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Cover sheet

**The 2014 European Parliament Elections:
Divided in Unity?**

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The 2014 European Parliament Elections: Divided in Unity?¹

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Introduction

The winners of the 2014 European Parliament elections were Eurosceptic parties, often found on the fringes of the political spectrum. Parties critical of, or even hostile to, the European Union, topped the polls in France, the United Kingdom, Hungary, Denmark, and Greece, gaining almost 30 per cent of the seats in the European Parliament. Does this Eurosceptic surge indicate a rejection of the European project by a growing number of voters across Europe? Was support for these parties a sign that voters wanted less Union, or perhaps a different Union?

This contribution examines the context and the outcome the 2014 European elections. Previous elections to the European Parliament (EP) elections have generally been characterised by lacklustre and domestically-focused campaigns and voter apathy, but two factors set these elections apart: they took place in the context of the worst economic crisis in post-war Europe and the political groups in the EP had for the first time nominated lead candidates to compete for the post of European Commission president. Many hoped that the increased saliency of European issues and the constitutional strengthening of the link between the EP ballot and the policy direction of the Commission would both mobilize voters to take part in the elections in greater numbers and encourage them to provide a democratic mandate for the future direction of the EU. The EP even put up large billboards in the run-up to the elections proclaiming ‘This time it’s different’.

Were these elections different? On the face of it very little had changed. Turnout remained low at 42.6 per cent, government parties were the losers and smaller parties the winners, and the introduction of lead candidates European Parliament’s seemed to have

¹ I would like to thank the *Annual Review* editors, Nat Copsy and Tim Haughton, for very insightful comments on previous versions of this contribution.

gone unnoticed by most citizens (see Hobolt, 2014a; Treib, 2014; Schmitt *et al.*, 2015a). Hence, the most European aspect of these elections was that fact that concerns about the EU, and its handling of the crisis, dominated the rhetoric in a number of countries and shaped vote choices. However, the findings of this study also show considerable variation not only in the electoral appeal of Eurosceptic parties across countries, but also in the reasons for voters' support. Whereas the radical right parties performed well in Northern Europe, and to a lesser extent in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), they gained only a handful of seats in the Member States that were recipients of a credit arrangement, or bailout, from the EU (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain). In these debtor states, the critique of the EU was expressed by parties on the radical left instead.

The analysis of individual-level data from the 2014 European Election Studies (EES) reveal that support for leftist Eurosceptic parties was not driven by a rejection of the European project, but by discontent with austerity policies and a desire for more European solidarity. In contrast, support for the anti-EU radical right in the North was more evidently motivated by an opposition to immigration and to transfers of funds to other Member States. 'Europe' thus played a more central role in these European elections than ever before, but the outcome also exposed deep divisions in opinions on the future of the European Union. Citizens who were most vulnerable in the economic downturn – the losers of globalization – were most likely to vote for Eurosceptic parties. However, in the richer countries in the North, voters adversely affected by the crisis favoured *less* Union and closed borders, whereas similar voters in the South were calling for *more* European solidarity and integration. These contrasting narratives of how to solve the crisis are also evident in the national media coverage. The findings of this study thus highlight the challenges facing European politicians as they seek to find common solutions to the continent's problems.

This contribution proceeds as follows. First, it discusses the political and economic context of the 2014 EP elections and the national debate on the EU in the period leading up to the vote. Thereafter, it examines the support for Eurosceptic parties and individual-level motivations, analysing a cross-national post-electoral survey. Finally, it discusses the broader implications of these elections for the future of the EU.

European Elections: No Longer Second-Order?

Elections to the EP ostensibly provide a unique opportunity for the citizens of the EU to shape the policies and the future of the Union. When direct elections to the EP were introduced in 1979, the hope was that this would enhance the democratic dimension of EU policy-making by creating a legislative chamber that was accountable to and representing voters' interests (Rittberger, 2005; Hix *et al.*, 2007). But rather than legitimising the EU's authority, scholars and commentators alike have argued that the EP elections have failed to bring about the genuine electoral connection between voters and EU policy-makers that was hoped for. At the heart of the problem is the so-called 'second-order national election' nature of EP elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). According to the 'second-order election' explanation, voters treat EP elections as midterm elections. As a consequence, most voters simply do not care enough about these elections to even cast a vote. Turnout has declined in successive EP elections from 62 per cent in 1979 to just below 43 per cent in 2014.² Those who do turn out to vote tend to use their ballot to punish their national incumbent or vote on the basis of policy preferences relevant in a domestic policy space, rather than to decide on the issues facing the EU.

Numerous studies have shown that parties in national government are punished, particularly during the (national) midterm, and that larger parties are disadvantaged (see e.g. Marsh, 1998; Hix and Marsh, 2007). These patterns of behaviour are generally interpreted as voters responding to the low salience context of EP elections, and have led to the conclusion that European elections have largely failed in providing a strong democratic mandate for policy-making at the EU level. There were good reasons, however, to expect that the 2014 European Parliament elections would be different: less 'second-order national elections' and more truly European contests about the future direction of European integration. The reasons were two-fold: the introduction of 'lead candidates' for the position of Commission president and the eurozone crisis.

² However, it is worth noting that this decline in average levels of turnout in EP elections can be largely accounted for by the changing composition of the EU electorate due to the multiple EU enlargements to countries often with lower turnout habits in general elections, especially in CEE (see Franklin, 2001).

Starting with the institutional innovations, the EP took advantage of a constitutional change in the Lisbon Treaty's Article 17, which stated that the results of the EP elections should be 'taken into account' when selecting the next Commission president (see Dinan, 2014). To reinforce this link between the EP ballot and the selection of the Commission president, the major EP political groups decided for the first time to each rally behind a common lead candidate (*Spitzenkandidat* in German) for the post of the next President of the European Commission: Jean-Claude Juncker for the European People's Party (EPP); Martin Schulz for the Party of European Socialists (belonging to the Socialists & Democrats group); Guy Verhofstadt for the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), Ska Keller and José Bové for the European Green Party; and finally, Alexis Tsipras for the Party of the European Left. Thus, in theory at least, the 2014 EP elections allowed voters to give a mandate to a specific political platform for the EU's executive body, the Commission, since a vote for these parties was also a vote for one of the lead candidates as Commission President.³ The Parliament's hope was that this would strengthen the European element in the campaigns, personalize the distant Brussels bureaucracy, and thereby increase interest and participation in European democracy (European Parliament, 2013; Hobolt, 2014a).

The second factor making these elections different from previous ones was the economic and political context. At the time of the elections in June 2014, the EU had been experiencing several years of severe economic crisis. The euro area's sovereign debt problems became increasingly evident in 2009 with the downgrading of government debt in many European states, particularly in the so-called 'GIIPS' countries (Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain). Concerns intensified in early 2010 and thereafter, leading the EU to implement a series of financial support measures such as the European Financial Stability Facility (subsequently the European Stability Mechanism).⁴ These euro-rescue measures targeted at helping countries in a severe sovereign debt crisis came with strings attached, including government promises of fiscal austerity and structural reforms. A series of new legal instruments (the Six Pack, the Two Pack, the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure), new decision-making procedures (the European Semester) and a new intergovernmental

³ On the appointment of the new President of the Commission see Dinan's contribution to this volume.

⁴ On eurozone governance see Hodson's contribution to this and previous issues of the *Annual Review*.

treaty, the Fiscal Compact, were aimed at more tightly constraining national fiscal policy-making. The ongoing attempts to rescue countries on the brink of bankruptcy, and avoid the collapse of the eurozone, and the more formal institutional changes to economic governance, were extensively covered in the national media across Europe. The following section looks at the coverage of Europe in the media and the shifting public mood.

The Debate on Europe: Converging or Diverging?

As a consequence of the euro crisis, the EU issue became more salient in the national public spheres than ever before. This manifested itself in two ways. On the one hand, the public debate on the crisis was more 'Europeanised' than previously. Across Europe, the national media debated similar issues, and European actors (such as Angela Merkel and José Manuel Barroso) were prominent in the media landscapes across Europe (see Kriesi and Grande, 2014). On the other hand, domestic media coverage continued to be characterised by distinct national perspective on the crisis, and the EP election campaigns were also dominated by national parties and national politicians.

Moreover, there were elements of the campaign debate pointing towards increasing divisiveness and disintegration, as the national discourses on the crisis diverged. Studies on how the euro crisis has been portrayed in the media have pointed to the clear manifestations of a 'blame game', with the different interpretations of who is to blame for the crisis (Häniska *et al.*, 2013; Reuters Institute, 2014). For instance, in Southern Europe, the hardship and unemployment of the euro crisis are often linked to the conditions associated with bailout agreements, attributed largely to Germany. In contrast, parts of the media in North European countries, e.g. Germany and Finland, have highlighted that GIIPS countries have themselves to blame for the crisis. A large-scale study of media coverage of the euro crisis directed by the Oxford Reuters Institute⁵ provides insights into who the national newspapers portrayed as 'bearing the main responsibility to solve the crisis' in the period between 2010 and 2012 (see Table 1). Interestingly, the national studies reveal a relatively

⁵ "The Euro Crisis, Media Coverage, and Perceptions of Europe within the EU"-project was directed by the Oxford Reuters Institute. More than 10,000 articles from 40 newspapers in 9 countries were analysed in the project, between 2010 and 2012.

convergent view that the European Union bears the main responsibility for solving the crisis, either the eurozone countries (44 per cent) or the EU as a whole (28 per cent). In some countries' media coverage, debtor countries themselves are also seen to bear the responsibility. That is a view found mainly in coverage in Finland, Germany and Belgium, and perhaps more surprisingly, in Spain. A much smaller proportion of news coverage also points to 'creditor' countries as the main culprit, whereas the IMF, banks and other lenders are mentioned far less frequently (see Table 1).

Table 1: Media coverage of who bears the main responsibility for solving the crisis (%)

	Belgium	Finland	France	Germany	Italy	The Netherlands	Poland	Spain	UK
Euro group	44	57	60	37	35	60	26	22	53
EU/European Central Bank	29	19	15	18	34	16	50	35	30
Countries with sovereign debt problems	20	22	12	22	21	16	9	28	10
Countries without sovereign debt problems	1	0	6	13	5	3	11	14	3
IMF, banks and other lenders	6	2	7	10	5	5	4	1	4

Note: Percent of articles on the crisis that mention an "actor" with main responsibility for solving the crisis. Excludes "none" and "others".

Source: Reuters Institute (2014)

The studies of the media coverage in the years leading up to the 2014 elections thus point to an increasingly integrated Europeanised public sphere where the same European issues, European actors and EU responsibility appeared prominently in the news coverage across Member States. However, the national framing also remained dominant and the crisis was viewed from a distinct national perspective (see Kriesi and Grande, 2014; Reuters Institute, 2014).

Not surprisingly, the EU's response to the crisis also affected citizens' attitudes towards the European Union. Survey data show that citizens became increasingly aware of the Euro crisis and more likely to hold the EU, rather than their national governments, responsible for the economic circumstances in their country in the period leading up to the 2014 elections (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014; Hobolt, 2014b). At the same time, Eurobarometer data show there was a marked decline in trust in the European Union. Between the 2009 and 2014 elections, the percentage of people who 'tend to trust' the EU, declined by 16

percentage points from 47 to 31 per cent, and similarly those who had a positive image of the EU declined from 45 to 35 per cent.⁶ While trust in national governments also declined in the same period, this decline was less steep. But how did these developments in the institutional procedures, the campaigns and people's attitudes towards Europe translate into voting behaviour in the 2014 elections?

Voting Behaviour in the 2014 Elections

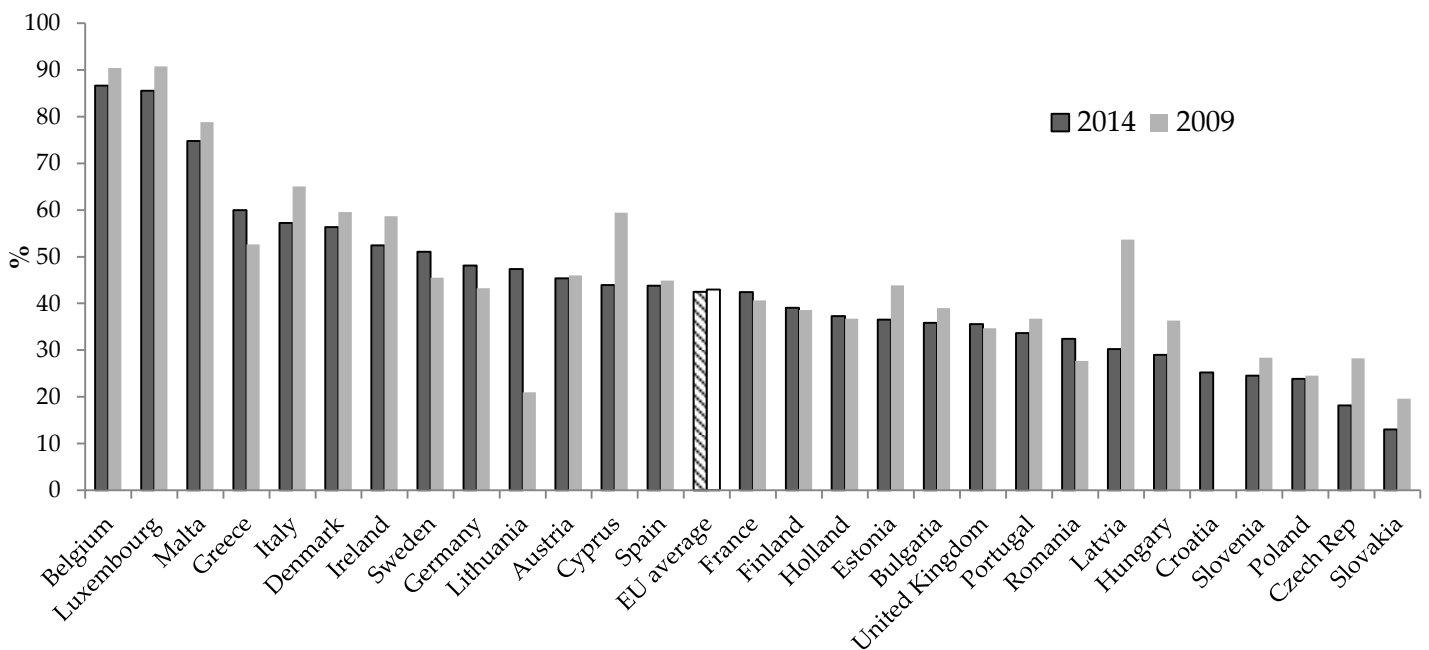
Given the rise in salience of European integration, and the strengthened link between the vote and executive politics in the EU, it was not unreasonable to expect that voters would be more motivated to turn out than in previous elections. While initial indications suggested a small increase in turnout, participation levels were in fact slightly below 2009 level. Hence, although the EP was successful in ensuring that the lead candidate of the winning political group (EPP), Jean-Claude Juncker, eventually became Commission president, it is less obvious that the introduction of lead candidates made a substantial difference to voting behaviour. Evidence suggests that the lead candidates did have a mobilizing effect on the minority of voters who had knowledge of the candidates, especially in countries where they had campaigned (see Schmitt *et al.*, 2015a). However, only a minority of Europeans were able to identify which political party the candidates belong to – only 19 and 17 per cent could link Juncker and Schulz to their parties, respectively - and hence for the vast majority of citizens, these candidates made little difference (see also Hobolt, 2014a).

There was significant variation across the EU in levels of participation, as shown in Figure 1. Most of that variation can be explained by three factors that are not directly related to the European nature of the elections, namely: compulsory voting rules, concurrent national and relatively recent history of Communist rule. The most powerful predictor of turnout at European elections is compulsory voting (Belgium, Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg) or a history of compulsory voting (Italy). It is well-known that compulsory voting raises turnout, even when it is not strictly enforced, especially in low-salience elections (Franklin, 2001). A second factor is concurrent national elections that bring voters to the polls, such as the national and regional elections in Belgium and the presidential

⁶ See Eurobarometer surveys 2007-2014.

elections in Lithuania (the latter helps explain the remarkable 21 percentage points increase in turnout compared to 2009). Finally, turnout in post-communist countries is significantly lower than in the rest of the Union. This may be due in part to general low levels of partisanship and political mobilization in these countries (Wessels and Franklin, 2009) and the fact that Europe is an even less salient issue in Central and Eastern Europe (Haughton, 2014; Haughton and Novotna, 2014).

Figure 1: Turnout in the 2014 European Parliament elections



Source: European Parliament (www.europarl.europa.eu)

While there was no great leap in participation levels, that is not to say that these elections were not distinctly more ‘European’ than in previous ones. At a first glance, the outcome of the election appears very similar to the 2009 elections: the centre-right EPP remained the largest party, but was also the elections’ biggest loser as its seat share dropped from 36 to 29 per cent; followed closely by its centre-left rival, the Socialists & Democrats with 25 per cent (the same as in 2009). The 8th European Parliament also includes the centrist ALDE group with 9 per cent (down from 11 per cent in 2009) and the Greens with 7 per cent of the seats (as in 2009). The clearest winners, however, were parties that belong to the groups more sceptical of the EU: on the right – the European Conservatives and Reformists group (9 per cent, up from 7 in 2009) and the European Freedom and Direct Democracy group (6 per cent,

up from 4) – and on the left - the United Left Group (7 per cent, up from 5) – as well as the 52 members (7 per cent, up from 4), who are not attached to any grouping.

The clearest indication that voters were more concerned about European issues was the surge in popularity for political parties that proposed radical reform of, or even exit from, the EU. The rise in the Eurosceptic vote was therefore the message that dominated the headlines in the aftermath of the EP elections, and sent shock waves through domestic political systems. The most striking result was that radical right Eurosceptic parties, which had never been in government, topped the polls in France, the UK and Denmark. This was not an isolated phenomenon. With the exception of Malta, all EU countries had a Eurosceptic party gaining more than 2 per cent of the popular vote, although with considerable cross-national differences in their level of popularity. Overall, 220 of the EP's 751 members (MEPs) represented Eurosceptic parties, accounting for 29 per cent of MEPs, as shown in Table 2.

Of course not all Eurosceptic parties are the same. *Euroscepticism* may be broadly defined as a sentiment of disapproval towards European integration, and this classification of Eurosceptic parties includes both 'soft' and 'hard' Eurosceptic parties (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004). Soft Eurosceptic parties refer to those that accept the idea of European integration, but oppose specific policies or institutional aspects of the EU, such as Syriza in Greece, the Conservative Party in Britain or Fidesz⁷ in Hungary. Hard Eurosceptic parties include parties that reject the European integration project as such, and tend to advocate a country's withdrawal from the EU, such as the Freedom Party in Austria and the UK Independence Party in Britain (see Treib, 2014). The parties classified as Eurosceptic in Table 2 belong to both categories and have been included in the list because a significant proportion of their campaign rhetoric and manifesto was devoted to a critique of the EU.⁸ Most Eurosceptic parties are found on the fringes of the left-right political spectrum, although a few adopt more centrist positions (such as the British Conservative Party and the

⁷ Fidesz is unusual among Eurosceptic parties, as it belongs the pro-European EPP, however, its leader Victor Orbán's rhetoric has become increasingly hostile towards the EU (for example, he compared EU bureaucrats to Soviet apparatchiks). Orbán has described his position as 'Eurorealist' rather than Eurosceptic.

⁸ The classification has been cross-referenced with expert judgements in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, as well as other academic work on Eurosceptic parties, notably Treib (2014).

Polish Law and Justice party) or reject any left-right classification (such as the Italian Five Star Movement).

Table 2: Eurosceptic Parties in the 2014 European Parliament elections

Country	Parties*	Eurosceptic Left vote %	MEPs	Eurosceptic Right vote %	MEPs
Austria	<i>Freedom Party [R], EUStop [R], Coalition for another Europe [L]</i>	2.1	0	22.5	4
Belgium	<i>Vlaams Belang [R]; PTB-GO! [L]</i>	2.0	0	4.3	1
Bulgaria	<i>VMRO-BND/Bulgaria without Censorship [R]**, National Front [R], ATAKA [R]</i>	-	-	16.7	2
Croatia	<i>Croatian Party of Rights [R]</i>	-	-	**	1
Cyprus	<i>Progressive Party of Working People [L]; ELAM [R]</i>	27.0	2	2.7	0
Czech Republic	<i>Communist Party [L]; Party of Free Citizens [R]; Dawn of Direct Democracy [R]</i>	11.0	3	8.4	1
Denmark	<i>Danish People's Party [R]; People's Movement against the EU [L]</i>	8.1	1	26.6	4
Estonia	<i>Conservative People's Party of Estonia [R]</i>	-	-	4.0	0
Finland	<i>Finns Party [R]</i>	-	-	12.9	2
France	<i>National Front [R]; Left Front [L]; France Arise [R]</i>	6.3	3	28.7	23
Germany	<i>Alternative for Germany [R]; Left Party [L]; National Democratic Party [R]</i>	7.4	7	8.1	8
Greece	<i>Syriza [L]; Golden Dawn [R]; KKE [L]; ANEL [R]; Popular Orthodox Rally [R]</i>	32.7	8	15.5	4
Hungary	<i>Fidesz [R]; JOBBIK [R]</i>	-	-	66.1	15
Ireland	<i>Sinn Fein [L]</i>	19.5	3	-	-
Italy	<i>Five Star Movement [R]****; Northern League [R]; The Other Europe with Tsipras [L]</i>	4.0	3	27.3	22
Latvia	<i>National Alliance [R]; Union of Greens and Farmers [R]</i>	-	-	22.5	2
Lithuania	<i>Order and Justice [R]; LLRA [R]</i>	-	-	22.3	3
Luxembourg	<i>Alternative for Democratic Reform [R]</i>	-	-	7.5	0
Malta	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands	<i>Freedom Party [R]; Socialist Party [L]; CU-SGP [R]</i>	9.6	2	21.0	6
Poland	<i>Law and Justice [R]; Congress of the New Right [R]; United Poland [R]; Right Wing of the Republic [R]</i>	-	-	42.9	23
Portugal	<i>United Democratic Coalition [L]; Left Bloc [L]</i>	18.6	4	-	-
Romania	<i>People's Party - Dan Diaconescu [L]; Greater Romania Party [R]</i>	3.7	0	2.7	0
Slovakia	<i>Ordinary People and Independent Personalities [R]; Nova [R]; Freedom and Solidarity [R]; Slovak National Party [R]</i>	-	-	24.6	3
Slovenia	<i>United Left [L]; Slovenian National Party [R]</i>	5.5	0	4.0	0
Spain	<i>United Left [L]; Podemos [L]; Peoples Decide [L]</i>	20.1	12	-	-
Sweden	<i>Sweden Democrats [R]; Left Party [L]</i>	6.3	1	9.7	2

United Kingdom	UKIP [R]; Conservative Party [R]; Sinn Fein [L]; Democratic Unionist Party [R]	0.7	1	50.6	44
Total MEPs			50		170

Notes:

* Only parties with more than 2% of the national vote or 1 MEP have been included

** VMRO-BND formed a coalition with Bulgaria Without Censorship, a soft Eurosceptic party, and other smaller parties, and their 2 MEPs joined the Eurosceptic ECR Group.

***Croatian Party of Rights dr. Ante Starčević (HPS AS) formed an electoral alliance with 3 other parties. The HSP AS member sits in the ECR group, whereas the other coalition members sit in the EPP Group. The coalition got 41% of the votes

While these parties share a critical, or even hostile, attitude to the European Union, they vary considerably the nature of their position on the left-right spectrum and therefore also in their views on other issues, such as redistribution, immigration and civil liberties. The left-right positions also translate into differences in the critique of the EU. The right-wing criticism is traditionally centred on nationalism and thus an opposition to the external threats to national sovereignty and to immigration (Mudde, 2007; Mair and Mudde, 1998). In contrast, critique from left-wing parties of the EU is rooted in an anti-capitalist ideology and call for greater state intervention and redistribution both nationally and internationally. However, while much divides the radical right and the radical left, they share a Eurosceptic, nationalist, and often populist, rhetoric that cuts across traditional left-right alignments (Halikiopoulou *et al.*, 2012). In the context of the 2014 EP elections, the concern about threats to national sovereignty and opposition to EU institutions and policies were shared by Eurosceptic parties on both the right and the left, often combined with populist and anti-establishment rhetoric. However, the anti-immigration rhetoric was far more pronounced on the right (especially in Western Europe), while the anti-austerity rhetoric was more pronounced on the left.

As shown in Table 2, the majority of Eurosceptic parties are found on the right, often on the far right. The popularity of radical right-wing Eurosceptic parties is particularly pronounced in Northern Europe creditor states: Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland and the UK. In other words, in the richer Member States that have generally benefited the most from the Single Market, but where there has also been a significant increase in social inequality (Copsey, 2015). The Eurosceptic right also did very well in Italy and France, as well as in CEE, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia. Yet we also saw

the success of the radical left Eurosceptic parties in a handful of countries. Interestingly, the Eurosceptic left did well in the countries that experienced the most severe anti-austerity programmes and conditionality associated with their bailout packages, namely in Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Ireland and Portugal, where the parties polled an average of 24 per cent.

These voting data clearly demonstrate the heightened appeal of Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 EP elections. Moreover, they point to important North-South and East-West differences: in the richer North, the radical right parties performed very well. In the poorer South-West (and Ireland), where the EU had imposed conditions of austerity and structural reform in return of credit, radical left parties did well; whereas there was a notable absence of radical right parties. In CEE, the Eurosceptic parties on the right generally performed well, although voter apathy was more pronounced than vocal Euroscepticism in this part of Europe (see Haughton and Novotna, 2014). These aggregate-level data, however, tell us less about the motivation of voters across Europe. In the next section, I analyse individual-level data to address the question of *why* Eurosceptic parties were popular.

Explaining the Eurosceptic vote

What explains support for Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 EP elections? As discussed above, the classic explanation for voting behaviour in European elections is the 'second-order national election' explanation (Reif and Schmitt, 1980 p. 9; see also van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Hix and Marsh, 2007). In comparison to first-order national elections, where the formation of a government is a primary objective, strategic considerations about party size and government performance matter less in second-order EP elections, and consequently voters are expected to vote more 'sincerely', focusing on ideological similarities. Moreover, voters may be motivated by a desire to punish national governments. Yet recent work on electoral behaviour in Europe has argued that the issue of European integration is becoming increasingly politicised and this has meant that the issue of European integration matters more to voters (Tillman, 2004; De Vries, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Studies of the 2004 and 2009 elections have shown that Euroscepticism plays a considerable role in voters' decision to defect and abstain, but that this is conditioned by the politicisation of the EU

issue in the national political debate (Hobolt *et al.*, 2009; de Vries *et al.*, 2011; Hobolt and Spoon, 2012). Hence the extant literature highlights three sets of factors which shape vote choices in EP elections: first, sincere ideological considerations, such as left-right and libertarian-authoritarian attitudes; second, dissatisfaction with the current (national) government and policy performance; and finally, attitudes that are specifically related to the European Union and European integration.

Electoral behaviour in EP elections is therefore often regarded as a ‘protest vote’: a protest against the incumbent national government or indeed against the direction of European integration. Since these elections remain ‘second-order’ they allow voters to express their dissatisfaction with the political establishment and policy performance without the constraints that voters feel when they are selecting a national government. Yet, this does not render the elections insignificant. EP elections matter, not only for policy-making in the EU, but also as barometers of citizens’ preferences and as ‘markers’ in national politics. In the context of an economic crisis in Europe, the fact that voters endorsed parties on the fringes of the political spectrum therefore seems unsurprising. But it still leaves several questions unanswered: if the rise of parties on the fringes were a protest vote, what were voters protesting against? How does this vary across Europe?

These questions can be addressed by analysing the European Election Study (EES) 2014; a post-election survey with representative samples in each of the 28 Member States (Schmitt *et al.*, 2015b).⁹ This study allows us to examine the factors that motivated citizens to support Eurosceptic parties across the EU. We examine support for both left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic parties by analysing responses to the EES question ‘how probable it is that you will ever vote for this party?’ on an 11-point scale. The distinct advantage of this question is that we are able to measure support for Eurosceptic parties among *all* respondents and not just those who voted in the EP elections.¹⁰ To examine the

⁹ Approximately 1,100 respondents were interviewed in each EU member country, totalling 30,064 respondents. The EES 2014 was carried out by TNS Opinion between 30 May and 27 June 2014. All the interviews were carried out face to face. More information can be found here:

<http://eeshomepage.net/voter-study-2014/>, where the EES questionnaire can also be found.

¹⁰ I also ran the models with vote choice in EP elections as the dependent variable (1= Eurosceptic Left/ Eurosceptic Right party) and the same explanatory variables come out as significant in these models).

determinants of Eurosceptic vote choice, we firstly measure individuals' socio-economic position by including a set of demographic variables (gender, age, education,¹¹ occupation¹² and unemployment) as well a variable capturing individuals adversely affected by the crisis.¹³ Second, we include a variable that capture individual's ideological attitudes towards the government¹⁴ and the economy.¹⁵ Third, we capture ideology using questions on economic redistribution, immigration, and combating crime versus civil liberties¹⁶. Finally, we include various questions that capture attitudes toward European integration¹⁷ and EU policies on trans-national redistribution,¹⁸ fiscal integration¹⁹ as well as approval of EU performance during the crisis.²⁰ We also include a measure of (objective) knowledge of the European Union.²¹

Table 3 shows the results from a multilevel linear regression model of Eurosceptic party support with random intercepts for political system.²² I have run separate models for left- and right-wing Eurosceptic parties (see Table 2) and for Western Europe - with more established party systems and longer democratic traditions – and post-Communist CEE, with less established party systems and lower salience of EU issues (Haughton, 2014; Haughton and Novotna, 2014). The results show both striking similarities and important differences across support for Eurosceptic parties (left and right) and regions (West and CEE).

Starting with the similarities, we can see that people who are economically

¹¹ Age of ending full-time education

¹² Dummies for respondents in a working class occupation (unskilled or skilled manual labour) and in a professional/ managerial position.

¹³ Loss of income and/or loss of job in the household over the last 24 months.

¹⁴ Disapproval of "The government's record to date"

¹⁵ General economic situation over the next 12 month in country.

¹⁶ Opposition to the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor in country; Opposition to a restrictive policy on immigration; In favour of restricting privacy rights to combat crime

¹⁷ Opposition to "European unification"

¹⁸ Disagreement with the statement: "In times of crisis, it is desirable for the UK to give financial help to another European Union Member State facing severe economic and financial difficulties."

¹⁹ Opposition to EU authority over the EU Member States' economic and budgetary policies

²⁰ Disapproval of The actions of the EU during the last 12 months

²¹ A scale based on correct responses to six factual knowledge questions on the EU and the lead candidates.

²² Estimating the models with country fixed-effects or clustered standard errors by country yield very similar results.

disadvantaged are more likely to support the Eurosceptic parties: those in working class occupations, the unemployed and those who have been adversely affected by the crisis. In other words, it is the ‘losers’ of European integration, and globalization, who are most attracted to Eurosceptic parties – and there are a lot of them as a result of the uneven distribution of the Single Market’s benefits over the past 30 years (Copsey, 2015). It is also noteworthy that supporters of these parties are generally dissatisfied with the performance of both their national government and the European Union. This suggests that the Eurosceptic vote is a classic protest against the political establishment among those who feel that that mainstream parties have let them down, and those who have suffered most in the crisis.

Table 3: Explaining the Eurosceptic Vote

	<u>Eurosceptic Right</u>						<u>Eurosceptic Left</u>					
	<i>West</i>			<i>East</i>			<i>West</i>			<i>East</i>		
	Coef	SE	Sig	Coef	SE	Sig	Coef	SE	Sig	Coef	SE	Sig
Female	-0.49	0.05	**	-0.12	0.06	**	0.05	0.06		-0.14	0.13	
Age	-0.01	0.00	**	-0.02	0.00	**	-0.02	0.00	**	0.02	0.00	**
Education	-0.14	0.04	**	0.06	0.05		0.08	0.04		-0.38	0.11	**
Professional occupation	-0.18	0.09		-0.26	0.12	**	-0.36	0.11	**	-0.75	0.29	**
Working class occupation	0.47	0.09	**	0.15	0.09		0.23	0.10	**	0.28	0.18	
Unemployed	0.10	0.10		-0.18	0.10		0.09	0.10		0.53	0.23	**
Adversely affected by the crisis	0.09	0.04	**	0.07	0.04	**	0.10	0.04	**	0.26	0.07	**
EU knowledge	-0.04	0.02		0.14	0.03	**	0.15	0.02	**	-0.13	0.06	**
Government disapproval	0.19	0.03	**	-0.02	0.03		0.43	0.03	**	0.13	0.06	**
Economic pessimism	0.08	0.03	**	-0.08	0.04	**	-0.02	0.03		0.02	0.08	
Anti civil liberties	0.08	0.01	**	0.03	0.01	**	-0.04	0.01	**	0.04	0.02	
Anti redistribution (national)	0.09	0.01	**	0.01	0.01		-0.20	0.01	**	0.01	0.02	
Anti immigration	0.16	0.01	**	0.00	0.01		-0.11	0.01	**	-0.03	0.02	
Anti EU unification	0.10	0.01	**	0.02	0.01	**	0.00	0.01		0.03	0.02	
EU performance disapproval	0.16	0.04	**	-0.13	0.04	**	0.17	0.04	**	0.17	0.08	**
Anti EU redistribution	0.33	0.03	**	-0.09	0.03	**	-0.26	0.03	**	-0.17	0.07	**

Anti EU fiscal integration	0.08	0.01	**	-0.01	0.01		0.01	0.01		-0.02	0.02	
Constant	-0.84	0.27	**	2.92	0.35	**	4.58	0.33	**	1.85	0.57	**
<i>N, groups</i>	13,481			10,124			13,062			2285		

Note: Multi-level logistic regression of propensity to vote for Eurosceptic parties (see Table 1). ** p<0.05. Source: EES 2014

Turning to the differences, we notice that the ideological motivations for supporting these parties vary considerable across party types and region. To illustrate the magnitude of these differences, Figure 2 shows that marginal effects (min-max) of each of the significant explanatory variables on Eurosceptic party support (0-10). When it comes to left-right preferences, it is perhaps unsurprising supporters of right-wing parties in the West are opposed to both redistribution and immigration, whereas support for left-wing Eurosceptic parties in the West is driven by a contrasting set of attitudes: favouring immigration and redistribution from rich to the poor. In contrast, in CEE these ideological considerations were far less significant as a predictor of party support²³ (see Figure 2b and 2d). Figure 2a shows that anti-immigration attitudes were the most important driver of right-wing Eurosceptic support, whereas Figure 2c shows that pro-redistribution attitudes were the key motivation behind left-wing Eurosceptic support. This is of course also a reflection of the rhetoric and policy positions of these parties. Right-wing Eurosceptic parties in the West have been able to successfully link their opposition to the EU to more salient concerns about immigration (from inside and outside the EU), whereas left-wing Eurosceptic parties have related their critique of the EU policies to a more general anti-austerity platform.

Most interesting is the relationship between EU attitudes and the support for Eurosceptic parties. One might have expected that Euroscepticism is a key predictor of both right- and left-wing party support, given that a distinguishing feature of these parties is their critical position on European integration. However, that is not the case. We find a strong association between Euroscepticism - opposition to European unification and opposition to specific EU policies – among supporters of right-wing Eurosceptic parties in

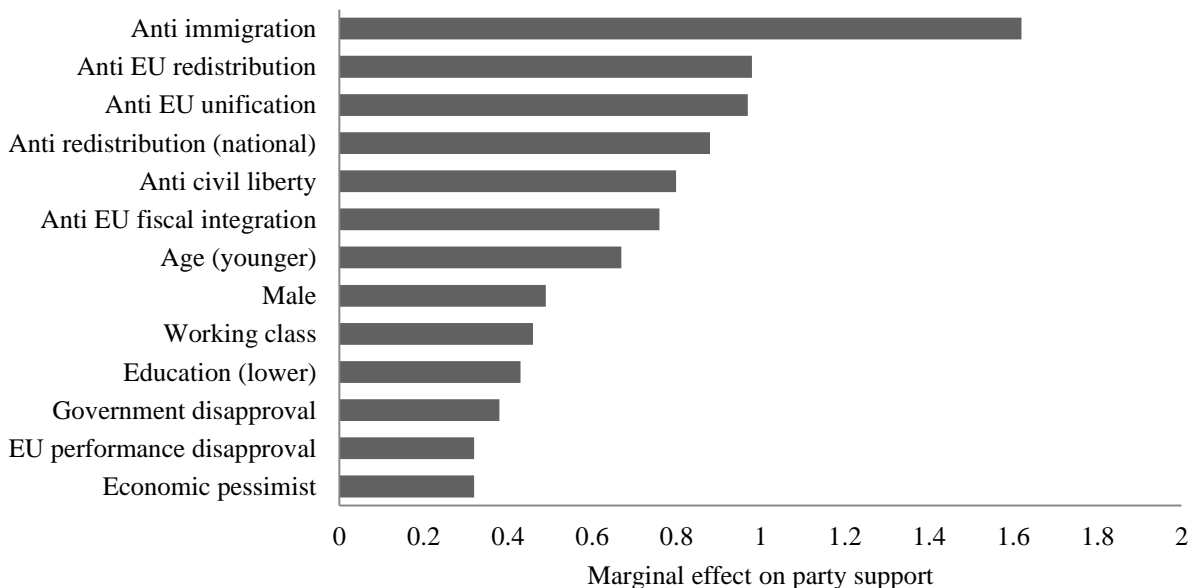
²³ But note that pro-redistribution attitudes are a significant predictor of left-wing Eurosceptic party support also in CEE.

the West. However, general attitudes towards European integration are *not* a significant predictor of support for left-wing Eurosceptic parties, such as Syriza and Podemos. If anything, supporters of these parties are more pro-European than mainstream party supporters. Moreover, they clearly favour greater financial transfers between EU Member States (a preference shared with supporters of right-wing Eurosceptic parties in CEE). Supporters of left-wing Eurosceptic parties in the West are also far more knowledgeable about the EU than the average voter.

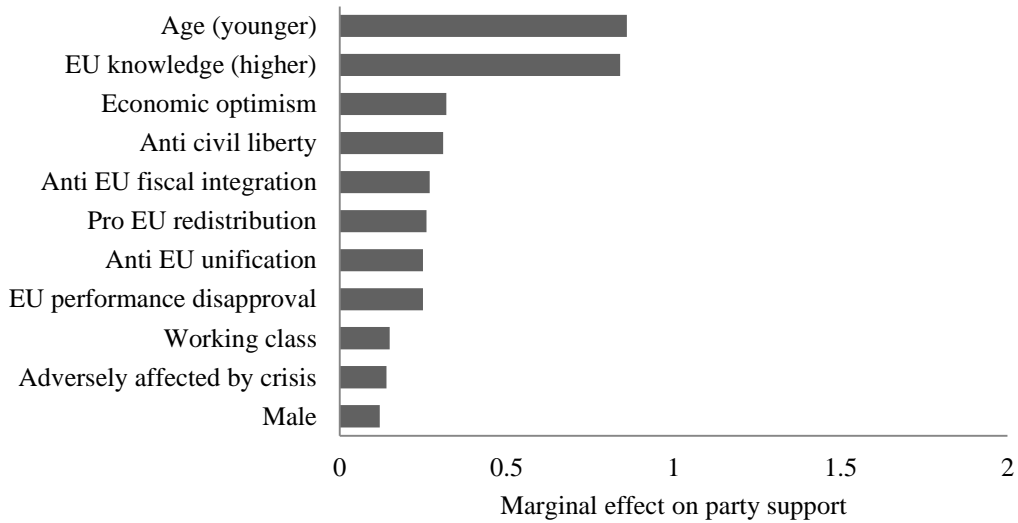
Hence, far from being disengaged and anti-European, the findings suggest that the Eurosceptic left-wing vote in the West is a call for a different Europe with greater solidarity and redistribution across and within European borders. Supporters of Eurosceptic parties in the East also favour greater European redistribution and a critical stance's on the EU's handling of the crisis. In contrast, supporters of Eurosceptic right-wing parties in the West favour closed borders, less integration and less redistribution.

Figure 2: The Eurosceptic Voter

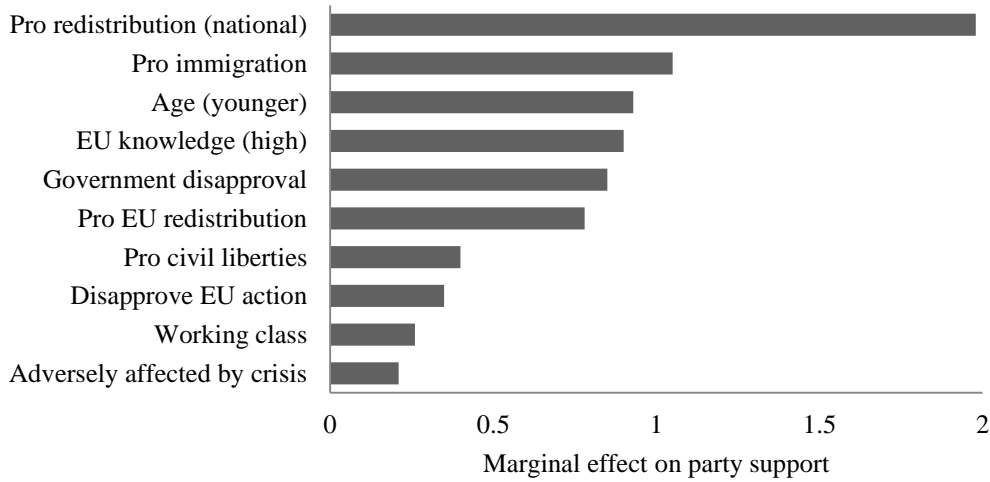
a) Support for right-wing Eurosceptic parties (West)



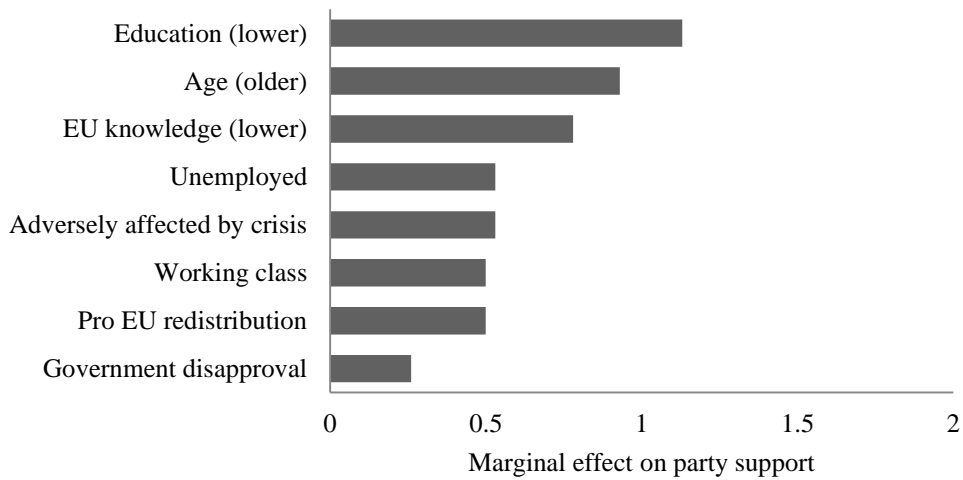
b) Support for right-wing Eurosceptic parties (East)



c) Support for left-wing Eurosceptic parties (West)



d) Support for left-wing Eurosceptic parties (East)



Conclusion

Many inside the European institutions had high hopes for the 2014 European Parliament elections, as they marked the introduction of genuine contests between candidates for the Commission presidency. However, evidence suggests that these lead candidates were recognised by only a small proportion of the electorate. Instead of a contest between candidates with competing visions for Europe, the elections were dominated by national parties and the key 'European' feature of these elections was the success of parties that were highly critical of the EU. Eurosceptic parties won 29 per cent of the seats in the EP, and topped the polls in several countries.

The success of these parties is not wholly surprising in the context of a deep economic crisis for which the EU was held at least partly responsible by the media and by ordinary citizens (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014; Kriesi and Grande, 2014; Reuters Institute, 2014). In the period leading up to the elections, unemployment rates for the EU reached a post-war high. The situation was particularly grave in the debtor states, such as Greece and Spain where a quarter of the workforce was excluded from the labour market and youth unemployment was even higher. As a result of this crisis and policy measures adopted in response to the crisis, the EU was more salient than ever in the national media. Yet this Europeanised public debate was accompanied by distinct national narratives of the crisis and blame-shifting to the EU and other countries. In response, citizens become more critical of the EU, and trust in mainstream parties and national government also declined. This contribution has investigated whether the electoral success of Eurosceptic parties on the fringes of the left-right spectrum is an expression of protest against national governments and parties, as the second-order election theory would predict, or whether voters cast their ballots with distinctly European questions in mind.

Of course, national and European politics is inherently intertwined, which makes it difficult to distinguish between 'national' and 'European' preferences. Nonetheless, our analysis of individual-level voting behaviour suggests that the success of Eurosceptic parties was driven, at least in part, by distinctly European concerns, especially in Western Europe. First, we find that those individuals who were most vulnerable in the crisis were most likely to support Eurosceptic parties. Our analysis shows that the support for Eurosceptic parties

was particularly high among those adversely affected by the crisis (the unemployed, the young, the manual workers and those who experience a reduction in income etc.). Second, the findings show that supporters of Eurosceptic parties share a disapproval of both national government and the EU's performance during the crisis.

Importantly, however, our analysis also point to significant differences. In the richer North the far-right general performed better, driven by opposition to immigration as well as to a closer integration EU and transfers of resources to other Member States. In contrast, support for the left-wing Eurosceptic parties was most pronounced in the Southern European countries that were hit hardest by the crisis and received credit from the EU and other lenders. Supporters of these parties were not adverse to closer European integration and favoured a Europe of greater redistribution, across and within countries, and more open borders. Thus while disapproval of the EU's handling of the crisis seem to unite these voters of the left and the right, their vision for a better Europe is radically different.

Hence, the 2014 EP elections may well have been the most 'European' electoral contests to date, yet they also revealed deepening divisions in Europe, between the winners and the losers of economic integration, and between South and North and East and West. The legitimacy of European Union has always rested on the idea that it brought about greater prosperity for *all* its Member States rather than substantial redistribution between Member States. The euro crisis has called this basic premise into question not only due the severity of the economic downturn, but because of the evident need for financial support, at least in the short term, for some Member States, especially poorer Southern European countries from the richer neighbours in the North (Copsey, 2015). The electoral appeal of Eurosceptic parties in the North calling for *less* solidarity, contrasted with the demand for *more* solidarity by popular Eurosceptic parties in the South, starkly illustrates the difficulty of establishing closer fiscal integration in the Union without further alienating a large group of voters.

The success of the Eurosceptic parties is unlikely to transform policy-making in the European Parliament, where the pro-European centrist political groups continue to dominate. However, the results did send shock waves through a number of national political systems, by giving radical parties an important foothold and by signalling to

governments that many voters wanted a different direction for Europe. The fact that the visions for reform of the EU differ so radically across (and within) nations point to the challenges ahead when it comes to finding common solutions for Europe. Rather than being 'united in diversity', as the EU's motto proclaims, the elections highlight that Europeans are increasingly 'divided in unity': they have been forced closer together, politically and economically, by the necessities of the eurozone crisis, yet this has only accentuated the lack of a common European outlook and the fragility of European solidarity.

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