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"Welcome" to Europe: How media and immigration affect increasing Euroscepticism

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**"Everything you read in newspapers is absolutely true, except for that rare story of which you
happen to have first-hand knowledge."**

Erwin Knoll

General Conclusion

Europe has dramatically changed over the last decades. A loose cooperation of European countries has turned into a union of nation states that obtained decision-making powers in a still increasing number of policy areas. Parallel to this increased political sovereignty of the EU, European citizens became increasingly skeptic of the process of European integration (Hobolt, 2009). This dissertation contributes to an understanding of why Euroscepticism came into being and why it is still on the rise. To that end, I have successively focused on the role of soft and hard factors influencing Euroscepticism across time, on the interplay between media and public opinion, on the role of media and RWDs on anti-immigration sentiment and on the impact of multi-frame messages on specific EU attitudes. In this final chapter the main findings of each of the four empirical chapters (chapters 2 to 5) are recapitulated. Subsequently, I discuss the main conclusions, the theoretical contributions, limitations and implications of my thesis.

Main Findings of the Four Empirical Chapters

Four studies were conducted to examine the potential sources of Euroscepticism. In chapter 2 I compared the relative impact of soft (i.e., identity, and cultural) and hard (i.e., utilitarian, economic) factors over time, and found that hard factors compared to soft factors have a rather limited influence on Euroscepticism. However, against my expectations, the impact of soft factors was consistently larger both in the mid-1990s and in the mid-2000s. The results are compelling, as they illustrate how soft factors have rightfully earned their position in current EU public opinion research. Hence, soft factors should not be discarded as provisional. These findings also justify the scope of chapter 4 and 5, where soft factors play an even more central role.

In chapter 3, the focus was on the interplay between the media landscape and the public discourse regarding the EU. I aimed to uncover a spiral of negativity between media and the public discourse, as I expected negatively valenced media about the EU to amplify Euroscepticism and vice versa. The main finding of this chapter is that negatively valenced media coverage increases Euroscepticism; however, Euroscepticism does not increase negatively valenced media coverage. Though this means there is no reciprocal spiral of negativity, the findings of this study do support Soroka's (2006) asymmetrical influences thesis. That is, the public is more responsive to negatively-valenced than to positively-valenced media coverage. This means that in the long run, a negativity bias can lead to more Euroscepticism. The fact that the media are not influenced by public opinion indicates that this is not a self-amplifying mechanism.

In chapter 4 I focused on a central soft factor: immigration attitudes. In this chapter I aimed to understand the role of media as an additional source of information to real-world developments (RWDs), and the effects of media and RWDs on immigration attitudes. With regard to RWDs, I found that immigrant *inflows* increase anti-immigration sentiment, while immigration *population* had a very limited influence. Furthermore with regard to media, I found that media *salience* increases

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anti-immigration attitudes, while the tone of the messages showed no definite influences. Positively toned messages reduce negative immigration attitudes, while there was no effect of negatively toned news. The main conclusion of chapter 4 was that media effects remained with the inclusion of RWDs, and vice versa. Hence, media have an additional influence on immigration attitudes on top of the more established RWDs.

In chapter 5 the focus was again on media influences. This time I investigated the effects of multi-frame messages (MFMs) on attitudes with regard to EU immigration and border control management. The two frames in this chapter showed contrasting effects. While conflict framing yielded attitude *reinforcement*, valence framing yielded attitudinal *change* if the valence was incongruent with people's prior perception of the EU policy area. These valence-framing effects remained present even when people were exposed to a high degree of conflict framing within the same message. The additional frame caused a slight, albeit insignificant reduction of the valence-frame effects. This means that MFMs do not necessarily reveal different results compared to single-frame messages, their effects do not necessarily disappear due to the presence of a second, or perhaps even a third, or fourth frame.

Increasing Euroscepticism

What becomes clear, collectively, from these findings is that the level of Euroscepticism is directly and indirectly determined by contextual (i.e., media and RWDs) as well as individual characteristics (e.g., financial situation, gender, immigration attitudes). In the following paragraphs I will relate the findings of each individual chapter to the main model of this dissertation (see Figure 6.1). Within the context of *increasing* Euroscepticism it is, however, important to distinguish between *static* and *variable* influential factors. Some of the findings simply relate to why Euroscepticism exists, or why people are Eurosceptic (i.e., static factors, such as people's gender, or average age), while other factors have the potential to contribute to the steady increase in Euroscepticism across time (i.e., variable factors, such as the valence in news media, or immigrant inflows or the economy). Now that I have established the influences of different types of factors I continue by making a clear distinction between static and variable factors to understand the upward trend in Euroscepticism. Therefore, the main focus in this section is on the *variable factors*.

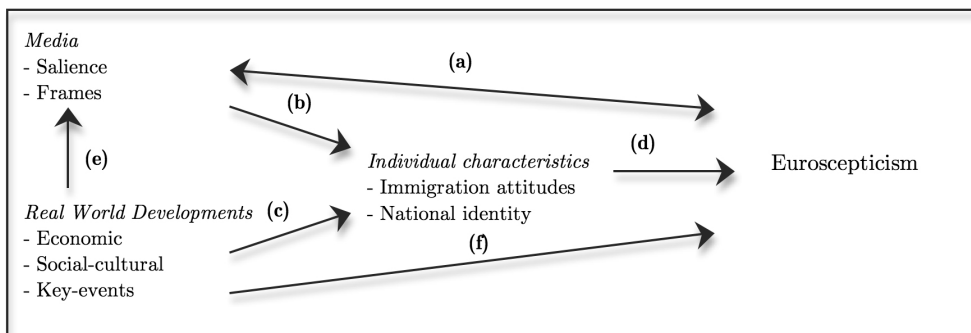
Before continuing, two things that need to be addressed. First, the idea of increasing Euroscepticism needs to be put into perspective. After the era of permissive consensus Europeans became more reluctant towards further European integration, which shows in increasing Euroscepticism. However, simultaneously an increase in EU *support* appeared (see for example Figure 1.1 in chapter 1), which is often neglected in EU attitudinal research. Though it is pertinent to understand why such a substantial part of European citizenry has become more skeptical, it is important to note that the majority of people still perceive the EU as positive. This brings me to the second important

point. In the next few paragraphs Euroscepticism may appear to be a clear and single concept, which in fact it is not. Therefore, it is important to clarify beforehand that this dissertation covers a selection of the types of Euroscepticism that may exist. In the first two chapters of this dissertation I investigated EU attitudes that relate to the *utilitarian* dimension (Boomgaarden et al., 2011) and *diffuse* EU support (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970). The dependent variable in chapter 5 relates to *specific* EU support, or the *performance* dimension. The fact that the generic term is used (i.e., Euroscepticism) will make this chapter more pleasant to read. However, one should take into consideration that the results comply to the above-mentioned dimensions of Euroscepticism only.

Having covered these two points, it is time to fit together all pieces of the puzzle and relate the findings to the trend of increasing Euroscepticism. This will be done with the help of the conceptual model below (Figure 6.1; the same as Figure 1.2 in chapter 1). It presents the three main areas discussed in the general introduction (media, RWDs and individual characteristics) and relates them to the main dependent variable: Euroscepticism. The findings that relate to each arrow will be discussed briefly; however, as stated above, the main emphasis in this section is on the findings that explain *increasing* Euroscepticism. Hence, the paragraphs below lead up to the main findings with regard to this upwards trend.

First, arrow a¹ represents the expectations related to direct media influences. These were covered in chapter 3 and 5. The findings of chapter 5 revealed that conflict framing reinforces, while valence framing changes EU attitudes (i.e., micro-micro approach). Hence, when a person is exposed to news about the EU that is different from their pre-existing attitudes, they tend to shift slightly towards the valence in the message. This happened regardless of whether the news was positive or negative. In chapter 3 on the aggregate level, the findings showed that negatively valenced news made the public more skeptical, while positively valenced news had no effect whatsoever (i.e., macro-macro approach). This inconsistency between individual- and aggregate-level effects will be elaborated on in the next section (i.e., theoretical contributions and implications for Euroscepticism research).

Figure 6.1 *Conceptual Model of the Dissertation*



¹ The reversed arrow is ignored for now. The results showed there was no effect of EU attitudes on the media landscape. Implications of this were discussed in chapter 3.

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Second, there is the possibility that media have an indirect effect via soft individual level characteristics (e.g., attitudes towards immigration; arrow b and d). In chapter 4 I found that increased visibility of immigration in news media generates negative immigration attitudes. Meanwhile, positively valenced media were found to reduce negative immigration attitudes². It is important to note that negative immigration attitudes (arrow d) were found to increase Euroscepticism (see De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005). That means that while increased media visibility has the potential to give rise to Euroscepticism, positively valenced messages may have the indirect ability to reduce Euroscepticism. Because there was a limited correlation between media and RWDs (arrow e), RWDs exerted a largely independent impact on immigration attitudes. RWDs (i.e., immigrant inflows and immigrant population; see arrow c) were found to have a limited impact on immigration attitudes. Only immigrant inflows led to a slight increase in negative immigration attitudes; therefore, they have a limited potential to indirectly affect Euroscepticism. Although these indirect effects were not tested as such, there is reason to believe that media and RWDs exert this indirect effect on Euroscepticism via immigration attitudes (see also general introduction).

However, an unexpected direct negative effect of immigration rates on Euroscepticism appeared in chapter 2 and 3 (see arrow f). This effect is puzzling, as it means that although immigration rates have the potential to indirectly *increase* Euroscepticism (arrow c and d), their direct effect shows to *reduce* Euroscepticism (arrow f³). In the next section, that covers the theoretical contribution, I will elaborate on the how these seemingly opposite effects might be explained. Finally, with regard to RWDs, chapter 2 also reveals that when a country experiences an increase in GDP, Euroscepticism declines severely. This indicates that the economic situation of a country has a large influence on how people perceive the European Union. Economic instability or crisis can therefore have detrimental consequences for people's support of the European Union.

Thus far, some of the factors that affect Euroscepticism have been established. To explain the rise since the 1990s, however, these factors or their impact should have changed since then. So have they changed in the "right" direction to explain increasing Euroscepticism?

First of all, I argue that media have an indirect as well as a direct effect on EU attitudes. On the aggregate level (i.e., macro-macro approach), negatively valenced news about the EU made the public more skeptical. Therefore, if there is a systematic rise in negative messages, this should explain the rise in Euroscepticism. Figure 3.2 (chapter 3) shows quite a systematic negativity bias, but not a structural rise since the 1990s. However, constant exposure to predominantly negative information about the EU does have the potential to give rise to more Euroscepticism. As Zaller (1992) argues, if a media environment is predominantly negative, the influences of negative news coverage trump those of positive news coverage, which makes the public more negative.

² It is also important to note that these effects were predominantly found in the Netherlands and should not necessarily be generalizable to other European countries.

³ Furthermore, countries with a rising GDP showed less Eurosceptic than those with a declining GDP, and rising unemployment generally led to more Euroscepticism, as did important EU related key events.

Furthermore, the salience of immigration in news media increased anti-immigration sentiments, which in turn was found to increase Euroscepticism. There has been a steady increase in the number of messages about immigration in the early 2000s up to 2008⁴(see also Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; 2009; Vliegenthart & Boomgaarden, 2007). Hence, this may have contributed, indirectly, to the rise in Euroscepticism. Additionally, I found that positively valenced media about immigration led to a decrease of anti-immigration attitudes. However, news media have not become less positive about immigration over time (see Figure 4.2 in chapter 4), and so this does not explain why the public has become more skeptical since the 1990s. The impact of the rise in immigration (RWDs) since the 1990s to Europe was discussed above; this has the potential to increase (indirectly) as well as decrease (directly) Euroscepticism. Finally, between 1995 and 2010 (the time period of observation) the economy in the EU countries mostly flourished⁵. Up to 2008 GDP-levels grew steadily in most EU countries. In 2008 the first signs of the crisis started to show and by 2009, it had reached all EU countries. This, however, does not explain why Euroscepticism has steadily increased since the 1990s, but rather why there was a simultaneous rise in EU support (see Figure 1.1).

Taken together, the findings described above indicate that a part of the trend of rising Euroscepticism can be explained by the composition of the media landscape, and some fluctuations that appeared in this landscape over time. But it is also important to note that some trends within the media landscape, as well as the real world, at the same time thwart the mechanisms that increase Euroscepticism, or give rise to EU support. I believe that a small part of the observed increase in Euroscepticism is due to the increased visibility of immigration in the news. But most importantly, since the negativity bias in media coverage showed quite consistent, I believe that a much larger part of the observed trend in Euroscepticism can be assigned to the constant exposure of the public to predominantly negative media coverage regarding the European Union.

Theoretical Contribution and Implications for Euroscepticism Research

Early scholarship on Euroscepticism mainly focused on utilitarian explanations, and in accordance with the early scholars in the field I found that economic well being affects people's attitudes with regard to the EU. In line with the rational choice theory (see Coleman, 1973; Heath, 1976; Scott, 2000), those who are more likely to experience financial losses, as well as the people who live in a country that has experienced financial loss, are more likely to be skeptical towards the EU (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Gabel & Palmer, 1997; Shepherd, 1975). The economic aspect of the EU is quite large; it is therefore not surprising that those who are, or feel financially fragile perceive the EU as a threat to their already delicate situation. My findings in chapter 2 yield that perceived,

⁴ Note that these effects were found in the Netherlands. These results are not necessarily generalizable to other European countries. However, the rise in media coverage on immigration does show in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Flanders.

⁵ See Eurostat:
<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&code=tec00115>

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but to a lesser degree also people's *actual* financial situation, and the economic situation of the country influenced Euroscepticism. The strength of the impact of these factors was about the same in the 1990s as in the 2000s. This means that over a ten-year period, not much has changed. People's perception was and is highly dependent on economic factors, and it is likely to stay this way. If anything, these factors have become more prominent since the start of the economic crisis in 2008 that greatly reflects upon the EU and the Eurozone today. Therefore, these factors are not only important to include as control variables in any study on EU attitudes, but in studies covering the period since the economic crisis, their potentially enlarged impact should be monitored. The main theoretical contribution of the findings in this dissertation with regard to these economic factors is their relatively smaller impact compared to soft factors.

As stated in chapter 2, research on Euroscepticism has taken a different turn in the early 2000s, when scholars argued that not only utilitarian, but also identity-based and social-cultural factors impinge on people's EU attitudes (e.g., McLaren, 2002; Hooghe & Marks, 2005). Though this literature is largely driven by the social identity, and realistic group conflict theories (Austin & Worchel 1979; LeVine & Campbell 1972; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) I did not find clear support for these theories. Throughout the different chapters it became apparent that, although soft factors played an important role, Euroscepticism is not simply triggered by immigrant numbers. It is likely that for a non-national development (see McLaren, 2002) to lead to an effect, it needs to be visible either through personal experiences or media. Since news media barely reflect real-world non-national developments (see chapter 4 and Vliegthart & Boomgaarden, 2007) it is difficult for people to have a realistic image of their surroundings. And because personal experiences are not always a good reflection of reality, people's images are distorted and *real* non-national developments may not yield an effect.

The opposite direction of the direct and indirect effects of immigration rates, as discussed in the previous section (previous page), adds to the complexity regarding the impact of soft factors on Euroscepticism. Here I found that immigration rates may increase Euroscepticism through immigration attitudes, above and beyond immigration rates which had a direct negative effect on Euroscepticism. Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory may help to understand these puzzling effects. According to this theory, inter-ethnic group contact can, under certain conditions, create mutual understanding and reduce negative outgroup attitudes. Increased immigration enlarges the odds of being in contact with people from different ethnic backgrounds. This creates the potential for more contact and more understanding. Although I have no empirical evidence for this idea myself, there is empirical evidence that shows that contact can matter in this regard (Hodson & Hewstone, 2013). The fact that immigration rates had a limited effect on immigration attitudes supports the idea that increasing immigration rates lead to anti-immigration attitudes among a selection of people. A growing immigrant population increases intergroup-contact, which can reduce anti-

immigration attitudes among an increasing number of citizens, which ultimately reduces Euroscepticism.

Overall, the findings with regard to soft factors indicate that feelings of risk and perceptions with regard to identity played a bigger role than objectively identifiable contextual characteristics. Therefore, I believe that identity-based threat and intergroup conflict do matter with concern to EU attitudes, but that the influence is mostly found in people's perceptions of the world and not their 'real' context. Thus, individual experiences, such as inter-group contact, are likely to play a bigger role than is accounted for in many of the studies in the field.

Because media play an important role in how people perceive the world around them, media influences are found to be bigger than those of real world context (see chapter 4). These findings with regard to media have some important theoretical implications. Across the board I found that negatively valenced media have the biggest, if not the only significant influence on Euroscepticism. This concurs with Soroka's (2006) asymmetry effects thesis, expressed in chapter 3. He states that due to a number of psychological factors (see chapter 3) people are more inclined to respond to negative information than to positive information. Yet, my findings in chapter 5 indicate that individual-level attitudes are influenced by positively- as well as negatively-valenced messages. This means there is no asymmetry effect on the individual level with regard to EU related issues. However, the across-the-board effect I found in chapter 3 might be due to, what Zaller (1992; 1996) calls one-sided information flows. In a society with evenly balanced two-sided information flows the effects of positive and negative messages balance each other out. Since the information provided by mass media is predominantly negative, the public is more likely to lean towards the negative side, eventually making them more skeptical (see also De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006).

But what about the effect of positive news on immigration attitudes in chapter 4? This effect does not just imply that negative media coverage is not stronger than positive coverage (i.e., no asymmetry effects), but that there is no effect of negative news media at all. Presumably, this is because the degree of one-sidedness in news media matters. If the information in media regarding an issue is extremely biased, it reaches a point where people have gotten so accustomed to this one-sided information that a different tone stands out. Hence, positive information reduces anti-immigration sentiment, because they have become somewhat numb to negative information, but are not used to reading positively valenced information (Boomgaarden, 2007). Hence, one should be careful with regard to making general claims with respect to general valence-frame effect, as these depend on the characteristics of the topic under investigation.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

No academic work is without limitations. Although most limitations are discussed in each individual chapter, the most prominent ones are discussed again here. This section also includes the limitations related to the dissertation at large.

First, the dependent Euroscepticism variables that were used were most often part of the so-called utilitarian dimension (Boomgaarden et al., 2011). Although this was not problematic for the purpose of these particular studies, future research could benefit from a comparison between hard and soft factors in relation to different dimensions of Euroscepticism.

Additionally, the use of large-scale newspaper data in chapter 3 and 4 is unique, but there are some limitations to this. First, it was difficult to keep every element of the data collection similar and comparable for each country. This may have had a slight effect on some of the between country result. Second, the fact that the data were gathered over such a long time-period meant that only a limited number of newspaper articles could be coded per year. This meant that half-yearly averages were the lowest aggregation level possible. Although some argue that media effects can take place over a period of a few weeks up to several months (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Stone & McCombs, 1981), I believe some of my findings were limited by this long timeframe between the observations. Subsequent research could benefit from shorter intervals between observations.

Furthermore, a main contribution of this dissertation is its bird-eye view: the generalizability of previously established, or assumed mechanisms over various European countries across time. Although this is a legitimate and useful approach to explain increasing Euroscepticism, I think the field would benefit from better measurements, especially with respect to soft factors on the individual-level. As for this dissertation, like many previous studies on EU attitudes, I have used a number of proxies. For example, national attachment, immigration attitudes as well as exclusive national identity are proxies for the willingness to divide oneself and others into ingroups and outgroups and perceived threat to one's national identity. Hence, in order to fully comprehend how these factors affect Euroscepticism, we need to get in closer proximity of measuring perceived context, perceived identity-threat, or people's willingness to categorize others into outgroups. In other words, more exact measurements of the soft factors that are assumed to affect Euroscepticism.

There are many different directions future research on Euroscepticism could take. The most-similar systems design, used in this dissertation was very useful to compare countries and investigate the generalizability of the media-, RWD- and individual-level findings. But it also limited the scope of this dissertation. Because the selected countries were all northern European countries, with relatively stable economies, there is more at stake for the people in these countries than for those in many southern- or eastern- European countries. Hence, subsequent research can invest in exploring

whether similar mechanisms are at play with regard to EU attitudes in less economically stable countries.

In this dissertation I have discussed the role of media, RWDs and individual characteristics in relation to Euroscepticism, but there are two relevant areas that were left out. First, the role of national politics and political elites, who are partially responsible for media content, but also act as opinion leaders through traditional news media, new and social media. Therefore, they are likely to play an important role with regard to EU public opinion (see for example De Vries & Edwards, 2009). A second area that was proven to be important but was not discussed in this dissertation is interpersonal communication. The importance of interpersonal communication was mentioned briefly in chapter 4 in relation to people's awareness of the media environment. But I believe that it also plays an important role in information processing and interpretation; and therefore also in people's political attitudes (see for example Desmet, 2013). Hence, these areas warrant further investigation in subsequent research.

Finally, the economic crisis most likely led to increased skepticism among many European citizens. It is likely that with the crisis, the tone in news media and public opinion shifted, which reshaped the relationship between media and the public. Future research should invest in studying the relationship between media and EU attitudes during the economic crisis.

Societal Implications

Thus far I have explained the findings, related them to the main theories in the field and discussed the main limitations. In this final section I will discuss the implications of my findings for society at large and reflect upon the findings in relation to Europe's current situation regarding border control and the economic crisis.

One important finding was that although EU attitudes are volatile (see chapter 5), attitudinal shifts are small and people rarely move from one extreme to another. Hence, people may be continuously influenced by the changing media landscape, but in small steps at the time and in opposite directions. Therefore I believe that in the short term, media tendencies have minor implications for people's attitudes. When averaged, these shifts are of no great impact on the public at large. However, in the long term I expect the consequences to be larger. The negativity bias of EU news increases the odds of being confronted with a negatively valenced message. Repeated exposure to failure, errors and disadvantages of a political system, politicians and/or its policies can make the public more Eurosceptic.

For example, in 2008 the EU entered a major economic crisis. Ever since, media have reported on bailout after bailout (Economist.com, 2012; Fleming, 2013) of European countries that otherwise would have gone bankrupt, rising unemployment rates (CBC news, 2013; Harress, 2013) and devaluation of the Euro (Cox, 2012). The consequences of the crisis are visible in all Eurozone

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countries and became even more tangible through growing unemployment rates among the youth (Burgen, 2013), decreasing purchasing power (Alberici, 2013; Europa.eu, 2012) and plummeting real estate prices (Nieuws.nl, 2011). The tone of news media regarding Europe's economic situation has been largely negative for years in a row. The balance of a two-sided media flow (Zaller, 1992) was distorted for a long time and the constant predominantly negative media coverage is likely to have caused the public to steadily become more negative. As stated in the discussion of chapter 3, it is likely to have led to severe criticism regarding the monetary union and increased skepticism among many European citizens. Today, the economy is slowly improving and the tone in news media is becoming more optimistic, but because media coverage has been one-sided for such a long period of time, it will presumably take a long time to restore people's trust in the economy and the monetary union.

The finding that people's attitudes change by the valence in news media means that media carry part of the responsibility with regard to public opinion formation about the EU. But media are not only negative; their coverage of EU issues is framed in many different ways, and each of these frames may yield a different effect (for an example, see conflict frame effects in chapter 5). Some leading to more skepticism, while others lead to more support. So, should media reduce the negativity bias? This would not necessarily be a good development. For the reason that there are multiple frames, but also because of what is called the watchdog function of mass media (Soroka, 2006; see chapter 3). One of the media's main purposes in democratic societies is to be critical and alert people of any potentially negative consequences of decisions made by higher political powers. It served the function to keep European citizens alert and the power holders on guard. Soroka (2006) argues that the negativity bias is associated with the idea that negative information is a more critical indicator of the performance of government than positive information is. Therefore this asymmetry it is a sign of a well-functioning democracy. Thus, if there is a reason to discuss the EU in a negative way and thereby be critical, media should continue to do so.

For example, today, the state of affairs on the Italian island Lampedusa in the Mediterranean Sea has placed the European border control policies under great scrutiny. Hundreds of migrants arrive at the island each day seeking refuge in Europe, having fled the wars in the Middle East and North Africa. Since this has been happening for several years now, the refugee facilities are over their capacity and the situation on the island has been referred to as extreme by international media. In October 2013, a tragedy occurred. A boat with refugees caught fire near the coast of Lampedusa, less than half of the passengers survived (see Davies, 2013; Kreikenbaum, 2013; Pop, 2013). The predominantly critical media coverage that followed—portraying Europe as a “bystander”⁶ (Traynor & Kington, 2013)—caused all heads to turn towards the EU and its role in this situation. If the tragedy alone did not put enough pressure on the EU already to revamp its border control and immigration policies, the media attention after the event surely did.

6 Mentioned in an open appeal by Giusi Nicolini, the mayor of Lampedusa

Although the situation in Lampedusa had been critical for months before the tragedy, the particular event triggered a great number of responses from the media. Within days the world was made aware of what had happened and what is happening on the island each day. Via news media people were made aware of how the responsible authorities neglected to prevent such an event from happening. Because the media coverage following the disaster near Lampedusa was predominantly negative, and given the presented findings in this dissertation and Zaller's (1992) views on the impact of one-sided information flows, the public opinion is likely to steadily become more negative towards Europe's border control policies. Additionally, the increased media coverage of this immigration topic is bound to trigger anti-immigration sentiment (as seen in chapter 4), which could lead to increased Euroscepticism. Since all eyes are currently directed at the situation in Italy and the role of the European Union in making sure the borders are secured, the steps that will be taken from this point on will be crucial for what will happen to the public opinion. So far, the EU has rejected any easing of its asylum policy, but Frontex's border control program has been intensified (wsws.org, 2013). The critical watchdog position the media has taken in this situation is slowly widening the gap between people's perceptions of what needs to be done by the EU and what is actually done to improve the situation with regard to immigration and border control.

These two recent developments show that negative developments and one-sided information streams can make a public increasingly skeptical towards the European Union, to the point where the system can start to show cracks. I argued in the introduction that public support is eminent to the future of the EU and that Euroscepticism has the potential to stagnate further European integration. Rising skepticism causes resistance among public and national governments, which inevitably makes it harder to successfully implement new EU policies, or make other changes. This already showed in the past; as the sovereignty of the European Union was placed under scrutiny by national governments several times with regard to Schengen and the border control area (see situation described in Denmark and Italy in chapter 5). And is still showing today, as attempting to protect their sovereign authority with regard to immigration issues, the interior ministers of the 28 member states showed little willingness to hand over more responsibility to Brussels after the tragedy in Lampedusa (Traynor & Kington, 2013). There is tension between Europe and its nation states, which descends from increasing negative evaluations from the member state citizens and their fear to lose more national sovereignty. These recent examples show that the political power of the EU is not guaranteed and that support from Europe's citizens and Europe's member states is crucial for European integration. Decreasing support from its citizens and cooperation between the member states and the European Union lead to system instabilities and regression rather than integration.

This dissertation established that a large part of the public skepticism descends from economic-, but mostly identity-related threat, that news media affect Euroscepticism and that predominantly negative media coverage can explain some of the observed rise. Finally these findings were used to investigate their impact in relation to Europe's immigration and border control policies; a policy area

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that at this very moment receives great criticism. In the end we got one step closer to understanding what is causing the increase in Euroscepticism.