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POPULIST EUROSCEPTICISM IN POLAND: TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS[1]

ABSTRACT

EU membership and European integration have generally enjoyed consistent and relatively high support among the public and political elites in Poland. Recent years, however, have seen EU contestation become an increasingly prominent feature of Polish politics. The 2015 election victories by Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) have resulted in the strengthening of the Eurosceptic and populist political discourse, as well as in a conflict with the European Commission concerning the rule of law in Poland. Euroscepticism is often considered to be

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closely related to populist politics as many populist slogans are, at the same time, anti-EU. The recent increase in EU contestation in Polish politics has been linked to a surge in populism in Europe in general, and to an increase in populist and illiberal politics on the domestic level. Although the body of literature in the field of populist and Eurosceptic politics is growing, there is still room for discussing the theoretical approach to the study of populist Euroscepticism. In this chapter, we analyse the state of play in the field of populist Euroscepticism in Poland and the rest of Europe, and, based on the existing research, we suggest the most useful approach to define and study populist Euroscepticism observed in Poland.

KEYWORDS: populism, Euroscepticism, party politics, Poland

INTRODUCTION

Opposition to European integration emerged in post-communist new EU member states alongside the process of EU accession but has long remained a relatively marginal phenomenon in post-communist politics. EU membership and European integration, which accompanied the processes of transformation, and the general trend of globalisation, have generally enjoyed consistent and relatively high support among the public and political elites in Poland (Styczyńska 2021; Zuba 2021). Recent years, however, have seen EU contestation become an increasingly prominent feature of Polish politics. The 2015 election victories by Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) have resulted in a "radical intensification of criticism of the EU" (Zuba 2021: 398) by the Polish government, as well as in a conflict with the European Commission concerning the rule of law in Poland. A number of consecutive European and global crises have further intensified the debate on EU membership and its relation to national sovereignty. Yet, despite the increased contestation of European integration in Polish politics, public opinion of EU membership has remained consistently high over the past decade. According to the 2022 Eurobarometer, more than 80% of Poles feel attached to the EU (European Commission 2022). This discrepancy between the broad pro-EU attitude

of the public and the Eurosceptic tendencies of a large part of the political scene makes anti-EU populism especially interesting in the case of Poland.

Euroscepticism is often considered to be closely related to populist politics (Lasoń 2011; Pirro and Taggart 2018). Many populist slogans are, at the same time, anti-EU, and the recent increase in EU contestation in Polish politics has been linked to a surge in populism in Europe in general, and to an increase in populist and illiberal politics domestically in particular (Jakubowski 2020: 232; Zuba 2021: 394). This is not only the case in newer member states, but also in countries such as Austria, the Netherlands and France. However, anti-EU populism is especially interesting in the case of Poland, a new member state that is the greatest beneficiary of EU funds and one of the most pro-European societies in the EU.

Support for populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) increased from 9% in the early 2000s to almost 35% in 2017 (Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020: 289), but still, most knowledge about populists comes from research focusing on populists in Western Europe. Similarly, the case of Euroscepticism in CEE requires more scholarly attention. Although Euroscepticism and populism are fashionable terms, the relationship between them seems to not have been fully examined. In order to understand them we need a systematic approach to the correlation between the two phenomena. In this chapter, we analyse the state of play in the field of populist Euroscepticism in Poland and the rest of Europe, and, based on the existing research, we suggest the most useful approach to define and study populist Euroscepticism observed in Poland. The chapter, along with others in this book, is a result of work conducted within the POPREBEL Horizon 2020 project and the empirical study of populist Euroscepticism in Poland will follow based on the proposed framework.

POPULISM

DEFINING POPULISM: THE IDEATIONAL APPROACH, THIN-CENTRED IDEOLOGY OR DISCOURSE?

Populism can be considered an "essentially contested concept" (Mudde 2017: 27; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 2) and, for that reason, several different understandings of the nature of populism exist. Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (2017) identify three approaches to the study of populism:[2] the ideational approach, the political-strategic approach, and the sociocultural approach. The ideational approach considers ideas to be of central importance to the phenomenon of populism, as expressed through political rhetoric and discourse (Mudde 2017). The political-strategic approach, in turn, "focuses not on what populists say, but on what they actually do, especially how they pursue and sustain political power" (Weyland 2017: 50), for example, through different modes of personalistic leadership. Finally, the sociocultural approach to populism studies sees populism to be "characterised by a particular form of the political relationship between political leaders and a social basis," which is achieved by using a certain type of appeal and is mediated by a country's socio-cultural historical context (Ostiguy 2017: 73).

The set of ideas at the core of populist politics is commonly referred to by scholars as an ideology or a discourse. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (Mudde 2004; 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017) describe populism as a "thin-centred ideology," or an ideology that relies on a limited number of core concepts but which can be combined with other sets of ideas in a process referred to as "thickening" (Mudde 2007; 2017; Hawkins et al. 2018). As such, populism may be married with varying worldviews, such as nationalism or socialism. Right-wing populism, for instance, can be seen as a product of populism thickened with the ideologies of nativism and authoritarianism (Freeden 1996; Mudde 2007; Hawkins et al. 2018; Kubik 2020: 6). The process

[2] Other differentiations also exist. Gidron and Bonikowski (2013; 2016), for example, identify three traditions in populism research, each relying on different ontological assumptions: populism as a political strategy; populism as an ideology; and populism as a discursive style. These do not fully align with the three approaches as defined by Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (2017).

of thickening of populist ideology is “one of the central conceptual foci” (Kubik 2020: 6) of the POPRBEL programme (Bešlin et al. 2020: 4). We consider this process to primarily take place through the definition of ‘the people’ – by people political actors often draw from cultural resources that vary according to the specific context (Bešlin et al. 2020: 5).

Some scholars prefer to speak of populism as a ‘discourse’ rather than a thin-centred ideology. Hawkins (2009), for example, considers populism to combine elements of ideology and rhetoric, and refers to the phenomenon as a discourse (Hawkins 2009: 1042–1047). The (subtle) differences between populism as a discourse and a thin-centred ideology are further debated by Stanley (2008), Hawkins et al. (2018: 3–6) and Mudde (2017: 30–32). However, it is generally agreed that a significant overlap exists and that any conceptual differences matter little in empirical research (Hawkins 2009: 1043; Hawkins et al. 2018: 420; Mudde 2017: 31). In POPREBEL, in particular, we consider the thin-centred ideology of populism to primarily be a ‘discursive strategy’ which constructs elite-people antagonism (Bešlin et al. 2020: 4).

CORE FEATURES OF POPULISM

At its core, the ideational approach considers populism to be a set of ideas that sees politics as “a Manichean struggle between the will of the common people and an evil, conspiring elite” (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018: 2). The essence of the populist worldview is a Manichean and moralistic cosmology, meaning that it “assigns a moral dimension to everything, no matter how technical, and interprets it as part of a cosmic struggle between good and evil” (Hawkins 2009: 1043; Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018; Mudde 2017). Populism is not the only political movement distinguishing the people from the elite, but what defines populism is the *morality* it ascribes to this division. In principle, the people and the elite are fundamentally opposed not based primarily on their socioeconomic class or ethnicity, but rather based on their ‘moral character.’ The elite is seen as corrupt and inauthentic, while the people are considered ‘pure’ and authentic (Hawkins 2009). Membership of the corrupt elite, more than anything, is considered to be a willing choice induced by special interests and impure morals, and hence something reprehensible (Mudde 2017: 32–33). Morality therefore provides a central axis to the populist worldview, to which all of its other components relate.

The central concept to populism is that of 'the people.' In its essence, 'the people' can be understood as "an idealised conception of the community" (Taggart 2004: 274; Mudde 2017). It is considered to be a homogenous and morally pure group, but its remaining characteristics are not predetermined and depend on the context of the populist politics in question. The definition of 'the people' is thereby closely tied to the concept of 'the heartland.' This is a utopian vision of reality often constructed with reference to specific (mythologised and romanticised) locations, people or periods in the past (Taggart 1998; 2004). The heartland is seen to embody the essential virtues of the community. However, neither the heartland nor the people are all-inclusive categories but rather a constructed sub-set of the population (Mudde 2004: 546; 2017; Wirth et al. 2016: 10).

It is from 'the people' that other core concepts such as 'the elite' and the 'will of the people' depart (Mudde 2004: 544). In the populist worldview, 'the elite' is considered to be fundamentally opposed to 'the people' on a moral dimension (Hawkins 2009). However, other characteristics and categories can be and often are ascribed to both the people and the elite as well – such as differences in class or ethnicity (Mudde 2017: 32). Translating this social categorisation to policy preferences, populist politicians motivate their policies with reference to 'common sense' – i.e. "the honest and logical priorities of the (common) people" (Mudde 2017: 33–34), while denouncing the interests and preferences of their opponents as motivated by 'special interests' (Mudde 2017). Populists hence present themselves as representatives of 'the will of the people' or the 'general will,' and 'the elite' as opposed to it (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). The will of the people is considered to be sovereign, and any limitations to its expression ought to be rejected. This makes populist politicians often hostile to institutions of liberal democracy that place limits on the executive and legislative branches – such as the judiciary, international treaties or institutions of minority rights protection – and sometimes makes them advocates of drastic, 'revolutionary,' system change (Mudde 2004; Hawkins 2009).

The specific nature of post-communist populism in CEE is analysed by, among others, Rupnik (2007) and Stanley (2017), as well as by the POPREBEL programme (Bešlin et al. 2020; Kubik 2020). In CEE countries, populism is mostly found in the centre and on the right-wing of the political spectrum, with very few active populist left-wing parties found in the region (Stanley

2017; Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020: 288). When researching populism in CEE, one needs to take into consideration the processes of post-communist transformation and Europeanisation. While in Western Europe populism emerged on the fringes of the political spectrum and is often stimulated by disappointment with democracy, multiculturalism and liberalism, the case of CEE is different. Here, populism occupies the mainstream of politics, as it developed together with the construction of democratic institutions during the transformation period (Lutovac 2017: 61; Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020: 289). For this reason, some authors claim that we should rather speak of 'populist democracy' (Pappas 2014) than of 'liberal democracy' in Central and Eastern Europe, as populism became a 'pathological normalcy' in the region (Mudde 2010). On the other hand, the extent and influence of populism in the political landscapes of CEE should not be overstated. Non-populist parties remain politically dominant across the region and significant variation between countries makes generalisations difficult (Stanley 2017).

Another interesting feature of populism, especially in CEE, is neo-traditionalism and its relation to populism. Neo-traditionalism is understood as a "conscious, often politicised, return to tradition and the rejection of modern cultural patterns and values already widely present in the society" (Mach 2022: 30). It aims to purposefully and selectively construct and reproduce ideas of 'tradition,' and revive 'authentic' culture, practices and institutions in order to contest 'modern,' liberal visions of culture and society. Neo-traditionalism is a reaction both to processes of modernisation and to influences seen as 'foreign' or external. It is understood to be a strategy of *political* reproduction, rather than one of *societal* reproduction, and is therefore primarily practiced by governments or political parties (Mach 2019: 93). When studying contemporary CEE, neo-traditionalist political narratives are often placed in the context of the post-communist transformation and closer integration with Western Europe. These processes went hand-in-hand with rapid social, economic and political change, which started to question or even replace the existing order. The destabilising nature of this change produced an opportunity for political actors to employ neo-traditionalist political narratives to oppose what they consider to be 'westernisation,' 'Europeanisation,' as well as the introduction of more liberal, cosmopolitan values, culture and policies (Benczes et al. 2020: 6).

Neo-traditionalist discourse has been used to further define the categories of the 'people' and the 'elites' in populist narratives. In Poland, populist politicians use neo-traditionalist frames to appeal to the *traditional* culture and values of the common people in opposition to the *modern* and liberal politics of the 'alienated' (or 'alien') elites (Rupnik 2007; Stanley 2017; Benczes et al. 2020: 6). The idealised 'heartland' of neo-traditionalist populists in Poland is characterised by 'ordinary Poles' who nourish traditions, respect the country's history, attend church and cherish the family as the foundation of social life (Melito 2021: 38). The liberalism of the elites, in turn, is often explicitly connected to 'the West' or Western Europe, and framed as a threat to Polish traditional values and identity. These narratives often contest the hegemony of 'Europeanisation' and the EU, the latter of which is seen to represent the 'elites' culpable of moving Poland towards its model of liberalism since the end of communism (Melito 2021: 37; Mach 2022: 25). The EU and European integration, therefore, take up an important role in neo-traditionalist populist discourse in Poland, and an analysis of populist discourse on European integration needs to take neo-traditionalist ideas and narratives into account as well.

THE EMERGENCE OF CONTEMPORARY POPULISM IN POLAND

Populism in Poland displays features common to other post-communist countries as well as "distinctly idiosyncratic elements" (Stanley and Cześnik 2019: 67). As in most countries in CEE, contemporary populism in Poland finds its origins in the transition away from communism in the late 1980s and 1990s. Early forms of populism in Poland could be observed both in the communist regime as well as within the anti-communist popular movement (Stanley and Cześnik 2019: 68–70). The anti-communist Solidarity movement in the 1980s adopted a binary political imagery, imbued with religious content, of the 'good religious people' opposing the 'bad secular authorities.' The religious characterisation with deep historical roots and wide support across the population allowed the Polish people to easily identify themselves as a community while also serving as a delineation from the communist rulers (Kotwas and Kubik 2019). Moreover, the key symbols of the movement did not reference the 'people' as defined in contrast to other 'people,' but to the 'authorities.' In essence, while the discourse of Solidarity

was polarising, most of the time it refrained from defining the 'other' in ethnic or religious terms; the enemy was the communists and 'their' system.

In the period following 1989, Polish politics was mostly dominated by conflicting ideas about the communist regime, but with broad support for the reforms under Poland's political and economic transition. Only a small number of early populist parties emerged on the political scene, which remained largely unsuccessful. Yet, by 2001, two populist parties – Self-Defence (*Samoobrona* – SRP) and League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin* – LPR) – experienced electoral success. While the SRP adopted quintessentially populist positions and narratives, the LPR is characterised as a radical right-wing party, combining fundamentalist Catholicism, nationalism and hard Euroscepticism with populist ideology (Stanley and Cześnik 2019: 70). These messages were furthermore amplified by the Catholic *Radio Maryja* media network, expressing something Stanley (2015) describes as 'populist Catholicism.' Although the effects took time to become visible, this 2001 electoral breakthrough ultimately reshaped Polish politics fundamentally: among others, it disrupted the post-communist political divide and political culture for which the removal of the communist regime still stood central, replacing it with a politics more focused on the perceived present-day effects of the ongoing transition reforms. The attention the populist party leaders received moreover influenced political communication in Poland (Stanley and Cześnik 2019: 72).

The popular support of populist political parties in Poland seems in large part to be determined by sociocultural variables and sentiments about national identity (Ding and Hlavac 2017; Kotwas and Kubik 2019; Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020). Based on an analysis of public attitudes in Central Europe, Ding and Hlavac (2017) find that cultural imagery rather than anti-establishment sentiments strongly predicts support for right-wing populist movements, in particular in Poland and Hungary (Ding and Hlavac 2017: 441). These movements "draw on moral beliefs in the cultural purity of nationhood and its centrality to the preservation of national identity" (Ding and Hlavac 2017: 429). Santana, Zagórski and Rama (2020) identify anti-EU sentiments and to a lesser extent nativism as well to be the strongest predictor of populist radical right-wing voting. Contrary to the understanding of populist movements in Western Europe, support for populist radical right-wing parties in Central and Eastern Europe is

not primarily determined by anti-establishment sentiments or economic deprivation (Smilov and Krastev 2008; Ding and Hlavac 2017; Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020; Vachudova 2020; Zgut 2021).

According to Kotwas and Kubik (2019), cultural entrepreneurs in Poland "deliberately engineer public culture" (Kotwas and Kubik 2019: 442) through a process they refer to as the "symbolic thickening of public culture." This entails the image of the national community moving from one based on a set of loosely associated symbols which have a broad extension (a 'thin symbolic system') to one based on a larger set of intricately interrelated symbols, which is thus rich in content but has a much narrower scope (a 'thick symbolic system'). In the case of Poland, Kotwas and Kubik (2019) observe that symbolic thickening among others took place "in subcultures infused with religious elements" (Kotwas and Kubik 2019: 460) and entailed the "interrelated intensification of exclusionary Catholicism and assertive nationalism" (Kotwas and Kubik 2019: 460). These narratives were strengthened and mobilised by various sectors of society, including right-wing populist actors, social movements, intellectuals, the Catholic clergy and some media (Kotwas and Kubik 2019).

While a thick symbolic system in principle resonates with fewer people than a thin system, certain political conditions can result in a larger part of society accepting the 'thickened' definition of the national community. In response to the symbolic thickening of public culture in semi-religious subcultures, right-wing populist political actors in Poland combine their populist narratives with (interrelated) religious and nationalist ideas – a process of 'thickening' populist ideology (Mudde 2004; Kotwas and Kubik 2019: 460). This iterative interchange between symbolic thickening in civil society and ideological thickening in politics played a significant role in shaping a specific understanding of Polishness and in enhancing the popularity of right-wing populism.

EUROSCEPTICISM

PROBLEMS WITH CONCEPTUALISATION

Generally speaking, we may define Euroscepticism as opposition to the European Union and European integration. However, similar to populism, there is an ongoing, dynamic debate in the literature about how to precisely conceptualise and operationalise the phenomenon – to the extent that Euroscepticism can be considered a 'contested,' or even a 'problematic' or 'exhausted' concept (Crespy and Verschueren 2009: 381; Vasilopoulou 2017: 22; Bijsmans 2020: 4).

For over two decades, scholars have been proposing not only different conceptualisations of this phenomenon but also several typologies. One of the best-known was offered by Paul Taggart (1998) who explained Euroscepticism as an "idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" (Taggart 1998: 366). A few years later Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001) proposed the first typology of Euroscepticism, pointing at differences between 'hard' and 'soft' opposition to the EU. Another popular typology was delivered by Kopecký and Mudde (2002), who proposed four stances on the EU and European integration: Euroenthusiasts, Eurosceptics, Europragmatists and Eurorejects. In a similar vein, Flood and Usherwood (2005) proposed six categories on EU alignments (from maximalists to rejectionists), while stressing the importance of ideology in adopting a certain position. The value of these proposals notwithstanding, it seems that none of the early definitions and typologies was sufficient enough to describe this complex phenomenon, especially considering that the definitions also depend on the examined actor (whether it's a political party, media or public opinion). The multifaceted nature of Euroscepticism has become even more visible during the recent crises the EU has faced, in particular the refugee crisis and Brexit.

Various factors make the conceptualisation of Euroscepticism difficult. As the term finds its origin outside of academic literature, its common, imprecise and normative usage in daily parlance obstructs many attempts at a specific and objective definition (Crespy and Verschueren 2009; Leconte 2015:

254). Euroscepticism is furthermore understood to be multifaceted in nature, meaning that it can be directed at the entire process of European integration or against specific policies of the European Union, or anything in between. This broad range of 'Euroscepticisms' risks any definition to be either too inclusive, too exclusive, or too involved (Leconte 2015: 254–255; Vasilopoulou 2017). Another problem is the fact that Euroscepticism is essentially negatively defined: it exists *in opposition to* European integration but does not contain a clear set of independent ideas on international relations or politics (Leruth, Startin and Usherwood 2018: 4). Any definition of Euroscepticism, therefore, depends on a definition of European integration, and as "the EU means different things to different observers" (Leconte 2015: 255), it is hard to universally determine *what* precisely Eurosceptics oppose or, in turn, propose (Leconte 2015: 254).

Currently, researchers struggling to explain the phenomenon focus on either public-based or party-based Euroscepticism (Vasilopoulou 2017: 28; Bijsmans 2020: 7). Our study focuses on the latter when examining the political actors opposing the EU. In doing so, we adopt the conceptualisation and typology of Euroscepticism as developed by Vasilopoulou (2011). This typology goes beyond a mere definition of Euroscepticism and places opposition to the EU in the broader context of attitudes towards European integration (or 'EU attitudes'). This is done by identifying a party's positions with regards to various distinct aspects of European integration. Based on these positions, various types of EU contestation can be differentiated. This approach allows for a more granular differentiation of EU contestations, thereby more accurately capturing the multifaceted nature of Euroscepticism. By determining not only points of opposition, but also of support, EU attitudes are able to provide a more complete and substantive description of a party's relation to European integration. The typology was originally developed to study radical right parties, but we believe it is useful in a broader political context as well (Vasilopoulou 2009; 2011), especially that in Poland (similarly to other Central European countries) Euroscepticism is the domain of the political right.

The four aspects of EU attitudes provided by Vasilopoulou (2011) are as follows:

– **A common cultural definition of Europe.** This entails the belief in a common identity of European peoples, or "the feeling of cultural, religious

and historical bonds among the European nation-states" (Vasilopoulou 2011: 229). These bonds are often defined with reference to Christian, Roman, and Greek traditions. A common cultural definition does need to supersede national identities. Rather, they are often considered a common denominator of otherwise independent European nations. This cultural definition is also commonly used as a marker to distinguish 'us' from 'them' and to exclude certain countries or regions from Europe, such as Turkey (Vasilopoulou 2011).

- **The principle of cooperation at a European multilateral level.** Support for the principle of European integration indicates a political actor's willingness for cooperation at a multilateral level within the EU framework. The principle of European integration refers to "a multifaceted multilateral agreement with a political character within the EU structures, even if the reform of the latter is actively pursued" (Vasilopoulou 2011: 230). Support for bilateral or trilateral cooperation, or multilateral cooperation on specific policies that do not require deep political commitment, are not a sign of support for the principle of European integration. Consequently, rejection of the principle of European integration is not merely a rejection of the current status quo of the governance of the EU, but rather a fundamental rejection of the very idea of multilateral, political integration on a European level. Rejection of the principle of European integration corresponds to the concepts of 'hard Eurosceptic' (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004) and 'Euroreject' (Kopecký and Mudde 2002).
- **The current EU policy practice and institutional structure.** Support for the 'practice' of European integration entails support for "the overall body of EU law and institutional framework, which include the policies administered at the European level as well as the nature of decision-making" (Vasilopoulou 2011: 231). This includes the "balance between the intergovernmental and the supranational governing of the EU" (Vasilopoulou 2009: 6) and accepting policies which are currently managed at the European level (Vasilopoulou 2009). The current practice of European integration, in turn, is rejected when the current body of EU law – the *acquis communautaire* – or the division of powers between member states and European institutions is called into question or outright rejected – while not necessarily opposing the principle of political integration in the framework of the European Union.

- **The desire to build a future European polity.** Support for the making of a European polity entails a strong willingness to "promote European cooperation within the EU political framework with the general aim of creating an ever-closer union" (Vasilopoulou 2011: 231). This is understood to include a deepening integration by transferring more policy competencies to the European level (Vasilopoulou 2009: 6).

Based on these four dimensions to EU attitudes, different attitudes towards European integration can be derived. Vasilopoulou (2009; 2011; 2018) identifies three types of Euroscepticism common among the European far right.

- **Rejecting Euroscepticism.** This comprises parties who accept the existence of common cultural European characteristics, but who are against all aspects of European integration. These parties reject the very principle of cooperation, reject the current practice of integration, and reject any future European polity-building (Vasilopoulou 2009: 7; 2018: 232).
- **Conditional Euroscepticism.** These parties accept that there are common cultural and historical bonds among the European peoples and may approve of the principle of European cooperation. However, they reject the current policy practice and the idea of building a European polity. 'Conditional' Eurosceptics generally accept the system, but desire reform "to the extent that supranational institutions do not compromise state sovereignty" (Vasilopoulou 2018: 232). Decisions made by European supranational bodies are often rejected and the idea of reforms which increase the role of nation-states is endorsed.
- **Compromising Euroscepticism.** This type of Euroscepticism accepts that a common European heritage is accepted, as well as the principle of European multilateral cooperation and, by-and-large, the current policy practice of integration. Such parties may not be enthusiastic about European integration but accept that it is necessary for the prosperity of its member states. However, 'compromising' Euroscepticism rejects the notion of the building of a European polity. When presented with the opportunity, they will resist further delegation of power to the supranational level and prefer intergovernmental over 'federalised' cooperation (Vasilopoulou 2018: 233).

Vasilopoulou (2018) notes that, among far-right political parties, we can also observe the strongest anti-EU stances, as the right-wing can be

associated with nationalism that somehow naturally contests deeper EU integration. She identifies three far-right party models, which are interrelated with the party's approach to democracy and the electorate. According to Vasilopoulou (2018: 2–3), each of these party models corresponds with one of the types of Euroscepticism. *Anti-system* far right parties tend to be *rejectionist* Eurosceptics, *anti-liberal* far-right parties tend to be *conditional* Eurosceptics, and *normalised* far-right parties tend to adopt a *compromising* Eurosceptic position on the EU. These models and their EU attitudes are highly determined by the domestic political context (Vasilopoulou 2018: 3–5).

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN EUROSCEPTICISM

The distinct experience of CEE with communist rule, and in particular the more recent post-communist transformation and the process of EU accession, have created particular conditions that are likely to shape the attitudes of the public and elites in this region with regards to European integration (Stoyanov 2017; Styczyńska 2018: 140; Cilento and Conti 2021: 604). Indeed, regional differences can be identified in EU attitudes between Western Europe on the one hand and CEE on the other (Garry and Tilley 2007; Stoyanov 2017: 120; Cilento and Conti 2021), along with common features among CEE countries (Stoyanov 2017: 103; Styczyńska 2018). At the same time, significant differences in EU attitudes exist *within* the region of CEE (Styczyńska 2018; Cilento and Conti 2021; Vogel 2021) so that, according to some studies, CEE is "less characterised by regional similarities but rather by country differences with regard to both the degree of Euroscepticism and its linkage to the issue of immigration and conceptions of democracy" (Vogel 2021: 30). The regional specificity of CEE Euroscepticism therefore remains a "contentious matter" (Cilento and Conti 2021: 605) in the literature.

Early studies on CEE Euroscepticism identified a "large and positive elite consensus on the issue of European integration" (Kopecký and Mudde 2002: 317) and concluded Euroscepticism was "a minority component of nearly all those party systems" (Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004: 21), mostly manifest as 'soft' Euroscepticism and with almost no political relevant parties that entirely rejected EU membership (Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2001; 2004; Styczyńska 2018). Recent years have seen a rise in Euroscepticism across all of Europe, expressed among others in an increase of Eurosceptic

parties in the European Parliament since 2014, as well as the outcome of the 2016 Brexit referendum (Bijsmans 2020; Treib 2020). Public Euroscepticism and the electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties increased between 2009 and 2019 across Central Europe as well, with some exceptions,[3] but does not seem to stand out within the EU (Bojinović Fenko et al. 2019: 399; Vogel 2021: 42). Elites in CEE are shown to be somewhat less supportive of deeper integration today than elites in Western Europe, although this regional divide should not be overstated, as "the differences between elites in the two regions are of intensity more than direction" (Cilento and Conti 2021: 618–619). Having said that, in the past years, numerous public conflicts have emerged between the European Commission and governments in Central Europe, in particular Hungary and Poland, and to a lesser extent the Czech Republic. However, actors in the region appear to contain this anti-EU rhetoric primarily to specific issues, such as national identity, migration policy, democracy and the rule of law, and do not necessarily follow "a coherent anti-EU strategy" (Lorenz and Anders 2021: 323–324, 335).

Several qualitative differences between Euroscepticism in Central Europe and in Western Europe can be identified as well. Where criticism of the (supposedly negative) economic consequences of EU membership and of the common currency has been an important feature of Euroscepticism in Western Europe, it is much less so in Central Europe, where the EU's economic effects are viewed more positively, where fewer countries have adopted the euro and where there is a substantial investment from the EU's structural and investment funds (Dąbrowski, Stead and Mashhoodi 2019: 709; Csehi and Zgut 2021). Furthermore, where the nativist and nationalist arguments of Eurosceptics in Western Europe often revolve around secularism and Islamophobia, Central European Euroscepticism is focused more on historical trauma, national identity and tradition (Styczyńska 2018; Csehi and Zgut 2021). According to Csehi and Zgut (2021:56), the recent memory of anti-communist resistance has allowed for an 'anti-imperialist' Eurosceptic narrative to emerge and resonate in Central Europe, emphasising national sovereignty and resistance against powerful neighbours and

[3] Public Euroscepticism appears to have decreased between 2009 and 2019 in Hungary (Vogel 2021: 42) and the vote share for Eurosceptic parties has remained consistently low in Slovenia between 2004 and 2018 (Bojinović Fenko et al. 2019).

supranational authorities (Cilento and Conti 2021; Csehi and Zgut 2021). These common aspects in the region notwithstanding, much variation can be observed in the determinants of Eurosceptic attitudes between countries in CEE. For example, preferences for restrictions on migration were related with Euroscepticism in Poland and Hungary, but not in the Czech Republic or Slovakia (Vogel 2021: 46). Similarly, the effect of various crises on Eurosceptic attitudes differed among countries, with the Eurozone crisis affecting Euroscepticism in Hungary and Slovenia, but less so in other Central European countries (Bojinović Fenko et al. 2019: 412).

POPULIST EUROSCEPTICISM

DISTINCT BUT INTERSECTING PHENOMENA – HOW TO DEFINE POPULIST EUROSCEPTICISM?

Evidence from the field demonstrates that the two thin ideologies – Euroscepticism and populism – interact and strengthen one another. There is a notable correlation between Eurosceptic and populist political actors, discourses and agendas (Taggart 1998; Lasoń 2011; Hartleb 2012; Kaniok and Havlík 2016; Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel 2018; Kneuer 2019; Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019). Recent years have seen “populist and Eurosceptic waves break together” (Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel 2018: 379), as European crises, such as the financial, refugee and Brexit crises, offered opportunities to both populist arguments of elite failure and to Eurosceptic arguments against European integration and interdependence (Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel 2018: 379; Kneuer 2019). Especially in CEE, voters who are more Eurosceptic have a significantly stronger tendency to vote for populist radical right-wing parties (Santana, Zagórski and Rama 2020: 296).

Studies of Euroscepticism and populism emerged more or less simultaneously in the late 1990s and early 2000s, yet they developed mostly independently from each other in the subsequent decades (Dechezelles and Neumayer 2010). Although both concepts share conceptual vagueness and theoretical similarities, there is a lack of communication between

populism and Euroscepticism studies (Kaniok and Havlík 2016: 22; Kneuer 2019). The relation and interaction between the two concepts is rarely truly investigated (Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019: 14; Roch 2020; Csehi and Zgut 2021) and it has been subject to little empirical research (Kaniok and Havlík 2016). As such, our understanding of how precisely Euroscepticism and populism relate to each other remains "conflated, confused and understudied" (Csehi and Zgut 2021). While recent years have seen an increased interest in populist Euroscepticism in academic literature, the field continues to be understudied and deserves closer theoretical and empirical attention (Harmsen 2010; Kaniok and Havlík 2016; Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019; Roch 2020; Csehi and Zgut 2021).

The relation between populism and Euroscepticism has been qualified in various ways. Some scholars emphasise the similarities between the two concepts, suggesting that populism and Euroscepticism are similar phenomena, or even variations of the same phenomenon. Eurosceptic and populist arguments are often underpinned by the same logic, namely defiance against mainstream parties and a perception of 'losing out' (Leconte 2015: 255). Similarly to how populism can be considered a response to the technocratisation of domestic politics, Euroscepticism can be seen as a reaction to the depoliticised nature of European integration and the 'democratic deficit' of the EU. Euroscepticism, therefore, may be a particular *form of populism* that has emerged as a result of European integration and has the ambition to democratise and re-politicise that very process (Leconte 2015: 255–256). Euroscepticism, as a concept, thus inherently connected to populism, is not considered to be particularly committed to specific ideas about European integration, but is rather conceived as a "discursive formation constructed in opposition to the legitimising efforts of the EU" (Sørensen 2020: 164).

But while many Eurosceptic parties use the EU issue to form a populist critique, Euroscepticism is not the prerogative of populist parties only (Taggart 1998: 377). Although these are the exception to the rule, it is possible to find critical EU discourses which do not involve a populist frame or ideology, such as by the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom (Hartleb 2012: 49). Euroscepticism can therefore not be seen as simply a sub-set of populism (Harmsen 2010: 334; Lasoń 2011; Hartleb 2012; Pirro, Taggart and van Kessel 2018; Kneuer 2019; Roch 2020). An emerging consensus in the literature, therefore, is to see populism and Euroscepticism as "distinct but intersecting

phenomena" (Harmsen 2010: 333; Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019; Csehi and Zgut 2021). This perspective acknowledges that populism and Euroscepticism "can often be observed in tandem" (Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019: 1), but denies that the two concepts should be virtually equated. Instead, a number of essential differences between populism and Euroscepticism can be identified. For example, the ideas central to populism are more abstract and refer to a *relationship* between the 'people' and the 'elite' defined in normative terms (Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019: 4; Csehi and Zgut 2021: 55). The precise meaning and interpretation of those categories varies according to the context and the populism's host ideology. Euroscepticism, in turn, is in principle much narrower and concrete, and specifically entails opposition to the process of European integration or the structure of the EU. Populism is therefore generally considered an ideologically-defining feature of a political party, whereas Euroscepticism is rather seen as a party's position on a specific policy issue. The two phenomena do often coincide and interact but not always (Rooduijn and van Kessel 2019: 4, 7–8).

Having established that populism and Euroscepticism are in principle distinct concepts, it is worthwhile to provide an independent definition for 'populist Euroscepticism,' as a phenomenon in which populism and Euroscepticism somehow coincide. Csehi and Zgut (2021: 55) define 'Eurosceptic populism' as a particular type of populism that combines "anti-EU sentiments with populist interpretations of the world." The EU is thus equated with 'the corrupt elite,' which stands in opposition to 'the pure people.' The 'people,' in the populist Eurosceptic worldview, can be defined in different terms. When directed at a domestic audience, 'the people' is often equated with the citizens of a certain member state but in other contexts it can manifest as a pan-European conception of the people ('the European people') as well (Csehi and Zgut 2021; Roch 2020; Sørensen 2020).

As the study of populist Euroscepticism is still an evolving field, a critical reflection on this definition is warranted. While portraying the EU or its representatives as 'the corrupt elite' by implication turns it into something that should be opposed, not every opposition to a 'European elite' necessarily entails outright opposition to European integration as a whole. Insofar as we understand Euroscepticism to be a form of 'opposition to European integration' and a rather concrete policy position, a populist Eurosceptic statement would therefore need to convey opposition not merely to the persons,

institutions or countries presented as the 'European elite,' but also to the very principle, practice or polity-building of European integration (Vasilopoulou 2011). Therefore, it is theoretically possible to distinguish, on the one hand, a discourse in which the populist worldview is projected onto the context of the EU from, on the other hand, one in which the populist logic is applied to the EU *as part of* a political argument against European integration.

The former can be considered a type of 'Europe-level' populist discourse. As populism adapts to different contexts, it can be adapted to the European context as well. 'The elite' is then defined as, for example, the EU ('Brussels'), certain European institutions or specific individuals or groups of people in these institutions. 'The people,' in turn, can be defined as 'the European people,' a specific national community or a socio-economic class. The logic of this Europe-level populism follows that of other populist discourses, but is not married to a specific position with regards to European integration *per se*. Similarly to how populism can be combined with both left-wing and right-wing ideologies, Europe-level populism can be combined with both Eurosceptic (opposing European integration) and pro-European (supporting European integration) narratives and policy preferences. An unusual example of Europe-level populism that does not fundamentally oppose European integration is found in the Spanish left-wing populist party *Podemos* (Roch 2020). In a 2014 speech by Pablo Iglesias, the EU issue was presented as a choice between a Europe of the people or a Europe of the elites.[4] In this example, the populist frame is not used to oppose European integration as a whole, but rather to advocate for a far-reaching European-wide social policy – arguably even a form of deeper integration.[5]

[4] Excerpt: "We love Europe if Europe means freedom, equality and fraternity, we love Europe if Europe means social rights, we love Europe if Europe means human rights. The problem is not Europe, the problem is that the president of the European Central Bank is called Mario Draghi and he was representative of Goldman Sachs in Europe […]. Europe's problem is called Durão Barroso […] that's why we say along with other southern Europeans that we want to recover the dignity and the future of our peoples and our countries." (Campaign speech in Sevilla by Pablo Iglesias, May 2014. Available at: https://youtu.be/Uw7_GrvxBPk [accessed: November 3, 2022]. From Roch (2020)).

[5] Excerpt: "Immediately adopt a shock plan to eradicate child poverty and exclusion throughout the European territory, strictly observing the application of the European Social Charter, and with a Community programme for social housing which includes a ban on evictions from first homes within the Community territory; a European Health Charter guaranteeing the right to public health for all in the territory of the EU, and the strengthening of the European Area of Education and

Yet, this Europe-level populist discourse is often used to form a political argument explicitly opposing European integration or EU membership. These cases clearly present a form of 'populist Euroscepticism.' We propose to determine whether an argument qualifies as 'opposing European integration' based on the typology as developed by Vasilopoulou (2011). We call a certain stance a 'populist Eurosceptic' when it both shows features of populist discourse, and expresses opposition to one or more of the four aspects of European integration. Examples of populist Euroscepticism as understood here are abound, but perhaps nowhere more prevalent than in the United Kingdom around the 2016 Brexit referendum. The leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) Nigel Farage, for example, regularly linked a people-elite antagonism in Europe with the purported necessity for the United Kingdom to resign from its EU membership.[6]

Differentiating between 'Europe-level populism' and 'populist Euroscepticism' is important because it allows for the untangling of populist and Eurosceptic messages. If we understand populism and Euroscepticism to be 'distinct but intersecting phenomena,' it is important to not only identify the intersections but also the distinctions between the two concepts on the European level.

A number of case studies on populist Euroscepticism have been conducted in recent years. To inform the research design of empirical investigation, a brief overview is provided of the different methodologies employed in similar case studies in the literature.

Among the case studies on populist Euroscepticism, roughly three types of research objectives can be differentiated. A first group of studies investigates the electoral success of certain populist and/or Eurosceptic

Culture." (Podemos, 2016 general election manifesto. 'Un país para la gente. Bases políticas para un gobierno estable y con garantías.' Available at: https://podemos.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/un-pais-para-la-gente.pdf [accessed: November 3, 2022]. From Roch (2020)).

[6] Excerpt: "Because what the little people did, what the ordinary people did – what the people who'd been oppressed over the last few years who'd seen their living standards go down did – was they rejected the multinationals, they rejected the merchant banks, they rejected big politics and they said actually, we want our country back, we want our fishing waters back, we want our borders back. We want to be an independent, self-governing, normal nation. That is what we have done and that is what must happen. In doing so we now offer a beacon of hope to democrats across the rest of the European continent. I'll make one prediction this morning: the United Kingdom will not be the last member state to leave the European Union" (Farage, 2016).

parties. Kneuer (2019) and Carrieri and Vittori (2021), for example, analyse the effect of the major European crises on the performances of populist Eurosceptic parties in elections, while Pasquinucci (2022) and Öner (2020) explain the rise of the Italian parties *Lega* and *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S). A second group of studies is primarily interested in testing whether populist and Eurosceptic features of political parties actually correlate. Kaniok and Havlík (2016), Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro (2018) and Cremonesi and Salvati (2019) position political parties on axes of populism and Euroscepticism, and assess to what extent these features are 'two sides of the same coin' or rather wholly independent ideologies. Finally, a third group of studies intends to understand the interaction of populist and Eurosceptic ideas and discursive frames by political actors. Pirro and van Kessel (2018), Roch (2020), Sørensen (2020) and Csehi and Zgut (2021) focus on the use of populist and Eurosceptic discursive frames, and they investigate how key concepts, such as 'the people,' 'the elite' and 'Europe,' are framed and combined by political actors.

The case studies in the literature moreover make use of different types of data and research methods. Some studies rely on quantitative data from datasets to analyse and compare political parties, such as the PopuList (e.g. Taggart and Pirro 2021), the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (e.g. Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro 2018), the Global Party Survey and the European Election Studies (EES) dataset (e.g. Carrieri and Vittori 2021). Other studies operationalise 'populism' and 'Euroscepticism' by quantifying primary, qualitative source material. Hawkins (2009) proposes 'holistic grading' as a valid and efficient method to measure the level of populism in a political text. This entails the reading of an entire political text and then scoring it on a scale from 0–2 on its 'degree of populist content.' This method and other, similar approaches have been adopted by, among others, Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro (2018), Kaniok and Havlík (2016) as well as Taggart and Pirro (2021). Yet other case studies primarily use qualitative methods such as content analysis and discourse analysis. Roch (2020) and Sørensen (2020) analyse party manifestos or convention speeches using (corpus-assisted) discourse analysis, interrogating the framing of key concepts in these political texts. Pirro and van Kessel (2018), similarly, categorise populist Eurosceptic parties according to what discursive frames and types of arguments they use.

Lastly, the case studies vary in the scope and timeframe they adopt. Some studies focus on one or a few parties or politicians, studying and comparing these in-depth. For example, Roch (2020) studies the parties *Podemos* and *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), Csehi and Zgut (2021) focus exclusively on Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński, while Cremonesi and Salvati (2019) compare the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and *Movimento Cinque Stelle* – with a special interest in their leaders. However, many other studies adopt a wider scope, studying all parties in certain countries (e.g. Kaniok and Havlík 2016; Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro 2018; Plaza-Colodro, Gómez-Reino and Marcos-Marne 2018; Pasquinucci 2022) or all of Europe (Kneuer 2019; Sørensen 2020; Taggart and Pirro 2021). In terms of timeframes, most parties study populist Euroscepticism over one or several years, with 2014 (European Parliament elections) and 2015 (refugee crisis) particularly common.

CONCLUSIONS

The chapter demonstrates that both populism and Euroscepticism, although popular terms, would benefit from more detailed research. It especially shows that Central and Eastern European (CEE) Euroscepticism is understudied (Stoyanov 2017; Csehi and Zgut 2021) and perceived through the prism of Western European research. We know from the existing literature that both phenomena interact and strengthen each other but are also very context-specific. Populist Euroscepticism in a post-communist environment takes slightly different forms than in Western Europe. Studying the Polish example, one needs to take into consideration the specific historical legacy and socio-cultural issues, but also the process of Europeanisation, political and economic transformation and globalisation.

Moreover, while general CEE populist Euroscepticism may be not be much stronger than in Western Europe, a major difference is that those Eurosceptics are more often in power. When looking at countries such as Poland or Hungary, we notice a challenge in analysing the dichotomy

between 'pure people' and the 'corrupted elite.' In countries with populists in power the elite is often portrayed as something external – either within the country (opposition, secret services) or outside (European Union, powerful neighbours, the United States).

Following the reasoning laid out in the POPREBEL frameworks (Bešlin et al. 2020; Kubik 2020), we suggest adopting the ideational approach to researching populism. The ideational approach applies a specific focus on the ideas of populist parties and movements, as it considers these to be the key features of populism and the distinguishing feature of the parties and movements in question (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018: 2). Meanwhile, when it comes to Euroscepticism, we suggest following the typology provided by Vasilopoulou (2011), as it allows for identifying three types of Euroscepticism common among the European far right based on four dimensions to EU attitudes. Keeping this in mind, we stress the importance of a detailed look at the correlation between populism and Euroscepticism which are often assumed to be 'distinct but intersecting phenomena.' We argue that differentiating between 'Europe-level populism' and 'populist Euroscepticism' is essential because it allows for the untangling of populist and Eurosceptic messages.

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