

WP 5 – Civil Society and the Public Sphere

Euroscepticism in the European Parliament Elections of June 2009 Country Report: France and Belgium

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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 as well as 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 public opinion in a transversally with respect to the traditional left/right cleavage. On the left, the souverainist leader and member of the Socialist Party J. P. Chevènement created his own party, the *Mouvement des Citoyens*. On the right, major Gaullist personalities, C. Pasqua and P. Seguin, advocated the rejection of the Maastricht treaty together with the xenophobic radical right embodied by P. de Villiers, on one hand, and the leader of the *Front national* J. M. Le Pen on the other. Progressively, however, the social critique of Europe prevailed over souverainist concern. The policies related to the European Monetary Union can be identified as the cause for fears related to the social consequences of intergration. In this respect, the traditional 'social critique' of Europe was reinvigorated by the coming of age of the alterglobalist movement with the creation of Attac in 1998. In the meantime, the Communist party operated a reconversion from an *anti* to an *alter*-European programme. As to the Socialist Party, the resurgence of older hostility towards the neo-liberal aspects of integration provoked the splitting of the party in the referendum campaign over the European constitutional treaty (ECT) in 2005. Social concern and massive mobilization of the electorate from the left explains to a very large extent the rejection of the ECT.

Eurobarometer data indicates a drop of support¹ for integration from 61% in 1973 to 49% in 2009, with respectively 5 and 21% people thinking that EU membership is a bad thing. However, the Eurobarometer shall be seen as a very limited indicator for conflict potential over the EU given the important short-term fluctuations. The figures for October 2007, for instance, were respectively of 60% of support and 12% of resent.

When compared to the others EU member states, Belgium can be seen as a europhile country. At the origins of European integration, the federalist movement was strong in Belgium with the three major political families having their 'father of Europe': P. H. Spaak for the Socialist movement, P. Van Zeeland for the Christian Democrats and J. Rey for the Liberals. Even later, some Belgian personalities have inspired major impulsions to the integration process, such as the Christian Democrat Léo Tindemans who advocated a common currency, a common foreign and defence policy and the strengthening of the European assembly in a famous report as early as in 1975. Until now, the main Belgian political parties have consistently called for 'more Europe'. However, criticism towards Europe was not inexistent in Belgium. Already in the first days of integration, the Socialist movement was divided with some personalities being critical of the modalities of the project. After a time of euphoria with the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the unions were very disillusioned towards the 'liberal' turn epitomized by the treaty of Rome. This led them to withdraw to the national level. Furthermore, criticism at the EU has increased over the last ten years, both on the left and on the right of the Belgian political spectrum. Overall, the Belgian public opinion remains nevertheless highly supportive of European integration with opinions about EU membership being a 'good thing' fluctuating between 57 and 66% between 1973 and 2008. Against this background, this paper will: 1. review the literature about euroscepticism in France and Belgium; 2. seek to identify the main actors framing euroscepticism with regard to the 2009 EP election; 3. seek to identify the main arenas where euroscepticism is voiced.

Euroscepticism in France and Belgium

A brief state of the art

Following the issues highlighted by Trenz and De Wilde this section will successively deal with: i) public opinion; ii) party politics and the issue of cleavages; iii) civil society organisations; iv) the normative dimension of this research topic. It first focuses on France. Due to the very scarce literature, Belgium is handled in a separate and shorter sub-section section.

There is an abundant literature on French public opinion and European integration. B. Cautrès has probably become the most prominent student of French electoral studies with a strong focus on the European elections and the Eurobarometer. While using both quantitative methods combined with qualitative insights, his - often collaborative - research seeks to highlight the multi-faceted explanations for the rebellious attitude of the French electorate in European consultations. He highlighted the macro-social variables, the political culture or changes within the French political system (Cautrès 1998, 2001, Cautrès & Denni 2000, Cautrès & Mayer 2004, Cautrès & Sinnott 2000, Gérard Grunberg & Cautrès 2007). 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, Gérard Grunberg & Cautrès 2007, Percheron 1991, Reungoat forthcoming, Schild 2001). Many analyses highlight social pessimism as a factor determining the lack of support for integration (Belot & Cautrès 2004, Cautrès 2000, Cautrès & Denni 2000). In other words, according to many scholars, the European integration suffers from an elitist bias (Costa & Magnette 2007). This analysis has largely

¹ « Do you think that European membership is a good or bad thing for your country ? »

been confirmed by the rejection of the European constitutional Treaty by 54.7% of the French on 29 May 2005. Analyses of the campaign and the vote unanimously identified socio-economic issues as the main driver of the campaign and social fears as a factor for the 'no' vote (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. Notwithstanding the shock provoked by the 2005 failed referendum in France, the French opinion is not seen as intrinsically hostile to European integration in the academic literature. Studies on the relationship between European and national identity did not find out that the French are more nationalistic or less European than other European citizens, for instance the Germans (Schild 2001). Therefore, literature about Euroscepticism in France stresses the importance of both cognitive (education) (Hanley 1983, Inglehart 1970) and utilitarian variables (profession, class) (Gabel 1998) over national identity (Belot 2002). Furthermore, polarization between national and European identities is greater in contexts of elections or consultations when the salience of Europe in the public sphere is higher (Frognier & Duchesne 2002). In the same vein, some recent research points out the importance of discourses over Europe in framing citizens' perceptions complementary to the influence of sociological variables (Schmidt 2007, Wiesner 2008). The formation of *perceptions* of European integration and its consequences is a potentially fruitful – and so far under-researched – causal mechanism mediating sociological variables and individual attitudes. This leads to the issue of the political parties' attitudes towards Europe.

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. However, unlike a strong trend in the literature (FitzGibbon 2008, Hooghe 2007, Kopecky & Mudde 2002) there is no focus on the dichotomy ideology vs strategy in the French literature. Rather, both 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 emphasizing the defence of the French sovereignty. In the same way, P. De Villiers could make his way through the opportunity structure provided by the French party system while forming a souverainist list together with the dissident Conservative C. Pasqua which gathered 13.1% of the votes at the 1999 European election (Hainsworth, O'Brian, & Mitchell 2004). 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). Left euroscepticism typically criticizes the lack of citizen involvement in the European decision-making process and reinforces the idea that euroscepticism is essentially the "politics of opposition" (Milner 2004). This is also a central hypothesis in the euroscepticism literature (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, on one hand, and mainstream pro-European parties on the other (Taggart 1998). Firstly, scepticism towards Europe has long existed within mainstream parties in France. Euroscepticism on the right is solidly grounded on Gaullist values emphasizing the defence of French sovereignty (Hainsworth, O'Brian, & Mitchell 2004). An abundant literature on the left similarly shows that there have been some fluctuating but persisting resistances towards the liberal aspects of EU integration among the Socialists. This opposition goes back as far as the rejection of the European Defence Community in 1954 (Bergounioux 1996, Bergounioux & Grunberg 2005, Pascal Delwit 1995). It has been demonstrated elsewhere that, while these latent resistances could be repressed under F. Mitterrand's pro-European leadership, they could also be re-activated under a favourable configuration of opportunity structure in the 2005 referendum campaign (Crespy 2008a,

Crespy 2008b). This supports the views of scholars who stress the importance of institutional opportunity structures as a factor generating euroscepticism (Harmsen 2005a, 2005b). The earthquake of the 29th May 2005 is to a large extent due to a very active campaign by a large leftist front – the *Comité national pour un non de gauche* – involving all leftist forces, from the Communists to the Trotskyites, from the Greens to the leftist Republicans, and from Attac to the dissidents from the PS as well as some important fringes from the unions. The *Comité national* spread into hundreds of local committees which raised an extraordinary interest for Europe while organizing thousands of meetings at the local level (Crespy 2008a, Crespy 2008b). Secondly, and corollary, eurosceptic splinter parties which appeared both on the left and on the right in the 1990s, namely P. de Villers' and C. Pasqua's *Mouvement pour la France* and J. P. Chevènement's *Mouvement des citoyens*, were both founded by leaders of respectively the Conservative (RPR) and the Socialist Party (Nicolaidis & Schmidt). They were both grounded on a new ideological synthesis qualified as social nationalism which pictures the EU as a historically and geographically flawed and anti-democratic project at odds with France's institutions and threatening the French economic prosperity and identity (Benoit 1997). In his very polemical 2005 book, D. Reynié applies the notion of social-nationalism to all parties and movements of the left which campaigned for the 'no' in 2005 (Reynié 2005).

Many scholars therefore consider that European integration is a transversal issue which has affected the French party system in the 1990s. However, they are not unanimous as to what extent in which manner. While some authors have argued that European integration did not bring about any major change in the French political system (Bidégaray & Emeri 1996), others have argued that it nevertheless reflected the mutation of traditional cleavages in the 1990s (Perrineau 1996). Many contended that support or opposition for the EU could be seen as a new source of political and social cleavage in France (Belot & Cautrès 2004, Gérard Grunberg & Cautrès 2007, Gérard Grunberg & Schweisguth 1997, Sauger 2005). Europe is also seen as a source of renewal for the traditional left/right cleavage (Sauger 2005). As A. Roger (Roger 2008) underlines, the French scholars tend to emphasize the transformative power of Europe more than it is the case in the international literature, where European integration is more frequently seen as a 'non-cleavage' absorbed by traditional cleavages (Harmsen 2005b, 2005c, 2005d), or as a source of confusion (Bartolini 2005, Mair 2000).

Literature on civil society and euroscepticism remains scarce in the French context. The central question has been the europeanization of collective action rather than the contestation of Europe (Balme, Chabanet, & Wright 2002, Sommier, Fillieule, & Agrikoliansky 2008). Euroscepticism or 'eurocriticism' has emerged as an epiphenomenon in research about the alterglobalist – or global justice – movement which considers the EU as the 'Trojan horse' of neoliberal globalization (della Porta 2006). Especially in France, Attac has played a major role in conveying a specific leftist critical discourse about the EU in the public sphere (Wintrebert 2007). The 1995 major strikes against the reform of the pension system planned by the government is often seen as the first revolt against globalized neo-liberalism hence as the founding moment for the French alterglobalist movement. However, it has been demonstrated that the original target of the movement was the "Europe of Maastricht" and the perceived detrimental consequences of the monetarist macroeconomic policies imposed upon the French system in the frame of the European Monetary Union (Contamin 2005, Gordon & Meunier 2002): 125-130). Ten years later, the eurocritical alterglobalist discourse had spread out into the entire French political radical and moderate left (Crespy 2008a) and was very efficient in mobilizing against the ECT in 2005 (Dufour 2009). Leftist euroscepticism takes nevertheless various ideological shapes with regard to economic and identity issues (Heine 2007, 2008a). Furthermore, J. Lacroix (Lacroix 2008) explored how important fringes of the French intellectuals have elaborated sophisticated arguments about the inadequacy of the European space for the exercise and legitimation of democracy. Unions

have also become relevant actors with respect to protest against EU policies, in particular as far as liberalization directives are concerned (Hilal 2007). In the case of the Bolkestein directive, it has been argued that protest against the liberalization of services ‘spilled over’ to a broader contestation of the entire EU economic and political system (Crespy 2009). 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).

It is however striking that contestation of EU integration among civil society is never phrased as ‘euroscepticism’ in the French literature. Many French and Belgian scholars have explicitly taken distance with the notion of euroscepticism which is seen rather as a topical notion and political weapon stigmatizing the actors at stake (Crespy & Verschueren forthcoming, Heine 2008a, 2008b, Lacroix & Coman 2007, L. Neumayer 2007, L. Neumayer, Roger, Antoine, Zalewski, Frédéric 2008). M. Le Boulay (Le Boulay 2008) for instance investigated how euroscepticism was constructed by journalists and academic observers in the aftermath of the treaty of Maastricht in France, while this did not happen in Germany in spite of very similar objective indicators for the level of mass support for integration. Some scholars have also criticized the interpretation by major academic personalities and politicians of the French ‘no’ as an irrational vote (Frinault & Guionnet 2008). Distance with the notion of euroscepticism furthermore reflects the endeavour to develop renewed theoretical approaches of this phenomenon; regardless whether seen from a sociological perspective of mass-level euroscepticism based on qualitative in-depth interviews (Gaxie & Hubé 2007) or from an historical and constructivist perspective focused on discursive representations of Europe (Crespy & Verschueren forthcoming). Euroscepticism has therefore been analysed as a manifestation of the increasing politicization of European integration and as contestation of its imperfect democratic character rather than as an undemocratic reaction to the building of the EU.

Due to Belgium’s europhile status mentioned in the introduction, literature about euroscepticism in this country is very meagre. Apart from the Eurobarometer data, a survey on sources of mass-level euroscepticism in Belgium has been conducted in the frame of the EU-funded project Intune. The conclusions claim that:

[N]egative 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, while education, national attachment, exclusive identity, actor-oriented distrust, and political inefficacy have a smaller, but significant impact.

(Abst, Heerwegh, & Swyngedouw 2009).

As in the French literature, the identity-based explanation is rejected but, unlike in the French literature, education is deemed irrelevant. The interesting point here is that the emphasis is put on subjective (evaluation of benefits, distrust) rather than objective variables (income, education). This confirms the need for paying more attention to perceptions of the EU and its consequences, but also to the mechanisms mediating between objective and subjective explanatory factors. As far as organized politics are concerned, Belgian actors have consistently been seen very supportive of the EU. Nevertheless, some more attentive scholars provided evidence that support for integration in Belgium was not as unanimous as it is often claimed. In particular, 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 at the economic level and of its intergovernmental bias allowing for less union participation at the institutional level. This nevertheless led them to withdraw to the national level and to abandon Europe rather

than to contest it (Verschuere forthcoming). From the mid-1950s, the Belgian Socialist parties and unions have therefore consistently combined a principled support for more integration with critical views on the actual European policies and institutions. As in France, they have increasingly voiced critical claims for 'another Europe' in the last years (Bursens & Mudde 2005). The Socialist union FGVB is much more inclined to protest than the PS and the Spa and is closer to more radical civil society organizations such as Attac. While no party called for the rejection of the 2005 ECT, resentment towards 'the neo-liberal EU' was relatively widespread within the leftist circles. In 2004, a coalition composed of the French-speaking PS, the unions and associations belonging to the Belgian Social Forum pioneered contestation against the Bolkestein directive proposal for services liberalization in the EU and allowed for the diffusion of protest towards other countries and the EU level (Crespy 2009). 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 arguably comes from the strong nationalist and populist right in Flanders epitomized by the Vlaams Belang. Because of its ideology grounded in ethnic nationalism, the Vlaams Belang blames the "Euro-Brussel" (Bursens & Mudde 2005, Mudde 2000). However, it does not claim a frontal opposition to Europe: rather, it advocates a confederal Europe where the peoples can enjoy an intact sovereignty (Bursens & Mudde 2005). The Belgian case therefore shows how difficult it is to distinguish between hard and soft euroscepticism. It seems more fruitful to pay attention to conflicting representations of Europe – such as 'Europe of the nations' or 'Europe of the peoples', 'social Europe', etc - grounded in well-established political ideologies. This nevertheless does not give an answer as to which from the citizens or from the parties cue each other.

To conclude, it is striking that euroscepticism is not an institutionalized research area as such in France and Belgium. It remains an epiphenomenon for scholars of public opinion and political parties. Literature on euroscepticism in France accounts for a quite high salience of European issues in French politics both with respect to public opinion and to the effects of Europe on the French party system. In this respect, France is rather an exception in the European landscape (Andersen & Evans 2005). Apart from the authors using the Eurobarometer and survey data, research on euroscepticism remains too often poorly grounded empirically, although this is changing with a younger generation of scholars. While the sociological insights are traditionally strong in the French political science, there is a willingness to develop alternative theoretical approaches and methods (discourse analysis, focus groups, in-depth interviews with citizens) to the dominant approach of party-based euroscepticism. Euroscepticism in Belgium has so far raised little interest due to its supposed weakness. This is however changing with the increasing criticism at the EU. In both countries, it is striking that literature on euroscepticism remains very focused on political parties. Recent works which have also considered some fringes of civil society provide evidence that the mediating organization between citizens and the realm of organized politics can be fruitful with respect to political cues on European integration.

Key actors in framing Euroscepticism in the EU parliamentary election campaign (January 2009-June 2009)

In France, euroscepticism was concentrated at the fringes of the political spectrum, both on the left and on the right. The political landscape displayed a strong fragmentation with some interesting attempts towards new alliances, though. As far as mainstream parties are concerned, the campaign strategy was very much focused on President Sarkozy. The President's party, *l'Union pour un mouvement populaire* (UMP) (27.8% of the votes), 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* (16.48%) pursued an ambiguous strategy wavering between attacking N. Sarkozy² or a 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. The *Front national* therefore advocates a 'Europe of the states' aiming at giving sovereignty back to the peoples while notably (re)establishing exterior as well as interior borders to protect jobs³. It is worth underlining that there is a sensible shift in the FN's discourse from the issues of immigration and Islam to the more leftist themes such as criticism of neo-liberalism and jobs protection. However, the Turkish membership is still an important topic.

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. Jobs and purchasing power should also be preserved through protectionist policies. The programme remains nevertheless very vague.

Interestingly, Philippe de Villiers' *Mouvement pour la France*, and the traditionalist hunters' movement *Chasse, pêche, nature et traditions* (CNPT) with Frédéric Nihous as a front man allied under the pan-European label *Libertas*. *Libertas* was founded by the Irish businessman Declan Ganley and campaigned successfully against the Lisbon treaty in 2008 in Ireland. It presented about 500 candidates in 12 member states for the 2009 EP election⁴. *Libertas'* main argument is about the EU being undemocratic, technocratic, unaccountable and too costly. In France, Philippe de Villiers and Frédéric Nihous mainly put forward two arguments. The first one is similarly about the need for a more democratic EU. The European Commission is the main target here. Although they do not mention that the EP should have less power, they claim that national democracies should make the law and not a European super-state. The second theme is the one of protectionism. Interestingly, it is not about national protectionism but about a European protectionism enforcing a "*préférence européenne*"⁵. The *Libertas*-list also used populist

² « Pour Mme Aubry, il y a « un seul adversaire : l'UMP », *Libération*, 06.06.2009.

³ M. Le Pen : "Nous, on ne vous a jamais menti, jamais trahis", *Le Monde*, 04.06.2009.

⁴ www.libertas.eu

⁵ Philippe de Villiers : "Il faut un protectionnisme européen", *Le Monde*, 27.05.2009.

argument such as the stigmatization of the “internationalist and neo-liberal elites”⁶ and the claim that Turkey is an Islamist and not a European country. In spite of an alliance strategy aiming at overcoming fragmentation at the national level, the French Libertas list could only gather 4.6% and obtain only one seat since P. de Villiers could be elected in his traditional stronghold of the West.

On the left, the fragmentation of the eurosceptic actors was even stronger. *Lutte ouvrière* (LO), and its new leader Nathalie Arthaud, grounded its campaign on a classical – if not to say old-fashioned – anti-capitalist rhetoric. She pictured an EU dominated by the dictatorship of the financiers. The campaign was focused on the incapacity of the EU to cope with the economic crisis given the exploding unemployment⁷.

The *Nouveau Parti anti-capitaliste* (NPA), whose front man is Olivier Besancenot, formulates a similar discourse. It was the first time that the dynamic Trotskyite party competed for an election since the re-foundation of the *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire* and the anti-capitalist turn in 2008-2009. In comparison with LO, the NPA epitomizes better the renovation of anti-capitalism and the convergence between radical unionism and alterglobalism. The popular O. Besancenot advocates radical reform of the economic system as a response to the global crisis. His main argument is that more money should be put into the wages instead of into the banks and share-holders’ profit. While the NPA was seen as a threat for the extremely weakened PS, it could only achieve a disappointing 4.9 % of the votes without any candidate being elected as an MEP.

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 founded only a few months ago by the well-known eurosceptic personality Jean-Luc Mélenchon. The European election is known for being favourable to smaller protest parties. However, it is questionable whether such a party can be seen as radical since it rather advocates, as the PC, classical Keynesian policies. There were attempts at allying with the NPA, but without success. 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 left⁸. As far as European policies are concerned, the stress is very much put on the protection of public services and workers’ rights protection and extension throughout the EU. With 6% of the votes and four seats in the EP, the *Front de gauche* achieved its objective which was to prevail over the NPA in the struggle for supremacy at the ‘left of the left’.

Last, but not least, the 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 (including for instance a minimum income, the instauration of a Tobin tax, etc). The capacity of the list to rally broader and campaign on the ground really focused on European issues might be the reasons for its historical success. It indeed achieved the 16.28 % of the votes, that is only 0.2 points less (and as many seats) than the PS! It seems that the capacity to develop radical propositions for reforming the EU without resorting to the eurosceptic

⁶ « Frédéric Nihous (Libertas), contre les élites “mondialistes et ultralibérales” », *Le Monde*, 29.05.2009.

⁷ « LO : Nathalie Arthaud plaide pour une Europe “débarrassée des exploiters” », *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 01.06.2009.

⁸ www.frontdegauche.eu

rhetoric and thus to reconcile the '*France du oui*' and the '*France du non*'⁹ had a strong appeal on the French electors.

It is worth underlining that all the actors EU referred to the 29th May 2005 referendum as a great moment of critical and democratic expression. N. Sarkozy's strategy consisting in calling the parliament to ratify a similar treaty is therefore considered as a denial of democracy. The two new groupings at the left of the political spectrum, namely the *Front de gauche* and *Europe-Ecologie*, can therefore be seen as attempts to bear the heritage of the successful campaign led by the leftist front in 2005. The reference to the referendum campaign was most explicit for the *Front de gauche* since the Communist leader M. G. Buffet and the former Socialist J. L. Mélenchon were two leading figures of the 'no campaign'.

Finally, political parties resorted less than usually to public support of intellectuals and show business personalities¹⁰. This tradition in French politics, especially on the left, seems to fade. However, the NPA exhibited proximity to Ken Loach, while the *Front de Gauche* enjoyed the support of the philosophers Régis Debray and Michel Onfray.

Europe was conspicuously absent from the Belgian campaign. This is mainly due to the fact that a regional election took place at the same time. The campaign was therefore focused on national and regional issues and there was almost no attention paid to European issues. This is reinforced by the fact that parties do not compete over Europe, and, in spite of compulsory voting, interest for Europe among the citizens is also very low (Pilet & Brack). 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. There was a dispute as several mayors in the Flemish Brabant refused to organize the European election in their constituency to protest against the anti-French linguistic policy led in Flanders. This is a very peculiar case of instrumentalization of the European election with regard to regional matters. 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. Although "the relations between the Flemish community, a Europe of the peoples; Indo-Europe, the great European empire and the Western alliance are not clear", the logic of the Vlaams Belang's international ideology remains highly dependant on the ethno-nationalistic populism (Swyngedouw, Abts, & Van Craen 2007: 97). Interestingly, the separatist party amalgamates criticism at the lack of transparency and inefficiency characterizing the institutional structure of the EU, on one hand, and of Belgium, on the other hand. The Vlaams Belang came considerably weakened out of the 2009 EP election with 10.88% of the votes when compared to 2004 where it was the first Flemish party.

This time, it had to compete with a new eurosceptic actor, the *Lijst Dedecker* (LDD) founded in 2007 for the federal election. The LDD developed a different style of euroscepticism, namely ultra-liberal euroscepticism. In this respect, it is interesting to underline that the head of the *Lijst Dedecker* was Derk Jan Epping, the former chief cabinet of the disparaged Commissioner Frits Bolkestein. Derk Jan Epping made a statement claiming ideological proximity to the Czech President Vaclav Klaus¹¹. Actually, LDD refuses the eurosceptic label and calls itself 'eurorealist' since it accepts the existence of the EU but is critical of its too bureaucratic functioning, of the democratic deficit and of the EU "green fundamentalism"¹².

⁹ « '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

¹⁰ « Le soutien des intellectuels divise la gauche de la gauche », *Le Monde*, 03.06.2009.

¹¹ „Vaclav Klaus raakte juiste snaar“, <http://www.lijstdedecker.com/nl/vaclav-klaus-raakte-juiste-snaar-derk-jan-eppink-754.htm>

¹² „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.

Key arenas of framing Euroscepticism in the EU parliamentary election campaign (January 2009-June 2009)

Both mainstream and alternative media seem to be relevant arenas where euroscepticism is framed, although in different ways. Many eurosceptic actors have a fairly good access to the mainstream media in France, namely television and quality press. In the main daily papers (*Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*), a significant number of articles were dedicated to rather marginal actors among the 161 lists competing for the EU election¹³. The campaign started very late with about 45% of the quality press coverage in the sole last week. There is no main pro-European-Eurosceptic cleavage among the French media. All are quite sympathetic to European integration, with the Communist daily *L'Humanité* nevertheless voicing the leftist criticism at the EU quite actively. All newspapers underlined the fragmentation and the contradictions among the left wing, with a very weak PS still in search of a renewal of its ideological profile and leadership. Every 29th May is also an opportunity to analyze how the former 'left of the no' is mobilizing. The left-oriented press is more prompt to see the new dynamics among the actors of the 'no' as positive¹⁴, while *Le Figaro* underlines the contradictions and uncertainties¹⁵. The overrepresentation of eurosceptic actors in comparison to their actual electoral strength is even stronger on television. This is due to the regulation of broadcasting by the *Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel* (CSA) which imposes on the TV channels and radio stations to offer a 'fair' access to all election candidates¹⁶. This is important insofar as the press has a narrow readership in France and most French are informed about politics only through the television. There were very few talk shows on the big channels dedicated to the European election. Two main shows were broadcasted only a few days before the election: *Mots croisés* on the 25th May and *A vous de juger* on the 4th June (both on *France 2*). While the first show gave the floor to Nathalie Arthaud and Nicolas Dupont-Aignan, the second show invited Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Olivier Besancenot, Philippe de Villiers, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen. The overrepresentation effect is particularly important for marginal lists such as *Lutte ouvrière* or Nicolas Dupont-Aignant's sovereigntist movement, which respectively rallied only 1.2 and 1.77% of the votes.

As far as the digital and internet media are concerned, it seems to reinforce a model of specialization (and fragmentation?) of communication: Europe is rather a specific issue than a common matter of interest with respect to politics. This is reflected both in the mainstream and alternative media. One of the paradoxes of internet is that it replicates to a certain extent the hegemony of quality press since the most visited sites are those of the most famous newspapers. It is striking that Europe is often handled as a specific issue on specific blogs attached to the main papers' site. *Le Monde* has for instance a page dedicated to a selection of the blogs with posts about the European election. *Libération* has his now quite famous blog called *Les coulisses de Bruxelles* run by its Brussels-based correspondent Jean Quatremer. The economics daily *La Tribune* had similarly a blog dedicated to the EU election. Even the smaller Christian Daily *La Croix* has a page called: *Parlons d'Europe*. While these blogs contribute to a greater visibility of Europe in the media-based public space, there is a risk of a lesser mainstreaming of

¹³ see the monitoring of the campaign coverage by the quality press in 22 member states conducted by the Cevipol at the Université libre de Bruxelles. http://dev.ulb.ac.be/cevipol/fr/dossiers_elections-europeennes-2009.html

¹⁴ « Les nonistes soufflent les bougies du référendum », *Libération*, 30.05.2009.

¹⁵ , « Quatre ans après, les partisans du « non » cherchent leur voie », *Le Figaro*, 29.05.2009.

¹⁶ CSA, « Recommandation du 24 mars 2009 en vue de l'élection des représentants au Parlement européen du 7 juin 2009 » (Recommandation of 24th March 2009 on the elections os representatives to the European Parliament on 7th June 2009), www.csa.fr

European issues into the general information about politics: discussions and information about substantial European politics may be relegated into specific pages which only people with a special interest consult. On the other hand, this dual information on newspapers' websites may also contribute to drain a wider public who first gets informed about the campaign in the general news pages towards more specific pages or blogs about Europe.

While they enhance the pluralistic nature of the media, individual blogs or small websites contribute to the specialization of information at the same time. Internet is actually the favorite and most accessible media to movements and political groupings with few resources and a marginal ideological profile. While the mainstream media in France tend to be rather pro-European, internet therefore represents the alternative venue for the framing of euroscepticism. While the Christian movement is, for instance very marginal in France, there are several Christian and royalist blogs which constitute a tribune for P. de Villiers. Interestingly, discourse is less constrained by the politically-correctness and, thus, it is much more radical. For instance, he P. de Villiers claimed in an interview with www.famillechretienne.fr that Turkish membership to the EU contributes to the islamization of Europe, which according to him, is considered ineluctable by President Sarkozy. The existence of a website and/or blog is the only element materializing the existence of some movements, such as the hard anti-European *Alliance pour la résistance des indépendantistes français* which claims the defense of the national identity. The internet is also the most appropriate media today to launch a pan-European protest action or to personalize European politics. French activists were involved in an anti-Barroso campaign during the 2009 European election with several websites and online petitions (www.anyonebutbarroso and <http://a-new-president.eu>) against a second mandate by J. M. Barroso at the Commission Presidency. However, there are almost no blogs or sites in France which are eurosceptic or anti-European in the first place. Euroscepticism does not seem to have a very high salience on the French web, as reflected by the content of some of the most popular blogs, such as *Sarkofrance*, where euroscepticism is absent. Actually, the internet is rather a tool which contributes to the internal communication and to create cohesion within marginal movements or groups. It can nevertheless be very efficient in backing mobilization. In the 2005 referendum campaign, the 'no camp' was able to make a very efficient use of the internet with a constellation of interlinked websites (Fouetillou 2007). An ordinary citizen, Etienne Chouard, even became rapidly a public actor in the campaign after publishing a text¹⁷ elaborating critical arguments against the ECT on his blog. The text was rapidly diffused throughout the public space via the web and provoked some public responses such as one by the Socialist leader D. Strauss-Kahn. Etienne Chouard became famous and was invited on TV. This is an extraordinary example of how content on the web can trigger a public debate within the mainstream media. Whether the web generates or only reflects mobilization on the ground nevertheless remains an open question.

In the 2009 campaign, the main issue was unarguably the response to the global financial and economic crisis. This topic had the advantage of linking both national policies – hence criticism at the government – and the response by the EU. Both the radical left and the radical right argued that the EU's response was inefficient and not sufficiently dealing with the social consequences of the crisis, namely job losses and rocketing unemployment. This can be seen as a new modulation of the 'social Europe' theme. While parties of the left advocates some protectionism, it is not always clear whether enhanced state control over the markets shall be enforced at the EU or at the national level. Moreover, parties of the radical right emphasized the identity issue, the defense of the national sovereignty and the picturing of Turkish membership to the EU as a great danger for the national and/or European identity. Here again, it is nevertheless not clear whether Turkish accession might threaten the national and/or European identity. The ECT remains an important issue in the French debate. *Le Monde* for instance

¹⁷ « Une mauvaise constitution qui révèle un secret cancer de notre démocratie »

launched a call towards those who voted 'no' in 2005 to ask them to explain if and for whom they would vote in the European election.

Assessing the impact of the media on public opinion is an extremely difficult (if not impossible) task which cannot be performed here. When looking at the election results, however, it seems that the French electors were not particularly seduced by the numerous eurosceptic lists which enjoyed a fair level of presence in the mainstream media, since none of these lists achieved the expected scores. There was no eurosceptic push on the internet susceptible to mobilize public opinion either. The results actually rather reflect the balance of power at the national level with a strong UMP, a deliquescing PS and rising Greens. When comparing 2005 and 2009, it is clear that the context of a referendum campaign is much more favorable to the expression of euroscepticism among parties, new alliances and civil society by means of alternative media than the more institutional context of the election for the European Parliament.

The Belgian mainstream press provided a very poor coverage of eurosceptic actors and arguments. Logically, the main actor is the Vlaams Belang. Its main themes are the Turkish accession as well as the fact that the EU is too costly for the Flemish tax payer¹⁸.

Interestingly, the Belgian press covered the strengthening of the eurosceptic forces in neighboring countries such as the UK or the Netherlands¹⁹. Abstention was one of the main issues in the press. Against this background, the Belgians also like to picture themselves as "good Europeans" more interested in the EU than their neighbors²⁰. The response to the crisis was also an important topic with a demonstration gathering 50 000 people in the streets of Brussels on the 16th of May and calling for a more social Europe and for more concrete measures for markets regulation at the EU level²¹. Apart from the Vlaams Belang, which was once the strongest Flemish party, the small and more eurosceptic lists enjoyed virtually no coverage. Indeed, the Flemish nationalist N-VA, the populist ultra-liberal *Lijst Dedeker*, the French-speaking *Front national*, the radical Socialist parties, *Partei van de Arbeid* (PVDA) and the *Parti des travailleurs belges* (PTB) and the Sociaal Liberale Partij (SLP) were barely mentioned in the mainstream press²². The NV-A could nevertheless garner 8.21% of the votes, LDD 4.9% and the PVDA 1.33%. Therefore, unlike the French mainstream press, the very pro-European Belgian mainstream press seems to censure the marginal movements critical of the EU. This may reflect the political practice of the *cordon sanitaire* in Belgium consisting in isolation and stigmatization of the "non democratic parties" such as the Vlaams Belang. This might also be due to the fact the Belgian political landscape is already extremely fragmented with a double French-speaking and Flemish party system, leaving less space for smaller lists in the media than in other countries. Against this background, these small parties make a differentiated use of the internet as an alternative medium for communication. While the N-VA, PTB/PVDA have relatively unsophisticated websites, the LDD and the SLP are quite well integrated into the internet communication sphere with links towards the websites of the associated young organization and think tank (for LDD) or individual blogs and facebook pages (SLP). The blogs in general do not seem to be a highly relevant vector for euroscepticism in Belgium since Europe is rarely an issue on the most popular blogs. There, criticism mainly targets the political establishment and individual politicians. There is therefore no real cleavage between mainstream and alternative/internet media in Belgium, since none of them seems to constitute a favorable venue for euroscepticism.

¹⁸ « Vlaams Belang laat zich niet afschrijven », *De Standaard*, 25.05.2009.

¹⁹ « Les anti-européens pavoisent », *Le Soir*, 16.05.2009.

²⁰ « Les Belges ont un fort intérêt pour l'Europe », *De Standaard*, 19.05.2009.

²¹ « Ils ne veulent pas payer la crise », *Vers l'Avenir*, 16.05.2009

²² See here also monitoring of the campaign by the Cevipol at ULB, including 2 French-speaking and two Flemish papers for Belgium, http://dev.ulb.ac.be/cevipol/fr/dossiers_belgique.html

Conclusion

Euroscepticism is not really a research topic as such in France and Belgium. While public opinion and electoral studies are well developed in France, research on attitudes towards Europe remain too much focused on political parties in connection to classical approaches to party systems and political cleavages. Many of these studies have concluded that European issues are more politicized and more contested in France than in most EU countries. Starting with the opposition of the two most important political movements after World War 2, namely Gaullism and Communism, resistance towards integration progressively decreased with the slow decline of these two movements. In the aftermath of Treaty of Maastricht, euroscepticism was mainly grounded on the defense of sovereignty and was the same time relegated to the fringes of the political spectrum with some eurosceptic leaders founding splinter parties from the two main parties (RPR and PS). The first referendum on a European treaty in France also showed that reluctance was widespread among French citizens. The rejection of the ECT by referendum in 2005 constitutes a crucial moment not only with respect to the relationship between France and the EU but also with respect to the study of euroscepticism. The massive 'no' showed that euroscepticism was not a marginal or radical stance but critical views of the EU were present even within mainstream parties and their electorate as well. It obviated the rise of the social critique of Europe in the second half of the 1990s' concomitant with the coming of age of the alterglobalist movement, which brought a relative ideological reinvigoration of the political left. At the same time, the 2005 political moment also showed that attitudes towards Europe could no longer being comprehended through a binary eurosceptic-pro-European lecture. In particular, social fears related to the consequences of integration can generate harsh criticism towards the EU without meaning a rejection of integration as such. Belgium follows a different pattern than France. It is the model pupil of Europe with political parties and a public opinion remaining very supportive of the EU. However, critical claims have been increasingly voiced in two opposite direction: while the left advocates more integration for building a more social Europe, the radical right claims the defense of regional identity and autonomy within a 'Europe of the peoples'.

In the aftermath of the French ECT rejection in 2005, some scholars have started to pay more attention to mobilization within civil society. Exploring the intermediate level of politics can be particularly interesting for developing future research. While the bulk of today's literature concentrates on either public opinion or political parties, exploring the intermediate level of politics may be fruitful to highlight the political cues and the actors mediating conflicting perceptions of the EU between the citizens and the political systems. However, it is particularly difficult to understand the role of EU critical civil society organizations on a regular basis besides the grand political moments.

The 2009 European election campaign displays a clear euro-apathy, not only among citizens, but also among political parties. In France, the campaign started particularly late and was essentially focused on President Sarkozy's decisions. Even the assertive eurosceptic parties did not succeed in mobilizing the voters. Those who went to the polls mainly voted for the President's pro-EU UMP or for parties combining a euro-critical discourse and a program advocating more integration, namely the PS and *Europe-Ecologie*. In Belgium, due to regional election, Europe remained absent of the campaign. At this stage, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the media. However, the two countries under study seem to display different patterns. One might argue that the mainstream press remains a relevant venue for euroscepticism in France, since eurosceptic actors tend to be overrepresented in comparison to their vote shares. In contrast, eurosceptic ideas are not specifically conveyed through internet websites and blogs. The digital media rather contribute to a dynamic of specialization of the information and communication about the EU. On one hand, blogs and sites dedicated to the EU are addressing an interested public. On the other hand, they are used by marginal and radical movements as a tool for creating cohesion within the community. The web

can nevertheless also be very efficient in feeding euroscepticism among the wider public hence in penetrating the mainstream media, as accounted for by the French 2005 referendum campaign. In Belgium, the eurosceptic actors do not enjoy media coverage as much in France. The very low salience of criticism at the EU is reinforced by the fact that they do not really campaign on European issues. The internet seems to play a negligible role in making Europe more visible to a paradoxical Belgian public opinion who is at the same time traditionally supportive of the EU but not interested in it.

Further research on the role of the internet in conveying eurosceptic ideas should focus on the relationships between the mainstream and the alternative media as well as between the traditional and the digital media. When looking at the 2009 campaign, there is a suspicion that the hierarchy between mainstream and marginal organizations and ideas is also reproduced on the web with the sites of the mainstream news enjoying the largest audience. While the internet is the favorite tool of marginal organizations which are denied access to the mainstream media, the conditions under which the internet can be an efficient tool for mobilizing the wider public need to be further investigated.

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