political landscape as well as the public opinion transversally with respect to the traditional left/right cleavage. When compared to the other EU member states, Belgium can be seen as a Europhile country. At the origins of European integration, the federalist movement was strong in Belgium. Until now, the main Belgian political parties have consistently called for 'more Europe' and the Belgian public opinion remains highly supportive of European integration. While France and Belgium can be seen as contrasted countries with respect to European integration, they share the same language and in several respects, French-speaking Belgium is especially geared towards French politics.

These contrasts and similarities are particularly interesting since the purpose of the research presented in the various chapters of this book is to test a non-substantialist definition of Euroscepticism. Rather than being considered as the property of given actors or countries, Euroscepticism is defined here as a discursive formation performed in the public sphere which accounts for the emergence of reactive identities to the very process of integration and

integration justification by its proponents (Trenz & de Wilde, 2009). In such a constructivist perspective, Euroscepticism does not constitute a separate discourse or a specific political position: it is rather intrinsically linked to the contentious nature of integration constitutive of both its future and its democratisation. In order to advance our knowledge of Euroscepticism, three dimensions are investigated: i) the evaluation of worth of the EU (or the substantial criticism towards integration); ii) the performance of Euroscepticism (or how and by whom it is formulated); iii) and the public resonance of Euroscepticism (or the reception among the wider population) (Trenz & de Wilde, 2009). The analysis of Eurosceptic discourses is based on a data sample focused on e-communication on information websites and political blogs. This chapter demonstrates 3 hypotheses. Firstly, starting from the general observation of the campaign, a very low salience of Euroscepticism is expected, both in the French and the Belgian public spheres. This shall be explained by suboptimal conditions for the performing of Euroscepticism by various political actors. Secondly, the analysis tends to confirm the most recent research on Euroscepticism putting forward that identity-based explanations and the fear of the loss of sovereignty are not so much at the heart of Eurosceptic discourses. Interactive communication and editorial contents rather reflect the importance of institutional distrust toward the European decision-makers, on the one hand, and of the intertwined democratic and social themes, on the other hand. The third hypothesis investigated is that the justifications are much less diverging that one could think. In fact, the same themes and arguments can be invoked by political actors and citizens in order to defend opposed – negative as well as positive – points of view over European integration. This confirms the idea underlying the RECON framework that Euroscepticism part of the contradictory and democratic controversy about Europe in the public sphere rather than a deviation or perversion of democracy. The chapter falls into 7 sections. Section 2 briefly reminds the main findings in the existing literature and provides for a general overview of the campaign's dynamics. After explaining the data and the method in section 3, the nature of the debate online will be dealt with. Section 5 and 6 will respectively deal with the more specific dimensions and justification of Eurosceptic claims. The final section draws the conclusions of the study.

2. Euroscepticism in France and French-speaking Belgium: a general overview

There is an abundant literature on French public opinion and European integration. Generally speaking, the social or sociological variable enjoys a very high salience in the literature as an explanation for French Euroscepticism: better-off citizens in terms of income

and education are identified as more supportive of European integration (Belot 2002, Grunberg & Cautrès 2007, Percheron 1991, Reungoat 2010). Many analyses highlight social pessimism as a factor determining the lack of support for integration (Belot & Cautrès 2004, Cautrès 2000, Cautrès & Denni 2000) and, according to many scholars, the European integration suffers from an elitist bias (Costa & Magnette 2007). This analysis has largely been confirmed by the rejection of the European constitutional Treaty by 54.7% of the French on 29 May 2005: socio-economic issues were identified as the main driver of the campaign (Binzer Hobolt & Brouard 2007, Ivaldi 2006, Laurent & Sauger 2005, Perrineau 2005, Sauger, Brouard, & Grossman 2007). There is traditionally a strong correlation between hostility towards European integration and xenophobic attitudes among the voters of the radical right. However, the extremes did not progress in 2005 (Perrineau 2005) and it was the electorate of the left who made the difference. The French opinion is not seen as intrinsically hostile to European integration and the French are more nationalistic or less European than other European citizens, for instance the Germans (Schild 2001).

As in the international literature, hostility of the French political parties has a lot to do with radical parties at both ends of the political spectrum (Taggart, 1995). Both ideology and strategy are considered as blended characteristics of radical parties' attitudes towards Europe. This is for instance the case of the *Front national* which first had a pro-European rhetoric accompanied by a Eurosceptic practice and then adopted a much more aggressive discourse emphasising the defence of the French sovereignty. Literature on Communist euroscepticism has emphasized the combination between traditional and ideologically driven hostility in the context of the Cold war, on one hand, and a more flexible practice geared towards coalition seeking at the national level, on the other hand (Benedetto & Quaglia 2007, Callot 1988, Ivaldi 1999). Literature on left euroscepticism confirms the thesis that euroscepticism is part of the "politics of opposition" (Milner 2004, Crum 2007, Sitter 2002, Steenbergen & Scott 2004). However, it is not sure whether the dynamics of Euroscepticism in France do corroborate the hypothesis of a strong demarcation between radical peripheral parties (Taggart 1998). Firstly, scepticism towards Europe has long existed within mainstream parties and was historically seen as partly contradictory both to Gaullist values (Hainsworth, O'Brian, & Mitchell 2004) and to the Socialist ideology (Bergounioux 1996, Bergounioux & Grunberg 2005, Pascal Delwit 1995).

Euroscepticism or 'eurocriticism' has emerged as an epiphenomenon in research about the alterglobalist – or global justice – movement (della Porta 2006) which considers the

EU as the ‘Trojan horse’ of neoliberal globalization. From the 1995 great strike on, the “Europe of Maastricht” was the target of leftist discourse (Contamin 2005, Gordon & Meunier 2002: 125-130) and Attac, which was founded a few years later, has played a major role in conveying a specific leftist critical discourse about the EU in the public sphere, (Wintrebert 2007). The eurocritical alterglobalist discourse had spread out into the entire French political radical and moderate left and was very efficient in mobilizing against the ECT in 2005 (Crespy 2008a, Dufour 2009, Heine, 2009). Unions have also become relevant actors with respect to protest against EU policies, in particular as far as liberalization directives are concerned (Hilal 2007), as for instance in the protest over the Bolkestein directive dealing with services liberalisation (Crespy 2010). Overall, contention over EU integration has increasingly attracted the attention of French scholars of civil society and collective action (Balme & Chabanet 2008, Sanchez Salgado 2009).

Due to Belgium’s europhile status mentioned in the introduction, literature about euroscepticism in this country is very meagre. A survey on sources of mass-level euroscepticism in Belgium concludes that: “Negative evaluations of the egocentric benefits of European membership, social distrust in European fellow citizens and institutional distrust in the EU are the most important determinants of Euroscepticism” (Abst, Heerwegh, & Swyngedouw 2009). Interestingly, the emphasis is put on subjective (evaluation of benefits, distrust) rather than objective variables (income, education). As far as party politics are concerned, Belgian actors have consistently been seen very supportive of the EU (ref). Nevertheless, attentive scholars provided evidence that support for integration in Belgium was not as unanimous as it is often claimed. The Socialist movement was divided already at the origins of the integration project with some fringes seeing the ECSC and the ECD as anti-sovietic undertakings incompatible with socialism (Pascal Delwit 1995). The unions accounted for a strong disappointment towards the ECC because of its liberal bias and intergovernmental bias, which led them to withdraw to the national level and to abandon Europe (Verschueren 2010). As in France, Belgian political parties have increasingly voiced critical claims for ‘another Europe’ in the last years (Bursens & Mudde 2005). Trade unions – especially the socialist FGTB – are cooperating with Attac and the leftist civil society within the *Forum social de Belgique*. While no party called for the rejection of the 2005 ECT, resentment towards ‘the neo-liberal EU’ is relatively widespread within the leftist circles. However, except for the marginal left radical parties such as the *Parti des travailleurs belges* (PTB), the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* (LCR) or the *Parti communiste*, the main parties’ critical

stance consists in advocating more Europe while calling for a more ‘social Europe’, a more ‘federal Europe’ or a ‘greener Europe’ (Pascal Delwit et al. 2005, Pilet & Brack, Pilet & van Haute 2007). The most important form of resistance towards the EU in Belgium comes from outside the French-speaking realm, from the strong nationalist and populist right in Flanders epitomized by the Vlaams Belang (Bursens & Mudde 2005, Mudde 2000).

The 2009 European election was far from being an important political moment. The campaign started late and raised little mobilisation among the media as well as the electorate. In France, the campaign strategy was very much focused on President Sarkozy. The President’s party, l’*Union pour un mouvement populaire* (UMP), mainly boasted about the success of the French presidency about for instance the agreements over the climate change package and over the conflict in Georgia. The UMP reproduces the Gaullist discourse about Europe as an enlarged theatre for the French politics of the *grandeur* while glorifying the French leadership in the EU. The *Parti socialiste* pursued an ambiguous strategy wavering between attacking N. Sarkozy¹ and arguments based on European issues. In spite of endeavours to stress coordination within the Party of European Socialists and the progressive nature of its European manifesto, these arguments remained inaudible in the campaign. Consequently, the smaller parties on the fringes could appear as the forces most engaged with the desire to ‘change’ Europe, a desire which has a strong resonance among the French public opinion.

On the right, the traditional nationalist and sovereignist parties were running. The *Front national* (6.3%) was mainly represented by Marine Le Pen. She pictured the EU as a failed enterprise due to its ideological bias towards ultra-liberalism and unbridled free trade bringing about competition between the peoples. Uncontrolled immigration and the Turkish membership were also major topics. The small neo-Gaullist party *Debout la République* (1.77%) campaigned on similar themes, although in a less aggressive manner. According to its leader Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, the ‘Europe of Brussels’ failed and it should be replaced with a Europe of cooperation between the nations over concrete projects. Interestingly, Philippe de Villiers’ *Mouvement pour la France*, and the traditionalist hunters’ movement *Chasse, pêche, nature et traditions* (CNPT) allied under the label *Libertas*, a pan-European Eurosceptic movement founded by the Irish businessman Declan Ganley. *Libertas*’ main argument is about the EU being undemocratic, technocratic, unaccountable and too costly.

¹ « Pour Mme Aubry, il y a « un seul adversaire : l’UMP », *Libération*, 06.06.2009.

The undemocratic European super-state, the European Commission and Turkey were the Libertas parties' main targets.

On the left, the fragmentation of the Eurosceptic actors was even stronger. *Lutte ouvrière* (LO) grounded its campaign on a classical – if not to say old-fashioned – anti-capitalist rhetoric. It pictured an EU dominated by the dictatorship of the financier unable to cope with the economic crisis given the exploding unemployment². The *Nouveau Parti anti-capitaliste* (NPA), whose front man is Olivier Besancenot, formulated a similar discourse but epitomized better the renovation of anti-capitalism. Its main argument is that more money should be put into the wages instead of into the banks and share-holders' profit. The 2009 EP campaign witnessed the constitution of a new actor very critical of the EU: the *Front de gauche*, composed of the Communist Party (PC) and the *Parti de gauche* (PG). The PG is a splinter party from the PS recently founded by the well-known Eurosceptic personality Jean-Luc Mélenchon who advocates, as the PC, classical Keynesian policies (protection of public services and workers' rights protection and extension throughout the EU). Again, the campaign was mainly dedicated to opposition to N. Sarkozy and to the crisis and its consequences, two priorities coming before “changing Europe” and the unity of the left³. Last, but not least, the green list *Europe-Ecologie*, led by the very popular Daniel Cohn-Bendit, was the most successful new grouping in the 2009 European election campaign. This list is a good example of how difficult (and perhaps misleading) it is to seek to qualify actors according to a binary category, namely eurosceptic or pro-European. *Europe-Ecologie* gathered the many streams of political ecology in France, including those who had campaigned against the ECT in 2005 such as the figure of the peasant movement José Bové. While it makes no use of a negative rhetoric stigmatizing the EU, it is nevertheless very critical of its present policies and the institutions and advocates radical reforms towards a new ecologic and social new deal in a more federal Europe thus reconciling the ‘*France du oui*’ and the ‘*France du non*’⁴.

Europe was conspicuously absent from the Belgian campaign. The lack of interest for the election among citizens throughout the Union was a central issue of the campaign

² « LO : Nathalie Arthaud plaide pour une Europe "débarassée des exploiters" », *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 01.06.2009.

³ www.frontdegauche.eu

⁴ « ‘L’Europe ouverte et solidaire’, nouveau rêve de José Bové », *Le Monde*, 31.05-01.06.2009, « Le clivage oui-non perdure, quatre ans après le référendum européen », *Le Monde*, 29.05.2009

(Dandoy & Pauwels). This is mainly due to the fact that the regional election took place at the same time and that voting is compulsory. This situation is reinforced by the low profile of the EP candidates and by the fact that, when they have a high profile, they make clear that they do not intend to seat in the European assembly. The Vlaams Belang campaigned on its favourite theme: Flemish identity, which involves claims for a ‘Europe of the peoples’ and against the Turkish membership to the EU. The Vlaams Belang came considerably weakened out of the 2009 EP election. This time, it had to compete with a new Eurosceptic actor, the *Lijst Dedecker* (LDD) founded in 2007 for the federal election, which developed a different style of Euroscepticism, namely ultra-liberal Euroscepticism critical of the bureaucratic functioning, of the democratic deficit and of the “green fundamentalism” of the EU ⁵.

3. Data and method for the analysis of online expression of Euroscepticism in the 2009 campaign

The research presented here is grounded on the idea that the media play a central role in the discursive formation of Euroscepticism, on the one hand, and on the assumption that the Internet is bound to play an increasingly important role with respect to political communication in electoral contexts on the other hand (réf papers e-sphere). In order to bring added-value to more classic research based on quality press, our purpose was to empirically investigate electronic communication over Europe. The data used for analysis therefore focused on newspapers’ websites and political blogs. The websites and blogs included in the sampling process had to fulfil simultaneously three main criteria: being the most or among the most visited sites in their field, allowing for some form of participation from the part of the audience and having RSS feeds available. The sites’ popularity was measured according to the rankings made by www.alexa.com. For France, the first three political sites in terms of popularity (www.lemonde.fr, www.lefigaro.fr, quotidien.nouvelobs.com) were also the ones selected, since they all provided both the RSS feeds and space for the readers’ comments. Moreover, they are seen as quality media and correspond broadly to the main traditional newspapers in France : *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Since there is no specific top concerning the blogs on www.alexa.com, *Plume de presse* and *Sarkofrance* were selected from a list ranking political blogs in France (www.wikio.fr/blogs/top/politique), but

⁵ „Europees Programma LDD: „LDD: De Eurorealisten’“. I would like to thank Teun Pauwels, research fellow at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB), for his precious insights on LDD.

their popularity was always checked on alexa.com. However, a problem was that Alexa doesn't always measure the popularity of individual blogs, but that of the websites they belong to (for example *over-blog* or *canalblog*), so for many blogs there was no possibility to find out their ranking and therefore couldn't been taken into account. In the selection of the blogs, popularity primed over the availability of RSS feeds. Although all the websites have created a special section dedicated to the European elections, *Le Monde* was by far the one to publish the most articles on this theme (around 340): it had two times more articles than *Le Nouvel Observateur* (155) and even more than a triple amount compared to *Le Figaro* (100). It was also the website with the most evaluations of the EU - around 50% - compared to 25% for *Le Figaro*, 15% for *Le Nouvel Observateur* and just 10% for the two blogs. In this sense, there was a significant disparity between the news websites and the blogs, the latter focusing almost exclusively on domestic issues⁶. *Sarkofrance*, for instance, was intentionally created as a means of criticism towards the French president (and his party, UMP) and none of the articles coded from this blog contained any evaluation of the EU, although they touched on the topic of the EP elections. Numerous comments and at a constant rate were made on articles from *Le Monde* and *Plume de presse*, while *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Sarkofrance* had the least number of interventions from the public. Most of the evaluations located in the main text were made directly by political actors through interviews and chats they took part in. The most important part of the evaluations from the comments came from simple citizens directly expressing their opinion on the topic of the articles. However, a smaller amount of these evaluations belonged to party actors and were indirectly transmitted. Overall, most of the evaluations appear in the comments.

For Belgium, the two websites selected were the most popular ones: www.dhnet.be, the electronic version of the highly popular and mostly sensational paper *La Dernière Heure* and www.lesoir.be, the website of the daily “Le Soir” which is the reference point of quality press in the French-speaking part of Belgium. Although only at the 6th place in the Alexa ranking, *Le Vif-L'Express* had to be selected over more popular websites which did not allow for the readers' participation (www.rtbf.be) or which presented technical problems in the access to the RSS feeds (www.rtlinfo.be, www.lalibre.be). The two political blogs selected –

⁶ In this sens, the distribution of topics among the selected threads is relevant: many of the articles published by the online journals were about “European integration” or “Democracy”, while most of the entries from the blogs concentrated on “Domestic issues”

Le Pan and *Le Blog politique* – were the most popular ones from the top created by a Belgian website (politique.belgoblog.com). Overall, the websites displayed few articles related to the European elections and most of them appeared in the last period, of the publication of the results. Moreover, the contrast between the news websites and the blogs was significant, *Le Blog Politique* having published just 5 entries in the first week of the campaign (from which 4 were presentations of opinion polls) and nothing else until the 10th of June (the last day of the monitored period), although the results were released on the 7th. However, this disparity was blurred by the fact that the sites with the most evaluations of the EU were *Le Soir* and the blog *Le Pan*, while all the other ones had extremely few or no evaluations at all. The Belgian articles on the elections were mainly neutral presentations of facts, events etc. and not opinion articles, leaving therefore few space of manoeuvre to the journalists for making judgments on the EU. There is indeed just one evaluation located in the main text, an indirect one, while all the others were situated in the comments and were made mainly by citizens. However, almost half of them were made by foreigners and were indirectly transmitted.

The actors that are the most involved in the online debate are the citizens, who account for 57.6% of all the evaluations, followed by the politicians with just 38.9% of the messages. The citizens' predominance can however be seen as a consequence of the privileged role conferred to them by the commenting function, enabling them to directly take part in the discussions.

Actor Frequency - France

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Journalist / Blogger	1	.6	.8	.8
	Citizen(s)	68	40.2	57.6	58.5
	Party Actor	47	27.8	39.8	98.3
	Non-Party State Actor	1	.6	.8	99.2
	Non-State Actor	1	.6	.8	100.0
	Total	118	69.8	100.0	
Missing	System	51	30.2		
Total		169	100.0		

Actor * Actor Scope Crosstabulation - France

Count

		Actor Scope			Total
		National	Foreign	EU	
Actor	Journalist / Blogger	1	0	0	1
	Citizen(s)	65	2	1	68
	Party Actor	28	3	16	47
	Non-Party State Actor	0	0	1	1
	Non-State Actor	1	0	0	1
Total		95	5	18	118

Moreover, it is very rare that a foreigner takes a direct stand in the French debate: 80% of the evaluations come from national actors and only 15% from European ones. However, this latter category comprises in a proportion of 50% evaluations made by Philippe de Villiers, a French politician, acting in his quality of former MEP and present candidate in the EP elections. The rest of the evaluations, made either by European or foreign actors, are almost entirely indirectly transmitted and usually don't respect the maxim of quantity and don't offer any justification of worth. Foreigners are therefore poorly involved in the French debate and there is little or no space at all allocated to elaborate presentations of their position on European matters.

Actor * Website Crosstabulation - France

Count

		Website				Total
		Le Monde	Le Figaro	Le Nouvel Observateur	Plume de Presse	
Actor	Journalist / Blogger	0	0	0	1	1
	Citizen(s)	44	18	5	1	68
	Party Actor	27	10	7	3	47
	Non-Party State Actor	0	1	0	0	1
	Non-State Actor	1	0	0	0	1
Total		72	29	12	5	118

Le Monde is by far the website with the most evaluations of the EU – 61% - compared to 25% for *Le Figaro*, 10% for *Le Nouvel Observateur* and just 4% for the two blogs. In this sense, there was a significant disparity between the news websites and the blogs, the latter focusing almost exclusively on domestic issues. *Sarkofrance*, for instance, was intentionally created as a means of criticism towards the French president (and his party, UMP) and none of the articles coded from this blog contained any evaluation of the EU, although they touched on the topic of the EP elections.

The most important part of the evaluations is made by citizens (72.7%) and political actors (22.7%). The national journalists are never present in the debates both because the Belgian articles on the European elections were mainly neutral presentations of facts and events and not opinion articles, and because the analysis focused on the power relationships at the national and regional level.

Actor Frequency - Belgium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Journalist / Blogger	1	2.1	4.5	4.5
	Citizen(s)	16	33.3	72.7	77.3
	Party Actor	5	10.4	22.7	100.0
	Total	22	45.8	100.0	
Missing	System	26	54.2		
Total		48	100.0		

In terms of actors' scope, unlike in the French debate, national and foreign actors are almost equally present: 54.5% for the former and 45.5% for the latter. The evaluations made by foreigners are related to Turkey's accession to the EU and account for the influence the French debate on this topic had on the Belgian discussions of the matter. They were in fact indirectly transmitted opinions of French political actors or citizens and disseminated by Belgian readers who copied them into their comments. It is also worth mentioning that evaluations of the EU, either positive or negative, were completely absent from national politicians' discourse, a situation that highlights the low salience of this topic both among the party actors and among the media, that did not convey such EU-related value judgements.

Actor * Actor Scope Crosstabulation - Belgium

Count

		Actor Scope		Total
		National	Foreign	
Actor	Journalist / Blogger	0	1	1
	Citizen(s)	12	4	16
	Party Actor	0	5	5
Total		12	10	22

Among the 5 websites and blogs selected for sampling in the Belgian case, only 3 of them had evaluations of the EU in their threads: *Le Soir* (with 45%), *Le Pan* (45%) and *Le Vif* (only 10%). Although there was a significant contrast between the websites and the blogs in terms of quantity of EU-related articles that they published (*Le Blog Politique* had just 5 entries at the beginning of the campaign, but nothing during the days when the results were released), this disparity was blurred by the fact that the website of *Le Soir* and the blog *Le Pan*, which accounted together for 90% of all the coded messages, had an equal amount of evaluations.

Actor * Website Crosstabulation

Count

		Website			Total
		Le Soir	Le Vif l'Express	Le Pan	
Actor	Journalist / Blogger	0	0	1	1
	Citizen(s)	10	1	5	16
	Party Actor	0	1	4	5
Total		10	2	10	22

4. A rather poor communication over Europe

As accounted for by a general overview of the data, arguments related to European integration were rather scarce in the online debate. The values for the encoding data are rather low. In France, only 8.5% of the encoded threads are related to the principle of integration, 50.8% with the EU polity and 68.6% with the project of integration. These values are even

lower for Belgium: respectively 0%, 72.7% and 36.4%. France and Belgium are not countries where the existence of the EU and the country's membership are questioned. As accounted for by the very low values on the category "principle of integration", existential issues are not the object of controversy in the public sphere. This confirms the argument made in the literature that a diffuse support for EU integration does exist in France and Belgium. The absence of a substantial debate over integration is not very surprising since it reflects the general dynamic of the campaign mainly focused on domestic politics.

The 2009 French campaign for the European election can be described as one mixing domestic and European issues but which mainly takes the form of domestic opposition politics, while the articulation of contrasted political projects related to the EU remained poor. As other European election campaigns, the 2009 campaign was pervaded by the fear of a high level of abstention. The debates mainly dealt with the EU's response to the crisis - or, more accurately, its failure in providing one -, the "no" vote in the 2005 referendum and Turkey's accession to the EU. More generally, the campaign was to a large extent focused on President Sarkozy, either pictured as a main protagonist on the European scene by its own party the UMP or instrumentally attacked as the main target by the other parties. All the political parties competing in the French 2009 campaign criticized certain aspects related to the European policies and/or institutions. However, mainstream parties can be depicted as mainly supporting the EU, while harsh criticism at the EU is concentrated in the discourse of smaller parties, either at the right or the left fringe of the political spectrum.

The UMP insisted on N. Sarkozy's achievements as a head of state and in the framework of the French presidency of the EU. In this respect, N. Sarkozy took advantage of the support of international personalities such as A. Merkel or B. Obama to increase its popularity and that of his party. In the context of school violence in France, the party reintroduced in its rhetoric old far right themes such as security/insecurity, immigration, that is subjects related to domestic problems, but very popular among its electorate. Due to internal dissent, the PS's position during the campaign is a feeble, more a reactive one. The party's General Secretary, M. Aubry, mainly criticized government's decisions such as the suppression of the milk quotas or the security measures proposed for combating youth violence in schools. F. Bayrou chose to concentrate its message on the critique and sanction of Sarkozy, being quite often accused by his competitors of not having any other project besides its "anti-sarkozysme". Against this substantially poor political backdrop, only the Green list managed to distinguish itself while bringing European issues to the fore. *Génération écologie*

advocated a reform of the EU in a more ecological and social direction and made concrete proposals with respect to the EU institutions like for instance the adoption of a European Constitution, the creation of transnational lists for the European election, citizens' involvement in the decision-making. Besides criticism at the government parties, the small parties from the margins also forum harsh criticism of the EU, depicted as an undemocratic construction infringing on the national States' competences (MPF, CPNT, FN) or as an ultra-liberal system built for the benefit of a financial and commercial oligarchy at the expense of ordinary citizens (Lutte ouvrière, NPA).

In Belgium, the election for the European Parliament was concomitant with the elections for the regional Parliaments. The latter ones had a very important stake, as it was thought they would have an impact on the composition of the federal government. This was all the more important given the national political context of high disagreements between the French-speaking and the Flemish elites on the future of the federal State. In this climate, the campaign was clearly dominated by domestic issues. Indeed, the press mentioned quite frequently the European election, but concentrated the main parts of its analysis on the relations of power between actors at the national level. Paradoxically, the fear of abstentionism and of the increasing indifference of the people for these elections all over the old continent brought a bit of a European tone to the debate. But Europe was practically inexistent from the Belgian 2009 campaign and evaluations of the EU were very scarce.

5. Dimensions of Euroscepticism: the future of the EU as a main concern

Our analysis of the evaluations made by political actors in the online news as well as by citizens in their comments and on blogs distinguishes three main dimensions of Euroscepticism: their stance towards the very principle of cooperation (principle of integration), the evaluation of the current "state of the Union" (evaluation of the EU polity) and the evaluations regarding the future of the EU (the project dimension). We believe this threefold dimension helps to better understand the EU as a moving target in time and nature. Also, it avoids simplification and binary analysis in terms of pro- or anti-EU. The main conclusion which can be drawn is that most critiques of EU integration concentrate on the project dimension, thus reflecting fears in connection with the future direction of the EU.

Firstly, there is clear evidence that that the "principle of integration" was not the main target of criticism: 91.5% of the evaluations did not mention it. It is also worth noting that none of the French actors positioned themselves against the principle of European

cooperation, which seems to be widely accepted as a positive achievement. However, 9 out of the 10 messages that explicitly take stand in favour of the “principle” are correlated with negative evaluations of the current status of the EU and/or with its projects of future development. Indeed, expressing oneself in favour of the principle of cooperation is often a way of introducing criticism: *“I think most of the abstentionists are pro-European, but the Europe that is proposed to us has nothing to do with the Europe we expect”*. In Belgium, The “principle of integration” was mentioned neither positively nor negatively but an implicit acceptance can be quite fairly deduced.

Although not highly salient, the second dimension relating to the evaluation of the current EU as a polity is more frequent than the principle of integration. A high proportion of the French actors (almost 50%) did not provide any evaluation related to the EU polity dimension.

EU Polity France

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Positive	5	3.0	4.2	4.2
	Level - Negative	25	14.9	21.2	25.4
	Scope - Positive	1	.6	.8	26.3
	Scope - Negative	3	1.8	2.5	28.8
	Inclusiveness - Negative	26	15.5	22.0	50.8
	N/A	58	34.5	49.2	100.0
	Total	118	70.2	100.0	
Missing	System	50	29.8		
Total		168	100.0		

One main argument invoked to criticise the EU polity is its lack of inclusiveness (26 cases and 22%). It consists mainly in critiques of the ultraliberal nature of the EU which is seen as a *“market space that laminates the social conquests and has nothing to do for the life of its citizens”* or as an entity that *“protects the liberalism, the deregulation and the big businessmen while claiming the contrary”*. The anti-liberal discourse is usually combined with the denunciation of the essentially undemocratic nature of the EU, especially among those citizens who voted against the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 (the *“nonistes”*): *“I am hostile to a Europe that some are trying to sell us, those who have ignored our opinion*

expressed at this referendum [2005]. [On the 7th of June] my vote will go to the movement the most favourable to a humanist, economic and social policy, close to the interests of the ordinary citizens of our nation". A further aspect emphasised by the anti-liberal critics is the EU's submission to the different lobby groups: MEPs are being accused of bowing before lobby groups that *"only represent selfish financial interests, hidden behind principles of competitiveness, acting at our expense, to ensure their "rentability" against all common sense, because outrageous benefits are their only aim"*. This type of speech is also taken up by some political actors like *Lutte ouvrière* that denounces the *"dictatorship"* of financial and industrial groups that *"lead whole regions to unemployment and poverty"*. Finally, some, among whom Philippe de Villiers, denounce the exclusivist manner in which decision-making and deliberation are conducted in the European Parliament: *"Opposition [in the EP] is badly treated and often disqualified. I could never get to be appointed rapporteur on a subject that I was fond of. Only the creatures and clients of the Commission are entitled to have a word and to publicly express themselves"*.

The second set of negative evaluations of the EU polity relates to the category Level-Negative (25 cases and 21.2%). Evaluations expressing a general discontent with the EU seem to have been enhanced by the disregard of the French "non" in the 2005 referendum. In this respect, citizens express their intention of not going to the poll because of the undemocratic way in which the Lisbon Treaty is pushed forward; which gives them the feeling that their vote is useless anyway: *"We massively voted in 2005 and politicians brutally ignored it. What's the interest then to go vote if when the citizens' choice is not convenient, one can just violate it? There are a lot of us who have chosen to abstain rather than to participate in a masquerade. They deny our choices on fundamental aspects and, even more, they want us to elect people that would apply what we have democratically refused"*. In a similar perspective of the democratic deficit, criticism targets the European Commission (and sometimes explicitly its President) accused of being an unaccountable, technocratic institution with too much power: *"the Commission doesn't want to democratize, it is the government of experts against democracy (...) The problem is that this technical Europe has forged very liberal policies that go against the European model that they are supposed to promote"*. Other evaluations target the EP and deplore its weak powers in the European institutional architecture. Evaluations vary from harsh criticism pointing to the *"absence of real powers of the EP"*, the *"helplessness"* of MEPs vis-à-vis the European legislative process in which they only have *"a minor"* say or to the resemblance of the EP's powers to those of a *"XVIIIth century monarchy rather than to a real democracy"* to more moderate and more precise

assertions: *“the EP still doesn’t have enough powers today”*, namely the legislative initiative. A minority of messages referring to the current European polity (5 cases; 4.2%) can be grouped under the Level - positive dimension. These evaluations are made by national citizens who highlight the historical achievements of the European integration process (peace, stability, economic prosperity) and also underline the importance of being part of an integrated organization in the present context of globalization: *“it is completely unreasonable to want to detach ourselves from an organization that enables us to have a word to say on the international scene. For we have to stop luring ourselves: the French hegemony is a myth”*.

In Belgium, the current status of the EU is also criticised, especially on its level dimension.

EU Polity Belgium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Positive	3	6.3	13.6	13.6
	Level - Negative	10	20.8	45.5	59.1
	Scope - Positive	1	2.1	4.5	63.6
	Inclusiveness - Negative	2	4.2	9.1	72.7
	N/A	6	12.5	27.3	100.0
	Total	22	45.8	100.0	
Missing	System	26	54.2		
Total		48	100.0		

Most evaluations in this category were generated by an article dealing with the MEPs’ wages and accused the parliamentarians of receiving too much money compared to the work they did: *“Personally, I think our MEPs are useless (except for making texts that are “idiotic” most of the time, for example to define the length of a banana or the diameter of a kiwi). As anything that is useless, they are by definition too expensive”*. Criticism targeted both the lack of real power of the MEPs (*“they can’t do any harm (...) given that they have no power”*), as well as their personal incompetence (*“rather well paid for some ex-speakerines, exhausted sportsmen or retired politicians”*). The positive evaluations are in fact answers to these accusations, defending the importance of the EP in the European institutional architecture (*“the Commission is far from being able to pass anything it wants”*) or arguing that the monthly salaries MEPs are entitled to are legitimate (*“if these MEPs are really competent this*

wage is justified”). Other negative evaluations of the EU polity include the denunciation of the unique currency as an economic failure (*“it’s the euro zone, even before the USA, that entered first into recession, that experiences today the biggest recession in the world, just behind Japan, and that has a ten-years past of dying growth”*) or the critique of the striking lack of respect for the citizens’ voice (*“The European Union was built in defiance of the disagreement of the people consulted by referendum on abandoning their national sovereignty”*).

The third dimension related to the project of integration is the most salient kind of evaluation of the EU in France. It was mentioned in 68.6% of the evaluations.

Project of Integration France					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Positive	17	10.1	14.4	14.4
	Level - Negative	34	20.2	28.8	43.2
	Scope - Positive	6	3.6	5.1	48.3
	Inclusiveness - Positive	10	6.0	8.5	56.8
	Inclusiveness - Negative	14	8.3	11.9	68.6
	N/A	37	22.0	31.4	100.0
	Total	118	70.2	100.0	
Missing	System	50	29.8		
Total		168	100.0		

In the Level – Negative category (34 cases and 28.8%), the most recurrent arguments refer to the new institutional architecture and balance of power brought about by the Constitutional Treaty and/or the Lisbon Treaty. Among the qualified evaluations, one can distinguish between those opposing a federal state, on the one hand, and those who are disappointed with the undemocratic way the French “no” to the Constitution was dealt with, on the other hand. Philippe de Villiers was one of the most important representative of the anti-federalists, who rejected the Lisbon treaty and the creation of a European state by invoking both identity issues - the legal personality of the EU and the European diplomatic service would “*subordinate national diplomacies*” and lead to “*an artificial federation*” that would be “*the denial of history, but also of modernity, that is of freedom and singularity*”) and democratic concerns -

the Lisbon Treaty reinforces the Commission's powers to the detriment of national democracies. Most citizens, however, denounce the overcoming of the treaty's rejection as a "*denial of democracy*". In contrast, the Level – Positive category includes (mostly unqualified) evaluations in favour of the Constitution or Lisbon Treaty or arguments for increasing the powers of the EP, as well as stances defending a federal, democratic Europe, created on the model of national democracies: "*Let's be intelligent and support a federal Europe where we would elect through direct suffrage a president of Europe and where we would also elect the European Parliament through direct suffrage*"; "*Europe will begin to passion [citizens] with the construction of the real United States of Europe and the election of its president through direct suffrage*".

Most messages from the Inclusiveness-Negative category (14 cases and 11.9%) express opposition to Turkey's accession to the EU mainly due to religious reasons and the implications it could have on democracy (recurrent references are made to the risk of "islamist drift" or to the interferences of this religion with human rights, namely with women's rights). In an interview to *Le Figaro*, Alain Juppé explains his opposition the Turkish accession "first of all for economic reasons" - he emphasizes that the EU doesn't have the "*capacity to absorb a country like Turkey*" for which it could not provide sufficient structural and cohesion funds as it did for its previous members -, but also for cultural ones, since he is convinced that the EU could have "*an original civilisation project*". Another aspect criticized by citizens is the exclusive character and the inequalities engendered by its capitalist system in its pursuit of profit: "*I am against this oligarchic Europe*", "*Its aim (of capitalism) is, for the activities that can't be easily delocalized, to create a competition in France between French and foreign employees, in order to maintain a high rate of unemployment, put pressure to decrease wages and raise its own profit*". Positions in favor of Turkey's adhesion to the EU –included in the Inclusiveness – positive category - are less frequent than the opposing stances. Moreover, some of them are just indirect messages of other actors' favorable opinion, accompanied by criticism of this position: "by defending Turkey's adhesion to the EU, Lutte ouvrière supports in fact capitalism in its efforts to deregulate the circulation of the workers", "as President of the Commission he has done everything to bury the political Europe - fervent supporter of Turkey's accession, of the doubtful pipeline Nabuco etc. " In the interview for "Le Figaro", Michel Rocard also gives his opinion on this matter: he is in favor of the Turkish accession, namely for geopolitical reasons

(it would help create a stable peace in the Asian region and it would prevent the country from drifting to islamization).

Similarly, the Turkish accession to the EU was the main issue in the communication about the project of integration in Belgium. 3 threads express positions against and 4 in favour of the new enlargement. However, these are in fact indirect evaluations made by French political actors or citizens, disseminated by Belgian readers who copied them into their comments. For instance, we find out that the UMP politician Michel Barnier and the socialists Pierre Moscovici and Michel Rocard (ex-Prime-Minister) support Turkey's accession, the last two even underlining its necessity ("We need Turkey in Europe"). Among the opponents, there is the French blogger who criticized the opinion on the matter of the above mentioned politicians and who also takes the opportunity to stigmatize the undemocratic character of the European construction that doesn't take into account the voice of its people ("If the people don't agree, they are, at choice, idiots, too uneducated to be able to take decisions on important matters or xenophobic").

Project of Integration

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Level - Negative	1	2.1	4.5	4.5
	Inclusiveness - Positive	4	8.3	18.2	22.7
	Inclusiveness - Negative	3	6.3	13.6	36.4
	N/A	14	29.2	63.6	100.0
	Total	22	45.8	100.0	
Missing	System	26	54.2		
Total		48	100.0		

6. Justifications

In France, democracy is the most recurrent justification given for the negative evaluation of the worth of the EU. First of all, the democratic argument grounds the argument that the EU excludes ordinary citizens from the decision-making process. It can be either referred to big lobby groups being accused of having a significant impact on EU politics or of citizens' complaints about their voice not being taken into account by EU decision-makers,

namely after the disregard of the French “no”. Consequently, criticism at the EU pictures citizens as being excluded from the benefits of integration: the “ultra-liberal” Europe is perceived as exclusively benefiting to the elite while being adverse to the mass of citizens. It is still a democratic perspective which justifies the rejection of the Lisbon treaty considered to be a duplicate of the Constitution which is being imposed upon the citizens despite their negative vote in 2005. Other messages also consider the present EU undemocratic because of the important role of an unelected body like the Commission in the decision-making process: “The big disparity between the expanding and more important competences delegated to the Commission and its lack of democratic accountability has become unsustainable. It nurtures the citizens’ lack of confidence in Europe”. Corollary, democracy is also used to legitimate a federalist vision of Europe with a Commission as a “democratic government” formed by the majority in the EP.

Justification of Worth - France

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Democracy	39	23.2	33.3	33.3
	Culture	5	3.0	4.3	37.6
	Necessity	11	6.5	9.4	47.0
	Economic Prosperity	2	1.2	1.7	48.7
	Safety	10	6.0	8.5	57.3
	Other	1	.6	.9	58.1
	N/A	49	29.2	41.9	100.0
	Total	117	69.6	100.0	
Missing	System	51	30.4		
Total		168	100.0		

A further significant set of claims involves need for more integration as the main justification for their opinion. Most of them advocate a federal Europe and justify their stance with the need for cooperation in the current era of globalization. The EU is often accused of eroding the nation-states’ sovereignty, but paradoxically, it is it is often seen as the only means to maintaining n decision-making power on the world stage: *“In a context of*

globalization, it is completely unreasonable to want to detach ourselves from an organization that can enable us to have a say on the world stage. Because we have to stop deluding ourselves: the French hegemony is a myth”; “It is through a federal pact, defining who does what and engaging all the partners, that, thanks to the subsidiarity principle, we will be able to preserve a certain sovereignty, of course limited, but controlled and guaranteed at the European level, through a federal pact that Europe will be able to function”. The “necessity” justification can also correlate with positive evaluations of the current state of the EU and of the progress it has brought about (peace, democracy, economic prosperity). The safety justification of worth corresponds to the evaluations highlighting the exclusivist nature of the EU and advocating for a more protective and social Europe. Understood in terms of security and peace, it is also the main motivation for Michel Rocard’s support of the Turkish accession which, in his view, will contribute to the stabilization of peace in the region.

In Belgium, necessity is the most recurrent argument (7cases). It is used both by those who criticize the level of MEPs’ wages and imply that money should be spent differently in order to have better results as well as by those who argue that these wages are justified since they can keep MEPs’ away from possible bribery by lobbyists or simply because their work needs to be properly rewarded.

Justification of Worth - Belgium

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Democracy	3	6.3	13.6	13.6
	Culture	2	4.2	9.1	22.7
	Necessity	7	14.6	31.8	54.5
	Economic Prosperity	3	6.3	13.6	68.2
	Safety	1	2.1	4.5	72.7
	N/A	6	12.5	27.3	100.0
	Total	22	45.8	100.0	
Missing	System	26	54.2		
Total		48	100.0		

A democratic perspective is adopted when criticizing the balance of power within the EU institutional design, namely the monopoly of the legislative initiative by the unelected Commission and the “decorative” function of the EP. This viewpoint also underlies critiques of the “progress” of the European integration in the defiance of the people’s will and the denunciation of the elitist character of the EU (“a minority of profiters”). At the same frequency as democracy (3 cases), economic prosperity is also invoked. In this sense, citizens complain about the use of the euro or in general about the expensive life or the unemployment that the UE represents and point out to the discrepancies that exist between the elites of the system who benefit from it and the ordinary citizens who have to cope with the present economic difficulties.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse the public expression of Euroscepticism on the web during the 2009 European election campaign. The investigation of the most visited information websites and political blogs allowing for citizen participation supports three main hypotheses regarding the performance, the evaluation of worth and the public resonance of Euroscepticism in France and French-speaking Belgium. The first main conclusion is that contestation of the legitimacy of the EU had a rather low salience during the campaign for the 2009 EP election. Values for the number of claims criticising the EU are rather low and the absence of an existential or substantial issues point to a rather poor debate. This can be explained by suboptimal conditions for the performance of Euroscepticism including the lack of interest within the constituencies and the weakness of the Eurosceptic actors. In France, the Eurosceptic peripheral actors were numerous but very fragmented. The campaign mainly turned into oppositional politics with criticism at the President being at the forefront. The low frequency of criticism of the EU in French-speaking Belgium reflects the structural weakness of Eurosceptic actors who are mainly concentrated at the right wing of the Flemish political spectrum. These findings also account for the weak resonance of Euroscepticism within the public sphere during the 2009 European election campaign, which was also confirmed by the election results themselves. In France, the greatest success was the boom of the green list *Europe-Ecologie* which did not use Eurosceptic rhetoric but, on the contrary, advocated a more integrated EU at the political, social and environmental level. While the European election is often considered as a favourable political opportunity for smaller Eurosceptic parties, these achieved only limited results in spite of new groupings.

The distinction between the different dimensions of Euroscepticism allows for a nuanced analysis of the evaluation and justification of worth. While the principle of integration is not contested – and, on the contrary, often welcomed – the nature of the current EU polity and the future of the EU project are the object of negative evaluations by political actors and citizens. The evidence supports the hypothesis that it is not so much the themes of identity and sovereignty loss which are invoked. Rather, justifications in terms of the democratic, social and geopolitical nature of the EU are crucial. In France, the predominant negative evaluations of the EU target its economically neoliberal bias at the expense of ordinary citizens and the undemocratic nature of the European integration process. In this respect, the EU Commission and its President are often targeted and epitomize, for many citizens, the bureaucratic and neoliberal face of integration. Furthermore, the 2005 referendum has imprinted a strong mark with respect to the EU issues in France and the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty was often denounced as a negation of democracy. Furthermore, the Turkish accession to the EU crystallises the fears related to the boundaries of the future EU polity. In Belgium, controversial debates about the EU are much less present. The populist theme of the “spender-EU” only benefiting to the Eurocrats is the most identifiable element of a Eurosceptic discourse and MePs are more often targeted. All in all, these themes expressing social fears and institutional distrust converge in the diagnosis of an elitist and exclusive EU. These findings are in line with strands of the literature which have emphasised the prevailing of economic and social fears as well as institutional distrust as the main Eurosceptic arguments in France and French-speaking Belgium. In Flanders, where the ethno-regionalist parties concentrate more on the defence of regional identity and sovereignty, the eurorealist discourse of the *Lijst Dedecker* mainly grounded on the criticism of the over-bureaucratic nature of the EU has been more successful in garnering votes in the 2009 election. In France, the FN and the sovereignist parties of the far right, such as Philippe De Villiers’ party and *Chasse, pêche, nature et traditions*, have also engaged massively with the anti-liberal discourse and the advocacy of economic protectionism and the defence of the French social model.

The third hypothesis was that similar justifications and arguments could be used to defend opposed stances over integration, especially as far as the prognostic (what should be done) is concerned. Indeed, the EU is both accused of eroding the national sovereignty of its members states and seen as the only possible way of preserving effective sovereignty with regard to globalization; its federalization is denounced by some as the end of national democracies, while being presented by others as the sole means of transforming it into a true democracy with a directly elected president or at least a Commission nominated according to

the majority in the EP. The contrasted arguments behind similar criticism might reflect the cognitive difficulty for the citizens to acknowledge the legitimacy of a hybrid political system whose integration is 'stuck' half way between a confederation of sovereign states and a supranational federation.

Finally, the comparative aspect of the chapter also provides for interesting insights. One main difference in the dynamics of the campaign in France and French-speaking Belgium is that visibility, performance and resonance of Eurosceptic themes and actors in France were mainly fed by references to the rejection of the ECT. The ratification of the Lisbon treaty in spite of the majoritarian 'no' vote in 2005 is a main issue of resent among political actors as well as citizens involved in political communication in the electronic public sphere. This is arguably a hint that research should pay more attention to the longitudinal dynamics of Euroscepticism. Present and future discursive constructions and re-constructions of a critical discourse over European integration or, in other words, the various actors' ability to perform a Euroscepticism, might be well dependent on previous political "moments" marking the different national public spheres.

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