contesting europe
exploring euroscepticism in online media coverage

P. de Wilde, A. Michailidou and H.-J. Trenz

with the collaboration of A. Crespy, O. Fimin, M. Heller, T. Kohut, B. Kriza and N. Styczyńska
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What this book is about

Since the early 1950s, European nation states have increasingly pooled sovereignty in a process generally referred to as European integration. Especially since the mid-1980s, the European Union (EU), as formally constituted by the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and consolidated in subsequent Treaty reforms, made substantial steps from market integration to political integration and entered into a more or less continuous, and still unsettled, process of constitutionalisation (Abromeit 2001; Rittberger and Schimmelfennig 2006). Although there is no agreement on what kind of political entity the EU is, it has developed beyond the status of an international organisation and is now so complex and encompassing that it may be referred to as some kind of ‘polity’ (Mair 2007) or ‘political system’ (Hix 2005). Whether this polity should exist, what it should look like, how many competencies it should have and to what extent one wants to be a part of it, are questions of constant debate and controversy. In other words, the polity of the European Union is an issue of political contestation throughout Europe.

The new salience of identity politics, the renationalisation of the European political agenda and the populist backlash we have been witnessing in European politics since the beginning of the Eurozone crisis underline this ‘unfinished’ and fundamentally contested character of the EU. The contemporary European Union is increasingly subject to regular critique of its policy choices and actors but also to more principled forms of opposition, which question its institutional and constitutional architecture and rationale of existence.

Current developments prominently feature varieties of objections to ongoing European integration that reflect attitudes of ‘Euroscepticism’ (Leconte 2010). These expressions of Euroscepticism not only respond to the integration process itself (De Wilde and Zürn 2012), they also interact with pro-European arguments supporting and legitimising this integration process (De Wilde and Trenz 2012). How do the various expressions of opposition to European integration manifest themselves in contemporary Europe? How to discern the boundaries between critical discourse and Eurosceptic discourse or between EU legitimization discourse and counter-discourse? Is there an intrinsic link between further integration and Eurosceptic responses in the form of fundamentally contesting the legitimacy of the EU and its achievements?

This volume aims at conceptualising and empirically mapping the political conflicts that shape the public perceptions of the EU. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which there is convergence on Eurosceptic discourse in terms of intensity, substance and justification across Member States, different discussion
forums and between citizens and elites. To do this, we adopt a public sphere approach which allows us to study the dynamic formation of public perceptions through discourse. We thus locate ‘Euroscepticism’ primarily in the public and media debates, which proliferate in response to current challenges to European integration and democracy.

After the era of permissive consensus, the legitimacy of the EU is now contested within and across the Member States, mobilising governments, political parties, civil society and a growing segment of the population.

In line with the existing literature on Euroscepticism (Crespy & Verschueren 2009; Fuchs et al. 2009a; Leconte 2010; Szczerbiak & Taggart 2008a, 2008b), we focus in the following on this particular type of contesting the legitimacy of the EU as a political system. More specifically, we introduce the term ‘EU polity contestation’ to emphasise two core elements of ‘Euroscepticism’. First, ‘EU polity contestation’ captures the public character of ‘Euroscepticism’, which becomes salient through public and media debates and is not simply measured in latent patterns of citizen dispositions, partisan positions or ideologies. Secondly, ‘EU polity contestation’ qualifies Euroscepticism as a particular form of contestation of the EU that goes beyond regular competition among politicians or conflicts about specific policies or decision-making processes. It refers to all kinds of debates which raise the ‘polity question’: i.e. questions of what type of political entity the EU is or should be, on what principles of legitimation it should be based and how its level and scope of authority should be confined. By taking a public sphere perspective, we place at centre stage the ways the legitimacy of the EU is challenged and defended in mediated public debates. Publicly debating the legitimacy of the EU is constitutive of how it is perceived and dealt with in the institutional arena (Koopmans & Statham 2010). Our aim is to supplement existing approaches within EU studies which focus primarily on intra-institutional dynamics of conflicts, the strategic games of national governments or the positioning of political parties (e.g. Marks & Steenbergen 2004; Moravcsik 1998).

The rising politicisation of European integration has arguably contributed to the restructuring of political conflict which now takes place at the level of mass politics (Kriesi et al. 2008). Understanding the nature and dynamics of public contestation and responding supportive arguments about European integration helps us to analyse how Europe is made visible, interesting and worthwhile to its citizens. Unlike most of the existing literature, we thus argue that the politicisation of European integration needs to be measured in ongoing public debates and the media and not purely in strategic party interaction or the ‘silent’ attitudes of the people involved. The politicisation of European integration, which is widely accepted to affect the legitimacy of the EU and the scope and future prospects of integration, is staged in and for the mass media (De Wilde 2011). By taking into account this public character of political conflicts over European integration, we can systematically reconstruct how politicisation shapes public perceptions of the legitimacy of the EU in terms of competing principles of what constitutes a legitimate political order, about the level and scope of political authority and about the future trajectory of integration (Morgan 2005; De Wilde and Trenz 2012).
Today’s public sphere is to a large extent constituted by the mass media (Bennett & Entman 2001). They are vital to the analysis of political contestation for at least three related reasons: First, from a normative perspective, mass media are ascribed the role of ‘translators’ of the political process into such formats that make it accessible to the people. In the EU case, it is of particular relevance whether the media provide a shared knowledge over European affairs and select the same issues across the national media spheres. For many scholars simultaneously unfolding public debates over EU matters are regarded as a key prerequisite for the emergence of a European public sphere – or at least as an indication that national public spheres are becoming ‘Europeanized’ (Eder & Kantner 2000). Secondly, mass media are central for political contestation because they supply flows of information that link relevant actors and institutions, including activated citizens. For the EU project, it is of significant bearing whether political actors, parties and citizens are linked across national borders and political levels. Some form of ‘social transnationalism’ (Mau & Mewes 2012; Risse 2010) or ‘transnational discursive exchange’ (Wessler et al. 2008) is therefore considered as a further indicator for the emergence of a European public sphere. Finally, mass media are relevant because they construct public opinion and facilitate collective will formation. This concerns whether interpretations of and concerns with the EU’s legitimacy are shared across the political space. The degree of convergence of patterns of EU polity contestation would indicate the emergence of a European public sphere that also facilitates collective will formation of Europeans who can, in principle, agree on what kind of entity the EU is and what should be the future trajectory of integration (Eriksen 2005; Habermas 2003). In contrast, the degree of divergence of patterns of political contestation would indicate a more fundamental controversy about the issues of concern and their possible solutions across and within Member States.

Given the fragmentation of the communicative spaces in the EU, it is generally accepted that political contestation over European integration is still mainly made salient, filtered and framed within national media systems. Our approach shares the premise that the Europeanisation of public debates is carried by national mass media, but also takes into consideration the possibility of media transformation. In particular, we want to test out the scope of contestation on the internet. Through operationalising our public sphere approach and making it applicable for empirical research, the volume presents a comparative analysis of interactive news websites during campaigns for the 2009 European Parliament (EP) elections, where, arguably, the dynamic elements of EU polity contestation can best be observed because citizens are presented with the possibility to directly and publicly respond to news articles and each other’s comments.
As indicated in the quantitative comparative data provided in the previous chapter, the Austrian debate fields a disproportionate amount of critical remarks. This may not be much of a surprise, given that Austria belongs to those Member States of the European Union where a substantial part of the population is generally categorised as ‘Eurosceptic’, expressing low degrees of support towards European integration and its institutions (Eurobarometer 2009b). The Austrian political climate is further affected by the permanent anti-system mobilisation of the late Jörg Haider and his party vassals in the FPÖ (Austrian Freedom Party) and BZÖ (Bündnis Zukunft Österreich, Alliance for the Future of Austria). Developing a style of ‘modern populism’ in symbiosis with the mass media, these parties have been successful in mobilising substantial parts of the electorate. Over the last two decades, the FPÖ has consolidated as a ‘hard’ Eurosceptic party that fundamentally and regularly opposes European integration in terms of principle, institutional setup and project (Fallend 2008). In this regard, Euroscepticism in Austria is strongly institutionalised and organised. This chapter will flesh out how media populism and far-right extremism can dovetail to amplify EU polity contestation.

Expressions of Euroscepticism in Austria are not unique and marginal but penetrate the core of the political system. Since 1999 there has been a stable percentage of around one quarter of the Austrian population supporting explicit Eurosceptic parties in EP elections. Governmental parties, instead, were regularly defeated in European elections for not being able to mobilise the electorate and losing on issues such as national sovereignty, borders and foreigners. European parliamentary elections are also found to be different from first order national elections in the sense of drawing attention to political outsiders, who mobilise protest votes against political parties and the established system of political representation (De Vreese 2009; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a). In the Austrian case, the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism is manifested in generalised patterns of resistance mobilised against the deepening of European integration and enlargement. In the following, we first give a brief historical account of Eurosceptic mobilisation in Austria. Secondly, we explain the strong symbiosis between party mobilisation and media amplification as the principal explanatory variable for the enduring success and impact of Austrian Euroscepticism. The quantitative content analysis data will be shown to reflect this symbiosis of media populism and far-right extremism.
The historical roots of euroscepticism in Austria

There is a notable shift in discussing European integration and Austria’s role in an integrated Europe over the last two decades, which is related to Austria’s peripheral position of forced neutrality during the Cold War and its unexpected return to European centrality after the fall of communism. After regaining sovereignty back in 1955, Austria stood apart from the process of Western integration. In contrast to the pre-war period when the majority of the population still wished a Union with Germany, the post-war, truncated Austrian state became more than a practical arrangement. As a way of dealing with the guilt of the past, the Austrian Sonderweg was welcomed as a detachment from Nazi Germany and fostered the re-interpretation of German regionalism into Austrian national culture (Lepsius 1989). The new post-war Austria did consolidate itself as a democracy and became established as a liberal market economy but, in contrast to Germany, did not develop a strong Western identity. Supranationalism, as linked to the project of European integration, was seen as an infringement of neutrality being at the heart of Austrian post-war identity (Pelinka 2002). After the end of the Cold War, Austria’s new central geographical position with open borders towards the East, and its own capital only a few miles away from Bratislava and Budapest, created mixed feelings among the Austrian population and an attitude of economic opportunism, paired with cultural protectionism and strong reactions against unwanted migrants from the East (Haller 2008a). The country’s post-war position in the periphery of Western Europe was not the only pretext for displacing the Nazi past. It also shielded Austria from its former ‘colonies’ at the East of Vienna, which were not exactly an ‘unknown territory’, as many were made to believe after the end of the Cold War, but became rather associated with the re-discovery of a specific historical and cultural burden. During the Cold War, Austria’s negative attitudes towards the project of (West) European integration were nourished mainly by the negative stance of the left (including the governing Social Democrats, Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs-SPÖ), which officially defended neutrality and anti-militarism behind the curtain of cultural closeness. After the Cold War, neutrality as the official alibi for social and cultural closure soon lost its impact in public debate, shifting towards a more offensive and exclusive rhetoric. Euroscepticism turned from an issue of the political left into the favourite topic of right-wing nationalism (Pelinka 2004).

The historical justification for not joining the European Economic Community (EEC) in the fifties was still held valid, and, in fact, can be found in many of the discussions evolving around the accession of the country to the European Union in 1995 (Pelinka 2004: 211). After the fall of the iron curtain, the SPÖ quickly turned from a defender of Austrian neutrality to a supporter of membership in the EU. In turn, the extreme right, represented by the FPÖ, discovered the issue of Austrian neutrality to justify their hostility towards the opening of the borders towards the East and the sharing of sovereignty with Brussels. This takeover of the Eurosceptic issue by the Austrian right went hand in hand with the reframing of Austrian post-war history. The rejection of Western integration was now justified
with a revisionist reading of history, the negation of Austria’s guilt of the past and
a rapprochement to Nazism and all-Germanism (Pelinka 2004: 211).

The populist strategy to mobilise EU opposition by reference to popular
sentiments is facilitated by some particularities of the Austrian political system,
which give a strong standing to direct elements of democracy through national
referenda\(^1\) and, so-called, popular initiatives (\textit{Volksbegehren})\(^2\). The accession
referendum in 1994 made clear that in spite of anti-European campaigning from
both the right and the left, a stable majority of 66.6 per cent of the electorate (more
than in any other country joining the EU in 1995) supported EU membership. In
this sense, the referendum still reflected the consensual style that characterised
Austrian post war politics. The electorate was (still) on the side of the political
establishment and acknowledged the need for a reorientation of Austria and its
rapprochement to Europe.

Although anti-EU campaigning during the accession referendum of 1994 was
largely unsuccessful, the Eurosceptics succeeded to occupy important issues like
resistance against deeper integration and enlargement. The possibility of popular
initiatives gives the opposition, even though in a minority position, a powerful tool
to oppose official governmental policies and guarantees high public attention and
mobilisation. Four popular initiatives took place: \textit{Österreich zuerst} (Austria first)
in 1993, the \textit{Volksbegehren Neue EU Abstimmung 2000}, the \textit{Veto gegen Temelin}
(veto against Temelin, a nuclear power plant in the border area with the Czech
Republic) in 2002 and the popular initiative \textit{Österreich bleibt frei} (Austria remains
free) in 2006 launched with the intention to incommode the Austrian Council
Presidency (Wikipedia 2010)\(^3\). Even though these popular initiatives failed to
attract substantial voters’ attention, they contributed to the mainstreaming of anti-
foreigner and anti-EU discourse, often with openly racist contents and frequent
reminiscences to Nazism.

Besides popular moves with anti-EU undertones, anti-system and anti-EU
opposition in contemporary Austria is dominated by the FPÖ and its offshoot, BZÖ.
Unlike neighbouring countries like the Czech Republic or Hungary, where we can
observe a mainstreaming of Euroscepticism as part of governmental strategies,
the Austrian case is characterised by a strong system-people confrontation.
Euroscepticism has become an opposition strategy to support demagogues like
Haider, Strache or Martin and minority parties’ claims to side with the people. Pro-

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1. National referenda are obligatory in the case of a total revision of the constitution and facultative or
   consultative in cases of substantial or minor revisions. The Constitutional Referendum is initiated
   by the Parliament.

2. Popular initiatives can be initiated by one-tenth of the Austrian population (approx. 8,000 people)
   and, once accepted, needs to mobilise support in the form of at least 100,000 signatures to be
   further proceeded by the Parliament. However, the national government or the Parliament cannot
   be compelled to change legislation or to take action based on the initiative.

3. A list of all thirty five popular initiatives held in Austria since 1964 can be found at Wikipedia
   (Wikipedia 2010).
chapter seven reflecting a morose political climate: eu polity contestation in Hungary

Maria Heller, Tamás Kohut and Borbála Kriza

The roots of Eurosceptic discourse in Hungary need to be sought in the history of the country’s rapprochement to the West. Hungary, like other Central and Eastern European countries, has known a certain delay in economic and social development accompanied by a profound commitment to European – or rather ‘Western’ – values, culture and civilization. The problem of how to catch up with the West has divided political and intellectual elites since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Three developmental models have been particularly influential in shaping intellectual, public and media debates. The first model advocated by progressive, urban intellectual circles promoted Western patterns of modernisation and the adoption of Western values including individual freedom and rights, liberal thinking and capitalist economy. The second model picked up on social injustices (second serfdom still in the nineteenth century, unequal treatment of ethnic and social groups, extreme poverty, etc.) which enhanced the appearance of left-wing ideologies. These got strong reinforcement later from the Soviet Union and the geopolitical arrangements after the Second World War. The socialist-communist orientation in the escalating competition during the Cold War period set the goal of rapidly overhauling the West and attempted a forced reorganisation of the economy and the society accordingly (Burawoy 2009). The third main option is – as Hungarians often call it – ‘the third way’: this ideological orientation rejects both Western liberal models and the ‘socialist’ solution idea, to catch up with the West through centrally organised, forced modernisation. The followers of this option rather advocate an insular orientation: the country has to reinforce its own traditional (national and ethnic) values without being exposed to Western influences. This orientation is extremely inward looking, trying to build on historic values, past glories, ethnic-national values and ‘uncorrupted’ social forces, such as peasantry and religion.¹

These three orientations have informed social debates in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries without their proponents being able to find common understanding in goals or methods. As a result, their differences have escalated in large-scale intellectual confrontations in the public sphere. At certain historic periods some collaboration existed among Westernisers and ‘populists’ (as the nationalist-traditionalist orientation is often called in Hungary) against the common ‘enemy’: the highly centralised ‘socialist’ establishment with its coercive

¹. This type of argumentation is not uncommon in other Central and East European public discourses. See Styczyńska in this volume on the case of Poland.
ruling communist party. It is important to mention that the struggles among the orientations were of symbolic nature, the participants were mainly intellectuals representing various fields of social sciences and humanities (historians, sociologists, lawyers, writers, journalists, teachers, etc.).

The system change in 1990 put an end to the peaceful cultural-ideological debates among intellectuals of the three opposing orientations and quickly dissolved any hope that they would be able to cooperate in putting the country on a new path of development and modernisation. With the implosion of the former political system, the former political class was also swept away and the empty political field was immediately filled up with representatives of all three camps. Yet with the rapid and unexpected system change, public intellectuals found themselves in the middle of the political arena and heavily politicised: the former cultural orientations have, all of a sudden, been reconstructed as political parties and ideological debates have been transformed into fierce political struggles. The public sphere has quickly become a battlefield where debates have increasingly glided to the extremes (Csepeli and Örkény 2002; Heller and Rényi 1996). The climate of political debate is now characterised by extremely violent skirmishes, spreading hate-speech, scapegoat-forming strategies, exclusion and radicalism (Gombár et al. 2006). As such, Hungarian politics have lately degenerated into a morose political climate.

The controversies in the new millennium around the question of joining the project of (Western) European integration have to be understood in this general political and cultural context. The very idea of EU accession was popular in public opinion as this move could be interpreted as a kind of achievement of the country or as reparation for the long historical, unjust fate of Hungary. As a matter of fact, most Hungarians have always considered that the country belonged to the West, even if it was condemned to a situation of periphery for long historical periods. The Hungarian society can be characterised by a complex and intricate construction of collective identity with strong feelings of inferiority mingled with self-pride and disdain of others. The country is often depicted in public discourse (literature, journalism, etc.) as a heroic nation having sacrificed itself to defend the West against enemies coming from the East, such as the Tatars and Turks (Hungary as ‘defending bastion of the West’). Public representation of the nation also includes the image of the ‘victim’: a prey of the strong competing European powers and empires (between Habsburgs and Russians, the Third Reich and the Soviet Union). The country is also often thought of as being a link between East and West (‘the ferry-country’ or the ‘bridge’). The most important item of the identity-complex is constituted by the still vivid wounds of the Treaty of Trianon. Probably the greatest problem of Hungarian politics, inherited from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, is the fact that the relationship between minorities in Greater Hungary and the new surrounding nation states in the twentieth century could not be tackled in a harmonious way and mutual grievances have never been settled. EU accession in the light of these popular symbolic constructions was considered as possible reparation for the discriminations of the past but it has also been considered, by emerging and strengthening nationalist political forces, as a means of ‘reuniting the torn apart nation’.
The topic of EU membership has, thus, re-opened an old ideological battlefield among intellectual elites. The expectations of the general public related to membership were based, however, mainly on economic grounds as it can be seen both from opinion polls and qualitative research materials (Heller 2010). Political debates of the 1990s tried to emphasise the political advantages of accession: guarantees for solid democracy, participation in EU institutions, freedom of movement and disappearing borders. However, the majority of the Hungarian population, deprived from consumption for long, associated EU membership with economic advantages: the hope for higher salaries, social security, ‘Western’ lifestyle, increased living standards and the advent of consumers’ society. In the early 2000s, public opinion became more realistic, although information and knowledge about the EU, its institutions and its functioning, continued to be extremely low (Hegedűs 2004).

In this chapter, we build on these existing analyses of public discourse about European integration in the period after accession. The question arises how the European orientation of Hungary and its increasingly deteriorating political climate interacted during the 2009 European election campaigns to shape discourse on European integration in general and EU polity contestation in particular. To further substantiate this question, this chapter now proceeds with a more thorough discussion of the political climate in Hungary that led to the expression of Euroscepticism.

**Euroscepticism in a morose political climate**

As in many other new Member States (see, for example, Styczyńska in this volume), the public expression of Euroscepticism in Hungary has increased in salience since accession. When analysing this phenomenon, it is not enough to point to common European trends; intrinsic domestic developments that underlie the strengthening of Eurosceptic discourse also need to be examined. With regard to the process of European integration in general, the ongoing conflicts concerning the EU’s internal functioning (the failure of the Constitution, the negative French, Dutch and Irish referenda, the long parley about the Lisbon Treaty) and the uncertain directions of future development (negotiations with Turkey and Balkan countries) have affected public opinion about the efficiency of the EU. The global financial crisis that found the EU unprepared has also played a determining role in the disillusionment of many Hungarians with the project of European integration.

Besides these common European trends, the rise of Euroscepticism in Hungary is mainly explained by domestic factors. With accession, the pronounced political goal has been achieved and Europe, as a catchword, ceased to play its role of defining the political agenda. On the other hand, as people did not experience any rapid amelioration of their living standards or tangible personal benefits from EU membership, public opinion very soon became indifferent or even disappointed about the EU.

Recently, disenchantment with EU membership has been aggravated by domestic political turbulences, in particular by the deep cleavage and the evolving conflict between the two major political parties, which distanced people even more