# Towards a unified anti-Europe narrative on the right and left? The challenge of Euroscepticism in the 2019 European elections

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## Abstract

In the aftermath of a decade of crisis, the 2019 European Parliament elections confirmed the results of the 2014 elections as voters turned away from the traditional political families to vote for parties with a strong message on Europe, including Eurosceptic parties. It further evidenced the normalization of Euroscepticism, which has become a stable component of European politics. But should one talk of Euroscepticism or rather of Euroscepticisms? This contribution focuses on 19 radical right and radical left parties, more specifically the parties from Western Europe belonging to the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) and the Identity and Democracy (I/D) groups. Through an analysis of the electoral manifestos, it analyses how the European Union has been framed by the parties and whether we can speak of a 'unified Eurosceptic narrative'. More specifically, this article concentrates on three issues that have been at the heart of the recent crises: the European Union's reform and how the regime itself is framed in a post-crisis context, the Economic and Monetary Union well as migration and free movement.

## Introduction

The European Union (EU) has been in a prolonged period of trouble in which it has faced multiple and simultaneous crises. This has led scholars to label the past several years as a 'decade of crisis' (Schimmelfennig, 2018) or as the 'age of crisis' (Dinan et al., 2017). The EU's scope of intervention and legitimacy are increasingly challenged, and Brexit has triggered new existential debates on the purposes and forms of European integration. The increased politicization of EU issues has opened up a space for Eurosceptic actors to mobilize domestic audiences against the EU even more (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Zeitlin et al., 2019). It is against this specific background that the 2019 European Parliament (EP) elections took place. Unsurprisingly, given the context, voters turned away from traditional political families and voted for parties with a strong message on Europe. These elections illustrated the increasing relevance of the 'integration–demarcation' divide at the expense of a normalization of the left–right

cleavage, as Liberals, Green parties and Eurosceptic actors – especially the radical right – were particularly successful. As noted by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018: 1203), Euroscepticism has almost become a widespread feature of European party systems, 'making it a near universal staple component of European politics'.

But should one talk of Euroscepticism or rather of Euroscepticisms? While some scholars have highlighted the divergences among these actors, others consider that there are common features. On the one hand, despite their differences, parties on the ideological fringes are often considered to be strange bedfellows when it comes to the EU,

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sharing a common opposition to the existing European political system (De Vries and Edwards, 2009; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004). On the other hand, scholars have also demonstrated that there are considerable differences between, and within, the radical left and radical right party families (Keith, 2018; Vasilopoulou, 2011).

Hence, this article will examine this question in the light of the 2019 elections. It will focus on 19 radical right and radical left parties from Western Europe belonging to the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) group, the Identity and Democracy (I/D) group and the non-attached in the EP.[1] These are Eurosceptic in the sense of displaying a 'contingent and conditional opposition to European integration as well as total and unconditional opposition to it' (Taggart, 1998: 364). Following Conti and Memoli (2012: 105) and De Vries and Edwards (2009: 11) among others, Euroscepticism should not be locked into a single static definition but should rather be understood as a continuum of postures.

Through a study of their electoral manifestos, this paper will analyse how the EU has been framed by these parties and whether one can speak of a 'unified Eurosceptic narrative'. The next section provides a short state of the art and presents the expectations of this research. I will then investigate the way Europe was framed in these parties' manifestos. The conclusion will discuss the main findings and their implications for the EP.

## Euroscepticism among the ideological fringes

With the increasingly visible contestation of European integration, there has been much research on Euroscepticism. More particularly, since the seminal article by Taggart (1998), party-based Euroscepticism has become an established sub-discipline of European studies (Mudde, 2011).

While the first discussions emerged regarding the definition and categorization of Euroscepticism, attitudes towards Europe have become more complex over time (for an overview, see Leruth et al., 2018) and research has increasingly focused on the factors explaining the positions of political parties towards the EU. The Sussex School tends to emphasize the strategic factors explaining party-based Euroscepticism while the North Carolina School highlights the ideological nature of a party's positions towards Europe (Conti and Memoli, 2012; Kopecky and Mudde, 2002; Marks et al., 2006; Mudde, 2011; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008). Both schools, however, show that the ideological fringes[2] share a common Eurosceptic stance, with the so-called 'inverted U' or horseshoe image. Radical right parties display a marked opposition to the EU and European integration, whereas opposition to the EU as it exists is a consolidating factor among radical left parties (March, 2012). Similarly, research has shown that nationalism is a common denominator that explains the Euroscepticism of both radical political

families (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012). In other words, 'extreme left and extreme right often share a tendency to lean toward Eurosceptical attitudes'. (Conti and Memoli, 2012: 92)

At the same time, scholars have also stressed the heterogeneity of the Eurosceptic 'family' (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2004). Whereas the inverted U image would suggest that parties at the fringes are united in Euroscepticism, the similarities between the positions on Europe of the radical left and radical right are rather superficial. They diverge on the nature and motivations of their Euroscepticism: radical right parties tend to stress the threat European integration poses to national sovereignty, traditions and identity while radical left parties focus on the economic aspect of European integration and its negative impact on the national welfare state. Furthermore, some argue that within the respective political families there are also differences (Keith, 2018, Vasilopoulou, 2011) as both the radical right and radical left include parties with a variety of positions towards the EU (Fagerholm, 2019).

The recent crises have brought some changes. They provided fertile ground for the success of Eurosceptic parties and have had an impact on (the nature and type of) Euroscepticism (Gomez-Reino and Plaza Colodro, 2018; Pirro et al., 2018; Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018). Indeed, there seems to be a convergence among and between the radical left and radical right political families. A recent study on voters shows that while radical right voters are increasingly dissatisfied with the current EU and focus less on the integration process as such, radical left voters are more prone to a principled opposition to Europe (Van Elsas et al., 2016). Hence, Van Elsas and her colleagues note that the two political families are not polar opposites as there is some form of convergence with a shift among radical right parties becoming concerned with welfare issues and a type of protectionism from the radical left that is close to nationalism. And the radical right family, which has long been rather heterogenous, is tending to converge around a form of economic sovereignism (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, 2020). But, as remarked by Braun et al. (2019), while there has been quite a bit of attention devoted to the effect of the crises on the attitudes of citizens towards national and EU political systems and their voting behaviour, the reactions of parties have been comparatively quite understudied thus far.

Drawing on the insight of this literature and especially the burgeoning research on parties' reactions to the (post-) crisis context, this study aims at analysing whether a convergence between radical left and radical right was noticeable during the 2019 EP elections. Although the crises have affected Member States differently, one can expect to find a convergence towards a 'unified narrative' on two key aspects due to the recent crises. First, on the EU as a polity and its institutions: the Eurozone crisis and austerity measures have led the radical left to harden its stance on the EU and European integration, thus converging towards the

position of radical right parties compared to before the crisis and its immediate aftermath (see Van Elsas et al., 2016 on the hardening of radical left voters' position on the EU). One can thus expect a convergence of the radical left and radical right on the EU as a polity, reflecting the dissatisfaction of the former with the EU as a whole as well as with the steps taken in the integration process during and after the economic crisis. Second, as noted by Ivaldi and Mazzoleni (2020), the radical right family has shifted towards economic protectionism following both the Eurozone crisis and the so-called migration crisis, so one may also expect to find similar stances between radical right and radical left parties on European economic governance during the 2019 EP elections.

However, such a convergence is not likely on the cultural aspects of European integration, as the two are too far apart on the Green Alternative Libertarian/Traditional Authoritarian Nationalist (GAL/TAN) dimension. The so-called migration crisis may have increased the salience of migration and forced a reaction from parties but one would not expect to find any convergence on this issue between radical left and radical right parties.

## Data and method

In order to assess whether radical right and radical left parties developed a unified narrative during the 2019 EP elections, their electoral manifesto was analysed qualitatively. The focus lies here on 19 parties from Western Europe (see annex in Online Appendix). The parties were selected on the basis of their belonging to the radical left or radical right family, attested by their EP group affiliation (the I/D group and the GUE/NGL group).[3] They are members or associated members with a radical left or radical right European Party or movement (Party of the European Left and its split movement Now the People, the Initiative of Communist and Workers' Parties and the I/D party). For 17 of them, a manifesto could be found online whereas 2 of them (Northern League and the Danish People's Party) did not draft any manifesto for the 2019 EP elections and only the campaign material on their website was used.

For each party, the stances in their manifesto were classified around three topics: the EU, its institutions and potential reforms; the European Monetary Union (EMU) and economic governance; migration and Schengen. I relied on the recent study carried out by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) in order to concentrate on the three main issues that have been at the heart of the recent crises: the EU's reform and how the regime itself is framed in a post-crisis context, the EMU and issues related to immigration. For each of these broad topics, subsections were inductively added after the first exploratory analysis to take into account the links parties made between different topics; for instance, economic and social policy or migration and welfare. In a second stage, the stances of each party were coded

as positive, negative, neutral or no mention to allow for a comparison between the parties. In a third stage, the nature of the party's position was analysed (what it is opposed to – a specific measure or the existence of a policy – and to what extent it proposes solutions and at what level – EU or national). It must be noted that this study focuses solely on the position of each party and not on the salience (through occurrence count, for instance) of the topic.

## A unified narrative on Europe?

A first notable evolution between 2014 and 2019 is the moderation in the stances of Eurosceptic parties, both on the left and the right. As noted by Taggart (2019), parties advocating an exit from the EU are now in a small minority. Contrarily to five years earlier, most Eurosceptic parties switched from a radical position to a more reformist rhetoric, arguing that they will change the EU from within. Eurosceptic parties mostly chose to present themselves as advocates of change: they all seemed to defend 'another Europe'. This likely reflects the shift in public opinion after the crisis and against the background of the uncertain Brexit situation: citizens seem more attached to European integration (although they are still critical of it) than in 2014, with 59% of them considering EU membership to be a good thing (compared to 54% in 2014, Eurobarometer 92.2) and 68% of them believing that their country has benefited from EU membership, the highest level since 1983 (Eurobarometer 90.1). But radical left and radical right parties could still tap into the feeling of distrust of citizens towards political parties and representative institutions[4] to claim they will reform the EU from within the EP.

### The EU as a polity

At first sight, left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptics have a lot in common when it comes to their stances regarding the EU as a polity. Indeed, as noted by scholars (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008), opposition to the EU brings together 'strange bedfellows' as both right-wing and left-wing Eurosceptics share an opposition to the status quo. In 2019, they advocated for a deep reform of the EU political system, through treaty change for most of them:

> The message is clear: we must break with the European architecture of the neoliberal project, which implies recognizing the impossibility of articulating an alternative project within the framework of the current EU. (United Left (IU), 2019)

> The aim is therefore to finally define the European project which can no longer be an abstract construction made by technocrats. To define what Europe is: its identity, its borders and its values. It is also time to define the main political objectives and a democratic and efficient way to implement them while respecting the will of the people. (Rassemblement National, National Rally (RN), 2019)

Transparency and subsidiarity are central issues when reforming the EU. Many of these parties are very critical towards lobbyists and call for a better regulation of these practices. Sovereignty and democracy are also key in their manifesto as they tend to pit the EU on the one hand against those two notions on the other hand. However, although they all claim to want to protect popular sovereignty, the reforms they propose tend to be divergent. Radical left parties are more prone to supporting direct democracy as well as further empowering the EP. The radical right seems to prioritize the renationalization of powers and the preservation of national sovereignty as if the respect of this principle would almost automatically safeguard the will of the people:

> The EU increasingly displays totalitarian characteristics and goes against European diversity. It jeopardizes the fundamental values and European achievements, such as sovereignty, subsidiarity, freedom, prosperity, democracy and the rule of law. (Flemish Interest (VB), 2019)

> Sinn Féin MEPS will fight for: The introduction of a mandatory Transparency Register to clean up corporate lobbying; an end to secret voting in the Council which allows governments to hide positions from the public; a reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy to simplify application processes for community and voluntary sector, farmers and business; enhanced national sovereignty; a Social Progress Protocol to the EU Treaty. (Sinn Fein, 2019)

The main division regarding the European regime is not so much between radical right and radical left parties but rather within the two Eurosceptic political families. Indeed, a few parties from both sides have a similar two-step plan involving reforming the institutional system or a potential exit from the EU:

> The treaties of Schengen, Maastricht, and Lisbon undermined the principle of popular sovereignty. If our approaches of fundamental reforms cannot be implemented in a reasonable timeframe within the existing community system, we believe it is necessary for Germany to exit the EU or that the EU should be dissolved in an orderly manner. (Alternative for Germany (AFD), 2019)

> The plan A involves a collective renegotiation of the treaties to allow notably for the social and fiscal harmonization, the establishment of a solidary and ecological protectionism, a social policy and a reorientation of the missions of the European Central Bank. Our plan B is our essential weapon in the power struggle. For France, without which the EU will not survive, it involves, in case it is impossible to implement our plan A, to forge a new European cooperation, free from the austerity treaties. (France Insoumise (FI), 2019)

Similarly, sovereignty issues and the need to come back to unanimity in the Council is stressed by radical parties such as the National Rally and the AFD, but also by the Portuguese Communist Party. While the Commission and the European Central Bank tend to be criticized by right-wing and left-wing Eurosceptics alike, some radical right parties such as the Flemish Interest and the AFD wish to abolish the EP, and others like the French National Rally advocate for a strengthening of the assembly, alongside radical left parties like the German party The Left or Podemos.

## Economic governance

Similarly, in terms of specific policies, the positions of Eurosceptics seem at first glance quite similar; that is, they are very critical but their diagnoses and the solutions they propose diverge.

If we look first at economic policies and the EMU in particular, we see that all these parties – both on the left and the right – are highly critical of European policies. Austerity measures are believed to be a disaster and the euro is considered to be a straightjacket for the national economy, or even as a failure:

> The Finns party believes that Finland taking up the Euro was a huge political and economic mistake- in terms of both the resulting structure and composition. (Finns Party, 2019)

> The European troika crisis policy of the European Central Bank (ECB), the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), under the leadership of the German government, has plunged millions into poverty.. . . Transferring the German model of too low wages and precarious jobs to the EU as a whole is not a solution. Such a policy leads to the spread of poverty and unemployment instead of fighting them. A further deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union under the current neoliberal and political conditions, as promoted by the European institutions, would give new impetus to the far right of this continent. What is needed is a reform of a European economic policy which supplements the internal market with social union and aims to improve living and working conditions. (Die Linke (DL), 2019)

The whole EMU should, in their view, be deeply reformed. But the intensity of reform diverges among these parties. On the one hand, left-wing Eurosceptics and the RN favour a deep reform of the eurozone and of economic policies. They want to change the treaties to promote growth and jobs, to revise the status and goals of the European Central Bank in order to include growth as an objective of monetary policies, to abolish the stability pact and all austerity measures that were taken during the financial crisis. On the other hand, right-wing Eurosceptic tend to favour an exit from the Eurozone, usually in two steps:

> This is why Germany should end this Union of transfers, by reintroducing its national currency, possibly with keeping the Euro. Through the reintroduction of national currencies, each state will be once again responsible for its economic, monetary

and financial policies and will thereby recover its sovereignty over its currency, its budgetary sovereignty, and its monetary and financial policies. (AFD, 2019)

Moreover, when one looks at the measures proposed to counter the effects of the economic crisis and, more particularly, social policies, two lines of division emerge. First, between left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptics: the former unsurprisingly tend to devote more space in their programme to social policies. The German party The Left, for instance, proposes a European unemployment insurance through which a solidarity fund would be created to help the social systems of the Member States in case of a crisis. Podemos advocates for a European Labour status and new powers for the EU regarding the pensions, and the Spanish IU''s programme includes many proposals regarding education, social issues and health policies. Social corrections to the market are key for these parties and the need to develop them is much more accentuated: 'social policies should be developed to counterbalance the four freedoms of the internal market and there should be minimum social standards with the possibility for Member States to have higher social rights' (Vasemmistoliitto (V), 2019).

However, that is not to say that right-wing parties do not speak of social policies: some parties such as the National Rally, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) or the Flemish Interest also consider their development to be very important. But, in their view, this policy field belongs exclusively to the nation-state and the EU should not have any competence in it. They are mostly against any form of harmonization or common minimum social norms, contrarily to left-wing Eurosceptics:

> The EU is not responsible for social policy, which is the responsibility of the Member States. There is a good reason for this: social systems have grown over many years, are very different, highly complex, and carefully balanced. They also reflect the respective national self-understanding on social questions. We want it to stay that way and we therefore reject a social union. (FPÖ, 2019)

One can see a second line of division between the Nordic countries and the others. Eurosceptics from Northern Europe, whether from the left or the right, are more reluctant towards a common European approach and are more likely to stress the national sovereignty of their country. For instance, the Finnish Vasemmistoliitto highlights that a supranational solution should only exist for significant challenges that cross borders, while the Finns Party opposes the so-called 'European federal states' and calls for an exit from the eurozone. The Swedish Left Party considers that leaving the EU and the EMU should be easier, opposes a federal Europe and argues that each Member State should have an independent economy policy while the EU budget should be decreased. Sinn Fein can also be considered as belonging to this category: it is a left-wing Eurosceptic

party but its MEPs 'will fight for enhanced national sovereignty' and 'pursue the goal of 'renationalizing macroeconomic policy and fiscal powers'.

## Migration and Schengen

If we turn our attention to migration policies, left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic parties diverge rather consistently. Left-wing Eurosceptics condemn what they call 'a fortress Europe', want to create a safe path to Europe for migrants and tackle the causes of migration:

> EU policies reflect a contrast between a human rights-based discourse and the reality of a fortress Europe that protects its borders, uses cheap labour, cuts rights, and imposes a repressive model which is not very consistent with the principles it proclaims. (IU, 2019)

In contrast, borders are framed by radical right parties as a key issue associated with sovereignty. Most right-wing Eurosceptic parties are openly against migration from outside the EU, but are also very critical of the key principle of free movement within the EU:

> In order to ensure the safety of the people, it has become urgent to protect the external borders of Europe through an enhanced cooperation between our countries. But this policy won't be enough if we do not restore controls at the national borders, respect the choice of Member States and abandon the logic of free movement of the Schengen treaty. (RN, 2019)

Most right-wing Eurosceptics are in favour of renationalizing the power to control who comes into the country. And they tend to frame migration (from within and from without the EU) as a threat to national culture, but also to social security. The Finns Party, for instance, claims that intra-EU migration leads to lower wages for national workers and that free movement is a threat to national security. The Danish People's Party links free movement, rising crime, drug circulation, and immigrants from Eastern Europe taking the jobs of Danish workers. And the AFD claims that, in order to have a reliable welfare state, Germany needs to prevent massive uncontrolled immigration of insufficiently qualified people.

As far as refugee quotas are concerned, unsurprisingly, right-wing Eurosceptics are opposed to quotas and to an EU-wide migration policy in general. On the contrary, radical left parties advocate for European solutions: 'no country alone can face the refugee crisis. Like climate change, migration requires solutions at the European and international level. Attacks on the right to asylum and the restriction of the fundamental rights of refugees constitute a danger for everyone' (Workers' Party of Belgium, 2019). They usually consider that migration, from within and from without the EU, is an asset at multiple levels and that more should be done to remove all restrictions to free movement

(IU, 2019): 'Immigration is not a crisis. It has brought a significant contribution to prosperity, democracy, and cultural development. In Europe, we owe a lot to migration' (Die Linke, 2019).

Frontex is criticized by all Eurosceptics but for very different reasons. For right-wing Eurosceptics, the agency must be deeply reformed or even disappear as nation states alone should control their own borders. These parties tend to consider that Frontex helps migrants: 'The European Border Agency Frontex should not be a glorified ferry service for illegal immigrants but should be given the resources and be made more efficient in order to adequately protect Europe's borders and put the pushbacks into practice' (FI, 2019). For left-wing Eurosceptics, Frontex is the symbol of the Fortress Europe they do not want. These parties advocate for the reform or dissolution of the agency and the prioritization of the search and rescue of migrants at sea through the creation of a European civilian rescue programme, for instance (Die Linke, 2019), or a European public search and sea rescue system (Podemos, 2019).

Here, there is little difference between parties from Northern and Southern Europe. The only outlier is the Portuguese Communist Party which, along with parties such as the Finns, the AFD or the Flemish Interest, argues in favour of national borders. It is in favour of reinforcing Frontex to help Member States but considers that border control should be a national competence. EU policies are responsible for migration and the party calls each Member State to provide a national response that respects international laws and conventions.

All in all, in a post-crisis context, one cannot speak of a unified Eurosceptic discourse, narrative or objective. Despite some similarities, especially regarding the EU as a polity and a convergence of radical right parties towards more economic protectionism, radical left and radical right parties have reacted differently to the crises. Of course, this study is only based on the analysis of parties from Western Europe and on three issues that are at the heart of European integration (the EU institutions – economic integration – free movement and migration). But since these parties are all Eurosceptic and precisely because those issues have been central both in the integration process and in the recent crises, one might have expected some convergence towards a Eurosceptic narrative. Heterogeneity remains high, however, both between the radical left and radical right families and within them. This heterogeneity likely reflects the core ideology of the party family on the one hand and the national context on the other. Indeed, as shown by scholars (especially from the North Carolina School on Euroscepticism), cleavages and ideology frame the response of parties to European issues. A party's reaction to EU politics and EU crisis is thus embedded in its core ideology (and the position of the party on the GAL/TAN cleavage) (Hooghe et al., 2002; Marks et al., 2006). But the national context also matters: each country has been hit differently by the various crises, and European issues are framed differently in the national political competition.

## Discussion and conclusion

During every EP election over the past 10 years, commentators have predicted a Eurosceptic tsunami and once again, in 2019, some feared such a wave. But it was largely contained. While the radical left lost a significant number of seats, radical right parties gained momentum, with their group – I/D – becoming the fifth largest one in the new parliament (and the fourth after Brexit). Their success is partially due to the moderation of their stance towards the EU: against the background of the difficult and unclear Brexit negotiations, most parties softened their position and few of them still openly advocate for their country's exit from the EU. But even with this nuanced success, radical right and radical left Eurosceptic parties represent almost one-fifth of the EP (the assembly is now less Eurosceptic after Brexit).

With such a presence and, in the case of the radical right, a better organization, one could expect Eurosceptic parties to influence the decision-making process in the EP. Indeed, the higher fragmentation of the current parliament provides a window of opportunity for these parties. The historic coalition between the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) and the European People's Party (EPP) no longer has a majority. It has become more difficult to build consistent and coherent majorities, be it on the right or left side of the assembly while excluding Eurosceptic Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

But the influence of Eurosceptics is likely to remain limited in the coming years for several reasons. First, as shown by this contribution, Eurosceptics do not share a common narrative or objective. Despite the so-called inverted U-curve highlighted by research on Euroscepticism (Conti and Memoli, 2012; Taggart, 1998), whereby actors at the fringe of the political spectrum are likely to share a common opposition to the EU, Eurosceptics have diverging stances when it comes to specific policy fields or to reforming the EU. They tend to be very critical towards the EU as a political system and advocate for in-depth reform but there are a lot of variations among Eurosceptic parties, both within the left and the right. Regarding economic policies, they share a common reluctance towards austerity policies and the EMU but here the divergence between radical left and radical right parties is more pronounced, along with regional differences. As far as migration is concerned, the difference between left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptics is the most significant, as border control and sovereignty are an essential issue for the radical right. As a result, these parties are split in different groups and do not easily cooperate with each other, thereby reducing their influence in the assembly.

Second, the *cordon sanitaire* is still very effective. Mainstream politicians do not want to cooperate with

Eurosceptics or let them have any kind of influence (Brack, 2018; Ripoll Servent and Panning, 2019; Startin, 2010). For instance, they have excluded them from any position of responsibility at the beginning of the new parliamentary term: while according to the D'Hondt system in place in the EP, the radical right group should have received two vice-presidencies of the EP as well as two chairmanships of parliamentary committees, the other groups disregarded the informal rules to elect MEPs from other groups to these positions. Although Eurosceptics cried foul, this kind of practice plays into their hands. The most radical ones usually do not intend to work with their colleagues from the other groups since it requires making compromises (Brack, 2018). And with their exclusion, they can portray the assembly and the whole EU as undemocratic and unrepresentative.

Finally, the way the EP works and its lack of media exposure considerably reduce the potential influence of Eurosceptics. In national parliaments, the success of radical parties can trigger reactions from mainstream parties which tend to change their stances on European integration and migration. More specifically, mainstream parties tend to adopt more restrictive positions on immigration and more Eurosceptic positions on EU issues (Meijers 2017). But in the EP, radical parties are less likely to be agenda-setters. Although the assembly has become more fragmented, mainstream parties still manage to exclude Eurosceptics. Moreover, even though many Eurosceptics use the EP as a platform to increase their visibility, the daily activities of MEPs are not followed closely by the media, which reduces the impact of radical parties. And mainstream parties still control the Council and the Commission, which again limits the influence of Eurosceptics.

That does not mean that the consolidated presence of Eurosceptics will have no effect at all. With the increased fragmented nature of the Parliament, majority-building has become more complex and the EP may become a more difficult partner in the inter-institutional game, leading to a decreased influence in the decision-making process. And Eurosceptic parties will continue to have an indirect impact on the European agenda, through the mainstreaming of their positions. As mainstream parties struggle to find the right strategies to counter them, it is likely that the success of Eurosceptic parties, especially of the radical right, will continue to influence European politics, especially when it comes to border control, national sovereignty, and budgetary decisions.

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## Supplemental material

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## Notes

1. Eurosceptic parties not belonging to the radical left and radical right were not included, such as members of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group.
2. 'Fringe' is used here not in the sense of irrelevant or marginal but rather as synonymous for radical (left or right), as these parties are located at the extreme of the political spectrum in their country.
3. One party is among the non-attached but it calls itself the Communist Party of Greece and can therefore be considered as a radical left party. The Five Star Movement is not included in this study since it is characterized by its 'fuzziness' on the left–right axis (Ivaldi et al., 2017: 355) and is mostly a polyvalent populist party (Pirro, 2018). Golden Dawn was not included given the lack of material to be found for the 2019 EP elections. Finally, the Party for Freedom (PVV) did not have any seat after the 2019 elections when this study was conducted (it gained a seat in February 2020 after Brexit).
4. Sixty-one percent of European citizens do not trust their national government while 77% do not trust political parties (Eurobarometer, 91).

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