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The nature and origins of Euroscepticism among left-wing and right-wing citizens in Western Europe

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Conclusion

Introduction

As European integration has become a topic of increasingly heated political debate, scholars have questioned its impact on the structure of political conflict (Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012; Marks and Steenbergen, 2004). The reason for this lies not only in the sudden rise of this ‘new’ issue, but also in its apparent cross-cutting alignment in relation to traditional left-right politics. Where many new issues are adopted by parties of either a left-wing or a right-wing profile – as has been the case for the environment, law and order, or immigration policy – political parties on *both* the left and right flanks across Western Europe take distinctly Eurosceptic positions. This horseshoe or ‘inverted U’-shaped relationship has become a dominant image to describe how Eurosceptic party positions relate to left-right ideology. In terms of the consequences of this constellation, the cross-cutting nature of the EU dimension has been put forward as a reason for both its low politicisation (De Vries, 2007b) and its (sleeping) potential to fundamentally restructure voter alignments (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004) or to contribute to a structural cleavage between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of globalisation (Kriesi et al., 2008; 2012).

Yet, to be able to draw conclusions about the potential for voter realignment due to European integration, we should study the applicability of the horseshoe model at the level of public opinion. As explained in the introduction, there are reasons to suspect that this model is actually a rather superficial representation of much more complex relationships, which moreover are subject to change over time. This is the case not only because left-right ideology itself has multiple interpretations, but also because Euroscepticism is a multidimensional attitude, at both the party and the citizen level. Particularly in public opinion research only few studies have taken these nuances into account, which has resulted in seemingly contradictory results. For these reasons, this dissertation has presented an elaborate study of the relationship between Euroscepticism, left-right ideology and party preferences among Western European citizens.

The four empirical chapters have aimed to shed light on the degree, nature, origins and consequences of Eurosceptic attitudes among citizens at the left and right sides of the political spectrum (both in terms of ideology and party preferences). This concluding chapter starts by taking stock of the applicability of the horseshoe model to public opinion on the basis of this dissertation’s findings. Thereafter, I discuss how the findings of these chapters contribute to the broader literature, followed by suggestions for future research. Finally, I discuss the societal and political implications of my findings.

The pros and cons of the horseshoe model

While the existence of a horseshoe-shaped relationship between left-right and Euroscepticism has been documented by several accounts at the party level (Aspinwall, 2002; Halikiopoulou et al., 2012; Hooghe et al., 2002), public opinion studies to date have yielded inconsistent findings as to whether this model is applicable to citizens as well. Part I of this dissertation has aimed to resolve these inconsistencies by means of two complementary empirical chapters. First, it has extensively and consistently mapped the relationship in public opinion across time and space (Chapter 2). Second, it disentangled the main concepts that constitute the relationship by distinguishing between two dimensions of Euroscepticism and between different (economic and cultural) motivations for Euroscepticism among left-wing and right-wing citizens (Chapter 3). Part II has studied the applicability of the horseshoe model to Euroscepticism and electoral support, by analysing the effect of the two dimensions of Euroscepticism on support for left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic parties (Chapter 4), and for mainstream and radical party families more generally (Chapter 5). In what follows, I review the results that speak in favour and against the horseshoe model. Taken together, the findings in this dissertation call for a refinement rather than a rejection of this model. A complete summary of the dissertation's findings by chapter is included separately after this concluding chapter in the English Summary.

Part I of the dissertation has provided a nuanced image of the relationship between left-right ideology and Eurosceptic attitudes in public opinion. In favour of the horseshoe model speaks the finding that in many Western European member states, a long-term development towards a U-shaped relationship is visible in public opinion when looking at Euroscepticism in its most general form (Chapter 2). Even though the asynchronous development of Euroscepticism at the left and right extremes reflects that their Euroscepticism has different roots and is a reaction to different aspects of European integration, at the surface the similarities between citizens at the far left and the far right are increasing. The fact that these similarities are superficial does not mean that they are irrelevant or without political consequences. As the coalition government formed in Greece in 2015 between the radical left Syriza and the right-wing nationalist Independent Greeks shows, even shallow similarities can form the basis for uncommon political alliances.

However, the horseshoe model is not blindly applicable, and several findings suggest that it should be refined. First, the relationship between Euroscepticism and ideology is not inherent or immutable (Marks, 2004). Euroscepticism can be high among either left-wing or right-wing citizens, or among both at the same time, depending on when and where we study it (Chapter 2). Changes in the relationship are not random, but related to real-world developments and changes in the nature of the European Union in particular. Second, Euroscepticism on the left and right is driven by different ideological motivations (Chapter 3). While EU attitudes among left-wing citizens are based on both socio-economic concerns (related to equality and the welfare state) and cultural concerns

(related to nationalism, cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism), for right-wing citizens only cultural attitudes matter. These differences in their motivations explain not only why the relationship between Euroscepticism and left-right has changed over time, but also why Euroscepticism manifests itself along different EU attitude dimensions for left-wing and right-wing citizens. Euroscepticism at the far left mainly reflects dissatisfaction with the current EU, whereas right-wing citizens stand out for their opposition to EU strengthening. Thus, the horseshoe model does not reflect the EU as a cross-cutting issue which juxtaposes radical to moderate citizens, but masks a more intricate pattern of relationships between left-right ideology and different types of Euroscepticism. When studying more specific dimensions of Euroscepticism, the horseshoe largely falls apart.

Part II of this dissertation has shown that the horseshoe model has similar pros and cons for our understanding of the relationship between Euroscepticism and electoral support. Generally speaking, the model is applicable to electoral support over the whole period under study (from 1989 to 2014). In each of the six waves that were studied, negative attitudes towards the EU (either dissatisfaction with the current EU or opposition to EU strengthening, or both) have been found to increase the likelihood of supporting left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic parties (Chapter 4). In the 2009 and 2014 waves, there is a clear symmetry: Dissatisfaction with the current EU increases support for left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic parties to a similar degree, whereas for all mainstream parties the effect runs in the opposite direction (Chapter 5). This symmetrical U-shaped relationship exists despite the fact that current EU dissatisfaction is stronger among citizens with a left-wing ideology than among those who identify as right-wing, as was found in Chapter 3. Apparently, even though left-wing citizens are more critical of the current EU than right-wing citizens, left-wing Eurosceptic parties do not profit from the greater electoral potential they have on this dimension in comparison to right-wing Eurosceptic parties. This might be due to the fact that the Eurosceptic left has a more complex story to tell regarding the EU than the right, and therefore puts less emphasis on EU issues – whereas for right-wing Eurosceptic parties it is easier to put their EU opposition front and centre. Nevertheless, those citizens dissatisfied with the current EU are roughly equally likely to support a Eurosceptic left-wing or right-wing party, which suggests that the horseshoe model applies to Eurosceptic electoral support.

Again, however, the findings call for a refined and conditional use of the horseshoe model. While the results for dissatisfaction with the current EU suggest that citizens base their electoral support on a simple pro/anti-EU dimension, this is contradicted by the effects of opposition to EU strengthening on electoral support. This more diffuse EU attitude generally has negative effects for left-wing and liberal parties (so these supporters are relatively enthusiastic about strengthening), and insignificant or positive effects for all remaining right-wing parties (which thus on average attract more sceptical supporters). Rather than creating a horseshoe-shaped divide between radical and mainstream parties, this dimension thus reinforces a left-liberal to right-conservative axis of political conflict.

The different patterns for the two EU dimensions can be understood from the different ideological motivations in which they are anchored. As Chapter 3 has shown, EU strengthening opposition is strongly rooted in cultural attitudes, and therefore connects to the nativist appeal of right-wing Eurosceptic parties, while left-wing and liberal parties are characterised by culturally more liberal or cosmopolitanist views. Dissatisfaction with the current EU relates to both economic and cultural concerns, and thus resonates with the critiques of both left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic parties. Thus, not all types of Eurosceptic attitudes are mobilised by parties at both sides of the left-right spectrum. Particularly more diffuse, culturally driven forms of Euroscepticism are concentrated at the political right.

In sum, the horseshoe model is useful to describe the general tendency of opposition to Europe to manifest itself at the margins of the political spectrum. Yet, the model is not universally applicable, neither over time, nor across countries, nor to different types of EU attitudes. Particularly, the model fails to capture the different nature of left-wing and right-wing Euroscepticism. Opposition towards European integration does not create a new dimension that unites Eurosceptics of different ideological backgrounds against a common foe. Rather, beyond the superficial similarities lie fundamentally different views on the European project. Thus, the findings of this dissertation show that in order to understand political competition over European integration, it is crucial to take into account what lies underneath the very general image of the horseshoe.

Contributions to the literature

By studying the relationship between Euroscepticism and the dimensionality of the political space, this dissertation is anchored in three streams of literature – and its findings consequently speak to each of these. In the first place, the findings contribute to the literature on the ideological structure of political conflict over European integration (Hooghe et al., 2002; Marks and Steenbergen, 2004), which brought up the horseshoe model and posited the EU dimension as a ‘sleeping giant’ (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004). Second, the findings are relevant to the literature on the emergence of a globalisation cleavage, which sees Euroscepticism as part of a broader ‘demarcation versus integration’ conflict (Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012). Third, with public Euroscepticism as its focal point, this dissertation contributes to the body of research on the correlates of public Euroscepticism.

European integration as a sleeping giant

In 2004 Van der Eijk and Franklin called the issue of European integration a sleeping giant. It was considered ‘sleeping’ as at the time of writing conflict over ‘Europe’ appeared little consequential for electoral competition. At the same time it was seen as a ‘giant’, as it could have the potential, if awakened, to fundamentally shake up the lines of political conflict.

This potential follows from the EU issue being perceived as a single dimension, orthogonal to dominant left-right ideology. Not only could this cross-cutting nature lead to divides within parties, but it could also turn former opponents into allies and vice versa. Political entrepreneurs at the extremes would have the incentive to politicise the EU dimension, while mainstream parties on the other hand would prefer to keep the issue depoliticised, precisely because it could upset their dominant position on the left-right dimension. Additionally, mainstream parties responding to public Euroscepticism would run the risk of ending up with 'strange bedfellows' – extremist parties of the opposite political colour (Green-Pedersen, 2012).

Even if more recent studies of politicisation of European integration have emphasised its multidimensionality and its intricate relation to left-right ideology at the level of political parties (Hoeglinger, 2016; Maag, 2015), the assumption seems to persist that at the level of citizens pro/anti-EU attitudes boil down to a single dimension, or even a dichotomy. Hoeglinger (2016: 126) asks, for instance, 'why should political actors invest heavily in the politicization of Europe if this issue is particularly difficult to own and does not help to distinguish them clearly from their competitors?'. Although parties of different ideologies have different arguments for their Euroscepticism, Hoeglinger contends, they will avoid the risk of being associated with their political opponents in the eyes of their potential voters – and this is one reason why they are 'struggling with the awakening giant', as his book's subtitle reads.

My findings suggest that citizens are actually aware of the ideological distinctiveness of different kinds of EU critiques. Not only do citizens hold independent attitudes towards different EU dimensions, which are rooted in (partially) distinct ideological motivations, but their electoral preferences for parties that are known as pro- or anti-EU are also structured by different kinds of EU attitudes. With regard to the sleeping giant thesis these findings have two major implications. First, in case political entrepreneurs would succeed in politicising 'Europe', this would not lead to a fundamental realignment of voters along a single pro/anti-EU dimension that unites left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptics against a common foe. Rather, depending on the ideological colour of the Eurosceptic entrepreneur, different kinds of Euroscepticism would become salient, and these would more likely lead to fragmentation within the left-wing respectively right-wing political blocks than to alliances across these blocks. Second and relatedly, this could mean that the politicisation of 'Europe' is not as limited as it now seems – it simply presents itself in a different way than some had expected. Instead of introducing a whole new dimension of political conflict, Euroscepticism is best understood in terms of its distinct sub dimensions which, like many other issues, form part of a broader attitudinal package in line with left-wing or right-wing ideology. Roughly put, the left-wing package of economic egalitarianism combined with multiculturalism fits with its Euroscepticism focused on the EU's current short-comings without turning down the European project altogether. The right-wing package of economic liberalism and nationalism is linked to a critique of shifting national

authority to the European level, and more categorically rejects both the current EU and the continuing of the integration process. As this dissertation has shown, citizens recognise these manifestations of Euroscepticism as distinct and relate them to different ideological motivations – and to support for ideologically distinct party families. Thus, the sleeping giant seems to be awakening, but its political consequences are not so ‘gigantic’ as the original thesis suggests. In part, this is certainly due to the fact that Europe for most citizens is not the most salient of issues. Yet its limited impact is also understandable from the fact that Eurosceptic positions overlap with existing ideological positions.

Globalisation ‘losers’ and the salience of the cultural dimension

The second stream of literature to which this dissertation’s findings speak is recent work on the emergence of a cleavage dividing the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of globalisation, coined and pursued by Kriesi and colleagues (2008; 2012; see also Azmanova, 2011; Teney et al., 2013). This line of research sees attitudes towards European integration as part of a broader ‘demarcation versus integration’ cleavage, related to issues of immigration, economic liberalisation, political integration, and the increasing permeability of national borders (Kriesi et al., 2008). The losers of globalisation are located in a ‘structural hole’ in the two-dimensional political space, as their combination of economically and culturally protectionist (or ‘demarcationist’) views finds scarce representation at the party level (see also Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). Similar to the sleeping giant thesis, this suggests that due to globalisation, citizens’ attitudes are organised in a way that defies traditional alignments of political competition. Kriesi and colleagues conclude that ‘[t]he ‘demarcation’ pole of the new cleavage has not yet been organized by a coherent political coalition which forcefully mobilizes the globalization ‘losers’” (Kriesi et al., 2012: 296).

My findings suggest that, apart from there being no coherent political coalition representing the globalisation losers, neither is there a coherent Eurosceptic electorate. Kriesi et al. (2012: 293-4) define different political coalitions in favour of demarcation at the party level – a nationalist coalition driven by the radical right and some conservative parties, and an interventionist coalition consisting of radical left parties, trade unions and other far left actors. While the first coalition mobilises primarily on cultural issues such as integration and takes a mixed position on the economic dimension, the latter focuses on economic protectionism and interventionism, while taking a neutral position on cultural issues (Kriesi et al., 2012: 293). The findings of this dissertation suggest that these two coalitions are actually mirrored at the level of citizens in the form of two quite distinct Eurosceptic electorates. Left-wing citizens are dissatisfied with the current EU but do not take negative positions on the (more culturally driven) EU strengthening dimension (Chapter 3). Their dissatisfaction is linked to both economic and cultural attitudes. However, my analysis of the support base of left-wing Eurosceptic parties shows that these supporters have positive rather than negative attitudes towards immigrants (Chapter 4), and thus do not share the nationalism that forms the core of the ‘losers of globalisation’ profile. Moreover,

the supporters of left-wing Eurosceptic parties have no clear lower educated profile. In contrast, at the right side of the spectrum I found highly different Eurosceptic potential. Right-wing citizens more categorically reject the European project, and this rejection is related solely to cultural concerns (and not at all to redistributive concerns, see Chapter 3). Supporters of right-wing Eurosceptic parties even tend to oppose income redistribution (Chapter 4). They do, however, disproportionately have a lower level of education. The Eurosceptic right thus speaks to globalisation losers' nationalist attitudes – and not to their socio-economic preferences. The Eurosceptic left has its potential among citizens who hold a more specific form of Euroscepticism, who strongly support income redistribution yet do not hold nationalist attitudes, and who come from diverse educational levels. Though Eurosceptic, their supporters do not fit the 'loser' profile as it is commonly characterised.

It thus appears that the radical right is more successful in mobilising the losers of globalisation – and this is in line with the conclusions of Kriesi and colleagues (2012). My findings also support the authors' explanation for this success, which lies in the fact that a cultural (rather than an economic) logic is currently most important in structuring political conflict over globalisation (2012: 296). This dominance of cultural arguments enables parties of the Eurosceptic right to incorporate economic fears – in a welfare chauvinist line of reasoning. On the contrary, the left has difficulties responding to nationalist Euroscepticism, and the salience of the cultural dimension over economic concerns augments their ambivalence towards Europe. Indeed, my findings show that this cultural logic is a much stronger structuring factor on the right than the economic logic is on the left. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 I find strong associations between opposition to EU strengthening, monoculturalist (anti-immigrant) attitudes, and supporting a right-wing ideology or radical right Eurosceptic party – and these associations are consistent across countries and over the recent time period. In addition, the finding that Euroscepticism has greatly increased among right-wing citizens from the 1990s onwards (Chapter 2) suggests that political and cultural concerns are increasingly salient. The economic logic, which drives the link between Euroscepticism, economic concerns and support for left-wing ideology and Eurosceptic parties, is much less strong as a structuring factor. These relationships are repeatedly found to be less consistent across countries, and are diminishing over time. This suggests that the cultural logic is dominant when it comes to Eurosceptic attitudes and voting behaviour, which is in line with the literature emphasising the importance of (cosmopolitan versus nationalist) values in explaining attitudes towards globalisation (e.g. Bechtel et al., 2014; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007).

The sources of Euroscepticism

Finally, this dissertation has shed light on the sources of public Euroscepticism more generally – and specifically how these may vary for different types of Euroscepticism. The literature on the sources of Euroscepticism has proposed three broad groups of explanations, summarised by Hooghe and Marks (2005) as 'calculation, community and

cues'. In the 1990s, most scholars focused on utilitarian explanations, under the expectation that citizens would evaluate European integration in terms of the benefits they believe to derive from it (Anderson, 1998; Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998; Gabel and Palmer, 1995). More recently, the focus has shifted to cultural explanations, which argue that perceived threats to national identity and a general fear of other cultures induce public Euroscepticism (Hooghe and Marks, 2004; 2005; McLaren, 2006; 2007). Third, public Euroscepticism has been shown to increase in response to the presence of Eurosceptic elites and ideological cues (De Vries and Edwards, 2009; Hooghe and Marks, 2005) or as a generalisation of support for domestic political actors (Anderson, 1998; Hartevelde et al., 2013). An important question is what the relative importance of these explanations is, and whether their weight has changed over time. Some hypothesise that identity factors have become more important – as suggested by Kriesi et al. (2012) and the findings in this dissertation – yet direct evidence of this claim is mixed (Lubbers and Jaspers, 2010; Van Klingeren et al., 2013). Others argue that the recent financial crises have brought the economy back in (Braun and Tausendpfund, 2014). My dissertation contributes to this field of study by demonstrating that the explanations of Euroscepticism highly depend on the specific dimension of Euroscepticism that is studied. EU attitudes that are more diffuse in nature – such as whether one prefers to continue integration or to see the process reversed – are likely to be driven by identity or cultural values. In contrast, EU attitudes that are specific evaluations of the EU's functioning are more likely to depend on economic or utilitarian concerns – though cultural attitudes also have a large impact on this dimension. The findings of extant research on the sources of Euroscepticism are likely to diverge as a function of how they operationalise their dependent variable.

Suggestions for future research

The first recommendation following from my findings is that future studies on the sources of Euroscepticism carefully specify their dependent variable, and if possible compare their explanations across different EU attitude dimensions. This recommendation applies not only to studies comparing utilitarian and value-based explanations, but also to scholars studying the effect of political cues on public Euroscepticism. Ideologically different 'senders' may have an impact upon different dimensions of Euroscepticism, and strike a chord with different groups of citizens. Even if these recommendations might seem evident, as of yet only few public opinion studies on the antecedents of Euroscepticism have taken the conceptual difference between distinct EU dimensions into account (notable exceptions are Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2007; 2010).

These recommendations also apply to studies on the consequences of EU attitudes. This dissertation has taken a first step by showing how distinct EU dimensions impact on electoral support for different party families. Yet, the distinction is likely to matter for other

types of electoral behaviour as well. Studies on voter abstention in European Parliament elections to date have relied on one-dimensional measures of Euroscepticism, with mixed results as to whether or not Eurosceptic attitudes increase abstention (Hobolt and Spoon, 2012; Hobolt et al., 2009; Schmitt, 2005). Future studies could disentangle the effects of different EU dimensions. Hypothetically, a fundamental disengagement from the European project could lead to abstention, as citizens have written off Europe altogether. In contrast, dissatisfaction with the current functioning of the EU (particularly when combined with a belief in 'a different Europe') might form an incentive for casting a vote. As voting in EP elections presupposes some level of confidence in the EU's democratic procedures, it could prove crucial to distinguish between procedural and policy dissatisfaction in such studies.

Second, although this dissertation's theoretical framework builds on the party literature, its empirical focus has been limited to citizens' attitudes. My finding that the complex ideological structure at the party level is mirrored at the level of voters raises the question to what extent these similarities are the result of actual effects running from parties to voters or vice versa. The quite extensive literature on mass-elite linkages with regard to Euroscepticism (Carrubba, 2001; De Vries and Edwards, 2009; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al. 2007; Wessels, 1995) has found a reciprocal influence between parties' and voters' positions towards the EU. However, none of these studies has conceptualised Euroscepticism multidimensionally – yet this dissertation has suggested that different kinds of Eurosceptic cues can affect different groups of voters. As of yet, most efforts to collect multidimensional data on parties' EU positions have distinguished between different policy dimensions (see for instance the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys) or policy directions (Maag, 2015) rather than theoretically different (e.g. specific versus diffuse) types of attitudes. The basic distinction between dissatisfaction with the current EU and opposition to further EU strengthening would be a valuable addition to future data collection efforts on party positions. On a different note, with the current levels of electoral volatility it is remarkable that most extant studies on mass-elite linkages focus on parties and their 'own' voters. In case of newly salient issues, party-voter linkages are likely to change, and the new parties that arise do not yet have their own voters to influence or be influenced by. To assess how mass-elite linkages work in times of (possible) realignment, we should therefore not (only) look at the link between parties and their own voters, but also take into account reciprocal effects linking the spectrum of party positions to the structure of public opinion as a whole.

Third, not only supply side dynamics but also historical context and the country-specific impact of European integration influence the way in which Euroscepticism connects to left-right ideology among citizens (Brinegar et al., 2004; Diez Medrano, 2003; Garry and Tilley, 2014; Hooghe and Marks, 2005, Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010). Although my dissertation focused on general patterns across countries, the country-specific deviations I encountered are of no less theoretical interest – and mark the relevance of distinguishing EU attitude dimensions. For instance, while in most countries Euroscepticism on the left takes the form of dissatisfaction with the current EU, in Sweden and Finland I also found more

principled opposition to EU strengthening to be concentrated on the left (see Chapter 3). The historical context of welfarism as a fundamental part of national identity might explain this deviation (Bornschieer, 2011). In 2014, I also found opposition to EU strengthening to be highest on the left in Greece and Portugal. In these countries, the austerity measures following the EU bailout programmes might play a role, as they might corrode the far left's belief in the prospects of a different, more social Europe. Not only do these findings underline the importance of distinguishing between different EU dimensions, they also indicate the relevance of historical context and country-specific developments. Yet, the importance of political agency is not to be overlooked. Economic hardship is not the exclusive breeding ground for left-wing Euroscepticism, but can just as well be fitted into a right-wing nationalist discourse. This is demonstrated by Marine Le Pen's Front National, which attained unprecedented electoral success by putting a critique of neoliberalism, austerity policy and the Euro central in its 2014 European Parliament election campaign (Goodliffe, 2015). This suggests that the structure of public opinion is not explained by structural conditions *per se*, but rather by how political actors make use of this context. While the effect of structural societal developments is channeled by political actors, the inverse is also possible. The potential for mobilisation of Euroscepticism at the left or right might be enhanced or limited by the societal or historical context. In Spain, for instance, the past of international isolation under the right-wing authoritarian Franco regime makes Eurosceptic mobilisation on nationalist grounds unlikely. Although a comparable argument long applied to the German case and the legacy of World War II, the recent rise of the right-wing nationalist Alternative für Deutschland shows that such historical limitations are not set in stone. Surprisingly, there is little research on the interaction effect between exogenous context factors (historical context, macro-economic developments, political events) and party supply on the structure of public opinion. Future research could explore how the effect of party cueing is conditional on structural context, and vice versa. Taking into account distinct dimensions of Euroscepticism could further enlighten this strand of research, as the pattern of country differences can greatly differ depending on the EU attitude under study.

Political and societal implications

This dissertation's findings have implications not only for further academic research, but also for the societal and political developments we can expect with regard to public opinion on European integration. First, the finding that the relationship between Euroscepticism changes over time in response to real-world developments implies that we can expect this process of change to continue in the light of recent events. But how exactly? First, the debt crisis and the subsequent Eurozone crisis that emerged in Europe from 2009 onwards could reinforce Euroscepticism at both the left and right extremes (see Van Elsas and Van der

Brug, 2015: 211). For left-wing citizens, the EU's pressure on national governments to take austerity measures and decrease budget deficits contributes to Euroscepticism, as they fear a dismantling of the welfare state. On the right, the Eurozone crisis creates a sense of public disaffection *between* the citizens of richer Northern and less affluent Southern member states. Where the first feel they have to pay for the latter's economic mismanagement, the latter feel they are disproportionately made to suffer by the first. In both the Northern and Southern countries this is likely to aggravate right-wing Euroscepticism, which denounces any European involvement that goes beyond the national interest. Second, the more recent refugee crisis from 2015 onwards, then, can be expected to reinforce such nationalist Euroscepticism, as the influx of refugees in many Western European countries triggers calls for closing the borders. On the other hand, for the (radical) left the refugee crisis leads to a strong critique of the EU's handling of this crisis (often combined with a call for more EU-level intervention). If we paint different types of Euroscepticism with a broad brush, these crises are likely to only deepen the horseshoe by strengthening Euroscepticism at both the left and right flanks.

Can we expect, under these circumstances, that Euroscepticism will continue to be of a different nature for left-wing and right-wing citizens – or might the deepening of the horseshoe mean that their Euroscepticism becomes more similar? Although the origins of their Euroscepticism remain distinct, it is imaginable that the opposition of the radical left will become more fundamental, and directed at the European project in itself. Easton (1975: 446) has pointed out that, although distinct dimensions, enduring specific political support can eventually spill over to diffuse political support. In line with this theory, Wessels (2007) has shown that negative evaluations of EU authorities and institutions can cumulate into a generalised opposition to the European regime, and even lead to an erosion of European identity. Thus, the radical left's critique of the current EU might, if persistent enough, eventually translate into a rejection of the European project altogether – or at least to calls for reversing (parts of) the integration process. In response to the Brexit referendum of June 2016, the Dutch radical left Socialist Party has called for a referendum on the new to-be negotiated EU treaty after the UK leaves the Union, and has demanded the abolishment of the European Commission to be part of the discussion.¹ In France, not only Le Pen's Front National pleads for a 'Frexit': Parti de Gauche leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon resolutely stated that 'Either we change the EU, or we leave'.² Although the radical left still seems to prefer transforming the EU over an EU exit, the question is how long its dedication to Europe will last if the EU would prove unable of fundamental reforms.

¹ Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS) (2016, June 24). 'Ook SP wil referendum, maar dan over de macht van de EU'. <http://nos.nl/artikel/2113180-ook-sp-wil-referendum-maar-dan-over-de-macht-van-de-eu.html>, accessed on July 4, 2016.

² Original quote in French: 'L'Union européenne, on la change ou on la quitte'. Interview Jean-Luc Mélenchon. Poussiélgue, G. (2016, June 24). 'Brexit : «C'est le début de la fin d'une époque», selon Mélenchon'. Les Echos <http://www.lesechos.fr/politique-societe/politique/0211063316510-brexit-cest-le-debut-de-la-fin-d-une-epoque-selon-melenchon-2009482.php>, accessed on July 4, 2016.

Even if the subsequent EU crises deepen the Euroscepticism on the left, the dominance of the cultural logic creates an asymmetry in the horseshoe to the advantage of the Eurosceptic right. The Brexit referendum of June 2016 has forcefully shown how culture and identity can overrule utilitarian, economic arguments: While David Cameron and the Remain camp tried to persuade voters with the benefits of EU membership for the UK's economy, the pro-Brexit campaign was more effective by exploiting the fears of immigration and loss of national sovereignty and identity – with Brexiteers claiming their victory on June 23 as constituting UK 'Independence Day'.³ The power of cultural rhetoric is also demonstrated by the success of radical right parties in the wake of the Eurocrisis: Radical right parties were quick to absorb economic issues into their nationalist discourse – by reframing welfare issues in welfare chauvinist terms, and turning criticism of the EU's handling of the Eurozone crisis into attacks on the 'profiting Greeks'. In this way, cultural and nationalist frames can remain dominant even when the economy is at the centre of the political debate. For the radical left, in turn, the dominance of cultural framing lays bare their ambivalence. Their fundamental ideology is inclusionary rather than exclusionary, and with regard to Europe this yields a combination of dissatisfaction with the current EU against a relatively pro-integrationist backdrop. As the pro-integrationism of the radical left is driven by its positions on the cultural dimension, this 'left-wing ambivalence' is only reinforced by the increasing salience of nationalist and cosmopolitan values in the debate on Europe. As a consequence, the mobilisation of Euroscepticism might become more and more a radical right affair.

Finally, the findings in this dissertation have implications for the current debates on how to handle rising levels of opposition to the EU across EU member states, as well as how to reduce the EU's democratic deficit (e.g. Føllesdal and Hix, 2006). The superficial nature of the horseshoe model of ideology and Euroscepticism implies that there is not one uniform type of Eurosceptic voter. Rather, European citizens are in disagreement on what it is they are sceptical about, as well as their motivations for being Eurosceptic in the first place. Those on the radical right that categorically reject any form of regional cooperation beyond a bare minimum are culturally motivated in their actions and beliefs. In sharp contrast, citizens on the radical left can actually demand further integration in some areas to align European policy with their redistributive ideals (see Van Elsas et al., 2016: 20). What in current debates is conflated under the header of Euroscepticism actually refers to radically different views on Europe. This has implications for how we should interpret current political contestation on European matters. First, EU referenda, such as the June 2016 Brexit vote, do not do justice to citizens' heterogeneous views on Europe. Politicians should reconsider whether complex questions are suitable for the black-and-white format

³ Interview Nigel Farage. Engineer, C. (2016, June 24). "It should be our independence day". Farage calls for national holiday in honour of Brexit'. Express. <http://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/682969/nigel-farage-independence-day-brexit>, accessed on July 4, 2016.

of the referendum, as it is can be unclear what a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ vote actually means, and the interpretation of the results is easily hijacked by the dominant political force. Second, different views on Europe follow not only ideological but also national lines. Particularly, in countries that profited from EU bailouts (such as Greece, Spain, Portugal), left-wing Eurosceptic parties are most successful with their critique not on European integration as such, but on the austerity measures implemented in exchange of the bailouts. In creditor countries (such as Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK), the right-wing Eurosceptic critique against intra-European redistribution finds more resonance (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016). In the wake of the Brexit referendum, the call for EU-wide reflection on the future of Europe is likely to stumble upon more complex cross-national disagreement than simply a ‘more’ or ‘less’ EU dichotomy. Finally, the different types of Euroscepticism at the left and the right imply that no silver bullet exists for reducing the EU’s lack of representation. Meeting the preferences of Eurosceptic publics could just as well entail the furthering of integration into a political and fiscal union as it could mean stripping down the EU in favour of national sovereignty – depending on the part of the public one aims to satisfy. Rather than offering European citizens the choice of being either in favour of or against the EU, the diverse nature of public Euroscepticism calls for a more comprehensive form of policy contestation than the EU has hitherto seen.