

WP 5 – Civil Society and the Public Sphere

Euroscepticism in the European Parliament Elections of June 2009 Country Report: The United Kingdom

Asimina Michailidou

ARENA, University of Oslo

Introduction

The United Kingdom (UK) is arguably a case of Euroscepticism *par excellence*. Branded Europe's 'awkward partner' (George 1990), the UK has been a reluctant European Union (EU) member from the outset both in terms of its political choices and in terms of public opinion, as this is voiced through and by media actors, as well as through opinion polls. During the '50s the UK attempted to antagonise the then new-founded EEC, with Whitehall developing an alternative 'Plan G' for a Free Trade area across Europe; a move that not only demonstrated British scepticism towards the Franco-German driven effort for European integration, but also fuelled suspicion and mistrust towards the UK from its continental neighbours (see, for example, (Young 2000)). After the UK's EU accession in 1973, scepticism has continued to characterise not only the country's stance towards the Union, but also the way Britain's role is viewed by its continental counterparts, not least because of key events, such as the 1975 UK referendum on EU membership and the British rebate, which Margaret Thatcher 'forcefully and successfully' negotiated in the 80s (and remains a recurring topic of heated domestic public debate and intergovernmental negotiations ever since).¹

What characterises British Euroscepticism is controversy: UK governments, at the early stages of their coming to power, have appeared to support the EU project and the country's role in it, only to retract on their pro-European rhetoric and acts later on. Moreover, Euroscepticism is not exclusive to party formations that sit at the extremes of the political spectrum: it features in the policy agendas and rhetoric of all political parties, with a tendency for parties to adopt a stronger Eurosceptic position when they are in opposition than when they are in government. At the same time, British public

¹ For a thorough historical analysis of Britain's roadmap to European integration since 1945 see (Daddow 2004).

opinion consistently comes up in opinion polls as strongly Eurosceptic and largely ill informed and/or indifferent towards EU matters. As for the British media, it is telling of their attitude towards the EU that the European Commission EU Representation in the UK has a special service dedicated to rebuffing myths and inaccuracies about the EU circulated in the British press.

Is Britain really so unique in its Euroscepticism among all member states? Does it deserve the title of 'the awkward partner' of the EU? What sets the content of Eurosceptic expressions in the UK apart from their continental counterparts? In order to address these questions, I look at the definitions methods of measurement for Euroscepticism deployed by scholars investigating the British case, as well as key findings concerning expressions of Euroscepticism in party politics, public opinion and the media and compare these with EU-wide definitions, methods and findings. I then focus specifically on the 2009 European Parliament election campaign and identify the key actors and themes that emerged from it.

Euroscepticism: definitions and methods

One Euroscepticism or many?

Scholarly approaches of Euroscepticism in the UK vary widely, both in terms of the conceptual framework and the method(s) deployed to measure Euroscepticism. However, largely, most researchers agree on two points: Firstly, that the term 'Euroscepticism' is multifaceted, meaning that there is no one single expression or source of Euroscepticism in Britain; and secondly, that expressions of Euroscepticism carry, to varying degrees, an evaluative opinion of the EU as an idea and/or of the EU as an integration project.

In its most common and generic use, Euroscepticism refers to a(ny) negative point of view towards the EU (Forster 2002). Although the term first appeared in the public domain in the late 1980s,² Forster traces British Euroscepticism as far back as the Second World War, as '*a particular manifestation of a school of sceptical thought about the value of Britain's involvement with moves towards supranational European integration*' featuring in both of the main British political parties (Labour and Conservatives) (Forster 2002): 2). Similarly, Alexandre-Collier defines Euroscepticism in Britain as a 'particular attitude', which may range from 'simple reticence' to 'open hostility' towards Europe (Alexandre-Collier 2002): 8)³ and largely concerns the value and feasibility of the EU integration process (Alexandre-Collier 1998 in Forster 2002: 2); a definition also adopted by that most reliable of English language resources, the Oxford English Dictionary.⁴

This approach of British Euroscepticism, as a wide-ranging set of attitudes towards the EU based on and driven by the worthiness of the polity as a whole and/or the process of integration coincides with more general definitions of the term outlined by scholars in order to describe the phenomenon of scepticism towards the EU across Europe (see, for example, (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006; Kopecky and Mudde 2002; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007; Taggart 1998; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004)). Perhaps one of the most influential works on Euroscepticism in recent years is that of Taggart and Szczerbiak

² The first public use of the word 'Euro-sceptic' was in The Times, on 30 June 1986, in reference to British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (Hooghe and Marks 2007): 127). The Oxford English Dictionary dates the first appearance of the term 'Euroscepticism' to April 1990, in a book review published in the International Affairs Journal (Hyde-Price 1990).

³ Original text in French: '*l'euroscepticisme désigne donc une attitude particulière, qui oscille entre la simple reticence et la franche hostilité vis-à-vis de l'Europe*'.

⁴ 'Euroscepticism: A tendency to have doubts or reservations regarding the supposed benefits of increasing cooperation between the member states of the European Union (and formerly the European Economic Community); opposition to greater political or economic integration in Europe.' (Oxford English Dictionary 2009).

(op.cit. and (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008), who, in a manner similar to Alexandre Collier, distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' Eurosceptics, thereby acknowledging the range of attitudes such a term encompasses (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008). According to the authors, a 'hard' Eurosceptic stance involves the outright rejection of the project of European (political and economic) integration and opposition to one's own country EU membership. This type of Euroscepticism is rooted in the opposition to the principle of transferring competencies/powers from national to supranational level. On the other hand, 'soft' Euroscepticism is the 'qualified opposition or disagreement on one or more policy areas' (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001): 10).

Taking this distinction further, Vasilopoulou proposes a typology of Eurosceptic types according to the level of European integration for which discontent/opposition is expressed (Vasilopoulou 2009): 6-7):

- Opposition to the principle of EU integration: Rejecting type (rejects any type of collaboration at European level, whether within the EU framework or otherwise);
- Opposition to the practice of EU integration: Conditional type (accepts the principle of integration but rejects the way this is implemented through the EU polity/ *acquis communautaire*);
- Opposition to the future of EU cooperation: Compromising type (accepts the idea/principle of integration and its current practice but opposes further integration).

This typology allows flexibility in measuring Euroscepticism, as it goes some way in acknowledging the finer variations of this form of EU-opposition, which Taggart and Szczerbiak's model does not.

Moving along similar lines, Daddow proposes that 'in order to reflect these various shades of contestation over Europe in individual countries and European party systems, Euroscepticism might need to be rewritten [Euro]scepticism.' (Daddow 2006): 64). This will arguably enable the user to choose the strand of scepticism that reflects his or her position most accurately, namely 'scepticism about the EU, scepticism about the euro or other specific elements of integration or [...] a broader-brush populist scepticism about anything to do with Europe at all.' (ibid.). At the same time, Daddow applies the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' to the camp of Europhiles too: 'Hard Europhile' perceptions are those expressed by scholars in favour of the integration project, while 'soft Europhiles' may show 'sympathy for the idea of integration but with one eye firmly on maintaining consensus-based decision-making and an inter-governmental approach.' (ibid.: 74-75).

Building further on this soft/hard divide, scholars associate Euroscepticism with the process of identity formation. Vetik et al (2006) define Euroscepticism as reactive identity formation', whereby the process of European integration is perceived as a threat to 'the collective worth of "us"' (ibid.: 1085). Following from this it is possible to argue that the greater the perceived threat, the harder the Eurosceptic feeling expressed. We would also expect that the stronger the Euroscepticism expressed by (a segment of the) population, the greater the attachment of this (segment of the) population to the national community/identity to be. Subsequently, the ability to identify with the 'other' will be lower (see (Fuchs, Magni-Berton, Roger 2009; Vetik, Nimmerfelft, Taru 2006).

Bruter also approaches Euroscepticism through the lens of identity formation, distinguishing between three interrelated 'pillars' of identity (Bruter 2008), namely

- Cultural: This pillar corresponds to 'a citizen's sense of belonging to a human community, with which he or she believes he or she shares a certain common culture, social similarities, ethics, values, religion or even ethnicity.' (ibid.);

- Civic: This pillar corresponds to 'a citizen's identification with a political system' (ibid.); and
- General/spontaneous self-assessment' pillar: This concerns the 'overarching aspect of identity', which determines 'whether or not the individual "feels" European, in a way that could relate to the civic and/or cultural components of identity.' (ibid.)

The last pillar is constructed in reference to one or both of the other two, i.e. the individual 'feels' European either in terms of the political system with which s/he identifies, or/and in terms of the values, culture, ethics, religion and/or ethnicity that s/he believes that has in common with the rest of the (European) community.

Going a step further, Wessels associates identity with discontent (Wessels 2007), arguing that when an individual identifies with a political community (Bruter's civic pillar of identity) they are unlikely to express political scepticism or discontent (the 'buffer hypothesis', ibid.: p.290). The more abstract the object of potential discontent, the stronger the 'buffering effect', i.e. the less likely is the individual to express dissatisfaction, once they have developed the civic pillar of their identity. Wessels also proposes that the buffering effect is cumulative (cumulation hypothesis, ibid.):

The framework of political support assumes generalization and suggests the accumulation of support from the specific to the general, as long as positive experience and evaluations persist. Similarly, one may hypothesize that also discontent or scepticism may accumulate [...] (which) over a longer period should translate into generalized discontent, and should spill over from authorities to regime.

Applied to the European level of identity, it follows that

[T]hose with a strong European identity should develop less discontent than those with a weaker or no European identity. Furthermore, the difference in discontent between those with and without European identity should be greatest at the most abstract level of orientations (generalized support for the regime) and lowest at the most concrete level (the specific evaluation of the authorities).

(ibid.: 290-291)

At the same time, once the cumulation effect has reached the level of generalised discontent, we should expect the spillover of discontent with the regime to culminate in a decline in European identity (ibid.). Moreover, similar to the hard/soft categorisation that Taggart and Szczerbiak have developed, Wessels distinguishes between adamant and critical Eurosceptics, using European identity as an additional measurement factor. Specifically, he defines adamant Eurosceptics as those who 'combine scepticism with no attachment to the European political community' and 'demand for a stop of or end to European integration', while critical Europeans 'can combine EU identity with scepticism' and 'demand for improvements of the EU' (Wessels 2007): 300-04).

In a similar manner, in the case of British Euroscepticism, identity is attributed a significant causal role. Gifford (Gifford 2006): 851) defines Euroscepticism as a distinct and powerful national movement asserting conceptions of Britain's exceptional national identity. However, contrary to Wessels's buffer and cumulation hypotheses, Gifford argues that a strong national identity does not lead to a strong European identity, regardless of the level of discontent. Rather, he applies the concept of identity as the opposite of 'other' in a manner similar to Vetik et al and Fuchs et al, discussed earlier:

In a context of imperial decline, the nation has had to be persistently regenerated and there has been a need for an 'other' against which a 'new' Britain can be

redefined. Since the 1970s, 'Europe' and more specifically the project of European integration, has played such a role. [...] Euroscepticism emerged as the guardian of powerful national myths and drew on assumptions about British political identity that appeared to further the process of post-imperial decline.

(Gifford 2006): 856-57).

Finally, one may choose to follow an altogether more optimistic approach of Euroscepticism, such as the one formulated by Krouwel and Abts (Krouwel and Abts 2007). According to the author, political discontent is 'a positive feature of democracy', as this type of governance is 'basically organized distrust' (ibid.: 268-69). Consequently, some level of distrust and political discontent towards the EU is desirable, as it mobilises citizens and enhances participation (ibid.); mobilized and engaged citizens are the 'paragon' of democratic systems and, therefore, scepticism should be viewed as a positive attitude, which functions as a control mechanism for the polity (ibid.). Nevertheless, even Krouwel recognises that (Euro) scepticism may become a tool in the hands of populists, who could transform healthy scepticism into 'more cynic or alienated stances', thus getting citizens to completely turn their backs on politics. Krouwel calls this the 'critical threshold', i.e. the point when levels of political discontent and negativism are so high, that the democratic system may destabilize (ibid.).

Measuring Euroscepticism

Considering there are a significant number of theoretical and conceptual interpretations of the term 'Euroscepticism', it comes as no surprise that there are also several methods deployed for measuring this phenomenon. Broadly categorised, most studies locate Euroscepticism within party rhetoric or public opinion and proceed to measure strength of Eurosceptic opinions/feeling with a) opinion-poll results (quantification of Euroscepticism; cf. de Vries and Edwards 2009; Eichenberg and Dalton 2007; Hix 2007; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007); or b) classification of political party statements (qualification of Euroscepticism; cf. McLaren 2007; Vasilopoulou 2009). It is worth noting that many studies which approach Euroscepticism quantitatively draw on *secondary data* (large-scale opinion polls in member-states and/or across Europe) compiled by governmental bodies or independent opinion poll companies, with all the implications for reliability and comparability that secondary data research entails. Crucially, there is no agreement among scholars regarding the reliability of Eurobarometer measurements of public sentiment towards Europe (cf. Bruter 2008; de Vries and van Kersbergen 2007).

A study which moves beyond the 'traditional' path of Eurosceptic research is that of de Vreese (2007), who innovates on two accounts: Firstly, he focuses on media content as potentially able to 'fuel' Euroscepticism, thereby shifting attention from party politics and public opinion as sources of Euroscepticism. Secondly, he deploys an innovative mixed-methods approach to measure Eurosceptic attitudes. Specifically, he uses experimentation to measure the impact of strategic news coverage on individual Eurosceptic attitudes (a manipulated TV news story was shown to a sample of 83 randomly elected respondents, measuring its impact on their attitudes towards Europe). He then combines panel surveys and media content analysis to map the dynamics of hard Euroscepticism, or 'Euro-cynicism' as he defines it (ibid.).

Studies of British Euroscepticism largely focus on party politics, usually approached from a historical/descriptive perspective, whereby scholars produce evidence of Euroscepticism in the UK political system by giving a historical account of party policies towards the EU and/or party/actor statements on Europe/European integration. Gifford, for example, illustrates the case of right-wing Euroscepticism in Britain by analysing the mobilization of the Eurosceptic wing within the Conservative party during the Maastricht Treaty crisis of the John Major Government (Gifford 2006). Focusing on a factual/historical appraisal of the actions and rhetoric of the Eurosceptic Conservatives, Gifford argues that it was precisely during the Maastricht crisis that right-wing Eurosceptic populism secured its

grip on the Conservative party's European policy, 'traumatising' at the same time the entire British political system (ibid.).

Sherrington also uses a case-study approach to analyse Euroscepticism in party politics (Sherrington 2006). Arguing that 'a more appropriate means of analysing the behaviour of the main UK political parties towards the EU is in terms of their political economy and their take on internationalism' (ibid.: 70), she examines the actions and policies of the three main parties⁵ towards the EU during the Constitutional process period (2000-2005), with a particular focus on the impact that the Iraq war has had on the EU issue, on EP and UK elections and the UK presidency. On the other hand, Daddow, who also approaches British Euroscepticism from a historical perspective, specifically implements Taggart and Szczesniak's definition of 'hard' Euroscepticism discussed earlier, in order to map the manifestations of this phenomenon in post-Maastricht public discourse (Daddow 2006). He, therefore, broadens his focus to include not only party-politics Eurosceptic expressions but also media and pressure-groups discourse.

Baker et al (Baker et al 2008) also provide a historical account of Euroscepticism within the British party system, by looking at the trajectory of Eurosceptic rhetoric (and actions/policies) within each of the main political parties (Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats) as well as regional and minor parties (such as the Scottish National party and the UK Independence party). At the same time, drawing on various sources (Eurobarometer, Mori) they examine quantitative data from opinion polls to conclude that Euroscepticism has not only had support within the British party system throughout the post-Second World War period, but is also highly salient among the British public (ibid.). Evans and Butt (2007) also use quantitative attitudinal data to measure Euroscepticism in Britain. Using datasets from the British Social Attitudes series 1983-2004 and the 1992 British General Election Study survey, they aggregate and combine the data to create a map of British attitudes towards the EU over time (ibid.).

Euroscepticism: Expressions, actors and causes

Party actors

Euroscepticism within the British party system has been thoroughly documented and analysed by a host of scholars (see, for example, Aspinwall 2000; Baker et al 2008; Forster 2002; George 1990; Gifford 2006; Wallace 1995). The term tends to be associated with those politicians within the Conservative party who increasingly contested the project of European integration in the 1980s and 1990s, and eventually succeeded in establishing a Eurosceptic policy line for the Conservative party (Forster 2002; Gifford 2006), as is discussed in the following paragraphs. Nevertheless, Forster traces the history of Euroscepticism in Britain back to the end of the Second World War and Britain's first application for membership to the European community (Forster 2002), pointing out that Euroscepticism is not exclusive to the Conservative party. Moving along similar lines, Baker et al (2008: 94) identify four distinct periods of British Euroscepticism, defined by the actions of the British political elite towards the project of Europe, namely:

- The Euroscepticism-as-'conventional wisdom' phase (certainly in the earlier days of this period), dating from the end of the Second World War and up until Britain's entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1972. Being Eurosceptic during this period was the norm among the British political elite, even after the 'pragmatic economic rationale for membership' became apparent;

- The Euroscepticism-in-the-offence phase; a brief period between Britain's accession in 1972 and the 1975 referendum on Labour's renegotiated terms of precisely this

⁵ The three main British parties are the Labour party, the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats.

membership. During this period, Eurosceptics 'fought a rearguard action to secure Britain's exit from the EEC' without success;

- The 'dormant' Euroscepticism phase, spanning from the year of the referendum until 1988, when according to Baker et al Euroscepticism was not at the fore of political actions and debates in Britain; and finally
- The current phase (late 1980s onwards), when Euroscepticism has become 'fundamental to the contemporary configuration of British politics and general elections'. Baker et al locate the 'catalytic' role of Euroscepticism in current British politics in the acceleration of European political integration, which has fuelled Eurosceptic concerns on issues of sovereignty and national identity (cf. (Evans and Butt 2007).⁶ This, in turn, has accelerated the growth of Euroscepticism within one of the three main British parties, the Conservatives, and has given rise to new Eurosceptic parties, such as UKIP and the BNP, which have gathered significant electoral momentum in recent European Parliament elections (see also Lubbers and Scheepers 2007).

At the same time, a new type of Eurosceptic politicians has come to the fore, those that Baker et al call a 'new breed of Soft Eurosceptics', who present themselves as pro-Europeans but strongly oppose the euro (Baker et al 2008). Similarly, Sherrington notes that in the period of 2000-2005, the 'British agenda' for a 'Europe of states' was consistently promoted by all three main parties. In the aftermath of the Constitutional process (or 'post-Constitutional stalling of the European project', as she calls it), the European issue has become electorally 'damaging' or at least 'unrewarding' for British parties. So much so, that her research uncovered 'almost deafening political silence on the European issue' during the 2005 UK general election 'underwritten by a silent pact between all the major parties' (ibid.: 69 and 76). It, therefore, appears that the main UK parties want to have their cake and eat it. They cannot talk directly about European integration because the political cost would be too high, but they cannot adopt a hard Eurosceptic stance either, as this would not be pragmatic; hence, they deploy a softer type of rhetoric in favour of the European ideal but against integration/specific policies in practice.

The Eurosceptic trajectory of each of the main three British political parties, namely Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats, is presented below, as well as that of the relatively newcomers, the British National Party (BNP) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP).⁷

The Conservative Party

Although in the aftermath of the Second World War the majority of the Conservative Party was Eurosceptic (Baker et al 2008: 97), the UK joined the EU under a Conservative Party government in 1973, while the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty were also signed by Conservative Prime Ministers (Margaret Thatcher and John Major respectively). However, from the late 1980s onwards, Euroscepticism gained significant strength within the party, with Margaret Thatcher herself adopting an anti-European stance. In the early 1990s, the signing and ratification of the Maastricht treaty caused such great divisions within the Conservative Party that Eurosceptic party 'rebels' managed a considerable victory on the party's Europe stance, imposing 'long-term

⁶ See also Gifford 2006 for an analysis of the role that the Maastricht Treaty in particular has had on accelerating British right-wing Euroscepticism, when 'the freedom of the people was posited against a centralising European state' (Gifford 2006: 862).

⁷ The ethno-regionalist Scottish National Party and *Paid Cymru* (Welsh) are excluded from the present review due to space limitations, but they present an interesting case, nevertheless, as, contrary to the bigger British parties, Euroscepticism among their ranks is marginal. See Baker et al 2008. See also Gifford 2006: 854ff for a historical overview of British politics.

constraints on the government's European strategy' (Seldon 1998: 47; see also Forster 2002; Gifford 2006; Gifford 2008).

An attempt in the new millennium by Michael Howard, then leader of the party, to open up to Europe is notable for its contradictory elements (stronger Britain in Europe but more flexible Europe) (Sherrington 2006: 73), while the appearance of UKIP in the British political arena in 2004 sealed the Conservative's turn to Eurosceptic rhetoric (ibid.). Gifford (2006: 865) observes that precisely UKIP's proposed policy of complete withdrawal from the EU

*[H]as allowed the Conservative Party to present itself as the middle way on Europe, despite campaigning for a fundamental reversal of the *acquis communautaire* and the return of powers to the nation state.*

Most recently, the Conservative party has raised its Eurosceptic profile even more with current party leader David Cameron's pledge to hold a referendum on the (already ratified by the UK) Lisbon Treaty, once his party is in government.

The Labour Party

Following an opposite course *vis à vis* the EU to that of the Conservative party, Labour expressed a fiercely anti-European stance in the 1970s and 1980s, but by the early 1990s a shift in its policy was already visible, when Labour acquired its first pro-European leader, John Smith. This process of Eurosceptic/Europhile 'role reversal' continued in the late 1990s and the new millennium, with New Labour's European policy starting out as pro-European. In 1997 Tony Blair's then newly elected government signed the EU's Social Chapter, reversing Thatcher's previous decision to opt out, thus taking an active step towards materializing Blair's pre-election commitment to bring the UK out of its 'isolation' from the rest of Europe. Blair also advocated what was to become the Lisbon agenda, linking Britain's role in Europe with effectively facing up to the challenges of globalisation through close collaboration with its continental neighbours (Sherrington 2006: 71). Nevertheless, Daddow is quick to point out that to consider Blair 'a federalist [...] would be tenuous' (Daddow 2006: 76). Rather, Blair has followed 'a pick-and-choose approach to integration', meaning that his European policies have been determined by Labour's internal party politics (ibid.).

Even so, New Labour's strategy on Europe would take a more Eurosceptic turn later on. A case in point is Britain's refusal to sign the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, under Tony Blair's premiership; another is the retraction of the Labour's pre-election promise on a referendum on the euro. Most recently, however, Labour has again come to be associated with a more pro-European profile, thanks to the Labour government's controversial decisions:

- Not to hold a referendum on the Constitutional treaty (was deemed unnecessary after the French and Dutch 'No' votes); and
- To ratify the follow-up Lisbon Treaty through parliamentary procedures (a referendum was deemed as contravening British law, although the Conservatives are accusing Labour of retracting on its promise to hold a referendum for fear of losing it).

Despite this, the change of New Labour prime ministers in June 2007 has marked yet another turn in the party's rhetoric towards Europe, with current premier Gordon Brown 'notable in his willingness to adopt the language of Euroscepticism' (Gifford 2008: 865; Gifford 2006). This turn towards a more Eurosceptic position has 'clear advantages' for New Labour, as 'it de-radicalizes the impact of European integration in the structure of British politics by implying that it can be made consistent with the particularities of British political and economic development.' (ibid.).

The Liberal Democrats

Unlike the Conservatives and Labour, the Liberal Democrats have been consistently positive towards European integration, if not too pro-European for their own electorate (Clarke and Curtice 1998). Having inherited 'a tradition of enthusiasm for European integration from their forebears in the Liberal Party' and after several restructuring and merging exercises, the (reconstituted) Liberal Democrats emerged in the late 1980s with a solidified pro-European voice (ibid.; see also Sherrington 2006). This has created a paradoxical situation for the party: On the one hand, their pro-European stance attracts the accusation from their opponents that they 'are willing to "surrender" Britain's sovereignty' with the aim to create a truly federal Europe (Sherrington 2006: 74). On the other hand, their own electorate (core and potential) remains largely confused and undecided on all the key EU issues (ibid.).

Nevertheless, Euroscepticism is no stranger to the Liberal Democrats. Nick Harvey was the party's sole parliamentary Eurosceptic in the 1990s, voting against the Maastricht Treaty and in favour of Conservative MP Bill Cash's 1996 Referendum Bill, although he later revised his stance to be more in line with the party's policy (Baker et al 2008: 99).⁸ Parliamentarians John Burnett and Paul Marsden had also consistently voiced their opposition to the euro, until their departure from the House of Commons in 2005 (ibid.: 100). After the UK national elections in 2005, the Liberal Democrats announced an overhaul of their programme and Euroscepticism found a voice in the faces of Chris Huhne and Nick Clegg, shadow chief secretary to the Treasury and shadow minister of foreign affairs respectively. As a newly-elected parliamentarian in 2005, Clegg explicitly declared his opposition to an 'EU constitution', dismissing Europe's political elites as 'threadbare' and the Brussels-led proposals for reform as 'front-end-load solutions' and calling for an end to the 'perpetual Maoist revolutions that emerge from Brussels' (White and Branigan 2005).

The British National Party and the UK Independence Party

Among the several minor political parties in the UK, the BNP and UKIP stand out because they have gained significant momentum in the past few years, so that the title 'minor parties' is perhaps no longer fitting for them. Although their ideological origins are different, both advocate a 'hard' Eurosceptic stance.⁹

The BNP is a far right wing party with an unmistakably racist and xenophobic agenda but which cleverly deploys a rhetoric of civil rights and anti-discrimination to publicise its positions. Indicative of this is the party's mission statement, according to which the aim of the BNP is to

[S]ecure a future for the indigenous peoples of these islands in the North Atlantic which have been our homeland for millennia [...] addressing the fundamental issues of civil liberties and reverse discrimination.

(The British National Party 2009a).

The term 'reverse discrimination' is used to denote that it is no longer the immigrants or minority ethnics who face discrimination in the UK, but the majority ethnic Britons, who the BNP understands to be the descendants of

⁸ Bill Cash's Referendum Bill provided for the holding of a referendum on the United Kingdom's continuing membership of the European Union, 11 June 1996.

⁹ It is also worth noting that neither the BNP nor UKIP are represented in the UK national parliament, although both parties have some marginal representation in local councils across the country. In the 2009 local council elections, UKIP had 7 councillors elected and BNP had 3, out of a total of 2362 councillors that were elected in the 34 councils across England.

[T]he Celts, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, Norse and closely related kindred peoples have been, over the past few thousands years, instrumental in defining the character of our family of nations.

(ibid.).

Since its foundation in 1982, the BNP has consistently supported a hard Eurosceptic line, advocating the withdrawal of Britain from the EU (Baker et al 2008). It is also against the single currency and, while not rejecting European cooperation in the form of free trade, it aspires to strengthen economic/trading ties with specific countries of the Commonwealth, namely Australia, New Zealand and Canada, once the UK has left the 'economic and political straightjacket' of the EU (The British National Party 2009b).

UKIP on the other hand is a party that was founded with the sole purpose to get Britain out of the EU, so it is no surprise that it too follows a hard Eurosceptic line towards European integration and the single currency. While there are certainly xenophobic undertones in its rhetoric, UKIP is careful not to alienate its potential electorate by branding itself 'the only moderate, democratic party to advocate Britain's withdrawal from the European Union' (Farrage 2009), an issue that has wide appeal to voters across the political spectrum. UKIP's main arguments against Britain's EU membership is the loss of national legal and political sovereignty to Brussels and the 'illogical, grotesque and wasteful' policies centrally imposed on Britain, and which would never win public support, were they to be tested in a national election (Baker et al 2008: 103; see, also, UK Independence Party 2009). Paradoxically, for a party that is such a staunch advocate of Britain's withdrawal from the EU, UKIP has always sought to win seats in the European Parliament and had 12 MEPs elected in the 2004 European Parliament elections.

The uniqueness of British party Euroscepticism

What emerges from the brief accounts of the British political parties' European policies, at least those of the three main party 'players', is that UK parties have been consistently inconsistent in their attitudes towards European integration. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon, Wallace (1995: 50) argues that while 'in many member states cross-party positions are constructed, [...] over the development of the European policy agenda' resulting in what we could identify as 'a "national" approach oriented towards shared "national interests" vis-à-vis the EU', this process has not taken place in the UK since its accession in 1973. Instead, 'Britain's European policy positions have been adopted by the government of the day in the light of its own prevalent preferences.' (ibid.).

However, it also becomes apparent from the above that Euroscepticism is deeply embedded in UK party politics and by no means does it constitute an 'exclusive' policy card for a specific ideological group or political party. A possible explanation then is what Aspinwall (2000) and Usherwood (2002) have identified as the 'factional' nature of Euroscepticism within British political parties. According to Aspinwall, for example, the so-called 'Euro-sceptic social voice' found in member states with power-sharing governments does not make it into mainstream politics, as it gets 'filtered out' through a range of institutional mechanisms (Aspinwall 2000: 433). By contrast, British governments operating in a system of one-party rule have to give greater consideration to backbench Eurosceptic opinion (ibid.: 434-36; see also Hix 2007: 138).

Yet other research contradicts this conclusion. Baker et al (2002), for example, have shown that in the case of the Conservative party, Euroscepticism does not come from the back benches but is a key feature of the party's 'hyperglobalist ideology'. Rather, as Gifford (2006: 854) argues,

Britain is exceptional in the sense that Euroscepticism has entered into a cartel party (i.e. a centre-left or centre-right party that attempts to appeal to a broad spectrum of the electorate and alternate in government).

The author here draws on Taggart and Szczepiński's findings on Euroscepticism across Europe, according to which the Conservative party appears to be the only mainstream Eurosceptic party with the potential to form a government (Gifford 2006; Taggart and Szczepiński 2004). This, in turn, indicates that it is 'a structural crisis within the party system, rather than the system per se, that has allowed Euroscepticism to take a hold in British politics.' (Gifford 2006: 854). At the heart of this structural crisis is populism (ibid.).

Drawing on Mair (2002), Wallace (1991) and others, Gifford argues that the UK is not a representative but a populist democracy, where political parties 'claim legitimacy on the basis that they represent the mass of the people' (Gifford 2006: 855). In this context, Euroscepticism has emerged as part of populist discourse, used by all political parties in their attempt to gain legitimacy by transcending party politics and appealing to the nation's collective identity. UK party Euroscepticism is, therefore, just one of the many expressions of the 'degenerating' populist approach to international affairs, characterised by 'the centrality of the Westminster parliament' and 'the myth of exceptionalism- a free country confronting an unfree European continent' (Wallace 1991: 29 in Gifford 2006).

The argument, therefore, is that Euroscepticism in British party politics is unique because the populist nature of UK political discourse and/or the power structure of the political system (one-party rule) have allowed Euroscepticism to gain a prominent position in the mainstream political debate (cf. Aspinwall 2000; Baker et al 2008; Daddow 2006; Gifford 2006; Gifford 2008; Usherwood 2002; Wallace 1995). While this was certainly the case in the 1970s and 1980s, Euroscepticism is no longer an 'exclusive' trait of British mainstream politics. To begin with, de Vries and Edwards have shown that Euroscepticism is a significant element of political discourse across Europe and across the political spectrum:

[T]he growing uncertainties about the future of European integration among national publics are increasingly politicized by Eurosceptical elites on both the extreme right and left of the political spectrum.

(de Vries and Edwards 2009: 5).

Certainly, Euroscepticism in mainstream parties in the new accession countries 'has clearly altered the context in which the dominant British parties now operate' (Gifford 2006: 866). Moreover, recent research shows that Euroscepticism is now 'a potent feature of the political landscape' across the EU and, in the post-Maastricht era, is also strongly linked to the idea of defending the national community from the EU (Crum 2007; de Vries and van Kersbergen 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2007).

Rather, I argue that what constitutes British party Euroscepticism 'a source of fascination, perplexity, and sometimes frustration' (Baker et al 2008) is the combination of the following: Euroscepticism is, indeed, found in the political discourse of all UK parties. At the same time, with the exception of some minor left-wing parties that play no role in national politics, its basis is on the collective-identity populist argument, i.e. the 'defence of national sovereignty from Europe' cue. This means that even parties such as Labour and the Conservatives, who position themselves in the centre of the political spectrum, display the type of Euroscepticism usually attributed to right-wing extremist parties across Europe (see de Vries and Edwards 2009 for a definition of extreme right- and left-wing Euroscepticism).

Public opinion

Public opinion polls consistently place the UK at the bottom of the list among EU member states when it comes to trust towards the Union and its institutions. At first glance, the UK's EU membership also gathers little support from the public, both in terms of absolute numbers and in comparison to the public opinion in other member states, (Eurobarometer 2007; Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and European Commission

Representation in the United Kingdom 2008). Specifically, in the latest Eurobarometer public opinion poll (Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008) the country's EU membership received a positive evaluation from only 32 per cent of the respondents, when the European average is at 53 per cent and with only two other member states where public opinion ranks lower (Hungary and Latvia, with a positive evaluation of membership at 31 per cent and 27 per cent respectively). The British public is also the least trusting of the EU as a polity, with only 25 per cent of respondents declaring their tendency to trust the EU overall (Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008: 27). Indicative of the British public's level of distrust towards the EU polity is the amount of percentage points that has consistently separated it from the EU average in the last five years (a difference of 20.5 percentage points on average, based on Eurobarometer figures from spring 2004 until autumn 2008); as well the distance from the second most distrusting member state, which on the last poll was Italy, with 41 per cent of respondents there declaring their tendency to trust the EU on the whole (Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008).

Sceptical as they may be towards EU institutions and the benefits of an EU membership, the British support intergovernmental cooperation at EU level on matters such as the fight against terrorism (67 per cent; cf. 79 per cent EU average); protection of the environment (57 per cent; cf. 67 per cent EU average); defence and foreign affairs and immigration (both at 43 per cent of support, with EU averages at 64 per cent and 60 per cent respectively); and crime, which is also the second major concern for the British public (34 per cent in support of joint EU decisions, with EU average at 38 per cent) (Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008).

These statistics are consistent with research findings on Euroscepticism in Britain and across Europe. Wessels, for example, measured Euroscepticism in public opinion in 25 member-states based on his typology of EU orientations (see Section A.1 above for the relevant discussion). He found that although adamant Eurosceptics (no European identity and negative evaluation of the EU's performance) make up 14.2 per cent of all Eurosceptics in the 25 countries (32 per cent of all European citizens are classified as Eurosceptics of one type or the other), in the UK they constitute the majority of Eurosceptics at 29 per cent, bringing the country first in Eurosceptic ranking (the total amount of Eurosceptic population in the UK is 46 per cent, significantly higher than the total European figure) (Wessels 2007: 301- 02).

Daddow identifies the source of British Eurosceptic public opinion in the 'modernist approach to history prevalent among British historians and the society in which they work' (Daddow 2006: 66). According to the author,

The overly reverential attitude to recent history on the part of the British, and an almost total neglect of the peacetime dimensions of modern European history since 1945, both serve to exaggerate the tendency in the country to fall back on glib images of Britain as a great power with a 'special relationship' across the Atlantic with Europe a hostile 'other' across the Channel to be confronted rather than engaged with constructively.

(ibid.)

This 'peculiarly British' historical approach to Europe means that Eurosceptics tend to view European integration through the lens of British history before 1945, while Europhiles evaluate the European project on the basis of peacetime history, i.e. after 1945 (Daddow 2006; see also Díez Medrano 2003 on the narrative of 'loss of empire' as factor for UK Euroscepticism).

However, upon closer inspection, the above figures reveal not so much a Eurosceptic public in the UK, as a politics-sceptic one. The British appear distrustful not only of EU institutions but of their national counterparts too (see Annex, for relevant figures).

Moreover, the public's trust towards institutions increases, the more specifically defined the latter are, i.e. the British are more trustful of the European Parliament, than the EU as a whole (see Annex, for relevant figures). In addition, although the UK public appears less trustful of the EU than the publics in most other member states, its support for the EU polity and institutions follows the same trend as the EU average (see Annex, for relevant figures). It is also important to note that insofar as the evaluation of EU membership is concerned, the positive response was lower than the EU average (53 per cent) in 13 out of 27 member states, which reflects a more general shift towards Euroscepticism across Europe, in terms of EU polity worth (Eurobarometer 2008: 31).

These findings confirm Rohrschneider's argument that citizens' trust towards EU institutions is proportional to their trust towards their domestic institutions and political system, i.e. the higher the trust to domestic institutions, the higher the trust to the EU, as citizens feel their interests are being adequately safeguarded by their national representatives in the EU (Rohrschneider 2002).¹⁰ If British citizens are distrustful of their domestic political system, it follows that they will show low levels of trust for the EU too.

Approaching the issue from a rational choice institutionalist theory, Hix (2007) offers a different explanation for British public opinion Euroscepticism. He argues that

[W]here a member state's domestic policy regime is to the left(right) of the European average, voters and parties on the left(right) are more likely than voters on the right(left) to be Eurosceptic, and vice versa.

(ibid.: 137).

Following on from this axiom, his research findings show that the UK fits this rational choice institutionalist framework best of all member states examined, as with a liberal labour market and service sector, Britain's domestic policy regime is to the right of the EU average (ibid.: 142). If we combine this with the fact that all mainstream parties regardless of their ideological positioning on the political spectrum follow a right-wing Euroscepticism discourse, as we have seen earlier, it is no surprise that UK public opinion appears Eurosceptic in its majority. This combination of 'utilitarianism' and national identity discourse are factors that determine public support of European integration and EU institutions across Europe, as McLaren's research has shown (McLaren 2007; see also Hix 2007). Another possible explanation, at least partially, for the high levels of Eurosceptic public opinion in the UK could be the low levels of knowledge about the EU among the British people. Specifically, in the most recent Eurobarometer poll, 58 per cent of UK citizens said they do not understand how the EU works, while overall levels of knowledge on specific European matters was also low, with 26 per cent of respondents giving wrong answers and 40 per cent opting for the 'I don't know' response (Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008). Although British citizens are by no means alone in their lack of knowledge on EU issues (66 per cent of Hungarians and 59 per cent of Italians and Portuguese responded 'I don't know' too), research suggests that lack of knowledge fuels Euroscepticism. As Hix put it, 'uncertainty breeds contempt' (Hix 2007: 147; cf. Lubbers and Scheepers 2007) while in his analysis of Euroscepticism in 25 member-states, Wessels also found that 'overall, eurosceptics of any type are less politically informed, less interested in politics, and less educated than the average citizen.' (Wessels 2007: 304), which also fits with the relevant Eurobarometer results on the UK (support for the EU and the UK's membership increased manifold in the categories of educated to the age of 20 and beyond and those still studying, as compared to those who had finished education aged 15 or less (Eurobarometer 2008)).

¹⁰ Conversely, Anderson argues that citizens' attitudes towards the EU is inversely proportional to their attitudes towards the domestic political system (Anderson 1998). The more citizens find that their interests and needs are met by their national government/political system, the less they will agree with a transfer of powers to the European level (see also Sanchez-Cuenca 2000).

Media

Research across Europe confirms that media reporting has a direct impact on the levels of public Euroscepticism (cf. Hooghe and Teepe 2007; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008; Trenz 2008). In one of the most recent studies of this issue, de Vreese found that 'news media coverage of EU-issues and events, such as Council meetings, can cause changes in the level of cynicism about European integration.' (de Vreese 2007: 280). Rather than suggest a 'hypodermic needle' model, whereby the media dictate the tone and quality of public debate on EU issues, de Vreese's research shows that the extent to which the media may feed into Eurosceptic attitudes depends on two factors: 'the pervasiveness of strategically framed news reporting' and individual level characteristics, such as the level of 'political sophistication' (ibid). This means that when EU news coverage is not worded/framed in a suggestive manner, pointing at winners and losers, using 'war and games' language, focusing on opinion polls and/or specific candidates, then cynicism about EU affairs decreases. Conversely, individuals may have a high level of political sophistication (to be interested and knowledgeable about EU matters) and still be dismissive of politicians and their performance (ibid.).

This is an intriguing finding when considering the high levels of a) lack of knowledge of EU issues and b) (hard) Eurosceptic attitudes towards the EU measured among British citizens: One assumption widely made is that an increase in information about the EU will drive Euroscepticism levels down. For example, this is certainly what has been driving the EU's public communication strategy in the new millennium (Michailidou 2008a; Michailidou 2008b) while the EU's Representation in London has a special section on its website dedicated on dispelling 'Euromyths' invariably circulated on British press (ECR-UK 2009). Yet, as de Vreese (2007) argues, it is not knowledge about the EU that generates greater public trust, but rather the way media present EU issues (see also Gaber 2009 on the 'public communication paradox').

Specifically in relation to the British media, although Euroscepticism is not an exclusive trait of specific UK newspapers, it is generally understood that the 'Eurosceptic tag' applies to the following:¹¹

- Tabloids: The Sun, the Mail, the Express
- Broad sheets: The Times, the Daily Telegraph (cf. Anderson 2004; Spiering 2004)

With regard to strategic framing of EU issues, the British press often makes references to national identity. Daddow has shown that Eurosceptic press material is directly linked with Britain's history before 1945, i.e. with the times of UK imperial/military glory:

The images and rhetorical strategies we see deployed in articles by Eurosceptical writers in the press can therefore be seen as yet more evidence that there exists an implicit public national consensus interpretation of Britain and Europe born out of literature coming from people quite literally brought up on a diet of modernist national history.

(Daddow 2006: 81).

At the same time, Anderson suggests that while the British Eurosceptic press indeed frames EU issues in a national-identity context, this discourse is largely a 'façade masking the commercial interests of the newspapers' proprietors' (Anderson 2004: 151). He consequently highlights the utilitarian aspect of Euroscepticism in the press (see also Inthorn 2006 on UK quality press coverage and EU identity). The press is also closely linked with Euroscepticism in party politics: Gifford, for example, draws attention to the fact that the Eurosceptics within the Conservative party, who eventually superseded

¹¹ As the number of studies into the role of audiovisual and electronic media in Eurosceptic public discourse is extremely limited (see, for example, Gavin 2001), here I focus on Euroscepticism in the British press.

during the Maastricht Treaty crisis (see Section B.1 for the relevant discussion), enjoyed 'substantial backing' from 'significant sections of the press' (Gifford 2006: 861).

European Parliament elections 2009

The campaign

One key theme dominated the EP election campaign in the UK, virtually eliminating debate on any other issues: UK national parliamentarians' expenses. The revelations on MPs excessive, and at times unlawful, expense claims caused what many have come to consider as the greatest political scandal in Britain's recent history. Although the issue of MPs expense claims has been under public scrutiny for two years¹², it was not until January this year when developments rapidly unravelled, when the UK government dropped a motion to exempt Parliament from key parts of the Freedom of Information Act, which could prevent details of MPs' expenses from being revealed. A month later, the Telegraph published the first in a long series of detailed expense claims submitted by MPs and furore ensued. Such was the public outcry on the revelations that MPs had been using taxpayers' money to pay for anything from lavish refurbishments in their main homes to movies, toilet seats and outlandish dry-cleaning bills, that the House of Commons Speaker, Michael Martin, announced his resignation on 19 May, an unprecedented move in modern British history.¹³

The implications of this scandal for the EP elections campaign were grave: As Richard Whitaker observed on the day the elections were held in the UK,

Such is the domination of the campaign by the issue of MPs' allowances that most of the main parties' European Election Broadcasts – a place where they have the opportunity to talk specifically about European issues – made little or no mention of Europe.

(Whitaker 2009).

What little space was devoted to EU issues focused primarily on the Lisbon Treaty, which the Conservative Party made a central issue not only of their EP election campaign but also of their national election campaign strategy. The Conservatives' foreign affairs spokesman William Hague was reported to have described Gordon Brown's refusal to hold a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty as 'a betrayal of voter trust which "debases the coinage of politics"' (Euractiv.com 2009). The Conservatives' leader, David Cameron, has on several occasions made the commitment to hold a referendum on the already ratified by the UK Treaty as soon as his party becomes government. According to the party's EP elections manifesto, the Conservatives pledge that

[I]f the Lisbon Treaty is not in force in the event of the election of a Conservative Government this year or next, we will hold a referendum on it, urge its rejection, and – if successful – reverse Britain's ratification. And if the Constitution is already

¹² It all started in February 2007 when the Information Commissioner Richard Thomas and the Information Tribunal ruled in favour of MPs travel expenses being published under the Freedom of Information Act, something that the House of Commons authorities had worked hard to avoid. The expenses now had to be published with a clear breakdown of costs of MPs travel. Following that ruling, MPs were then ordered in June of the same year to release details of their expense claims for running a second home (A second home is considered to be either the place MPs use for their overnight stays in London, when their main home is in their constituency, or the place MPs use for overnight stays in their constituency when their main home is in London. In case neither applies, MPs may choose which of the two to nominate as second home. MPs from inner London constituencies are not eligible for such allowance (House of Commons 2009: 12-13). See The Telegraph 2009a; The Telegraph 2009b; Guardian.co.uk 2009b for more details on the issue.

¹³ The last time a House of Commons Speaker was forced to resign was in 1695, when Sir John Trevor was expelled from the Commons after being found guilty of accepting a bribe (BBC News 2009).

in force by then, we have made clear that in our view political integration in the EU would have gone too far, the Treaty would lack democratic legitimacy, and we would not let matters rest there.

(Conservatives 2009: 2).

During the EP election campaign, Cameron also declared his party's intention to withdraw from the European People's Party (EPP) coalition, where Conservatives MEPs have traditionally been sitting, and form a new anti-federalist group with allies drawn from other independent (and Eurosceptic) parties around Europe.

Amidst the MPs' expenses scandal and the Conservatives calls for a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, the BNP (British National Party) made a dynamic come-back, following a rhetoric similar to the Conservatives on the Lisbon Treaty issue. However, the BNP's overall electoral campaign was far more extreme in the policies it proposed than the Conservatives, in line with its overall right-wing, xenophobic ideology.¹⁴ Despite its extreme rhetoric, it became quickly apparent that the BNP was gaining in popularity and speculation about it gaining its first seat in the EP was rife in the days before the elections were held.

As far as strategic media reporting is concerned, both press and online media focused on 'performers' and 'critics', 'candidate style and performance' and opinion polls (components of strategic reporting as per Jamieson 1992), although online media offered extensive factual resources on the European Parliament, EU issues and policies and political parties across Europe (see, for example, BBC.co.uk 2009; Guardian.co.uk 2009a). Moreover, UK media was by and large negatively predisposed towards the BNP, despite its Eurosceptic positions. Rather, its openly racist ideology led even other Eurosceptic politicians to condemn the party's positions, both during and after the elections, in what the BNP itself evaluated as a 'media onslaught' against it.

The results

On the surface, the June electoral results confirmed the BNP's rise as well as the UK's leading position as Eurosceptic country. The results also reflected the public's discontent with Labour, who lost even in what were considered to be core areas, such as the North West and Wales. In total, the UK elected 72 MEPs, of whom 25 are Conservatives, 13 Labour, 13 UKIP, 11 Liberal Democrats, 2 Greens and 2 of the BNP, the first in the party's history. It is worth noting that UKIP received more votes than Labour. Voter turnout was at just 34.5 per cent, but although this is not a high outcome, it is not the worst to be ever recorded in the UK and also, it does not deviate much from previous years' turnouts (European Parliament 2009; Mellows-Facer et al 2009). Moreover, it is not much lower than the European average, which hit a record low this year at 43 per cent (European Parliament 2009).

True to their pre-election pledge and despite predictions for the contrary,¹⁵ the Conservatives have formed a new Eurosceptic EP group, the European Conservatives and Reformists group (ECR), after succeeding in gathering the required number of MEPs from across the EU.¹⁶ The majority of the group's MEPs come from the UK (25), while the rest

¹⁴ It is indicative of the party's ideology that even the meta-description it uses for its website (i.e. the description by which all search engines list the website) declares that '*The British National Party is the only party which opposes mass immigration and surrender to the European Union. Unlike the other parties, we mean it when we say it.*'

¹⁵ As the Economist put it, 'finding others who share his [Mr. Cameron's] Euroscepticism yet believe in free trade and do not exude a sulphurous whiff of extremism may be tricky' (The Economist 2009).

¹⁶ In order to form a new European Parliament party coalition, it is necessary to have at least 25 MEPs (the Conservatives meet this number with their own MEPs) but from members also need to be from at least seven member states.

are mostly MEPs who formerly grouped either under the centre-right European People's Party/European Democrats (EPP-ED) or the (former) Union for Europe of the Nations group (UEN). In total, seven countries apart from the UK are represented through 55 MEPs in the ECR, namely Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Belgium.

UKIP has also formed a new Eurosceptic EP group, although more out of necessity, as the previous EP formation to which it belonged (Independence/Democracy, IND/DEM) failed to meet the numbers required to qualify for EU funding and recognition as a formal EP group. Similarly, UEN faced a similar problem so the two groups merged to create what is now called the Europe of Freedom and Democracy group (EFD). In total, 30 MEPs from nine countries belong to this group, with the majority representing UKIP.¹⁷ Ideologically, the new EP group is far more to the right than UEN, to which UKIP previously belonged, as there are no left-wing Eurosceptics in this formation and all other national parties represented here sit on the extreme-right end of the political spectrum. Like the Conservatives, UKIP will head the new EP group, with UKIP's Nigel Farage sharing leadership with Italian Enrico Speroni of Lega Nord.

Across Europe, electoral results confirm the rise of Eurosceptic parties, as well as an overall turn of Europeans to the right, as the table below illustrates:

Table 1: EP election results 2009, per political group, Source: TNS opinion in collaboration with the EP (European Parliament 2009).

Political group	Number of seats	Score in %
EPP	265	36
S&D	184	25
ALDE	84	11.4
GREENS/EFA	55	7.5
ECR	54	7.3
GUE/NGL	35	4.8
EFD	32	4.3
NA	27	3.7

- EPP : Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)
- S&D : Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
- ALDE : Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
- GREENS/ EFA : Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance
- ECR : European Conservatives and Reformists Group
- GUE/ NGL : Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left
- EFD : Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group
- NA : Non-attached

While no longer an exclusive characteristic of British politics, Euroscepticism in the UK constitutes a core feature of the public political discourse, both media- and party-driven, as well as a key trait of public opinion, as this emerges through opinion polls and electoral results. What can rather be said about UK Euroscepticism is that it is unique in the extent that it has become embedded in party politics and in its expression through (what is generally considered) right-wing rhetoric, regardless of the political background of its advocates.

¹⁷ The other countries are Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Lithuania and Slovakia.

At the same time, the key theme that monopolised the EP electoral campaign, namely MPs expense claims, confirms those scholarly propositions that Euroscepticism is an expression of discontent, directly proportional to the discontent citizens feel about national governments, as discussed in Section A.1. This could also go some way towards explaining the presence of that other 'elephant in the room': the impressive 57 per cent of Europeans on average (65.5 per cent of Britons) who did not vote.

On the other hand, with European citizens 'turning right' at these EP elections, UK party Euroscepticism moves to a new phase: No longer the 'awkward partners' in the EP, UK Eurosceptic parties take the lead and organise their continental counterparts in formal EP groups. It is difficult to escape the irony here: Eurosceptic parties that advocate their countries' departure from the EU receiving funding from the European Parliament for the function of their EP group.

Moreover, the EP electoral results of June 2009 clearly show a wider Eurosceptic trend across Europe, thus confirming Hooghe and Marks's assessment that

Rather than a 'permissive consensus' on the benefits of continuous integration, the political climate in Europe has more and more turned towards a 'constraining dissensus.'

(Hooghe and Marks 2009: 4).

This 'dissensus' can also be interpreted as a measurement of a growing divide between Europe's elites and citizens (see relevant discussion in de Wilde 2007: 14). In this context, it is clear that the political issue of European integration is *no longer* a 'sleeping giant' in most member states, as the evidence, which enabled van der Eijk and Franklin to make this assessment just five years ago (van der Eijk and Franklin 2004: 8), has now been overturned (see also Lubbers and Scheepers 2007).

Conclusions

Britain has long been considered an exceptionally Eurosceptic member state. However, when reviewing the historical trajectories of Euroscepticism within British political parties, it becomes evident that these have been anything but consistent in their policies towards European integration. Rather, the two constants that define UK Euroscepticism are the unswervingly Euro-distrustful British public opinion and the consistent rhetorical link between (loss of) national identity and EU membership. This is also where the uniqueness of UK Euroscepticism lies: While in most other member-states identity-based Euroscepticism is linked with extreme right-wing party politics, in the UK it is found in the rhetoric of otherwise moderate/centre parties, such as the Conservatives.

Current, often conflicting, definitions and conceptual models of Euroscepticism only allow for general observations and conclusions to be drawn not only in the case of the UK, but also in cross-national comparative studies of Euroscepticism across the continent. Recent studies have highlighted the need for a reconceptualisation of Euroscepticism in order to accurately attribute the several different expressions of scepticism towards Europe. Europeans may be sceptical towards the idea of EU integration or towards some/all of the EU institutions, and may also have different motivations for their scepticism (discontent/contentment with national politics; pragmatic/perceived benefits/losses from EU membership; national/European identity-driven evaluations of EU polity worth, to name but a few). Nevertheless, there is no conceptual model of Euroscepticism that captures all these variations. Certainly in the UK case, most analysis of Euroscepticism has focused in its political elite expressions, as these emerge from party politics and policies. Media expressions of Euroscepticism have not received similar attention; the

relatively limited number of studies on British media have focused on national Eurosceptic press and of course present similar conceptual limitations as most other studies on this topic. Consequently, a more systematic, methodologically and conceptually, approach of British Euroscepticism in all its manifestations is required in order to confirm Britain's status as Europe's 'awkward' partner.

Annex: Eurobarometer statistics

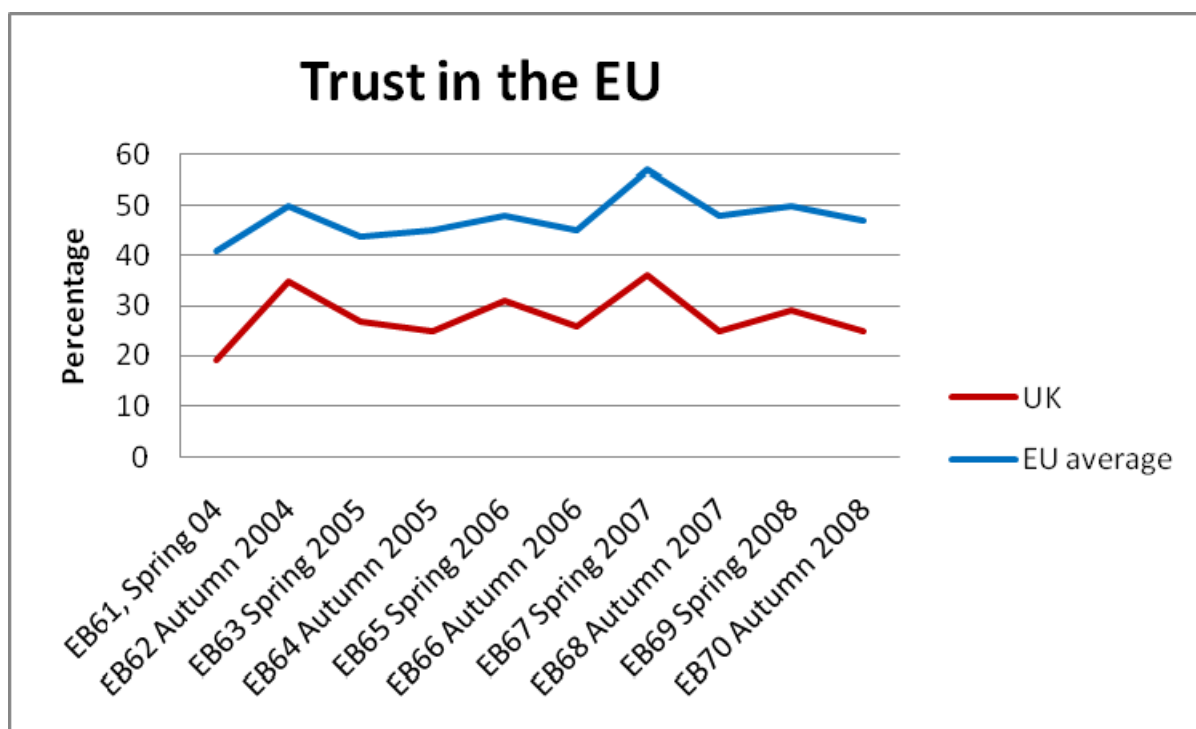


Figure 1: Trust in the EU- UK/EU average results, data sources Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008

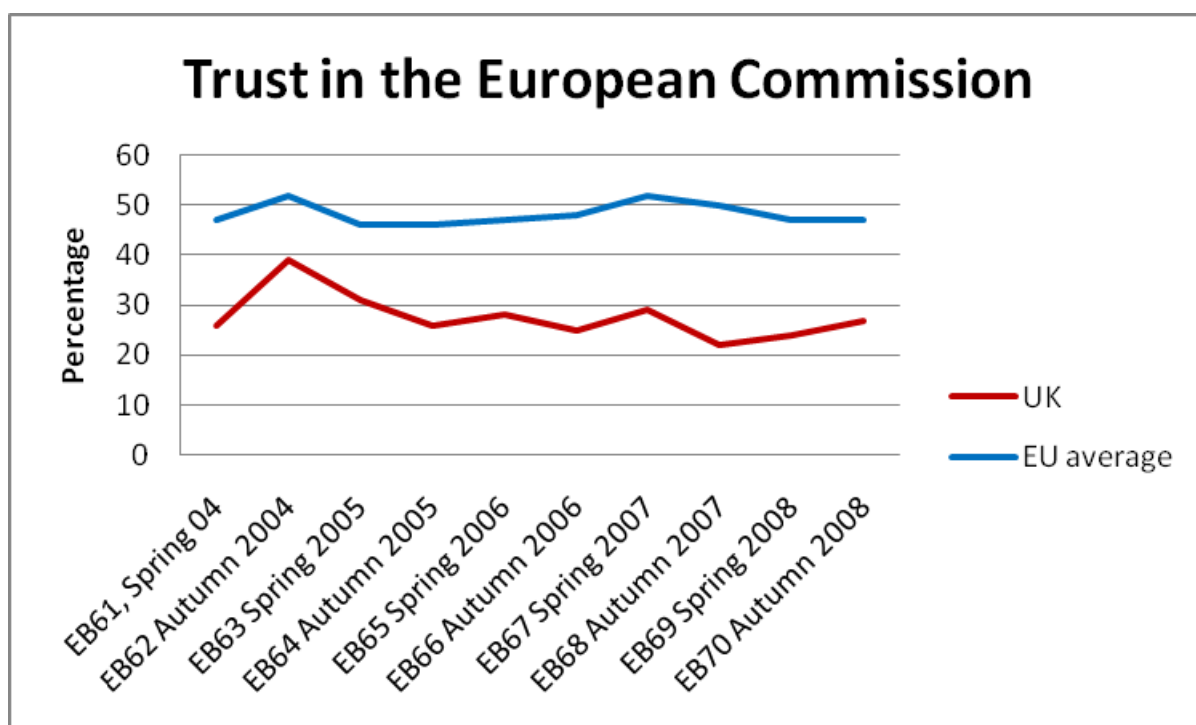


Figure 2: Trust in the European Commission- UK/EU average results, data sources Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008

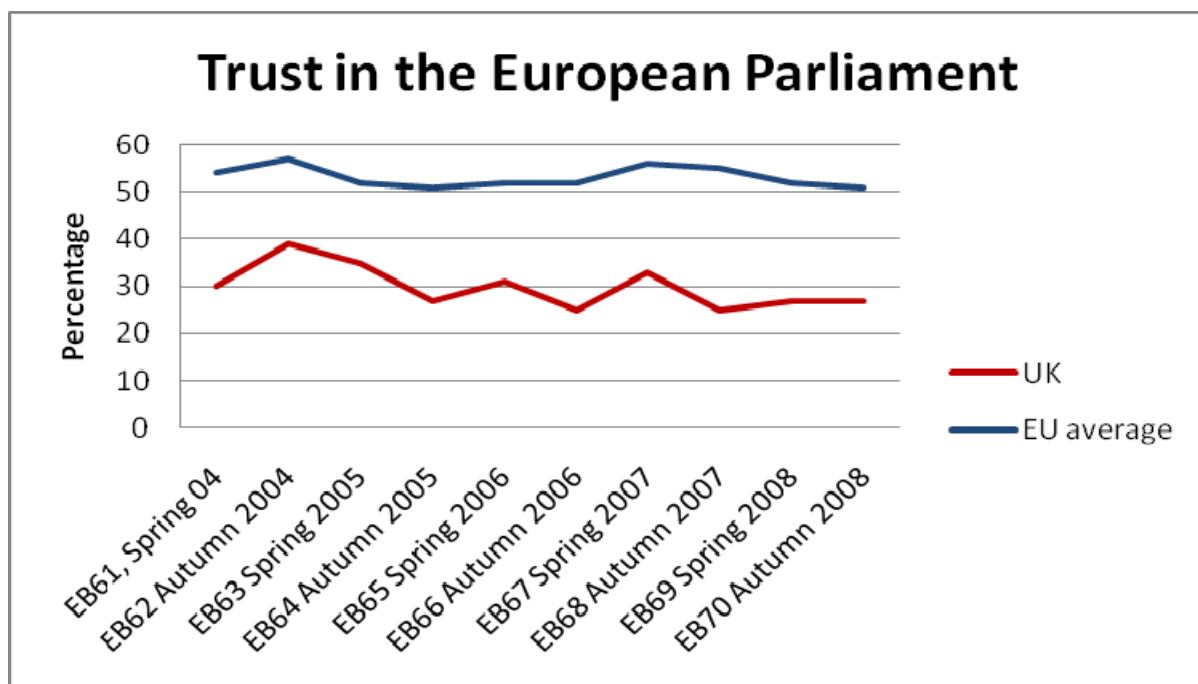


Figure 3: Trust in the European Parliament- UK/EU average results, data sources Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008

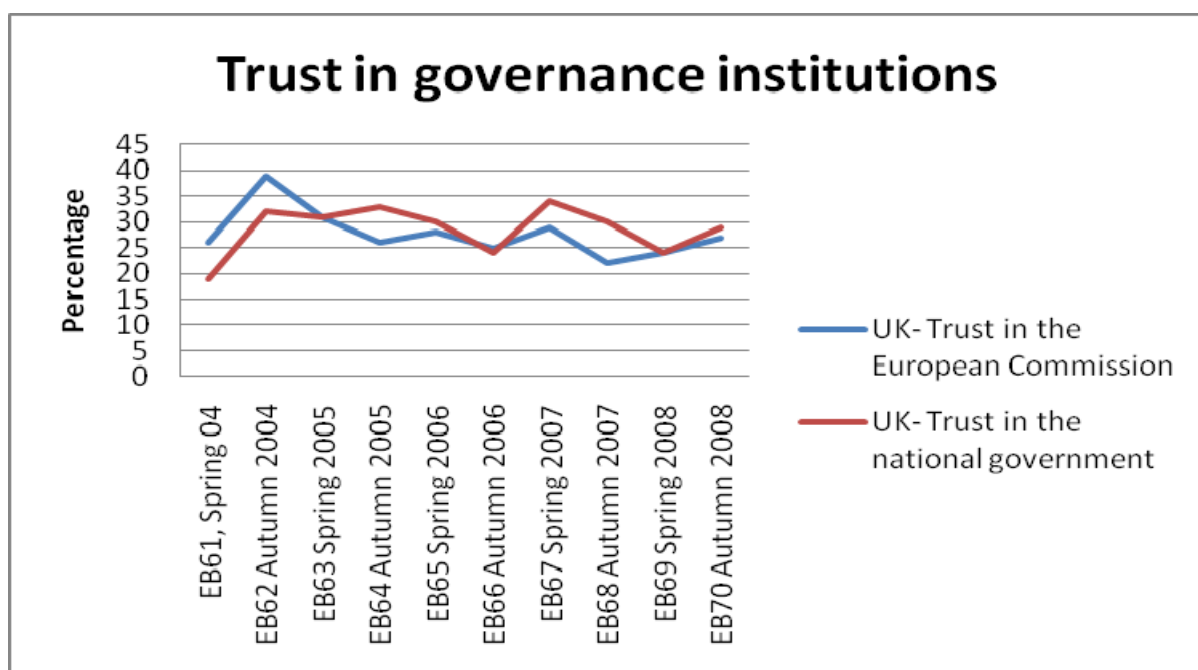


Figure 4: Trust in the governance institutions- UK/EU comparison, data sources Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008

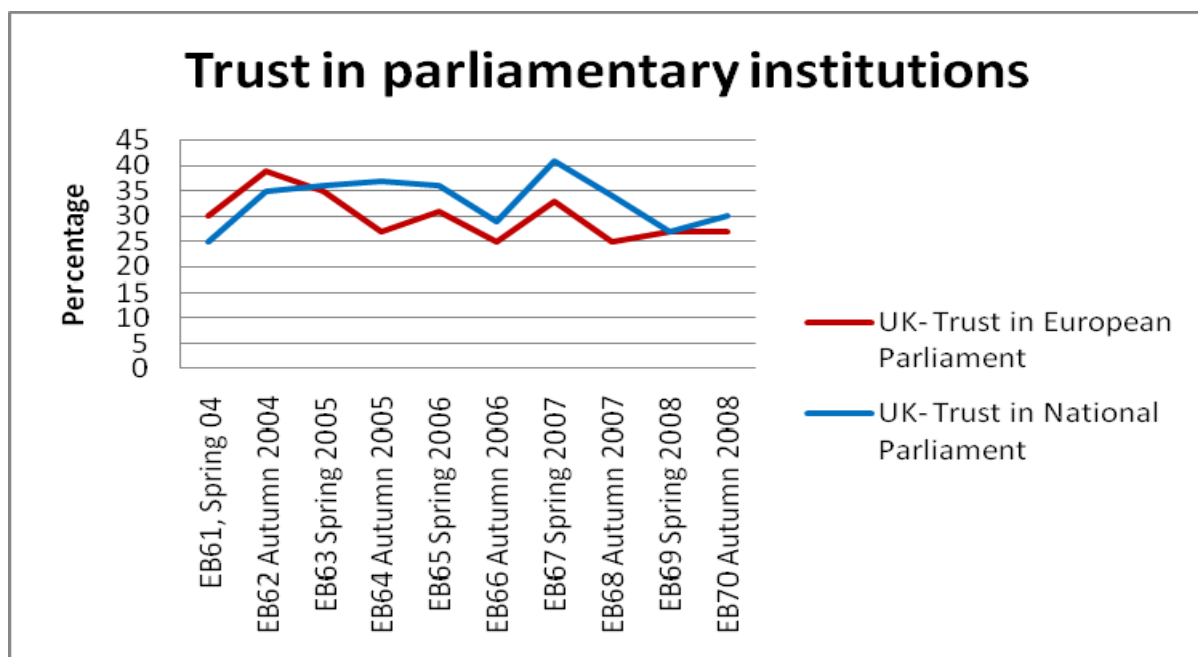


Figure 5: Trust in the parliamentary institutions- UK/EU comparison, data sources Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008

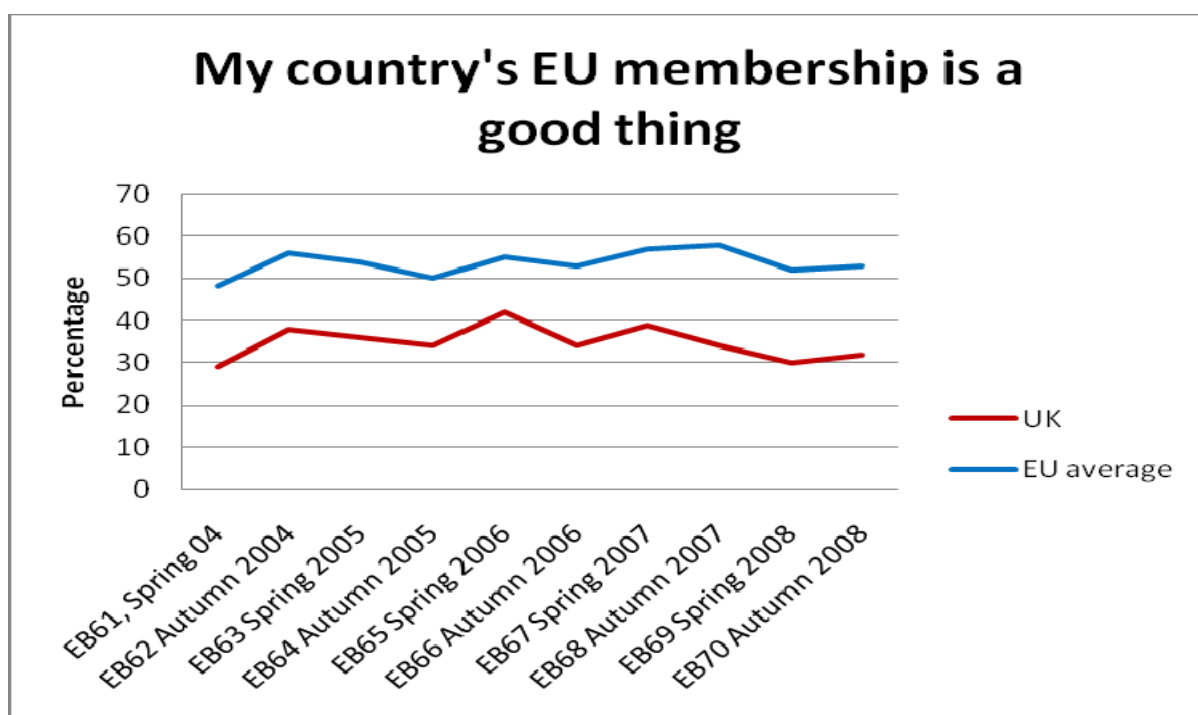


Figure 6: Evaluation of country's EU membership- UK/EU average results, data sources Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008

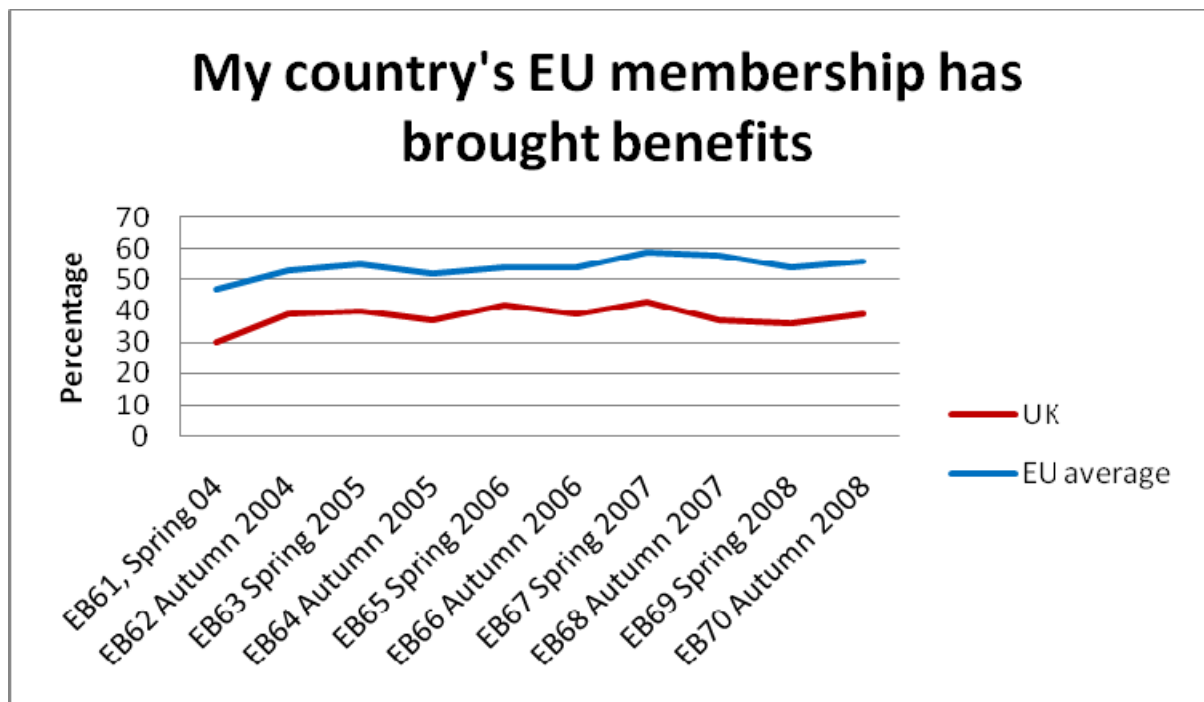


Figure 7: Evaluation of benefits from country's membership- UK/EU average results, data sources Eurobarometer 2008; Eurobarometer and ECR-UK 2008

Bibliography

- Alexandre-Collier, A., 2002. La Grande-Bretagne Eurosceptique?: L'enjeu Européen dans le débat politique Britannique. Nantes: Éditions du Temps.
- Anderson, P.J., 2004. A flag of convenience? Discourse and motivations of the London-based Eurosceptic press. In: R. Harmsen and M. Spiering, (eds). *Euroscepticism: Party politics, national identity and European integration*, Amsterdam ; New York, NY: Rodopi, pp.151-170.
- ANDERSON, C.J., 1998. When in Doubt, Use Proxies: Attitudes toward Domestic Politics and Support for European Integration. *Comparative Political Studies*, 31(5), pp.569-601.
- Aspinwall, M., 2000. Structuring Europe: Powersharing institutions and British preferences on European integration. *Political Studies*, 48(3), pp.415-442.
- Baker, D., Gamble, A., Randall, N., Seawright, D., 2008. Euroscepticism in the British Party system: 'A case of fascination, perplexity and sometimes frustration'. In: A. Szczerbiak and P.A. Taggart, (eds). *Opposing Europe? The comparative party politics of Euroscepticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.93-116.
- Baker, D., Gamble, A., Seawright, D., 2002. Sovereign nations and global markets: modern British Conservatism and hyperglobalism. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 4(3), pp.399-428.
- BBC News, 2009. Q&A: New Speaker elected. URL: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7263344.stm [29 June 2009].
- BBC.co.uk, 2009. Elections 2009. URL: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/europe/2009/election_09/default.stm [4 July 2009].
- Boltanski, L. and Thévenot, L., 2006. *On justification: economies of worth*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Bruter, M., 2008. Legitimacy, Euroscepticism and identity in the European Union: Problems of measurement, modelling and paradoxical patterns of influence. *Journal of Contemporary European Research [online]*, 4(4), pp.273-285. URL: <http://www.jcer.net/ojs/index.php/jcer/issue/view/11/showToc> [27 May 2009].
- Clarke, S. and Curtice, J., 1998. The Liberal Democrats and European integration. In: D. Baker and D. Seawright, (eds). *Britain for and against Europe : British politics and the question of European integration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.87-107.
- Conservatives, 2009. *Vote for Change: European Election Manifesto*. Conservatives-Policy: Europe, URL: http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where_we_stand/Europe.aspx [29 June 2009].
- Crum, B., 2007. Party Stances in the Referendums on the EU Constitution: Causes and Consequences of Competition and Collusion. *European Union Politics*, 8(1), pp.61-82.
- Daddow, O.J., 2004. *Britain and Europe since 1945: historiographical perspectives on integration*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Daddow, O.J., 2006. Euroscepticism and History Education in Britain. *Government and Opposition*, 41(1), pp.64-85.
- de Vreese, C.H., 2007. A spiral of Euroscepticism: The media's fault? *Acta Politica*, 42(2-3), pp.271-286.
- de Vries, C.E. and Edwards, E.E., 2009. Taking Europe to its extremes: Extremist parties and public Euroscepticism. *Party Politics [online]*, 15(1), pp.5-28. URL: <http://ppq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/short/15/1/5> [27 May 2009].
- de Vries, C.E. and van Kersbergen, K., 2007. Interests, identity and political allegiance in the European Union. *Acta politica [online]*, 42(2), pp.307-328. URL: <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/ap/journal/v42/n2/index.html> [27 May 2009].
- de Wilde, P., 2007. *Politicisation of European Integration: Bringing the process into focus* (Working Paper No. 18). Oslo: ARENA Centre for European Studies.
- Díez Medrano, J., 2003. *Framing Europe: attitudes to European integration in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom*. Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press.

- ECR-UK (European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom), 2009. *Euomyths*. URL: http://ec.europa.eu/unitedkingdom/press/euomyths/index_en.htm [24 June 2009].
- Eichenberg, R.C. and Dalton, R.J., 2007. Post-Maastricht blues: The transformation of citizen support for European integration, 1973-2004. *Acta Politica [online]*, 42(2), pp.128-152. URL: <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/ap/journal/v42/n2/index.html> [27 May 2009].
- Euractiv.com, 2009. Lisbon Treaty shadow looms large over UK elections. URL: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/eu-elections/lisbon-treaty-shadow-looms-large-uk-elections/article-182100> [29 June 2009].
- Eurobarometer, 2007. *Public Opinion in the European Union, First Results* (Standard Eurobarometer 68). European Commission Public Opinion [online], URL: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb68/eb68_first_en.pdf [28 March 2008].
- Eurobarometer, 2008. *Public Opinion in the European Union, First Results* (Standard Eurobarometer 70). European Commission: Public Opinion [online], URL: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb68/eb68_first_en.pdf [28 March 2008].
- Eurobarometer and ECR-UK (European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom), 2008. *Standard Eurobarometer 70- National report: United Kingdom* (Standard Eurobarometer 70). European Commission: Public Opinion [online], URL: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb70/eb70_en.htm [4 June 2009].
- European Parliament, 2009. *Results of the 2009 European Elections*. URL: http://www.elections2009-results.eu/en/new_parliament_en_txt.html [4 July 2009].
- Evans, G. and Butt, S., 2007. Explainign change in British public opinion on the European Union: Top down or bottom up? *Acta Politica [online]*, 42(2), pp.173-190. URL: <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/ap/journal/v42/n2/index.html> [27 May 2009].
- Farrage, N., 2009. *UK Independence Party- Campaign letter from UKIP Leader Nigel Farage MEP*. URL: <http://www.ukip.org/content/manifestos-and-literature/1019-campaign-letter-from-ukip-leader-nigel-farage-mep> [15 July 2009].
- Forster, A., 2002. *Euroscepticism in contemporary British politics: opposition to Europe in the British conservative and labour parties since 1945*. London: Routledge.
- Fuchs, D., Magni-Berton, R., Roger, A., 2009. *Euroscepticism: Images of Europe among mass publics and political elites*. Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Gaber, I., 2009. Exploring the paradox of liberal democracy: More political communications equals less public trust. *Political Quarterly*, 80(1), pp.84-91.
- Gavin, N.T., 2001. British journalists in the spotlight: Europe and media research. *Journalism*, 2(3), pp.299-314.
- George, S., 1990. *An awkward partner: Britain in the European Community*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gifford, C., 2006. The rise of post-imperial populism: The case of right-wing Euroscepticism in Britain. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45, pp.851-869.
- Gifford, C., 2008. *The making of Eurosceptic Britain: identity and economy in a post-imperial state*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Guardian.co.uk, 2009a. *European Elections*. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/european-elections> [4 July 2009].
- Guardian.co.uk, 2009b. *MPs' expenses*. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/mps-expenses> [29 June 2009].
- Hix, S., 2007. Euroscepticism as Anti-Centralization: A rational-choice institutional perspective. *European Union Politics [online]*, 8(1), pp.131-150. URL: <http://eup.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/8/1/131> [27 May 2009].
- Hooghe, L. and Marks, G., 2007. Sources of Euroscepticism. *Acta Politica [online]*, 42(2), pp.119-127. URL: <http://palgrave-journals.com/ap/journal/v42/n2/index.html> [27 May 2009].
- Hooghe, M. and Teepe, W., 2007. Party profiles on the web: an analysis of the logfiles of non-partisan interactive political internet sites in the 2003 and 2004 election campaigns in Belgium. *New Media Society*, 9(6), pp.965-985.
- House of Commons, 2009. *The Green Book: A guide to Members' allowances* URL: <http://www.parliament.uk/mpslordsandoffices/finances.cfm> [29 June 2009].

- Hyde-Price, A.G.V., 1990. Review: European Security beyond the Year 2000. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 66(2), pp.358.
- Inthorn, S., 2006. What Does It Mean to Be an EU Citizen? How News Media Construct Civic and Cultural Concepts of Europe. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture [online]*, 3(3), pp.71-90. URL: http://wmin.ac.uk/mad/pdf/WPCC-Vol3-No3-Sanna_Inthorn.pdf [25 June 2009].
- Jamieson, K.H., 1992. *Dirty politics : deception, distraction, and democracy* Oxford University Press.
- Kopecky, P. and Mudde, C., 2002. The Two Sides of Euroscepticism: Party Positions on European Integration in East Central Europe. *European Union Politics*, 3(3), pp.297-326.
- Krouwel, A. and Abts, K., 2007. Varieties of Euroscepticism and populist mobilization: Transforming attitudes from mild Euroscepticism to harsh Eurocynicism. *Acta Politica*, 42(2-3), pp.252-270.
- Lubbers, M. and Scheepers, P., 2007. Euroscepticism and extreme voting patterns in Europe. In: G. Loosveldt, M. Swyngedouw and B. Cambre, (eds). *Measuring meaningful data in social research*, pp.71-92.
- McLaren, L., 2007. Explaining mass-level Euroscepticism: identity, interests, and institutional distrust. *Acta Politica [online]*, 42(2), pp.233-251. URL: <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/ap/journal/v42/n2/index.html> [27 May 2009].
- Mellows-Facer, A., Cracknell, R., Lightbown, S., 2009. *European Parliament Elections 2009* (Research Paper 09/53). London: House of Commons Library.
- Michailidou, A., 2008a. Democracy and New Media in the European Union: Communication or Participation Deficit? *Journal of Contemporary European Research [online]*, 4(4), pp.346-368. URL: <http://www.jcer.net/ojs/index.php/jcer/article/viewArticle/129> [29 May 2009].
- Michailidou, A., 2008b. *The European Union online*. Berlin: VDM-Verlag Dr Müller.
- Oxford English Dictionary, 2009. *Euroscepticism (definition)*. URL: http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50295140?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=euroscepticisms&first=1&max_to_show=10 [14 July 2009].
- Rohrschneider, R., 2002. The Democracy Deficit and Mass Support for an EU-Wide Government. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(2), pp.463-475.
- Sanchez-Cuenca, I., 2000. The political basis of support for European integration. *European Union Politics*, 1(2), pp.147-171.
- Seldon, A., 1998. *Major: a political life*. London: Phoenix.
- Sherrington, P., 2006. Confronting Europe: UK political parties and the EU 2000-2005. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 8, pp.69-78.
- Spiering, M., 2004. British Euroscepticism. In: R. Harmsen and M. Spiering, (eds). *Euroscepticism: Party politics, national identity and European integration*, Amsterdam ; New York, NY: Rodopi, pp.127-149.
- Szczerbiak, A. and Taggart, P.A. (eds), 2008. *Opposing Europe? The comparative party politics of Euroscepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taggart, P., 1998. A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems. *European Journal of Political Research*, 33(3), pp.363-388.
- Taggart, P. and Szczerbiak, A., 2001. *Parties, Positions and Europe: Euroscepticism in the EU Candidate States of Central and Eastern Europe* (Working Paper 46). URL: <http://www.susx.ac.uk/sei/documents/wp46.pdf> [29 June 2009].
- Taggart, P. and Szczerbiak, A., 2004. Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(1), pp.1-27.
- The British National Party, 2009a. *Mission statement*. URL: <http://bnp.org.uk/about-us/mission-statement/> [15 July 2009].
- The British National Party, 2009b. *Policies- Europe*. URL: <http://bnp.org.uk/policies/europe/> [15 July 2009].
- The Economist, 2009. Swing low, swing right. *The Economist.com*, 11 June 2009. URL: http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?story_id=13832286 [30 June 2009].

- The Telegraph, 2009a. How MP's expenses became a hot topic. *Telegraph.co.uk*, 8 May 2009. URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/5294350/Expenses-How-MPs-expenses-became-a-hot-topic.html> [29 June 2009].
- The Telegraph, 2009b. MPs' expenses. *Telegraph.co.uk*, 20 July 2009. URL: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/> [24 July 2009].
- Trenz, H., 2008. Understanding Media Impact on European Integration: Enhancing or Restricting the Scope of Legitimacy of the EU? *Journal of European Integration [online]*, 30(2), pp.291-309. URL: <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a792786077~tab=citation> [29 May 2009].
- UK Independence Party, 2009. *UKIP- Policies*. URL: <http://www.ukip.org/content/ukip-policies> [15 July 2009].
- Usherwood, S., 2002. Opposition to the European Union in the UK: The dilemma of public opinion and party management. *Government and Opposition*, 37(2), pp.211-230.
- van der Eijk, C., Franklin, M. N., 2004. Potential for contestation on European matters at national elections in Europe. In: G. Marks and M.R. Steenbergen, (eds). *European integration and political conflict*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.32-50.
- Vasilopoulou, S., 2009. Varieties of Euroscepticism: The case of the European extreme right. *Journal of Contemporary European Research [online]*, 5(1), pp.3-23. URL: <http://www.jcer.net/ojs/index.php/jcer/issue/view/12/showToc> [27 May 2009].
- Vetik, R., Nimmerfelft, G., Taru, M., 2006. Reactive Identity versus EU Integration. *Journal of Common Market Studies [online]*, 44(5), pp.1079-1102. URL: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=950069> [29 May 2009].
- Wallace, H., 1995. Britain out on a limb? *The Political Quarterly*, 66(1), pp.46-58.
- Wessels, B., 2007. Discontent and European identity: Three types of Euroscepticism. *Acta Politica*, 42(2-3), pp.287-306.
- Whitaker, R. What European election campaign? 2009. *Reuters UK*, 4 June. URL: <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate-uk/2009/06/04/what-european-election-campaign/> [29 June 2009].
- White, M. and Branigan, T., 2005. Back from Brussels and ready to fight. *The Guardian*, 13 June 2005. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2005/jun/13/uk.eu> [13 May 2009].
- Young, J.W., 2000. *Britain and European unity, 1945-1999*, 2nd ed. Basingstoke: Macmillan.