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Euromphiles or Eurosceptics? Comparing the European policies of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats

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Abstract

The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats are often portrayed as Britain's pro-European parties. Indeed, both parties express a keen interest in keeping Britain in the European Union (EU) and in promoting a constructive engagement with other member states. Yet, to what extent can the two parties be characterized as Europhiles? In this article, we develop Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2008) concept of hard and soft Euroscepticism, extend it to Europhile party positions, and apply it to Labour and the Liberal Democrats' recent European policies. For this purpose, we analyze manifestos and party leaders' key speeches on the EU. We find, overall, that the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats are 'soft' Europhiles whose discourses have focused on EU reform. Yet, whilst their EU policies are very similar, their EU strategies differ: the Labour leadership have generally tried to contain the salience of EU issues, whereas the Liberal Democrats have followed a more offensive EU strategy after 2014. This can best be explained through electoral incentives and internal dynamics.

Keywords: Euroscepticism, Europhilia, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, European policy.

Introduction

Britain's 'awkward' relationship with the European Union (EU) is a topic that fills library shelves. Since Britain joined the European Union in 1973, the two main parties, the Labour Party and the Conservative Party, have been critical of Britain's EU membership at various times (Geddes, 2013; George, 1998). In the 1970s and early 1980s, the Labour Party was deeply divided over Britain's EU membership (Daniels, 1998). In the past two decades, large sections of the Conservative Party have called for Britain's exit from the EU (Lynch, 2015; Bale, 2006). This situation culminated in October 2011, when 81 Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs) defied Prime Minister David Cameron to call for a referendum on Britain's EU membership (The Guardian, 25/10/2011). In January 2013, David Cameron then promised a referendum on whether the UK should stay in the EU for 2017, thereby trying to appease Eurosceptic conservative backbenchers.

In very few other member states has EU membership been as controversial amongst mainstream parties as in the UK. What is more, the recent successes of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which calls for EU withdrawal and has won a considerable number of seats in local and European elections, as well as one seat in the general election of 2015, has contributed to a EU-hostile environment (Abbarno and Zapryanova, 2013). By contrast, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats are often portrayed as Britain's 'Europhiles'. For instance, the *Economist* referred to Labour's leader Ed Miliband's 'proud Europhilia' (15/03/2014) and to the Liberal Democrats as an 'earnestly pro-European' party (01/03/2014). What is more, the Liberal Democrats often stress their 'proud track record as the most consistently pro-European party in British politics' (see for instance: Liberal Democrats, 2013). In this article, we investigate these claims. We compare the recent European policies of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats in order to establish their degree of Europhilia.

Much has been written about New Labour's EU policy record (Daddow, 2015; Daddow, 2011; Bulmer, 2008; Forster, 2002). It is often argued that under the leadership of Tony Blair (1994-2007), the Labour Party took a particularly pro-European approach (Heffernan 2001). Yet, Blair's former EU adviser, Roger Liddle

(2014) argues that the Labour leadership lacked a EU strategy when it took office in 1997 and, due to their lack of experience in government, missed the opportunity for Britain to join the Euro. Thus, despite high aspirations, Blair's EU policy record in office has been described as 'at best mixed' (Smith, 2005). Schnapper (2015) compares the EU policies of Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband, with those of their predecessors. She concludes that they distanced themselves from Blair's 'trumpeted Euroenthusiastic rhetoric' and instead moved closer to the 'cautiously and unenthusiastically pro-European social democracy' of Hugh Gaitskell and Harold Wilson in the 1960s and James Callaghan in the 1970s.

Less has been written about the Liberal Democrats' European policies, which is not surprising, given that the party had only entered government for the first time in 2010. However, the Liberal Democrats' origins are, in part, tied to the European question. After all, debates about European integration during the referendum on Britain's membership of the European Community in 1975 were one of the reasons causing Europhile politicians from the Labour Party to break away and form the Social Democratic Party. When the latter merged with the Liberal Party to form the Liberal Democrats in 1988, their enthusiasm for Europe continued. They supported the single currency, a federal Europe, and deeper integration more generally (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005). More recent studies have assessed the role of the EU in the Liberal Democrats' coalition with the Conservative Party in 2010. For instance, Goes (2013: 15) argues that the Conservatives were the drivers of the Coalition's EU policy, whilst the Liberal Democrats acted as navigators ensuring, most of the time, that the agreed roadmap was respected. Oppermann and Brummer (2014: 566), by contrast, argue that the Liberal Democrats initially succeeded in constraining the Conservatives' 'Eurosceptic aspirations', but that their influence waned over the years.

The European policies of Labour and the Liberal Democrats have thus been studied separately. In this article, we compare the two parties' EU policies to address this gap in existing research. Our analysis starts in 2007, when new party leaders came into power, and ends in 2015, when these leaders stepped down. We thus focus our attention on the EU policy developments under Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband's leaderships of the Labour Party and Nick Clegg's leadership of the Liberal Democrats.

We begin the article by investigating Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2008) framework of Eurocepticism and by extending it to include Europhilia. Next, we compare the positions of Labour and the Liberal Democrats on EU politics, the EU polity, and EU policies. We do this by investigating the three main themes we identified in manifestos and leaders' EU speeches: Britain's relationship with the EU; the EU's institutional design; and, EU economic and monetary policy. We find that in all three areas, the parties have more in common than sets them apart; both want Britain to stay in the EU, but focus their attention on the EU's need to reform. We then explain why the two parties are 'soft' Europhiles, focusing on the EU-hostile political environment, their status as parties in government or opposition, and intra-party divisions. In the conclusion we discuss the implications of our findings for comparative research into Euroscepticism. We argue that while Labour and the Liberal Democrats are often portrayed as Europhiles, placing this in a European context highlights the limits to their support for European integration.

Eurosceptics or Europhiles? Political parties and their European policies

In the past two decades there has been a growth in comparative research into the phenomenon of Euroscepticism. The literature on party-based Euroscepticism draws heavily on the work of Paul Taggart (1998: 366) who defined Euroscepticism as 'the idea of contingent, or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration'. More recently, Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak (2008: 247-248) have refined the concept and now distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' Euroscepticism. Hard Euroscepticism can be understood as 'principled opposition to the project of European integration as embodied in the EU, in other words, based on the transfer of powers to supranational institutions such as the EU'. In contrast, soft Euroscepticism applies to situations 'when there is no principled objection to the European integration project of transferring powers to a supranational body such as the EU, but there is opposition to the EU's current or future planned trajectory based on the *further* extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make'. 'Soft' Euroscepticism, in particular, has been criticized for being defined 'in such a broad manner that virtually every

disagreement with any policy decision of the EU can be included (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002: 300).

In response to the criticism, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008) have specified what Euroscepticism is *not*, arguing that a party criticizing the EU for failing to properly reflect its country's national interests in, for example, EU budget or EU accession negotiations, cannot be described as Eurosceptic. Furthermore, according to the authors, Euroscepticism does not apply to a party that is broadly in favour of European integration but opposes one or two EU policy areas. They add that this depends on the 'quality of these policy areas being opposed rather than the quantity' (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2008: 250). For instance, they specify that a party opposing a core policy area such as the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) is more likely to be categorized as Eurosceptic than a party opposing a peripheral EU policy area.

The concept of Euroscepticism has made major advances in our understanding of party positions on Europe, yet it can only be used to analyze degrees of EU opposition. It does not help us categorize the positions of parties that are in favour of European integration, or Europhiles. The need to disentangle the meaning of party positions on the EU has led Flood and Usherwood (2005) to design a typology categorizing positions towards the EU in general and towards any given aspect of the EU. The categories they use - maximalist, reformist, gradualist, minimalist, revisionist, and rejectionist – allow for a more nuanced analysis of party positions towards the EU. Yet ultimately, what remains significant is the issue of whether a party is in favour or against the EU.

In this study, we will therefore extend Taggart and Szczerbiak's concept and suggest that hard and soft Euroscepticism can be mirrored by hard and soft Europhilia. For this purpose, hard Europhilia can be understood as very strong, unconditional support for the EU integration project in general, for the EU's core policies and institutions, and for further transfer of powers to the EU. Strong support for further integration need not go against the EU's principle of subsidiarity.¹ For instance, hard Europhiles

¹ The principle of subsidiarity is defined in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union. It ensures that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen and that constant checks are made to verify that action at the EU level is justified in light of the possibilities available at national, regional, or local level. Specifically, it is the principle whereby the EU does not

would support the extension of the EU's powers of fiscal and budgetary oversight, a topic that has been salient throughout the Eurozone crisis. Meanwhile, soft Europhiles also show strong support for the EU integration project in general. At the same time, they call for different, or reformed, EU institutions and policies. Hence, in contrast to soft Eurosceptics, soft Europhiles do not oppose the EU's key policies and institutions; they merely stress the need for change or reform. Soft Europhiles are also hesitant towards further integration, or transfer of powers to the EU. Table 1 (below) illustrates our conceptual framework.

Table 1 about here

In the following section, we will apply this framework to the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats' recent EU policies.

The European policies of Labour and the Liberal Democrats

We analyse and compare Labour and the Liberal Democrats' EU policies along three dimensions: politics, polity, and policies. The first dimension refers to the politics of the UK's EU membership. In recent years, the membership question has overshadowed all other EU debates in Britain and led to a referendum on EU membership in 2017. With respect to the referendum campaign, Labour and the Liberal Democrats' positions on EU membership is highly relevant. Second, we investigate the parties' positions on the EU polity, meaning the EU's institutional structure. Third, we compare Labour and the Liberal Democrats' positions on the EU's policies. In the recent decades, an increasing amount of policies have become 'Europeanized' (Graziano and Vink, 2008). As space is limited, we focus on the EU's economic and monetary policies, which have been a cornerstone of the EU project and a salient area of debate in British politics.

Our analysis draws on two main sources: party manifestos and leader speeches. Manifestos are authoritative policy statements that have been approved by the party organization in a democratic process. Therefore, manifestos are often used to map

take action (except in the areas that fall within its exclusive competence), unless it is more effective than action taken at national, regional or local level (Europa.eu, Glossary, n.d.g.).

parties' policy preferences (Volkens et al., 2013). Second, party leaders' speeches on the EU provide a snapshot of current themes and debates, and are therefore a useful addition to manifestos. Third, we have also drawn on a newspaper article written by Nick Clegg, and on a EU policy document published by the Liberal Democrats, as these two documents provide additional details about the party's EU policy. Table 2 below lists the documents we used for our analysis.

Table 2 about here

The politics of the UK's membership of the European Union

The Labour Party leadership under Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband unequivocally supported Britain's membership of the European Union and sold it as a matter of 'national interest'. In all manifestos and speeches, the Labour leaders stressed that EU membership was in the national/British/our/your/strategic interest. Not surprisingly, the last chapter of Labour's 2015 general elections manifesto was even entitled 'Standing up for Britain's Interests in Europe and the World'. Table 3 below illustrates this trend.

Table 3 about here

The Labour leaders argued that the British economy benefits from the membership of the European single market, and that therefore, EU membership is in Britain's national interest. Labour's case for EU membership has, above all, been an economic one. British parties' obsession with defending the 'national interest' in Brussels was already noted by Helen Wallace in 1997. Today, the three major British parties seem to compete in a race for who protects more vigorously the national interest. In this competition, they frequently accuse each other of betraying the national interest. This is highlighted in Ed Miliband's speech to the CBI (10/11/2014) in which he stated:

There are some people in our country who advocate exit from the EU. (...) It is a betrayal of our national interest. It is a clear and present danger. A clear and present danger to businesses like yours that trade with Europe every single day. You know that leaving the single market and stepping away from a trading block that allows us to work with the new economies, like Brazil, India and China, would be a disaster for our

country. It would risk billions of pounds in lost profits, risk millions of jobs and would make Britain weaker, not stronger, in the world.

Other benefits from Britain's EU membership have also been mentioned, but they were given a much lower profile. For instance, in Labour's 2009 and 2014 EU manifestos, Britain's interest in a European response to climate change, social inequality, and security threats, comes second, third, and fourth after the economic rationale of EU membership. What is more, despite the call for more collective action in some policy areas, the party leadership under Ed Miliband dismissed the idea that Labour ever wanted a federal Europe (BBC News Online, 25/09/2011), thereby echoing Tony Blair's preference for an intergovernmental rather than a supranational EU (Liddle, 2014: 69). Ed Miliband (12/03/2014) was also keen to stress that '... under Labour, Britain will not be part of an inexorable drive to an ever closer union'.

When Prime Minister David Cameron announced his referendum pledge, both the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats' leaderships were under pressure to set out their respective strategies. On 12 March 2014, Ed Miliband outlined Labour's referendum strategy, explaining that the next Labour government would legislate for a lock that guarantees that there can be no transfer of powers from Britain to the European Union without the consent of the British public through an in/out referendum – a promise that was enshrined in Labour's 2015 manifesto. Yet, Miliband believed it to be 'unlikely this lock will be used in the next parliament' (Miliband, 12/03/2014) as a new EU treaty was not on the horizon. However, after Labour's defeat in the 2015 elections, the party underwent a 'change of heart' (BBC News Online, 24/05/2015), thereby backing the 'in/out' referendum announced by David Cameron. Interim leader Harriet Harman explained that Labour would still campaign for the UK to stay in the EU (BBC News Online, 24/05/2015). During the Labour Party's 2015 leadership campaign, frontrunner Jeremy Corbyn stated that he would not rule out campaigning for a no vote in the UK's future EU membership referendum owing to David Cameron's position on workers' rights (The Guardian, 28/07/2015). After his election as the new party leader, Corbyn clarified that he was in favour of the UK's continued EU membership. Still, in a leaked speech he called David Cameron's decision to hold the EU referendum 'a cynical, opportunistic ploy to try and win back anti-EU votes that had switched from Tories to Ukip' (Social Europe, 2015).

Like Labour, the Liberal Democrats have argued that EU membership serves the UK's national interest, which they have also defined in primarily economic terms. Thus, all European manifestos and all of Clegg's EU speeches referred to Britain's (national) interest. Most notably, the 2014 European manifesto referred three times to Britain's interest in staying in the EU for primarily economic reasons. It states:

(...) Being in Europe is good for Britain. Leaving the EU is the surest way to trash our economic recovery. Pulling up the drawbridge would leave our nation isolated and diminished in the world. Now is the time to use your voice to protect Britain's interests (Liberal Democrats, 2014: 4).

Table 4 below illustrates the Liberal Democrats' references to EU membership as a means of defending the national interest.

To the Liberal Democrats, it was important that Britain played an active role in the EU to avoid becoming isolated in EU budget negotiations and in setting the rules of the single market. Furthermore, and like Labour, the Liberal Democrats saw the EU as an effective way to solve global problems such as climate change, cross border crime, and threats to civil liberty (Liberal Democrats, 2013). Therefore, the Liberal Democrats committed themselves to holding a referendum on Britain's EU membership, but tried to avoid holding a referendum in practice. For example, in their 2009 European manifesto, the Liberal Democrats were the only mainstream party to call for a referendum on Britain's EU membership, stating:

Of course the EU needs to change. A lot of money is wasted on out-of-date policies and structures. The EU should concentrate on big issues and not get involved when national or regional action would be more effective. Liberal Democrats support the Lisbon Treaty because it will help do that, making the EU more efficient and accountable. But Britain will only win the case in Brussels for a flexible, democratic Europe if we settle our arguments at home on whether we should be part of the EU or not. That is why Liberal Democrats have argued for a referendum on whether Britain stays in or leaves the EU. We are clear where we stand – you have to be in it to win it (Liberal Democrats, 2009: 3).

After 2010, the Liberal Democrats clarified and strengthened their position, calling for a referendum on EU membership, but only when there was a substantial shift in powers to the EU. In their 2014 European manifesto, they stated:

Liberal Democrats in the Coalition Government supported the European Union Act 2011, which will ensure that, in the event of proposals for any further significant transfer of powers from the UK to the EU, there will be a referendum. Liberal Democrats want this referendum to be an in or out referendum, giving every British citizen a say on British membership of the European Union (Liberal Democrats, 2014: 33).

Unlike Labour, the Liberal Democrats stood their ground after the 2015 electoral defeat and did not support David Cameron's plans for a EU referendum before the end of 2017. However, on 9 June all Liberal Democrat MPs other than Nick Clegg who was absent, voted for a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU. The Liberal Democrats' newly elected leader, Tim Farron, is known to strongly support the referendum. Already in 2011, he wrote:

I am passionate about our membership of the EU, but I am equally passionate about allowing the British public to decide the future of that membership. An 'in-out' referendum is important for democracy, but it would also act as a catharsis. It would force those who take cheap shots at Europe whilst not actually wanting us to withdraw, to face up to realities (Liberal Democrat Voice, 24/10/2011).

Overall, regarding their position on Britain's relationship with the EU, Labour and the Liberal Democrats are soft Europhiles; they support the principle of European integration and Britain's EU membership. At the same time, both parties support an 'in/out' referendum, thereby putting Britain's EU membership at risk. The two parties' EU discourse is utilitarian, or instrumentalist, rather than emotive or identity-based, as there are little or no references to a shared European history, to common values or identities in their manifestos and speeches.

The EU's polity

Despite their general support for European integration, consecutive Labour leaders have stressed the EU's need to reform its institutions (Kohler-Koch, 2000; Bulmer, 2008). It is telling that Blair's former EU advisor, Roger Liddle, refers to the 'familiar Blairite mantra of "reform" when discussing Blair's political arguments for Europe

(Liddle, 2014: 89). This reformist line of argument has continued over recent years. In each manifesto, Labour called for EU institutional reform. The 2014 European manifesto was the first to contain a separate chapter entitled ‘reform and value for money’ in which the party argued: ‘European institutions must be reformed to be more effective and better suited to meet the needs of its Member States, including the UK. Labour has a robust European reform agenda which seeks to achieve this’ (Labour Party, 2014: 24).

Despite this rhetoric, Labour’s EU institutional reform plans remained vague. The key reform project was a ‘red card system’, which would allow national parliaments to express concern with a piece of EU legislation and force the EU to either abandon or amend it (Miliband, 12/03/2014). Moreover, there were some suggestions as to making the workings of the European Parliament and Commission ‘more streamlined and effective’, e.g. through decreasing the number of Commissioners and portfolios. Labour also aimed to abolish the Strasbourg seat of the European Parliament, describing it as ‘wasteful’ in the 2014 European manifesto; a view that was shared by the Liberal Democrats. Hence, despite the vague plans, Labour has taken a soft Europhile, reformist stance on the EU’s institutional design.

As for Labour leaders, it is rare for Liberal Democrat politicians to speak about the EU polity without first stressing reform. However, the reform plans were more detailed and give the impression of a party that put more thought into its EU agenda than Labour. The need for EU institutional reform was highlighted in all manifestos. Moreover, Nick Clegg referred to EU institutional reform in all of his EU speeches. This trend was not new. Already in 2004, when the Liberal Democrats’ ‘Orange Book’ was published in an attempt to re-orientate the party’s policies, Nick Clegg argued in his chapter that the EU should gain public confidence by ending the perpetual institutional changes and by focusing on major issues, such as climate change and building economic prosperity. At the same time, however, he remained committed to a host of EU institutional reforms, and emphasised the EU’s need for decentralisation (Clegg, 2004).

The Liberal Democrats shared Labour’s position on the importance of national parliaments, arguing that they should be given more powers to shape EU policy

(Clegg, 2013). Yet, the Liberal Democrats went further than Labour by calling for the introduction of a regular European Affairs question time in parliament to hold ministers to account for their positions in European Council meetings. They also believed that ‘the Prime Minister should make a statement to the House of Commons setting out the objectives of the government before each European Council meeting, giving British MPs a chance to influence the position taken by the British government in Europe’ (Liberal Democrats, 2014). Furthermore, the Liberal Democrats wanted a greater say for local and regional authorities in designing and managing EU funded projects (Liberal Democrats, 2009) – which is a topic that Labour did not elaborate on. Overall, longstanding commitments to a federal Europe have disappeared from the Liberal Democrats’ official policy statements and speeches by Tim Farron and Nick Clegg. The exceptions were the highly pro-federalist statements of former MEPs, such as Andrew Duff (House of Lords, 26/02/2008). The missing reference to federalism in the party’s official statements made the Liberal Democrats more similar to Labour. The Liberal Democrats’ position on the EU polity is, therefore, characterized by soft Europhilia.

The EU’s economic and monetary policies

Under Blair’s leadership, Labour was principally in favour of joining the Euro. However, the Labour Party’s 1997 manifesto’s section on the Euro was ‘a piece of studied ambiguity to see Labour through an election’ (Liddle, 2014: 74) and Blair was soon after the election under pressure to announce a Euro-strategy. Under Chancellor Brown, the ‘5 tests’ - a Treasury-led economic assessment – had to be met if Britain was to join the single currency, and the public had to be consulted in a referendum. The introduction of the Euro thus depended on whether the British and European economy had converged; whether there was a high level of business and workforce flexibility in the UK; whether by joining the Euro the UK would create better conditions for firms to invest; whether the British financial industry would benefit from the introduction of the Euro; and whether joining the Euro would promote economic growth and employment. Due to a number of reasons, amongst them Blair’s initial indecisiveness and the highly publicized rivalry between Blair and Brown, the Labour government never put the Euro to a referendum. In their 2009 EU manifesto, Labour stated that: ‘in principle we are in favour of membership of the single currency’ provided that the five economic tests are met. Yet, from then onwards, the

party was less and less committed to the Euro. In the 2010 general election manifesto, Labour made the following statement: ‘on the Euro, we hold to our promise that there will be no membership of the single currency without the consent of the British people in a referendum’. In the 2014 European manifesto, the single currency is no longer even mentioned. In his five speeches on the EU, Miliband referred to the Euro only once, and this particular reference was not very positive:

The failures of the Euro shakes people’s confidence in the whole European Union. Britain is outside the Euro. And will, in my view rightly, remain so. But is that an excuse for leaving? No. I believe we must work to ensure that this more flexible European Union, where some countries pursue deeper integration and others don’t, still benefits all (Miliband, 19/11/2012).

In their 2015 general election manifesto, Labour further clarified their position on the Euro by stating that: ‘we will not join the Euro, and we will ensure EU rules protect the interests of non-Euro members.’ It is thus interesting to note that Labour has not only abandoned plans for Euro membership, but that, despite the salience of the Eurozone crisis, the party barely mentioned the topic in its manifestos and speeches.

The Liberal Democrats gave stronger support for joining the single currency than the other parties in the 1997 and 2001 general elections (Carey and Geddes, 2010). In their 2009 EU manifesto, the party maintained their support for joining the Euro, stating that ‘it is in Britain’s long-term interest to be part of the euro which would help Britain improve economic stability and boost trade and investment’ (Liberal Democrats, 2009). The final decision to join the Euro would be made by the public in a referendum. However, critics argued that the Liberal Democrats had done little to keep the Euro on the agenda after entering government in 2010 (Smith, 2012). Indeed, our analysis confirms that the Liberal Democrats’ discourse on Britain’s membership of the single currency became less positive and prevalent. Since the outbreak of the 2008 economic and financial crisis, the Liberal Democrats began arguing that Britain should not join the Euro immediately, but should wait until the conditions were right. For instance, the 2014 EU manifesto read: ‘Liberal Democrats believe it will not be in the British national interest to join the Euro in the foreseeable future’ (Liberal Democrats, 2014). Thus, the potential positive effects of a future British Euro membership were no longer mentioned.

Furthermore, from 2011 onwards, Nick Clegg no longer made positive references to the single currency in his speeches. For instance, in his speech at Chatham House, Clegg merely declared that: ‘Joining the Euro will not be in our interests anytime soon – certainly not in my political lifetime’ (Clegg, 01/11/2011). At the same time, the Liberal Democrats acknowledged the need to rescue the Euro and support sovereign debt bailouts (Telegraph, 08/07/2011). They also called for the EU to play a significant role in regulating the banking sector, and encouraged more cooperation between national financial services authorities and the European Central Bank to prevent future financial crises (Liberal Democrats, 2009). Thus, both Labour and the Liberal Democrats argued that Britain should support the reform of the Euro without joining it. Following Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008) rejecting the Euro is a soft Eurosceptic position, as the Euro is one of the EU’s core policies.

Labour and the Liberal Democrats also took similar positions on other important economic issues, such as the EU budget, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), structural funds, and trade policy. For a long time, the size and purpose of the EU budget has been a controversial topic in British politics, and Prime Minister Thatcher famously achieved a rebate for Britain in 1984 (Geddes, 2013: 68). Tony Blair and Gordon Brown also advocated a reform of the EU budget (O’Donnell and Whitman, 2007). The need to reform the EU budget was highlighted in all of Labour’s 2009-2015 manifestos. In fact, whenever the EU budget was mentioned in these documents, the word ‘reform’ could be found in the same sentence. Yet, Labour not only mentioned the *reform* of the budget (i.e. how it is spent) but also increasingly stressed the need for *restraint*. Labour’s 2014 European manifesto was the first to refer to restraint, stating: ‘(...) we recognise that at a time of tough choices at home, we must argue not just for restraint of the EU budget but also for reform’. Labour even supported cutting the 2014-2020 EU budget. Labour MPs joined Eurosceptic Conservative backbenchers in a rebellion against David Cameron’s plan to vote for a budget freeze rather than a budget reduction (Telegraph, 12/02/13; BBC News Online, 31/10/2012). Nick Clegg then accused Labour of ‘dishonesty’ and ‘hypocrisy’ (The Guardian, 31/10/2012). After all, Labour’s shadow foreign secretary, Douglas Alexander, had been Europe minister during the last EU budget negotiations in 2005, during the UK presidency of the EU, when Tony Blair had agreed to water down the

British rebate and brokered an above-inflation increase in the overall EU budget. Labour's more recent votes for the EU budget cuts can be interpreted as a tactical decision to defy the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government rather than a policy U-turn.

The Liberal Democrats' position on the EU budget evolved in a similar, but less radical pattern. The need to reform the budget was stressed in the 2009 European manifesto, which stated:

The EU budget is in urgent need of wholesale reform so that money is spent only on the things the EU really needs to do. (...) We do not see the need, in the current context, for any significant growth in the budget's size, nor the abolition of the British rebate (Liberal Democrats, 2009: 17).

Yet, the tone of the 2009 manifesto was generally positive, as the Liberal Democrats - in contrast to Labour - also mentioned successful projects that were funded by the EU. It is thus interesting to note that five years later, the Liberal Democrats followed suit and stressed the need for restraint:

At a time of austerity across Europe, Liberal Democrats helped push through the first ever reduction in the European Union budget by £30 billion. We want to build on the savings already achieved and push for further reductions in European Union administrative costs including through cuts to travel and transport budgets (Liberal Democrats, 2014: 32).

The 'tough' stance on the EU budget was also highlighted in Nick Clegg's speeches. Most notably, in his speech to Chatham House, Clegg (01/11/2011) stressed: 'we will not accept an increase, above inflation, to the EU Budget. That is a real terms freeze. And we will protect the British rebate in full. That is the toughest position of any European country.'

Thus, Labour and the Liberal Democrats increasingly toughened their stances on the EU budget and ended up agreeing with the Conservative Party on EU budget cuts (Conservative Party, 2015). A tough stance on the EU budget has thus become a consensus amongst Britain's three major parties. Linked to this is Labour's and the Liberal Democrats' recurrent argument that the proportion of the EU budget spent on

the CAP is too large. In all of Labour's 2009-2015 manifestos, EU budget reform was directly linked to the CAP. For instance, Labour's 2014 European manifesto read:

At time of tough choices at home, this not only means restraint in the EU budget but also reform. The budget should focus on those items where spending at an EU level can save money at the national level, and resources should be shifted from areas such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and put into areas of more productive economic development, such as research and development for new technologies (Labour Party, 2014: 6).

Furthermore, in all of his three key speeches on the EU, Ed Miliband referred to EU budget reform, and in two of them, this included CAP reform. Yet, again, the reform plans remained very vague.

The Liberal Democrats also mentioned CAP reform in all manifestos and EU speeches. Yet, in contrast to Labour, they offered a more detailed reform plan. For example, the party proposed to replace the CAP with a new European Sustainable Rural Development policy to encourage home grown food, and a fair price for farmers. Again, the Liberal Democrats were keen to highlight positive policy achievements. For instance, in their 2014 European manifesto, the party stated:

Liberal Democrats in the European Parliament have strongly backed reform of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. More than half of Common Agricultural Policy funds will now be directed towards environmental services and tackling climate change (Liberal Democrats, 2014: 25).

Thus, both parties agreed on the need to reform the CAP, but differed in their concrete proposals and in their tone.

It also has to be noted that there were economic policy areas where Labour and the Liberal Democrats supported a stronger role for the EU. For instance, both parties saw the EU as an effective vehicle for international trade because of its ability to broker trade agreements with third countries, including the US (Labour Party, 2014; Liberal Democrats, 2014). Furthermore, both parties called for an extension of the EU single market. In fact, Labour's discourse on the European single market was very positive and extensive, especially when compared to the discourse on the Euro, the EU budget,

or the CAP. Especially in the 2009 and 2014 European manifestos, Labour referred to the economic benefits of ‘the largest single market in the world’ (Labour Party, 2009) or ‘a market with 21 million companies generating £11 trillion in economic activity’ (Labour Party, 2014). What is more, Ed Miliband, in his three major EU speeches, made a strong case for the UK’s EU membership on the basis of the single market. For instance, in his speech at the London Business School (12/03/2014) he declared:

The economic case for membership is overwhelming. Our membership of the EU gives Britain access to a market with hundreds of millions of people. With 21 million companies. Generating 11 trillion pounds in economic activity. Almost half of all overseas investment in the UK comes from within the EU. Directly providing 3.5 million jobs. And much of the rest of the investment into our country comes because we are part of the single market.

Moreover, Labour supported the completion of the European single market in areas like the digital, energy and financial sectors. ‘Removing the barriers to the single market’, ‘completing the single market’, and ‘driving the single market forward’ is the types of language used in Ed Miliband’s speeches.

The Liberal Democrats also called for an extension of the single market into areas such as energy, financial services, defence, and transport. Like Labour, they used a very positive language in their manifestos and speeches, referring to ‘the largest single market in the world’, or ‘the world’s biggest borderless market place’. Nick Clegg even described the single market as ‘the crowning achievement of the EU’ (09/05/2014) and sold it as ‘a British invention’ (29/10/2011). Hence, when it comes to their positions on the EU single market, Labour and the Liberal Democrats can even be described as hard Europhiles.

Overall, however, Labour and the Liberal Democrats can hardly be labelled hard Europhiles, as they constantly stressed the deficiencies of the EU. What is more, on Britain’s membership of the Euro, they took a soft Eurosceptic stance. Table 5 below provides an overview of Labour’s and the Liberal Democrats’ positions on EU politics, the polity, and policies.

Table 5 about here

The question is whether the two parties' focus on EU reform has become more pronounced in recent years. Our own coding of Labour's and the Liberal Democrats' general election manifestos since 1997 shows that the two parties have been relatively consistent in their emphasis on EU reform. Importantly, however, data from the Manifesto Research Group (Volkens et al., 2013) indicates that the parties have placed declining emphasis on the positive aspects of European integration (see tables 6 and 7 below). Thus, reforming the EU has become more significant relative to the positive mentions of the EU.

Table 6 about here

Table 7 about here

Why so cautious about the EU?

In this section we explain Labour and the Liberal Democrats' cautious approach to Europe, which is best understood as soft Europhilia. We account for external and internal explanatory variables. The external variables refer to the broader political environment in which the two parties operate, such as the media and voters, and to their status as parties in government or opposition. The internal explanatory variable refers to intra-party divisions on the EU that have put pressure on party leaderships.

The Limits of Europhilia

The UK's relationship with the EU is complex, and no other member state has negotiated as many opt-outs from core EU policies (such as the Euro or Schengen) as the UK. Yet, as Copsy and Haughton (2014) remind us, levels of public Euroscepticism are not overwhelmingly high in the UK, compared to some other member states. Rather, a great majority of British voters are 'EU-agnostic' and change their EU views over time. This volatility makes it difficult for mainstream parties to hit the right tone. Furthermore, levels of EU knowledge are low amongst the British public (Oppermann and Brummer, 2013). It is also common knowledge that news media can fuel public cynicism and scepticism about the EU (de Vreese, 2007).

In the UK, the press ‘have been forthright in their opposition towards the EU and its perceived threat to Britain’s sovereignty’ (Usherwood and Startin, 2013: 10). In this context, party leaders try to avoid harsh criticism from the largely Eurosceptic press. National party elites also respond to the party supporters’ EU positions. At the same time, they also shape them. For example, Sanders and Toka (2013) and Steenbergen et al. (2007) demonstrate that party elites and supporters influence each other’s EU positions. Data from the British Election Study (2004-2013) demonstrates that supporters of Labour and the Liberal Democrats (i.e. respondents who said they would vote for one of these parties at the next general election) were generally *strongly approving* or *approving* of Britain’s membership of the EU; far more so than the supporters of the Conservative party. Graph 1 below illustrates this trend. Still, as graph 2 below shows, the majority of Labour and Liberal Democrats supporters *approved* rather than *strongly approved* Britain’s EU membership. The supporters’ EU preferences can in part explain the two parties’ soft Europhilia.

Graph 1 about here

Graph 2 about here

Furthermore, these two graphs also depict that Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters were very similar in their views on Britain’s EU membership. This was mirrored by the two parties’ very similar policies on the EU membership referendum. Yet, despite these similarities, the two parties have chosen different EU strategies. Most importantly, Labour has sought to depoliticise or defuse EU issues for fear of losing votes since the beginning of the 2000s (Oppermann, 2008) and Ed Miliband followed the same strategy between 2010 and 2015. Initially, the growth of UKIP had also reinforced the Liberal Democrats’ long-term strategy of downplaying Europe. It was only during the 2014 European parliamentary election campaign that the Liberal Democrats had re-gained their confidence to speak out for the EU, as will be discussed below.

Being in government or opposition

In government, political parties tend to be more cautious not to clash over policies with their coalition partners, whilst in opposition, they can make bolder claims and

promises. The Liberal Democrats managed to curtail the Conservative Party's efforts to renegotiate the basis of Britain's membership of the EU in the 2010 coalition agreement (Oppermann and Brummer, 2013). However, in government, the Liberal Democrats only played a junior role on foreign policy issues and only played a limited role in moderating Conservative Party policy behind the scenes. This drew criticism that the party was seeking to avoid talking in public about Europe for fear of destabilising the government (Daddow, 2012). As Dommett (2013: 218) has noted, the Liberal Democrats struggled to find ways to maintain their distinctiveness while in government. By the summer of 2013, the party's campaign team had therefore shifted its strategy. It signaled to the party activists and elected officials that it was time to focus on Europe. Nick Clegg began speaking publicly about Europe and in 2014 entered into a series of public EU debates with UKIP leader Nigel Farage. This can be identified as a core vote strategy that arguably appeased the core supporters. It is significant that 68 per cent of supporters stated that it was a good decision for Nick Clegg to challenge Nigel Farage to a EU debate (Liberal Democrat Voice, 24/04/2014). This EU charm offensive, however, failed to attract voters, as the Liberal Democrats lost 10 out of 11 seats in the 2014 European parliamentary elections, and 49 out of 57 seats in the 2015 general elections. These defeats had a number of reasons, but European policy was, in all likelihood, not a very important one. In the UK, EU issue voting, or 'the process in which attitudes towards European integration translate into national vote choice' (de Vries, 2007: 364) is higher than in most other EU countries, due to the high level of partisan conflict over EU issues. Still, overall, EU policy is not very salient amongst the British electorate (Clements et al., 2013), and both the 2014 and 2015 election campaigns focused on issues other than the EU, such as health policy and public spending in general. Hence, speaking out for the EU is unlikely to have affected the Liberal Democrats' vote shares.

The example of the Labour Party shows that even in opposition, mainstream party leaderships are careful not to come across as hard Europhiles. Under Ed Miliband, EU issues were kept at a very low profile. As a consequence, the party took time to decide on a referendum strategy and felt pressurised to offer a referendum, against its initial plans. This has been interpreted by some as an attempt to defuse differences between Labour and the Liberal Democrats in order to retain the allegiance of Liberal Democrat supporters who defected to Labour after the 2010 election (Financial Times,

12/03/2014). Even during Labour's 2014 European campaign, EU issues were kept at a very low, barely visible profile. The campaign focused almost exclusively on domestic issues. Labour also abstained in their vote for the Party of European Socialists' candidate for the presidency of the European commission, Martin Schulz, portraying him as a fiscally irresponsible federalist (The Guardian, 01/03/2014). Moreover, Ed Miliband refused to join the televised EU debates with Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage. However, LabourList (a weblog that is supportive of but independent from the Labour Party) conducted a survey of 768 blog readers ahead of the 2014 European parliamentary elections and showed that 46 per cent wanted Labour to spend more time critiquing UKIP compared to 24 per cent who rejected the idea (LabourList, 15/05/2014). Still, the EU did not play a major role during Labour's 2015 election campaign, which focused almost exclusively on health policy and the costs of living. The following quote from the 'Europe' section of Labour's 2015 election manifesto illustrates this: 'Labour's priority in government will be protecting the NHS [National Health Service] and tackling the cost-of-living crisis. It is not to take Britain out of Europe' (Labour Party, 2015: 77).

In other words, being in opposition did not encourage Labour to become more Europhile. Instead, the Labour Party continued to contain the salience of EU issues, whilst the Liberal Democrats started to speak out for EU membership during the second half of their term in government.

Intra-Party divisions on EU issues

Last but not least, intra-party divisions on EU issues within the leadership, but also between the leadership and the broader party organization, emerged that made it more difficult for Labour's and the Liberal Democrats' leaderships to send out a hard Europhile message. In the Labour Party, divisions have re-surfaced in recent years. Thus, in 2013, the party leadership still rejected a referendum on EU membership, but a campaign was launched by a number of former and incumbent MPs and local councillors who called for a 2017 referendum. This group, called 'Labour for a Referendum' was formed in May 2013. On their website (2014) the group declared: 'we have no corporate view on In or Out. Some of our supporters are pro EU, some are "Euro-realist", seeking a better deal, but favouring remaining in the EU, and others are pro the UK leaving the EU'.

What is more, polls show that in September 2014, 45 per cent of Labour supporters backed a referendum against 36 per cent who opposed it (The Guardian, 23/09/2014). Ed Miliband's promise to keep the referendum lock can thus be interpreted as a response to these demands from the party and its supporters. Following the 2015 general election, a party member survey found that 84.7 per cent of Labour Party members would vote in favour of the UK remaining in the EU regardless of any terms of renegotiation (Webb and Bale 2015).

At the beginning of the 2000s, the Liberal Democrats were still described as 'uniformly Euro enthusiastic' other than the odd dissenter (BBC News Online, 15/12/2001). It has to be noted that amongst Britain's three major parties, the Liberal Democrats were the only one led by a (multilingual) former Member of the European Parliament, namely Nick Clegg. Moreover, until their defeat in the 2014 European elections, Liberal Democrat MEPs, such as Andrew Duff, held very prominent positions in the European Parliament due to their EU expertise and pro-integrationist positions. In recent years, however, it has become increasingly clear that Europe has been divisive in even the most pro-European of the main political parties in Britain. The older generation of Liberal Democrats, and especially the members of the House of Lords, were generally more Europhile than the younger generation. For instance, a study by Julie Smith (2012: 1285) found that Liberal Democrat MPs from the South-West of England, former heartlands of the party, adopted fairly Eurosceptic positions. Internal divisions over European policy became apparent at the 2005 Liberal Democrat party conference when the conference rebelled to overturn leadership proposals to limit British spending on the EU to 1 per cent of GDP (BBC News Online, 19/09/2005). High profile divisions also have occurred since 2005 over proposals for referendums on the EU Constitutional Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty, and Britain's membership of the EU. It appears that in a response to public opinion as well as generational changes at the top of the party, the Liberal Democrats have become less Europhile.

However, European integration remains popular with party activists. Surveys conducted through 'Liberal Democrat Voice', the party's discussion website, in 2011, show that 48 per cent of the respondents wanted the UK to remain 'a full member of

the EU and work towards ever closer union, economically and politically'. A further 37 per cent responded that the UK should remain a full member of the EU, but rejected working towards an ever-closer union, economically and politically (Liberal Democratic Voice, 03/10/2011). What is more, 58 per cent of members stated that they did not want the Liberal Democrats' 2015 election manifesto to contain a pledge to hold an in/out referendum on the UK's continuing EU membership, whilst 34 per cent were in favour (Liberal Democrat Voice, 01/04/2013). At the same time, party activists began stressing the need for Nick Clegg to recognise that the Euro was a mistake (Liberal Democrat Voice, 01/11/2012). Thus, whilst the party activists appeared very supportive of the EU in general, their support of the UK's membership of the Euro was weak. After the 2015 general election, surveys suggested that 86 per cent of Liberal Democrat members would vote to remain in the EU regardless of any terms of renegotiation (Webb and Bale 2015).

Hence, in recent years, both Labour's and the Liberal Democrats' leaderships had to manage a certain level of intra-party divisions on EU issues. This can explain, in part, why they avoided strongly Europhile statements in public when it could damage the cohesion of their parties.

Conclusions

The Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats have often been described as pro-European or Europhile parties. In this article, we have investigated this claim. We first developed Taggart and Szczerbak's (2008) concept of hard and soft Euroscepticism so that it also extends to hard and soft Europhilia. We then analyzed and compared the European policies of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats between 2007 and 2015, focusing on Britain's relationship with the EU, the EU's institutional set-up, and European economic and monetary policies. We found that overall, Labour and the Liberal Democrats can be best described as soft and, at times, half-hearted, lukewarm, Europhiles. Whilst the two parties made the case for Britain's EU membership, selling it as a matter of 'national interest', they strongly emphasized the EU's need to reform its institutions and policies, thereby speaking less positively about the EU.

Admittedly, in the other big Western European member states, such as France, Germany, or Italy, this discourse would be interpreted as soft Euroscepticism. After all, both Labour and the Liberal Democrats started to openly reject Britain's membership of the Euro and also supported EU budget cuts. In most EU countries, such positions were adopted by fringe parties on the extreme left or right of the spectrum. However, in the British context, where outright rejection of EU membership is rife, Labour and the Liberal Democrats are relative Europhiles. Hence, the EU positions of political parties across Europe still need to be understood in their domestic context. This does not mean that we should refrain from conducting comparative research into party-based Euroscepticism and Europhilia. On the contrary, our extended typology can be applied to parties across Europe. For instance, a promising future research avenue would be to compare the European positions of Labour and the Liberal Democrats to those of their European sister parties.

When we investigate party-based Euroscepticism and Europhilia, the parties' self-perception also matters. Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats still considered themselves Europhiles, but they now equated Europhilia with reformism. This EU approach is best illustrated by a quote from Labour's then shadow foreign secretary, Douglas Alexander, who made the following statement:

For Labour, unlike some Conservatives, being pro-reform is not a proxy for being anti-Europe. Indeed, for Labour, the reform of Europe should not be seen as a question mark over our commitment to Britain's future within Europe. Instead it is not just the safest ground, but also the most solid foundation, on which a positive case about Britain's membership of the EU can be made - and the concerns of the public addressed. That is why Labour will continue to make the case for Britain's place in Europe - but also for reform within Europe (Douglas Alexander, 16/02/2013).

The Liberal Democrats' former leader, Nick Clegg, made a similar statement, arguing that 'pro-Europeans are the real reformers now' and that being 'pro-European means being pro-reform' (Liberal Democrats, 09/05/2014). Thus, the two parties still perceived themselves as Europhiles.

Against the backdrop of the European Union's continuing economic, financial, and legitimacy crisis, this reformist discourse is hardly surprising. In fact, most, if not all, mainstream parties in Europe started to call for EU reform after the outbreak of the

Eurozone crisis. Yet, many of these parties called for more, not less, European integration. By contrast, Labour and the Liberal Democrats rarely made a positive, emotive case for the EU. They mainly praised the economic benefits of the EU, such as the membership of the single market of goods and services. Whether this rather sober message will be strong enough to convince the voters to vote in favour of staying in the EU in the upcoming referendum remains to be seen. At the least, given their strikingly similar EU policies, Labour and the Liberal Democrats could easily join forces during the EU referendum campaign.

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