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### “Opposing Europe inside the European Parliament: Which strategies for Eurosceptic MEPs?”

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European integration has entered a new and more difficult phase of its existence, characterized by mass Euroscepticism, the rise of radical and anti-establishment parties and a mainstreaming of anti-EU rhetoric (Brack & Startin 2015; Vasilopoulou 2013). The ongoing economic and financial crisis has not only re-opened debates on the *raison d'être* of European integration and the legitimacy of European Union (EU)'s intervention but it has also increased the EU's visibility in the public sphere. This context has provided fertile ground for the galvanization of oppositions to the EU. As a result, there has been an unprecedented success for Eurosceptic parties such as UKIP, the Front National in France, Syriza in Greece and the Danish People's Party, leading some commentators to talk about a “Eurosceptic storm in Brussels” (Financial Times, 26 May 2014). Although their success varies from country to country, both soft and hard Eurosceptic parties increased their representation in the European Parliament (EP) after the 2014 elections. This seems to confirm the argument made by Usherwood and Startin (2013) that Euroscepticism has become persistent and embedded at both the national and the supranational levels, which may have considerable consequences for the EU.

As opposition to the EU has become more diverse and visible, there has been a growing academic interest in Euroscepticism (Leconte 2010; Mudde 2011). This literature has first and

foremost sought to understand the nature and the factors explaining the positions of political actors. Scholars have highlighted the heterogeneity and complexity of the attitudes towards the EU and the influence of institutional, national, ideological and strategic factors (Conti and Memoli, 2012; Kopecky and Mudde, 2002; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008). Generally however, they have preoccupied themselves with taxonomic questions – seeking to define and categorize parties (Harmsen, 2010:339) and tended to neglect the analysis of Eurosceptic actors once elected to Parliament (Jensen and Spoon, 2010). Moreover, except for some recent exceptions (Benedetto, 2008; Brack, 2014; Brack and Costa, 2012; Lynch et al., 2012; Lynch and Whitaker, 2014), there remains a comparatively limited literature on Euroscepticism at the supranational level and its implications.

At a time when the European integration faces a crisis with multiple dimensions, it is important to consider the resistances engendered by this process at both national and European levels. Rather than investigating the sources of Euroscepticism, this paper examines the strategies of Eurosceptics, once elected to the EP. More specifically, the aim is to determine how these actors cope with the tension between the Eurosceptic platform on the basis of which they were elected and the tasks and expectations arising from their representative mandate. The analysis covers both right-wing and left-wing Eurosceptics, from the margins (European United Left/Nordic Green Left, Independence/Democracy, Europe of Freedom and Democracy, non-attached MEPs) as well as from the mainstream (European Democrats and European Conservatives and Reformists) between 2004 and 2014. It includes all the actors who oppose the EU and European integration in its current form (Taggart, 1998). On the basis of the results of this analysis, I then consider the implications of their presence for the EP and the EU. Indeed, relying on a “bottom-up approach”, this paper assumes that a micro-level analysis of MEPs provides a different perspective on the EU’s democratic and legitimacy deficit by shifting the focus from the institutional to the individual level (Jenson and Mérand, 2010).

After briefly presenting the approach and the data, the second part of the paper proposes a typology of roles played by Eurosceptics. The final part discusses the consequences of the presence of these dissenting voices for the EP and for the EU and argues that it may be an asset for its legitimacy.

### **1. Understanding Eurosceptics' strategies through Role theory**

In order to understand the strategies of Eurosceptics and how they carry out their European mandate, this paper draws on the insights of role theory and more particularly, of the motivational approach which defines the role as a “dynamic configuration of interrelated goals, attitudes and core behaviours that are characteristics of people in particular positions” (Searing, 1994: 18). This concept provides an understanding of what actors do, why they do it and why they think it is appropriate to act this way rather than another (Searing, 1994: 351). In the case of the Eurosceptics, it overcomes the apparent heterogeneity of their individual activities and to articulate their attitudes and behaviours through an analysis of the role they play.

Following Searing's approach, an interpretative and inductive methodology is used here to develop a typology of roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs. Indeed, roles are based on how elected representatives conceive their tasks and on the motivations guiding their actions. They are not dictated by *a priori* constructs, but should reflect the universe of meaning of the actors. Rather than testing pre-established typologies, an inductive approach takes into account the complexity of the parliamentary mandate by seeking to reconstruct the roles from the actors' point of view, focusing on actors' meanings and motivations (Searing, 2012). However, contrary to Searing's work, the roles here should be understood as ideal-types: the

characteristic attitudes and behaviours of each role have been accentuated to highlight their specificity (Costa and Kerrouche, 2009; Navarro, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

As role perception and actual behaviour form a coherent and dynamic whole (Searing, 1994, 2012), three main types of data were used to reconstruct the typology of roles. First, priority is given to the way Eurosceptics conceive their role as MEP. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of 65 Eurosceptic MEPs as well as with 30 parliamentary assistants, staff members and non-Eurosceptic MEPs. These interviews allowed for in-depth discussions of their vision of their mandate, their priorities and motivations. Second, their parliamentary activities were analysed to determine their priorities and the way in which they invest their time and resources. More precisely, the number of parliamentary questions, speeches, written declarations, motions, opinions and reports as well as the attendance rate and the responsibilities within the EP of the interviewed Eurosceptic MEPs were examined. From this, it can be determined to what extent they are involved in parliamentary work, but also to which activities they devote more resource and energy. A qualitative analysis of their parliamentary questions during two years is used to determine the type of questions they ask and the territorial level mentioned in their questions. Their voting behaviour was also analysed to see if it changes according to the policy area concerned. Finally, group dynamics could be observed through attendance to all group meetings of the EUL/NGL and EFD groups for 6 months during the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature. Through the combination of these data, it could be assessed to what extent actors' visions of their mandate correspond to their actual behaviour and rather than rely on a single indicator, these elements were combined to develop the typology of four roles: the Absentee, the Public Orator, the Pragmatist and the Participant.

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<sup>1</sup> As a result, each Eurosceptic MEP is more or less close to one ideal-type and there might be some overlap between categories. Absentees and Public Orators for instance share a same lack of interest for traditional parliamentary activities while Pragmatists and Participants share a same desire to influence, although in a different way, the daily work of the EP. Each MEP was categorized in the ideal-type he or she is closer to and to do so, priority was given to his or her role conception.

## 2. A Typology of Roles played by Eurosceptic MEPs

### *The Absentee*

Absentees are characterized by two main indicators: comparatively low involvement in the chamber and an emphasis on the national level, especially towards their voters.

Weak involvement of Absentees can be interpreted as an exit strategy from parliamentary work, motivated by a total refusal to engage in the work of the institution or by indifference towards the European mandate: *“No, I don’t want to get involved in this! It’s not a full-time job that I’m doing here. Most of the MEPs, they are involved, they have contacts with lobbyists, groups, they are doing amendments. But I don’t”* (interview MEP1, IND/DEM). Considering their limited capacity for action, such MEPs believe that any activities undertaken within the institution would be futile. They do not actively participate in committee or delegation work and do not seek to be in charge of reports or have responsibility within the EP. The same logic applies to other parliamentary activities. Speeches in plenary assume no special significance and Absentees with a relatively high number of speeches derive little satisfaction from it (interviews MEPs 2, 3 and 4). And when Absentees follow the voting instructions of their national delegation, or their group, they have a very realistic view of the impact of their vote:

*“I don’t think it matters by the way because even if we sit there to blow bubbles it doesn’t matter, they are going to push the laws through anyway. So the whole thing is pointless. [...] The problem we’ve got, you see, is the more we do here, even voting, the more we add legitimacy to this place, and it’s got no legitimacy, so we’ve to be careful in how we get involved here, so I get involved as little as possible because I think it is a dreadful place”* (interview MEP2, EFD).

While neglecting Parliament, Absentees are very active at national and local levels. When interviewed, most Absentees acknowledge they spend most of their time at the national level

and attend parliament only a few days per month. They see their role as a promoter of Euroscepticism in national public opinion through interventions in the media, dissemination of DVDs, meetings and school visits. Their (limited) presence in the EP gives them access to information about the EU which can then be transmitted to local or national levels. The Absentee's main source of satisfaction is derived, not from a non-conformist attitude, a desire to be efficient or influent, but from an ongoing campaign against the EU in order to influence national public opinion.

While certain Absentees are motivated by activism, more utilitarian and opportunistic considerations must be taken into account. Indeed, Absentees may be motivated, at least partially, by the benefits attached to the status such as compensation, salary, prestige, media access, etc.: *"I am more interested in what MEP status can provide me with, it provides me with a platform, I go on television and radio, because I am a MEP"* (interview MEP2, EFD). Others may be rather "utilitarian Absentees": their participation in European elections is largely driven by national political considerations. They take advantage from the electoral system for the EP elections which is more favourable to small fringe parties, especially in countries with a first-past-the-post system. Moreover, EU elections have a tendency to be second-order elections favouring the emergence of protest parties (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). The European mandate is thus seen as an opportunity to get attention at the national level and a platform to increase visibility and gain legitimacy, while only being minimally involved in the EP.

In terms of behaviour, MEPs identified as Absentee in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> legislatures formed a relatively homogenous group. Firstly, a majority of them had comparatively low attendance records, though they attended plenary sessions more than other types of meeting (groups, delegations, committees) to avoid financial penalties designed to combat absenteeism. Second, they characterized themselves through relatively limited involvement in any kind of parliamentary activity (table 1). They have not been responsible for any reports nor opinions.

Most have neither proposed nor signed any declarations or motions for resolution. As an example of their low involvement in their respective parliamentary committees and their lack of interest in the legislative process, these MEPs have tabled between zero and six amendments. Absentees are less homogeneous in terms of the number of speeches in the plenary. On average, they made 32.9 speeches over the last two parliamentary terms but there is a variation at the individual level (the number of speeches varying between three and 81). Finally, parliamentary questions are the only activity in which some Absentees involve themselves as it does not require an actual physical presence in the EP. On average, these MEPs asked 29.8 questions, with here again a variation among Absentees. While the majority of them asked less than ten questions during a legislature, one MEP asked no less than 199 parliamentary questions. However, the nature of their questions is similar: Absentees tend to use questions to defend a specific interest and their questions revealed regular allusions to their constituents, their district and national issues. In fact, this allows them to make pledges to their constituents and obtain an official statement from the Commission that they can then use at the national level (interviews MEPs 2 and 4).

**Table 1: Summary of the parliamentary activities of MEPs close to the ideal-type of Absentee, 2004-2014 (N=10)**

	Participation in Roll Call Votes (%)	Reports	Declarations	Speeches	Motions for resolution	Opinions	Questions	Amendments
<b>Mean</b>	66.22	0	0.2	32.9	0.5	0	29.8	1
<b>Median</b>	61.88	0	0	24	0.5	0	5.5	0
<b>Mode</b>	27.37	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
<b>S-D</b>	20.09	0	0.42	24.57	0.53	0	61.14	1.89

*Data from European Parliament and Votewatch*

*The Public Orator*

Guided by a taste for anti-conformism and an attitude of frontal opposition, Public Orators give priority to two aspects of their mandate: public speaking and dissemination of negative information on European integration.

Public orators' main objective is to publicize and defend their positions by all means. They see themselves first and foremost as representatives in permanent opposition. They believe that their role is to speak on behalf of Eurosceptic citizens, who they see as neglected by European institutions but also to delegitimize the institution through speaking in public. Therefore, the vast majority of their activities consist of general accusations of the failures and the negative consequences of integration. Their interventions do not address the content of specific European policies but seek to break down the so-called consensus within the assembly. Contrary to the Absentees, they are much more present in the EP:

*"I was elected because I reflected a political philosophy, and I maintained that political philosophy so I attempted to put my particular point of view into every debate, every discussion that I can. That means turning up, the empty chair philosophy doesn't work over here unless you have unanimity and everybody has to be there and everybody has to agree. So turning up to the meetings, getting speaking time, I am not here to make this place work better, I am not here to help this thing exist, I am to criticize, criticize, criticize." (interview MEP7, non-attached).*

Even though Public Orators are relatively present in Parliament, they are not very interested in the 'traditional' aspects of parliamentary work. They prefer to uphold their campaign of denunciation and maintain a balance between their presence within the system and their desire not to be integrated in it under any circumstances. They vote against the vast majority of texts, regardless of the policy area. They believe their role is to oppose nearly everything since they are opposed to Parliament's legislative powers and, more generally, the EU. They do not seek responsibility and are rarely involved in committee work. At the same



time, Public Orators are not cut off from the institution: comprehensive understanding of EP's rules allows them to achieve their goal of obtaining speaking time. Their behaviour in the plenary is clearly different from the three other types. Indeed, they do not hesitate to resort to insults or personal attacks which allow them to attain the publicity they desire. Feeling discriminated against and/or marginalized, Public Orators can disrupt parliamentary work or create controversy, arguing that their mandate is to stimulate debate by breaking up what they perceive as the overly consensual nature of the EP. As a result of this type of attitude, Public Orators maintain poor relationships with MEPs from other political groups, and, in particular, from large groups. Even Eurosceptics from other ideal-types rely on Public Orators as a reference point from which they can distinguish themselves. But Public Orators are indifferent to this since their purpose is not to negotiate a compromise with their colleagues.

The second fundamental aspect of this ideal-type is the significance accorded to dissemination of negative information on the EU. Indeed, like Absentees, Public Orators consider it their duty to inform the public of EU decisions and their negative consequences. But unlike the Absentee, they also seek to remind their colleagues that EP decisions are not supported by a segment of the population:

*“One of the things we do is simply get up as often as possible and remind them that people out there take a different view, and I get a perverse satisfaction out of that, because they hate it, they hate to be reminded that ordinary people out there on the streets take a different view on this matter”* (interview MEP9, ECR).

They frequently update their websites, are very aware of new forms of communication (blog, Twitter, Facebook), maintain close relationships with the press and are available for anyone wishing to contact them. Their presence in the EP is conditioned not only by the satisfaction derived from their public speaking but also by the need to collect and disseminate negative information of any kind on European institutions. This search for information can be

found in their written questions to the Commission. Generally, they do not pertain to the content of European or national policies, but tend to remain general in nature, even contentious or ironic (such as questioning the “real” contribution of European integration to peace in Europe, or the costs related to European Commissioners and their bodyguards).

The analysis of Public Orator activities and their responsibilities within Parliament demonstrates that they form a relatively cohesive group, in the sense that they can be distinguished from others by their lack of involvement in the legislative process, their lack of responsibilities within the EP and the priority given to individual action, especially speeches (table 2). On average, they made 222 speeches by legislature, making this by far their main parliamentary activity. But this goes hand in hand with a limited investment in other types of activities and in particular, the ‘positive tools’ at their disposal such as reports, opinions and amendments. None of the Public Orators wrote a report between 2004 and 2014 while just one of them wrote three opinions. Finally, none of the Public Orators has exercised responsibility in the EP, except for Nigel Farage who was co-chairman of the EFD group. This demonstrates both their desire not to integrate themselves into the institutional system and their strained relations with their colleagues, as responsibilities in the EP depends on the endorsement of other MEPs through a vote.

**Table 2: Summary of the parliamentary activities of MEPs close to the ideal-type of Public Orator, 2004-2014 (N= 19)**

	Participation in Roll Call Votes (%)	Reports	Declarations	Speeches	Motions for resolution	Opinions	Questions	Amendments
<b>Mean</b>	82.16	0	3.42	222.05	2.89	0.16	117.63	13.79
<b>Median</b>	83.6	0	0	101	2	0	101	2
<b>Mode</b>	44.87	0	0	65	1	0	2	0
<b>S-D</b>	12.95	0	7.22	319.29	3.38	0.68	129.07	30.21

*Data from European Parliament and Votewatch*

### ***The Pragmatist***

Pragmatists develop a dual strategy whereby they seek to achieve concrete results while not compromising their Eurosceptic beliefs. Guided by a desire to be efficient, such MEPs are characterized by greater investment in the EP's daily work, a tendency to follow the assembly's rules and a willingness to change, in a targeted and limited way, the system of which they are critical.

Like the Public Orators and Absentees, the Pragmatists are aware of belonging to a minority with little chance of having their point of view prevail. While they may share some characteristics with the Public Orators, Pragmatists carry out their mandate in a completely different way. They do not remain in a sterile opposition but try to find a balance between the promotion of their convictions and the pursuit of tangible results without intending to disrupt the functioning of Parliament or undermining the European political system. As one MEP claimed, *"it is not only opposition, it is constructive opposition which makes reports and proposals"* (interview MEP12, EUL/NGL). They also emphasize their mission of representation and believe they have a quasi-imperative mandate linking them to their constituents, fellow citizens or party. They have developed a dual strategy, corresponding to their perception of the European mandate: as Eurosceptics, they see themselves as opposition actors, but as MEPs, they wish to emphasize the constructive nature of their opposition and their willingness to get involved to make a difference through their actions.

Two categories can be distinguished, each focusing on a different aspect. The first group emphasizes its mission of control. These Pragmatists see themselves as "watchdogs of the EU institutions" (interview MEP19, IND/DEM): they conceive and carry out their mandate in order to amend and control, in very specific areas, the initiatives of their peers and other EU institutions. *"I think we should participate in legislative work and the control of parliament*

*and I think it's important that we use the resources at our disposal as MEPs to perform these tasks"* (interview MEP15, non-attached). They also rely on the EP to control their national government. Parliamentary questions are considered a very important tool which allows them to carry out their mission of control. The answers to these questions are then used not so much for the purposes of activism but for politicization of the national debate on the EU or for government control. However, this involvement in parliamentary work is limited to the policies in which they believe the EU has a role to play.

While all Pragmatists attach significance to the national arena as it is considered the legitimate arena for political action, the second category is fundamentally guided by the defence of national or regional interests: *"I am at the service of the Cypriot citizens and I expect my political activities to help the major problems of my country"* (interview MEP49, EUL/NGL). Their action is primarily instrumental: the EP is used as a forum to solve national problems or defend specific interests which they cannot effectively defend at the national level. They remain very active in their Member state and hope to obtain, through their mandate, additional resources for their territory. As noted by such a MEP, a key aspect of their role is *"to do everything possible to give answers to the territory, to respond to their needs, to, why not, bring money, assistance, be it from a social, economic or institutional point of view..."* (interview MEP20, EFD)

The perception of the mandate developed by the Pragmatists, whether the first or second category, implies greater investment in the work of the Parliament as well as the mobilization of a much broader range of activities than that of the Public Orators and Absentees. Committee work is considered an essential tool and they seek reports and opinions in the policy areas which interest them. They accept the principle of negotiation with their colleagues and establish contacts with officials of EU institutions to increase the effectiveness of their actions all while criticizing the functioning of these very same institutions. The vote is not the subject of a

principled objection as Pragmatists tend to modify their voting behaviour according to the public policies being considered (for example internal market or environmental policies because this corresponds to their idea of the EU's added-value or because it serves their territory). They also tend to respect the EP's rules and the language of their speeches is less confrontational than those of Public Orators. Moreover, speeches are not considered as the most effective tool. However, while it appears meaningful within the context of a limited number of policies, Pragmatists do not envisage any compromise of their convictions towards integration and European institutions, even if this prevents them from influencing certain policies or obtaining responsibility within the EP.

The Pragmatists' behaviour is more heterogeneous than the two previous types as their involvement in a broader range of activities leads to greater variation in the individual interpretation of the role. First, more Pragmatists have exercised a position of responsibility within the EP than the Absentees and Public Orators. Between 2004 and 2009, a majority of them held positions of responsibility but they were mostly chairs or vice-chairs of delegations or committees with weak legislative impact. Second, the analysis of their activities demonstrates their involvement in the various facets of parliamentary work (table 3). Like Public Orators, Pragmatists resort to the individual type of actions such as questions (with 189 questions on average by MEP by legislature) and speeches (with an average of 268 speeches). However, they also use other parliamentary tools and their investment in their respective committee(s) appears to be confirmed by the allocation of reports and opinions (with an average of two reports and two opinions). Similarly, Pragmatists tabled a large number of amendments, with an average of 70 amendments per MEP during the last two terms. Although the number of amendments varies greatly between them, this suggests their willingness to be involved, to some extent, in parliamentary work and to attempt to make changes to legislation.

**Table 3: Summary of the parliamentary activities of MEPs close to the ideal-type of Pragmatist (N=36)**

	Participation in Roll Call Votes (%)	Reports	Declarations	Speeches	Motions for resolutions	Opinions	Questions	Amendments
<b>Mean</b>	87.62	2.14	3.67	268.18	32.42	2.31	188.97	70.42
<b>Median</b>	88.69	1	3	147	21.5	2	99	71
<b>Mode</b>	63.67	0	2	32	2	0	52	11
<b>S-D</b>	8.21	2.83	3.7	371.74	36.55	2.45	223.59	45.69

*Data from European Parliament and Votewatch*

### ***The Participant***

This ideal-type is characterized by his/her willingness to appear as an MEP like any other and to adapt to the rules of the game so as to achieve his/her main objective: to influence the European legislative process. Participants see themselves first and foremost not as opposition players but as legislators, whose mandate is to *"formulate European initiatives, discuss them with other MEPs and find a middle ground that can be shared"* (interview MEP28, EFD).

To satisfy their desire to influence, they invest the majority of their time in the chamber. As noted by such an MEP, the European mandate involves immersion in European issues: *"we must become involved in the institution and society, once engaged in Europe, we cannot have other responsibilities, it requires serious investment in institutional work"* (interview MEP33, EUL/NGL). Unlike Public Orators and Pragmatists, Participants not only know and respect the formal and informal EP rules but adjust their behaviour to them. They subscribe to the rules of political deliberation. This means developing negotiating skills, seeking the broadest possible coalitions and accepting compromise. They can, occasionally, disregard their beliefs:

*"Here we don't work on an isolated basis, never. You have your political point of view and your ideological background and this is of course mirrored in the proposals you*

*present but then we work on the basis of cooperation with the other groups. At the end, what counts is really what we can do, and not what any member in particular can do”* (interview MEP30, EUL/NGL).

They are aware that the legislative process also takes place at an inter-institutional level (with the Council and the Commission) and therefore, in their views, *“a good MEP should be able to pass a legislative package of measures, to reach consensus between parties in order to prepare the vote. So he should be a good negotiator- he should be able to work across parties since the EP is different from national parliaments and requires a consensus”* (interview MEP35, ECR). Parliamentary committees are seen as the best arena to reach their goal as they are the principal venue for socialization of MEPs where most of the deliberations, legislative and technical work but especially negotiations take place. In maintaining good relationships with colleagues, they can obtain legislative reports which they draft in such a way as to be accepted by their colleagues. For example, a member of the ALDE group described a report written for the Committee on Budgetary Control by a well-known Eurosceptic as follows: *“One would not be able to distinguish his report from a report which had been written by someone else. He plays the game”* (interview MEP44).

All their activities are conditioned by a desire to be influential. The choice of committees on which they serve tends to be determined by the competences of committees and while, in principle, they use all parliamentary tools at their disposal, the Participants have a predilection for reports, opinions and amendments. Their speeches in plenary are generally confined to areas related to their parliamentary committees. They also seek to perform duties and responsibilities within the Assembly and are involved in the development of rich networks of contacts in the EP but also in the Commission, the Council and the Permanent Representations. They are generally involved in multiple organizations, forums and discussion groups. They dedicate a lot of time and resources to more informal activities such as inter-

groups, meetings with lobbyists, working lunches and they greatly appreciate having access to influential people.

While Participants believe that their tasks are primarily at the supranational level, this does not mean they are cut off from the national level. Indeed they try to maintain a connection with their constituents and fellow citizens through their websites, newsletters, local assistants and electoral district visits during weekends and green weeks. But unlike the Pragmatists, the Participants rather intend to "educate" their fellow citizens on Europe and to promote their own work, or even the work of the EU in some aspects. This can also cause a lag between the Participant and his/her voters, whether on their respective vision of the EU (although the MEPs defines themselves as Eurosceptics) or their expectations about the MEP's role. Participants may then have the feeling of being torn between the expectations of voters and the way in which they perceive their role. In addition, the national or local level may also serve as a fall-back position for disappointed Participants. Having failed at reaching their goal at the supranational level, they may then tend to invest in the party or local positions. Indeed, if the Participants are unable, for various reasons, to be influential in the EP, they may withdraw and regret having chosen the European mandate (interview MEP40, ECR).

The involvement of the Participants in all EP activities causes a certain heterogeneity in their activities. Although some do obtain important positions within the EP such as the (vice) president of desired committees (Internal Market, International Trade, Industry, Research and Energy) or even the position of Quaestor, they are not all successful. In regards to their activities, Participants are characterized by three main elements (table 4). First, they use relatively few individual-type actions such as questions (with on average 47 questions by MEP) and speeches. Secondly, seeking to appear as MEPs like any other, they do not resort to a particular type of activities and their moderation in all of their activities makes them stand out



from the other ideal-types. Finally, these MEPs have, for the most part, been in charge of several reports and opinions, one having been rapporteur 16 times during one term.

**Table 4: Summary of the parliamentary activities of MEPs close to the ideal-type of Participant, 2004-2014 (N=32)**

	Participation in Roll Call Votes (%)	Reports	Declarations	Speeches	Motions for resolutions	Opinions	Questions	Amendments
<b>Mean</b>	84.87	3.28	1.38	84.25	33.91	2.19	47	54.38
<b>Median</b>	86.91	2	1	52.5	18	2	24.5	28.5
<b>Mode</b>	86.91	1	0	30	0	0	13	1
<b>S-D</b>	9.33	3.55	1.66	117.54	59.66	2.28	61.21	52.47

*Data from European Parliament and Votewatch*

### **3. The implications of the (increased) presence of Eurosceptics in the EP**

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper aims to concentrate on the actors opposed to the European project in order to understand how they act once elected in the EP but also to reflect on the consequences of their presence for the EP and the EU. This section seeks to provide food for thought regarding the implications of the presence of these dissenting voices in the EP. I argue here that rather than endangering European integration, the presence of Eurosceptics in the EP might be an asset for EU's legitimacy. Contributing to the representativeness of the EP and the politicization of European issues, dissenting voices could be seen as assets for the affirmation of the EU as a democratic political system, open to conflict.

#### ***Eurosceptic MEPs, an asset for the EP representativeness***

While European citizens are increasingly willing to express dissatisfaction with the EU, the EP as the only directly elected institution has failed to build effective links between the people and

the EU (Farrell and Scully, 2007). Several studies have demonstrated that an important proportion of the European electorate does not share the same views as their representatives on EU issues and that the positions of Eurosceptic voters are almost totally ignored (Mattila and Raunio, 2012; Thomassen, 2012).

The presence and the roles of Eurosceptic MEPs could help enhance the linkage between citizens and EU institutions. Indeed, these dissenting voices provide a channel for the expression of oppositions found in some segments of the population that would otherwise remain unrepresented. They allow citizens' dissatisfaction to be expressed inside the EP and, hence, make an opposition, not only *to* but also *in* the EU possible. Contradicting the widely held idea of European elites devoted to furthering the integration process, their presence and the role they play contribute to increasing the EP's representativeness as an institution open to society in its diversity. While challenging the legitimacy of the EP's deliberation, either through an empty-chair strategy (Absentee) or a posture of noisy and frontal opposition (Public Orator), Eurosceptics contribute to the legitimacy of the institution through their participation in EP elections. By participating in elections (rather than resorting to boycott as Sinn Fein did in the British context) and entering the institution, they help integrate the most Eurosceptic segment of the population within the system and contribute to the plural and democratic nature of the institution, legitimizing thereby indirectly its deliberation. Moreover, as the previous section has shown, some of the Eurosceptics do not remain in an outsider position (Pragmatist and Participant). Through their active involvement in the daily work of the institution, they recognize its legitimacy and its decision-making process. Complying with the rules and practices of the institution, they integrate with the system they criticize without being able to significantly influence the EU's decision-making on sensitive issues. They therefore contribute in a crucial manner to legitimizing the EP.

### *A politicization of the EU through conflict*

In addition to increasing the EP's representativeness, the presence of dissenting voices at the heart of the EU could be a resource for the legitimization challenge of the European polity through its politicization. The EU relies on largely consensual and depoliticized interactions, leading some authors to categorize it as leaning toward a "consociational model" (Bogaards, 2002; Costa and Magnette 2003). As noted by Abélès (1996:63), "political practice at the European level involves comprehension (in the etymological sense of taking together) rather than confrontation". EU institutions tend to emphasize the technical rather than political aspects of politics in order to facilitate reaching compromise and overcoming both political and national divisions. This "technicisation" of issues, understood as the reduction of ideological and intergovernmental conflict and the use of technical or consensual arguments, encourages building alliances (Lascombes, 2009). But it also results in a depoliticization of the debates and a lack of clarity for citizens to understand what is at stake. This logic of conflict avoidance fuels the EU's legitimacy deficit as citizens perceive its institutions as remote, technocratic and cut off from their everyday concerns. The situation is further reinforced by the relative weakness of its democratic institutions and more particularly, by the lack of an institutionalized site for the expression of opposition. As Zellentin (1967) put it, a political community exists only insofar as the opposition is present within the political system. But the EU seems to have missed the third milestone on the path towards fully democratic institutions (Dahl 1966, 1971), namely the establishment of the right of an organized opposition within the system to call to vote against the government. As a result, classical opposition tends to turn into principled opposition to the EU (Mair, 2007) while the lack of politics at the EU level leads to indifference and apathy among citizens.

The presence of Eurosceptics in the EP could be seen as an asset in that respect as it contributes to the politicization of Europe, understood as a greater controversiality and

increased partisan conflict on European issues (De Wilde, 2011). If this politicization of European issues has not taken the form expected by neo-functionalists, prompting a contestation of the integration process and a constraining dissensus rather than deeper integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), its effects remain beneficial for the EU and its democratic nature. As noted by Magnette and Papadopoulos (2008: 14), "the politicization of the EU should be seen as a value in itself and not merely as a positive or negative instrument for European integration." Eurosceptic MEPs are very active and visible in debates on European issues, both at the national and supranational levels. And, unlike Europhile actors, Eurosceptics bring to European politics a gift of plain speaking (Duff, 2013: 152), making dividing lines and EU issues more visible and understandable for citizens. Through the politicization of the EU, they allow the emergence of a more political and confrontational style in a consensual and technocratic polity and contribute to the expansion of debates from a closed elite-dominated arena to wider publics (Statham and Trenz, 2012). This could help the EU to switch from a negotiating democracy to a debate democracy since this increased contestation through politicization is a core element of a consolidated and "normal" political system (De Wilde and Zürn, 2012). Their presence might therefore be an asset for the affirmation of the EU as a democratic political system, open to conflict and help alleviate its democratic deficit.

## **Conclusion**

Since 2009, the European project is once again in the eye of the storm. After two decades of institutional reform, the current economic crisis reopens the discussions on the goal of European integration. With the unpopular bailout, the EU's visibility in national political arenas has increased (Mudde, 2014) but its legitimacy remains highly challenged. This context has contributed to engendering a new phase of opposition and resistance to the European

project. As evidenced by the 2014 elections, the status of Eurosceptic parties is reinforced and Euroscepticism has entered the mainstream.

While opposition to Europe at the national level has been much studied, the literature on Euroscepticism at the supranational level remains comparatively sparse. More particularly, only limited attention has been dedicated to Euroscepticism at the heart of the EU's only directly elected institution. The ambition of this paper was to connect legislative studies to research on the EU and political parties and to reverse the dominant perspective in the study of Euroscepticism. Rather than analyzing the causes of Euroscepticism, it examines how Eurosceptics conceive and carry out their representative mandate. Relying on role theory, the paper proposes a typology of four strategies available to Eurosceptics: the Absentee, the Public Orator, the Pragmatist and the Participant. This typology shows that they carry out their mandate in different ways and have contrasting views of their job, their duties, and their relations to citizens. Some remain in an outsider position, through an empty chair strategy (Absentee) or noisy opposition (Public Orator). But some are relatively well integrated in the parliamentary game and choose to get involved in the EP's deliberation either in a limited and instrumental way (Pragmatist) or by compromising their Eurosceptic convictions without being able to influence the legislative process on sensitive issues (Participant).

Overall, even with their increased success at the last EP elections, these actors remain too disorganized, marginal and heterogeneous to influence the deliberation of the EP or European decision-making. That does not mean however that their presence does not have any impact at all. They can have an effect at the national level, putting pressure on mainstream parties on European issues (see Startin in this issue, and Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2013) but also at the supranational level as I have argued here. Their presence and the roles they play in the EP should not systematically be seen as an obstacle to European integration but as an asset for the EU. They provide a channel for the expression of the opposition of segments of public opinion

that would otherwise remain unrepresented. Eurosceptics contribute to increasing the EP's representativeness as an institution open to society in its diversity and could strengthen the role of the EP as an arena for political conflict.

However, this would require that these oppositions are not only expressed in the EP but also engaged with. For now, the status of opposition in the EP is still indefinite: Eurosceptic MEPs face strong institutional constraints as the institution has frequently reformed its rules of procedure. These reforms have allowed the institution to become more efficient, to formulate clear and coherent positions and so, to maximize its influence in the EU's decision-making process. But it has also produced less emphasis on the representative aspects of the EP's deliberation and less transparent political debates (Brack et al., 2014). Moreover, the EP remains a bastion of Europhiles (Mudde, 2013) and the coalition between the two main groups (with the support of the Liberals) which has been renewed for the 8<sup>th</sup> legislature, will continue enforcing its will on the dissenters: in other words, Eurosceptics are not able to play a significant part in the legislative process in the EP, to have a blackmail potential or even for some such as the EFDD group to have responsibilities within parliamentary bodies. Whereas the 2014 election results could be interpreted as a signal or even a warning for EU elites, it seems they persist in ignoring the sceptics, which can be damaging for the EU. The existence of an anti-system opposition within the chamber is not likely to undermine the effectiveness of the EP's decision-making process because it has no other choice than acting within the existing institutional arrangements. But in the absence of a dialogue between the Union and its critics, the EP cannot (yet) be considered as a proper institutionalized site where opposition is engaged with, which will strengthen part of Eurosceptics' critique of the EU.

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