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EUROSCEPTICISM IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract:

Across the European Union, there has always been a criticism towards integration. Since the two decades, the debates have witnessed a widespread scepticism about the benefits of the European Union. The euroscepticism is manifested in critical practices that oppose European integration. Euroscepticism relates to the principally contested character of the European Union as a political entity. It correlates with the attempts to promote the democratic legitimacy of the European Union. Euroscepticism was seen as a British disease. But it has now spread across the continent. The scepticism could be seen in the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty, in the 2005 referendums in France and the Netherlands, and in the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, in the 2008 Irish referendum. This paper aims to make a two-fold contribution to the study of Euroscepticism in Europe. The former is to analyze the euroscepticism as an ideology. The latter is to find out the effects of the Euroscepticism on European integration in general and in particular.

Keywords:

Euroscepticism, The European Union, European Integration, Scepticism

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Euroscepticism as an Ideology

Before analyzing the effects of Euroscepticism in Europe, first of all, the definition of the term should be made. The term can be divided as 'Euro', 'Sceptic' and '-ism'. The word sceptic came from the ancient Greek schools of philosophy, specifically of Pyrrho. According to him, it is impossible to get real knowledge of things. (Euractiv, 2013) Thus, scepticism can be described as doubt. It suggests an attitude and a situation of doubt with regard to the object. (Hobolt and the others, 2011, p.3) When it is used with 'Euro', the matter of convention became the EU or for some other notion of Europe. The suffix of the word '-ism', which is used generally for ideologies, makes the word related to the political ideologies and issues. (Arató and Kaniok, 2009, p.7) One of the most acceptable definition of the term is that "the opposition and doubt to the process of European integration". (Taggart, 1998, p.365)

Euroscepticism can be understood as a discursive formation of arguments, which performed by political actors in rejecting the EU policies. The nature of Euroscepticism is reactive. It means that Eurosceptic arguments are related not only to the European integration process itself but also to the justificatory discourse employed by political actors to legitimise this process. (Trenz and Wilde, 2009, p.6)

There are two types of Euroscepticism according to the categorization of Taggart and Szczerbiak. One of the is soft, the other is hard Euroscepticism. (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002, p.7)

"Hard Euroscepticism is where there is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived." As it is understood from the definition, hard Euroscepticism includes the rejection of the European Union membership. (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002, p.300) It is related to the pure Europhobia, and radically denies both economic and political European integration. (Milardovic, 2009, p.43) It is a kind of withdrawalist euroscepticism, which is even against to the existence of the EU. The European Parliament's Europe of Freedom and Democracy group, which includes the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), are the main examples of hard eurosceptic organizations and parties. (Euractiv, 2013)

"Soft Euroscepticism" is where there is Not a principled objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that 'national interest' is currently at odds with the EU's trajectory. (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002, p.7) Soft Euroscepticism is a kind of reformist euroscepticism, which supports the existence of the European Union and also the membership. The opposition issues of soft euroscepticism are the integration policies of the EU and the

idea of a federal Europe. (Henderson, 2001, p.20) The soft type is related to Eurorealism that includes the desire for more sovereignty for nation states. (Milardovic, 2009, p.43) Soft Euroscepticism is more pervasive and contingent, so if the policies change, it can also be a subject to modification. (Sandvika, 2003, p.250) The European Conservatives and Reformists group, including the British Conservative Party and the European United Left-Nordic Green Left alliance, can be given as major examples of soft eurosceptic organizations and parties. (Euractiv, 2013)

After describing the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' Euroscepticism, it can be seen that Euroscepticism can be both ideologically and strategically driven. (Kopecky and Mudde, 2002, p.299) Ideologically driven Eurosceptics are under the influence of Euroscepticism because it is implied in their original ideological positions. The values and normative political goals are came from the initial ideology. Thus a party, which opposes to the values, goals, or policies of the European integration, must choose and adopt a hard or soft Eurosceptic stance. On the other hand, strategically driven Eurosceptics use Euroscepticism as a pragmatic addition to their original program. Eurosceptic parties usually use it to attract new voters, extend their coverage of the electorate and increase their political influence. (Rovny, 2004, p.37)

There are some paradoxes that characterize the European Union. One of them is the trend of a centralization and decentralization in the same time. Second, there are trends of Euroscepticism and Europhoria, both among and within EU member states. Third, there are trends of state nationalism appeared through Euroscepticism and xenophobia, and minority nationalism appeared through Europhoria. And finally, there is a trend of diminishing focus on sovereignty among regions and ethnoterritorial minorities. (Olsson, 2009, p.1) Among these terms, Euroscepticism can be understood as same as Europhobia or xenophobia. But they do not have the same meaning. Even though all of them are the forms of scepticism, Xenophobia and Europhobia are the most extreme expression of Euroscepticism. (Euractiv, 2013) The positions of people or political parties can be explained by four terms: Euroenthusiasts, people who support the ideas of integration, and see the EU as meeting these goals; Eurosceptics, people who are keen on the European integration, but feel the EU is not the best way of achieving this; Europragmatists, people who support the EU as profitable for their own country or position in the short-term, but do not aspire to integration; and Eurorejects, people who certainly reject the EU and European integration. (Toomey, 2007, p.8-9)

Euroscepticism, European Integration and the United Kingdom

After explaining the definition of Euroscepticism and its related terms, we can focus on its effects to the European integration. European elites have been largely very supportive of the development of European integration. But over the years, it has become difficult to sustain in a larger and more integrated European Union. In some the member states, Euroscepticism has become a visible and stable through the public opinion. (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2002, p.5)

The term was first seen on 11 November 1985, in the British newspaper, 'The Times', in order to describe a sceptic opposition towards the European Union and its policies. (Information Guide Euroscepticism, 2013, p.2) As it is understood from the definition of Euroscepticism, Eurosceptic people criticize the European Union for taking power away from the national government of member states and posing a threat to the national sovereignty. (Euractiv, 2013). The first example of this situation was seen when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher made her "Bruges Speech" on 20 September 1988. In her discourse the Prime Minister apparently expressed her opposition to the European Union sovereignty to supersede that of Great Britain. (Information Guide Euroscepticism, 2013, p.2).

As it can be seen, Euroscepticism became a significant issue on the EU agenda in the 1990s. The event that was accepted as a start point was the Maastricht Treaty. This treaty was seen as an event that caused to opposition because of its challenges to national sovereignty, its economic prescriptions, and the fears of the erosion of national identity aggravated by the project for European citizenship. The ratification of the treaty affected the positive belief in a 'permissive consensus' in public opinion. (Verney, 2011, p.1)

According to Taggart and Szczerbiak, (2002, p.3) there are three main factors that leads Euroscepticism to grow across Europe. First of them is a sense to decline the permissive consensus, especially during the approval period of the Maastricht Treaty. Second one is having a stimulation of interest in European issues created by the tendency in the European integration project to resort to referendums to ratify treaties. The last one is the enlargement procedure that widened the scope of the integration project. Many studies showed that the 'permissive consensus' was an accepted process for the integration in Europe. However, it began to be replaced by a more prominent opposition to the European Union. During this change, it is easy to see that there is a diversity within this opposition. Because both the left and the right parties, even within the same country, are against to the European integration. (Sutcliffe, 2010, p.3)

With the Eastern enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and 2007, ten new member states from post-communist Eastern Europe bacame as members of the EU and integrated into the structures and decision-making processes. This enlargement was seen as the EU's greatest foreign policy success to date. (Cirtautas and Schimmelfennig, 2010, p.422) However, Euroscepticism continue to spread through Europe. After the oppositon of the Maastricht Treaty, in the 2000s, voters in some member states continued to reject the other changes. For example, the Treaty of Nice in 2001, the European Constitution in 2005 and the Lisbon Treaty in 2008. These repeated upsets both decelerated and delegitimised the integration process. (Verney, 2011, p.1)

Euroscepticism can be seen when there is an opposition to a specific project. For example, Euroscepticism is in opposition to existing or proposed policy in case there is

a regulation or redistribution or intervention of any policy area. Almost all kind of Euroscepticism are expressed in terms of policy both at the EU level and at the national level. Opposition is generally linked to a preferable domestic alternative. Euroscepticism can change by a party's ideas on related policies. Nationalism is one of the most used ideology by most of the Eurosceptic parties. Even though Euroscepticism can accommodate a wide range of policies, it is usually shaped by the party system. (Sandvika, 2003, p.240)

As it is mentioned, the United Kingdom is the most suitable example of a Eurosceptic country in the European Union. (Sutcliffe, 2010, p.7) The United Kingdom has not felt herself as a part of Europe over the years. She was both geographically separated from the continental land of Europe and psychologically distant from the European integration movement established in the Rome Treaty of 1957. The British Eurosceptic tradition was based on these geographical and psychological feelings. The Eurosceptic tradition ranges such as politics, economics, language, culture, and history make it difficult to accept the integration for the United Kingdom. (Daddow, 2013, p.212-213) Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was one of the most important Eurosceptic voices in the United Kingdom. She always refused the progress of European integration, and became a vocal and prominent hard Eurosceptic Prime Minister. (Sutcliffe, 2010, p.7) In her book, Thatcher argued that in the absence of fundamental reform, the United Kingdom would be a better country by leaving the European Union and applying for membership of the North American Free Trade Agreement. (Thatcher, 2002, p.403) During the Thatcher government, Conservative parties played an important role in articulating the neo-liberal doctrines of openness, flexibility and competition, while Margaret Thatcher re-emphasised on the importance of national sovereignty and the sanctity of the nation state which were the party's oldest traditions. This kind of divisions in Conservative Parties over the European Union should be understood in order to explore the relationship between modern Conservative ideology and the changing political economy of the global order. (Baker, Gamble and Seawright, 2002, p.400)

Euroscepticism was more apparent in the party systems and party strategies. (Sandvika, 2003, p.247) One of the reasons of British Euroscepticism is also related to its party system. The British system is one of the states that have one of its major parties govern as a 'soft' Eurosceptic party. (Taggart, 2013, p.2) Euroscepticism has had a long history and strong support in the United Kingdom, and has affected all of the Prime Minister's foreign policy discourses. (Daddow, 2013, p.212-213) Moreover, Euroscepticism has threatened to evolve into xenophobia or cause a rise in the popularity of right-wing parties, including UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party), and harm the UK's social cohesion as a result. (Kim, 2013, p.352) Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom proves itself in public opinion polls. They show the public belief that a country's membership to the EU is not a good thing. Euroscepticism is always seen on the policies of not only the major parties but also the marginal political forces. (Sutcliffe, 2010, p.7) According to a survey which has hold between the United Kingdom citizens, there was a low level of trust, and a relatively negative image of the

EU. People who did not trust the EU was nearly 80 percent in 2012. (Torreblanca and Leonard, 2013, p.5)

Member States' Policies and 2014 European Parliament Elections

In the European Union, there have been some Eurosceptic forces that have tried to lead the policies of the Union. The far-right parties are the most important of them. In every member country, it can be seen such parties. For example, the National Front in France, Lega Nord in Italy, the Dutch Freedom Party, the Freedom Party of Austria, Golden Dawn in Greece, Jobbik in Hungary, Dawn of Direct Democracy in the Czech Republic, and ATAKA in Bulgaria. All of these parties share an anti-immigration and anti-euro agenda. (Leonard and Torreblanca, 2014, p.4) Far right parties have participated in government in Italy, Austria and the Netherlands, and support minority centre-right coalitions in Denmark and Norway. (Sandvika, 2003, p.240) The methods that were applied by far-right political parties caused the rise of Eurosceptic thoughts within the societies. In many European Union member states, these political parties gained significant success in both the 2004 and 2009 European Parliamentary elections. (Sutcliffe, 2010, p.1)

Although public opinion on the EU showed that there were positive trends as some of the benefits of membership, such as free movement of labour and the availability of EU funds, (Henderson and Sitter, 2007, p.195) there is always a criticism of European integration in different countries. The debates about the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty made the Euroscepticism more popular. People began to doubt about the benefits of the European Union. This scepticism was apparently seen in the 2005 referendums both in France and the Netherlands that rejected the Constitutional Treaty. (Sutcliffe, 2010, p.1) After the shock of the failed referendums on the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands, the EU policies could not play a prominent role in any of the member states during 2006. (Henderson and Sitter, 2007, p.210). The failed ratification process of the Constitution Treaty was not an end to Eurosceptic behaviours. In the 2008 referendum, Ireland also decided not to support the Lisbon Treaty. (Olsson, 2009, p.27)

Before the 2008 economic crisis, 52 percent of citizens had a positive image of the EU, but in 2014 only 31 percent do. On the contrary, in 2007, 15 percent of citizens had a negative image of the EU, in 2014 nearly 28 percent do. (Leonard and Torreblanca, 2014, p.2) After 6 years of financial crisis, the most important danger to the Europe became economic stagnation and also political rejection. (European Elections: The Eurosceptic Union, 2014) The surveys of the Eurobarometers indicated that Poland, despite having one of the most Eurosceptic governments in Europe, was the only member state in which support for EU membership has increased since accession. The other new member states also became the supporters of further EU enlargement. (Henderson and Sitter, 2007, p.195)

At the end of May 2014, approximately 390 million European citizens went to the polls. The results of the election showed that right-wing anti-EU parties have won in France, Britain and Denmark. (European Elections: The Eurosceptic Union, 2014) Nowadays, the Eurosceptics have political momentum. Governments in France and Britain face an acute dilemma over how to respond, and the likelihood is that they will harden their stance on a host of issues, particularly immigration and EU enlargement. (European Elections: The Eurosceptic Union, 2014)

Conclusion

As it can be seen through the historical perspective, it was mostly used in connection with the British Conservative approach to Europe, and also with the opposition to European integration which was demonstrated by the referenda on the Maastricht and Nice Treaties and on adopting the Euro. (Rovny, 2004, p.31) It was once seen as a British disease. However, each period of enlargement increased the Euroscepticism as a general phenomenon spanning the continent. (Torreblanca and Leonard, 2013, p.1)

All the European Union's members have a reason that explains why they joined the Union. For example, according to France and Germany, European co-operation was a means to heal the scars of war. Belgium saw it as an opportunity to gain diplomatic economies of scale, Poland, Hungary and Estonia thought that the Union was a guarantor against Russian bullying. However, the United Kingdom joined the Union in 1973, without any enthusiasm and in a moment of transient economic anxiety. Maybe that is why the Eurosceptic voices has increased in the United Kingdom.

Euroscepticism is not a temporary phenomenon, it has a long history and strong fundamental support within the state's political culture. The members of the Union can not cope with by themselves with the developments in the world, such as climate change, energy security, crime, terrorism, or migration. If the European Union focuses increasingly on substance rather than process, the Eurosceptics can be deprived of their most powerful arguments.

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