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The EU "Democratic Deficit" and Euroscepticism: the development of Eurosceptic actors and arguments in three key crises

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INTRODUCTION

In a world where the European Union has become one of the leading international political institutions, particularly today with the Covid19 and the recent Ukrainian Crisis, it is important to understand the series of controversies, surrounding this unique International Organization, that have been existing since its creation and that are still present today. I will try to accurately scrutinise the IO's behaviors, and to assess whether or not it pursues a democratic behavior. This will be done by looking at how it has changed trough time, its actions in the past years, and the political debate surrounding them.

The European Union is not always portrayed as the most democratic institution. In fact, as it will be discussed later on, there are clearly some "deficiencies" within the system which have proven such a theory to be in part accurate. For this reason, many political actors and parties in the course of the years have accused the Union several times of being anti-democratic. In some cases, these political actors are what we may start to define by the term Eurosceptics. However, not all critiques to the democratic deficit come from Eurosceptic actors. In fact, this phenomenon, even if always present, is the result of what we call *critical junctures*. These may be better understood as periods of crisis which have as an outcome historical, institutional, economic, and so on, turning points. The theory is quite used in relationship to comparative-historical analysis (CHA) and the concept of path dependency, which is the result of past events and decisions that condition the future. [1]

One of the elements which we will see is that in the EU, when these critical junctures have occurred, i.e., failure of an EU constitution (2004), the Eurozone-Greek crisis (2008) and Brexit (2016), there has been a rise in scepticism and criticism towards the Union, on behalf of the both the public opinion and the political parties.[2] For example the failure of the referendums for the European constitution in France and Netherlands are considered as the passage from "permissive consensus" to "constraining dissensus". [3]

Permissive consensus lies in the fact that the European citizens give their permission to the doings of the European Institutions, since they trust the EU and feel as if they were capable of conditioning the political decisions of the EU trough the elected political parties. In a sense, it is as if they do not focus much on the doings of the EU, nor on the integration process as a whole. [4] By constraining dissensus we intend instead the fact that the public opinion becomes more divided on the matters of the EU and there starts to be a sense of aversion towards the deepening process of integration. [5]

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[1] Giovanni Capoccia, "Critical junctures and institutional change." *Advances in comparative-historical analysis* 147 (2015).
[2] Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen. "The study of critical junctures: Theory, narrative, and counterfactuals in historical institutionalism." *World politics* 59.3 (2007): 341-369.
[3] Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Calculation, community and cues: Public opinion on European integration." *European Union Politics* 6.4 (2005): 419-443.
[4] Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "European Union?. " *West European Politics* 31.1-2 (2008): 108-129.
[5] Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus." *British journal of political science* 39.1 (2009): 1-23.

What I will try to uncover throughout this thesis is if the strong feeling of scepticism towards the EU has emerged from these parties, mainly "populists" ones preaching for less integration and more power to national government, and from public opinion only because of the democratic deficit or not.

It will become clear that, the democratic deficit is not sufficient to generate such a strong feeling, but because of several crises that have occurred in Europe since the beginning of the 21st century, it has been "easy" for political parties to politicize the deficit and extremize it.

1. Origin and competences of the EU

The European Union was the result of a compromise, after the end of World War II, between several European countries who were in need of a common economic support, necessary to rebuild their nations. The 6-founding member, **Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands**, united and created in 1951 the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) by unanimously signing the Treaty of Paris. What started as a trade agreement slowly developed and transformed into a strong supranational organisation by creating two other communities in 1957, firstly, the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC) and then the European Economic Community (EEC).

It must also be kept mind that the economic implications are sufficient to explain the reason why the agreement was signed. In fact, it should be considered that while on one side Germany, and to a certain extent also Italy, wanted to reaffirm itself as a normal nation, on the other side France wanted to keep the former in check by have direct access to its economy and industry. [6]

Subsequently, these three economic communities will be merged together and in 1992 with the signature of the Maastricht treaty the term EU will become the official name of the IO. This treaty was one of the most important ones, since it was preparing the Union for what would have been some year after, the *Big Enlargement*, since countries having different political regimes and values would have wanted to enter the EU.[7] Moreover, throughout the years the quota of member states (MS) will increase, slowly reaching the number of 28 by 2013, with the youngest added-member being Croatia. That said, as we may already know, nowadays the number of member states is 27, with the official departure of the United Kingdom in 2020.[8] Brexit will be another "critical juncture" which will be further discussed in this thesis, and we will see that it did not have the political resonance as expected.

The main objective of the founding MS was that of creating a powerful and stable economic alliance, which would ease exports and imports throughout the community, for example by abolishing customs and duties. Moreover, today the community provides the member states with four freedoms: free movement of goods, free movement of persons (and therefore workers), free movement of capital and last but not least important

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[6] Alan S Milward, "The reconstruction of western Europe 1945-51", *Routledge* (2003).
[7] Robert Schütze, "European Union Law", *OUP Oxford*, (3rd ed. 2021).
[8] https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu_en

free movement of services.[9] The Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which paved the foundation for the Euro, was set up with the Maastricht treaty.[10] That said, there is still a long way to go before reaching a fully free circulation of capital, because we are far from a total union of economic policy yet. Probably this is the case, since the rejection of the constitution in 2004 also meant from a political point of view that there is still lot of distrust towards a complete integration. [11]

Therefore, the Union set out to create a completely new model of International Organization with the scope of integrating more and more the European continent. In a sense this increasing integration is slowly transforming the European scenario into a form of supranational federal state. Such integration has always brought to tensions between the supranational institutions and the MS national governments. Even if, the latter, according to scholars such as Moravcsik, are convinced that the polity was set up to reach certain goals domestically given.[12]

Furthermore, the main characteristic of the Union was that, differently from other IOs, such as the United Nations, the EU is provided with the competence of direct effect and direct applicability. Legally speaking this means that in some spheres of legislature the national powers are automatically delegated to the EU, which is, therefore, given the capacity of not only legislating, but also entering directly into the national legal order, without the need of ratification.[13] This important feature is why the EU is considered as a unique organisation. According to article 288 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), which, alongside the Treaty of the EU (TEU), is the document that determines the powers, functions, duties and competences that the Union has. There are 3 typologies of acts that can be adopted, known as regulations, directives and decisions. Regulations and decisions as written in the article are "binding in its entirety and directly applicable", whilst directives "shall leave to the national authorities the choice of forms and methods". The latter means that the EU provides only the goals that must be achieved but then the member states maintain their national sovereignty on the matter and it is up to them to decide how to implement the goal.[14]

Reaching this kind of authority was a process that lasted decades, it was achieved by the EU after quite some time and still has not fully stopped. In fact, member states were split between the doctrine of monism and dualism. The former considers international law as part of the domestic legal order and are more favourable of integrating it directly within the system, even if it means losing some national sovereignty. The latter instead are the exact opposite meaning that they prefer to keep the two elements separate. [15]

From the previous discussion we may already define the union as having a more monistic approach, even because it would result rather difficult to create a common market if every state would have to ratify and

[9] Robert Schütze, "European Union Law", *OUP Oxford*, (3rd ed. 2021).
[10]Enrico Spolaore, "What is European integration really about? A political guide for economists.", *Journal of Economic Perspectives* (27.3 2013): 125-44.
[11] Paul De Grauwe, "On monetary and political union." *On Monetary and Political Union* (2007): 1000-1007.
[12]Andrew Moravcsik, "Reassessing legitimacy in the European Union." *JCMS: journal of common market studies 40.4* (2002): 603-624.
[13] Case 26/62, Van Gend en Loos, 13. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:61962CJ0026&from=IT
[14] Art. 288 of the TFEU
[15] Robert Schütze, "European Union Law*", *OUP Oxford*, (3rd ed. 2021), chapter 2

incorporate each legislation into the domestic legal order. However, even if the monistic side "won", this does not mean that it did so easily and without complaints. In fact, the union has been subject to many controversies and not all the Member States reacted cheerfully in knowing they would have to automatically delegate decision making power to the Union. In reality, many political actors throughout the years have fought against this process of "national power loss", believing that the EU has gained and keeps on gaining too much power. Looking at the development of the power in the hands of the union, it is clear that the competences and scope of legislation owned by the EU are both ascribed to the European Court of Justice (ECJ), which has been the main political actor granting Europe, in the past years, with more and more power, trial after trial.

Therefore, we may summarize this brief overview by saying that the EU is a unique international political actor, who possesses the power to enter directly into the legal orders of the different member states.

As I stated before, the EU institutions have been deeply studied and since there is a clear lack of a fully democratic union, this has generated some reactions, from both political parties and the public opinion in general. From this general discontent, but not only, added to other several factors Euroscepticism has developed.

2. Consistency: The democratic deficit in the EU

Assessing whether or not there is a democratic deficit in the EU is quite complicated. It entails looking at the problem from various points of view, based on what may be considered as the main elements defining a democratic entity. It all depends on what scholars judge as legitimate.

We may start form Dahl's theory of democracy, which focuses on the concept of *continuing responsiveness of the government towards its citizens*.[16] In fact, the government has to be able to continuously (both in the present and in the future) keep into account the preferences of its citizens. The latter must be able to signify their preferences, both by individual and collective action and to have such preferences weighed equally by the government, meaning without discrimination nor preference. It is for these three conditions that the scholar illustrates the two fundamental characteristics of any democracy: *participation* and *opposition*, the former being the extent of involvement of citizens in political decision making, whilst the latter being the popular involvement when full rights of opinion expression and of opposition are granted. From these two elements, Dahl shows us that there are several paths that lead to democracy, depending on which of the two conditions, meaning either *Liberalization* or *Inclusiveness*, was fully achieved first. Once both have been achieved, we reach the status of Polyarchy, a completely liberalized and inclusive system. Of course, we are speaking of an ideal type, no political system has ever reached this status, and we will see why the EU as well is part of these non-achievers.[17]

Another fundamental element, when discussing what constitutes a democracy, is the concept of *accountability*. Here the key idea is that democracy gives to the citizens the possibility to control the elite, therefore who

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[16] Robert A Dahl. *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. Yale university press, 2008.
[17] *Ibid*

governs them. This task is carried out trough elections and representatives. In fact, trough elections, the voters not only decide who will represent them, but they may also "punish" the representatives which did not fulfill as expected their task as governors.[18] As we will see, one of the main issues in the EU is the fact that the only directly elected body is the EU Parliament, so there is limited to no possibility for the European citizens to control the executive, i.e., the Commission, nor the other institutions, and there is even less possibility for them to hold them accountable if there were mistakes conducted during their government period.

Now that we have explained what elements constitutes a democracy, we may try to show how close, or far, is to this ideal type. In relation to this, Moravcsik and Majone tried to explain, by using five elements what are the key issues when it comes to the EU and the concept of democratic-deficit.

- First of all, there has been a shift of importance from the control given to the legislative power, to a much stronger executive, which in the EU is indirectly elected and held accountable by the Parliament. The main actors are the Commission and the Council which have little accountability towards the national parliaments, even though they are part of the legislative process when adopting either a regulation, a directive or a decision. Moreover, we must not forget that while the approval of any legislation is carried out by both the Parliament and the Council of ministries, only the Commission, is the institution in charge of proposing legislation. For this reason, it is the only EU body having this capacity, the Parliament and the Council may only try to amend the legislation. So as a result, the various national governments are outside the reach of their national parliament and have much more freedom in Brussels. Therefore, it can be assessed form what written above that in time the executive power increased, while the national parliaments' powers decreased.[19] We must also keep in mind that while the Council is composed by heads of the national executives and ministries, it is an institution quite similar to any MSs' national government, therefore it is more or less representative of the national electorate. However, the problem here lies in the fact that it is not accountable to any other institution since there is no form of "confidence" which may be revoked in case of misbehavior. In this respect, it can be said that there is no system of control or sanctions to keep it in check.[20] Usually, it votes on decisions trough qualified majority. That said there some decisions, for example the appointment of judges for the ECJ[21], are taken directly by general agreement of MSs' governments, meaning that there is no way to challenge such non-EU acts before the ECJ.[22] The Commission, instead, has always been considered as the most non-democratic institution, even if it may be dismissed by the Parliament trough the motion of censure[23]. The President of the Commission is, selected indirectly by the population, but

[18] Philippe Carl Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What democracy is... and is not." *Journal of democracy* 2.3 (1991): 75-88.
[19] Andreas Follesdal, "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, (London School of Economics, Vol.44, n3) 2006. 534-535.
[20] Gianfranco Pasquino, "Deficit democratico e leadership nell'Unione europea.", *Deficit democratico e leadership nell'Unione europea*, (2000): 1000-1021.
[21] Art. 19 (2) TEU https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016M019
[22] Art. 16 TEU https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12016M016
[23] Art. 234 TFEU https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12016E234

de facto appointed by the heads of the executives of each MS, which "formally" keep in mind the preferences of the Parliament, since it is the latter who gives him/her the confidence. The way in which he/she is selected results unclear, the general idea until 1999 was that with rotation the presidency was given either to a socialist (S&D) or conservative (EPP), being that they were the largest coalitions present in the Parliament. Since 2004, the candidate has always been of the EPP. Moreover, one commissioner is appointed per MS and sometimes they are not politicians, but rather technocrats (ex-director generals), who keep in mind the interests of the EU rather than the national governments.[24]

- Secondly, there is this widespread idea that the EU Parliament is very week. In the past, it was just a representative body without no power at all. Today, this is not the case anymore. Many reforms have been made starting from the 1980s to increase its power. That said, with respect to the other institutions, its power is still very limited. Even if legally speaking MEPs are in charge of electing the Commission's president, the majority of the power still lies in the hands of the governments.

- Related to this lack of relevance of the Parliament we may add the third element which introduces the absence of actual European Elections. This is due to the fact that when there are the parliamentary elections, there is no actual political propaganda as for national elections. It is not about the individuals who will represent the parties and the MS in parliament, but rather they are based on national issues. So, there is no actual vote for the political agenda, and European[25] politicians are not judged based on the legislation proposed and passed through time.

- Another issue is that even if all of the above was worked out, there would still be a lot of distance between EU citizens (voters) and the EU, not because there is a lack of transparency, but rather because they are too distant from one another. In fact, the EU has always lacked a strong citizen participation. The union tried to involve the population by establishing EU Parliamentary elections in 1979, but voter turnout has been always very low and not much has changed. [26] One of the reasons why turnout is not high as hoped, is that participating to the elections of the EP is seen as useless, being that it does not have the same amount of power of the other political institutions. With the scope of increasing participation, the EU introduced the European Citizens Initiative (ECI) when adopting the Lisbon Treaty. It can be seen as an agenda-setting measure, that did have some positive outcomes such as social media campaigns receiving millions of views and followers, however there is still much to do in order to incentivize the citizens to participate and be active withing the union. [27]

- Finally, recalling Dahl's definition of democracy illustrated above, let us consider the concept of responsiveness of government which is another essential element. For responsiveness, we intend that

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[24] Gianfranco Pasquino, "Deficit democratico e leadership nell'Unione europea.", *Deficit democratico e leadership nell'Unione europea,* (2000): 1000-1021.

[25] Andreas Follesdal, "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, (London School of Economics, Vol.44, n3 2006): 536-537.

[26] Mikko Mattila, "Why bother? Determinants of turnout in the European elections." *Electoral studies 22.3* (2003): 449-468.

[27] Elizabeth Monaghan, "Assessing participation and democracy in the EU: The case of the European citizens' initiative." *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 13.3 (2012): 285-298.

governing bodies are capable of satisfying citizens with their needs, in a continuous way, without passing any legislation which could prevent governments from being responsive in the future.[28] This means that the government is supposed to legislate in policy areas considered as relevant form the general public. [29] Since governments at the EU level have much more power, they are capable of adopting legislation which nationally speaking would not pass, causing a "policy drift of voters" which would probably not agree domestically speaking. [30] In a sense it can be said that here the democratic deficit becomes visible because the politicians of the MSs may adopt decisions which are not fully responsive. This occurs mainly because as said before there is a lack of participation on behalf of the citizens due to a low level of "issue-salience". Moreover, the legislative process is quite complex, therefore it becomes difficult for voters to identify those responsible for the decisions adopted. Last but not least, there is not much information on the EU policy-making and policy-adoption spread through media, which appears to be a prerequisite to responsiveness.[31]

Following the reasons for which some believe that there is a democratic deficit in the union, according to Jensen (2009), scholars may be split under two categories: those following the *electoral approach* and those following the *governmental approach*. [32]

The former believes that there is a scarcity of electoral institutions in the EU, since they undermine national democracies. The main problem lies in the fact, that too many national competences, such as the power of approving monetary, economic, competition etc. laws, are transferred and delegated directly to the union, subjecting the Member States to EU law having direct effect and direct applicability and being considered as primary source of law. However, the problematic is that the institutions adopting this sort of regulations and decisions are not always directly elected, in fact only recently the parliament started to have much more power, but the main institutions such as the Commissions are still not fully democratic. There are different approaches and points of view related to the solutions which should be adopted in order to deal with this issue. The main idea is that there should be much more accountability and the electoral system should become a direct form democracy, with citizens directly electing their representatives not just for Parliament, but also for other institutions not composed of national government members. [33]

The governmental approach instead is related to a different meaning given to the concept of procedural legitimacy. Here, scholars focus on the individual, on the public sphere and on how much it is strong and present within the EU. Jorges & Neyer (1997) have focused on what is defined as the EU's *Comitology system*,

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[28] Robert A Dahl. *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. Yale university press, 2008.
[29] Christopher Wratil, "Democratic responsiveness in the European Union: The case of the council." *LEQS Paper* 94 (2015).
[30] Andreas Follesdal, "Why There is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, (London School of Economics, Vol.44, n3 2006): 538.
[31] David Strömberg and J. M. Snyder. "The media's influence on public policy decisions." *Information and Public Choice. From Media Markets to Policy Making*, (The World Bank, Washington, DC, 2008): 17-31.
[32] Thomas Jensen, "The Democratic Deficit of the European Union." *Living Reviews in Democracy* 1, (2009).
[33] *Ibid*

and how they can result in an effective way to deal with the legality issues which may occur in the process of supranational decision-making. By comitology it is intended a series of procedures through which the EU Member States can control the operations of the Commissions, trough the help of committees. In the end the Committee provides with an opinion on the Commission's work. These comitology committees offer an alternative non-hierarchical governance structure which work with the use of maneuver and persuasion. Even though there has been an effort is dealing with finding new solutions to the democratic-deficit, public participation is still scarce. In fact, the majority of citizens does not even now how the EU operates and adopt legislation. Moreover, there is a weak sponsoring of the EU works, and on the political spheres and divisions that there are. [34]

Scholars such as Majone, believe that the so called "insulated" institutions should be the ones executing effective regulatory policies, such as standards-setting. For what concerns, instead, redistributive policies, for example decisions on income tax rates, they should be carried out through a democratic decision-making process. To this theory we may connect Scharpf's division of output and input legitimacy. While input-legitimacy depends on electoral proves, but unfortunately is unsuccessful due to low turnout; on the other account, output-legitimacy is related to the widespread benefits enjoyed once the there is an effective policy-making process.[35]

Briefly, we may also acknowledge the debate on legitimacy, because it shows us more possible solutions that could be adopted in order to reduce the deficit. Here, the most spread-out definition was introduced by Weiler, who bases it on two elements, central for assessing the level of legitimacy of a political system, which is nothing more than the idea that an institution is in charge and has the right to govern. [36] For starters, the structures must be democratic, such that the individuals' part of the system have to be sovereign within the system and at the same time also the decision-makers. After that, the system must be able of producing outcomes, which in this case can be understood as effective policies. Moreover, the public opinion has to perceive the system as legit, in order for it to be so.[37]

As stated before, form this dialogue it is comprehensible that in order to assess wheatear or not there is an actual deficit, we need to understand what is considered as democratic and legitimate within supranational organizations. Not only, let us not forget that these two concepts assume different value than if we were talking of any national entity. That said we definitions now a little bit clearer we may assess where the EU stands in this discussion of democratic deficit, and how, in time, such argument has been an advantage for political parties considered as *Eurosceptics*.[38]

[34] Thomas Jensen, "The Democratic Deficit of the European Union." *Living Reviews in Democracy* 1 (2009).
[35] Francesco Nicoli, "Democratic deficit and its counter-movements: the Eurocentric–Eurosceptic divide in times of functional legitimacy." *Anti-Europeanism*. Springer, Cham, 2020. 13-29.
[36] Joseph HH Weiler, "Europe in crisis-on'political messianism', 'legitimacy' and the 'rule of law'." *Singapore Journal of Legal Studies* (Dec 2012): 248-268.
[37] Jan Rovný, "Approaches to the Democratic Deficit of the European Union." (2002): 109-119.
[38] *Ibid*.

3. Euroscepticism

Now that we have clearly stated that the EU suffers from a "democratic deficit", it is necessary to analyze what are the consequences of this deficit and how parties instrumentalize/politicize it to their advantage. For this reason, it is essential to understand and to define what is meant by Euroscepticism, even though it is much harder than what one would think. Following the definition given by the Oxford English Dictionary, it is explained as "*A person who is opposed to increasing the powers of the European Union*".[39] This of course is a simplistic way of viewing the concept, in fact it is much more complex and there are also different kinds of origins of Eurosceptic feelings and arguments. However, from the perspective of the public it can be looked at as any form of political opposition to the EU, regardless of the roots of this sceptical feeling. When talking of Euroscepticism, we speak of a phenomenon which is related both to the public opinion, and to political parties and actors.

Starting from the latter, it can be said that there is no unique form of scepticism. Eurosceptic political actors and parties can be split into two categories according to Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2001) classification [40]. There are the so-called "hard Eurosceptics' ', who are against the EU in general, not just towards integration, but they reject and advocate against their country's membership in the union [41]. Then, there is a "soft" form which is mainly advocating against policies passed by the union [42]. Furthermore, they also believe that the union should operate more as an international organisation which takes decisions through consensus and unanimity, rather. [43]

In general, we may say that the "support for Eurosceptic parties has doubled" in the past decade. As seen in the TABLE 1, since 1992, Year of signature of the Maastricht treaty, the vote shares have gone up of almost 25%. With Central and Eastern Europe countries supporting mainly "soft Eurosceptics", i.e., Italy, Poland, Hungary and so on…; instead, we have more "hard Eurosceptic parties being more on the North-Western side of Europe, such as the French National Front with their known leader Marine Le Pen and the Dutch Freedom Party leader Geert Wilders, the Podemos in Spain etc.

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[39] https://eavi.eu/what-is-euroscepticism/
[40] Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, "Parties, positions and Europe: Euroscepticism in the EU candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe". *Brighton: Sussex European Institute* (2001).
[41] Sofia Vasilopoulou, "Varieties of Euroscepticism: the case of the European extreme right." *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 5.1 (2009), 3-23.
[42] Cécile Leconte, "Understanding Euroscepticism", *The European Union Series* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 6
[43] Sofia Vasilopoulou, "Varieties of Euroscepticism: the case of the European extreme right." *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 5.1 (2009), 3-23.

TABLE 1. Vote shares of Eurosceptic, far-right and far-left parties in European countries (weighted by population size)
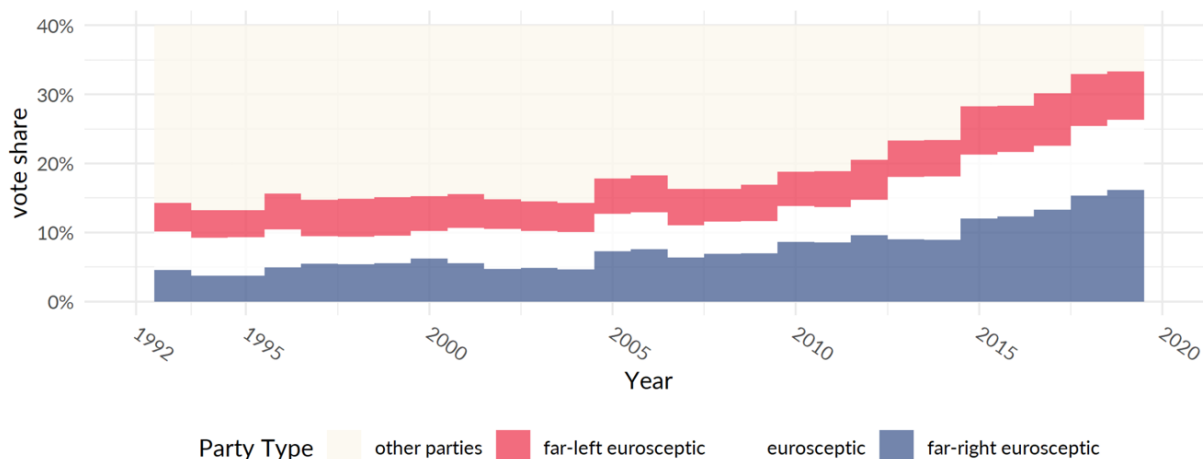
[44]

We should also consider the definition of Euroscepticism proposed by Sofia Vasilopoulou, regarding three typologies of positions adopted by political parties within the EU. They vary according to how they perceive the main principles regarding European integration. There are three principles: the first one is related to how much MS wish to *coordinate* with the others, and how much they are willing to commonly negotiate with different member states. [45]

The second principle is related to the *practice of integration*, which should always be the result of a compromise between the "intergovernmental and the supranational governing of the EU and the policies that are accepted as being managed at the EU level". As we can see from Vasilopoulou, this concept of balance and equity is nonetheless written with the TEU, in relation to the establishment of an acquis communautaire which is the gathering of principles in relation to the duties and political goals, that MS are impurely forced to live by.[46]

Finally, the last pillar is based on the fact that Member States have expressed their *commitment* to keep transforming, in the future, the EU into a more and more integrated entity. Hence, it is easy to predict that the EU will keep on gaining competence, in legal matters that perhaps today are still in the hands of the national entities rather than the supranational ones.[47] As for the second principle, also for the third the TEU supports this will: "This Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe" (European Union 2002: 10).

So, to sum up, it can be said that this definition is based on three facts that all regard what can be understood with the concept of supporting a more integrated EU. Moreover, it gives us a clear distinction between parties opposing the EU, that may come from the right or the left of the spectrum but still preach different forms of scepticism.

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[44] Matthijs Rooduijn, University of Amsterdam, The PopuList (survey)
[45] *Ibid*, 6
[46] TEU
[47] Sofia Vasilopoulou, "Varieties of Euroscepticism: the case of the European extreme right." *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 5.1 (2009).

The most important part of this definition lies within the three typologies of Eurosceptic parties that originate, according to the principle, practice and future of integration (TABLE 2).

TABLE 2. The typologies of Euroscepticism

	Rejecting	Conditional	Compromise
Principle of European integration/cooperation	AGAINST	IN FAVOUR	IN FAVOUR
Practice of European integration/cooperation	AGAINST	AGAINST	IN FAVOUR
Future of European integration/cooperation	AGAINST	AGAINST	AGAINST

To start with, there are parties in the category Rejecting Euroscepticism, who are completely against anything regarding integration. They are usually strong nationalistic parties, which advocate for more domestic power and less devolution of competences to the EU. As a consequence, they oppose the transmission of power to any supranational organization and argue for dealing nationally with any kind of policy and legislation. [48]
Secondly, there are parties which can be identified under the Conditional Euroscepticism category. They understand and respect the principle of cooperation, but the more there is integration the more they believe that it can have a damaging impact on the objectives and sovereignty of their country. If the latter is maintained adequately, then there are good prospects for cooperation with others in those fields where it is retained in the interest of the country. For what concerns the practice and the future of EU cooperation they are completely against, and moreover, they believe that power should be given back to the single nation states in accordance with their interests. [49]
Thirdly, the most open parties to integration are the ones which can be classified according to Compromising Euroscepticism. Differently from the other two typologies, these parties are much more open to a dialogue with supranational institutions, and for this reason they recognize the necessity of delegating some power away even if it means losing the competence to legislate on that subject matter. This happens because they realize that to reach some economic objectives, cooperation is necessary and the more the law is equal for every MS, the more it is equally applied, creating a situation where no country benefits more than the other from the system. The main objective of these parties is to gain the most out of the participation in the EU, losing the

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[48] *Ibid*, 7
[49] Sofia Vasilopoulou, "Varieties of Euroscepticism: the case of the European extreme right." *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 5.1 (2009).

least possible national sovereignty, and reaching compromises where necessary, mainly with regards to economic policies. That said, they do not push forward the idea of future integration. [50]

As stated in the beginning, skepticism is not only related to integration, there are other factors that in the course of the years have conditioned the perception of the EU, on behalf of political parties and public opinion. Many political parties instrumentalized the presence of a democratic deficit in order to maintain a strong position. Moreover, we see increases in the level of scepticism also in relation to economic. i.e., the Greek Crisis, or political crisis, for example that the failure of the EU constitution, as an example, or even more extreme, the Brexit.

In general, for the purpose of this thesis, it can be said that Eurosceptic actors advocate for a separation from the EU, and for less integration. As we will see in the second chapter, this phenomenon is conceived and varies across the different member states. In fact, it mainly depends on the political regime we are looking at and what are the values and the political representation of the nation dealt with. Initially the tendency was related to the percentage of nationalism within a country, the more it was close, the more it usually tended to be sceptical about integration and loss of sovereign authority and power. Some say that this phenomenon started in the UK, however it is not completely true, looking also at the special relationship between the UK and the EU which we will analyze further on. All in all, it has always been present among several MS, among mainly nationalistic and populist parties.[51]

However, in recent years this has proven to be not entirely accurate, since today even the most Euroenthusiasts countries have took a step back towards Euroscepticism. A simple example can be found by looking at countries such as Poland or Hungary, who have always advocated themselves as Euroenthusiasts. For example, with the rise of the Movement for a better Hungary (Jobbik party) and the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland, there was an increase of skepticism in the country, since both of them where leading parties in the opposition coalition. [52]

We may say that Euroscepticism has developed differently in every EU Member State, according to the socio-economic condition, but it is not enough as explanation. In fact, as found out by Franklin e Van der Eijk, usually the tendency of voters, when deciding for the MEPs, is to vote the party which politically represents them the most nationally. That said, as we can see from the TABLE 3 in most of the cases the more a party is leftist the more it tends to be Eurosceptical, probably because it opposes the increasing capitalism within the EU legal order. So, voters should keep this in mind when voting for parties which will represent the degree of

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[50] *Ibid*

[51] Cécile Leconte, "Understanding Euroscepticism", *The European Union Series* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[52] Nóra Lázár, "Euroscepticism in Hungary and Poland: a comparative analysis of Jobbik and the Law and Justice Parties." *Politeja-Pismo Wydziału Studiów Międzynarodowych i Politycznych Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego* (2015): 215-233.

willingness to participate in the EU, but instead they choose to vote as if they were deciding their national government. [53]

TABLE 3. Party position in left/right (horizontal) and less/more EU integration (vertical) terms
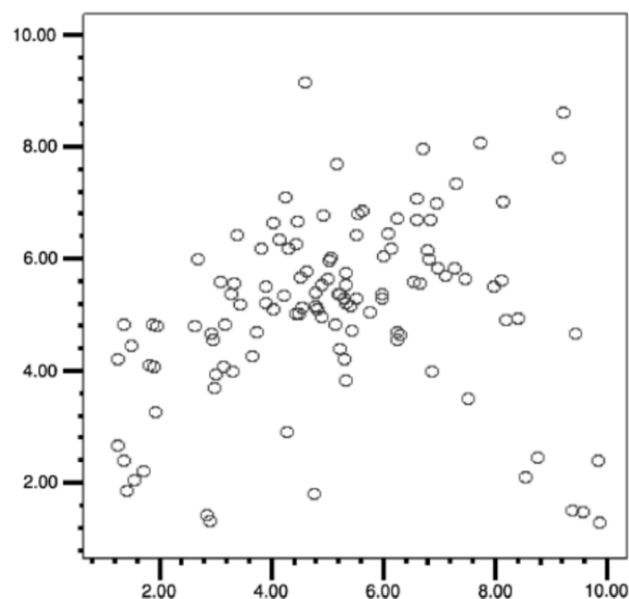
Looking now briefly at the public opinion, it can be said that hostility towards the EU varies not only through space, but also through time. In fact, as stated by Cecile Leconte in her book "Understanding Euroscepticism": "Opposition to European integration in 1957 mainly implied (...) the setting up of the common market; by contrast, opposition to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 amounted to hostility towards political integration (as (...) the Common Foreign and Security Policy (...))."[54]

Finally, it can be added that Euroscepticism is not a doctrine, nor an ideology and for this reason it is shared from political actors belonging to completely different spheres of influence, both leftist and rightist, under several political matters.

In fact, sometimes it spreads from a general discontent which originates from the public perception, which are as well correlated to the outcome of EU policies and activities. The more citizens believe that the initiatives of the EU are useless and could have been easily done better from their national government, the more Euroscepticism grows and spreads.[55] It all depends on what are the objectives of the policies and if in the end they are reached "efficiently". By efficiency, here it is intended that the costs are not imposing too much on the European population and if the trade-off is balanced.

Looking at TABLE 4 we may see that trends in the support of the EU has changed trough time. For example, in the years soon after the economic crisis, there was an increase on average of 10% in the belief that being

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[53] Cees Van der Eijk, & Mark Franklin, "Potential for contestation on European matters at national elections in Europe", *European Integration and political conflict,* (Cambridge University Press, Chapter 2, 2004).

[54] Cécile Leconte, "Understanding Euroscepticism", *The European Union Series* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[55] *Ibid*, 248.

part of the EU was not a good thing, reaching a peak by mid-2011. Another increase in scepticism is found in 2016, during the Brexit referendum, however as we will see in chapter three the referendum did not lead to a strong increase in Euroscepticism as expected.

TABLE 4. Do you think your country's membership in the EU is…? (%-EU) [56]
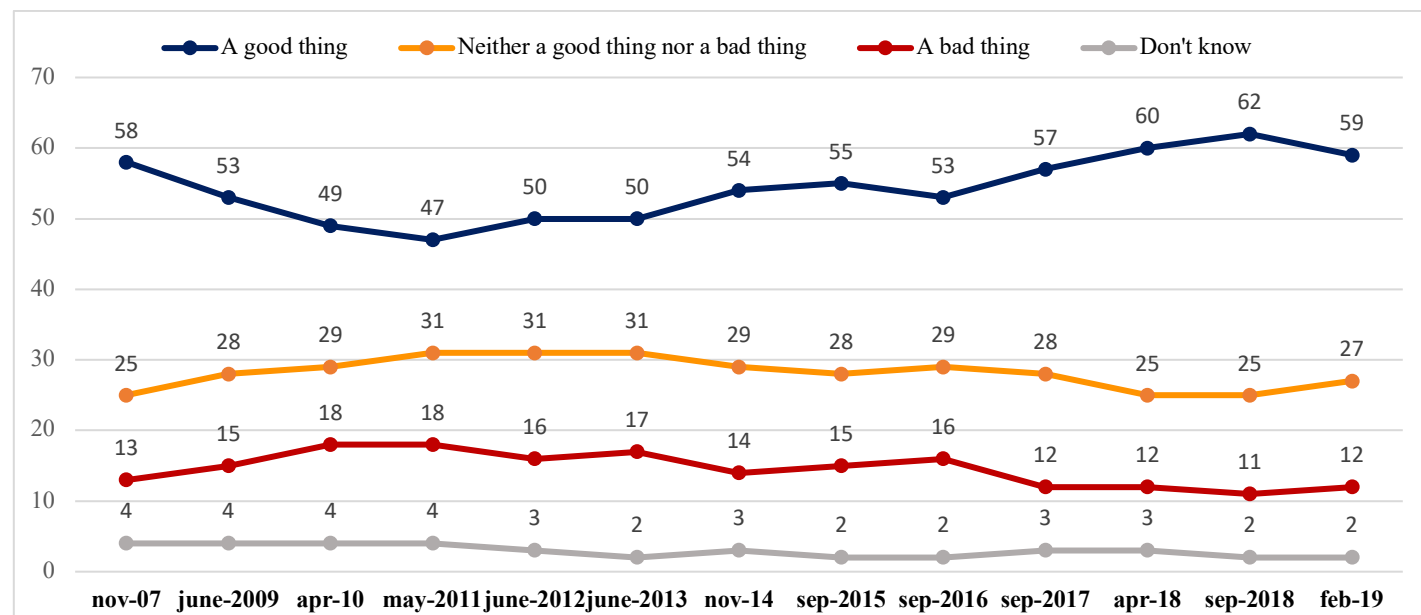
Another element which may create distrust among the population, depends on the level of attachment to the national identity, meaning that the more there is a high level of nationalism, the more distrust there will be towards the European institutions and their doings.[57] As a consequence, the support towards EU membership decreases, causing a chain reaction which slowly leads to an increasing feeling of scepticism.

Even though Euroscepticism is not only related to the fight against the constantly increasing European integration, but rather also towards other issues, which are detached from the concept of integration, such as immigration, economic crisis, multiculturalism, geographical enlargement and so on. That said, it may be argued that today it is mainly connected to opposing this phenomenon of increasing integration, the institutions, and the policies.[58] As we previously found in Paul Taggart's definition of Euroscepticism: "contingent and conditional opposition to European integration as well as total and unconditional opposition to it' (1998:364).[59]

To sum up, it can be said that Euroscepticism is a complicated phenomenon, which can spread both among political parties and the public opinion. Following the development of the EU, the increasing integration, and several crises that have struck in time such as, the eurozone crisis, the migration crisis, several referendums

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[56] Parlemeter 2019, *Eurobarometer* https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2294.
[57] Cécile Leconte, "Understanding Euroscepticism", *The European Union Series* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 188.
[58] *Ibid*, 5.
[59] *Ibid.*

and so on., Eurosceptic parties have gained an increasing consent trough time, and were capable of mobilizing the citizens against the EU. [60]

4. Conclusion

The main scope of this thesis is to analyze whether or not the EU has been gradually showing a rooted history of an institution which is stroked by a democratic deficit, or whether Eurosceptics have just been advocating for more national sovereignty on the basis of policies in contrast with their own political agenda.

Of course, there is no such thing as a yes or no answer, but rather the discourse is much more complex and varies also depending on the different historical situations that the union has lived throughout the past (almost) century. On this matter, we will be able to look more in dept throughout the next pages, researching for the different leading political parties within the MS, which lead to either a strong/mild opposition towards the EU, or a complete approval even if with clauses.

What is clear is that there is no similar existing IO in the world, and that the Union has always advocated to evolving in a form of federal state, and for this reason it has been extremizing the process of integration which was explained before. That said, it has also come across different stages of our history, such as a period of post war, Cold war, economic prosperity, followed by a new economic crisis from which we are still recovering today, the first Brexit and finally the pandemic which has actually shown that the union is much stronger and more unified than ever before. So, from one point of view, it can be said that especially with Brexit there has been a tourn back to nationalist parties advocating for more national powers, or for an exit from the institution.

Throughout these pages, we will discover how the feeling of Euroscepticism has changed depending on time and space, and the research will be useful to uncover what kind of political system we are in within the EU, which is composed of MS having the outmost different political settings and agendas. However, in the end the focus will be directed towards the analysis and comprehension of three main case studies, which can be considered as defining events that have shaped the public opinion of the EU and the relationship between the institutions and the MS.

The first case study we will focus on is the failure of a European Constitution in 2004, caused by the veto against it of two MS: France and Netherlands. The second case study is going to be the Economic Greek crisis and all the controversy which surrounds it. Finally, the last case study will be one of the most relevant events which has occurred in the past years, that was a strong message against the Union, undermining its strength and credibility in the beginning: the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU, first MS to ever leave the organisation.

The literary review and the discussion of these three case studies will be used to try and reach a final answer of how and if political parties have used these crises to their use. Is Euroscepticism destined to keep on

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[60] *Ibid.*

increasing or will the European Union maintain its status as an innovative and unique institution? Nowadays, it appears to be more united due to the Covid19 crisis, up until the Ukrainian war which has demonstrated that the EU needs to show its strength to the rest of the world, and for this reason there is also an ongoing discussion on the creation of a European army, which would be a revolution because even more legislative and executive power would have to be delegated in order to create an effective harmonized system.

As stated in the first chapter, the purpose of this thesis is to show how political parties have used to their advantage the fact that there is a "democratic deficit" in the EU, with the scope of politicizing on the matter and drawing the support of the public opinion towards them. However, the fact that there was a decrease in the trust towards the EU and its institution cannot be completely attributed only to the doings of these political parties.

In fact, throughout this chapter we will try to look at the political configuration of the EU, meaning which parties have emerged within the different members states, why they have emerged and what historical-political condition helped them to increase, if this was the case, their power and in sometimes reach new outstanding numbers during the elections.

The best way to look at the development of these parties' positions within the EU and its Member States is following an historical perspective, focusing on the critical junctures that opened up structural opportunities for the contestation of the EU. The starting point in this case will be the ratification of the Maastricht treaty, which was signed in 1992 and entered into force one year later, 1993. The crisis and cracks in the system caused by this new and improved EU, post '92, will lead to an increase in scepticism and we will try to understand why and how it happened, exploring the dynamics that led from permissive consensus to constraining dissensus. Then we will go forward in time, to the effective creation of the Eurozone during the beginning of the 21st century, which however was the beginning of an economic crisis and failed, at least initially, to satisfy all of the MS within the Zone. After that there was the failure of the Treaty of an EU constitution, which the Union tried to substitute a few years later with the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. In recent times, during the period of the migratory crisis, there was newly found distrust in the EU institutions and that gave the possibilities to some populist parties, i.e., the League in Italy, Marine LePen's Front National in France etc., to politicize on the matter and gain consensus, reaching its extremist peak with the Brexit in 2016.

1. Overview of the European Party Systems
   i. *From Maastricht to the Economic Crisis*

Taggart and Szczerbiak, (2002, p.3) wrote of three elements that have led to the formation of Euroscepticism across Europe.[61] The first element is related to the declining permissive consensus, since the approval of the Maastricht Treaty. The concept of *permissive consensus,* as previously seen in the first chapter, lies in the fact that the European citizens give their permission to the doings of the European Institutions, since they trust the EU and feel as if they were capable of conditioning the political decisions of the EU trough the elected political parties.[62] Several studies point out the fact that there was a general

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[61] Paul Taggart, and Aleks Szczerbiak. "Coming in from the cold? Euroscepticism, government participation and party positions on Europe*." Journal of Common Market Studies* 51.1 (2013): 17-37.
[62] Liesbet Hooghe, and Gary Marks. "European Union?." *West European Politics* 31.1-2 (2008): 108-129.

acceptance of it. [63] One of the consequences of its decline, in relation to the ratification of the Maastricht treaty was the rise of a strong opposition, which culminated with an intense resistance in the EU for the signature of the Maastricht treaty. It is important to recall that it is with this treaty that the EU, as we know it today, starts to develop. It can be understood as the foundation of the modern EU, therefore there was a lot of faith in its ratification. The second element is linked to stimulating the general public by using as a method of treaty ratification referendums, in fact in the years preceding the signature of the Maastricht treaty 7 referendums were held, and afterwards 27.[64] We must to keep in mind, that here we are not anymore in the field of permissive consensus, because citizens are called to actively vote and take a decision on matters related to the EU. Therefore, the decision-making power is not anymore in the hands of the EU's Institutions, but it the hands of the public, which as we said is oriented towards an increasing constraining dissensus. This means that the public opinion becomes more and more divided on EU matters, giving the opportunity to Eurosceptic political parties to exploit these feelings and to push voters towards a more Eurosceptic position. [65]Finally, the third element is correlated to the increasing scope of the process of integration during the extensive enlargement, that there was by the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.[66] Also in this case political parties had the opportunity to spread their Eurosceptic position and gain voter support. They used the treat felt by the MSs and the European citizens on the enlargement and admission of countries coming from a post-Communist regime. One of the main reasons why there is this malcontent generated by the enlargement is due to the economic performance of the newly-added MSs, and the costs and benefits evaluation of adding a new member to the Union. [67]

Recalling the relevance of the Maastricht treaty, it can be said that it is essential since it granted the freedom of movement of workers, which gave the latter the possibility to decide where to live within the European MS. It also created a system of EU international relations, with the main goal of protecting the founding principles and values of the Union. With this respect, it was preparing itself to the big enlargement which took place some years after. Finally, it instituted the home and justice affairs pillar to guarantee the protection of the European citizens.[68]

However, the Maastricht treaty is known, mainly, for setting the groundworks for the creation of the Eurozone and the adoption of the Euro as a common currency. In fact, it created the European Central Bank (ECB), which has the scope of keeping the prices of goods and services stable.

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[63] Mehlika Ozlem Ultan, and Serdar Ornek. "Euroscepticism in the European Union." International Journal of Social Sciences 4.2 (2015): 49-57.

[64] Liesbet Hooghe, and Gary Marks. "European Union?." *West European Politics* 31.1-2 (2008): 108-129.

[65] Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Calculation, community and cues: Public opinion on European integration." *European Union Politics* 6.4 (2005): 419-443.

[66] Mehlika Ozlem Ultan, and Serdar Ornek. "Euroscepticism in the European Union." *International Journal of Social Sciences* 4.2 (2015): 49-57.

[67] Robert Rohrschneider and Stephen Whitefield. "Political parties, public opinion and European integration in post-communist countries: the state of the art." *European Union Politics* 7.1 (2006): 141-160.

[68] Robert Schütze, "European Union Law", *OUP Oxford*, (3rd ed. 2021).

Even if the Union ideally came out as more unified and integrated, it is precisely from that moment on, of enter into force of the treaty, that the EU's cracks start to show, giving the possibility to parties to use it to their advantage and advocate for leaving the EU.

Not all the nations were convinced by this newly and ever faster process of integration. A clear example is the role of the British "soft" Eurosceptic conservative government, headed by John Major, which during the final negotiations of the treaty stated that it was unsure of the acceptance of a different currency. In the end, Major managed to negotiate some "opt-outs", introducing for the first time the concept of *differentiation*, and splitting Europe in to countries with the euro and without.[69]

TABLE 5. Vote shares of Eurosceptic, far-right and far-left parties by country. [70]
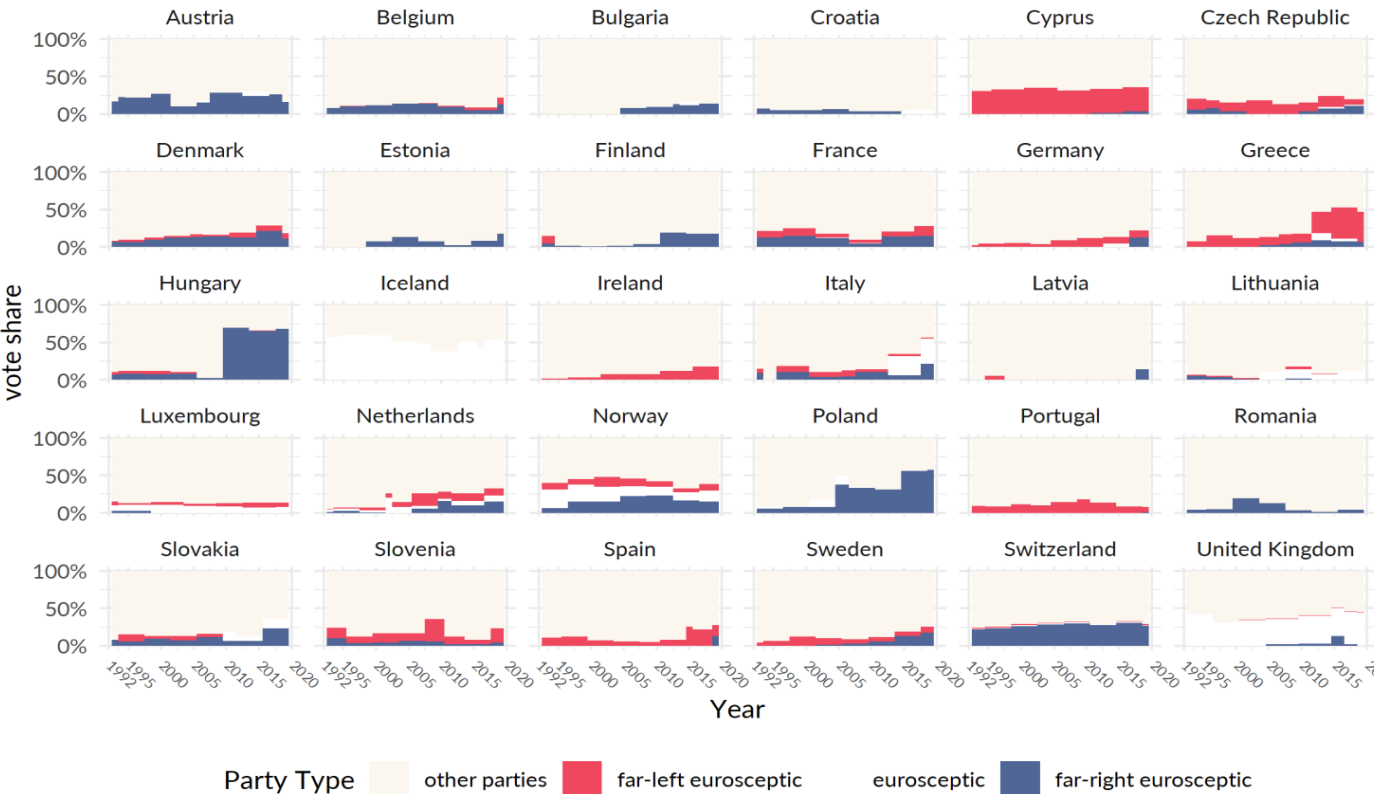
That said a number of Eurosceptic parties started to emerge and gain consensus. Looking at TABLE 5 we see the historical trends on escalating vote shares for Eurosceptic parties both from the left and of the right. The support towards these parties increased gradually in the forms of "waves" of Euroscepticism. On average, in the last two decades, we see a net growth of almost 20% in all of the union's MSs, some more than others, such as for example Poland, Hungary, Greece, the UK and so on. Furthermore, looking at countries such as Austria, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Poland, there can be easily seen an immediate increase of Eurosceptic vote shares soon after the ratification of the Maastricht treaty. Additionally, I would like to recall how in some MS, Eurosceptic parties had the capacity to enter within the governmental system and at the same time to influence the European participation and the outcomes of the EU policies. [71] Some

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[69] https://it.insideover.com/politica/i-trentanni-di-maastricht-come-e-cambiata-leuropa.htmln
[70] Matthijs Rooduijn, University of Amsterdam, The PopuList (survey).
[71] Paul Taggart, and Aleks Szczerbiak. "Coming in from the cold? Euroscepticism, government participation and party positions on Europe." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51.1 (2013): 17-37.

examples can be made. In France there was a change in the support for the Union which developed since the "scarce" victory of Maastricht referendum in 1992 (only 51.03% voted in favour). During the adoption of the Maastricht treaty, in fact, the extreme-rightist National Front (NF) showed a strong opposition, as well as the French Communist Party (FCP), and managed to gain support. In the majority of cases, Euroscepticism is used by parties as a "card" to deepen the already-existing doubts among the population, which were related not only to the process of integration as a whole, but also towards the creation of the EMU.[72] An example related to this phenomenon is what occurred in Italy. Here, scepticism increased during the mid-1990s, when the Northern Land emerged as a party strongly against globalization, but the actual turnover of the party was after the entrance in the Single Currency system.[73] In fact, while being part of the Berlusconi government, its attitude of "hostility" towards the EU was just strategic.[74]

During the adoption of the Nice (2001) and then the Lisbon (2007) treaty there was a slowing down in the integration process. There was a sort of return to a less integrated EU, and of an added concentration of power in the hands of the MS. [75] For example, even if the Maastricht treaty spoke of recognizing the "national identities of the member states", meaning their constitutions, three problems emerged. Firstly, the loss of monetary sovereignty trough the EMU; secondly, the creation of a European citizenship; finally, a renovation within the foreign policy and justice and home affairs fields, which reduced the intervention power of the MS.

Differently Lisbon provided the EU with two main changes. Initially, the clause which gave primacy to EU law was eliminated, so there was an extension of the powers of national identities. Moreover, to the clause of recognizing the national identities of MSs there was an add on, which gave the latter the possibility to deal with national security matters exclusively. What's more is that with the Lisbon Treaty, also national parliaments gained more power, and the possibility to work jointly with the EP, being not anymore side figures, but also active participants which can block a regulation, directive or decision.[76] With the Lisbon treaty the EU had a step back from the point of view of integration, however it had a major step forward for what concerns national or supranational responsibilities, and to whom they are entailed.

It tried to patch up what had happened after the adoption of the EMU, the almost failure of the Nice treaty and the failure of the EU Constitution on behalf of France and Netherlands after the referendum. In fact, it is during the latter that the public opinion expressed mistrust and malcontent towards the European

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[72] Susan Milner. "Euroscepticism in France and changing state-society relations." *Journal of European Integration* 22.1 (2000): 35-58.

[73] Benito Giordano, "The politics of the Northern League and Italy's changing attitude towards Europe." *The EU and Territorial Politics within Member States*. (Brill, 2004.): 211-229.

[74] Paul Taggart, and Aleks Szczerbiak. "Coming in from the cold? Euroscepticism, government participation and party positions on Europe." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51.1 (2013): 25-26

[75] Susannah Verney. "Euroscepticism in Southern Europe: A diachronic perspective." *South European Society and Politics* 16.01 (2011): 1-29.

[76] Bruno De Witte. "The Lisbon Treaty and National Constitutions More or Less Europeanisation?" *The Lisbon Treaty and National Constitutions* (2008): 25.

institutions. Nevertheless, the situation in Europe post-Maastricht was quite complicated with the voters having a strong rejection for further changes.

To all the above-mentioned events, we cannot forget to add the big Eastern enlargement of the EU (2004-2007), during which ex-Soviet countries, meaning countries coming from a different political, economic, and social background, entered the EU more enthusiasts as ever. After 1989 with the dissolution of the USSR more than one hundred people started to trade and circulate in the EU. We already know that this enthusiasm did not last much, and strong opposition parties today are from nations such as Hungary and Poland.

In Hungary there was the participation in government of the soft Eurosceptic Fidesz Party, during 1998-2002 in the coalition and then alone since 2010. Even if it had always advocated for an entrance in the EU, it contested the length of the accession procedure, and slowly became more and more Eurosceptic, with President Orban acting today without following the EU guidelines.[77]

In Poland instead three parties that can be deemed as Eurosceptic formed a government coalition, which lasted more or less one year (from May 2006 to June 2007). They were the Law and Justice Party led by Jarosław Kaczyński, backed up in parliament by the agrarian Self-Defense Party and the clerical-nationalist League of Polish Families. The main arguments here were related to the fact that Poland was not benefitting enough, and they put at risk the ratification of the Lisbon treaty, contesting the adoption of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.[78]

We could also recall once again the Northern League in Italy, which only after the second coalition government, shifted position from "soft" Euroscepticism to a "hard" one. It starting opposed European immigration, EU enlargement, the EU Constitutional Treaty and even Italian membership of the eurozone.[79] To sum up, the achievement of the enlargement was understood as one of the EU's biggest successes in the field of foreign policy, but it did come at some costs, with new arguments to be used by parties to strengthen their position. [80]

Finally, looking initially at the economic, eurozone, crisis of 2008, it's clear that it had a direct impact on the Union. After the collapse of the Lehman Brothers, the at the time German's Chancellor, Mrs. Angela Merkel, affirmed that there should be a willingness of each country to stabilize the monetary union, however with the commitment of "deficit sinners", such as Greece, to carry out reforms mainly on their own.[81]

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[77] Paul Taggart, and Aleks Szczerbiak. "Coming in from the cold? Euroscepticism, government participation and party positions on Europe." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51.1 (2013): 24-25

[78] Aleks Szczerbiak. "Opposing Europe or Problematizing Europe. Euroscepticism and" Eurorealism" in the Polish Party System." *Opposing Europe 2* (2008): 221-242.

[79] Paul Taggart, and Aleks Szczerbiak. "Coming in from the cold? Euroscepticism, government participation and party positions on Europe." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51.1 (2013): 25-26

[80] Arista Maria Cirtautas, and Frank Schimmelfennig. "Europeanisation before and after accession: conditionality, legacies and compliance." *Europe-Asia Studies* 62.3 (2010): 421-441.

[81] Frank Wendler, "End of consensus? The European leadership discourse of the second merkel government during the Eurozone crisis and its contestation in debates of the Bundestag (2009− 13)." *German politics* 23.4 (2014): 446-459.

Both the banks and the governments tried their best to maintain the euro, by carrying out diplomatic negotiations and avoiding parliaments and the EU institutions. [82] The outcome of these negotiations led to the establishment of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which is an intergovernmental financial institution created with the scope of "safeguarding the financial stability in the Eurozone" and also helping those countries affected by the economic crisis by providing them with resources in the case of financial distress. [83] However, it is an intergovernmental body, headed by the Board of governors, which is composed by the Eurozone finance ministries. Decisions are taken thorough unanimity, and in turn this has transformed into a debate on the accountability of the ESM. For what concerns vertical accountability, for example, there is no obligation of behalf of the MS to have parliamentary approval of any EMS regulation, even if today there has been an increase in the research of national parliaments approvals.[84] Instead, regrading horizontal accountability, it has not been much improved. In fact, the scrutiny, which should be provided by the European Parliament and the EU Court of Auditors, is inexistent. It is argued that, there is no integration between the ESM and the EU Treaties, even if the will to better the engagement within the EU Parliament has been pointed out.[85] As a result, there was the creation of a divide between creditor and debtor countries.

As a consequence of the economic crisis, even in this case several political parties started to gain support for their Eurosceptic feeling. It was easy for them to politicize on the matter, being that the public had been suffering the consequences of the crisis. In Germany, the Christian Social Democratic Party (CSU), which was part of the government coalition until 2005 and then until 2009, started to affirm more and more the Eurosceptics arguments and values. According to them Germany, as a creditor country was risking a lot into helping other countries such as Greece. Their stance was kept throughout the elections and afterwards during their participation in the European Parliament. In the Netherlands Geert Wilders resumed the agenda of the List Pym Fortuyn, with the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), and became the second largest Dutch party, and tried successfully also to influence the government into having a strong line during the EU economic crisis. [86]

Also, in the UK there was a strong contrast to the ESM. With Cameron's government (2010) it refused to sign the EU fiscal stability pact and the EU Act in 2011, and probably it is only thanks to the presence in the government coalition of the lib-dem, that their level of Eurosceptic measures were limited.[87] However, we will see in the final chapter, how scepticism with the emergence of United Kingdom Independence

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[82] Carlos Closa and Aleksandra Maatsch, "In a spirit of solidarity? Justifying the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) in national parliamentary debates." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 52.4 (2014): 826-842.

[83] David Howarth, and Aneta Spendzharova. "Accountability in Post-Crisis Eurozone Governance: The Tricky Case of the European Stability Mechanism." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 57.4 (2019): 894-911.

[84] *Ibid*.

[85] Sara Davies, and Laura Polverari. "Financial accountability and European Union cohesion policy." *Regional Studies* 45.5 (2011): 695-706.

[86] Paul Taggart, and Aleks Szczerbiak. "Coming in from the cold? Euroscepticism, government participation and party positions on Europe." Journal of Common Market Studies 51.1 (2013): 22-23.

[87] Paul Taggart, and Aleks Szczerbiak. "Coming in from the cold? Euroscepticism, government participation and party positions on Europe." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51.1 (2013): 22-23.

Party (UKIP), led to an increasing mistrust towards the EU among the British, culminating with the victory of the Brexit referendum and afterwards the official exit of the country from the union.[88]

All in all, what was shown by several experts is that the salience of discussions on the EU, became more relevant within the public debate, as we described in the first chapter there is a passage to constraining dissensus. For instance, during the migration crisis, the center of the discussion was the debate on migrants' redistribution and the EU result was that immigration had been considered as one of the most relevant issues in the majority of the MS. [89] In a sense, we may argue that the more the topic at the center of the political discussion is salient and the EU is participating in the discussion, the more political parties tend to comprehend it in their judgment, wheatear the Union is behaving in a positive or negative way. [90]

ii.   *Euroscepticism or strategy?*

Moreover, we can add on the fact that Euroscepticism does not depend only on the ideologies that determine parties and party systems, but rather on the "strategic-tactical" positioning of these parties.[91]

Scholars such as Sitter (2001), speak for example of "Europeanisation of party politics", meaning that parties tend to incorporate into their domestic political agenda, all of their arguments and points of view on several matters trough the issues connected to EU integration. This is used as a strategy [92] to demonstrate such concept, he discusses about the Scandinavian party system, due to the fact that the majority of EU opposition comes. from these countries. In Norway the result of the integration of the EU is on matters related to domestic politics, resulted into changing more or less four different governments and leaders. The Danish people have been strong opposers of the Maastricht treaty, then the EMU, in fact they are not part of the European Monetary Union, being that they still use and are attached to the Danish Crowns. The scholar splits these forms of government opposition into three categories: the first one is based on a system pre-socialist party; it was concentrated to an opposition between a conservative right and a liberal left; the second one gives us the right-left contrast which was famous in Europe especially in the post-war period; the last one focuses on the opposition of extreme parties. Both left and right have focused on an anti-establishment system. The object of the EU opposition is the alternation of government ideology due to the

[88] Evans, Geoffrey, and Jonathan Mellon. "Immigration, Euroscepticism, and the rise and fall of UKIP." Party Politics 25.1 (2019): 76-87.

[89] Liesbet Hooghe, and Gary Marks. "Cleavage theory meets Europe's crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage." *Journal of European public policy* 25.1 (2018): 109-110.

[90] *Ibid.*

[91] Giacomo Benedetto, and Lucia Quaglia. "The comparative politics of communist Euroscepticism in France, Italy and Spain." *Party Politics* 13.4 (2007): 478-499.

[92] Nick Sitter. "The politics of opposition and European integration in Scandinavia: Is Euro-scepticism a government-opposition dynamic?". *West European Politics* 24.4 (2001): 22-39.

contrast of center-left and/or center-right parties. The competition which developed among those parties which have not evolved into catch-all or, mass parties. The new anti-establishment form of opposition. [93]

Regardless of the situation, in the case in which the party is not *per se* against the EU, usually the opposition is not towards the policies carried out and implemented by the EU, but instead on the party's opposition to Integration. What's more is that the variables which determines the extent of scepticism are mainly three: electoral strategy, coalition formation and government participation.[94] The former is dependent on the needs of the party, if in order to survive a niche may be sufficient or if instead it needs an extensive range of voters; on the configuration of the party system; on how the power is distributed among the state's structure; oppositions position; party technology and so on. [95] Other elements to keep in mind are the inner tactics used by the parties., such as how to access the government, and how and with whom they could or should form a coalition. [96]

Furthermore, parties decide to be in opposition with regards to some exact EU projects, policies and interventions regarding whichever policy area. This opposition however is not just related to the EU, but it also encompasses the national level, in some cases assessing wheatear the "domestic alternative" is seen as better than the communitarian one. So, it can be said that Euroscepticism depends also on the policy area, on some matters the party may be completely in opposition, i.e., the Italian League with regards to migratory policies, but for some different matters it may be completely on the European side. [97]

2. The new Transnational Cleavage

That said, the rise in Euroscepticism registered in the past 30 years, is not to be attributed only to the political systems. In fact, after the introduction of the Euro in 2002, there was a spike in Euroscepticism, dictated by the fact that it was an economic shock in most of EU countries. They tried their best to stay within the EMU, but struggled deeply to maintain the system in equilibrium and therefore having as a consequence a strong inflation. Society became therefore split in this process of increasing integration.

The reaction against European integration and immigration has been explained by Hooghe and Marks (2017) by recalling Lipset and Rokkan's Cleavage theory, in which the scholars explained that political parties are the result of sociocultural fractures after undergoing four thresholds: *legitimation*, mainly how ideas are perceived; *incorporation*, allowing citizens to participate in choosing their representative (universal suffrage); *representation*, how representatives are elected, i.e. a proportional system is better than a First-past-the-Post (FPTP) because it gives full representation; *majority power*: government has to be able to change anything within the system, it is not a full democracy if some policy areas are reserved for example to the crown or the

[93] Nick Sitter. "The politics of opposition and European integration in Scandinavia: Is Euro-scepticism a government-opposition dynamic?". *West European Politics* 24.4 (2001): 24-25.

[94] Aleks Szczerbiak, and Paul Taggart. "Theorizing party-based Euroscepticism: Problems of definition, measurement and causality." (2003): 18.

[95] *Ibid*.

[96] *Ibid.*

[97] Paul Taggart, and Aleks Szczerbiak. "Coming in from the cold? Euroscepticism, government participation and party positions on Europe*." Journal of Common Market Studies* 51.1 (2013): 17-37.

army (i.e. Turkey). The four cleavages which they spoke of were: Center vs Periphery, Urban vs Rural, Church vs State and Workers vs Employers. There was a strong solidarity among these groups, a sort of collective identity. What is more is that these cleavages divided society into groups and determined the creation of the party coalition, so also how these different groups would interact and collapse between each other[98].

Starting from cleavage theory, we can assess today's political state of affairs. In fact, there seems to be new cleavages emerging, for example the one introduced by Hooghe and Marks is a *transnational cleavage*, which is the outcome of a new fracture that has been generated by globalization. The conflict is the outcome of an opposition between those who benefit from the process of economic, political and cultural integration, i.e., the winners, which are more open to international trade and are oriented towards multiculturalism; and those who struggle during this process of denationalization, i.e., the losers, which are more adjusted towards protected sectors, and their national community.[99]

Part of this new conflict is also the result of a reaction towards the EU's increasing process of integration, which results in a loss of national sovereignty.[100] This reaction comes from the "damage" which the MS were subject to, due to an increase in immigration, integration and trade, and a decrease in the possibility of the national states to exercise their authority over these matters, since they have delegated the task to the EU. Maastricht provided the Union with new and extensive powers. The outburst of this new cleavage can be seen in the exit of a MS from the EU, i.e., UK and the Brexit, but also with the upsurge of new radical right party in Germany, which had been one of the few EU Member States to never have Eurosceptic parties within its party system. It is important to consider the fact that it is seen as a new social divide, also because it disregards the left-right divide. In fact, on the sceptic side it focuses on nationality protection, and it opposes immigration and trade.[101]

3. What changed the European Union's course?

All in all, even if the EU has been struck by several periods of ups and down, there are three main events which reshaped the future of Europe. They can be considered as critical junctures, which as explained in the first chapter of this thesis are moments of "rupture" that determine a change in the system. In this case we will see if these crises gave the right opportunity to increasing support, or not, towards Euroscepticism and Eurosceptic parties.

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[98] Lipset, S.M. and Rokkan, S. 'Cleavage structures, party systems, and voter alignments: an introduction', *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspective*s, (1967) Toronto: The Free Press, pp. 1–64.
[99] Hanspeter Kriesi, et al. "Globalization and the transformation of the national political space: Six European countries compared." *European Journal of Political Research* 45.6 (2006): 921-956.
[100] Liesbet Hooghe, and Gary Marks. "Cleavage theory meets Europe's crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage." *Journal of European public policy* 25.1 (2018): 109-110.
[101] *Ibid*, 115-116.

i. *History of a failed Constitution for Europe*

In the begging of this new century and era, after the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties, since there was the creation of the EMU and the "big" enlargement of 2004, which saw the accession of ten new countries, a new project found its way in between the EU institutions: the adoption of a Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE).[102] The goal behind this document was to unite the treaties, namely the TEU and the TFEU, and to give a new and renewed political direction to the EU. Among the changes, the political leaders sought to transform the processes with a series of changes by: making the legislative procedure more transparent and efficient, adjusting the weight of bigger countries national votes', using more the majority vote in Parliament, transforming the enlargement procedures and so on.

Basically, they wanted to create an improved legal order which would revitalize a Union that had been increasingly suffering due to the euro crisis. The proposed changes would not have altered the structure of the EU, but they would have definitely enhanced the governance of the organization.[103]

Ultimately, it needed to be ratified by all 25 members (of the time) in order to be adopted. As we already know the TCE was a failure, since in France and in the Netherlands, the Referendum, held in May and June 2005, lost to the victory of the "no" side. [104]

Of course, this event, had a major political outcome on the public opinion towards the EU and led to an increase in skepticism. The biggest problem was the fact that two of the founding members were the ones to reject it, leaving the union into a further state of crisis, deepening the Eurosceptic opinion and giving radical parties, such as the Front National (FN) and the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), the opportunity to politicize on the matter.[105] In the final chapter we will explore the political causes and consequences behind its failure, but it is clear that it was the outcome of an ever more increasing scepticism.[106]

ii. *Origins of the Greek Crisis*

In 2008, our society was struck from one of the biggest financial crises ever occurred since the end of the war. There was, in fact, a global economic crisis, which was triggered on the 15th September 2008, after the declaration of bankruptcy on behalf of the Lehman Brothers, one of the four largest, and at the time, safest investment bank in the USA. Governments were forced to intervene to prevent the collapse of the

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[102] Rudolf Streinz, "The European constitution after the failure of the Constitutional Treaty*." Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht* 63.2 (2008): 159-187.

[103] Andrew Moravcsik, "What can we learn from the collapse of the European constitutional project?." *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 47.2 (2006): 219-241.

[104] Robert Schütze, "European Union Law", *OUP Oxford*, (3rd ed. 2021).

[105] Nick Startin, and André Krouwel, "Euroscepticism re-galvanized: The Consequences of the 2005 French and Dutch Rejections of the EU Constitution." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 51.1 (2013): 65-84.

[106] Andrew Moravcsik, "What can we learn from the collapse of the European constitutional project?." *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 47.2 (2006): 219-241.

economic system, after the failure of subprime mortgages and the increased pressure of the baking sector as a whole.[107]

The repercussions of such an unpredicted event were drastic, and the crisis slowly reached the EU, affecting several countries more than others. The most impacted MS in terms of financial crisis was Greece, which was already suffering after the integration in the EMU, even though proportionally speaking the Greek banking sector did not suffer as much as the other MS, due to its small-size capital and money market. Greece already did not enjoy the best financial condition, it has always been one of the weakest links of the EU, due to a high level of both deficit and debt. Even if after the War it saw a period of economic and financial growth, it still was not at the same level of the other EU members. [108] Public debt, for example, slowly increased from €183 bn in 2001-2004, to reach €292 bn by 2009, while the deficit rose up to €36.1 bn.[109]

Before 2008, the country was already suffering from four years of recession, therefore the consequences of the crisis were quite radical. There were repercussions mainly on the economic sectors which relied on bank credit, such as the housing or mortgage industry; then also on small-size enterprises, because less capital meant less consumption causing a reduction also on production and therefore there was a slowing down of the economic growth; an increase in unemployment, which reached 22 percent of the population; a cut in the pensions; and finally, there was also a strong negative impact on international trade and exports.[110] The worst part was the decrease in domestic demand, which worsened public assets even more. To tackle the crisis, a number of policies and economic measures were adopted by the Greek government. These measures represent the *financial crisis reaction plan*, which had as goal the one of tackling all of the problems that had emerged and helping all of the mentioned-above categories which were suffering the most from the crisis. Among the initiatives adopted by the Greek government there were as leading points to:

- Strengthen the liquidity by inserting capital in the banking system with a 28billion package;
- Boost the bank deposits guarantees system;
- Protect borrowers, mainly coming from the lower-income class;
- Better the Credit Guarantee Fund, to help the smaller enterprises.

The plan proposed by the at the time New Democratic Government was largely debated, and initially banks, with the support of the opposition parties, were not supportive of the proposal. [111]

Moreover, in 2010, after several downgrades in the credit ranking on behalf of agencies such as Fitch and Standard & Poor's from a class A- to a BBB+ the government introduced, on approval of the Commission,

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[107] Dimitris Tsarouhas, "The political origins of the Greek crisis: domestic failures and the EU factor.*" Insight Turkey* 14.2 (2012): 83-98.
[108] Dimitris Tsarouhas, "The political origins of the Greek crisis: domestic failures and the EU factor.*" Insight Turkey* 14.2 (2012): 83-98.
[109] Panagiotis Petrakis, "The 2008–2010 crisis and the European stability mechanism." *The Greek economy and the crisis* (Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2012): 269-309.
[110] George Pagoulatos and Christos Triantopoulos, "The return of the Greek patient: Greece and the 2008 global financial crisis." *South European Society and Politics* 14.1 (2009): 35-54.
[111] Ibid.

a new Stability and Growth Program which would decrease the fiscal deficit. Clearly it was not enough, and the Spread level drastically increased, worsening the situation. [112]

For this reason, on February 10, there was an unscheduled teleconference among the Eurozone ministers of Economy and Finance (Ecofin), whom decided what to do next, however without reaching any agreement. They decided to consult the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with no usage of its funds.[113] Unfortunately, at the same time there was a further downgrading of four Greek Banks from BBB+ to BBB, which spiked the Spread even more.

The Greek government continued to refuse economic assistance and endured in trying to solve the problem on its own, but by April it was already clear that this was no longer possible. In fact, from 2010 the country was not able to repay its debts and after a further downgrade of the credit-banking system to BBB- the Greek Minister of Finance wrote a letter requesting help from the EU, the ECB and the IMF, which put together are known as the "troika", with the object of activating the stability mechanism to save the economy. For these reasons the Ecofin Council met again with the participation of the IMF, and created the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), which provided economic assistance by issuing bonds and debt instruments. [114] In the end, Greece received €110mlrd, with the promise of adopting a series of policies in agreement with what established by the Ecofin Council. [115]

Of course, none of the abovementioned decisions were "free", and the cost that the government had to pay was quite high, in a sense it lost the exclusivity of its own economic and monetary policy, resulting in a general public and political malcontent, and a new political debate on the legitimacy of the decisions broke out.

iii.   *UK: The "awkward partner" of the European Union*

The final crisis that we are going to discuss in this thesis represents one of the most unique and allegedly unexpected events that have occurred since the beginning of the 21st century: the exit for the first time of a European member state. Some of the most frequent questions are on how did we reach this critical point of rupture, if it was predictable, if it was the result of a strong Eurosceptic feeling or not.

However, before debating on the political implications and outcomes of such a unique event it is important to grasp the historical context in which it occurred, and reconstructed the facts that led to Brexit. As strange as it may be, Brexit was not an unpredictable event as it can be believed. In fact, it can be said that the UK has always been a sort of "awkward partner" within the EU context [116]. It joined the EEC only in 1972, when the at the time Prime Minister (PM), Edward Heath, signed the treaty of accession without any public

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[112] Panagiotis Petrakis, "The 2008–2010 crisis and the European stability mechanism." *The Greek economy and the crisis* (Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2012): 269-309.

[113]   Dichiarazione   dei   capi   di   Stato   o   di   governo   dell'Unione   europea https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20474/115278.pdf

[114] EFSF - the temporary fiscal backstop https://www.esm.europa.eu/about-us/efsf/before-the-esm

[115]   Dichiarazione   dei   capi   di   stato   o   di   governo   dell'euro https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/it/ec/114305.pdf

[116] Stephen George, "An awkward partner: Britain in the European Community". *Oxford University Press* (USA, 1998).

referendum on the matter. The referendum was held only in 1975, with the 67% of the population voting for the "Yes" side. However, Euroscepticism has always been high in the UK, with PM Margaret Thatcher being one of the opposers to the increasing integration of the Union and the possibility of further loss of national sovereignty. The UK can be seen as a unique actor which always tried to get the majority of benefits from the EU, but without pledging itself fully to it. In a sense we may say that, on behalf of the UK, there has always been a persisting feeling of challenge towards an excessive process of Europeanization.[117]

This feeling reached its peak point in 2015, when the Conservative PM, David Cameron, promised a referendum on the membership of the country in the EU, if they would have come out as the majority party in the 2015's general election.[118] After the victory during the elections, Cameron started a negotiation process with the EU institutions, focusing mainly on financial and migration policy, and after an unsuccessful exchange, he set the date for the referendum on the 23rd of June 2016.

Political actors were split between the *Leave* side which based their entire campaign on regaining sovereignty and independence when taking decision related for example to relevant issues such as migration and border control. With much less enthusiasm and public involvement, the *Remain* side focused instead on the economic benefits that the EU had brought to the nation and the problems related to exiting the EU. In the end the referendum passed with ta high voter turnout, with 51.9% of the voters whom were on the Leave side. Since no one believed that the referendum was going to pass, Cameron among those, the shock among the population was high, and in the end the PM decided to resign and leave politics for good. His successor Theresa May wrote to the European Council's President, Donald Tusk, expressing all the intentions of the country to leave the EU. The negotiation process was only completed four years after the famous referendum. Under the leadership of the new UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, the UK officially exited the Union on the 31st of January of 2020, with a transition period that lasted until the 24th of December of the same year, after the which the country left the EU, the single market and the customs union. [119]

In the third chapter we will see, how this unique event did not cause the increase in scepticism as expected, in fact it actually led to an increasing support towards the EU, and a newly-found sense of unity and trust in the institutions.

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[117] Cris Shore, "Britain, Brexit and Euroscepticism: Anthropological Perspectives on Angry Politics, Technopopulism and the UK Referendum." *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 30.2 (2021): 4-7.
[118] Nicholas Startin, "Have we reached a tipping point? The mainstreaming of Euroscepticism in the UK." *International Political Science Review* 36.3 (2015): 311-323.
[119] Cris Shore, "Britain, Brexit and Euroscepticism: Anthropological Perspectives on Angry Politics, Technopopulism and the UK Referendum." *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 30.2 (2021): 11-12.

4. Conclusion

Euroscepticism has certainly increased in the past thirty years. We discussed in this chapter the several reasons why this has occurred. Probably, the EU was not ready yet to transform itself so "radically" by integrating among its members also a monetary union, mainly because some countries were already struggling with their economic system and it was too much to take on, causing a great instability. In turn this instability was the main cause and the main appeal that parties used in order to justify their position, especially during the Greek crisis which brought down the levels of support towards the EU. Such position however, in some cases started as radically being against the EU, its institutions and the treaties, but in some situations as explained above this "strong" position would collapse once the possibility of being part of the government entered the picture. The following chapter is going to dig a little deeper into the three main crises which have been already historically introduced as being radical turning points in the history of the EU. Let us see, more in dept, how they tried to shaped the EU's policies to their advantage and what was the outcome of this type of behavior. Moreover, we will see how political parties used to their advantage, in order to increase support, the problem of the democratic deficit surrounding the EU from the beginning, when the crises occurred.

CHAPTER 3

We have reached the key chapter of this thesis. As repeatedly said throughout the previous chapters, the focus in these final pages will be on three key crises, from which Euroscepticism appeared to strongly emerge.

Firstly, we will address the failure of the constitution of the European Union in 2004. It occurred because France and Netherlands held a referendum which ended up with the victory of the "No" side. Our focus will be on the reasons that led the French and Dutch citizens to vote against its ratification and what happened in the aftermath of this unexpected decision.

Secondly, we will concentrate on the 2008 Greek crisis, which as we saw previously is related to the economic crisis and as we know from chapter 2 was partially the result of the creation of the EMU. The focus here will be on what measures were put into place in order to solve the problem and how they were received by the general public and the political parties.

Finally, we will discuss the Brexit, one of the most exceptional events that has occurred in the European Union since its creation. It can be considered both as unique and disruptive, being that it was the first time that a MS decided to exit the Union permanently.

1. Failure for an EU Constitution (2004)

    i. *Does the EU need a Constitution?*

As anticipated in the second chapter in the beginning of the 21st century, MSs felt the need to strengthen the cooperation and integration process by drafting the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE).[120] However the treaty was failed, because France and Netherlands held two national referendums where the opposing side won. [121]

The intentions behind the constitution were several. However, scholars, such as Moravcsik 2016, argued that the Constitution had no legal purpose, and that it could have been easily substituted by the treaty of Rome. The realistic goal behind it was to recreate the popular trust in the Institutions, which had slowly gone lost. In fact, the majority of the changes were not related to those that have been the main areas of action of the EU, such as the improvement of the common market, the economic growth, trade etc., but rather the focus was centered on increasing the feeling of European citizenship and engagement, by ideally smoothing out the democratic deficit and increasing the popularity of the EU among its citizens. As Moravcsik explains, this was done mainly by MEPs, whom believed that the constitution would have been a perfect opportunity to shift the direction of the union towards a pro-federalist path.[122] The outcome of its failure spread the Eurosceptic feeling even more throughout the

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[120] Rudolf Streinz, "The European constitution after the failure of the Constitutional Treaty*." Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht* 63.2 (2008): 159-187.
[121] Robert Schütze, "European Union Law", *OUP Oxford*, (3rd ed. 2021).
[122] *Ibid*, 220-221.

other MSs, but it is important to understand how we got to this point, and what concrete consequences followed after.

ii.   *The causes behind its failure*

Even though it may seem absurd that two EU-supporting countries such as France and Netherlands were the ones to reject the referendum, shockingly it does not come as unpredicted as one may think. In fact, if we look at the past EU-related events, such as the ratification of the Maastricht treaty it is possible to see that the percentages of votes in favor of the treaty, mainly in France, were not as high as imagined. As a matter of fact, considering the political support of the EU in both the countries, it can be noticed that while the political leaders had a pro-EU attitude, it was not shared by the public which resulted in not being on the same page and quite skeptical about the constitution. Truthfully, as Crum stated, the "proposed Constitutional Treaty for Europe revealed a deep divide between the people and their political representatives".[123]

Firstly, overlooking the French situation, we can say that the political elites and the vast majority of the media were all pro-EU, while the population, since the narrow pass of the Maastricht treaty, with shortly above 51 % votes in favor, had more doubts, that were deepened by the Eurocrisis and the "big" enlargement. In fact, it must be recalled that for neither of these two events a referendum was held, probably because in both cases the possibility of pass was not has high as one suspected. Moreover, it must be also recalled that in 2002 during the presidential election, Jean-Marie LePen's FN gained a lot of consensuses, reaching the second round. The French popular opinion was mainly concerned on socio-economic problems which had previously emerged. The majority stated that France was not ready for this Constitution, that it would have worsened the already precarious unemployment rate and that it would have liberalized too much the economy.[124]

Secondly, entering into the Dutch situation, we see the beginning of a strong position against the EU, with the critics moved by the right-wing VVD party, against the process of integration. The problem is that not only the rightist wings became supporters of Eurosceptic ideologies, but also the leftist parties, such as the Socialist Party (SP) were firmly against the increasingly "capitalist" outcome of the common market.[125] Differently from France, here the population was mainly unprepared on the contents of the Constitution, at least one-thirds lacked information on it. Moreover, the focus was not the socio-economic aspects, but rather related to the increasing integration and the loss of sovereignty.

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[123] Ben Crum, "Party stances in the referendums on the EU constitution: Causes and consequences of competition and collusion." *European Union Politics* 8.1 (2007): 61-82.
[124] *Ibid*
[125] *Ibid*

The only economic aspect which had a strong impact on the public opinion was the financial contribution to the EU budget on behalf of the country, since the Netherlands is one of the main contributors to the budget.[126]

Looking at the general situation in Europe, one finds, as described by Crum, that parties' behavior can take two different Models, as we can see from TABLE 6, depending on the position followed by government parties and opposition parties. Generally speaking, government parties tend to adopt the "Yes" side when dealing with Constitutional treaties referendums. In fact, here it is important to observe the behavior of opposition parties which are less constrained than the former ones. If the opposition follows the "No" side, then the model is defined as Competitive, while if instead these parties end up being on the same side, the one of ratification, then the model is considered as Collusive.[127]

TABLE 6. Two model of party behavior in referendums.[128]
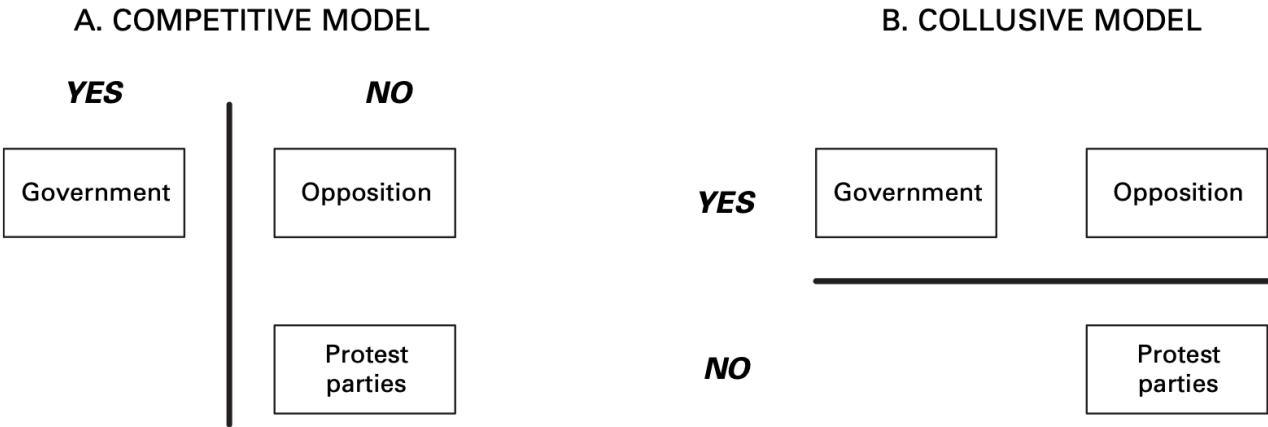
The reason why it is important to consider the party stance during EU Treaty Referendums is because of the impact that they have on the voters. Usually, the more the party has a strong internal unity, the more it can influence its voters. [129] However, it is not enough to understand how voters behave. In fact, we must that, often, it is easier for government parties to convince voters to support their side. For this reason, the success, or the failure, of the referendum usually depends on the government's capacity to convince the voters, being that the vote becomes a sort of "test" for the government to show its strength

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[126] Andreas RT Schuck and Claes H. De Vreese, "The Dutch no to the EU constitution: Assessing the role of EU scepticism and the campaign." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 18.1 (2008): 101-128.
[127] Ben Crum, "Party stances in the referendums on the EU constitution: Causes and consequences of competition and collusion." *European Union Politics* 8.1 (2007): 62.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Matthew Gabel and Kenneth Scheve, "Mixed messages: Party dissent and mass opinion on European integration." *European Union Politics* 8.1 (2007): 37-59.

and support within the country. "The government can win the referendum if it is able to re-establish the majority by which it was elected".[130]

Even if from these assumptions one may be forced to believe that government parties are the most active in a Competitive Model, this is not the case, because even in the Collusive one they are forced to mobilize the support towards a positive outcome, being that the opposition will not be as strong and moreover the protest parties will be against the revision Treaty. As we can see from TABLE 7, all the government parties, in the end, were in favor of ratification, moreover all of the parties were part of the negotiation process of the constitutional treaty, except the Portuguese Socialist party which rose to power shortly after. Looking instead at non-government parties UK, Poland and the Czech Republic enter the Competitive Model with conservative parties, whilst the remaining ones are to be deemed as part of the Collusive one. The opposition parties supporting the treaty were coming mainly from the Greens. However, in France and the Netherlands the support towards the "NO" side was supported by the extreme sides of the political spectrum. On one side the radical right, with the National Front (FN) and the Pim Fortuyn List (LPF), and on the other side also by the extreme left with the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (EUL).[131] That said as we saw previously, the outcome of the referendum was the result also of a precarious economic situation in France, which did not want the EU to expand, while in the Netherlands it was the union of the leftist support with the rightist campaign.

TABLE 7. Party position in the 10 referendum countries

GOVERNMENT				OPPOSITION			
Party	Party group	Vote share	Y/N/U	Party	Party group	Vote share	Y/N/U
CZECH REPUBLIC							
Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)	PES	(30%)	Y	*Civic Democratic Party (ODS)*	*EPP-ED*	*(24%)*	*N*
Christian and Democratic Union–				*Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia*			
Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU–ČSL)	EPP-ED	(10%)	Y	*(KSČM)*	*EUL-NGL*	*(18%)*	*N*
Freedom Union-Democratic Union (US–DU)	*EPP-ED*	*(4%)*	*U*				
DENMARK							
Liberals (V)	ELDR	(29%)	Y	Social Democrats (SD)	PES	(26%)	Y
Conservative People's Party (KF)	EPP-ED	(10%)	Y	*Danish People's Party (DF)*	*UEN*	*(13%)*	*N*
				Social Liberals (RV)	ELDR	(9%)	Y
				Socialist People's Party (SF)	EG/EFA	(6%)	Y
FRANCE							
Union for a Popular Movement (UMP)	EPP-ED	(34%)	Y	Socialist Party (PS)	PES	(24%)	Y
Union for French Democracy (UDF)	ELDR	(5%)	Y	*National Front (FN)*	*NA*	*(11%)*	*N*
				French Communist Party (PCF)	*EUL-NGL*	*(5%)*	*N*
				The Greens (Verts)	EG/EFA	(4%)	Y
IRELAND							
Fianna Fail	UEN	(41%)	Y	Fine Gael	EPP-ED	(22%)	Y
Progressive Democrats	ELDR	(4%)	Y	Labour Party	PES	(11%)	Y
				Sinn Fein	*EUL-NGL*	*(6%)*	*N*
				Green Party	*EG/EFA*	*(4%)*	*U*
LUXEMBOURG							
Christian Social People's Party (CSV)	EPP-ED	(36%)	Y	Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party (LSAP)	PES	(23%)	Y
Democratic Party (DP)	ELDR	(16%)	Y	The Greens (Déi Gréng)	EG/EFA	(12%)	Y
				Action Committee for Democracy and Pensions			
				Justice (ADR)	*NA*	*(10%)*	*N*

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[130] Mark Franklin, Michael Marsh, and Lauren McLaren. "Uncorking the bottle: Popular opposition to European unification in the wake of Maastricht." *J. Common Mkt. Stud*. 32 (1994): 455.
[131] Ben Crum, "Party stances in the referendums on the EU constitution: Causes and consequences of competition and collusion." *European Union Politics* 8.1 (2007): 62.

THE NETHERLANDS						
Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA)	EPP-ED	(29%)	Y	Labour Party (PvdA)	PES	(27%)	Y
People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	ELDR	(18%)	Y	*Socialist Party (SP)*	*EUL-NGL*	*(6%)*	*N*
Democrats 66 (D66)	ELDR	(4%)	Y	*Pim Fortuyn List (LPF)*	*NA*	*(6%)*	*N*
				Green Left (GL)	EG/EFA	(5%)	Y
POLAND						
Alliance of Democratic Left (SLD) +	PES	(41%)	Y	*Citizens Platform (PO)*	*EPP-ED*	*(13%)*	*U*
Union of Labour (UP) +				*Self Defence of the Polish Republic (S)*	*NA*	*(10%)*	*N*
Polish Social Democracy (SDLP)				*Law and Justice (PiS)*	*UEN*	*(9%)*	*N*
				Polish Peasant Party (PSL)	*EPP-ED*	*(9%)*	*U*
				League of Polish Families (LPR)	*ID*	*(8%)*	*N*
PORTUGAL						
Socialist Party (PS)	PES	(45%)	Y	Social Democrat Party (PSD)	EPP-ED	(29%)	Y
				Unitarian Democratic Coalition (CDU)	*EUL-NGL*	*(8%)*	*N*
				People's Party (PP)	EPP-ED	(7%)	Y
				Left Block (BE)	*EUL-NGL*	*(6%)*	*N*
SPAIN						
Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE)	PES	(43%)	Y	People's Party (PP)	EPP-ED	(38%)	Y
				United Left (IU)	*EUL-NGL*	*(5%)*	*N*
				Democratic Convergence of Catalunya (CDC)	ELDR	(3%)	Y
				Republican Left of Catalunya (ERC)	*EG/EFA*	*(2%)*	*N*
				Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV)	EG/EFA	(2%)	Y
UNITED KINGDOM						
Labour Party	PES	(35%)	Y	*Conservative Party*	*EPP-ED*	*(32%)*	*N*
				Liberal Democrats	ELDR	(22%)	Y

Notes: Summer 2005, between UK elections of 5/5/2005 and Polish elections of 25/9/2005. Based on the EPIN Ratification Monitor (Kurpas et al., 2005). Vote shares based on www.electionworld.org.
Y [plain text] – party in favour of Constitutional Treaty; **N** [*bold italics*] – party against Constitutional Treaty; U [*italics*] – party undecided on the issue.
PES = Party of European Socialists; EPP-ED = European People's Party-European Democrats; ELDR = European Liberal Democrat and Reform group; UEN = Union for Europe of the Nations Group; EUL/NGL = Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left; EG/EFA = Group of the Greens / European Free Alliance; ID = Independence/Democracy Group; NA = non-attached.

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iii. *The consequences of its failure*

The failure of the Constitutional Treaty has to be seen as more than a minor event, even if as previously found out, scholars were not at all surprised but such an outcome. In fact, the two negative outcomes in France and in the Netherlands served as a further base point on which Eurosceptic parties based their political propaganda. Mainly, in these two countries we can see how during the 2006 elections there was an increase in the support towards anti-EU parties, and a radicalization towards the right, namely for the National Front (FN) and the Party for Freedom (PVV). [133] It is important to consider also the negative spillover effect that the result had on the rest of Europe. Generally speaking, it had an impact on all the elements which constitute European governance, therefore the institutions, the involved political actors and most importantly the policy process. Individual governments started giving priority to more domestic issue and decision-making rather than the Union's decisions. The idea of enlargement also changed, dividing society even more and decreasing the willingness to support the admission of future member state, at least until a better functioning Europe was guaranteed to the already present MS. [134]

This event was understood as a victory for the Eurosceptics, but not all was lost after. The turning point of the failure of the EU Constitution gave the EU a goal to focus on: the recreation of trust towards the institutions and the importance of transforming a system that was not working as its best capacity. The outcome of this reinvention of the organization culminated with the ratification of the Lisbon treaty which was supposed to transform Europe into a more inclusive, and efficient institution.

That said, to avoid another backlash, all the MS, except Ireland which had to follow the constitutional constraint of calling for a referendum, ratified directly the Reform Treaty. This had a negative impact on

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[132] *Ibid.*
[133] Nick Startin, and André Krouwel, "Euroscepticism re-galvanized: The Consequences of the 2005 French and Dutch Rejections of the EU Constitution." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 51.1 (2013): 65-84.
[134] Boyka Stefanova, "The 'No' Vote in the French and Dutch Referenda on the EU Constitution: A Spillover of Consequences for the Wider Europe." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39, no. 2 (2006): 251–55.

the general public, because it reduced the *democratic legitimacy* of the Treaty, depicting the Union as not being fully representative.[135] However, the efforts put into the Lisbon Treaty were clearly of use and served as a pathway to be followed in the future by the EU, in order to hold the institution, and its MS, democratically accountable, and moreover to legitimate more national institution such as the judiciary and the national parliament, i.e., article 7 "The Union is founded on the values of respect for (…), democracy, equality, the rule of law (…)."[136]

All in all, it can be said that this crisis was a clear demonstration of how the general public viewed negatively the EU, giving the possibility to more Eurosceptic parties to emerge stronger.

2. The "Greek" Crisis (2008)

   i.   *Does financial stability equal austerity?*

In the second chapter, we deeply discussed all the events that led to the Greek crisis in 2008, and all the economic and political consequences that it had on Europe, with some countries being more hit than others. We also discussed the measures that the EU adopted, once Greece was unable to repay its debt and declaredly asked for help to the other MS. Therefore, the EU adopted a series of mechanisms to bring stability once again and focus on protecting the Eurozone.

The emphasis of the ESM was on increasing revenues and cutting expenses, such as decreasing allowances in the public sector and moreover reducing incomes, insurance funds, and the Program for Public Investment.

That said the focus was on three elements:

* adjusting the budget;

* increasing competitiveness and development;

* reforming the financial system.

Therefore, there was a stop in salaries and pensions raises. What's more is that the measures also required an increase in the public sector age limit for pensions to 65 years from women. Instead, financially speaking, a Financial Stability Fund was created to check on the Bank of Greece's network. [137] In total, three programs have been put into action on behalf of the Union, and unfortunately the price to pay was dreadful *austerity* measures, which led to an increase in unemployment, and a complete reform of the public administration. [138]

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[135] Jiří Přibáň, "Desiring a Democratic European Polity: The European Union Between the Constitutional Failure and the Lisbon Treaty." *The European Union after Lisbon*. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2012. 71-91.
[136] Art. 7 of the TEU
[137] Panagiotis Petrakis, "The 2008–2010 crisis and the European stability mechanism." *The Greek economy and the crisis* (Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2012): 269-309.
[138] Ioannis Papageorgiou, "Crisi greca, crisi europea e crisi di legittimita' in europa", *Paradoxa* (ANNO IX, Numero 3, Luglio/Settembre 2015)

For this reasons, citizens and political parties were not at all satisfied, even because there was a lot of confusion and perplexity on how these decisions were taken and put into place

ii.   *A decision taken behind "closed doors"*

After the crisis of the failed constitution in 2005, a new legitimacy crisis strikes down the EU as a consequence of the economic crisis and the adoption of a new economic policy. The outcome of the meetings of the Ecofin commission resulted in the creation of a new bail-out institution, the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). This new institution was the only plausible solution that the Eurozone MS agreed upon in May 2010, as an answer to the Greek economic crisis, with France and Germany being the main financial providers. [139] The solution was taken to "safeguard financial stability in the euro area as a whole". [140] Germany was one of the key operators, by deciding upon the parameters of the response of the institution. That said the government was split into two, on one hand the willingness to support Greece, but on the other the public opinion being against any form of aid. The second strongest player was France, which however was still the country of the negative vote for the Constitution, therefore president Sarkozy proposed to solve the crisis trough the ECB's mobilization on behalf of the Commission. The decision on who would guide the mechanism, namely the Commission or the Council, created a general discussion with as the result the administering of the System on behalf of the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV). The program however did not work completely, especially in the beginning, leading to a fall in the Euro and the increasing risk of the possibility to borrow to other countries which were in debt such as Ireland, Portugal, Spain or Italy. [141]

There was the need to transform and expand the powers pf the EFSF, even if countries such as Germany were not in favor of expanding the budget of the institutions. That said, EFSF and EFSM became the ESM in 2011, with new features such as the possibility to enter the market with its bonds, invest more at lower interest rates, and lend more money.[142]

The problem behind the EFSF and then the ESM does not lie only on the fact that they did not fully fulfill their goals, but in the way they were created. They have been deemed by political partied and the general public several times as illegitimate. In general, legitimacy represents the relationship between the government and the governed, meaning that the government is expected to perform and execute law. The level of legitimacy is then measured trough the satisfaction and outcome of any previously undertaken action. In general, if the level of appreciation is low, the government will have less chance to be reelected,

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[139] Ledina Gocaj and Sophie Meunier. "Time will tell: The EFSF, the ESM, and the euro crisis." *Journal of European Integration* 35.3 (2013): 239-253.

[140] European Council. 2010b. Statement by the heads of state and government, February 11.

[141] Ledina Gocaj and Sophie Meunier. "Time will tell: The EFSF, the ESM, and the euro crisis." *Journal of European Integration* 35.3 (2013): 239-253.

[142] Ibid

so it is controlled by the citizens trough elections. [143] This is quite different when it comes to international organizations such as the EU, where citizens can only directly elect the MEPs, whilst the rest is all indirect and uncontrollable. In time the EU has gained a broader scope of action, increasing the level of democratic deficit, for the reasons explained in the first chapter, and spreading the fear of using public consultations, such as referendums, for taking any relevant decision.

It must not come as a surprise that the austerity decisions taken "in favor" of Greece and Ireland, where adopted by politicians of different nationalities, international financial institutions and so on, with little or no consideration of the national electorate, that therefore became ineffective. [144] This was the result of an incapability of MS to deal with their financial problems on their own. In fact, not only Greece, but also in countries such as Ireland, Portugal, and possibly also in Spain and Italy, the ability-to-pay risk increased largely due to the economic crisis. [145] For this reason, the several stability plans were created in an intergovernmental way, completely outside of the scope of the institutions. Moreover, these plans implied a deep interference on behalf of external actors within, for example, the Greek economic policy, therefore the ones who resented the newly taken actions were first and foremost the Greek citizens. [146] In Greece, in fact, there was an increase in the negative perception of the European integration, which as we can see from the TABLE 8, in 2006-2007 was equal to the general average of the European citizens, but has been sharply increasing since 2008, and has kept on raising with its peak point reached by the end of 2015, when there was a difference of almost 26% points above the EU average.

TABLE 8. Greek and EU-wide negative image of the European Union, 2002–2017.[147]

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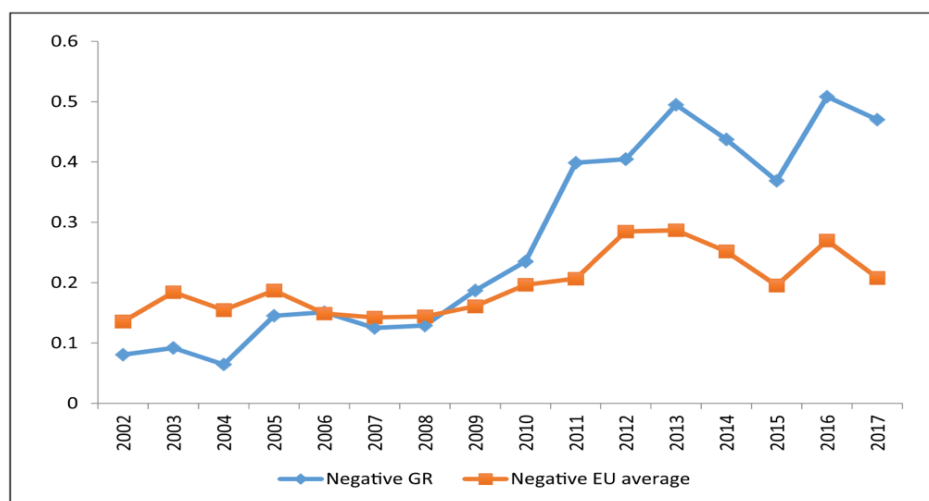
[143] Ioannis Papageorgiou, "Crisi greca, crisi europea e crisi di legittimita' in europa", *Paradoxa* (ANNO IX, Numero 3, Luglio/Settembre 2015)

[144] Ioannis Papageorgiou, "Crisi greca, crisi europea e crisi di legittimita' in europa", *Paradoxa* (ANNO IX, Numero 3, Luglio/Settembre 2015)

[145] Fritz W. Scharpf, "After the Crash: A Perspective on Multilevel E uropean Democracy.*" European Law Journal* 21.3 (2015): 384-405.

[146] Sofia Vasilopoulou, "The party politics of Euroscepticism in times of crisis: The case of Greece." *Politics* 38.3 (2018): 311-326.

[147] Eurobarometer, European Commission

Another issue was the fact that the "surplus states" such as France and Germany were the main MSs investing in these plans, and so the risk of a future banking crisis in their countries was at stake as well. These are some of the reasons why the Council decided willingly to ignore the Maastricht treaty, which in article 125(1) of the TFEU prohibited the possibility to bailout countries on behalf of other MS and use the ECB funds to finance states. As a result, the only way to ensure the protection and rescue of the Euro were strong "conditionalities" put on the shoulders of debtor-countries, resulting with a non-appreciated fiscal austerity, that could always remerge trough the state crisis. [148] This was all done with an exceptional procedure, that resulted in the signature of Regulation 407/2010, an intergovernmental agreement that permitted the creation of the EFSF even if outside the scope of action of the EU treaties.[149] EFSF needed however the approval of national parliaments, which could reject and veto its creation. In the end, it was approved by all the MS, but not without any critics. The main criticisms moved came from two groups. The radicals, who rejected EFSF on the basis of article 125, but also on article 119 of the TFEU, which states that public finances fall under the scope of national legislation, not the EU's one. And the second group whom was sceptical of the legality of EFSF, being that it was indeed outside the scope of the EU legislation. [150]

     iii.   *Was it worth saving the Euro? The consequences of the crisis*

As we said in the first chapter, one of the critiques moved by both political parties and the general public towards the EU, is the lack of accountability for the decisions that are being taken at the institutional level. In fact, this is exactly what happened during the economic crisis. The New Euro Regime implied a loss of power on behalf of national governments, in favor of the EU institutions, which could now control and overrule the democratic political process of MS. [151]

That said looking at the behavior of the MS' national parliaments the outcome results however quite unexpected. Out of four hypotheses proposed by Closa and Maatsch (2014), on the different stances taken by parties, two were statistically verified:

- Government parties would be supportive of EFSF, while the opposition would be mainly against. This is in part true because even if opposition parties were apparently not supportive and made negative statements towards the EFSF, in the end their votes were positive being that they wanted to "support the euro";

- Since Eurosceptic actors, as we saw in the first chapter, tend to be in favor of granting the union with added competences, they would have a negative impact on the approval of the EFSF. In fact, two justifications were given by the Eurosceptic parties. On one side, they deemed to be protecting the

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[148] Fritz W. Scharpf, "After the Crash: A Perspective on Multilevel E European Democracy." European Law Journal 21.3 (2015): 384-405.
[149] Carlos Closa and Aleksandra Maatsch, "In a spirit of solidarity? Justifying the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) in national parliamentary debates." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 52.4 (2014): 826-842.
[150] Ibid
[151] Fritz W. Scharpf, "After the Crash: A Perspective on Multilevel E uropean Democracy.*" European Law Journal* 21.3 (2015): 384-405.

national economic interest. On the other, they were against the austerity measures that would have been implemented. [152]

However, even if in the end, the EFSF was approved, this does not mean that no concerns were raised. In fact, the scenario shows us quite the opposite. Very soon, EU citizens, whom had apparently never realized the possibility of lack of accountability of the institutions, had a change of faith, which resulted in a decrease of trust towards the EU. The average trust levels fell from 57 to 33 %, while mistrust rose of 25% points. [153] Clearly, the political resonance of the crisis was the reason why there was this change of heart. Before citizens never had the chance to actually look at the power possessed by the Union, however the economic crisis entered directly into the households and finances of the citizens of the debtor states, forcing them to actively understand what had always been in front of their eyes, causing also a decrease in satisfaction and trust towards the institutions, who were deemed responsible of the crisis itself. The reason why this is the case is that while creditor states were forced to provide debtor states with economic aid without the possibility to reject such a decision, also the latter benefiting from the aid, had to do so at a high cost: the loss of any form of bargaining power, causing an "asymmetric intergovernmental negotiation system". So, not only there is a lack of democratic legitimacy, but also an unequal distribution of the burden. [154]

In conclusion, one thing that clearly emerged from this crisis is that there needs to be a stronger connection between, political parties, the citizens and the decisions taken in the EU.

3. Brexit (2016)

   i. *Is it possible to exit the EU?*

Our final case study, as introduced previously, focuses on one of the most distinctive events that has ever took place within the context of an international organization. If people were wondering whether or not the withdrawal option was ever possibly going to be used, they got the confirmation of its existence, when Brexit occurred. Not only did this event end up by being one of the most debated referendums of our time, but also in the aftermath of 2016, during the negotiations between the institution and the country, the system was still quite controversial and complicated to deal with. [155]

That said differently as expected we will see that the exit of the UK did not have the expected impact. In fact, studies will show us, mainly later on, how Brexit helped in reuniting its citizens rather than dividing them even more.

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[152] Carlos Closa and Aleksandra Maatsch, "In a spirit of solidarity? Justifying the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) in national parliamentary debates*." JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 52.4 (2014): 826-842.

[153] J. Zalc, "The Europeans' attitudes about Europe: A downturn linked only to the crisis?" *European Issues* No. 277, (Fondation Robert Schuman 2013).

[154] Fritz W. Scharpf, "No exit from the euro-rescuing trap?", *Complex democracy* (Springer, Cham, 2015): 135-154.

[155] Cris Shore, "Britain, Brexit and Euroscepticism: Anthropological Perspectives on Angry Politics, Technopopulism and the UK Referendum." *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 30.2 (2021): 1-22.

ii. *Euroscepticism or misinformation?*

Even if there has always been a feeling of skepticism among the different MS of the Union, Britain has been the leading nation when it comes to political Euroscepticism, with the succession of PMs, whom wanted to maintain the maximum possible amount of national sovereignty to the UK, rather than delegating power to a supranational organization. Moreover, also looking at the different parties, namely Labour and Conservative parties being the main characters of the political scene, there has always been an interchange between their support or non-support of the EU. [156] The raise of opposition towards the EU started to spike firstly with the ratification of the Maastricht treaty and its *freedom of movement of workers,* which meant that the UK was losing control, in a sense, over its borders. Secondly, for those who opposed the federalization of the EU, the big enlargement of 2004 was a lot to handle, with the UK Independence Party strengthening its non-immigration political agenda. Finally, the Eurocrisis and the shock of 2008 was another element which supported the Eurosceptic point of view, in the sense that it weakened the argument support by pro-EU parties, whom said that the union was granting the country with large economic benefits, unreachable otherwise. [157] This attitude of hard Euroscepticism was supported by tabloid press which played an important role in spreading most of the times also wrongful information and statistics on the EU, such as how much a citizen would pay on average to be a part of the EU, providing the general public with unrealistic information. [158]

It can be said that Brexit is related to much more than just a political event, and the issue goes deeper than the need for a government approval. Several factors influenced the citizens, and among those the concept of EU integration was key. For example, in a study conducted in 2015, people in the UK believed that it had already gone through far with accession procedure, giving the chance to too many countries to enter the union. Moreover, the main issues on which the three political campaigns, Britain Stronger in Europe, Vote Leave and Grassroots Out/Leave.EU, focused where related to the economic and trade relationship between the UK and the rest of Europe, the international position of the country, and mainly the problem related to security and border control. [159]

Migration was one of the most salient issues in the country at the time. In fact, when asked on which policy areas should David Cameron focus during the renegotiation process with the EU, as we can see from TABLE 9, it turned out that 52% of the population wanted change for what concerned border control, and the reestablishment of greater control to the UK. What's more, is that 46% also wanted a restriction for the benefits that are granted to migrants.

Another strong willingness to change the current system was related to the capability of the national parliament to block EU regulation which reached 29%.

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[156] Nicholas Startin, "Have we reached a tipping point? The mainstreaming of Euroscepticism in the UK." *International Political Science Review* 36.3 (2015): 313-314.
[157] Ibid, 315.
[158] Ibid, 321.
[159] Sofia Vasilopoulou, "UK Euroscepticism and the Brexit referendum." *The Political Quarterly* 87.2 (2016): 219-227.

Quite differently, economic issues did not have as much salience as expected, and fell behind with for example 3% wanting fewer employment regulations or 7% related to business regulations. [160]

TABLE 9. EU negotiation wish list: When renegotiating Britain's relationship with the EU, in which if any of the following areas do you think David Cameron should seek to change our relationship? (%) [161]
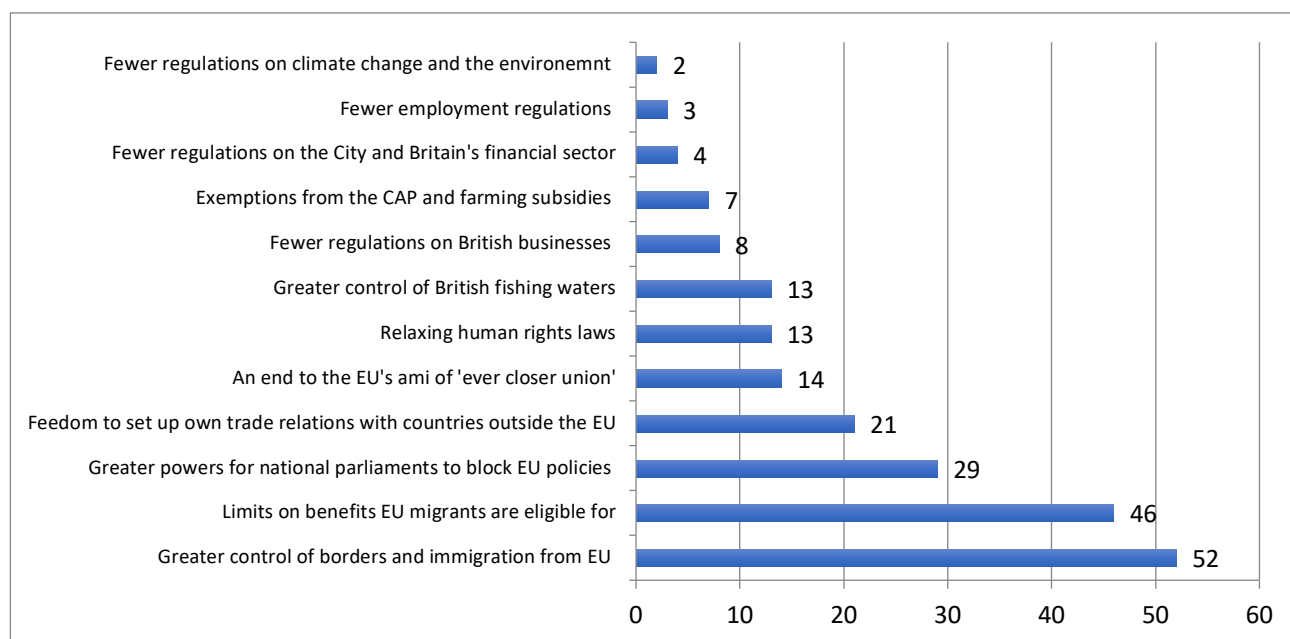
However, the public vote was still quite uncertain, being that most of them still did not know how to respond during a service poll to the question: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?" [162], only 57 % had decided on the position to take. Even the political parties in the UK were not very precise on their position. While UKIP was on the "Leave" side, and the Greens and LibDem on the "Remain" side, the mainstream parties, namely Labour and Conservative had different views on the referendum. The latter has been divided on EU since the entrance in the EEC, and therefore even in this case there was a split between the Conservatives on the decision to make. Even PM Cameron, whom had promised the referendum initially, was siding on the "Remain" side. Labour as well was quite split into half. The result of these insecurities among the two main parties could have left also their voters in a state of Limbo with no indication on where to stand on the matter. [163]

For what concerns tabloid press, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, played a key role into shaping the public opinion, especially the uneducated public, and brought the attention on the key arguments supported by Eurosceptic supporters. To that, we have to add the campaign spread out by the *Express* in 2010: "Britain out of Europe". With its newly gain power and public, it was capable of organizing a petition to have a parliamentary vote in the House of Commons in October 2011 on the UK membership question, and siding

[160] Ibid, 222.
[161] https://yougov.co.uk/news/2015/12/10/eu-polling-soft-leave/
[162] http://whatukthinks.org/eu/questions/should-the-united-kingdom-remain-a-member-of-the-eu-or-leave-the-eu/
[163] Sofia Vasilopoulou, "UK Euroscepticism and the Brexit referendum." *The Political Quarterly* 87.2 (2016): 221.

with UKIP. With all of its bombardment and headlines such as "You pay £6,000 to be in the EU" or "Now even the EU want us to leave" it had a strong influence in shifting the debate towards the need of a referendum, under which in the end Cameron had to "surrender". [164]

iii.   *Did Brexit have a strong impact as predicted or was it a "marginal phenomenon"?*

After the results of the Brexit referendum many have started to question how could the outcome of the referendum impact the UK system, and what would happen next. Our focus, however, will be on what direct implications surrounding Brexit will there be on the EU and for Euroscepticism in general and if Brexit could pave the way for the future exit of other MS from the EU. Initially it led to a short decrease in public support of Euroscepticism, probably dictated by the instability of the moment and the uncertainty of what would happen next, what would the decision to leave the EU imply. Probably, this outcome according to Szczerbiak and Taggart, will lead to a reshaping of the concept of "hard Euroscepticism" giving the political leader a clear example to follow and the possibility that if they want to withdrawal from the EU, it is a viable option. [165]

For what concerns the public opinion there could have been either a newly-found support towards the EU and therefore a stronger feeling of closeness to the Union, or it may have given ground for the question of EU Membership, being that it sets the precedent for quitting the EU. [166] As found by De Vries (2017), actually right after Brexit the public support of the EU membership was quite higher, especially for those who believe that the event will have a negative impact on the UK. Moreover, the focus is put on the fact that the public opinion must be grasped in relationship to *benchmark theory*, which implies that individuals tend to shape their attitude towards the EU based on the assessment of the pros and cons of being part of the Union. Clearly, if the country is benefitting from the membership and is doing better than it would if it was in an alternative state, i.e., on its own, then support towards the institution will increase, and vice versa. Therefore, De Vries shows us that the negative information gained by the public on the state of their country results in an increased support towards EU integration and delegation of competences, since they believe that the benefits of being part of the union will be higher with respect to being alone. [167]

Brexit was a strong indicator for the other MS on what could be the benefits or costs of a potential exit from the Union, and the consequent risks of leaving it. In general, De Vries found date suggesting that the precedent set by the Brexit had a negative reception and the support towards the EU increased. As we can see from TABLE 10, which analyzed the opinion of the consequences of Brexit in the five main countries: Germany, France, Italy, Poland and Spain, even those considered as Eurosceptic parties such as the FN,

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[164] Nicholas Startin, "Have we reached a tipping point? The mainstreaming of Euroscepticism in the UK." *International Political Science Review* 36.3 (2015): 318-320.

[165] Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart, "Hard choices and few soft options: The implications of Brexit for Euroscepticism across Europe." *LSE European Politics and Policy* (EUROPP) Blog (2016).
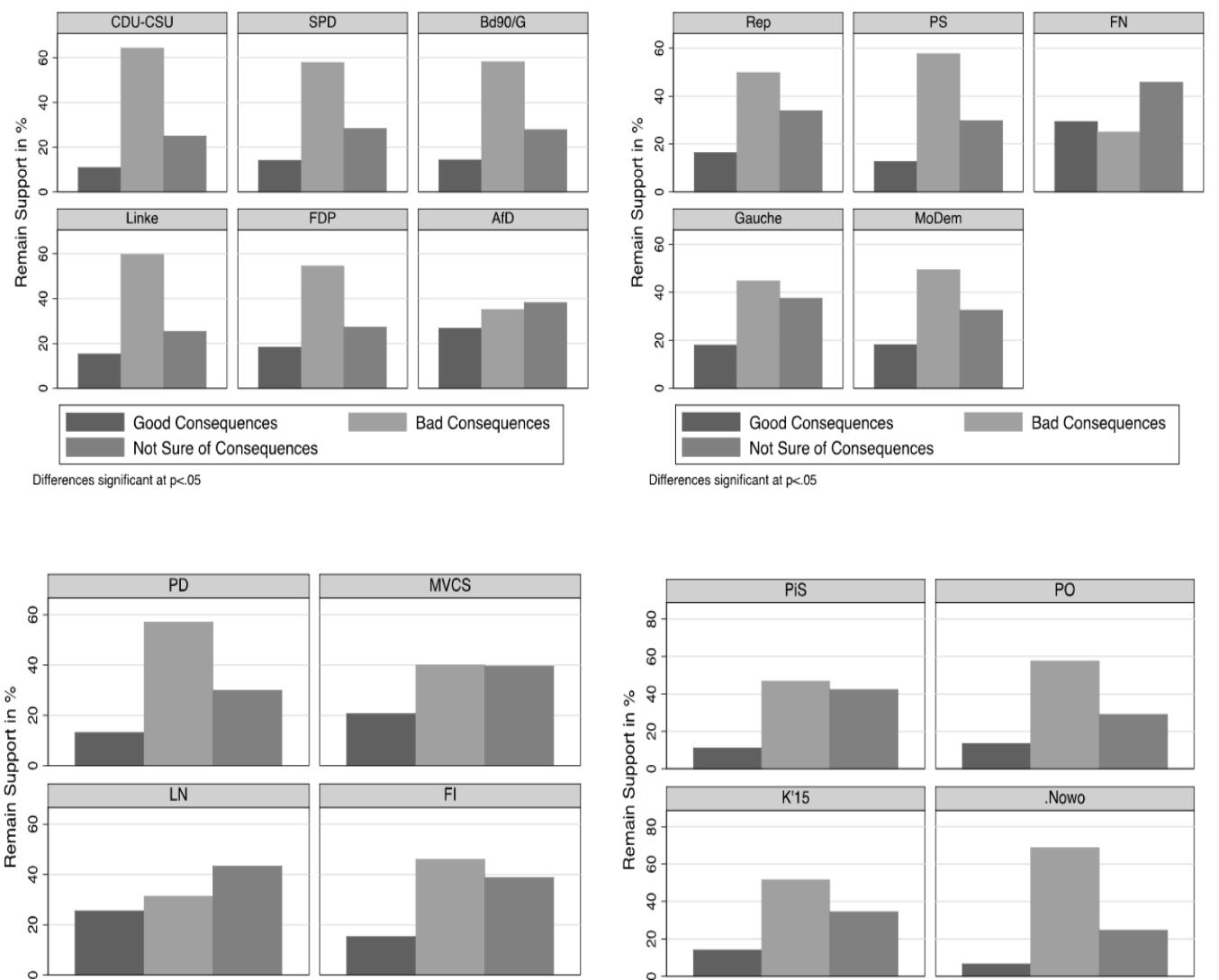
[166] Catherine E. De Vries, "Benchmarking Brexit: How the British decision to leave shapes EU public opinion." *J. Common Mkt. Stud.* 55 (2017): 38-53.

[167] Ibid

Podemos, Northern League (LN), AfD were less pessimistic than expected or unsure on what would happen to the UK. That said there were some political leaders like Marine Le Pen or Geert Wilders who right after the outcome of the referendum stated that it was time to call for exit referendums also in their countries and recognized Brexit as a potential win for the UK.

The bars in the Table shows us the percentage of who would vote today to stay in the EU, in relationship of those who think that Brexit will have a positive, negative or unsure impact on the UK.

TABLE 10. Comparing support for remaining in the EU of those who think consequences of Brexit will be good or bad for Britain, by party identifiers in five countries. [168]

[168] Catherine E. De Vries, "Benchmarking Brexit: How the British decision to leave shapes EU public opinion." *J. Common Mkt. Stud.* 55 (2017): 38-53.
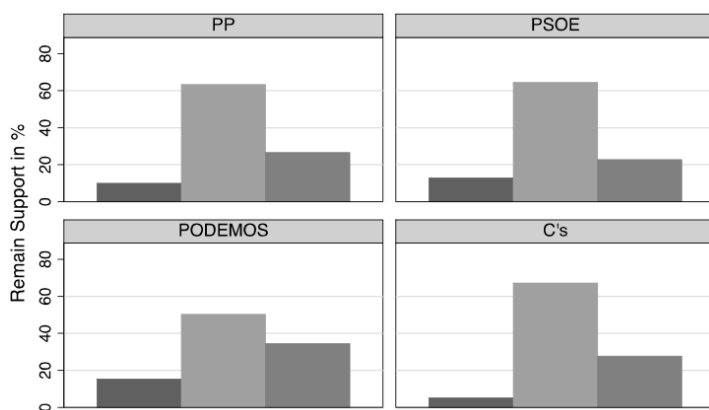
In conclusion, we may say that even if Brexit showed for the first time that there is possibility of exiting the European Union, it did not have the impact that one would expect on the public opinion and on the political parties. In fact, as shown by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018), crisis like the one of the Eurozone or the one on migration had a much stronger impact in increasing the amount of Euroscepticism. [169]

The eurozone crisis, in particular, had an intense negative outcome, especially for those countries who were involved the most, such as Greece, Ireland, Germany and Italy. The migration crisis as well, mainly for those countries coming from post-Soviet control. Quite differently, the 2016 referendum had a limited impact, because it did reassess the legitimacy of what Eurosceptic parties had been advocating for, but it had little-to no popular significance, especially if compared to the one of the other two crisis.

In the end, Brexit helped in reducing party-based Euroscepticism, but if this will last it depends only on the time factor. The reason why I say this is, recalling benchmark theory once again, if in the lasting future, the UK will be seen as better off since it left the EU, then it may be an incentive for parties and countries to promote the Eurosceptic stance. [170]

4.   Conclusions

The scope of this chapter was that of demonstrating the theory of "critical junctures", which we have deeply discussed throughout this thesis. All of these crises were turning points for the Union, because they generated a strong increase in scepticism and mistrust.

The failure of the constitutional treaty was one of the very first victories for those on the Eurosceptic side, because not only they blocked a treaty which would have further integrated Europe, but also, they spread mistrust among the general public towards the EU's Institutions.

Trust decreased even more with the Greek crisis, due to the fact that the public was not involved in the decision-making process, and found itself living a moment of crisis with an increased amount of austerity measures to worsen the situation.

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[169] Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, "Putting Brexit into perspective: the effect of the Eurozone and migration crises and Brexit on Euroscepticism in European states." *Journal of European Public Policy* 25.8 (2018): 1194-1214.
[170] Ibid.

It is only with Brexit that Euroscepticism in Europe slows down, due to the negative view of the exit of the UK from the Union, on behalf of the European citizens. That said, the event incentivized Eurosceptic parties to advocate for the exit of their MS from the EU, and in the future, there may be a change of hearts of the citizens if they see UK prospering in its own, therefore only time will show us the impact of this unique event.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this dissertation was to examine the relationship between the existing democratic deficit in the European Union and Euroscepticism, which we saw comes both from the point of view of political parties and the public opinion.

There are two elements that have become evident from the beginning. The first one is that *there clearly is a democratic deficit in the EU*. We started from Dahl's theory of Polyarchy in order to understand how close does the EU get to this ideal type of democracy. Among the several issues that are present in the union, we must recall the lack of accountability, as we explored the reasons for which European citizens are not able to hold completely the EU's institutions accountable. In fact, the only one that is more or less held accountable is the European Parliament, being that it is the only directly elected institution. Another matter that we discussed is related to the concept of responsiveness of government, however there is a lack of it, also because citizens are not very interested in the issues discussed by the Union. Moreover, we also explained why there is a lot of distance between the public and the EU.

The second element discussed is that without a doubt there was *an increase in Euroscepticism* in the course of the years. Political parties, which are split under "soft" and "hard" Eurosceptics, have politicized on the fact that there is a deficit in the EU several times, (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2001)

One of the answers that we looked for was if the democratic deficit is sufficient to support the political propaganda against the union, or if other elements have a much stronger impact on the public.

For this reason, I chose to analyze three main crises that have occurred in the EU throughout the years: the failure of an EU Constitution (2004), the Greek crisis (2008) and Brexit (2016). The question that I wanted to answer was if these crises could be considered as "critical junctures". As described in the very first chapter, when there is an event considered as a critical juncture it means that there has been point of rupture which has led to some changes in the system. For the purpose of this thesis, I analyzed if these three crises had as a result an increase in Euroscepticism, and if they were used by political parties to strengthen their position and gain support from the voters.

The answer to this question is a clear yes, however there are some remarks to keep in mind. In fact, while after the failure of the Constitution and the beginning of the Greek crisis there was more support towards Eurosceptic values and Eurosceptic political parties; after the Brexit this is not entirely the case.

The first two crises left political parties and the public with a general feeling of mistrust towards the EU's Institutions. With the negative outcome of the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty in France and in the Netherlands, there was the passage from what we described as "permissive consensus" to "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe and Marks, 2005), which led to an increasing aversion towards the EU and its institutions. This feeling deepened when the latter failed to maintain stability, and especially with the economic crisis,

where some countries suffered and paid the consequences more than others, the outcome was a further unsatisfaction on behalf of the citizens.

That said, after one of the most unique events in the Unions history, i.e., the exit of a MS from the EU, the outcome on individual thoughts on the EU were not as expected. Of course, many extreme left/right parties started to advocate for the exit of their MS from the Union. On the contrary the public opinion, instead, started to believe that the UK would suffer the consequences of the leaving the EU, and would have been better off if it had decided to remain within the organization. Therefore, surprisingly, there was a renewed support towards the EU (De Vries. 2017).

In conclusion, it can be said that the fact that there is a democratic deficit in the EU is not sufficient to justify the strong feeling of Euroscepticism that emerged in the course of the years, but it is the crises that we analyzed which were turning points for the Union, both in a negative, but also in a positive way.

Euroscepticism still remains a strong political component of the EU and it has been on the rise. Voters' support of Eurosceptic parties has almost doubled in the last two decades.[171]

Still due to recent events, such as the Covid19 crisis and the Ukrainian War, there has been a renewed interest towards the EU. Maybe these events will be a new turning point for the Union, and MSs will start to feel that during these difficult moments it is best to stay united, or maybe not, only time will be able to answer our questions.

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[171] https://chart-studio.plotly.com/~data2viz/9.embed?share_key=3F2ieypLEs2M9furwscNs2

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RIASSUNTO IN ITALIANO

Introduzione

L'Unione Europea (UE) con i suoi 27 stati membri è un'Unione sia politica che economica e rappresenta da sempre una delle principali istituzioni in ambito internazionale. Fu creata nel 1951 da sei stati fondatori, quali il Belgio, la Francia, la Germania, l'Italia, il Lussemburgo e l'Olanda. Nel corso degli anni i poteri e le competenze dell'Unione si sono espansi, non senza critiche; lo scopo di questa tesi sarà proprio quello di indagare e comprendere le varie controversie che aleggiano intorno a questa complessa organizzazione.

Il focus è incentrato sul deficit democratico, per cui l'UE è stata criticata più volte, e sul modo in cui i vari partiti politici, soprattutto i cosiddetti partiti "populisti", lo hanno utilizzato a scopo politico, per incrementare il loro supporto da parte dei votanti. In particolare ci concentreremo su analisi di trend storici e dati statistici, in rapporto a varie crisi che si sono susseguite nel corso degli anni in Europa, per comprendere se quest'ultime sono state la causa di un aumento del sostegno nei confronti dell'euroscetticismo e di partiti euroscettici. La teoria di partenza è quella delle "giunture critiche". Esse descrivono dei momenti di crisi, che hanno come conseguenza un cambiamento storico, istituzionale, economico e così via. Nel nostro caso analizzeremo se all'occorrenza di tali giunture critiche, è aumentato lo scetticismo nei confronti dell'UE. Come casi studio analizzeremo il fallimento della Costituzione Europea nel 2004, la crisi economica in Grecia nel 2008 e la Brexit nel 2016.

È possibile anticipare che questo fenomeno si è effettivamente verificato, in quanto i partiti politici hanno sfruttato queste crisi per i loro interessi personali. Ciononostante, se la diffidenza nei confronti dell'Unione ha preso piede sia per il fallimento della Costituzione Europea, sia durante la crisi economia, lo stesso non può dirsi per la Brexit, in quanto a parere di molti la scelta effettuata dalla Gran Bretagna è stata giudicata svantaggiosa per quest'ultima.

Il presente elaborato si articola in tre capitoli. Nel primo capitolo, per poter ben capire il rapporto che c'è fra l'euroscetticismo e il deficit democratico, vi è un'introduzione sulle caratteristiche principali del soggetto alla base della tesi, ovvero dell'UE. Per poter studiare quest'ultima bisogna prima comprendere come è nata, come negli anni ha acquistato potere decisionale e quali sono i principi alla sua base. Successivamente, sono state descritte le argomentazioni per le quali si può chiaramente affermare che nell'Unione vi è un deficit democratico. Per fare ciò, si è partiti dalla teoria di Dahl e dalla sua definizione di democrazia. Per Dahl, infatti, i due elementi cardine, fondamentali per qualsiasi democrazia sono la *partecipazione*, ovvero quanto sono coinvolti i cittadini nel processo di decisione e *l'opposizione,* che rappresenta invece il coinvolgimento dei cittadini quando hanno piena libertà di espressione e di opposizione. Alla fine quando si ha piena

partecipazione e opposizione si dovrebbe raggiungere lo status ideale di Poliarchia, vedremo infatti quanto l'UE si discosta, o meno, da questo modello. Un altro elemento fondamentale da ricordare è il concetto di *responsabilità* (accountability), che raffigura quanto i cittadini hanno la capacità di "controllare" la classe elitaria, dunque chi è al governo. Questo compito è svolto dai cittadini che scelgono chi sarà il loro rappresentante, e hanno, così, la possibilità di "punirlo" tramite la non rielezione, qualora non fossero soddisfatti del suo operato.

Una volta compreso il concetto di deficit democratico, abbiamo analizzato il fenomeno dell'Euroscetticismo. Va ricordato immediatamente che esso si è diffuso sia fra i partiti politici, ma soprattutto fra i cittadini che a volte sono rimasti insoddisfatti dalle leggi adottate dall'Unione. Vedremo come si è evoluto l'Euroscetticismo nel tempo e quali sono le argomentazioni sostenute dai partiti euroscettici, al fine di aumentare i voti degli elettori.

Dopo aver illustrato le varie teorie e definizioni dei fenomeni che studieremo, al fine di metterli in correlazione l'uno fra l'altro, ci sposteremo al secondo capitolo. Qui vi sarà una rassegna generale in cui verranno presentate le varie crisi che si sono susseguite in Europa nel corso degli anni a partire dal Trattato di Maastricht (1992). Dopo questa analisi pressoché storica, parleremo più nello specifico della strategia adottata dai partiti euroscettici. In seguito, l'attenzione verrà spostata sull'evoluzione delle *cleavages* descritte da Lipset e Rokkan, e su come sia emersa oggi una nuova cleavage transazionale, portando alla nascita di conflitti politici. Infine, per introdurre i tre casi studio scelti, ne parleremo brevemente da un punto di vista storico.

Nel terzo e ultimo capitolo troviamo il cuore dell'elaborato. Infatti, saranno analizzate le varie cause e conseguenze delle tre crisi fondamentali avvenute nell'UE, per dimostrare se effettivamente possono essere considerate come giunture critiche e di conseguenza, a quali cambiamenti hanno portato. Infine, nelle conclusioni tireremo le somme di quanto descritto e spiegato, per vedere se il quesito posto si verifichi effettivamente o meno.

Il Deficit Democratico nell'Unione Europea

Come precedentemente anticipato, nell'UE vi è chiaramente un deficit democratico, in quanto se comparato al modello di democrazia descritto da Dahl, vi sono degli elementi che impediscono all'Unione di essere un'entità democratica completa a 360^ gradi. Per prima cosa l'unica istituzione che è eletta direttamente dai cittadini è il Parlamento Europeo (PE), mentre le altre o sono elette indirettamente, come la Commissione Europea, o sono formate dai Capi di Stato e di Governo, come il Consiglio Europeo, o sono formate dai vari ministri in base alle tematiche discusse, come per il Consiglio. Di conseguenza si può dire che il controllo su queste istituzioni viene meno, in quanto non esiste un sistema di "fiducia", né tanto meno di "punizione" tramite la non-rielezione. Per questo motivo vi è anche una mancanza di "accountability" (controllo della

responsabilità) in quanto i cittadini non hanno la possibilità di controllare chi è eletto, e dunque vi è un non-controllo delle istituzioni che compongono l'Esecutivo Europeo.

In secondo luogo, il PE è considerato una delle istituzioni più deboli nell'Unione, in quanto ha potere legislativo, ma da solo non può operare. Infatti, serve sempre la proposta di legge da parte della Commissione e l'approvazione della legge è sempre presa in maniera congiunta al Consiglio. Dato che il PE è l'istituzione europea meno rilevante e con un potere minimo, non esistono delle vere e proprie Elezioni Europee, né tantomeno una propaganda europea. Infatti di solito le elezioni del PE sono accorpate a elezioni interne dei vari stati membri. Inoltre vi è molta distanza fra i cittadini e le istituzioni, il più delle volte i primi non sono al corrente delle leggi passate o delle trattative che vi sono in corso.

L'Euroscetticismo e i partiti euroscettici

La presenza del deficit democratico e dele varie crisi hanno portato alla crescita in tutta Europa dei partiti euroscettici. Infatti, negli ultimi venti anni, l'euroscetticismo si è diffuso a una velocità smisurata, aumentando circa del 25%.

Una persona si dice euroscettica quando si oppone all'aumento di potere dell'Unione Europea. Questa definizione risulta abbastanza semplicistica, infatti non è sufficiente per capire questo fenomeno così vasto e complicato. Per prima cosa si deve dire che l'euroscetticismo riguarda sia i partiti politici, sia l'opinione pubblica. In generale, i partiti euroscettici sono quelli che promuovono una minore integrazione europea e un maggiore potere nelle mani dello stato, dunque una minor delega di potere nei confronti dell'UE.

In base alla definizione di Taggart e Szczerbiak (2001), i partiti euroscettici si dividono in due categorie:
- "Hard Eurosceptics": comprende i partiti che si oppongono al processo di integrazione e anche all'appartenenza del loro paese nell'UE. Ad esempio in questa categoria possiamo trovare partiti come il Fronte Nazionale Francese (FN), i Podemos in Spagna, il Partito per la Libertà in Olanda (PVV) e così via;
- "Soft Eurosceptics": comprende i partiti che si oppongono soprattutto alle leggi passate a livello europeo, ma non all'appartenenza all'Unione. In questa categoria sono racchiusi i partiti euroscettici provenienti da paesi dell'Europa, quali l'Italia, la Polonia, la Grecia etc.

Oltre a questa definizione vi è anche quella di Vasilopoulou (2009), la quale si focalizza sullo schieramento adottato dai partiti all'interno dell'UE. In base al rapporto che tali partiti hanno con i principi di integrazione Europea si possono identificare tre categorie. Più i partiti sono contrari all'integrazione costante, meno sono propensi a trovare dei compromessi fra le istituzioni e lo stato, di conseguenza più risultano euroscettici.

Invece, se si analizza il supporto dell'Unione da parte dell'opinione pubblica, vediamo che il livello di euroscetticismo non dipende solo dallo "spazio", e quindi dal paese di appartenenza, ma ha raggiunto

percentuali diverse nel corso degli anni, di conseguenza va tenuto in considerazione anche il "tempo2. Nella maggior parte dei casi l'opinione pubblica è legata al punto di vista dei partiti con i quali si schierano, ma non solo. Infatti, in base alla percezione delle varie crisi che ci sono state negli anni, il punto di vista dei cittadini europei ha subito delle variazioni. La conseguenza più evidente è una minore fiducia nei confronti delle istituzioni europee, le quali risultano lontane dai cittadini e prendono decisioni di cui il pubblico, il più delle volte, non è a conoscenza.

Per concludere, possiamo affermare che l'euroscetticismo è un fenomeno che ha preso piede in Europa. Esso ha varie sfumature, che dipendono dalla percezione umana ed è promosso da partiti euroscettici che usano a loro vantaggio, il più delle volte, l'esistenza di un effettivo "deficit democratico" nell'UE, per portare l'opinione pubblica dalla loro parte.

Rassegna della letteratura

Il punto di partenza per analizzare la diffusione del sentimento euroscettico in Europa è la ratificazione del trattato di Maastricht (1992). Con questo trattato infatti l'UE introduce il sistema di movimento libero dei lavoratori, crea un sistema di relazioni internazionali con Stati al di fuori dell'organizzazione, Ma soprattutto getta le fondamenta per la creazione dell'Eurozona, della Banca Centrale Europea e dell'Euro come moneta unica di scambio. Queste innovazioni hanno dato vita a ulteriori critiche, e per questo motivo è stata introdotta la "differenziazione", la quale divide l'Unione in paesi appartenenti e non-appartenenti all'eurozona. Già con Maastricht si è visto un incremento dell'euroscetticismo, ad esempio in Francia il referendum sulla ratificazione è stato approvato con una maggioranza minima, infatti solo il 51% dei voti era a favore. Successivamente con il trattato di Nizza (2001), il processo di integrazione europea fu rallentato, culminando nel 2004 con il fallimento del trattato costituzionale per l'UE, uno degli eventi cardine che abbiamo introdotto all'inizio, poiché ha dimostrato la visibile presenza di sfiducia nei confronti delle istituzioni europee.

Per cercare di rimediare a quanto avvenuto nel 2004, l'UE decise di lavorare a un nuovo trattato, il quale è stato ratificato nel 2007 sotto il nome di Trattato di Lisbona. Per prima cosa fu eliminata la clausola sul primato dell'UE, restituendo potere ai singoli stati membri. In secondo luogo, a questa clausola fu aggiunta la possibilità degli SM di occuparsi autonomamente della sicurezza nazionale. Tramite il trattato di Lisbona, ci fu un ulteriore blocco del processo di integrazione, per cercare di ovviare a quanto accaduto con la crisi dell'Unione Economica e Monetaria (UEM), in seguito al fallimento della Costituzione Europea. Ciononostante, il malcontento dell'opinione pubblica non smise di crescere, anzi si verificò l'opposto in quanto in quegli anni c'era stata la "Grande Espansione" con l'entrata nell'Unione di dieci nuovi SM proveniente dall'Europa dell'Est. Tale mossa era stata considerata avventata da parte di alcuni partiti politici, come ad esempio la Lega in Italia, che passò da uno schieramento moderato a uno più radicale.

Dopo Lisbona si susseguirono altre crisi. Inizialmente, ci fu una nuova crisi economica nel 2008 che mise ancora una volta a rischio la stabilità dell'euro e dell'eurozona, obbligando i vari Capi di Stato e i Ministri dell'Economia ad adottare il Meccanismo di stabilità europeo, e implementando un sistema di austerità, in paesi come la Grecia, uno degli SM più colpiti che non riuscì più a ripagare i debiti e subì un forte incremento del deficit.

Le conseguenze della crisi Greca, sommate alle crisi migratorie del 2015, furono poi la causa di uno degli eventi più unici nella storia dell'UE, ovvero l'uscita di uno stato membro dall'Unione, con la vittoria del referendum per la Brexit nel 2016. Questo evento rappresenta la più grande vittoria dei partiti euroscettici, anche se non si verificò un incremento dello scetticismo così come previsto.

Al susseguirsi di questi eventi va ricordato che in alcuni casi, le crisi sono state sfruttate dagli euroscettici come un sistema di "posizionamento strategico" per rappresentare una nuova forma di opposizione ai partiti al governo. Infatti l'opposizione varia anche in base all'ambito politico di cui si sta trattando, di conseguenza si può affermare che in certe situazioni l'euroscetticismo è una forma di strategia politica. Inoltre non si può non ricordare lo sviluppo di una nuova frattura (cleavage) sociale, quella *transnazionale,* introdotta da Hooghe e Marks sulla base della "teorie delle fratture" (Cleavage theory di Lipset e Rokkan). Il nuovo conflitto che sta emergendo si concentra soprattutto su una "lotta" fra coloro che sono i cosiddetti vincitori o perdenti della globalizzazione. Questa opposizione è il risultato anche di una reazione al sistema di integrazione europeo che è sempre in espansione. Qui il focus è sulla protezione dei poteri governativi e l'opposizione all'immigrazione e al commercio comune.

Il fallimento della Costituzione Europea (2004)

Come anticipato nel 2004 vi fu il fallimento del referendum per il trattato sulla Costituzione Europea, a seguito dell'esito negativo in Francia e Olanda, dove vinse il "NO". Nonostante lo stupore causato dall'evento, un risultato del genere non era da considerare improbabile. Indagando meglio sul sistema politico Francese e Olandese, vediamo, già a partire dal trattato di Maastricht, una crescente opposizione nei confronti dell'UE. In tutti e due i paesi ci fu una grande discrepanza tra quanto proposto dai capi politici e l'opinione pubblica. Infatti la propaganda politica per il lato del "NO" non era stata così estesa, ma alla fine i cittadini votarono proprio per la non-adozione della Costituzione.

In Francia, però, il malcontento della popolazione era aumentato a seguito della crisi economica e dell'aggiunta dei nuovi paesi all'Unione, con l'aumento di supporto nei confronti della destra radicale di Marine Le Pen con il suo Fronte Nazione (FN).
Per quanto riguarda l'Olanda, lo schieramento contro l'UE era potente sia a destra, con il Partito Popolare per la Libertà e la Democrazia (VVD), che a sinistra con il partito socialista (SP). Diversamente dalla Francia, qui

il focus della popolazione era sulla mancanza di informazioni sui contenuti della Costituzione e sul contributo economico del paese, essendo uno dei principali contribuenti.

Il fallimento della costituzione fu usato successivamente dai partiti euroscettici per aumentare la sfiducia e il dissenso nei confronti delle Istituzioni Europee. Questo sentimento si propagò non solo in Francia e Olanda, ma in tutti gli stati membri, portando a una ulteriore divisone tra la popolazione e i partiti politici. Come situazione tampone, per cercare di ovviare a quanto successo, gli SM ratificarono nel 2007 il Trattato di Lisbona, cercando di dare una nuova vita all'Europa.

La crisi Greca (2008)

Il fallimento dei Lehman Brothers in America ebbe come conseguenza una crisi economica mondiale, che purtroppo arrivò anche in Europa colpendo alcuni paesi più di altri. Fra quest'ultimi troviamo la Grecia, uno degli SM più colpiti. Quest'ultima vista la sua incapacità di riparare i propri debiti, chiese aiuto all'UE, la quale adottò una serie di meccanismi di stabilità per cercare di mantenere intatta l'Eurozona. Tra le varie misure adottate, la Grecia fu costretta a bloccare gli stipendi, e ad aumentare l'età di pensionamento, causando malcontento nella popolazione. La controversia principale diffusasi tra l'opinione pubblica era che queste misure di contenimento della crisi erano state adottate da Ministri dell'Economia, Capi di Stato e di Governo provenienti da altri stati.

Per colpa di queste decisioni prese "a porte chiuse", ci fu un incremento del 26% della percezione negativa dell'UE. Inoltre anche i paesi creditori, come la Francia e la Germania, erano a rischio crisi economica, ciononostante stavano contribuendo economicamente ad aiutare la Grecia e l'Irlanda. Per questo motivo il Consiglio scelse di bypassare l'articolo 125 del TFUE il quale asserisce di non finanziare gli stati attraverso altri SM. Di conseguenza per proteggere i paesi creditori, la Grecia fu costretta ad accettare delle condizionalità molto austere.

A seguito dell'adozione di queste misure, i cittadini europei si resero conto dell'effettiva mancanza di "accountability" delle istituzioni europee, aumentando dunque la sfiducia nei loro confronti. I partiti dell'opposizione invece criticarono il fondo europeo di stabilità finanziaria (FESF), anche se continuarono a supportare l'euro; mentre i partiti più euroscettici furono contrari sia alla perdita di potere da parte dei governi nazionali sia all'adozione di queste misure austere.

La Brexit (2016)

L'ultima crisi analizzata, rappresenta uno degli eventi più unici che ha mai avuto luogo nella storia dell'Europa. La Brexit dimostrò che era effettivamente possibile lasciare l'Unione, creando un precedente. La Gran Bretagna è stata da sempre uno degli SM in cui l'euroscetticismo ha preso più piede, con il susseguirsi

di vari Primi Ministri, i quali hanno cercato in tutti i modi di preservare la sovranità nazionale dello stato delegando il minor potere possibile. Infatti, basti pensare al concetto di differenziazione per il quale la GB non è mai entrata a far parte dell'eurozona. L'opposizione nei confronti dell'Unione ebbe il suo culmine con la ratificazione del trattato di Maastricht, il quale introduceva la liberà di spostamento dei lavoratori; poi si riaccese nel 2004 con la grande espansione, e infine nuovamente con la crisi dell'eurozona.

L'evento saliente, che incrementò rapidamente il livello di euroscetticismo, fu la crisi migratoria, sulla quale David Cameron, il PM dell'epoca, si appoggiò per proporre il referendum sul permanere o meno nell'Unione. In pochi avevano le idee chiare, e anche i partiti politici non sapevano bene che direzione scegliere. Da un lato c'era lo UKIP pro-uscita dall'Unione, mentre dall'altro c'erano i Greens e i LibDem pro-permanenza nell'UE. Per quanto riguarda i partiti principali, Conservative e Labour, erano entrambi divisi in due. Per di più, lo stesso Cameron, il quale aveva proposto il referendum, alla fine ha parteggiato con il lato della rimanenza nell'UE. Queste insicurezze non furono di aiuto per i cittadini britannici i quali si ritrovarono in un limbo senza sapere da che parte stare. Per di più la stampa si mobilizzò per convincere la popolazione, soprattutto le classi inferiori, a votare per l'uscita.

Per quanto riguarda l'impatto del referendum sul resto d'Europa, non ci fu l'incremento di scetticismo che ci si aspettava. Infatti, tutto dipendeva da come gli altri SM vedevano la situazione britannica. Se i partiti e la popolazione credevano che uscire dall'UE avrebbe peggiorato la situazione britannica, allora l'impatto della Brexit sarebbe stato pressoché nullo nel favorire l'incremento di scetticismo. Non è detto che in futuro l'opinione pubblica non cambierà idea, infatti qualora la GB dovesse vivere una situazione migliore a quella che viveva mentre era parte dell'Unione, allora i partiti euroscettici potrebbero usare questo fatto a loro favore, riaumentando così il sentimento di euroscetticismo.

Conclusioni

Analizzando le varie crisi che si sono susseguite negli anni abbiamo tracciato la storia dell'Unione Europea, in relazione all'aumento o meno di scetticismo presente sia nell'opinione pubblica sia fra i partiti politici euroscettici.

Come dimostrato, le tre crisi sono state dei punti di svolta per l'UE, quindi la risposta al nostro quesito iniziale sulle giunture critiche è si, queste situazioni hanno contribuito ad aumentare l'opinione negativa nei confronti dell'UE, anche se la Brexit non ha avuto l'impatto che ci aspettavamo, ma quasi l'effetto opposto. Inoltre abbiamo confermato come i partiti euroscettici usano a loro favore, nei momenti di crisi, l'esistenza di un deficit democratico, per attrarre supporto e votanti dalla loro parte.

Ciononostante, l'esistenza di un deficit non è una condizione sufficiente per poter descrivere l'aumento dell'euroscetticismo. Sono, infatti, proprio le crisi che abbiamo discusso e analizzato, ad aver dato una carica in più ai partiti.

Per concludere, si vuole ricordare che l'euroscetticismo è presente ancora oggi, ed è sempre in aumento, però con la recente pandemia da Covid19 e lo scoppio della guerra in Ucraina, vi è stato un rinnovato interesse per le misure adottate dell'Unione. Forse questi due eventi rappresentano delle nuove giunture critiche che trasformeranno la storia dell'UE, ma solo il tempo saprà dircelo.