Working Title:

"European Narratives and Euroscepticism in the Western Balkans and the EU"

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Abstract[1]*:*

With an extensive fieldwork based on meso level interviews with political actors (parties and movements) and focus groups, archival material, analysis of electoral manifestoes and organizational (offline and online) documents, this timely book investigates **European narratives (and Euroscepticism) from below**, from the Right and the Left, in **five European countries**: two candidate countries for accession to the EU – North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina- and three member states (one founding member and two that joined the Eu in the 21st century): Italy, Poland and Slovenia. Bringing social movement studies and party politics, with the novel phenomenon of 'movement-parties', and going beyond the notion Euroscepticism, it sheds light on recent developments of Eurocritical frames from below, showing different paths and trajectories of opposition toward Europe.

Keywords: *Euroscepticism; European narratives, frames, Left wing and right wing political parties and movements, illiberalism; interviews, focus groups*

[1] This book is based upon material collected within the European project 2021-2022 'Tackling illiberal narratives and Euroscepticism from below', *Europe for Citizens Program* (number: 625696-CITIZ-1-2020-1-MK-CITIZ-CIV). We are enormously grateful to the Coordinator of the project Dimitar.Nikolovski (dimitar.nikolovski@eurothink.mk) and all the Eurothink.mk team for allowing us to use the data on Macedonia. Chapter 6 is based on the report downloadable at: https://eurothink.mk/home/

Brief description

This book investigates **European narratives (and Euroscepticism) from below**, from the Right and the Left, in five countries in Europe: two candidate-countries for accession to the EU – North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and three member states (one founding member and two that joined the Eu in the 21st century): Italy, Poland and Slovenia.

In spite of the visible differences among these countries, they have something in common: the **presence (emergence or re-emergence) and increase in the recent past of critical 'voices' towards Europe**. While the wave of anti-austerity protests in the early 2010s reemphasized that the time of 'permissive consensus' concerning European integration is long gone (Hooghe & Marks 2009), they were also marked by the 'low visibility' (Flesher Fominaya 2017: 1) or even 'invisibility' (Kaldor & Selchow 2013: 79) of Europe. More recently, activists from across the political spectrum are increasingly advancing their own 'visions of Europe' based on strong European identities (Caiani & Weisskircher 2019). In the second half of the 2010s, mobilization in favor of 'Europe' and against 'nationalism' became a crucial element for many left-wing and liberal activists, especially in the face of the significant increase of far-right parties' electoral strength. Simultaneously, far-right groups organized protests in response to the intensifying 'refugee crisis' (Caiani & Císař 2019, Castelli Gattinara & Pirro 2019). While the support for joining the EU is traditionally high in North Macedonia (around 70%), the past several years have witnessed an increase of right-wing nationalist discursive and physical outbursts, including a violent attack on parliament in April 2017. The adoption of the French proposal, which removed the veto, in June 2022 caused violent outbursts in North Macedonia and further strengthened the Eurosceptic narratives in that country. This is even more complex in BiH, where on paper 77,4 % of the people supports the membership in the EU, but digging deeper, only 54,4 % of the people living in Republika Srpska supports membership (in contrast with people living in Federation of BiH that in 90,1 % support the membership) (Klix, 2022). In parallel, the other three member states included in the study host a high number of Eurosceptic (and illiberal?) voices from the Right and the Left that are in need to be comprehensively understood, beyond just 'Euroscepticism' (della Porta & Caiani 2009).

Moreover, in these five countries, Eurosceptic and nationalist political forces and political parties in recent years have become not only stronger in terms of social penetration but also part of governing coalitions or governments' leaders---such as Gruevski, leader of the 'Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity'

in North Macedonia; Salvini of the Lega party in Italy; Morawiecki of the Law and Justice, PiS, party in Poland, and Janša, from the Slovenian Democratic Party, SDS in Slovenia. Also in Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH) these trajectories can be traced in the ruling ethno-nationalist party led by Dodik, who also serves as a member of the tripartite presidency on state-level (Kočan, 2022).

This book aims at going **beyond Euroscepticism,** analyzing and 'unpacking' a variety of narratives on Europe from below, **at a party and social movement level.**

While Euroscepticism is almost a long-term political phenomenon that developed hand in hand with the development of the European integration project, the most recent critical events (such as the pandemic crisis and the recent Russo-Ukrainian conflict) coupled with the potential enlargement to the Balkans have renewed the attention on it. Euroscepticism nowadays is a diffused phenomenon that involves left and right-wing parties and grassroots movements and is diffused among the public at large. As an example, it is enough to mention the anti-austerity protest back in the 2010s that showed how the so-called "permissive consensus" has transformed itself in a "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe & Marks 2007). Decisions taken at the European level are indeed not anymore the results of closed negotiations among the European elite but are rather subject to the people's scrutiny and criticism. As a matter of fact, references to the European dimension of policy making have become a regular feature of the protest arena. This is true even if the main issue at stake is not simply the European integration process.

Such protests and criticisms come from both the left and the right of the ideological spectrum, while for left wing players Europe has become a 'strange beast' (Caiani and Weisskircher 2021, della Porta 2020) even if they have strengthen their feeling as European, right-wing players exalt the nationalist turn besides recognizing the importance of working and trading together among member states. This is to say that there is a dominant tendency toward the European identity even if the EU is strongly criticised from several perspectives.

All in all, which are the core dimensions of criticism toward the EU? Which narratives do develop from below? How many Europe are criticized and/or envisaged by various types of political collective actors (from political parties and social movement, **from the Left and the Right**)?

Replying to these questions is the central objective of this book that relies on a combination of desk research and fieldwork that aims at mapping the key hotspot of Eurosceptic narratives in

the countries mentioned above. In this book Europe is conceived as an imagined community (Anderson 2020) and the criticism (or favour) toward Europe/the European integration is seen as a multidimensional concept which can imply different visions of Europe (Caiani & Weisskircher 2021) from political, economic, cultural and historical angles.

The focus is on the **frames** and framing on Europe(s) and the integration (or envisaged dis-integration) process, namely on the symbolic construction of the social and political reality from below, from Left-wing and Right-wing social movements and political parties. Theoretically the book bridges insights coming from European studies social movements studies, international relations, and party politics. While the rise of sovereigntism has much to do with the crises of the liberal international order, popular contestation of liberal internationalism has not yet get much traction in the international relations which tends to see states as 'black boxes'. In similar terms, comparative politics has yet to address how changes of the international environment play out in national debates in different countries.

Method-wise, the book adopts a **mixed methods approach**, combining qualitative and quantitative-formalized data: content analysis of electoral manifestoes and leader speeches; in-depth interviews with Eurosceptic and Pro-European political parties, associations and social movements; focus groups with activists, party members, sympathizes and ordinary citizens; comparative historical analysis; secondary analysis of country dataset and documents on Euroscepticism. As a peculiarity, these latter foresee the presence of what the book addresses as 'ordinary citizens' whose participation helps a deeper understanding of the perception of the EU from below. In particular the book relies on: *i.* **57 in-depth semi-structured interviews** with representatives of right wing and left wing Euro-skeptical /Euro-critical civil society associations and political parties, at the local and national level, conducted in our selected countries; *ii.* **30 focus groups** cross our five cases with representatives of social movements, associations, political parties and ordinary citizens, from the Left and the Right ideological spectrum **(for a total of 168 people involved);** a *iii.* formalized and qualitative **content analysis** of (national and European) **electoral manifestos (for a total number of 68 national and European manifestos)** of the main relevant Euro-skeptical political forces in the last two decades in the selected countries; and, finally, *iv.* Archival, secondary material and survey data analysis, for the reconstruction of the political and discursive opportunities of the context (**more than 35 survey and pool data have been used to study stances toward the EU at national and supranational level**). *v.* for some countries, especially when the access to interviews was

more difficult, an in depth analysis of the official webpages and social media outlets of the leaders of euroskeptic political parties integrated the previous data.

The book makes three important contributions: firstly, it **demonstrates in a comparative fashion differences and similarities** in the narratives used to address Europe and in the conceptualization of Euroscepticism. Relying on the analysis of frames and narratives concerning Europe from below expressed by political actors, parties, movements from both the left and the right of the political spectrum and ordinary citizens **five general paths of Euroscepticism are recognizable**: i) poor integration and rise of illiberalism-Euroscepticism in the EU crises context (Slovenia); ii) Euroscepticism beneath the surface (Poland); iii) strong support for the EU coupled with a contemporary hard opposition to the EU (Italy); iv) moderate Europhilia and strong doubts about accession (North Macedonia); and v) between strong Europhilia and moderate to hard Euroscepticism (Federation of BiH).

This comparative analysis is particularly valuable due to the fact that it is able to portrait similarities and differences between East and West (new and old) European countries and between member and non-member states of the EU (or quasi-member states). The varieties of Euroscepticism found between movements and parties in 'older' and 'newer' members and in non-member states confirm that the position toward the EU is a polyform concept (della Porta & Caiani 2009) and that Europe has different meanings depending on the actors who 'construct' it.

Secondly, on the one hand, highlighting the varieties of Euroscepticism, the book formulates some guidelines for promising future research on Euroscepticism, which bridges literatures branches that scarcely communicate among each other: social movement studies and international relations; party politics and European politics. On the other hand, it summarizes a necessarily more complex theoretical framework coupled with more elaborated instrument of analysis that are both able to empirically grasp the phenomenon and understand it in a comprehensive fashion in the light of the various crises, sometimes even 'critical junctures' (della Porta 2022), that recently developed in Europe and beyond (such as the pandemic crisis and the Russo-Ukrainian conflict). Thirdly, it formulates some policy recommendations that complement its theoretical contribution and are addressed to practitioners (e.g.: politicians or policy-makers).

The book is structured around 8 chapters: the first introductive one presents the broad research question, delineates the state of the art of the study of Euroscepticism and Eurosceptic illiberal

narratives in Europe and summarizes the general research design of the work. Chapter from two to six are dedicated to the presentation of the five cases included in the work. Each chapter reports the empirics and the results obtained in the analysis delineating the peculiarities and specificities of each country. The last conclusive chapter, as just mentioned both compares the obtained findings and delineate the above-mentioned analytical guidelines and policy recommendations.

Abstract for each chapter:

Chapter 1. Introduction.

This first chapter explores the evolution of Euroscepticism from its origin in the mass-media until its conceptualization in the academic literature delving deeper in the most recent theoretical developments stressing the multidimensionality of the concept. Once the ground is prepared the chapter connects the academic theory together with the most recent developments in Europe with a special focus on the various crises that hit it (from the austerity crisis, the immigration crisis, moving toward the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and the most recent conflict in Ukraine). In this sub-section the chapter stresses the implications deriving from the handling of the crises in terms of unity among the member states and of diffusion of criticism among parties, movements and the public at large. The chapter then describes what is meant by Euroscepticism from the left and the right of the ideological panorama. The following sub-section analyses the cases under review in this book and proposes an overview of Eurosceptic voices present both in European (East and West) and non-European (or quasi-European) countries. The chapter proposes a review of narratives and frames commonly used to address the EU. Doing that it presents the methods and data used in the empirical part of the book (see above). As for *the case selection* this chapter will underline that these selected countries provide us with a significant variety on several dimensions we consider relevant to explain different frames and narrative on Europe. In fact, beyond having different organizational milieus of Eurosceptic political parties and movements on the Right and the Left, they also offer different political and discursive opportunity structures for Eurocritical forces to locate and justify their opposition (or favour) to Europe. On this regard, for instance, as opposed to Hungary, in Italy, Poland and Slovenia, Eurosceptic parties have not yet consolidated authoritarian types of governance. In similar terms, as opposed to several other candidate countries, in North Macedonia, important parts of the elites and the public are determined to complete the accession process once received the green light by the EU. Moreover, contrary to the North Macedonia, BiH serves as a litmus test for the EU (accession process), as the country is in a deadlock vis-à-vis the EU since 2019. In its final part the chapter presents the structure of the volume.

Chapter 2. Our cases: Setting the contexts, Political and Cultural opportunities for Eurosceptic narratives

Chapter 2 re construct the context of political and cultural-discursive opportunities (also historically driven) in the five countries of the study, against which European narratives are constructed and eventually mobilized. Our cases offer a sufficient variation on the so called 'discursive opportunities and constraints'—which may be relevant for a study focusing on frames on Europe, that is, the 'political-cultural or symbolic opportunities that determine what kind of ideas become visible for the public, resonate with public opinion and are held to be ''legitimate'' by the audience' (Kriesi, 2004, p. 72). Either due to instrumental or cultural reasons, political parties and movements would tend to make their discourses resonant among the populations they address, by linking their own traditional frames with those present in the environment (Snow et al, 1986). There may be some resilience of the historical discourse on Europe/the EU integration in the country- as some frames can resonate better with the 'cultural stock' of a society and traditions- as well as, on the contrary, a higher alignment to the organizations' own norms and values (e.g. Left wing vs. right wing political parties and movements). In fact, developing their frames on Europe, organizations try to make their discourses appealing for different potential supporters, whose 'culture(s)' (on populism, Caiani and Padoan 2023) can limit or emphasize vis a vis the context, the range of usable arguments.

Chapter 3. Poor EU contestation, external shocks and the rise of illiberalism in the Slovenian post-transition context.

This chapter analyses the appeal of the Eurosceptic and Illiberal narratives pushed by the domestic political elites for individual socio-demographic groups. Focusing on Slovenia, the chapter builds on two sets of data – the first set was obtained through desk research, with a focus on the Illiberalism and Euroscepticism in the Slovenian political arena on the basis of party programmes and opinion polls, while the second set recorded the voices of individuals via two focus groups and five interviews about Eurosceptic and Illiberal narratives taking into account both public opinion and advocacy experts. The desk research has shown that Slovenian citizens have until recently been generally supportive of the EU, including the political elites that have not built their political programmes upon relativisation of the EU. However, several of its internal crises have contributed to the perception of the Slovenian citizens that their voice within the EU is weak. This dynamics is – as the research shows – successfully translating into the programmes of Eurosceptic parties as they tend to "call" for independent decision-making. Those trajectories correspond with the results of focus groups and interviews, as the decision-making part was relativised in at least two directions; the first one being the centralism of

Brussels coupled with the progressive ideologies (radical right) and the other being the neoliberal ideology of the 'Verhofstadtian' type supported by political elites (radical left). Unlike the decision-making process, the debate about the National vs. European identity was less problematic, inferring that the Slovenian can coexist with the European identity. Here, the most important lesson was that the European identity worked as an empty signifier, "everything and nothing" at the same time. The chapter concludes delineating three general recommendation for further comparison with the other case studies: i) the potential of the economic narrative, which could facilitate inclusivity via green and sustainable growth; ii) the notion of non-interference with the independent institutions, arbitrariness and prevention of corruption; iii) the deconstruction of the idea of Slovenia as "small and weak" vis-à-vis EU.

Chapter 4. If you scratch the surface: Euroscepticism in Poland.

Euroscepticism in Poland is a very complex topic because the attitude of the Polish society towards the EU is characterized by a high level of ambivalence. According to the opinion polls a great majority of Poles supports the membership of their country in the EU and this level of support is one of the highest among the EU member states. The Polish attitude to the EU, however, becomes substantially more complex and less unequivocally positive if we take into consideration some fundamental issues. Indeed, many Poles subscribe to very particular opinions that could be recognized as Eurosceptic. Moreover, in the recent elections. a substantial majority voted for parties that are soft Eurosceptics (Untied Right dominated by the Law and Justice – PiS – almost 45% in 2019) and hard Eurosceptics (Confederacy 7% in 2019). This ambivalence will be defined in this research of Euroscepticism in Poland within four framework: the socioeconomic, the one concerning sovereignty (including the rule of law), the legitimacy framework (including security) and the cultural framework. This chapter is based on an analysis of recent opinion polls in the country, elites political discourses, and focus groups organized with both exponents of grassroots movements and ordinary citizens.

Chapter 5. From strong support to harsh opposition to the EU: the case of Italy.

This chapter focuses on the case of Italy, it starts presenting the Italian scenario with reference to the diffusion and evolution of Eurosceptic feelings among the wide public. Indeed, the Italian case is the perfect mirror of a country that moved from a strong Euro-enthusiast position toward a diffusely Eurosceptic one. Besides providing a general description of this phenomenon, the first section highlights the multidimensionality of negative stances toward the EU presenting the dimensions of Euroscepticism used in the empirical analysis. More precisely, this work uses

two core dimensions: i) the cultural, political and economic Europe, and the ii) the policy, polity and politics of the EU. After a brief introduction the chapter presents the methods and the data collected. The final section of the chapter presents and discusses the obtained findings besides formulating a conceptual framework within which to place Euroscepticism from below in the country.

Chapter 6. To join or not to join? The case of North Macedonia.

North Macedonia as part of the Western Balkans is, since 2005, a candidate for membership in the EU. The ambitions and mood of the establishment but also of the citizens in North Macedonia over the years moved quite high in the direction of Euro-enthusiasm. Indeed, the EU was seen as a significant thread for the survival of the state, the economic and the identity of the dominant Macedonian ethnic population (including the primarily Albanian minority). However, primarily due to the illiberal approach in politics set in place during the VMRO – DPMNE government (2006 – 2017), a Eurosceptic sentiment diffused among political parties as well as in other social sectors. Such sentiments diffused in the political debate, pleading for alternative models not only for the political system, but also for the state's prospects regarding the EU. During and after VMRO-DPMNE's rule, new Eurosceptic political parties and informal groups have mushroomed throughout the country, holding strong potential for disrupting the path of European integration.

This chapter investigates the development and dynamics of Eurosceptic trends in North Macedonia over the last 5 year. As a matter of fact, this period saw the diffusion of such illiberal Eurosceptic trends via fragmented initiatives outside the governing parties organism. Indeed, the illiberal government style created a basis for the reduction of the sense of social responsibility coupled with the introduction of elements related to the national and identity perspectives into the public discourse. Currently, the primary basis of Euroscepticism is the perceived permissiveness of the European elites towards the Bulgarian demands to include compromises on controversial historical topics within the negotiating structure.

Chapter 7. Anticipating the (European) future while revisiting the (troubled) past: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina

This chapter focuses on the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), a post-conflict Western Balkan country (WBc), where the question on the membership in the European Union (EU) is

not as straightforward as in other WBc. One of the main reasons for such complexity lies in institutional architecture of BiH, which has not only divided the country along ethnic lines but also into two almost identical in size, coequal "entities" – the majority-Serb Republika Srpska (RS) and the mostly Bosniak-Croat Federaton of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). These two entities wield significant powers and sovereignty, and have their own parliaments, governments, and veto rights over all national policies, meaning that BiH as a country – when there is no clear political consensus among the entities on state policies – is perceived as non-functional state.

Stemming from this, the first part of the chapter will contextualise the institutional architecture of BiH and highlight the tension between the two autonomous entities vis-á-vis the historical trajectory of the EU accession process of BiH. In the second part, the chapter will outline the methods and the collected data (i.e., desk research, ten focus groups and interviews in both FBiH and RS with ordinary citizens, which are either active or inactive members of various political parties in the country). Afterwards, the chapter introduces the conceptual framework, scrutinising the core dimension of the cultural, political and economic Europe(s).

The final section of the chapter presents and discusses the findings besides formulating some recommendations for both academic and non-academic sectors.

Chapter 8. Varieties of Euroscepticism: between movements and parties, from the Left and the Right, in new and old member states.

This last conclusive chapter is structured around three main sections. The first one summarizes the obtained findings making a comparison between the countries included in the analysis. It stresses differences and similarities between member and non-member states and East/South and West European countries.

The second section provides a theoretical reflection aiming at bridging branches of the literature that scarcely communicate among each other with a particular focus on the lack of communication between international relations, political parties and social movement literature. In doing that the chapter contributes to a conceptualization of Euroscepticism from below which identifies **five general paths**: i) poor integration and rise of illiberalism-Euroscepticism in the EU crises context (Slovenia); ii) Euroscepticism beneath the surface (Poland); iii) strong support for the EU coupled with a contemporary hard opposition to the EU (Italy); iv) moderate Europhilia and strong doubts about accession (North Macedonia); and v) between strong Europhilia and moderate to hard Euroscepticism (Federation of BiH). The third and final

section the chapter delineates some directions for further investigation in the field. It also also reflects on some recommendations that are particularly aimed at practitioners (e.g.: political entrepreneurs or policy-makers) to either normalize or counterpose Eurosceptic narratives developing around Europe.

Short bios of the authors

Manuela Caiani: Manuela Caiani is Professor in Political Science at the Scuola Normale Superiore, affiliated scholar at the Cosmos Center for Social Movement Studies (SNS) and associated faculty at the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) in Vienna. Her research focuses on Social Movements and Europeanization; Far Right Politics; Extremism online; Right Wing and Left Wing Populism; Movement-parties; Qualitative methods of social research. Since 2019 she is Convenor of the Standing Group 'Political Participation and Social Movements' of the Italian Association for Political Science (SISP) and since 2021 Co-director of the International Observatory on Social Cohesion and Inclusion-OCIS, https://osservatoriocoesionesociale.eu/.. She has directed and collaborated in various international projects (Horizon 2021; Volskwagen Stiftung; Europe for Citizens Program; FP4, FP5, FP7; PRIN; Marie Curie; Research Grant Jubilaumsfonds, ONB; Doctoral TRA Fellowship, START Center, 2009, University of Maryland). She published in, among others, the following journals: Social Movement Studies, EJPR, Mobilization, Acta Politica, West European Politics, Government and Opposition; European Union Politics, South European Society and Politics, RISP and for the following publishers: Oxford University press, Ashgate, Palgrave, Routledge. Current project AUTHLIB, Neoautoritarianism in Europe (Horizon 2022-2025).

Benedetta Carlotti: Benedetta Carlotti is a researcher at the Free University of Bolzano – Bozen in political science where she teaches Comparative Politics, Public Policy and European Integration. She received her PhD in 2018 in political science and sociology from the Scuola Normale Superiore with a thesis on political opposition within the European parties. Her research focuses on Euroscepticism, the European Union, populist populism (in all its declinations), social media analysis and qualitative and quantitative methods for research. Among other, she has published for Palgrave, Italian Review of Political Science, Journal of Contemporary European Studies, European Political Science Review.

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Maria Wincławska is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Political and Security Studies of the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. Her main research interests concentrate on political parties, party organizations, party members, and party systems,

as well as research methods. She published monographs or in edited volumes among others with Palgrave, Scholar, L'Harmattan. And in Journals, such as: “Problems of Post-communism”, „Romanian Journal of Political Science”, “Czech Journal of Political Science”, and „Polish Political Science Yearbook”.

Faris Kočan: Faris Kočan is a researcher at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences. His research is focused on the Europeanisation of the Western Balkans and the role of the European integration in addressing the troubled past of post-Yugoslav space. He received his PhD in 2021 in European Studies with a thesis on the impact of Europeanisation on the formulation of the ethnic identity of Bosnian Serbs and the political identity of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He has published, among others, in the Nationalities Papers, Ethnopolitics, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, and contributed chapters to monographs published in international publishing houses (Peter Lang, Ibidem). He has been working on many research projects, including those funded by Horizon 2020, JM/Erasmus+ and Slovenian Research Council.

Adam Balcer is program director of the Jan Nowak Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe and lecturer at the Centre for East European Studies at the University of Warsaw and national researcher of the European Council on Foreign Relations. Previously, he worked, among others, at the Centre for Eastern Studies(head of project), demosEUROPA- Center for European Strategy(program director) and as a foreign policy advisor in the office of the President of the Republic of Poland. Author of three books, numerous articles, and reports on Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Black Sea countries. He contributed chapters to monographs published in international publishing houses (Lexington Press, Ibidem, Peter Lang, Nomos, Nordic Academic Press, Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung, Angelo Longo Editore, Edizioni Nuova Cultura) His reports, commentaries and policy papers have been published by main international think thanks (for instance, European Council on Foreign Relations, German Marshall Fund, Centre for European Policy Studies, European Policy Centre, Carnegie). He has been working on many research projects, including those funded by Horizon 2020, Erasmus+ and Europe for Citizens.

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”European Narratives and Euroscepticism in the Western Balkans and the EU”

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Abstract[2]:

With an extensive fieldwork based on meso level interviews with political actors (parties and movements) and focus groups, archival material, analysis of electoral manifestoes and organizational (offline and online) documents, this timely book investigates **European narratives (and Euroscepticism) from below**, from the Right and the Left, in **five European countries**: two candidate countries for accession to the EU – North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina- and three member states (one founding member and two that joined the Eu in the 21st century): Italy, Poland and Slovenia. Bringing social movement studies and party politics, with the novel phenomenon of ‘movement-parties’, and going beyond the notion Euroscepticism, it sheds light on recent developments of Eurocritical frames from below, showing different paths and trajectories of opposition toward Europe.

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Chapter 1.

European Narratives and Euroscepticism: An Introduction

Abstract

This chapter examines the evolution of Euroscepticism from its origins in the mass media to its conceptualization in the academic literature and delves into recent theoretical developments, emphasizing the multidimensionality of the concept. Academic theory is then related to the various crises that have afflicted the EU (the austerity crisis, the immigration crisis, the Covid 19 pandemic, and the conflict in Ukraine), highlighting the impact of the handling of the crises in terms of unity among member states and the diffusion of criticism among parties, movements, and the general public in the old EU member states and the candidate countries in the Balkans. Special attention is given to the varieties of 'Eurosceptic' voices and the comparative dimension, with the proposal of some analytical guidelines to locate them: across political parties and social movements, the Left and the Right, as well as various member or potential members states (i.e., Eastern/Western/Southeastern Europe). The chapter also illustrates the mixed method approach and data used in the study. The final section presents the structure of the volume.

The best way to fully stabilize the Balkans is to permanently anchor the region to the European family.

Giorgia Meloni, leader of the radical right political party FdI and Italian Prime Minister, at a ministerial meeting on the Western Balkans, April 3rd 2023[3]

Introduction

As the quotation at the beginning of the chapter shows, the entry of the Western Balkans into the EU "family" has become an important issue for old member states, particularly in light of the current Russo-Ukrainian crisis. The accession of Western Balkans was described as a priority for the EU by the Italian Foreign minister and vice-president of the Italian Council of ministers Tajani.

However, Europe, as well as the European integration, are contested concepts, whose meanings are different for different actors, as well testified by the massive pro-EU protest in Moldova brings tens of thousands of citizens to streets in May 2023[i]. They change in time and become a terrain of struggle and contestation within and across countries, justifying the (pro/contra)

[3] See the full video of Meloni's intervention at Meloni: "Ancorare i Balcani alla famiglia europea" - Il Sole 24 ORE.

positions toward the European integration process itself, giving birth to different collective identities and political action(s).

This book investigates European narratives (and Euroscepticism) from below, from the Right and the Left, in five countries in Europe: two candidate-countries for accession to the EU – North Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and three member states (one founding member and two that joined the Eu in the 21st century): Italy, Poland and Slovenia[ii].

This comparative analysis is particularly valuable since it portrays similarities and differences among Eastern/Central/Southeastern and Western Europe, as well as member and non-member states (or quasi-member states)—filing an empirical gap on this respect—as well as similarities and differences across various collective actors (political parties and social movements), something also rarely compared. Despite the visible differences among these countries, they have in fact something in common: the presence (emergence or re-emergence) and increase in the recent past of critical 'voices' towards Europe, which not necessarily entails Euro-skepticism (or a rejection of Europe) tour court. While the wave of anti-austerity protests in the early 2010s reemphasized that the time of 'permissive consensus' concerning European integration is over (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), they were also marked by the 'low visibility' (Flesher Fominaya, 2017, p. 1) or even 'invisibility' (Kaldor & Selchow, 2013, p. 79) of Europe. More recently however, organizations (both political parties and movements, on the Right and the Left) from across the political spectrum are increasingly advancing their own 'visions of Europe' based on strong European identities (Caiani & Weisskircher, 2019). In the second half of the 2010s, mobilization in favor of "Europe" and against "nationalism" became a crucial element for many left-wing and liberal activists, especially in the face of significant increase in the electoral strength of far-right parties. Simultaneously, far-right groups organized protests in response to the intensifying "refugee crisis" (Caiani & Císař, 2019; Castelli Gattinara & Pirro, 2019). Moreover, Euroscepticism seems to have become a trans-national issue.

While support for joining the EU was traditionally high in North Macedonia (around 70%), the last years have seen an increase in right-wing nationalist outbursts, including a violent attack on the Macedonian parliament in April 2017. The adoption of the French proposal to remove the veto in June 2022 caused violent outbursts in North Macedonia and further strengthened Eurosceptic narratives in that country. This is even more complex in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH), where on paper 77.4% of people support EU membership, but in Republika Srpska only 54.4% of people support EU membership, whereas in the Federation of

BiH that figure is 90,1% (Klix, 2022). In parallel, the other three countries included in the study (Poland, Slovenia and Italy) have significant anti-EU sentiment coming from both the Right and the Left, and this must be comprehensively analyzed in a manner that moves beyond the simple framework of "Euroscepticism" (della Porta & Caiani, 2009).

Moreover, in these five countries, Eurosceptic and nationalist political forces and political parties in recent years have become not only stronger in terms of social penetration but also part of governing coalitions or governments' leaders---such as Gruevski, leader of the 'Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity' in North Macedonia; Salvini of the Lega party in Italy; Morawiecki of the Law and Justice, PiS, party in Poland, and Janša, from the Slovenian Democratic Party, SDS in Slovenia. Also in Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH) these trajectories can be traced in the ruling ethno-nationalist party led by Dodik, who also serves as a member of the tripartite presidency on state-level (Kočan, 2022). **This book aims at going beyond Euroscepticism, analyzing and 'unpacking' a variety of narratives on Europe from below, at the level of parties and social movements.**

While Euroscepticism is almost a long-term political phenomenon that developed hand in hand with the development of the European integration project, the most recent critical events (such as the pandemic crisis and the recent Russo-Ukrainian conflict) coupled with the potential enlargement to the Balkans have renewed the attention on it. Euroscepticism nowadays is a diffused phenomenon that involves left and right-wing parties and grassroots movements and is diffused among the public at large. As an example, it is enough to mention the anti-austerity protest back in the 2010s that showed how the permissive consensus has transformed itself in a "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe & Marks 2007). Decisions taken at the European level are indeed not anymore the results of closed negotiations among the European elite but are rather subject to the people's scrutiny and criticism. As a matter of fact, references to the European dimension of policy making have become a regular feature of the protest arena (in struggles on labour, women, environment, territorial independentism, etc., della Porta 2020b). This is true even if the main issue at stake is not simply the European integration process (on environmental issues, see Caiani & Lubarda 2023).

Such protests and criticisms come from both the left and the right of the ideological spectrum, while for left wing players Europe has become a 'strange beast' (Caiani and Weisskircher 2021,

della Porta 2020) even if they have strengthen their feeling as European, right-wing players exalt the nationalist turn besides recognizing the importance of working and trading together among member states. This is to say that there is a dominant tendency toward the European identity even if the EU is strongly criticised from several perspectives.

All in all, what are the core dimensions of criticism toward the EU? Which narratives develop from below? How many different notions of Europe are criticized or envisaged by various types of political collective actors (from political parties and social movements, from the Left and the Right)?

Replying to these questions is the central objective of this book that draws on a combination of desk research and fieldwork that aims at mapping the key hotspot of Eurosceptic narratives in the countries mentioned above. In this book Europe is conceived as an imagined community (Anderson 2020) and the criticism (or favour) toward Europe/the European integration is seen as a multidimensional concept (which not necessarily entails rejectionism) (see table 1.1) and which can imply different visions of Europe (Caiani & Weisskircher 2021) from political, economic, cultural and historical angles. It can be a disobedient Euroscepticism, understood as a 'fourth way' of Euroscepticism. The focus is on the **frames** and framing on Europe(s) and the integration (or envisaged dis-integration) process, namely on the symbolic construction of the social and political reality from below, from Left-wing and Right-wing social movements and political parties. Theoretically the book bridges insights coming from European studies social movements studies, international relations, and party politics. While the rise of sovereigntism has much to do with the crises of the liberal international order, popular contestation of liberal internationalism has not yet get much traction in the international relations which tends to see states as 'black boxes'. In similar terms, comparative politics has yet to address how changes of the international environment play out in national debates in different countries.

In particular, an analysis of public discourses allows us to address soft pressures on European integration, expressed through the varying beliefs and expectations of national actors (della Porta & Caiani, 2009). If traditional theories of European integration see it as driven by national (mainly economic) interests; a framing approach (also in international relations) emphasizes instead the role of national debates on European issues. In this sense, Europeanization may proceed through the work of norm entrepreneurs that adopt and adapt European frames (della Porta & Caiani, 2009). In order to account for these phenomena, we will analyze how Europe

is framed from below, in the public discourses. As for the **case selection**, our countries have been chosen since they provide us with sufficient variation on dimensions that we consider relevant to explain Euroscepticism from below. Indeed, beyond having different organizational milieus of Eurosceptic political parties and movements on the Right and the Left (McCarthy & Zald, 1996), they also offer different *'political opportunity structures'*[iii] for Eurocritical forces to locate and justify their opposition (or favor) to Europe (Tarrow & McAdam, 2010; della Porta & Caiani, 2009). Namely, the set of opportunities and constraints of the institutional structure and political culture of the political systems in which these groups operate (e.g., Tarrow, 1994; Koopmans, 2005).

In other words, **our research design includes two comparative dimensions**: cross-national and cross- organizational type. Cross-nationally, the design includes five national case studies of Italy, Slovenia, Macedonia, Poland and B&H. The first choice was to compare countries where our main object of research is present: namely the European integration as a salient (or increasingly salient) topic and 'voices' from below on that[iv]. Second, this set of countries offer different political and discursive opportunities for Euroscepticism to be raised and mobilized ('older' member vs. 'newer' or 'not yet' ones; countries with a resurgence of nationalist actors and right wing actors in power; geographical West/East/Balkans variation; different (consensual vs. conflictual) elites' political discourse vis a vis the European integration; historically determined traditions and legacy toward the European integration process and Europe, etc. see chapter 2 for details), which can determine a more open or closed context for degrees of Euroscepticism and its varieties (see also della Porta & Caiani, 2009). For instance, in Italy, Poland and Slovenia – unlike in Hungary – Eurosceptic parties have not yet consolidated authoritarian types of governance. Similarly, in North Macedonia, in contrast to several other candidate countries, important elite and public forces are determined to complete the accession process once it is approved by the EU. Moreover, contrary to the North Macedonia, BiH serves as a litmus test for EU accession processes, as the country has been in a deadlock vis-à-vis EU membership since 2019 (Istinomjer, 2022). Third, this research project focuses on both political parties and non-party organizations, including radical groups (see chapter 2), from both the Right and Left of the political spectrum. These countries have been chosen as they present various civil society organizational milieus (in terms of presence of Left/Right actors; parties vs. movements; institutionalized vs. more informal groups mobilizing on the EU, etc.), within which various frames on Europe and forms (more focused on a political, cultural and/or economic dimension can emerge (Caiani 2019). While for some organizations

Europe may imply a more positive balance of opportunities (e.g. adding new channels to the traditional tools of politics), other groups in the same country may stand to lose influence[v].

Using a combination of desk and field research, this book maps the key hotspots of Eurosceptic narratives in the above-mentioned countries. **Methodologically**, the book adopts a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative-formalized data; content analysis of electoral manifestoes and leader speeches; in-depth interviews with members of Eurosceptic and Pro-European political parties, associations and social movements; focus groups with activists, party members, sympathizers and ordinary citizens; comparative historical analysis; and secondary analysis of country datasets and documents on Euroscepticism. It is to be noted that the focus groups saw the presence of what the book addresses as 'ordinary citizens' whose participation provides a deeper understanding of the perception of the EU from below.

Relying on the analysis of frames and narratives concerning Europe from below constructed by political actors, parties, movements from both the left and the right of the political spectrum and ordinary citizens, this book points out five main paths and trajectories of opposition towards Europe, exemplified by our cases, that can interact with and enrich the classical categories for interpreting Euroscepticism. They are: *i.* poor integration and the rise of illiberalism-Euroscepticism in the context of EU crises (Slovenia); *ii.* Euroscepticism beneath the surface (Poland); *iii.* strong support coupled with firm opposition to the EU (Italy); *iv.* moderate Europhilia and strong doubts about accession (North Macedonia); *v.* between strong Europhilia (Federation of BiH) and moderate to hard Euroscepticism (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The varieties of Euroscepticism found between movements and parties in old and non-member states from West, Eastern Europe and Balkans confirm that positions toward the EU (and therefore Euroscepticism) is a polyform concept (Caiani & della Porta, 2009) and that Europe has different meanings depending on the actor who 'construct' it.

Beyond the added value of the comparative analysis across several analytical dimensions, highlighting the varieties of Euroscepticism, this volume has also the merit to formulate some guidelines for promising future research on the topic (also methodological, with the support for qualitative methods in studying Euroscepticism), which attempts to bridge literatures branches that scarcely communicate among each other: social movement studies and international relations; party politics and European politics. Finally, it formulates some policy recommendations that complement its theoretical contribution.

1.1.Euroscepticism: an old concept with new emerging features

Euroscepticism is a media-driven concept that emerged in the 1980s in the British context, at a time when the British Conservatives, following a functionalist approach, were harshly opposed to the construction of the supranational market (Harmsen & Spiering, 2004). The now famous Margaret Thatcher Bruges Speech contributed to moving opposition toward the process of European integration from "side-show to center stage" (Holmes, 2016, p. 1). Margaret Thatcher was indeed the booster for the development of Euroscepticism within the British party system and among the society at large, enabling the sentiment to spillover from the political sphere to academia and the media. While Euroscepticism was initially conceived as a marginal phenomenon that was not of significant interest to the scientific community, the progress of the integration process brought increased attention and resulted in struggles for its conceptualization, use and normative characteristics (Flood, 2002; Carlotti, 2021). Many scholarly works recognize the Maastricht Treaty as a turning point for Euroscepticism's evolution (Ray, 1999; Taggart, 2006; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2013; Usherwood & Startin, 2013; Brack & Startin, 2015; Sørensen, 2004), a treaty that transformed the Community of Member States into a Union of States with 'shared objective and values' (art. 1 of the TEU). Alongside formal changes in the supranational structure of European extravagant institutional arrangements, the EU's increased competencies in the domains of social, economic, legal, environmental and foreign affairs blurred the distinction between national and supranational power relationships. After Maastricht, the EU integration project increased in salience among the public at large and was easily capitalized on by parties opposing it (de Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Vasilopoulou, 2017). From Maastricht onwards, the literature begins to refer to the EU democratic deficit, citing the passage from 'permissive consensus' to 'constrained dissensus' as its major cause. In other words, if the integration project was initially the result of coordination and agreement between the elite, coupled with a substantial consensus and even lack of awareness from the public at large, none of this remains the case after the Maastricht period. Political dissensus spread, public conflict and awareness awakened, and "the elite became vulnerable. And, as they became vulnerable, so too did their projects, and that for Europe" (Mair, 2013, p. 114).

If Euroscepticism was initially a residual phenomenon expressed by scattered and residual Eurosceptic formations, a sort of "grit in the system that occurs when political systems are built

and develop" (Uskerwhood & Startin, 2013), the era of "constrained dissensus" coupled with the EU evolution phases (e.g.: the monetary union, enlargement to the East, or negotiation for the constitutional Treaty) resulted in an increased number of Eurosceptic voices and the widespread diffusion of Euroscepticism among citizens. Recent years have seen an increase in this trend, resulting from factors such as the Eurozone crisis, the EU's inability to handle the immigration crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Russo-Ukrainian war, which exposed the EU's inability to take a strong and solid position. Indeed, nowadays scholars no longer conceive of Euroscepticism as a passing phenomenon, but as something that is here to stay and that "moved from the realm of political phenomenon to constituent element of the European political sphere" (FitzGibbon et al., 2017, p. 3).

Euroscepticism was in its origin studied through the lenses of single-case studies that used a national perspective to investigate Euroscepticism in specific countries (Ward, 1996; Benoit, 1998; Evans, 1998; Aspinwall, 2000; Sitter, 2001). Nowadays, studies on Euroscepticism follow a broad comparative approach and have become a fully-fledged body of literature (Flood, 2009; Mudde, 2012; Brack & Startin, 2015). This body of literature can be easily split in two part: firstly, the one that deals with the conceptualization of Euroscepticism, what it means, which dimensions it touches and how it is to be characterized. Secondly, the one that aims at understanding its causes.

1.1.2 Euroscepticism between social movements and political parties: toward a unified approach?

With the increasing politicization of European integration in the 1990s, political scientists began to study how the process was framed by its opponents, and by political parties in particular. This subfield came to be defined by the concept of "Euroscepticism", or "contingent or qualified opposition as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" (Taggart, 1998, p. 366). Further distinctions have been proposed, such as the classical one that divides Euroscepticism into soft (contingent or qualified opposition to European integration) and hard (outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration) (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 1998). Later, Kopecky and Mudde (2002) distinguished more precisely between a general approval of the idea of European integration and specific support for the EU in its current form. For them, "Euroenthusiasts" support European integration both in theory and in practice, while

"Eurorejects" disapprove of both the European idea and its reality. In this paradigm, "Eurosceptics" exist between these two poles and favor the idea of European integration but reject its current form. Recently, other scholars have analyzed various elements of Euroscepticism, disentangling cultural, legitimacy, socioeconomic, and sovereignty frames (Pirro & van Kessel, 2018).

Many other classificatory schemes have been put forward, such that it might become rather difficult to grasp differences and similarities among critical actors pushing some scholars to identify Euroscepticism as, for example, a "Cinderella concept" (Caruso, 2016); to reject it in favor of more traditional concepts of "political opposition" (Carlotti, 2021); or to identify the phenomenon of the "mainstreaming of Euroscepticism" to rationalize critical stances expressed by mainstream parties traditionally conceived of as supporters of the EU (Vasilopoulou, 2013).

When moving from the definition and conceptualization of Euroscepticism to research on its explanations, the literature evolves hand in hand with the development of the EU itself. Key findings to explain the presence of Euroscepticism might be found in the distinction between the Sussex and North Carolina School (Carlotti, 2021). The former was mainly focused on definitional efforts, studying the phenomenon by relying on qualitative methods and attributing it to strategic or tactical competition coupled with ideology (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2003; 2004; 2008). The North Carolina School, on the contrary, was less interested in defining the phenomenon than in understanding its diffusion, which it did by relying on quantitative tools and recognizing ideology as the central element explaining Euroscepticism. Consequently, according to the North Carolina school Euroscepticism is a phenomenon typical of those political forces closer to either Green-Alternative-Libertarian or Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist ideologies (see Hooghe & Marks, 2007; 2018). More recent studies point toward the impact on Euroscepticism of endogenous (e.g.: ideology) and exogenous factors (e.g.: contextual or institutional) (Usherwood, 2017), or the role of European integration on the diffusion of the phenomenon. As Pirro and Van Kessel (2018) point out, the elements shaping the phenomenon of Euroscepticism are to be seen as various in nature, ranging from explanations concerning cultural cleavages, EU legitimacy, socioeconomic variables, and the distinction between national and supranational tendencies.

While scholars of party politics focused predominantly on far-right Euroscepticism, social movement scholars devoted more attention to the left. These movement-oriented scholars

highlight the constructive dimension of criticism of the EU and problematize concepts like 'scepticism' and 'rejectionism'. For instance, 'Euroalternativism' allows for 'pro-systemic opposition' that supports deepening EU integration in a more social-democratic way (e.g., della Porta & Caiani 2007, FitzGibbon 2013). Della Porta and Caiani (2009) highlight 'critical Europeanists', or movements that approve of European integration in principle but reject specific EU policies. In particular conceptualizations have been elaborated within social movement literature which unpack Euroscepticism by intersecting the axes of criticism in respectively (European) polity, politics and policies, and showing that each dimension can imply in turn a different positioning on a economic, cultural and /or political Europe (della Porta and Caiani 2007b). Unsurprisingly, left-wing activists' perceptions of the EU became more critical during the wave of anti-austerity protests, which scholars try to understand through concepts such as 'radical Eurocritical attitudes' (Milan 2020) and 'Euro-disenchantment' (Zamponi 2020).

However, some scholars have noted positive identification with Europe in social movements on both the left and the far right. Caiani and Weisskircher (2020) describe how their 'visions of Europe' imply: some form of cooperation between European states that do not necessarily support the current trajectory of EU development, and typically include significant criticism. Still, these visions imply a positive identification with a European identity, or even integration, and therefore go beyond mere rejection.

This perspective mirrors recent scholarship on far-right parties: the Rassemblement National (known as the Front National until 2018), it is argued, uses European integration as an 'ideological resource' to draw legitimacy in public discourse, linking Europe to values such as sovereignty, self-rule, and autonomy (Lorimer 2020a, see also Lorimer 2020b). Similarly, Pytlas (2020) argues that the Rassemblement National, Alternative für Deutschland, and Fidesz should not be regarded merely as Eurorejectionists, but rather notes that these parties draw on counter-European claims as a 'tactical resource' that links their nativist ideology with positive references to Europe. In sum, a number of scholars have coined terms or identified concepts defined by simultaneous criticism of the EU and positive identification with Europe (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 here

This conceptualization (i.e. visions of Europe) is compelling because it acknowledges the existence of strong European identities across the political spectrum. Therefore, positive orientations toward Europe are not merely opportunistic or strategic – as is often assumed, particularly by the literature on far-right actors – but deeply embedded in activists' mindsets. Both left-wing and liberal movements as well as far-right groups share the desire to defend "Europe" from what (or who) they regard as threats. But while this defensiveness may be some groups' raison d'être, it still allows for sharp criticism of the current state of European integration. These concepts also highlight key differences between European identities among left-wing and liberal movements and those of the far right. Similarly to the distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary populism, left-wing and liberal movements tend to rely on inclusionary visions of Europe, while far-right movements generally opt for exclusionary visions (Caiani & Weisskircher, 2021).

The methods and approaches for the analysis of Euroscepticism have generally followed a strict division between party politics literature and social movement studies. Party politics and Euroscepticism have mainly focused on political parties and organizations, generally disregarding the opposition to the EU stemming from beyond the sphere of political competition (e.g.: among citizens). These fields have mainly relied on theories of party competition, challengers, the mainstream and incumbency to explain the phenomenon of Euroscepticism. In terms of methods, they have mainly relied on surveys of electors, expert surveys, party manifestoes and content analysis (e.g. Brack, 2020; Pertović et al., 2022). On the other hand, the literature on social movements, looking at Europe and 'Europeanization' (e.g. della Porta & Caiani, 2009), have mainly focused on left-wing progressive social movements, neglecting far-right politics (Castelli Gattinara & Froio, 2022, p.201), paying more attention to the context of Euroscepticism and the reasons and motivations for it, such as the ways in which social movements formulate claims, frames, and justifications about European institutions. They have also have focused on positions toward Europe and on the Europeanization of social movements in terms of action strategies, frames, and organization. Methodologically, the literature on social movements has used more qualitative tools of data collection such as frame analysis, protest event analysis, in-depth interviews, and giving more leverage to the 'agents'. In this book, we try to build bridges between these two schools. In this sense, the question becomes: Talking *about* Euroscepticism or talking *with* Eurosceptics?

In this book, we apply these concepts (see table 1.1, which go beyond the concept of Euro-skepticism) to our five country cases with a presence of left wing and right-wing movements and parties' mobilization and discourses on European issues: Italy, Poland, Slovenia, B&H and Macedonia. As main 'explanations' of the positions toward the EU, we took the frames elaborated by the various political actors, which in turn can be influenced by the context and the characteristics of the actors (e.g. ideology, traditions, etc.). In particular, frames are defined as cognitive instruments that allow making sense of the external reality (Snow & Benford, 1988). They are very often produced by organizational leadership, which provides the necessary background within which individual activists can locate their actions (Snow et al, 1986; Gamson, 1988; Snow & Benford, 1988). Looking at frames on Europe (see the method section) in this book we aim to go beyond the mere notion of Euroscepticism (Caiani, 2023) and of surveying of 'degrees' of it, while emphasizing the agency of various actors in constructing their Europe desired and opposed.

1.2 Euroscepticism and economic, cultural, political, and health crises

The EU crises – the Eurozone crisis, migration crisis, Brexit, the rise of illiberalism, the Covid-19 pandemic, energy crisis and Ukraine war – are external shocks that also reveal specific dysfunctionalities of the EU (Zeitlin & Nicoli, 2020). Some of these crises (as the Covid-19 one) could be understood as 'critical junctures' (della Porta 2022) that might turn European integration – understood as a process that "attempts to reconcile grandiose visions for the future of the Europe with complicated national attitudes towards unity" (Cohen & Dootalieva, 2022) – away from the "ever deeper and larger" union path set by supranational-centralist institutional bias, or, alternatively, be also a push toward the development of a new Europe (more inclusive? More democratic?). The term critical juncture is related to the theory of historical institutionalism, which highlights the institutional embeddedness of decision-making in the EU (Peterson, 1995). According to this perspective, critical junctures are specific points in time when there is a shared interest on the part of several actors for broader institutional-political change. Critical junctures are part of the political process that include the "locking in" of interests and views in institutional settings. As this locking-in involves "grand bargains" on several related issues, these interests and views can be difficult to change. This is especially true as institutionalization transforms new patterns of behavior into standard practice. These preferences finally become embedded, inextricably linked to, and codetermined by, the historical-institutional setting.

From a social movement perspective, protests can also be critical junctures**,** producing abrupt changes which develop contingently and become path-dependent (della Porta, 2022). Great transformation, great recession, and great regression have been frequently used as short-hand terms to characterize the period following the financial breakdown in 2008. As for contentious politics in these times, we frequently hear references to crisis as well as 'eventful protests' (della Porta, 2020), as mobilisations producing themselves new political identities, networks among organizations and new frames. We think that this can also be applied to European politics and mobilisations around it. With the aim of mapping some relevant questions, this book will refer to research we conducted on European narratives, and on recent opposition from below (from political parties to social movements) to the process of European integration and Europe itself, while taking into consideration the concept of critical junctures.

According to Schmitter (2012) and Zeitlin et al. (2019), EU crises were more than typical critical junctions that in the past led to new grand bargains but were more of broader political crises that threatened to derail the European integration project from its historical trajectory. The EU crises have prompted some to claim that since 1990, European integration has gone too far beyond the market integration of the European Economic Community. The European Union has become a superstate, gaining power and authority over core state powers (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2018) such as monetary affairs (Eurozone), borders, and citizenship (Schengen). The euro currency and Schengen Agreement were the most important projects of the Maastricht Treaty (along with the Eastern enlargement), and these were precisely the policy areas were crises subsequently occurred. This was due to a partial transfer of sovereignty that resulted in half-built policies and governance structures, lacking systems of enforcement of responsibility, structures of solidarity to address imbalances between member states, and a lack of (democratic) accountability (Jones et al., 2016).

It was not just decision-makers that were blamed for the integrationist mood, but also theories of European integration itself. In particular, the three grand theories of the European integration – neofunctionalism, liberal governmentalism and post-functionalism – have been charged with pro-integration bias (Börzel & Risse, 2018a). Those theories supported power transfer to supranational technocratic authorities (neofunctionalism), bargaining in closed intergovernmental settings (liberal governmentalism) and dismissed criticism by pointing at the actual – often permissive – levels of contestation (post-functionalism). While all three theories

recognized the possibility of disintegration – for neofunctionalism, this is spillback, for liberal governmentalism, blocking of decisions taken at EU level, and for post-functionalism, re-politization of community authorities – such options have played a marginal role in these theories (Börzel & Risse, 2018a). However, research into the EU crises does not necessarily support the charges against the liberal progressive "grand trio" of European integration theories, as those theories can in fact help to shed light on specific differences in the way the EU responded to crises, demonstrating at least a more nuanced role of European integration.

Schimmelfennig (2018) agrees that the euro and Schengen crises were triggered by external shocks, revealing internal dysfunctionalities of the EU and causing distributional issues and politicization. In the case of the euro crisis, it was the lack of control over fiscal policy and the absence of lender of last resort that triggered tensions over who will pay for the bailout and for the necessary structural adjustment; in the migration crisis, it was lack of control over the accomplishment of the first country of entrance and disagreement on the distribution of burdens and migration policy in general (ibid.). However, the fact that there were different responses to these crises – further integration following the Eurozone crisis and governmental response to the migration crisis – demonstrates the relevance of the three grand theories. In the case of the eurozone crisis, institutional legacy, or the strong interdependence between countries as reflected in capital market pressures and the absence of a viable exit strategy, coupled with the capacity of existing institutions such as of the ECB to act, created a "neofunctionalist moment" that included new institutional developments, such as the decision by ECB to do "whatever it takes" to save the euro, the introduction of new financial stability support mechanisms, fiscal rules and the banking union (ibid.). Those developments went against arguments that the euro is "a one size fits none policy", and that structural economic imbalances are too big to be overcome, which risks further economic and political crises.

In contrast, in the migration crisis, countries were able to act effectively on their own by closing their borders while EU-level institutions such as the Schengen regime, the European Asylum Support Office and Frontex continued to play a rather weak role. Liberal governmental theory demonstrated how asymmetric effects of the Schengen crisis on different countries and persistence of several countries with the status quo created a bargaining situation where there was insufficient opportunity for more substantial policy change, such as an additional authority transfer to the EU level (Biermann et al., 2017). As a result, asylum policy largely remained in the hands of member states and the common denominator of stopping immigrants at the external

borders of the EU in return for mobility within the Schengen area was retained. In addition, post functionalism further explained the euro and the Schengen crises from the perspective of variations in patterns of identity politics (Börzel & Risse, 2018b): in the euro crisis, depoliticization of the monetary policy initially created even more politicization even though discourses of order, rules and solidarity ultimately prevailed; in the Schengen crisis, however, nationalist and identity discourse prevailed and underpinned corresponding institutional and policy developments.

Brexit and the rise of illiberalism can also be addressed by the grand theories (Hooghe & Marks, 2019). The rise of illiberalism has been explained by a weak definition of EU competencies within the treaties (e.g. ambiguities concerning Article 7 procedure) and a weak conditionality in the post-accession period. This contrasts with the strict rules on common policies such as the market, where limited violations have been recorded. Moreover, EU institutions did act as an important lever to support domestic opposition to authoritarian trends. As for Brexit, it has either been explained as a mistake, or in terms of insignificant change for the UK concerning its specific position in the EU.

At a different level of analysis, the criticism of pro-integration bias has pointed to the replacement of the traditional party cleavages (left vs right) with new transnational ones (globalism vs sovereigntism), based on opposition to trade, integration, and migration, all of which have put the EU at the center of politicization (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). EU crises acted as catalysts for growing discontent, with liberal-centrist elites repeating the benefits of pro-integration bias and for growing politicization by previously skewed and marginalized leftist and conservative political forces (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019). However, research demonstrates that the eurozone crisis was politicized especially in Southern member states, where traditional cleavages still existed to a larger extent, while the migration crisis was politicized in the North in line with the new cleavages (ibid.). Moreover, the EU response can be seen as in line with emerging political cleavages, as the Eurozone crisis finally led to further integration, while the migration crisis did not result in any changes from the nationalist status quo. An exception to the politicization pattern is the Central and East European countries, which are considered as such due to the underdeveloped nature of their party systems, to which crises brought some structure (ibid.). Other literature also indicated that the spread of contestation of the EU across the Union (Rooduijn et al., 2014) had to do more with political tactics such as an attempt to

challenge established parties (de Vries & Hobolt, 2020) or even rhetoric (Rodi et al., 2023) rather than fundamentally challenging the rationale of the European integration.

Finally, the EU as a political system responded to growing contestation, and EU institutions themselves increasingly evolved into political actors (Zeitlin & Nicoli, 2020). For example, Schmidt (2019) highlighted the somewhat overlooked issue of growing politicization of relations among EU institutions. In response to Brexit and the growing anti-integration mood, Juncker's Commission published a white paper on the future of the EU in which it outlined different integration scenarios such as disintegration, differentiated integration, multi-speed Europe and federalization. Interestingly, growing politicization of integration, the response by EU institutions and consideration of alternatives have resulted in an apparent U-turn in support for the EU, as was evident during the health crisis. The initial nationalist reaction to the health crisis, such as closing borders and national procurement, did not bring significant additional support to national governments (Krastev & Leonard, 2020). Furthermore, while the EU's role was initially criticized, even more respondents were critical of EU inaction (ibid.). Against certain previous trends, support for national governments and for the EU approach correlated, which demonstrated the perceived importance of the EU-level approach for a proper policy response (Poland was an exception among the nine countries involved in the study) (ibid.). Following Youngs (2020), during the early stages of the health crisis, right-wing populists such as the Lega in Italy, Vox in Spain, FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreich) in Austria and the PVV (Partij voor de Vreijheid) in the Netherlands lost support, beginning to regain ground at a later stage by, paradoxically, questioning the restrictive measures on a liberal-constitutional basis. In contrast to the previous crises, the EU also responded relatively quickly and effectively by proposing the Recovery and Resilience plan to address economic recovery, which became part of the new European Commission's Green Deal - Next Generation political agenda.

In 2020-2021, Eurosceptic political forces tried to benefit from social fears, economic problems and political tensions provoked by the Covid-19 pandemic. They criticized national governments and EU institutions, accusing them of using the fight against the pandemic as a pretext for imposing tighter control over citizens. Some radical parties and organizations created and disseminated conspiracy theories concerning the pandemic. Moreover, Eurosceptic parties organized mass protests against restrictions and vaccinations. They tried to gain the votes of people hit by the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. Libertarian Eurosceptic politicians blamed the EU and national governments for allocating vast sums of money for

recovery and resilience. On the other hand, Eurosceptics supportive of the welfare state were disappointed at allegedly insufficient state interventionism. However, the pandemic did not transform into a considerable increase of support for Eurosceptic parties. The majority of Europeans did not embrace "hard" anti-EU and conspiracy narratives promoted by Eurosceptics. While Eurobarometers conducted during the pandemic show that EU citizens remained deeply divided regarding assessments of national governments' and the EU institutions' handling of the pandemic, results of elections and polls of political sympathies undertaken in 2020-2021 nevertheless show that Eurosceptic parties did not benefit from the pandemic (see also Ganderson et al., 2023).

In contrast to the pandemic crisis, the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine had a more significant influence on the popularity of Eurosceptic forces. The war was met with a range of different and at times conflicting reactions by Eurosceptic political forces, making their attempts to cooperate considerably more difficult. The most powerful "soft" Eurosceptic parties, such as Law and Justice (PiS) from Poland, VOX in Spain and Brothers of Italy (FdI), joined the Eu mainstream in taking a clearly pro-Ukrainian position. On the other hand, Eurosceptic forces, such as AfD, FPÖ, RNq and far-left parties such as Workers' Party of Belgium (PTB) and France Unbowed (FI) openly supported Russia or at least intentionally avoided condemning the Kremlin's aggression against Ukraine. Some Eurosceptic parties, such as The Lega in Italy and Fidesz in Hungary, took a notably ambiguous position towards the war. While they condemned the Russian invasion, called for an immediate ceasefire, and organised "pro-peace" demonstrations, they also maintained contact with Russia, did not endorse the delivery of arms to Kiev, and claimed sanctions imposed on Russia were too severe. The general criticism of the EU's policy regarding the war translated into a rise in support for Eurosceptic parties such as AfD and FPÖ. The clearest example of that trend is represented by Fidesz's securing of almost 55% of votes in Hungary's April 2022 national elections. During the electoral campaign, Viktor Orbán repeatedly attacked the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky, accusing him of warmongering, and presenting the opposition as an irresponsible political force allegedly eager to involve Hungary in the war (Walker, 2022). Finally, the war contributed to the radicalization of socialist parties in certain countries (e.g. Bulgaria, Slovakia) which vehemently rejected the EU's policy towards Ukraine, causing their position to overlap with the radical right.

1.3 Euroscepticism and international relations: liberalism/illiberalism and 'backsliding'

The EU crises are part of the broader global crisis of the post-WWII international liberal order. This order was based on the norms and rules of free trade and liberal democracy, and supported by progressive, centrist progressive political forces. In recent contexts of slow growth and increasing inequality and instability, this order has lost ground to illiberalism, nationalism, and authoritarianism (Ikenberry, 2018). Sovereignty is a traditional International Relations concept. It refers to a state's effective control of its territory, expressed through the making and effective enforcement of laws. The concept of sovereignty has changed over time. Growing interdependence of nations and the role of international regimes, organization and non-state actors have relativized and altered the exclusivist understanding of sovereignty. More recently, the concept has once again come to the fore in terms of 'popular sovereignty,' and it has been argued that certain aspects of modern global governance, such as interventions on liberal grounds of economics and human rights and the overarching authority of multilateralism and international organizations, conflict with the consent of the governed as a necessary source of legitimacy (Colgan & Keohane, 2017). In response, there has been growing opposition to the limits on sovereignty by powerful institutions as well as growing faith in strong domestic leaders directly accountable to 'the people' (ibid.).

The trend has been explained by forces of globalization that have, on the demand side, brought intense economic competition and cultural diversity, which has triggered socioeconomic instability and cultural backlash and, on the supply side, have skewed political space in terms of pressures on redistribution and national-conservative politics, increasing competition between different vertical levels of authority (ibid.; Abu-Chadi & Kurer, 2021). Globalization has obscured democracy and the functions of the state; the globalization winners, protected by international regimes and organizations and highly mobile, no longer needed national democracy to protect their interests, while the losers of globalization cannot use democracy to advance their interests (Goodhart & Bondanella, 2011; Krastev, 2018). As a result, national institutions have faced a decline in participation and legitimacy, spurring an existential crisis (Blokker, 2021) In response, losers and (part of) the political elites responded by advancing popular sovereignty against established (inter)national elites and institutions, taking back control and enacting nationalist policies against liberal norms, rules and authorities of international organization, which has been explained as an "illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 116; Mudde, 2021). Crises of the

liberal international order such as the global financial and economic crises acted as a trigger, because in those crises there was a gap between international governance, often slow and complex, partly due to national opposition to distribution, and the national system of representation that allowed for pressure on national elites (Chryssogelos, 2017). The trend took place in a specific context of global power shifts where US was losing its hegemony in the face of the rise of the China and more assertive role of Russia. Huntington (1991, p. 17–21) argued with respect to the post-1980s wave of democratization that there will be a reverse wave should the USA, Europe and others fail in terms of economic setbacks, intensified social conflict, polarization, and terrorism, causing the remaining authoritarian powers to appear more appealing.

The term illiberalism is typically understood as an opposite to the liberal or pluralist vision of democracy and is closely related to the globalization context (Vormann & Weinman, 2021; Smilova, 2021). According to Laurelle (2022, p. 309) illiberalism is a relatively coherent phenomenon that repersents a backlash against liberalism in its various dimensions, including international (the role of supranational institutions), economic (denouncing neoliberal orthodoxy, though often selectively), cultural (rejection of multiculturalism, migration and minority rights), often in the name of its contradition towards popular support, and proposes anti-pluralist and nation-centrist solutions, sometimes combined with traditional values and ethnocentrism, depending on a local context.The disciplinary division between a focus on systemic factors (International Relations) and party politics (comparative political science) makes the question of foreign policy responses by nationalists-sovereigntists difficult to address. The notion that foreign policy is an extension of domestic politics, or a "continuation of domestic politics by other means," is based Allison's decision-making model, in which state influence in the international community is based on the socialized national interest and rational cost-benefit analysis (Rational Actor Model). The Government Politics Model, however, views foreign policy as an instrumentalized arena of domestic politics that requires opening up the "black box". According to existing research, one of the few consistent patterns shows that sovereigntist movements have mostly been left wing in the global South, due to pressures by financial institutions and transnational corporations, and mostly right wing in the global North due to pressures from migration on the welfare state (Chryssogelos, 2017). When it comes to international relations, the populist-sovereigntist forces have often been perceived as "dogs that bark but do not bite". Their impact has been limited; for example, they have not yet impacted decisions of war and peace, which demonstrates their socialization within the international

order, high levels of pragmatism and a cherry-picking approach (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2015; Chryssogelos, 2017; Destradi, Plageman & Tas, 2022). However, this does not mean that those forces are benign, as seen during the case of the Donald Trump administration and Brexit. More general negative implications include inconsistency, breaks with existing foreign policy, over-prioritization of domestic politics and poor diplomacy (Cadier, 2019).

The sovereigntism-nationalism trend brought certain de-institutionalization tendencies, leaving gaps to be filled by strong national authorities, both domestically (the rise of the so called illiberal or majoritarian democracies) and on the international level (growing nationalism and departure from international commitments). This brought the risk of furthering instability and focusing on short-term gains, as well as an increased role of the rule of power (as opposed to the power of rules). As rational actors, once in power politicians do not seek benevolently to improve institutions, but rather to use them in ways that secure their hold on power. Strong authorities, polarization strategies and exclusive interests have negative impacts on inclusive and cooperative relations and institutions. Still, the trends should not be overstated against the role of complex and changing relevant (international) contexts. More recent research of illiberal parties in power demonstrates tactical behavior and business as usual politics (Puleo & Cavalieri, 2021; for a detailed discussion of the EU context, see previous section 1.2).

It could be argued that a context of strong international actors and weak domestic institutions, such as was the case in Eastern Europe, creates opportunities for new authoritarian rules, neotraditional identities (Greskovits, 2015; Vachudova, 2020) and alignment with remaining authoritarian regimes. While it was initially argued that a certain level of "liberal autocracy" was needed to provide for liberal democratic developments in post-communist countries (Zakaria, 1997), more recently the limited contestation of norms and rules imposed by domestic technocratic elites has been held accountable for the illiberal turn in Eastern Europe (Krastev, 2018). Existing research of foreign policy by populist-sovereigntist regimes in the CEE region demonstrates the important role of systemic factors on an international level and politics as usual on the domestic level: populist governments mainly changed the style and rhetoric of their foreign policy, and electoral successes resulting from more nationalist foreign policy that went against systemic pressures were limited to areas such as migration (Lovec & Bojinović Fenko, 2020; for a more differentiated view see Havlík & Hloušek, 2021). Somehow in line with this, more recent research also highlights the limits of the narrow and one-directional 'backsliding' paradigm (Cianetti & Hanley, 2021).

1.4. Euroscepticism and Europeanization: between the Left and the Right

Whenever we talk about Euroscepticism and the process of Europeanization, we should also refer to the shaping of these phenomena by potential endogenous factors. In other words, we should look at actors' general **ideological positioning** (Left vs Right) and how it might impact positions on the EU/European integration. Especially as Taggart and Szczerbiak noted, Euroscepticism is 'an almost universal feature of contemporary European party system making it a near universal staple component of European politics. What is more, the authors continue, it 'spans the ideological range (…). It exits in parties on the left and right and in established as well by new political parties' (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2021, p. 115).

If we look back at the history of the study of Euroscepticism, we find two schools that aimed at identifying the "drivers" of opposition to the EU: the Sussex School, developing -as mentined- around Taggart's work, and the North Carolina School. The Sussex School argues that ideology does play a role in shaping attitudes to the EU, but it is "not necessarily a guide to parties' position on the EU" (Taggart, 1998, p. 379). To put it differently, ideology would not be the core factor explaining opposition to the EU, but rather the role played by political actors within the national context (e.g.: the government-opposition dynamic at a national level). The North Carolina School looks beyond party-based perspectives, considering ideology to be the main driver of attitudes to the EU. Scholars affiliated with this school do, in fact, rely on a rich mixture of data that helps explain the phenomenon as developing outside of party logics, such as for example popular Euroscepticism (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007; Gabel & Scheve, 2007; Krouwel & Abts, 2007) or Euroscepticism in the media (de Vreese, 2007; Kriesi, 2007). The work of the North Carolina School originates in Leonard Ray's now famous dissertation (1999). The work has been extensively developed, reaching the core conclusion that actors' positioning to the EU is structured around a new cleavage in European politics, a sort of new dimension of competition. Such a dimension has been labelled in several ways: the post-materialist/materialist cleavage (Inglehart & Flanagan, 1987); the old/new politics distinction (Franklin 1992); the left-libertarian/authoritarian dimension (Kitschelt, 1994); or the GAL/TAN (Green Alternative Libertarian/Traditional Authoritarian Nationalist) distinction (Hooghe et al., 2004). Political actors' positioning toward the EU can be graphically represented as an inverted U curve: those that position themselves at the extremes of the axis (thus closer to the GAL/TAN poles) show higher degrees of opposition to the EU.

While these two schools still tend to avoid "cross-fertilization" (Mudde, 2012, p. 200), each disregarding either actors' strategical moves or their ideological positions, it is undeniable that ideology is a crucial factor motivating opposition to the EU. Indeed, the European political sphere might be imagined as building upon pre-established national political spheres (Carlotti, 2021), in which ideological distinctions can also be traced. Pan-European and translational political groups, for example, are likely to form out of pre-established national ideological guidelines. In other words, actors come together at a transnational level thanks to their common ideological ground, as is the case in the formation of Europarties or party groups in the European Parliament. Thus, ideology is a weak but rather pervasive glue. It is "like gravity: it pervades the space and provides some general structuration, but a structuration that is much weaker than the other dynamics and forces that it occasionally encounters" (Usherwood, 2017, p. 19).

Here, it is worth emphasizing, as noticed by Brack (2020), that nationalism tends to be a common denominator of Euroscepticism of both left and right political parties (e.g., Halikiopoulou et al., 2012), specifically of those furthest from the political centre (e.g., Conti & Memoli, 2012, p. 92). On the other hand, scholars show that the similarities between the positions on Europe of the radical left and right are rather superficial (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004), and that they diverge in the motivations of their Euroscepticism (Keith, 2018; Vasilopoulou, 2011): whereas radical right parties tend to stress the threat of European integration to national sovereignty, traditions and identity, the radical left parties focus on the economic aspect of European integration and tie it to the question of the welfare state (Fagerholm, 2019). Still, following Brack (2020), recent critical junctures (see previous section 1.2.) have brought some convergence between the two poles in the field of welfare and protectionism. Here, one could also highlight the conclusions drawn by Ivaldi and Mazzoleni (2020), who pinpointed the converging trajectories within the radical right family around economic sovereigntism.

1.5. The state of the art: Euroscepticism in Old Europe and the Balkans

The 'audacity' (as defined Fagan & Sircar, 2015) of the EU's mission to transform the successor states of the former Yugoslavia to a point at which they become eligible for membership is well known (ibid., Džankić et al., 2019). Whilst the accession of Croatia in July 2013 was an historic validation of the EU institutional strategy, it did little to mitigate the huge challenge that faces other Western Balkan states that remain candidates (Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro), or

potential candidates (Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo), for whom there is no foreseeable accession date in sight (Bojinović Fenko et al., 2023; Koneska et al., 2023).

The Europeanization of the Western Balkans is a far complex endeavor with a different attitude towards the EU and European integration (Fagan & Sircar, 2015). These countries, and their citizens and elites, do not identify with Europe in the same way as the Poles and Czechs, for whom a 'return to Europe' was a non-negotiable foundation of their transition from Soviet-style communism (Fagan & Sircar 2015). For Bosnians and Serbians, there is a rationale in engaging with EU conditionality, but it is far less rooted in national identity, and the benefits and opportunities are much less obvious. Such relative indifference can, of course, be explained in terms of the lack of substantive progress the governments of these countries have made towards accession, but also the additional conditionality and general lack of enthusiasm for further enlargement amongst member states (Džankić et al., 2019). According to some scholars, it was not simply that the Poles and Czechs wanted to join the EU more, but that their terms of entry were easier and there was widespread support within the EU for taking them in. In line with this, it does not come as a surprise that recent studies have started to observe the Western Balkans's own fatigue towards the EU (e.g., Belloni, 2016; Belloni & Brunazzo 2017; Keil & Stahl, 2023).

The starting point for such observations is contextualized in the idea that the integration of the Balkans has to a large extent been subjected to the negative consequences of wars and ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s (Damjanovski et al., 2020; Kartsonaki & Wolff, 2023). As a result, the Balkans did not begin the Europeanization process until the 2000s, when the enlargement of the post-communist CEECs was rapidly unravelling. In this regard, the EU framed its presence in the Balkans within the Stabilization and Association Process, which was predominantly focused on the stabilization of the region. Until the present, only Croatia has managed to become an EU member state, while Montenegro and Serbia have been engaged in accession negotiations for the past decade with limited success (Džankić et al., 2023).

When discussing the Europeanization trajectories in the Balkans, the most highlighted element are domestic actors' adaptation costs (Dimitrova, 2016). In this respect, the logic of stabilization rests on domestic political elites, which "guarantee stability in the region". This in turn empowers semi-authoritarian political elites reluctant to change and engage in meaningful reforms that might pave the way towards membership of the EU (Radeljić, 2019). In addition

to what Bieber (2018) conceptualizes as "competitive authoritarianism", there are also certain political conditions that the EU imposes, conditions that are prone to instrumentalization by ethnopolitical elites within a broader societal framework (e.g., Subotić, 2010; Kasapović & Kočan 2022). Examples include the need for the cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the resolution of the name dispute between Greece and North Macedonia. As Damjanovski et al. (2020, p. 3–4) argued, this has had a "disruptive effect on societal cohesion and domestic power structures, which in turn raised certain anti-EU sentiments". This, in combination with enlargement fatigue and the waning credibility of the enlargement process in general exemplified by the French and Bulgarian veto in 2019 and 2022 respectively, has hindered the development of the Balkan countries' path towards the membership of the EU.

As we will point out in the next section, against the background of the above-mentioned theoretical insights (sections 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4), we will also consider the political and cultural opportunities and resources (symbolic and material) for the mobilization of Eurosceptic and/or pro-European discourses and narratives, investigating them with a constructivist and dynamic/processual approach. Indeed, although they do not deny the presence of grievances related to EU integration processes – as well as the critical juncture (della Porta, 2022) represented by the Covid-19 emergency - social movement studies tend to give more leverage to the capacity of collective actors, such as social movement organizations, to adapt to contextual resources and constraints, or, as it has been said with reference to specific social movements, "to take advantage of the available opportunities" (Rydgren, 2003, p. 49). Particularly relevant for a study focusing on frames is the analysis of both discursive opportunities and constraints (Kriesi, 2004), coupled with the appeal of Eurosceptic and populist discourses in times of crisis. In Western Europe, Eurosceptic populism, as it is referred to by Csehi and Zgut (2020), manifests itself in anti-liberal market discourse, where the critique of economic integration is center stage. In Eastern Europe, the rhetoric is more often 'inti-imperialist', with the EU depicted as an imperial power led by a dishonest, fraudulent and corrupt elite against the will of "the pure people" (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 2-3). So, for example in older Europe EU economic policies will be more criticized (Lees, 2018) while in the newer Europe, the fear of losing "national culture, tradition, and religion" (Csehi & Zgut 2020, p. 3) would prevail among Eurosceptics (Styczyńska, 2017). Beyond this, however, we also expect framing to be constrained not only by the general cultures in which these political actors and groups develop, but also by the organizations' own culture. On the basis of the existing

literature (see previous section), we hypothesize that we will find different configurations of frames concerning the concept of Europe, the EU and European integration. These configurations will depend on the type of organization – right wing vs. left wing, political parties vs. social movements and associations. In particular, we expect to find some differences, even of an extreme type, between political parties, civil society and social movement groups.

1.6. Method and data: frames on Europe and focus groups

This study adopts a mixed method approach. In particular the book relies on: *i.* 57 in-depth semi-structured interviews with representatives of right-wing and left-wing Euro-sceptical/Euro-critical civil society associations and political parties, at the local and national level, conducted in our selected countries; *ii.* 30 focus groups across our five cases with representatives of social movements, associations, political parties and ordinary citizens, from both the left and right of the ideological spectrum (with a total of 168 people involved); *iii.* formalized and qualitative content analysis of national and European electoral manifestos of relevant Euro-sceptical political forces in the last two decades in the selected countries (with a total number of 68 national and European manifestos); *iv.* archival and secondary material and survey data analysis, for the reconstruction of the political and discursive opportunities of the context (including more than 35 survey and pool data used to study stances toward the EU at the national and supranational level); and, finally, *v.* for some countries, especially when access to interviews was more difficult, an in-depth analysis of the official webpages and social media outlets of leaders of Eurosceptic political parties was conducted.

1.6.1 Frame Analysis

Frames are defined as cognitive instruments that allow making sense of the external reality (Snow & Benford, 1988). They are very often produced by organizational leadership, which provides the necessary background within which individual activists can locate their actions (Snow et al,, 1986; Gamson, 1988; Snow & Benford, 1988). Looking at frames on Europe (see

the method section) in this book we aim to go beyond the mere notion of Euroscepticism (Caiani, 2023) and of surveying of 'degrees' of it, while emphasizing the agency of various actors in constructing their Europe desired and opposed. In order to investigate European narratives from below, we build on the Eurosceptic literature mentioned above, making use of a concept developed especially in social movement studies (but also partly in party literature): the interpretative frame, i.e. the cognitive schemes that allow people to make sense of social and political external reality (Snow & Benford, 1988). Collective actors have to motivate individuals to act, providing followers and potential followers with rationales for participating and supporting their organizations. In particular, diagnostic frames allow for the conversion of a phenomenon into a social problem, and potentially the object of collective action (Snow et al. 1986); prognostic framing also involves the suggestion of future developments that could solve the identified problems; and motivational frames are needed to produce the motivations and the incentives for action. In order to convince individuals to act, frames "must generalize a certain problem or controversy, showing the connections with other events or with the condition of other social groups; and also demonstrate the relevance of a given problem to individual life experiences. Along with the critique of dominant representations of order and of social patterns, interpretative frames must therefore produce new definitions of the foundations of collective solidarity, to transform actors' identity in a way which favors action" (della Porta & Diani, 2006). In doing so, framing processes also allow for the definition of self and opponent – in short, for the definition of the categories of 'us' and 'them' (Tilly, 2003, p. 139). The social science literature on frames has taken two different approaches (Johnston & Noakes, 2005). With a focus on individual cognitive processes, some authors have analyzed the way in which "normal" people try to make sense of what happens by framing events in familiar categories (Gamson, 1988). Looking instead at the meso-organizational level, other scholars have considered the instrumental dimension of the symbolic construction of reality by collective entrepreneurs (Snow & Benford, 1988).

In this book we focus on the organizational level. We empirically address the conceptualization of Europe and the European integration process by right-wing and left-wing political parties and social movements. We do so by investigating the frames produced in the discourse of different types of organizations chosen from the political party and non-party extreme-right milieu, focusing on five European countries including various types of members states (Wester and Easter/Central Europe), as well as some "waiting countries" of the Balkans, Conducting a frame analysis of various types of documents of these organizations (transcripts of interviews,

newspapers, magazines, archives of online discussion forums, websites, etc.), we shall examine the relevance and characteristics of the EU and Europe on the Left and the Right, institutionally and socially, underlining the similarities and differences in the framing strategies of these groups and linking these features to historically determined political cultures in the five countries. In particular, we will explore the bridging of Eurosceptic/Eurocritical appeal with other political, cultural and socio-economic frames (e.g.: the use of nativism and authoritarianism or the development of the new idea of "conflict of civilization" – Brubaker (2017) – rallying around the opaque notion of the "West" defending Europe from itself used by the extreme right), but also the populist frame (i.e. the people vs. the elite transposed at the transnational level), as well as how Eurosceptic frames from below are linked to the political actors' definition of 'us' and 'them' (i.e. allies and enemies), when developing diagnoses, prognoses and motivations to action.

We refer to the concept of frames rather than 'thin ideology', which has recently been used in research on populist parties, such as some of the Eurosceptic parties included in our sample. The use of frames can indeed better enable us to interact with other research in social movement studies that have long used that term. Furthermore, the Goffmanian concept of the frame allows us to stress both the fragmentation of Eurosceptic discourse (whose eclecticism has often and increasingly been stressed, as indicated in the literature above) and the cognitive function of the discourse we analyze, providing readers of with an immediate instrument to make sense of external reality. The term ideology seems less useful for these purposes (Caiani et al., 2012). The main categories of frames on Europe we use in the various chapters are inspired by the works of Pirro and Kessel (2018) and Caiani and Weisskircher (2021). They are: socio-economic frames, political frames, and cultural frames. The authors of the following chapters adjust the frames to their regional contexts, so in each of the chapters they may be defined and applied to the research in a slightly different manner. This application nonetheless allows us, by offering a robust analytical framework, to structure and analyse the everyday discourse of "ordinary citizens" in the countries we are studying. Frames also enable us to reconstruct the narrative on Euroscepticism using a comparative perspective, showing similarities and differences of Eurosceptic discourse in the research countries.

1.6.2 Interviews with civil society groups and political elites

Carefully designed qualitative research methods allow social scientists to comprehend the narratives that people create, to learn about and understand their subjective experiences, opinions, values, motivations, and practices, and place them in a broader social context. In our research project, we have used two such methods: qualitative in-depth, semi-structured interviews that were conducted with public figures, and focus groups interviews conducted with respondents on grassroots levels. The in-depth semi-structured interview is a research method in which the conversation is conducted one-to-one. The interviewer has a general set of topics to cover during the interview, but the method also allows for flexibility and follow-up questions based on the respondent's answers. It enables the researcher to explore the subject and deepen the understanding of the topic from the respondent's perspective, since they allow the interviewee to use their own words and ways of defining the phenomena in question. Moreover, the method allows the conversation between the researcher and the respondent to raise unforeseen issues. The researcher may decide to follow the emerging theme if, according to them, it may be essential to understand the topic better. Semi-structured interviews, as a research method, provide a detailed and in-depth exploration of the topic, while at the same time respecting a level of structure and consistency across the interviews. Beyond being a suitable method of gathering information, learning about motivations and ways of thinking, and interpreting research phenomena, in-depth interviews are also a useful and popular method of researching elites (Peabody et al., 1990, p. 451-455), who, for various reasons, are unlikely to participate in other forms of research, due to lack of time, as Harriet Zukerman pointed out, because they can be offended when asked to respond to standardized forms of enquiry such as questionnaires (Zukerman, 1972, p. 159).

1.6.3 Focus groups: Emerging meanings on Europe

Another research method we used was focus group interviews to apprehend the negotiated political meanings (if any) attributed to Europe/EU integration in social interactions and the emerging norms and values related to the respective 'positions' toward Europe. Focusing on the interaction in the group, we explore in fact the reciprocal production of meanings of political

attitudes. As Donatella della Porta (2014, p. 290) defines it, a focus group interview is "a loosely structured conversation conducted with a group of interviewees that, through a focused debate upon certain topics, aims at investigating collective opinions". Where quantitative data from opinion polls show the presence and spread of some opinions and/or behaviors, focus groups capture the reasons for and meanings given to some behaviors (della Porta 2005).

Following this definition, our FG's purpose was to investigate the defined themes (e.g. European integration; European identities, etc.) in depth, stimulating the debates between the participants. This in fact allows the researcher to learn about the opinions, motivations, experiences, and practices of the respondents, while also helping them to understand the values, norms, and meanings behind the group answers (Morgan, 1997; Bloor et al., 2001). To make the discussion more lively, dynamic, and inspiring for the interviewees, the moderators of the FG's conducted in this study have used different stimuli, tools, and techniques, such as working cards, handouts, and projective techniques. These also allowed the researchers to discover to some degree unconscious "feelings, beliefs, attitudes and motivations, which many consumers find difficult to articulate" (Webb, 1992, p. 125-126). Our assumption in these focus groups was that citizens and groups do not just have a preset list of preferences and opinions regarding Europe (à la rational choice approach). Instead, they discuss, construct, and communicate the meanings they attach to Europe/EU integration within a social context. Focus groups were conducted during the pandemic (between 2020 and 2021), and therefore with the limits and constraints of various public health measures. Our focus groups were distributed based on the location of populist parties' constituencies as well as geographically, to account for political subcultural variations such as that between the North and the South of Italy. The focus group process lasted two and a half hours, and its procedure can be found in the appendix.

1.7. The volume

The volume is structured around 8 chapters, after this first introductory chapter detailing the concept of Euroscepticism, its evolution and the data and methods used. Chapter 2 presents our cases and the re-construction of the context of political and cultural opportunities for Euroscepticism within each country. The following chapters are dedicated to each country in the study and are unified by a common comparative research design. Chapter 3 explores the

case of Slovenia, analyzing the appeal of Eurosceptic and illiberal narratives promoted by domestic political elites for specific socio-demographic groups. Relying on the analysis of party programs, opinion pools, focus groups and interviews, the chapter shows that despite the support that until recently was present among the public at large, Eurosceptic voices have tended to call for more independent decision-making, and have expressed a general sense of being a weak country within the EU. Furthermore, the chapter shows how European identity works as an empty signifier, signifying everything and nothing at the same time. Chapter 4 explores the case of Poland, showing that Euroscepticism in Poland is a complex topic, with attitudes toward the EU characterized by high levels of ambivalence. This ambivalence is framed according to four main dimensions: socioeconomics, sovereignty (including the rule of law), legitimacy, and culture.

Chapter 5 deals with Italy, an historically Europhile country. It investigates from below networks of political actors who are both supporters and critics of the EU and explores the diffusion and evolution of Eurosceptic feelings among the wider public. It argues that the Italian case is the perfect example of a country that moved from a strong Euro-enthusiast position to a diffusely Eurosceptic one. Based on in-depth interviews with the most important radical right and progressive political parties and social movements in the country, as well as focus groups with ordinary citizens, it shows the multidimensionality of oppositions to the EU, stressing attitudes toward Europe as a cultural, political or economic entity and as political arenas of contestation (policy, polity or politics). Chapter 6 focuses on the North Macedonian case. North Macedonia has been part of the Western Balkans since 2005, and is a candidate for membership of the EU. Our case study shows that the ambition and mood of both citizens and the establishment in North Macedonia over the years has moved quite quickly in the direction of Euro-enthusiasm. The EU is perceived to be significant to the survival of the state, the economy and the identity of the dominant Macedonian ethnic population (including the Albanian minority). The chapter also stresses how such Euro-enthusiasm is diminishing over time in a manner that reflects the diffusion of illiberal Eurosceptic trends via fragmented initiatives outside the scope of governing parties. Indeed, the “illiberal governmental style” seems to create a basis for the reduction of social responsibility and the introduction of national and identity perspectives into public discourse.

Chapter 7 focuses on the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a post-conflict Western Balkan country where the question of the membership of the EU is not as straightforward as in other

Western Balkan states. Combining different types of textual and interview data, it shows that a principal reason for this complexity is the institutional architecture of BiH, which has not only divided the country along ethnic lines but also into two coequal "entities" almost identical in size– the majority-Serb Republika Srpska (RS) and the mostly Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH). These two entities wield significant powers and sovereignty, and have their own parliaments, governments, and veto rights over all national policies, meaning that BiH as a country – when there is no clear political consensus among the entities regarding state policies – is perceived as a non-functional state. The chapter illustrates how various actors' attitudes toward the EU are embedded in this context of opportunities and constraints, and change depending on which dimension (cultural, political, or economic) of the EU itself is under consideration.

Finally, chapter 8 concludes by critically reflecting on the main similarities and differences in the narratives on Europe across cases and actors (party vs. movements, Left wing vs. Right wing, various part of Europe, member states vs. candidate states), identifying **five paths of opposition towards Europe** and linking them to current debates in the field of Euroscepticism. Normative issues will be addressed as well as new strands of future research.

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Chapter 2

Our cases: Setting the context

Political and cultural opportunities for Eurosceptic narratives

Abstract

Chapter 2 reconstructs the context of political and cultural-discursive opportunities (also historically driven) in the five countries of the study, against which European narratives are constructed and eventually mobilized. Our cases offer a sufficient variation on the so called 'discursive opportunities and constraints'—which may be relevant for a study focusing on frames on Europe, that is, the 'political-cultural or symbolic opportunities that determine what kind of ideas become visible for the public, resonate with public opinion and are held to be ''legitimate'' by the audience' (Kriesi, 2004, p. 72). Either due to instrumental or cultural reasons, political parties and movements would tend to make their discourses resonant among the populations they address, by linking their own traditional frames with those present in the environment (Snow et al, 1986). There may be some resilience of the historical discourse on Europe/the EU integration in the country- as some frames can resonate better with the 'cultural stock' of a society and traditions- as well as, on the contrary, a higher alignment to the organizations' own norms and values (e.g., Left wing vs. right wing political parties and movements). In fact, developing their frames on Europe, organizations try to make their discourses appealing for different potential supporters, whose 'culture(s)' (on populism, Caiani and Padoan 2023) can limit or emphasize vis a vis the context, the range of usable arguments. All this will be illustrated in chapter 2.

In the five countries of our research Euroscepticism from below is surrounded by a variety of different (institutional, political and cultural) opportunities, which might have a direct or indirect impact on, as well as on various organizational milieus made of different actors (left wing/right wing; formal vs. informal; political parties, movement, movement-parties, etc.). In the following sections of this chapter, we look at them in the selected countries, discussing their potential impact on (degrees and forms of) Euroscepticism.

2.1 Slovenia and the EU integration process

Slovenians, both public and political actors, have typically been pro-EU-oriented, although the EU – largely equated with Western Europe – has not always been well understood and has often acted as an "empty signifier". In Slovenia, European integration went hand in hand with political and socioeconomic transition, and the country was long considered a champion of both. However, the EU crises brought disenchantment, strong political turbulence, and the rise of Euroscepticism in Slovenia. The main conservative party, Janša's Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), moved to the right and began to emulate illiberal regimes such as that of Victor Orban, resulting in open clashes with EU institutions. However, when Janša came to power in the early 2020s, he faced strong opposition from the public and civil society as well as strong support for the liberal democratic norms and rules associated with the EU. Following the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Slovenia quickly turned towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Contrary to the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia was more open towards the West and people enjoyed more economic freedoms. In contrast to the former Soviet republics of Central and Eastern Europe, Slovenia also enjoyed more political autonomy. Along with a higher level of development, this enabled Slovenia to proceed smoothly to EU membership, becoming one of the first among the CEE candidate countries to effectively adopt the EU acquis.

EU membership was supported by almost 90% of the population (as opposed to NATO membership, which was supported by 60%) (Bojinović and Svetličič, 2017) and was only opposed by marginal political forces such as the Slovenian national party (SNS), which was the only parliamentary Eurosceptic party at the time. As in many other CEE countries, institutional transition – characterized in Slovenia by gradualism-corporativism – was often shallow and formal, thus leaving many structural challenges unaddressed. Nonetheless, contrary to many other CEE countries, Slovenia did not experience EU disenchantment, decline in support and institutional backsliding immediately after accession. In 2007, Slovenia was also the first among the CEE to enter the Eurozone and Schengen. In 2008, as a perceived reward for its 'best pupil' status, Slovenia became the first to preside over the EU Council (and is still the only CEE country to preside over the EU council under the pre-Lisbon rules) (Bojinović and Svetličič, 2017). At the time, Slovenia was consistently among five member states in which popular support for the EU was strongest.

Things changed significantly in the period following the global crises that triggered the EU crisis, which revealed the dysfunction of the EU. Slovenia was hit hard due to domestic structural issues amplified by asymmetric dependencies that weighed heavily on its small and open economy. Slovenia narrowly escaped a bailout in 2013. In 2015, after Hungary closed its borders to migrant influx, Slovenia became the main point of entry to the Schengen area on the Western Balkans route. Over a period of three months, almost a million migrants and refugees entered territory of Slovenia – a country of two million people, triggering fears of humanitarian and security crises due to the border restrictions of destination countries.

In the beginning, even though criticism of the EU's economic governance grew, as seen in the establishment of the Left that entered parliament during the 2014 parliamentary elections, Slovenians mostly blamed the domestic elites. However, as the crisis dragged on, and especially after the migration and refugee crisis, which created the impression of Slovenia being abandoned on issues such as security and migration, Slovenians shifted their loyalty from the EU towards the national elites (Lovec, 2019). In parallel, SDS, the most important right-wing opposition party at the time, turned rightwards and aligned with Eurosceptic and illiberal forces such as the Victor Orban regime.

While support for the EU once again began to grow following the EU crises, the trend of supply-side Euroscepticism continued in the context of Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, and the ongoing political instability and fragmentation of Slovenia's centre-left. The trend peaked around the 2018 parliamentary elections (Lovec et al., 2022) and the return to "normal" was seen during the 2019 European elections. Still, even during the period of crisis, European identity (ranked first by around 10% of respondents) was not seen as conflicting with national identity (ranked first by 37% of respondents – quite low compared to other EU member states) (ibid.). In particular, Slovenians strongly supported the common market, mobility and the euro, while support for distributive policies and the EU's foreign policy was below the EU average. Slovenia's voice in the EU was perceived to be weak, both due to the growing role of larger member states and domestic political instability in Slovenia during the crises period (Lovec, 2019).

When SDS came to power in 2020 following the collapse of the centre-left coalition and the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, it tried to interfere with independent state institutions, the media and civil society, triggering tensions with the EU and public protests that continued until the end of its mandate in 2022. Simultaneously, while support for the government and national elites decreased, public support for the EU associated with the protection of liberal democratic norms and values reached record-high levels (Lovec et al., 2022). Janša's government adopted a more moderate rhetoric regarding the EU during the Slovenian second EU Council presidency in the second half of 2021 and at the beginning of the war in early Ukraine in 2022. This, however, did not prevent its electoral defeat in that same year. Many radical voices such as the SNS also failed to pass the threshold and The Left halved its result from the 2018 elections.

2.2 Poland and the EU integration process

Poland's integration with the EU strongly correlated with the end of the Cold War (1989-1991), accompanied by the fall of communism, democratization, and the transition to a free market economy. Poland's accession was a part of the "Big Bang" enlargement involving the eastern part of Europe in particular (2004). This "Big Bang" had a strong geopolitical impact on the EU, being the largest expansion in the history of the Union in terms of population, territory, and number of states (ten countries). Poland was decisively the biggest state to join the EU in 2004, accounting for almost half of the GDP of new member states and more than 50% of its inhabitants. It became the sixth and, after Brexit, the fifth biggest EU member state in terms of population and GDP. Currently, Poland is the largest EU member state outside of the Eurozone. Moreover, due to a radical increase in defence spending and procurement of weapons in response to the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine, Poland became the fourth strongest military power within the EU. The country benefited spectacularly from its membership in the EU, experiencing one of the fastest paces of growth in Europe between 2004 and 2021. Poland's membership in the EU enjoys extensive support in Polish society, but since 2015 many Poles have been voting for soft-Eurosceptic parties. Moreover, opinion polls conducted in recent years in Poland show that Poles are not supportive of the adoption of the common European currency.

Official diplomatic relations between Poland and the European Economic Community (EEC) were established before the fall of communism in September 1988. In September 1989, during the first-ever visit of the EEC Chairman of the Committee of Ministers to Poland, where

democratization had already begun, an agreement was signed on trade, and commercial and economic cooperation. Regime change in 1989-1990 allowed the launch of diplomatic talks regarding Poland's association with the EEC. Formal negotiations began in December 1990 and ended one year later. Unlike the agreements concluded by other countries in the 1980s, the European Agreement establishing Poland's association with the EEC, signed in December 1991, did not contain any provisions regarding the prospect of membership or even the start of negotiations. The association agreement with the EEC came into force on February 1st, 1994, three months after the Maastricht Treaty came into effect, and on April 8th, 1994, Poland submitted a formal application for membership of the European Union. It was accepted by all member states on 9–10 December 1994, and the European Council, during the meeting in Luxembourg on 12–13 December 1997, decided to begin accession negotiations with five countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, and Estonia) as well as Cyprus (Tomaszewski, 2015). Poland's EU accession process was formally launched at a meeting of the Council for General Affairs in March 1998, followed by the preparation of a study of the compatibility of candidate countries' current laws with EU law. The actual negotiations started after the study concluded in November 1998, and ended during the EU summit in Copenhagen in December 2002. The Treaty of Accession between Poland and the EU was signed on April 16th, 2003 in Athens, and is the legal basis for Poland's accession to the EU. The final process of adopting the Treaty took place in the form of a national referendum conducted in Poland on 7–8 June 2003. Poles were asked to answer the following question: "Do you give permission for the Republic of Poland to enter into the European Union?" Only 18% of Polish citizens participated on the first day of the referendum. The turnout increased the next day to 59%. In the results, 77% of eligible voters answered "yes", and 23% responded "no" (Marczewska-Rytko, 2015). Poland was able to officially join the EU on May 1st, 2004.

The accession resulted in an unprecedented GDP increase and improved socio-economic living standards, primarily thanks to Poland's participation in the Single Market and EU funds. Poland became the largest beneficiary in absolute numbers among member states of the net transfers from the EU budget. Between 2004 and 2020, accession brought structural funds worth 164 billion euros to Poland. Most of these were spent on developing infrastructure, particularly roads, highways, express roads, public transport, and sewage facilities. Accession, combined with the opening of the labour markets of existing EU countries to Polish workers, has resulted in more than two million Poles emigrating temporarily to other EU countries, mainly to work

or study (Czerwiński, 2019). In 2021, Poland's GDP per capita measured in purchasing power parity accounted for 78% of the EU average, compared to 40% in 1990 and 50% in 2004. According to estimations by the Polish Economic Institute, Poles currently have approximately 30 per cent higher GDP (PPP) per capita than they would have had if Poland had not joined the European Union (Ambroziak et al., 2022, p. 4-5). Surveys conducted since 2004 show a level of support for EU membership similar or higher than that of the 2003 referendum. Despite this, opinion polls reveal significant reservations among the Polish population regarding further engagement in EU integration. For instance, Poles do not endorse the adoption of the euro. According to the terms outlined in the Polish Treaty of Accession with the European Union, Poland is expected to participate (with derogation) in the Economic and Monetary Union upon accession as a Member State. Nevertheless, there is no target date for Polish euro adoption and no fixed date for when the country will join ERM II. Moreover, Poland's prospects of joining the Eurozone in the foreseeable future are doubtful, as the adoption of the euro will require the approval of at least two-thirds of the Polish parliament to make a constitutional amendment (art. 235 of the Polish Constitution) changing the official currency from złoty to euro.

Meanwhile, parties opposing the common European currency won 50% of the parliamentary vote in the last national elections in 2019. The popularity of Eurosceptic parties among Polish voters further exemplifies the ambivalence of Polish society toward the EU. The right-wing Law and Justice party (PiS), a soft-Eurosceptic political force that gained power in 2015 and was re-elected in 2019, implemented policies that dismantled the rule of law in Poland and undermined fundamental European values. It resulted in an unprecedented conflict between Poland and other EU member states and institutions. In January 2016, the European Commission launched the first-ever formal rule-of-law assessment under Article 7 of the Treaty of Lisbon. This assessment was prompted by concerns regarding the amendments made to Poland's constitutional court and public media law. Meanwhile, the changes to the Polish National Council of the Judiciary and the Supreme Court attracted scrutiny from the European Court of Justice, which issued several rulings recognizing these changes as a severe violation of *acquis communautaire*. In response, in July 2021, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal issued a verdict that any interim measures from the European Court of Justice against Poland's judicial reforms were deemed to be "not in line" with the Polish constitution. Moreover, in October 2021, the Polish Constitutional Court delivered an exceptional verdict claiming that parts of the Treaty on the European Union were incompatible with Poland's constitution, putting Poland's membership in the European Union legal system into question.

2.3 Italy and the EU integration process

Italians have usually been considered (and have often considered themselves) Euro-enthusiast, and Italy has been widely regarded as a country with a strong Europhile tradition. Moreover, being part of the funding members, Italy has had a long time to become accustomed to the various stages of the integration process (Mughan et al., 1997). As is the case in other Southern European Countries, this Europhile tradition is coupled with a generally low opinion of the national elites' performance, which, in turn, contrasts with the high degree of confidence given to the functioning of European institutions (Sanchez-Cuenca 2000). Indeed, faced with diffused national political corruption and inefficient public administration, both public opinion and political elites have tended to support European integration, perceived as an opportunity for the "normalization" of many Italian pathologies (Giuliani and Piattoni 2001; Ferrera 2003, p. 243). A possible explanation for this general Europhile tradition among the public at large is the generous allocation of cohesion funds, with the European Commission budgetary balances locating Italy among the net recipient. Furthermore, this tendency is coupled with the presence of Southern European, less universalist welfare states that might lead to an increase in support for European Integration (Brinegar and Jolly, 2005). Another possible explanation is the relationship between national and European identity. Indeed, similarly to Germany and Spain and in contrast to the UK, European identity in Italy does not compete with strong national identity. In other words, the Italian national identity is perceived to be "more compatible with a European identity that would constitute a sort of completion and integration" (Grilli di Cortona, 2004, p. 73).

However, in addition to favorable attitudes toward common membership in terms of well-being, economic growth, and advantages of joining forces with other states, qualitative research on the "framing of Europe" also indicates fears regarding the distance, opaqueness, unaccountability, and inefficiency of the EU (Diez Medrano, 2003). The data presented in this book underlines the uncertainties surrounding the perception of Italians as enthusiastic supporters of the European Union – a perception that has already been challenged by previous studies and data. In the Eurobarometer data, Italians not only score within the average range on various indicators of support for membership, but also show a very low degree of knowledge of EU institutions (della Porta & Diani 2006; Grilli di Cortona, 2004). In 2000, opinion polls showed that Italians generally looked favorably on Italy's membership of the EU. However, while Italians' endorsement of EU membership was in line with the European average, it was rather lower than Luxembourg (75%), Ireland (71%), the Netherlands (64%), Belgium and other Southern

European countries (all above 50%). It was, though, well above West Germany, Denmark, the UK or Sweden (Diez Medrano 2003, p. 10).

Examining Italy's endorsement of the European Union from a party-based perspective, it is possible to state that, in the past, support for the EU among political parties was widely considered to be bipartisan. Scholars in the field have described elite support for European integration as lukewarm, at least during the Cold War when it was used by the Christian Democrats as a surrogate for a more open, pro-American profile (Varsori, 1995; Conti and Verzichelli, 2005, 66). The Christian Democrats had indeed always supported the process of European integration, since its very beginning after the Second World War (Bull, 1996). It is, however, enough to state that by the 1970s even the extreme left Italian Communist party shifted from opposition to the EU (i.e. the EU conceived as part of the pan-American strategy) to enthusiastic support (Sbargia, 2001; Verzichelli and Cotta, 2000). This bipartisan endorsement of the EU was initially challenged when the corruption scandals of the early 1990s ended with the disappearance of the Christian Democratic party and the emergence of the center-right party Forza Italia and the right-wing ethno-populist party Lega Nord – both of which were much less supportive of the EU integration project.

Furthermore, the enlargement of the European Union on its Eastern borders, as well as the introduction of the euro and the austerity policy imposed to meet the Maastricht criteria for entering the European Monetary Union, have contributed to transforming the permissive consensus around European integration into a so-called constrained dissensus (Mair, 2013). This is true for Europe in general and for Italy in particular. Since Maastricht, opposition to the EU has diffused and become wider in scope. Moreover, Italy’s influence on European choices was traditionally quite limited, a tendency that began with Italy’s internal political crisis in the 1990s (Bellucci, 2005). Indeed, Italy has often been perceived as a weakly influential member (Ferrera, 2003) and as a partner who defaults on European prescriptions (Giuliani and Piattoni, 2001). Such perception became widespread during the outburst of the economic crisis that further limited Italy’s political influence and even autonomy (Cotta, 2016). The economic crisis, coupled with the migration crisis reaching its alleged peak back in 2015-2016, and the most recent Covid-19 pandemic, are the contextual factors that triggered the development and strengthening of parties opposed to the EU. Indeed, such contextual crises favored the growth of parties critical of the EU, allowing them to capitalize on peoples’ negative perception of the European mismanagement of the crises. In other words, people were fed up with the national elite’s inability to face the crises and with the perceived lack of solidarity from the EU (Carlotti,

2021). As a consequence, parties such as the Movimento Cinque Stelle, the Lega, and the Fratelli D'Italia started to instrumentalize EU in order to win national elections. This general situation is also mirrored by fluctuation in support for the EU coming from the people at large. Indeed, at the beginning of the 2000s, the EU was referred to in internal public debates to justify unpopular choices (Bellucci, 2005, p. 212). Furthermore, opinion polls identified a persistent segment of the electors who are against the EU if it does not present itself with an innocuous face (Isernia, 2005, p. 253). In recent years, there has been a suggested shift in the attitudes of Italians, transitioning from a steadfast belief in the European Union (where the EU was viewed as a stable and legitimate point of reference) to a more Euro-realist standpoint. Euro-realism is conceived in opposition to Euroscepticism and is defined as a feeling of separateness from the Europe of the Euro, which is seen as a necessity rather than a source of concrete advantages (Diamanti and Bordignon, 2002, p. 58). This fluctuation is corroborated by the data gathered in this study, and it is further accentuated by the latest developments that reveal an increasing inclination towards placing trust in EU institutions, which can be interpreted as a result of their handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as further stressed in this work, this critical or realist position toward the EU is still multifaceted in Italy and not easily classifiable with a single label. Most of the Italian trends discussed in this book are common among long-standing member states of the European Union (della Porta and Caiani, 2007; 2009). As a result, the Italian case can serve as an illustration of broader dynamics concerning old EU member states and their attitudes towards the EU.

2.4 (North) Macedonia and the EU integration process

Unlike in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), where the 'delays' vis-à-vis the European integration process are to be understood within a domestic paradigm, the case of (North) Macedonia tends to portray the complexities in its external environment. These complexities consisted primarily of the political dispute with Greece over the country's name, which in turn prevented (North) Macedonia from receiving the green light from the Council of the EU to officially begin the negotiations process. In June 2018, following the signing of the Prespa Agreement with Greece, which in turn 'forced' Macedonia to change its name to North Macedonia, the European Council failed to make the decision to start negotiations with the country due to the French veto; the latter did not touch upon the question of North Macedonia per se but rather on the question of the accession process as such. When in 2020, the Council of the EU adopted a new enlargement methodology for negotiations with the countries of the

Western Balkans, North Macedonia faced a new (externally driven) challenge from Bulgaria, which prevented the initiation of the first Intergovernmental Conference within the European Council and pushed for new, bilateral conditions for starting the accession talks with North Macedonia (Mojsovska, 2021).

Within such externally driven dynamics, it does not come as a surprise that North Macedonia has seen a significant rise in Euroscepticism (Demiri and Nikolovski, 2022). Although Euro-enthusiasm continues to characterize North Macedonia's stance towards the EU and European integration, Euroscepticism has become increasingly institutionalized, particularly through the formation, since 2018, of political parties that have emerged in response to the aforementioned challenges faced by North Macedonia. The two most prominent parties in this regard were United Macedonia (*Edinstvena Makedonija*) and Fatherland (*Rodina*), which promote the rejection of the EU as a political, economic, ethical, and civilizational option (Demiri and Nikolovski, 2022, p. 61). These parties argue that 'Artificial war-mongering creations such as the EU and NATO are falling apart, and the programmatic goal is to prepare Macedonia for the upcoming geostrategic reality, which is Eurosasia (from Lisbon to Vladivostok)' (ibid.). The Left (*Levica*), on the contrary do not oppose the EU, they are mostly focused on the rejection of NATO, of which North Macedonia is already a member. In essence, the party now embraces populism as its foundation, departing from the previously dominant left-inclusive populism and instead adopting mono-ethnic, nationalist, and anti-establishment narratives.

These Eurosceptic trajectories align with the opinion polls conducted by Eurothink from 2014 onwards (Demiri and Nikolovski, 2022, p. 63). The latest survey from 2021 shows that while 57% of people believe that the EU is the best alternative for North Macedonia, 38% of them believe that North Macedonia should find its own model of development. Such logic can be further differentiated via the ethnic axis that shows strong (polarizing) cleavages; while 82% of ethnic Albanians believe that the EU is the only alternative for North Macedonia, only 47% of ethnic Macedonians share such a view. In this respect, 48% of Macedonians believe that the country should find its own model of development outside of the EU, which in turn offers a strong foundation for the institutionalization of Euroscepticism on the party level. Stemming from this, the North Macedonian case – particularly the trends discussed in this book – can be taken as an illustration of how externally-driven obstacles can transform an otherwise stable Euro-enthusiast habitus into a more Eurosceptic one.

2.5 Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the EU integration process

Despite the long-standing economic and political ties between Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the European Union following the conclusion of the Bosnian war (1992-1995), the majority of the EU's efforts to establish "political stability, economic prosperity, and social harmony failed", with the exception of achievements such as visa liberalization, the establishment of new state agencies, and police reform (Brljevac, 2011, p. 3). Considering that BiH is perceived as one of the countries in the Western Balkans that are lagging behind on its way to membership of the EU[vi] – primarily because of the polity-driven reality of the country combined with strong ethnonationalism – it comes as no surprise that most citizens of BiH cannot be considered Euroenthusiasts. This is in line with the annual Balkan Opinion Barometer reports commissioned by the Regional Cooperation Council, which show that around 35% of citizens believe that EU membership would be a good thing (and around 40 % believe that it would be neither good nor bad), while around 30% of citizens believe that BiH will never be a part of the EU (Regional Cooperation Council, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022).

BiH's citizens – like the citizens of many other Western Balkan countries – have low opinions of their domestic political elites, which impacts political participation[vii] and perceptions of the stability of democratic institutions (e.g., Banović et al., 2021) as well as attitudes toward the welfare regime (e.g., Andres, 2004), socioeconomic status (e.g., Šiljak and Nielsen, 2022), rule of law (e.g., Vanjek, 2021) and consensus-building mechanisms (e.g., Trlin, 2017). In this respect, European integration could be grasped as an opportunity for the 'normalization' of BiH's fragile sociopolitical landscape (e.g., Kočan, 2022), but this has yet to materialize. Support for European integration among the domestic political elite across ethnic lines and entities (i.e., Republika Srpska and Federation of BiH) is not uniform, spanning from high support by the Bosniak and Bosnian Croat (ethno-)political elite in the Federation of BiH (FBiH) and conditional support by the Bosnian Serb (ethno-)political elite in Republika Srpska (RS) (e.g., Turčilo, 2013).

Particularly in the case of the RS, the (ethno-)politicized discourse led by Milorad Dodik shows that European integration and the EU as such is 'welcomed' only when the process of 'Europeanization' is 'domestically-led' (Brljevac, 2011, p. 1); as stated on numerous occasions by Milorad Dodik, "the EU will have a partner in RS only if the solutions for BiH's problems are not imposed by the international community" (ibid). In this respect, a consensus on the prospect of BiH's membership in the EU among the political elites in BiH was never fully reached; one could even argue that support for the EU is divided along entity lines, meaning

that BiH is divided into Euroenthusiast citizens living in FBiH (i.e., Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats) and at least Euro-critical if not Eurosceptic citizens living in RS (i.e., Bosnian Serbs).

While there is significant polarization among citizens at the macro level regarding the perceived benefits or drawbacks of European Union (EU) membership, quantitative data reveal several areas of consensus among the population. The data from 2017 onwards show a consensus on the benefits of the following policy areas (i) freedom to study and/or work in the EU; (ii) economic prosperity; (iii) freedom to travel; (iv) social protection; and (v) peace and stability (Regional Cooperation Council, 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021; 2022). In this respect, the common denominator amidst polarizing views on membership fit the socioeconomic frame, meaning that the EU in general (as an abstract concept) has to be further clustered in terms of policy in order to appear more 'attractive'. Despite the presence of shared elements that could potentially facilitate a certain level of functional cooperation among the domestic (ethno-)political elite, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has not achieved the necessary progress in terms of implementing reforms. Illustrative in this regard are the European Commission assessments of BiH between 2019 and 2021 (ESI, 2022, p. 7), which show that either the EU failed to incentivize the reforms in BiH or the domestic (ethno)political elite failed to 'internalize' the process.

Nevertheless, in December 2022, amidst the war in Ukraine, BiH received the green light and officially became an EU candidate country, having first requested the status in 2016. The status, which directly corresponds with the EU's attempt to revitalize and solidify its presence in the Western Balkans amidst growing Russian influence in the region (e.g., e.g., Mahmutaj, 2023) comes rather unsurprisingly, given the fact that BiH has only managed to address one out of fourteen recommendations issued by the European Commission (European Commission, 2022). In such a context, the need to understand the dynamics of BiH's citizens' perceptions of European integration and the EU/Europe as such is very timely; in the section on the case of BiH, the analytical frames that guide this book are utilized in order to unpack the nature and dynamics of the narratives that reflect on attitudes toward the socioeconomic, political and cultural aspects of the EU, Europe, and European integration.

Conclusion

In sum, comparing the five selected countries in terms of the different institutional, cultural, and organizational opportunities that may potentially affect Euroscepticism from below, we see great variations but also some similarities, not necessarily cross cutting the West/East or 'older' and 'newer' (or quasi) members divide. Moreover, we also see, beyond the context of opportunities, that in terms of organizational milieu of civil society actors, a certain fluidity of 'types' of actors characterized especially the Eastern Europe and Balkans, with new actors emerging and taking position toward the EU, which are classifiable as movement-parties (Caiani, 2022).

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Chapter 3

A poorly contested entry to the EU, external shocks, and the rise of illiberalism in Slovenia

Abstract

The literature has shown that until recently Slovenian citizens generally supported the EU, including political elites who did not base their political programmes on relativizing the EU. However, several internal crises of the EU have contributed to the feeling among Slovenian citizens that their voice within the EU is weak. As the research shows, this dynamic is successfully reflected in the programmes of Eurosceptic parties, which tend to “demand" independent decision-making. These tendencies are consistent with the findings of the focus groups and interviews, as decision-making has been relativized in at least two ways: first, by Brussels centralism combined with progressive ideologies (radical right), and second, by the "Verhofstadt"-type neoliberal ideology ‘supported by political elites (radical left). In contrast to the decision-making process, the debate on national versus European identity was less problematic, suggesting that Slovenian identity can coexist with European identity. The most important lesson in this context was that European identity functions as an empty signifier, as “everything and nothing” at the same time.

3.1 Introduction

In the last 15 years, global crises have triggered broad popular discontent with the existing elites and institutions that have long uncritically supported the liberal internationalist agenda of enhanced cooperation on security, trade, finance and other areas based on the transfer of authority to international institutions. The EU, one of the greatest achievements of liberal internationalism, has been significantly affected. The global crises revealed flaws in the EU in certain crises like the eurozone, migrant and refugee crises, Brexit and the rise of illiberal regimes in Eastern Europe.

What is peculiar about Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries is that their political and socioeconomic transition and integration into Euro-Atlantic organisations – viewed as one of the most important successes of liberal internationalism and the EU since the Cold War ended – occurred hand in hand. Through the ‘Europeanisation’ process, international institutions and the EU provided CEE elites with legitimacy in return for ‘downloading’ certain norms, rules and procedures. While institutional changes in CEE often took place more on the surface, the region underwent a profound socioeconomic transformation. In the EU, CEE countries have retained their ‘junior’ or ‘new member’ status. The global and EU crises had a deep impact on CEE where they caused a crisis regarding the external source of authority. To ensure their

longevity, the elites in CEE have attempted to interfere with independent institutions and turned to nationalist-conservative and illiberal ideologies and narratives. Slovenia is an interesting example. Slovenia was one of the most pro-EU countries and often seen as the 'best pupil' in CEE (Bojinović and Svetličič, 2017). It was among the first in the group to enter the eurozone and Schengen. The various crises affecting the EU created substantial pressures and political turbulence in Slovenia, leading to the rise of Eurosceptic and illiberal forces (Lovec et al., 2022).

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on the Slovenian case. It has been argued that the integration was a top-down and elite project based on a permissive consensus (Lajh and Novak, 2020). This chapter adds to the research on Euroscepticism-liberalism by breaking it down into demand and supply sides, politics, polity, and policy, including representation, socioeconomic and identity issues (Pirro & Van Kessel, 2018). Specific attention is paid to the narratives 'from below'. The chapter generally focuses on the time between 2018 and 2021 when supply-side Euroscepticism and illiberalism reached its peak. It considers research of opinion polls, party manifestos as well as focus groups of supporters of Eurosceptic/illiberal parties and interviews with experts in public opinion, media and advocacy to better understand the bottom-up and top-down dynamics involved.

3.2 Theoretical framework: international shocks, crisis of legitimacy, and a populist backlash

The concept of populism occupies the centre of research into popular discontent with existing elites and institutions. Populism is understood as an ideology, strategy, rhetoric or discourse that concentrates on the 'pure people' as opposed to the 'corrupt elites' and since it is 'narrowcentred', i.e., it does not encompass a comprehensive vision of the world, it can mix with various thick ideologies (Mudde, 2004, p. 543; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 5; Taggart, 2002; Pirro & Taggart, 2018, pp. 255–256). Populism can be good for democracy by mobilising participation. Yet, populism's 'absolute' view of the general will (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 18) and antagonising discourse (Müller, 2016, p. 19; 42) contradict the pluralist/liberal view of democracy that entails various checks and balances and protections of individual rights. These are often challenged by strong personalities who are said to be directly accountable to the people, which, however, brings the risk of corruption and the abuse of power (Mudde, 2004, p. 545). Populism namely points to certain contradictions of modern liberal democracy and popular democracy.

The recent rise of populism is related to the forces of globalisation. On the demand side, globalisation has brought a backlash to socioeconomic and cultural change while on the supply side it has seen increased competition among different levels of authority. Centrist political forces have long supported enhanced international cooperation on security, trade, finance, and other areas based on the transfer of authority to international institutions, which acted to constrain competition from forces on the left – pro-distribution – and the right – socially-conservative (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017, p. 9; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1674). Globalisation has challenged democracy by creating groups of winners that no longer need democracy to protect their interests while individual loser groups cannot use it to improve their position. A gap has thereby been created between international governance and domestic representation (Chryssogelos, 2017). In response, global crises led to the rise of a popular sovereignty movement which objected to the multilateral overreach and interventionism against the will of the governed on a broad spectrum of liberal policies tanging from trade, investment, human rights to migration. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017, p. 116) describe the "popular sovereignty" movement as an "illiberal democratic response to the undemocratic liberalism". As opposed to the 'internationalist state', the movement called for a neotraditional sovereign state (Chryssogelos, 2020). While in the global south, the populist movement was often left-leaning and targeted global finance, the populist movement in the global north largely mixed right-leaning ideologies and highlighted migration (Chryssogelos, 2017).

The EU found itself in the centre of the new political cleavage. Although the EU aimed to protect the European welfare state from the excesses of globalisation, it was also seen as one of the biggest proponents of liberal internationalism and globalism. This led to growing public discontent with the EU as already seen in the 1990s and 2000s in the failed referendums to support constitutional treaties. According to Krastev (2007; 2012), the EU was increasingly seen as a "policy without politics on the EU level and politics without policy on the member state level" where "the elites were increasingly suspicious towards democracy and the public was becoming increasingly hostile to liberalism". Global crises like the eurozone and migration crises revealed specific flaws in the EU that nourished the rise of Euroscepticism (Pirro & van Kessel, 2017, p. 406–407). The literature identified two types of Euroscepticism: the 'hard' version of outright and unqualified rejection to the European integration and the 'soft' version of contingent and qualified opposition to it along with calls for EU reforms (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2001; Taggart, 2002; Pirro & Taggart, 2018, p. 256).

In the CEE countries, the Euro-Atlantic integration and politico-economic transformation went hand in hand. It followed an elite apolitical pattern with expert politicians in the centre and decisions imposed from above (Korkut, 2012). Implementation of the liberal paradigm was often artificial and/or poorly accommodated to local needs. EU accession soon led to disenchantment with democracy (Rupnik, 2007). Due to the elitist structure, from the onset dissenting voices were characterised by a "pure anti-establishment appeal" (Učeň, 2007). The global and EU crises resulted in a crisis of the pro-EU elites. The fragile institutions provided an opportunity for authoritarian forms of governance (Bugarič & Ginsburg, 2016) to emerge, such as 'illiberal democracies', a hybrid 'semi-democratic' form of a political regime which have spread around the region and enabled the ruling class to save the image of a democratic state while also constraining criticism and political opposition. Following Kauth and King (2020) (based on previous work by Zakaria and Schenkkan), an illiberal democracy is characterised as a system in which free elections still exist and there is no explicit violent oppression of citizens. However, the state apparatus rejects criticism by citizens and hinders their participation in the political process. These regimes contained various illiberal features such as extreme social conservativism and nationalism (Cabada, 2021).

3.3 Method and sources

The empirical research has two parts. The first part is based on existing datasets (demand side) and content analysis of political party manifestos (supply side). International datasets such as Eurobarometer were used along with national datasets; longitudinal data provided insight into general attitudes to the EU[viii] while data for the 2018–2021 period were used to better understand more specific attitudes regarding individual aspects and dimensions[ix]. The 2018–2021 period was focused on since that is when (supply side) Euroscepticism and illiberalism reached their peak (in Slovenia) (see section 3.5). The content analysis of party manifestos was based on the framework proposed by Pirro and van Kessel (2018) that includes the categories of sovereignty, legitimacy, socioeconomic issues, and culture. From the supply-side perspective, the research included manifestos of Eurosceptic and illiberal parties that ran at the 2018 parliamentary national elections and/or 2019 European elections in Slovenia (i.e., the time when supply-side Euroscepticism/illiberalism peaked): the Slovenian National Party (SNS), United Slovenia, Homeland League, The Left, and the Socialist Party of Slovenia (SPS). Among the parties selected, three were hard-right (the first three) and two were radical-left (the last two). Two were parliamentary parties (SNS and The Left). For details of the party manifestos, see List 3A in the Appendix.

In the second part of our research, the marginal representation of Eurosceptic and illiberal views in the datasets/surveys meant that additional qualitative data were collected through focus groups (FGs) containing supporters of Eurosceptic and illiberal parties. The FG design aimed to collect data on narratives 'from below' corresponding to the Euroscepticism frames proposed by Pirro and van Kessel (2018) The aim was for the FGs to represent members or supporters of relevant political parties, such as those in parliament, to avoid too specific examples of niche and short-lived parties including in the sample while, within that sample, representing the diversity of Eurosceptic and illiberal parties in Slovenia (e.g., left and right leaning). The decision was made to organise one FG with supporters of right-wing parties such as SNS or the Homeland League in the Ptuj area – an Eastern, less developed, and rural part of Slovenia, and another with supporters of left-wing parties such as The Left in Ljubljana, an urban centre. In mid 2021, the FGs were arranged by independent organisations with connections to supporters of those parties. These organisations made up a sample of four participants per FG with a representative demographic background (in terms of both typical supporters and the representation of different age, gender and occupations). Details concerning the FGs' design, questions and demographics are presented in Tables 3A and 3B in the appendix.

To further understand the relationship between the top-down and bottom-up narratives in specific contexts, we conducted five semi-structured detailed interviews with an expert on public opinion, a civil society and interest group representative, an advocacy expert, and a journalist. While the questions were in line with the framework used for the FGs, each interviewee was asked several sub questions (for details of the questions and interviewees, see the Tables 3C and 3D in the appendix).

3.4. The Slovenian context of European narratives from below: opportunities and constraints

Slovenia was one of the most pro-European/EU and pro-Western post-socialist countries due to the softer version of a communist regime and Yugoslavia's openness to the West (relative to the Soviet Union). The already established relatively strong connectedness with the West meant that Slovenia could move quickly with its integration into Euro Atlantic organisations. Still, overall knowledge and discussion of those organisations was weak, and the integration process was primarily led by technocratic elites. As opposed to joining the EU that was based on strong

support across the political spectrum, civil society and public opinion, membership in NATO was opposed by a substantial share of the public and civil society organisations.

In contrast to the effective downloading and implementation of the acquis, the internalisation of more general liberal/democratic norms and rules in Slovenia was sometimes more artificial and institutional quality issues often remained. After joining the EU, the European integration largely remained an apolitical and non-contested issue due to the strong positive perception of it that was often used by political elites to legitimise various policies such as economic reforms (SNS, the sole parliamentary party to express Eurosceptic views played quite a marginal role). This perception was a result of the then high economic growth and Slovenia being the first CEE country to enter the eurozone and Schengen, and the first to preside over the EU Council, which was seen as a reward for its 'best pupil' status in CEE and was an important part of Slovenian identity at the time. The period of EU crises which hit Slovenia hard (Slovenia was greatly pressured by the eurozone crisis and just avoided the need for a bailout in 2013 and was one of the main entry countries for the Schengen area along the Western Balkans route during the migrant and refugee crisis in 2015) caused significant political turbulence in Slovenia. Many centre-left parties disappeared overnight, with new Eurosceptic parties emerging on the left such as The United Left. The main centre-right party, the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), led by Janez Janša, increasingly aligned itself with Eurosceptic and illiberal regimes such as that of Victor Orban, adopting their playbook and rhetoric. During the SDS-led government between 2020 and 2022, Janša's SDS clashed with EU institutions over the coalition's interference in civil society and media. This led to protest by civil society and the media together with growing support for the EU.

3.5 Demand and supply of Euroscepticism and illiberalism in Slovenia during the EU crises period

Demand side

Slovenians have traditionally strongly identified with Europe/EU. Eurobarometer data show that Slovenian attitudes to the EU and EU membership have customarily polled above EU average. Support has been high specifically for the four freedoms (the free movement of goods, services, capital and people) and the euro, but lower for distributive policies (CAP, cohesion) and foreign policy. A negative aspect is that Slovenia's voice within the EU has persistently

been perceived as weak, which may partly be explained by the country's size and the political turbulence of the recent period.

The EU's crises have seen a decline in support for the European integration, like across much of the EU. However, support for the EU was initially still above support for the country's national governments, which apparently took most of the blame. This partly changed during the migration crisis in the context of the strong domestic securitisation of the crisis regarding certain aspects when support for the government became stronger than support for the EU (Lovec, 2019).[x] This sort of supply-side dynamics is shown in support for the EU dipping below the EU average for the first time in the second half of the 2015 (Scheme 1). Two further such occurrences in the following years reveal the altered role of the domestic supply side (as discussed in more detail in the supply-side section), followed by a 'U turn' in support for the EU that demonstrates that the supply-side trend was short-lived and bounced back.

Figure 3.1 here

Slovenians have traditionally been supportive of liberal values, especially compared to other CEE countries. Yet, public support for liberalism varies from one issue to another and depends on the context and framing of narratives. For example, the support for personal freedom and independence is very strong, followed by support for democracy, an independent media, human rights and, at the end of the list, for specific rights like the right to asylum (Lovec, 2019). Increased attention to the liberal values such as the rule-of-law issues in response to the supply-side dynamics has seen a rise in pro-EU and pro-liberal views. According to Eurobarometer polls, the rule of law in terms of legality, certainty, equality before the law, the separation of powers, prohibition of arbitrariness, penalties for corruption and effective judicial protection by an independent courts has been perceived as very important in Slovenia.[xi] The same applies to the need for an independent and critical media and civil society.[xii] At the same time, the perceived need to improve the situation in Slovenia with respect to those matters has been significantly above the EU average due to the perception of the low independence of the judiciary and corruption with interference by domestic politics and political parties viewed as the biggest reason.[xiii] Most Slovenians also believed they had been exposed to divisive contents online while one-third of respondents believed they had exposed to intimidation by politicians through threats or hateful messages (in both cases this was well above the EU average).[xiv]

Demographic research shows that while a more negative attitude to the EU was more common among various less privileged groups not benefiting so much from the EU such as the older population, women, those with a lower education and income, these factors did not feature while explaining the overall attitudes as negative attitudes did not prevail in any of those groups[xv] (Lovec, 2019). Age, education, income and rural residence also correlated with less support for individual liberal values and more support for illiberal features like ethnic homogeneity and the role of a strong leader (ibid.). Party support was generally found to be more important than demographic variables (ibid.), suggesting the role of the supply side to which we now turn.

Supply side

Slovenian political parties have traditionally been in favour of the EU. This changed somewhat after the EU crises which triggered a crisis of the established elites and led to the rise of Eurosceptic and illiberal narratives. However, the trend was short-lived and bounced back during the government of Janša's SDS between 2020 and 2022 which, after having previously aligned itself with Eurosceptic and illiberal regimes, attempted to interfere with independent state institutions. SNS is considered the most important (hard) Eurosceptic party in Slovenia (Taggart & Pirro, 2021). The party has consistently featured various elements of nationalism and populism. Although it failed to clear the 4% parliamentary threshold at the 2011 and 2014 elections, SNS returned to parliament for another mandate in 2018. Another party denoted as (soft) Eurosceptic is The Left (ibid.). The United Left, later renamed The Left, entered parliament in 2014 after having been established just prior in the context of the austerity measures. It shares features with Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain and was against the EU's ordo liberalism and interventionist/military foreign policy. At the 2018 parliamentary elections, it received a little less than 9% of votes. At the 2019 European parliament elections, The Left was unable to reach the threshold (7%–8%), albeit it was close. At the 2022 parliamentary elections, The Left saw its result halved.

Taggart and Pirro (2021) also identify certain hard-right, populist and Eurosceptic elements in Janša's SDS, which after the EU crises aligned itself ever more with the Eurosceptic and illiberal regime of Victor Orban, with Donald Trump, and other controversial figures. While SDS is economically liberal, it defends conservative values and has occasionally criticised Brussels' centrism and double standards on rule-of-law issues as well as its migration policy. Although it was the relative winner of the 2018 elections, it could not put a government coalition

together. After coming to power in 2020, it attempted to interfere in the judiciary, civil society, and the media. Taggart and Pirro (2021) also detect populist elements in individual centre-left parties that emerged in the 2010s, such as Marjan Šarec's List (LMŠ), which was established and entered parliament in 2018 and led the government between 2018 and 2020. It merged with the Freedom movement after its landslide victory in 2022.

Apart from parliamentary parties, another two hard Eurosceptic parties participated at the 2018 parliamentary elections but failed to pass the threshold: the nativist United Slovenia and the communist SPS. Both parties strongly opposed various features of liberal internationalism. At the 2019 European elections, the reformist identitarian Homeland League participated but could not clear the threshold. Building on Pirro and van Kessel's (2018) framework, in the below table we present the positions of two parliamentary and three non-parliamentary parties whose manifestos consistently demonstrated corresponding Eurosceptic and anti-liberal (internationalist) narratives. This excludes SDS and LMŠ because these features could not be identified in their manifestos. As the table shows, national sovereignty plays an important role in all the manifestos as opposed to the decisions imposed by the EU or other Western-dominated organisations (NATO, trade) or countries (USA, Germany). More radical Eurosceptic narratives are more commonly found among parties on the margins of the left–right political spectrum, which indicates a link between political centrism and pro-EU/pro-liberal internationalist attitudes. Concerns over legitimacy range from decision-making processes to individual policy areas like the economy and security, depending on the ideological backgrounds. Populist framing is widely represented and positively correlated with more radical ideologies. While socioeconomic issues are important across the political spectrum and feature in different categories, there are certain differences across traditional cleavages as right-wing parties object to interventionism, regulation and redistribution. Cultural issues like migration are more important for right-leaning parties that see it as a project of social meddling.

Table 3.1 here

It is more difficult to assess various illiberal narratives of the parties since none would directly argue against a liberal democracy and given that many have not yet come to power to be able to enforce an illiberal agenda. In the 2020–2022 period, SNS supported Janša's minority government. It opposed the right to asylum, the rights of minorities and ethnic groups and showed support for the Russian regime – a model illiberal democracy. SDS representatives

verbally attacked journalists, the government cut the financing of the national press agency and supported the emergence of partisan media, thereby hindering media pluralism (Freedomhouse, 2021). The government also put pressure on public protesters using the fight against the epidemic as an excuse. Still, some commentators would argue against labelling SDS as 'illiberal'.[xvi]

3.6 Narratives of those supporting Euroscepticism and illiberalism on the hard right and radical left

In this section, we present evidence from the FGs and interviews structured in line with the four categories in the framework of Pirro and van Kessel (2018) (sovereignty, legitimacy, socioeconomic issues, and culture). Where relevant, we also point out the role of politics, polity and policy, the traditional left–right cleavage, populist framing, the role of national historical (autobiographic) narratives as well as demographic backgrounds.

Sovereignism

Sovereignty (often mixed with input and output legitimacy issues; see the following sections on legitimacy and socioeconomic issues) came out as a central frame across political and demographic dividing lines. The participants in FG A – supporters of hard-right parties – raised issues like "interference" and "dictating" by EU (members) (ID2.1, ID2.2) as well as of "bureaucracy" (ID2.1, ID2.4) and "democratic deficit" (ID2.4). They argued that "powers should be brought back" (ID2.1, ID2.3) and be "kept in line with the Slovenian Constitution" (ID2.2). According to ID2.1, an older participant, "the EU plays too important a role, a bunch of bureaucrats dictates what we should eat and drink. We should stamp our foot down and be more independent instead of obeying every dictate". A younger participant (ID2.4) argued that "/the EU/ is mostly about well-paid jobs in the Commission /…/ they are not accountable to anyone /…/ the European parliament has no powers to initiate legislation, only the Commission can". The other younger participant (ID2.3) called for a return to the pre-Maastricht structure:

> Each member state should have its own policy and only joint problems should be dealt with collectively, in Brussels. In the Homeland League, we are strongly behind subsidiarity. Meaning that only those things that cannot be solved on the member-state level should be considered. This was the original idea; free trade, lower barriers and when the EU was a tariff union everything worked well. But when multiculti globalists came with the idea of abandoning national democracies and the state, problems

> emerged. The EU should take care of security and economic conduct and leave the rest to the sovereign nation states. The EU is a hybrid entity in the process of turning into a federation. However, sovereign nation states is the basis. But what Weber and Macron want is a classic federation, the United States of Europe.

The participants of FG B– supporters of radical left parties – criticised the EU as a "liberal economic project" "that does not care about the social dimension" and as an "ideological tool" (ID2.5; ID2.6). They argued that "the EU is using its (economic) power to subjugate non-Western areas" (ID2.5). Members of FG B agreed that the EU is "not heading in any direction" (ID2.7) and that "if it is, it is definitely pursuing the interests of capital, not the people" (ID2.5). One participant (ID2.8) described the vision of the EU as "unambitious" and that "Brussels is becoming an institution where we only apply for the co-financing of projects".

According to the interviewees, the general public's perception of the EU is "positive" (ID2.9) while, in the public debates, "the EU is not an important topic" (ID2.10; ID2.13). Interviewee ID2.9 stated that the quite high (75%) support for the EU in the early years of monitoring was influenced by euphoria whereas in more recent years it has been around 45% and stable. Support for the European integration on a scale from 1 to 10 been around 6, with positive upwards fluctuations in specifically framed questions (ID2.9). According to Interviewee ID.2.9, on average cleavages such as young–old, urban–rural etc. exist in Slovenia, but play a more particular role since support for the EU is considerable across all those groups while the rationale for these attitudes is typically quite pragmatic. The interviewees noted that in the context of domestic framing certain issues can raise EU scepticism along the lines of party support and, to a smaller extent, still religion (ID2.9).

Legitimacy

FG A participants expressed broad mistrust in the current elites and representative institutions. Several references were made to "the need for a new generation" to "replace people who have been in power for too long" (ID2.2, ID2.3). The older representative ID2.1 questioned a representative democracy generally by declaring that "all parties are the same" "changing over their clothes" and "communists in disguise" which is "part of a multiparty system". On the other hand, he also blamed leftists for most of the problems and claimed that "Europe sees it": "It is positive that we got rid of Yugoslavia, but we did not get rid of socialism. In the EU, our leftist elites cannot do the sorts they used to in Yugoslavia /.../ yet socialism is still there". He also

believed the media is manipulated by its owners. In contrast, ID2.2 and ID2.3 chiefly blamed the current elites. For ID2.3 "their views (views of political elites, experts, the media, note added by authors.) are different from ours. They want to lead the country according to their own ideas". In contrast, ID2.2 simply stated that the elites "have not performed". In his view, "power should be returned to the people. If they do not deliver, they should be replaced". He expressed trust in the media and noted that "it is good to listen to them all and create your own opinion".

The participants of FG B blamed "Western liberals" for the "lack of social cohesion" (ID2.6; ID2.7), "inactivity in facing the climate crisis" (ID2.8) and the "erosion of human rights" in general (ID2.5). Explaining this further, participant ID2.5 declared that "we are talking about the Western bourgeoisie and their local assistants", while participant ID2.6 said that it would be "unthinkable that Slovenia would produce politicians such as Guy Verhofstadt". As opposed to those in FG A, the FG B participants expressed greater trust in various public institutions such as high-quality media (ID2.5; ID2.7).

The interviewees highlighted the importance of EU-level politics (e.g., developments in European political groups) for Slovenia (ID2.10; ID2.12). They also pointed out Slovenian voters' limited awareness of the European political groups, their visions or the position of Slovenian political actors on the EU level (ID2.11; ID2.15). Interviewee ID2.9 held the view that the global and EU crises had triggered a crisis of the established 'dependent' political elite in Slovenia, which had led to the rise of anti-elitist discourses as well as the radical ideologies entering mainstream politics:

> According to Krastev, the fall of the Iron Curtain was perceived as the beginning of the normality which the West synonymised. For the right-wing parties, Christian democracy such as Kohl and similar was seen as the gold standard. Left-wing parties were more articulated and critical, such as towards neoliberalism of the 1990s, but felt that it would not pay to go against. Today, certain values that are universal and not exclusively related to Europe but are strongest here are problematised. It is part of a broader global change. The EU is regrouping but is often pragmatic and not doing enough for its defence. Slovenia has been self-isolated by the current elites. Centre-left parties now defend those values for tactical reasons, but face difficulties because in the economic area they generate injustice, and neoliberalism is still present. They and the Greens are presently exploring new paradigms. The right wing is upset because of the

> interference with identity, Islam /…/ these are in fact old cleavages that were reinvented in the new context where the right-wing realised that the Europe represented by the likes of Kohl and Mitterrand no longer exists.

While narratives such as that concerned with globalism vs souvereignism were, like the EU itself, considered "too sophisticated for ordinary people" (ID2.9), to gain support political actors would build on certain sensitive topics and (perceived) weaknesses, also by exploiting the overall lack of knowledge (ID2.12). ID2.12 added that (vis-à-vis Slovenia's perceived weak voice within the EU) "people tend to follow the politicians that build the impression that they have more power (in EU-level decision-making, note added by the authors) than they actually do, which goes hand in hand with the rise of all kinds of scepticism regarding the EU".

Socioeconomic issues

For the FG A participants, socioeconomic issues lay at the centre of their disenchantment with the EU. According to ID2.1: "We expected more. There are no jobs and those that exist are poorly paid. In short, what they promised us did not happen". In line with their backgrounds, ID2.1 (an older participant) raised the issue of loss of independent policy and social rights, ID2.2 (a middle-aged entrepreneur) referred to the constraints on business, ID2.3 (a young female with low-paid precarious job in services) the lack of jobs and ID2.4 (a student, unemployed) the absence of social fabric.

Migration policy was raised as an issue by ID2.1: "I am not a nationalist, but we cannot accept them all. If we accept everybody, we ourselves will be poor. Currently, 75% of social transfers goes for these migrants when they come here. That has to be stopped".[xvii] Younger participants expressed their disappointment with the EU in more general terms, arguing "we are just a number" (ID2.3) and that "with so many negative things each day it is hard to look into the future, sometimes even in the present" (ID2.4). ID2.4 noted he was not born when Slovenian EU integration was being discussed and unaware of opportunities that were being promised or of the present opportunities. In his view, Slovenia should quit the euro.

The FG B participants were equally critical of the EU's socioeconomic impact even though the experience they presented was more mixed (they were generally better educated and positioned). ID2.6 gave the example of "education and training" and argued that the Bologna higher education reform (associated with the EU) had "the most negative effects" in this field.

ID2.7 agreed that the Bologna higher education reform is a "horrible reform, which is oriented to competencies, meaning that it treats people as human resources". ID2.5 used the freedom of movement as another example. Here, the participant argued that "on an individual level, it is very stimulating for a Bulgarian citizen to study and work in Belgium, but it is a disaster for the Bulgarian socioeconomic environment", and again pointed out the idea of the EU as a "non-social Union", but more as a mechanism for "the richer, Western members".

Interviewee ID2.9 argued that while people see sense in the integration regardless of particular issues, the attitude towards specific policies and the EU generally can, e.g., in the context of the crises attributed to the EU and the groups specifically affected by those crises, generate more negative views. The COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in lockdowns and the disrupted economy was given as an example. Interviewee ID2.13 argued similarly that "Slovenians are pro-European until it comes to more problematic issues, such as the migrant crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, when they tend to react according to their assessment of how threatening it is to them".

Culture

The FG A participants felt 'Slovenian' as opposed to 'European', but argued these two could go along: "if it was what they promised, it could be" (ID2.1, 2021). For ID2.2, "At the beginning, it seemed that we would be more independent /…/ now everything is dictated from Brussels". The position held by the FG B participants was more agnostic. ID2.5 declared that he is "more Slovenian than European" because "he was never on an Erasmus programme and is paying taxes in Slovenia", while ID2.6 claimed that "she is neither Slovenian nor European, but a citizen of the world". ID2.7 stated that "she cannot imagine what Slovenian and European means, but she has both 'labels' on her passport".

The interviewees held a "non-conflicting" view of Slovenian and European identity. Interviewee ID2.9 described how a "European identity, largely perceived as the same as the EU, was never controversial, well-articulated or attractive for any of the groups or a source of political programme or cleavage"; it was instead "perceived mostly positively and was non-upsetting, as opposed to membership in NATO". European values were explained to "underpin the Slovenian identity" (ID2.10) and the European identity as something that "should complement the Slovenian one" (ID2.12). However, ID2.13 pointed out that "the European identity in the Slovenian case only 'makes sense' if it helps to give harbour to the nation's

liberty". Interviewee ID2.12 further explained that the Slovenian identity was built upon the resistance shown to totalitarianisms, especially the Italian fascism and German Nazism.

The EU and Europe were said to be an empty signifier in the 1990s and while national identity prevailed in the context of independence, the issue of Europeanness came more to surface during the accession period (ID2.9). Yet, according to interviewee ID2.11, "people had a much clearer picture of what Europe meant in the period before Slovenia's membership in the EU", while "today, Slovenia is – when talking about the socio-political environment – more divided, the perception of the European identity depends more on every individual". Still, as opposed to the rest of the region, Slovenia does not have a great historical narrative and nationalism has not been toxic or exclusivist for the most part and was even seen as grotesque such as references to Karantanija or the political programme of SNS (ID2.9). Belongingness to Europe in 2020 increased, but still only 10% of respondents placed being European first (in 1991 just 1%). On the other hand, national identity was placed first by 37%, which is also quite low compared to other countries, followed by region (19%), town (25%) and world (8%) (ID2.9).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has shown for the CEE post-socialist countries generally and for Slovenia in particular the European integration has become the new centre of authority. However, the EU was also weakly understood, and the technocratic process of accession which was accompanied by superficial institutional developments created huge liabilities for the times of crisis when asymmetric shocks coupled with fragile domestic institutions paved the way for the dramatic rise of populism and Euroscepticism/illiberal narratives that, as opposed to the old EU members, have become an important part of government politics throughout CEE.

The empirical research of the case of Slovenia was based on different dimensions of Eurosceptic narratives such as sovereignty, legitimacy, socioeconomic issues, and culture (Pirro & Van Kessel, 2018), as well as aspects like party ideology, including populism, on the demand and supply sides. The Slovenian case was specific for the firm support shown for the EU across the political spectrum and actors, as well as the rapid integration that created strong dependencies and liabilities in terms of asymmetric shocks but also quite limited manoeuvring space for Eurosceptic and illiberal actors.

The research of demand- and supply-side dynamics during the EU's crises, based on existing opinion surveys and party manifestos of Eurosceptic-illiberal parities with a specific focus on the 2018–2020 period when (supply-side) Euroscepticism and illiberalism reached its peak in Slovenia, demonstrated that the EU's crises have led to a decline in the output legitimacy of the pro-EU centrist political forces. This encouraged the increased supply of Eurosceptic/illiberal narratives across the ideological spectrum which on the grounds of sovereignty criticised several aspects of the EU and liberal internationalism, used populist framing, and highlighted socioeconomic issues to various degrees, while disagreeing over how these should be resolved and on the issue of migration which featured as an important topic only for the right-wing parties. In this setting, ruling elites attempted to legitimize interference with independent institutions to ensure their stay in power which caused a direct (rhetorical) confrontation with the EU institutions. Yet, in combination with the return of the EU's output legitimacy, this also led to the growing mobilisation of centrist political forces and civil society in support of the EU and a liberal democracy.

The narrower research of Eurosceptic and illiberal narratives based on FGs with supporters of hard-right and radical-left political parties and interviews with mediators between views from below and elite debates (public opinion and advocacy experts, journalists, NGO representatives) demonstrated that sovereignty served as a meta frame that fed into a sovereigntist grand-narrative across the ideological spectrum. On the hard right, it was associated with centralisation tendencies, bureaucracy and a lack of accountability, i.e., a deficient polity (in modern, liberal terms), and on the radical left with neoliberal economic politics and policy (and hence contradictions of liberal democracy). On the hard right, the crisis of trust in the overall institutions and elites was more profound as seen in the populist framing, which was related to the narrative of failed expectations of the EU being a liberal-reformist project. On the radial left, there was no such disenchantment with the EU as the EU was from the outset viewed as a project of Western capital and its local assistants. The socioeconomic dimension played an important role that fed into output legitimacy (the disenchantment with the EU) on the hard right but basically brought nothing new to the input legitimacy contradictions with the radical-left ideologies. Finally, culture and identity issues did not emerge as especially important; here, contradictions with the European identity or the EU – often considered to be the same thing – were chiefly related with the political issues and policy impact discussed above.

To conclude, it seems that the EU's crises have supported the much-needed contestation and politization of the EU in Slovenia. Awareness of the importance of the EU and liberal internationalism for Slovenia as a small and open economy has increased. Still, the EU's output legitimacy remains highly fragile as does the quality of institutions in Slovenia that is important for the EU's input legitimacy. More discussion is needed of different kinds of European integrations and of liberal internationalism generally, where political developments on the international level should occur alongside those in Slovenia. Focus on specialisation and regional cooperation could help Slovenia to overcome the constraints arising from its (perceived) small size. From a topical perspective, the (narrative on) changing geopolitics (assertive Russia, China's growing role) could help to inform debates about national sovereignty and democratic backslides, and the EU's transformative growth plan to address the socioeconomic concerns.

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Chapter 4.
If you scratch the surface: Euroscepticism in Poland

Abstract

Euroscepticism in Poland is characterized by a high degree of ambivalence. According to opinion polls, a large majority of Poles support their country's membership in the EU, and this support is among the highest among EU member states. However, Polish attitudes toward the EU become much more complex and less unambiguously positive if we consider some fundamental issues. Indeed, many Poles hold very specific opinions that could be described as Eurosceptic. Moreover, in the last elections, a significant majority voted for parties that are soft Eurosceptics (the United Right dominated by Law and Justice (PiS) – almost 45% in 2019) and hard Eurosceptics (Confederation 7% in 2019). This ambivalence is defined in terms of four narrative frames: the socioeconomic frame, the sovereignty frame (including the rule of law), the legitimacy frame (including security), and the

cultural frame. The study draws on analysis of opinion polls in the context of the current political situation, discourse by politicians and opinion makers, and the results of three focus groups conducted with both representatives of grassroots movements and ordinary citizens.

Introduction

Euroscepticism in Poland is a very complex topic because the attitude of Polish society towards the EU distinguishes itself by its high level of ambivalence. On the one hand, in opinion polls, the great majority of Poles support EU membership, and the level of support is one of the highest among member states. The Polish attitude to the EU becomes substantially more complex and less unequivocally positive if issues are taken into consideration. Indeed, many Poles subscribe to opinions which should be recognised as Eurosceptic. Moreover, most of them voted in the 2019 elections for parties which are soft Eurosceptics (United Right dominated by Law and Justice (PiS) almost 45%) and hard Eurosceptics (Confederation 7%).[xviii] Euroscepticism in Poland is strongly correlated with the right side of the political scene, while it remains very weak in the centre and the left. Moreover, a considerable merge between Euroscepticism and Germanophobia, as well as cultural scepticism or even antipathy towards today's West, represents another important feature of anti-EU discourses in Poland.

To show and structure this ambivalence in this article, we will adopt the concept of Eurosceptic populism (Csehi and Zgut, 2021). This is a set of ideas that "equate the EU with 'the corrupt elite' that stands in sharp contrast to 'the pure people', usually, but not exclusively, the nationals of a given member state". The article is divided into four main sections. In the introduction, we discuss background information and data on general support for Poland's membership in the Community, confidence in the EU, and the EU's image in a comparative perspective. The second part discusses the article's theoretical and methodological background. It describes the concepts used in the article and the methods of collecting and analysing the data of the empirical study. The third part offers a presentation of the findings, with particular emphasis on discussions during the focus group study. This is done alongside secondary quantitative data analysis. The fourth section then offers a conclusion.

4.1. Political and cultural opportunities for Euroscepticism in Poland: a historical perspective

In the 2003 referendum on accession to the EU, 77% of Poles voted for membership and 23% voted against it. In all opinion polls following the vote, a solid majority of Poles have always

expressed support for Polish membership in the EU, surpassing in some surveys even 80% (however, this is mostly among decided respondents).[xix] This high approval rating in favour of EU membership has been correlated to various degrees with socio-demographic variables such as: age (young and middle), a higher level of education, a higher income, place of residence (large and middle-sized cities, the western and central parts of the country), sex (a more positive attitude toward the EU is present among women), and political views (ranging from centre-right to the left).

The accession to the EU resulted in dramatic socio-economic advancement for most Poles. Indeed, Poland has received (in absolute numbers) more than 140 billion euros because of EU financial transfers since accession. These numbers make the country by far the biggest beneficiary of EU funds. Moreover, according to the estimates of some Polish economists, whether directly or indirectly, Poland has gained up to 900 billion euros following accession to the EU (the Single Market, interest rates, FDI portfolio investment, faster GDP growth, etc.) (Morawski, 2021). This translated into a gradual increase in trust in the EU and a further strengthening of its positive image. In the summer of 2022 Poland was the country with the second most positive image of the EU among its member states (Figure 4.1). The Poles' confidence in the EU was also considerably higher than the EU's average (Figure 4.2).[xx]

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 about here

Looking merely at this data, one could draw the conclusion that EU support in Poland is at a very high level. As a result, there should be no concerns about the future of Polish membership in the Community. However, at the same time, Polish society is characterised by a relatively high level of volatility in attitudes toward the EU in the short-term perspective.[xxi] What is even more important is that the Eurobarometer surveys also detected considerable contradictions and ambivalence in approaches to the EU. For instance, a sizeable minority of Poles (a higher proportion than the EU's average) believed that Poland could better face its future challenges outside the EU (see figure 4.3). This constitutes a vital example of this ambivalence.

Figure 4.3 about here

Euroscepticism in Poland, both among its political actors and "ordinary" citizens, is mainly of right-wing origins: conservative, ultraconservative and nationalistic (Petrović, 2019).[xxii] The

victory of Law and Justice (PiS), a soft Eurosceptic right-wing party, in the 2015 national elections, which allowed it to establish the first-ever government composed of a single political group[xxiii] in the modern history of Poland, translated into an unprecedented rise in Eurosceptic discourse in Polish public debate. Politicians, journalists, academicians, experts and activists from the United Right and Confederation regularly express sceptical or even hostile opinions towards the EU. They do this through public, private, and social media that reaches millions of Polish citizens. In 2015, after the elections, PiS took over public TV and radio and transformed them into propaganda mouthpieces at an unprecedented scale in the EU, excluding only Hungary.

On the one hand, as the opinion polls confirm, this did not have a significant negative impact on the generally pro-European social mood of Polish citizens. On the other hand, the qualitative and quantitative research presented in our article concerning particular topics shows that various forms of Euroscepticism resonate well among many Polish citizens. This is particularly true regarding the issue of legitimacy (including attitude towards Germany), socio-economic factors (energy transformation), the question of sovereignty (EU conditionality) and cultural issues (approach to minorities).

4.2. Theoretical background and methodological approach

In recent years populism as a concept, a means of winning power, and a means of exercising power, has been used extensively by political actors worldwide. The idea of populism that can be defined "in the minimal terms as the unique set of ideas that understand politics as a Manichean struggle between a reified will of the people and a conspiring elite" (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2019: 3) has many strains or varieties and is adopted by political parties and political leaders in a way that suits best the country, or region-specific conditions. It is no wonder then that we can distinguish the concept of Eurosceptic populism, which "is a particular kind of populism that relates to a political phenomenon that mingles anti-EU sentiments with populist interpretations of the world". We use this perception in the study as the article's theoretical background. In this set of ideas, we also find the belief that the European Union is an anti-democratic organisation because it does not represent the "will of the people" (Reungoat, 2010). Due to this, its actions and decisions are seen as unjust and even discriminatory to some of its members. In many countries, including Poland, parties which utilise the concept of Eurosceptic

populism also appropriate new nationalism, defined as "emphasis on national sovereignty, strict positions on immigration, the 'national preference', scepticism of supra-national institutions and often anti-elitism" (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2019, p. 411), which, in the Polish case for example, results with the promotion of the "Europe of Nations" concept. For a deeper overview of the concept of Euroscepticism, its evolution, and its current state, please refer to Chapter 1 of this book.

To learn about and understand the Eurosceptics' way of thinking and reasoning, and to explore and analyse their narrations about the EU, we adopted a pragmatic approach and combined secondary analysis of existing qualitative data with focus group interviews.[xxiv] The quantitative data, mainly opinion polls placed in the context of a political situation, gave us information on the scope of the Eurosceptic views. At the same time, the focus group interviews allowed us to examine the Eurosceptic respondents' perceptions of the European Union and its comprehension. To analyse both the quantitative data and the focus groups' interviews, we used four frames of Euroscepticism: socio-economic, sovereignty (including rule of law), legitimacy (including security) and cultural. We adopted these frames from an article by Andrea Pirro and Stijn van Kessel (2018), who used them to analyse populist Eurosceptic trajectories in Italian and Dutch political parties.

However, in the focus groups we also wanted to learn about the respondents' general idea of the EU as a community and whether they identify with it since they hold European citizenship. So, we raised such issues as part of the benefits of membership, both at the individual and collective levels. We also asked about the undesirable effects of Poland's membership in the EU, the Community's weaknesses, and potential adoption of the euro. Finally, the question was asked whether Poland should remain in or leave the EU. To activate perhaps sometimes unconscious, hidden, or even not fully conscious inwards opinions or judgements on the European Union, at one point in each focus group we used the projective technique of a "Chinese portrait" (Webb, 1992, pp. 125-126). The participants in the focus groups were divided into groups of two or three and asked to imagine that "if the EU was a vehicle, what vehicle would it be?" Then, they were given the task of drawing these vehicles and discussing them with the rest of the group and moderator.

We selected a purposive sample of 22 respondents to take part in the study. These people were chosen to participate in the focus groups based on their Eurosceptic convictions from the

survey. The research groups were then held in three cities: Toruń (October 28th 2021), Rzeszów (November 19th 2021) and Wrocław (December 8th 2021), which differ in size and location. Toruń is a medium-sized city (200,000 people) in northern Poland, Rzeszów is of a similar size located in south-eastern Poland, and Wrocław is a big city (over 600,000 people) in south-western Poland. The questionnaire also included questions about participation in parliamentary elections and the party for which the respondent would vote if the election took place on that day. Most people selected for the survey were supporters of Confederation (alongside radical right non-parliamentary groups) and Law and Justice. A few individuals declared support for PO, Polska 2050 or Nowa Lewica. Only one person could not specify his/her political preferences. So, the focus group was conducted among people who are at least somewhat interested in politics. Based on their responses, respondents were also differentiated according to their level of Euroscepticism. A distinction was made between hard and soft Eurosceptics, as defined by Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak (2004). However, in line with Peter Kopecký and Cas Mudde's (2002, p. 300) belief that there is too much inclusiveness in the category of soft Euroscepticism, a third category of "moderate Eurosceptics" was added. Based on these aforementioned theoretical concepts, we propose operational definitions for these different kinds of Eurosceptics. While hard Eurosceptics are those who reject European integration *par excellence*, moderate Eurosceptics are those who support integration but would like to limit its scope or even reverse many of the provisions. Soft Eurosceptics are those who support integration but would like the EU not to integrate further. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. They were conducted by a moderator, who was assisted by a person in charge of recording and overseeing the technical side of the interview. The interview was recorded in both video and audio formats and then transcribed. Each focus group was carried out according to the prepared scheme. They also made use of work cards for the respondents. Delve software, dedicated to analysing qualitative data, was used to analyse the study's results.

The following section looks at quantitative data analysis, which shows support for Polish membership in the EU, placed in the context of a political situation within the four frames of analysis. The second part discusses the qualitative part of the research. On the one hand, this limits the results only to Eurosceptic narratives, but on the other, it delves into the results and allows us to understand the group's reasoning. The results of the focus group interviews are presented in three parts. The first focuses on respondents' identities, and on their general, holistic narratives on the European Union. The second part analyses the respondents' discourse

in line with the four previously mentioned frames. The third section then raises the question of a potential "Polexit".

4.3. The Eurosceptic discourse

Socio-economic frame

Most Poles perceive the EU positively due to the enormous social and economic benefits that membership has brought to Polish society. About 80% of Poles selected the free movement of people as one of the greatest advantages, while more than 55% recognised EU funds as such. Democracy and human rights were of secondary importance in Polish associations about the EU. The issues of climate and energy policies ("Fit for 55") emerged as a potential key source of tension between Poland and the EU within the socio-economic framework. Indeed, they may have had a negative effect on the attitude of many Poles towards the Union. While the EU promotes the fast-paced decarbonisation of its members' economies, Poland is foremost among the EU countries in adopting a very reluctant position on this matter. This is due to its "dirtiest" energy balance within the EU. Most Poles support decarbonisation in general, but a considerable minority rejects it. Moreover, a large group only accepts it conditionally, that is, only if it is introduced slowly and with no additional costs.[xxv] There is a considerable correlation between support for decarbonisation and voters' political sympathies (centre and left).

Sovereignty

PiS defines Polish national sovereignty as the chief element of its political ideology. Therefore, it advocates for the thorough reform of the EU, mainly by returning various key competencies in the decision-making process from the EU to the member states (A "Europe of nations", unanimity – the Polish tradition of the *liberum veto*).[xxvi] Polish society is less supportive of reversing EU integration than the PiS leadership. Despite this, Poles express only rather lukewarm approval for a considerable deepening of the EU's economic and political integration in the future, as well as for Poland's participation in it.[xxvii] Another example of this reluctance among Polish society is the fact that all national opinion polls conducted in the last 15 years in Poland have shown a majority against accession to the Eurozone (against were about 55% and for were about 25%).[xxviii]

Attitudes toward sovereignty and the EU overlap with issues concerning the rule of law. PiS implemented illiberal policies that have resulted in democratic backsliding[xxix] and the dismantling of the rule of law. This has been confirmed by an exceptional number of negative verdicts from the European courts concerning Poland. This situation provoked a dramatic and unprecedented deterioration in relations between Poland on the one hand and the EU's institutions and key member states on the other. The European Commission preconditioned EU budget funds for Poland with the maintenance of the rule of law. Polish society has expressed contradictory positions on this issue. They depend very strongly on political sympathies (pro-government and far-right forces versus the centre and left opposition).[xxx]

Legitimacy

The government of Law and Justice, after gaining power in 2015, started to vehemently contest Franco-German leadership in the EU, and consequently, the internal legitimacy of the Union.[xxxi] The role of Germany in the EU meets with particularly strong opposition among the United Right. This position has resonated among a substantial part of Polish society. In one poll, when asked about the disadvantages of EU membership, a significant percentage of Poles (40%) defined the lack of equality among member states as a key detriment, alongside the issue of more powerful member states imposing their own interests on others. Other issues had less traction. The legitimacy of the EU in Poland is in an especially weak position in the security field. Since 1989, Poland has always treated the EU as a second-rate security provider in comparison to NATO and the US. The war in Ukraine made security a top priority in Poland's domestic and foreign policies. The French, and especially German, reactions to the war in Ukraine – sometimes too lenient – triggered a very negative response throughout Polish society, and even more so in the Polish government.[xxxii] The United Right used this as a pretext to ramp up its criticism of the Franco-German tandem's leading role in the EU.

Certainly, PiS's criticism is considerably more focused on Germany than France. The war was used by PiS as a pretext to launch a comprehensive anti-German and by default, indirectly anti-EU, campaign. Law and Justice accused Germany not only of insufficient support for Ukraine but also of attempts to topple its own government through alleged cooperation with the opposition, which is presented as a fifth column full of "traitors". Moreover, PiS defines the EU as an organisation completely dominated by Germany, which uses it instrumentally to subjugate Poland. This opinion resonates among a great number of Polish citizens. In an opinion

poll carried out by Ipsos in September 2022, more than 40% of Poles recognised Germany as Poland's enemy and only slightly more than 50% defined Germany as a friendly country (Pacewicz, 2022). Moreover, another poll from the same research company conducted slightly later showed that more than 45% of Poles endorsed the opinion that Germany exploits the EU to subdue Poland and only less than half of them rejected this idea. However, almost 25% of all respondents did not exclude completely the idea that this statement is true (Danielewski, 2022).

Cultural framework

In Polish public discourse, the EU is generally identified with Europe and membership in the EU is perceived and presented as key proof of both the Europeanness (in a cultural sense) of Poland and its affiliation with the West. In addition to this, because of the great importance of religion as an element of Polish national identity, and because of the greater numbers participating in religious practices in comparison to the rest of the EU, many Poles, and their political and intellectual elites (excluding the left), identify Europe with Christianity, and with Roman Catholicism in particular.[xxxiii] PiS and the intellectuals supporting the party entertain a vision of the EU in which the Union has "betrayed" its Christian identity (traditionalism and conservatism) and therefore, it cannot be identified with "genuine" Europe.

Despite ongoing rapid secularisation, Polish society remains more conservative in comparison to most societies within the EU (with more negative attitudes towards abortion, LGBT, etc.). Consequently, as opinion polls have exhibited, many Poles perceive themselves as different in a cultural sense to the West.[xxxiv] This social disposition has only been strengthened by PiS and the far right, who often use anti-LGBT and anti-abortion discourses in order to mobilise their own electorates.[xxxv] The negative attitude of Poles towards Muslims constitutes another cultural factor which may influence their approach to the EU indirectly.[xxxvi] In an opinion poll conducted in the summer of 2017 more than half of Poles said that, if the EU insisted on the relocation of Muslim refugees (a very small number in fact) to Poland, the country should leave the Union (Bierzyński, 2017). The negative opinion of many Poles concerning Muslims is interlinked with their rejection of multiculturalism and civic national identity in favour of a preference for ethnic nationalism.

4.5. Under the surface: Identity issues and EU perceptions.

4.5.1. Is there a European citizenship?

Each citizen of the EU member states has an additional citizenship of the European Union. This provision was formally created with the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. So, when Poland with other countries joined the EU in 2004, the citizens of those states automatically acquired EU citizenship. Does this mean anything for our Eurosceptic respondents? Do they identify themselves with the European Union? Or maybe they feel themselves closer to the concept of the European Union as an "imaginary community, from which not much stems for us", as expressed by President Andrzej Duda in one of his speeches in 2018 (cited after *Niegdyś wyimaginowana wspólnota…* (2020))? To answer this question, we asked focus group respondents if they identify as a citizen of their local community, Poland, the European Union, and the world. They were asked to mark their place inside a circle on a worksheet (figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 about here

The results show that the identity of the respondents is divided. Overall, we can identify three groups of respondents. The first saw themselves as EU citizens, saying "I am European, my country is part of the EU, that is cool." Some in this group identify with the EU through the personal benefits they have received. As one respondent explained: "the EU gave me the chance to start my studies in Poland, thanks to it I could go to the Netherlands to earn some money to study. Otherwise, I would have had to withdraw from it. The EU helped me to improve my quality of life." In this discourse, the interviewees also underlined that EU identity is not exclusive. On the contrary, it effortlessly merges with other identities. One can be as much European as Polish, a citizen of the world or a member of their local community.

The second group of respondents was sceptical about European identity and citizenship. They underlined that the EU is an organisation like any other international organisation. As one of them said: "we are members of the EU, but also of NATO and many other organisations. International cooperation cannot go against the citizenship of a country. Conflict arises when the Community tries to step into the shoes of the state." Or, as another respondent said: "the question of whether I am a citizen of it [EU] is as legitimate as the question of if I am a citizen of NATO or the International Monetary Fund. The EU is supposed to perform certain tasks (…). It is simply an organisation." This group of respondents also differentiates between EU identity and European identity in terms of a whole continent and its legacy (Roman law, Greek

philosophy, and Christian religion). One of the respondents said that "Europe is not the EU. I do not see how the two terms could be identified together." And another one added that "Europe is not the same as the EU, if only by looking at the map. There are non-EU countries in Europe (Belarus, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom). Moreover, Europe has many cultures: the Spaniards differ from the Poles and the French from the Italians. The EU, like any union, although it promotes diversity, tries to unify these cultures."

The third group denounces the whole EU project and does not want to speak about European identity at all. They identify themselves with Poland, the local community and even the world. As one of them said: "I can call myself a citizen of the world to some degree, but I am not a citizen of the EU." By placing the discourse on EU citizenship in the broader context of identities, the nativist tone of the statements was unambiguous. It does not surprise us that national and local identities (the latter more in Rzeszów than in Wrocław) were more robust than world and European ones. The attitudes towards EU citizenship were closely aligned with views on the EU, which does not come as a surprise. The stronger the Eurosceptic views, the weaker the identification with the EU.

4.5.2. The EU as vehicles

Projective techniques used in focus groups give the respondents an opportunity to realise their projections on the subject in relation to some other objects. They are used in the research to explore people's subconscious feelings, beliefs and even desires about the subject. In the Chinese portrait technique, we used in the research, the respondents were asked to depict the European Union as a vehicle. Using this metaphor allowed them to explain a complex matter through a familiar subject and to reveal their mindsets and emotions about it. Figure 4.5 shows some of the drawings created by the respondents.

Figure 4.5 about here

The most popular drawings were that of cars. However, all the cars were either divided (drawings 1 and 4) or broken and thus dysfunctional somehow (drawings 2, 3 and 5). According to the respondents, the broken cars symbolised the division of the EU between "old and rich" member states and the "new and poor" ones. In the first one (car number 1) "The front is taken from a sports car, it looks nice and modern, and it represents the "rich" member states, who are doing well, like Germany and France. The back of the car does not seem so nice, because it is

tattered, patched up, and dirty. It represents countries like Poland and other CEE states. (…). These countries are left behind (…) the richer do not allow them to develop, for fear of being outrivaled." The authors of picture number 4 said that they "drew two cars with one towing the other. The first one represents "old states" and pulls the second one, which represents the "new states" being pulled into the abyss." The abyss was defined by the authors of the drawing as "left progressivism, loss of Christian identity, and values, and acceptance of refugees, especially those from Muslim countries". An attentive observer will notice that "the car behind tries to push on the brake until sparks fly to halt this mad drive towards federalisation but does not have enough strength, because it is ignored."

The other three cars drawn by the respondents are dysfunctional. It is reported that "they look nice from the outside, like elegant, modern, ecological [green colour – drawings 2 and 3, and with symbols of ecology on car number 3], and specious cars", but when one [a new member state] gets inside, it discovers that the car "turns out to be very cramped" (picture number 2), symbolising the "narrowness of the ideas accepted within the EU". What is more, the "engine is in the back, so it causes the car to be quite slow", thus ineffective and unmanageable. The car may lack fuel, battery, lights and even a driver (no rational guiding idea) or have square wheels, which make it very difficult to move forward (pictures 2, 3 and 5). And although "it is built on solid foundations and has strong suspension (founding ideas of the EU), it is very expensive and not economical to maintain, because of extensive bureaucracy, inefficiency, and flawed policies limiting the competitiveness of the EU, for example the "Fit for 55" programme."

The metaphors used by the respondents as part of this projective technique and the accompanying narrations showed that they perceive the EU as an organisation that preserves semblance but, in fact, is deeply dysfunctional because of its internal divisions, exploitation of member states, who joined the EU in the 21st century, lack of legitimacy and authority, leftist ideology, and horrendous running costs. So, according to the respondents, the EU must either "come to its mind and change or collapse in the future".

4.6. Under the surface: frames on the European Union

4.6.1 In defence of dignity and sovereignty[xxxvii]

The basic assumption underlying the sovereignty frame is that "European integration curtails the sovereignty of member states" (Pirro and van Kessel 2018: 3). This idea lies at the heart of

the narratives expressed by the researched Eurosceptics in Poland. In Polish discourse, it has such prominence for two main reasons. The first one stems from Poland's history and experience of losing independence in the years from 1772 to 1918 when the traditional Polish territory was divided between three powers: Prussia, Russia and Austria. Losing sovereignty during the Cold War (1945-1989), when Poland was a country situated in the Soviet zone of influence, also plays a key role in this regard. The second reason relates to traditional values and convictions focused on the nation-state and the programmes of the right-wing political actors and their sympathisers, who are, as we have already mentioned, the main proponents of Eurosceptic ideas in Poland.

In the focus group discussions, the European Union was described as taking away states' sovereignty by interfering with matters that should be reserved for the states. One of the respondents said: "the beginning [of Polish membership in the EU] was gratifying, but now it is getting worse and worse. We have less and less to say. Laws are being imposed on us, regarding the judiciary or climate, for example." Another added that after we joined the EU, the Community imposed on us "many orders and bans. The Union interferes with our worldview, which I do not like very much. We have been forced to do things against ourselves for some time now. I would not want my children to live in a world of orders and bans." And still, one more argued that Poland "should leave the EU to regain its sovereignty. We do not have it today because we surrendered the legislation to Brussels." Voices praising the EU for interfering in what most of the respondents described as "domestic matters" of the member states were isolated, such as one person who said that "sometimes it is good that the EU tries to meddle in Polish affairs, such as the judiciary reforms."

Moreover, according to these respondents, the current direction in which the EU is developing, and the process of deeper integration threaten to limit the states' sovereignty further. This is so because the EU elites (and institutions) want to broaden their prerogatives and competencies unlawfully, against the EU treaties, with verdicts issued by the EU tribunals, for instance. To avoid this risk, the European Union should halt all further integration and even reverse some of the political developments it has already accomplished. It should return "to its roots, to the Community designed by the founding fathers". It should also limit itself to being once again an economic organisation in the form of a "community of homelands".During discussions in the focus group interviews, the belief in limited Polish sovereignty within the European Union was present the whole time. And the respondents contrasted this constraint to preserving unity,

national homogeneity, and state autonomy. One could sense that these concepts were basic presuppositions during each of the three focus groups conducted.

4.6.2. German attack under the EU flag[xxxviii]

The legitimacy frame is the second one that emerges from the focus group interviews. It is composed of two arguments. The first one concerns the lack of EU authority to make decisions about certain issues and to impose these decisions, resolutions, or even world views, on its member states and their citizens. The second one concerns accusations levelled at the EU elites of being detached from the people and the countries that constitute the Community. The EU, according to the respondents, arbitrarily enforces decisions, resolutions or simply world views on the member states. The frequent use of the word "impose" implies, firstly, a perception of the European Union as an extraneous organisation to its member states, sometimes compared even to the Soviet Union (as described by one of the respondents). Secondly, this suggests a belief in a lack of EU authority to rule on anything concerning the member states. As one of the respondents said: "There is an attempt to dictate a world view that the European Commission, or a group of blind people, are trying to inflict upon all countries, but every country is different." A belief in an imbalance between the member states is closely related to that conviction. According to the respondents, the EU is dominated by the "old" member states, particularly by Germany, and to a lesser degree France. Both countries, "within a framework of supposed cooperation, pursue their chauvinistic interests". Moreover, they "are guided primarily by their national interests; they only talk about the Community when it is profitable for them". The policies that are supposedly profitable for Germany are those concerning "climate, migration, and human rights, concerning mainly gender and LBGTQ&A". As one of the respondents most radical in this respect said, Germany "simply kidnapped the EU", while the rest of the states are forced into a demonstrably lower position, with the position of the "new" member states the lowest by far.

The EU elites, which, according to the respondents, are not accountable to anyone and "certainly not to the citizens of the European Union", form a key part of the second thread within this legitimacy framework. The interviewees claimed that "with these elites, the EU will fall apart" (…), "and especially because they are corrupt and have ambiguous interests". Within this legitimacy framework, we identified a model populist discourse. The respondents felt deceived by the EU and its "dishonest, untrustworthy, and mercenary elites". They also pointed

to the unfairness brought about by the inequality among the states. Instead of providing equal cooperation, the EU forces, according to them, the weaker countries to move away from their interests. As a result, the development of these countries is curbed.

4.6.3. Let Poland be Poland

Within the cultural framework, the narrative of the respondents seems prima facie twofold. The EU, according to the respondents, is responsible for some spontaneous processes of westernisation and the diffusion of cultures throughout Europe. At the same time, it is also to blame for actively promoting this unification. So, on the one hand, the EU is perceived as a threat to traditional Polish culture, customs, norms, and values, because Polish national identity, morals and manners are being dissolved in a broader Western culture. As one of the respondents said: "Western culture is permeating our country. Our cultural patterns are disappearing, and so are religious values. It is not looking good." And another confirmed that "the EU is taking away our national identity, which is being subjugated to some pan-European identity. If we lose our identity, we will die as a nation." On the other hand, the EU enforces liberal values and norms on its member states and punishes them if they want to keep and preserve their own values. According to the respondents, these procedures are lethal for the Polish identity, especially with regard to migration, the rights of women, and LBGTQ&A people. The most unambivalent and personal statement came from a person who said that they do not want their child "to learn that having two dads is okay. I know it is not a bad thing, but I cannot quite agree with it. My child is brought up in a family with a mum and a dad, and I would not like him to learn at school or anywhere else that this is not normal. I am afraid that this is the direction where the EU is heading." The cultural framework that we identified within the focus groups can be interpreted through the "cultural grievance story" based on social identity theory[xxxix]) and used by Matt Golder (2016: 485), to discuss anti-immigrants' sentiments within far-right political parties. But it can be used to explain not only the resistance to immigration but also other issues that, according to the respondents, threaten Polish identity.

4.6.4. The Eurobalance sheet of profits and losses

One of the chief concepts underlying all the interviews was that the European Union would be a much better organisation if cooperation between the nation-states was limited only to its economic dimension. It is no wonder then that the socio-economic dimension of EU

membership was the one most appreciated by the respondents. They could easily list many personal benefits that membership has brought them and some advantages for Poland. Nevertheless, the latter was not so readily admitted to: "well there are some benefits [for Poland from the membership A.B.; M.W.] but not as many as some people would like to believe."

The interviewees considered mainly the EU programmes they participated in as beneficial, including the infrastructure developments co-financed by the EU, and some provisions included in EU policies. Among the most frequently named were the Erasmus programme, and the vocational training programmes. One of the respondents said that "the EU gave me a lot. I did two English courses from the EU programmes, I had vocational courses, thanks to them I can work in my profession and earn a decent salary." The construction of roads and other infrastructure, the possibility to work abroad, and international contacts were the other benefits mentioned by the respondents. As one of them said: "personally, I gained a lot of contacts. Thanks to the Erasmus programme and language exchanges. I could get to know other people, from different countries. In other conditions it would be difficult. It is nice to get to know each other, to exchange opinions (…). The EU gave me a broader point of view." Open borders were also pointed out as a benefit in this circumstance: "I owe to the EU easy, because it is borderless, travelling."

However, as some noted, the EU should not be credited with all these benefits, because "it is enough to sign an international agreement to attain the same goals." For example, "there is an agreement between the EU and non-EU countries on the Schengen zone, which does not include all the EU states, and at the same time, some non-EU countries belong to it." Also, the Erasmus programme was not the idea of the EU, since "Nicolaus Copernicus, you remember, studied in Italy." What is more, according to some of the respondents, the three other basic EU freedoms of services, the movement of capital, and the free movement of goods, can be agreed upon through international multilateral agreements, without the umbrella of the EU. As one of the respondents said: "I am in favour of cooperation and the intermingling of societies, cultures, ideas, and capital, but not under a bureaucratic cap. Are they doing anything positive in Brussels or Strasbourg, or are they just squandering our money and making laws that we do not know how they will serve us? The assumptions were good, but it went the wrong way."

Analysing the socio-economic frame of the respondents' narratives, one may get the impression that the current attitudes towards the European Union express, on the one hand, some

disappointed hopes, and on the other are very cynical. When Poland joined the EU the respondents had many hopes, especially for economic development (some were fulfilled). However, now the EU is a disappointment to them, because "it was the EU that gained from the enlargement and now it treats the post-communist countries in a colonial way." The cynical attitude is visible mainly in perceiving the EU as an organization that provides the states with financial support, not as a community of shared values and common rights. The views that Poland "should remain in the EU as long as it benefits from the financial opportunities" and that it should "stay in the EU but only if it is not a "net contributor"" were common among the respondents. Some of them, mainly those holding positions more firmly against the EU, went further to question the benefits in general: "Poland could manage without membership in the EU, and it is not at all certain that membership will work in our favour in the long run."

In the accession treaty, Poland made a commitment to adopt the euro in the future. Leaving aside whether it meets the economic criteria now, in the study we asked our respondents to share their opinions on the subject. They were strongly against it, fearing above all its impact on the economy and the disposable income of people: "we should stay with our currency. We are not ready for the change, and it would not give us power, a greater voice. Only problems. If wages were to fall and prices were to stay, it would look very bad." Another respondent gave the example of different countries that according to him adopted the euro: "Looking at Lithuania, Slovakia, or Hungary (sic!) – no, it was not profitable for them. There are probably some countries that have benefited from it, but not those people. Ordinary citizens pay more for everything. Everything is more expensive." The other argument that was raised against the euro was that control over currency is one of the country's economic assets, especially during times of economic crisis. One of the respondents said that "we can now [having our own currency] shape monetary policy. It is vital, the Central Bank can do something. Look at Greece, how the country lost out on the common currency."

4.7. Is leaving the EU an option?

The word Polexit has become popular in Poland. The opposition parties suggest that the government, with its rhetoric and actions, is putting the country on the path of leaving the European Union. Naturally, the government denies these accusations. Since we were conducting focus interviews with Eurosceptics, we wanted to learn their stance on the issue. Thus, at the end of the focus groups, after the discussions, we conducted a mock referendum.

We asked the respondents to imagine that they were in a polling booth holding a ballot paper with a question on whether Poland should leave the EU or not.

Despite critical attitudes to the EU, many of the interviewees "voted" no, for different reasons. Some voted this way for pragmatic reasons, arguing that "leaving the EU is a difficult and costly process, and since the Community will soon disintegrate anyway, why should we take such steps in advance?" There were also economic arguments that Poland should remain a member of the Community for as long as it is not a net contributor. As one of the respondents argued: "We need to wait for the new financial perspective. See how much money we can get. Try to win as much as possible." Another added that "we should stay in the EU as long as it is beneficial for us," however, "the EU cannot impose conditions on us." Finally, there were some arguments of a geopolitical nature. As one of the respondents put it: "Poland is not a powerful enough player on the international stage (also economically). We are too weak to be relevant outside the Union, to be an actor in international relations," so "there is no alternative for Poland to being a member of the EU." None of the respondents, however, mentioned EU norms or values as arguments for staying in the Community. These were instead given by respondents as reasons for leaving the EU right away. According to them, the Union is responsible for the "destruction of our Catholic values and the deprivation of Poland's national identity".

Respondents also expressed their concern and dissatisfaction with the migration policy of the EU. They were against accepting refugees, especially from Muslim countries and Africa. As one of the respondents argued: "I would not want to leave, but I also would not want the EU to control what is going on in my country, how we raise our children or who our neighbours would be. It's not that I have a problem with foreigners. However, I would not want 80% of the people in my building to be Muslims." The Polexit supporters also challenged the economic arguments put forward by those in favour of remaining in the Union. They were convinced that Poland will be better off economically in an alliance with the Visegrad and Baltic states, and even by strengthening relations with Russia and China, joining the latter in building the new Silk Road. What is more, they were certain that all these countries would not only readily cooperate with Poland, but also (including China and Russia) treat Poland as an equal partner.

Conclusions

Under the surface of the significant support for Polish membership in the EU, some Eurosceptical narratives can be observed in the public sphere and among "ordinary" citizens. Since the election of 2015, which was won by the right-wing coalition led by Law and Justice, Eurosceptic discourse has become more acceptable in governmental circles and has been promoted by those in power (Zuba, 2015; Pacześniak, 2015). A decisive increase in anti-EU discourse in Poland occurred when PiS launched policies that contributed to the dismantling of the rule of law and provoked the most serious conflict ever between Warsaw and the EU institutions and member states. Law and Justice intertwined with such anti-EU rhetoric an anti-German discourse, which in Poland has found fertile ground in certain circles of voters. This particularly strong overlap between Euroscepticism and Germanophobia constitutes a sort of Polish *spécialité de la maison*, and it will maintain a central place in the ideological narrative of PiS for as long as the party considers it politically beneficial.

Robert Csehi and Edit Zgut argue that Eurosceptic discourse from above has always greatly affected public opinion in the EU member states (Csehi and Zgut, 2021). Their observation proves to be right in Poland, where Eurosceptics are highly influenced by the Eurosceptic narratives, mingled with the ideas of new nationalism, produced by the ruling elite, far-right political associations and circles, pro-government media, and some public figures (intellectuals and journalists). The public opinion polls and the focus groups we conducted echo these doubts and arguments against the EU and the accusations made towards the Community, combining them, in many cases, with anti-German rhetoric. This responsiveness of the voters in turn, convinces politicians that Euroscepticism can be an effective tool to sustain their popularity and win over the electorate. And so, this vicious cycle continues.

It can be predicted that if the right-wing political forces enjoy substantial popularity among the Polish electorate in the future, then Eurosceptic ideas will increase in influence among the Polish citizens. This is especially true as support for the EU in Poland is also strongly correlated with the economic benefits the Community offers to its member states. Therefore, the transformation of Poland into a net contributor may considerably decrease the attractiveness of EU membership in the eyes of Polish society, making anti-EU discourse even more popular and acceptable. And if reinforced enough by certain powerful sectors within the political elite and media, it may, in the long run, function as the pebble that will start the avalanche leading to the worst-case scenario, towards the Doomsday, that is, Poland's exit from the EU.

For the time being, the Eurosceptics hold mostly far right and right-wing beliefs. They predominantly support political parties such as Confederation, Sovereign Poland and Law and Justice or are linked to other right-wing organisations and associations. None of the relevant left-wing parties or their voters may be characterised as Eurosceptic. In this respect, Poland is not an exception among Central and Eastern European member states (Zuba, 2015, p. 168; Pacześniak & Styczyńska, 2023). However, at the same time, a relatively new phenomenon – "new Euroscepticism" – is slowly starting to emerge and may gain supporters in the coming years (Kublik, 2020). The new Eurosceptics are those citizens who support EU integration, share and promote European values and believe in the overall aim of the EU (that is, deepening economic and political integration and thus creating a more stable and united Europe). However, they have become disappointed with the fact that the EU does not do enough or even turns a blind eye to deficits in the rule of law and is not effective enough in preventing the ongoing undemocratic changes in Poland.

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Chapter 5.

From strong support to harsh opposition to the EU: the case of Italy

This chapter starts presenting the Italian scenario with reference to the diffusion and evolution of Eurosceptic feelings among the wide public. Indeed, the Italian case is the perfect mirror of a country that moved from a strong Euro-enthusiast position toward a diffusely Eurosceptic one. Besides providing a general description of this phenomenon, the first section highlights the multidimensionality of negative stances toward the EU presenting the dimensions of Euroscepticism used in the empirical analysis. More precisely, this chapter uses two core dimensions: i) the cultural, political and economic Europe, and the ii) the policy, polity and politics of the EU. The final section of the chapter presents and discusses the obtained findings besides formulating a conceptual framework within which to place Euroscepticism from below in the country.

Introduction

This chapter presents the case of Italy as the quintessential example of a country that moved from a strong Euro-enthusiast position toward a diffusely Eurosceptic one. Besides providing a general description of this phenomenon, this chapter sketches out the theoretical framework, focusing on how the conceptualization of Euroscepticism has recently pushed scholars to consider it a multidimensional concept. Having presented both the contextual and political dimensions of the theoretical framework, the chapter presents the methods employed and the data collected and analyzed in the empirical phase. The final section of the chapter demonstrates empirically the multidimensional nature of Euroscepticism in Italy. Furthermore, the conclusive section provides some hints for further research and investigation in the field.

5.1 Talking about Europe in the Italian public sphere: Political and discursive opportunities

Since the economic crisis of 2007, the EU has been during consecutive and virulent crises: the migration crisis (reaching its peak between 2015 and 2016), the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and its management, and the most recent Russo-Ukrainian crisis. All these events contribute to the emergence and spread of discontent toward the EU. Such discontent, on the one hand, is diffused among the public at large, while, on the other hand, it is capitalized upon by political entrepreneurs both from the left and the right of the political spectrum. Surely enough, such discontent takes different shapes depending also on the context in which it develops. The case study of this chapter is Italy, a founding member state historically considered to be widely Euro-enthusiast. Past research in the field has often predicted high levels of support for European integration processes as well as a generally high degree of trust toward the European Union's institutions. Some hypotheses have been formulated to explain the high level of support for the EU in Italy, such as: geopolitical interests and net gain from participation in the EU; low trust in national institutions; identification as Europeans as being jeopardized by a strong and exclusive national identification (Marks and McAdam 1999); and positive correlation between support for the EU and the length of member states' participation in EU institutions (Niedermayer 1995, Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Carey 2002).

Indeed, being among the founding members of the EU, Italy and, consequently, Italians, have had a longer time to become accustomed to the various stages of the European integration process. Furthermore, and similarly to other Southern European member states, Italians show a

generally low level of trust in the national governing elite, compensated by a higher degree of confidence in the functioning of European institutions (Sanchez and Cuenca 2000). As a matter of fact, the high degree of perceived corruption and inefficient public administration caused an increase in support for European integration, with the EU widely perceived as an opportunity to "normalize" many Italian pathologies (Giuliani 2001; Ferrera 2003, p. 243). This is coupled with the fact that Italy is located among the net receivers of generous allocations of cohesion funds in connection to a less universalist welfare state (typical of Southern European member states) (Brinegar and Jolly 2005). Moreover, as mentioned before, in contrast to other member states such as Germany or Spain, in Italy, European identity goes hand in hand with a less intense perception of national identity. This is to say that the Italian national identity is somehow "more compatible with a European identity that would constitute a sort of completion and integration" (Grilli di Cortona 2004, p. 73).

Besides the importance given to the general perception of the EU and European identity, it is fundamental to notice that the Italian elite has also been widely considered to be "bi-partisanly" pro-EU, at least in the past. Key examples are the centrist Christian Democratic Party (DC) created after the Second World War and the shift of the Italian Communist Party in the 1970s. This latter moved from a critical position toward the EU's anti-Atlanticism to enthusiastic support for the EU (Verzichelli and Cotta 2000).

If this picture was true in the past, nowadays Italy is confronted with the rise of populist Eurosceptic parties (especially on the right side of the ideological spectrum), combined with a general mainstreaming of Euroscepticism (Vasilopoulou 2013) and the diffusion among the wider public of distrust in the EU and EU institutions. Eurobarometer data for the period between 2003 and 2018 highlight an increase in the percentage of Italians not trusting the EU (moving from 25% in 2003 to approximately 54% in 2018). Despite this negative trend, the EU management of the Covid-19 crisis resulted in an increase in the degree of trust in EU institutions. The European Parliament is the most appreciated institution, with 54% of interviewees showing positive stances toward the EP - an increase that is likely related to the unexpected death of the former EP president David Sassoli. However, the overall level of trust in the EU in general is decreasing.[xl]

Departing from these considerations, the chapter provides a deeper understanding of Italians' positions toward the EU expressed from below, focusing on associations active on the ground and on ordinary citizens as a constituent part of civil society. In what follows, the conceptual framework of a multidimensional Euroscepticism is presented, followed by details concerning

the data and the methods used to conduct the empirical analysis. In the final section, the chapter presents the results obtained and delineates some conclusive remarks and policy guidelines that may be useful for facing the development of Euroscepticism on the ground.

5.2 Euroscepticism as a multidimensional data-container: the theoretical framework

The debate about the evolution of Euroscepticism and its conceptualization has been already presented in chapter 1 of this book. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this chapter, it is important to stress that Euroscepticism is still a highly debated concept. Even some of the representing parties in the European Parliament reject the concept, opting for other definitions such as "Eurorealist", a term used by the European Reformist and Conservative group (ECR) to rebrand their stances toward the European integration project (Carlotti 2021). Furthermore, this debate in the literature highlights the fact that Euroscepticism as such entails several elements concerning culture, legitimacy and socio-economic aspects (Pirro and van Kessel 2018). Consequently, a study that deals with Eurosceptic stances expressed from below should accept the fact that Euroscepticism has to be understood as a multidimensional and imagined concept (Anderson 2020). In other words, Euroscepticism encompasses various perceptions and interpretations of the European Union and the project of European integration, reflecting the diverse ways in which people engage with and appropriate the concept of Europe itself.

This last assertion is key to understanding the theoretical framework applied in the study of Eurosceptic stances from below in the case of Italy. The study focuses on the contextual and political dimensions. The contextual dimension is divided into three sub-categories: a) the political EU, concerning democratic dynamics at the supranational level b) the economic EU, concerning all the aspects of the European Single Market and regulation thereof, and; c) the cultural EU, concerning cultural aspects of the EU as a union of different member states. The political dimension is also divided into three sub-categories: a) the polity of the EU, delineating the boundaries of the territorial community and the distinction between the national and supranational levels of EU governance; b) the politics of the EU, referring to power, institutional arrangements and institutional relations, and addressing the contrast between intergovernmentalist and federalist stances, and; c) the policies of the EU, referring to pragmatic opposition to the activity of the EU (e.g.: the contrast between market-driven and socially-oriented Europe). These two core dimensions and their sub-categories highlight the frames through which the EU is criticized by normal people. In other words, which dimensions of the

EU are mainly addressed in opposition from below, and how are they addressed? Focusing on Italy as a case study, the next section presents the methods and criteria applied in both the data collection and data analysis phase of this work.

5.3 Methods and data

This chapter is based on data deriving from both in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted during between July and September 2021, across the Italian territory (for more details on the questionnaire and the list of participants see the appendix to the Italian case). Criteria for participant selection was different for the focus groups and the in-depth interviews. In the in-depth interviews, the core aim was to involve exponents of both pro and anti-EU organizations in Italy. The interviews were organized in such a manner as to involve the three main communities of the Italian territory (North, Center and South). Furthermore, interview participants were selected from across the ideological spectrum. Similarly to the in-depth interviews, the focus groups also included voices from across the ideological spectrum, as well as both pro and anti-EU perspectives (e.g.: key critical voices such as Azione Studentesca and actors endorsing the EU such as the Movimento Federalista Italiano). Each focus group typically comprised 4 to 6 individuals, with the composition varying based on basic socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, level of education, and employment status. In contrast to the in-depth interviews, the inclusion of regular citizens in focus groups allows for a better understanding of the nuances of attitudes toward Europe.[xli] Furthermore, audio-visual stimuli were used to encourage active involvement of the focus group participants.[xlii]

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively to identify the most prominent frames concerning the above-presented dimensions of the EU and the European integration project (see chapter 1 for further information about the frame analysis method). In other words, both the interviews and the focus groups were organized around the above-described dimensions. In what follows, the chapter reports the findings that were obtained, stressing the key aspects that organize anti-EU frames. As mentioned above, social movements and civil society associations are diversified in their core grievances and ideological categorization, as further detailed in Table 5.1 below. The core objective of this chapter is to provide a deeper analysis of the stances of associations on the ground, compared with what we call “ordinary citizens” – people who do not belong to any specific association, organization, or political party.

Table 5.1 here

5.4 The framing of Europe in an old member state

Following the changes in Italian society resulting from the increase of Euroscepticism in recent years, this study delves deeper into understanding Italian positions vis-à-vis the EU expressed from below by civil society associations and ordinary people. However, social movements and civil society organizations differ from ordinary citizens in their core grievances and ideological categorization. Table 5.1 below describes the core characteristics of the civil society organizations for the Italian case.

Table 5.2. here

Looking at the stances of political parties and social movements in Europe toward the EU/Europe, our main findings point to a multifaced Euroscepticism in Italy. Europe means different things to different people and political actors (from the Right to the Left), giving rise to diverse criticisms on economic, cultural and political grounds (see table 5.2). The following subsections present the obtained results, identifying the frames used by both civil society associations (i.e.: social movements and parties) and ordinary citizens, stressing differences and similarities in their respective critiques.

5.4.1. Europe as a community of values

In Italy, the contestation of Europe manifests itself across multiple dimensions, with the primary one that emerged being cultural in nature. Indeed, the EU is no longer conceived of as a community of common values. For instance, in the case of the Movimento Federalista Europeo, we see the use of "reformist arguments" supporting European institutions, albeit from "Eurocritical positions". According to this organization, the EU should return to its founding values, in order to recover a general sense of solidarity and avoid a utilitarian drift. That is to say, the Union itself becomes "the place where one expect the funding values to be respected but, sometimes, they are not even taken into consideration. That's disappointing" (Saputo MFE). In other words, according to some of the associations involved in our study - generally

those that are pro-European - the EU should return to its founding values and reform its institutions in such a way as to embed a solidarity-oriented perspective. In a similar vein, Greenpeace depicts the EU as a "a great opportunity that has sometimes gone unnoticed" (Giannì Greenpeace). This perceived lost opportunity brings criticism of the EU elite to the fore. Indeed, there is a perception that the EU elite bear sole responsibility for moral corruption, a view that rests on the "contrast that actually exists between the "dynastic powers" of an elite that I think holds the reins of the whole game, and respect for peoples' right" (Gianní, Greenpeace). Reformist frames are also used by the Comitato No Tunnel TAV, who highlight the disconnect between the underlying values of the EU and the practical realization of those values. However, the interviewee uses socio-economic references to stress the differences between the EU of capitals and the EU of the people, drawing a distinction between member states: "I am obviously referring to the strong differences that exist between the member states of the South and the North of the Union. With states in the North that are obviously more powerful economically and play their part at the expense of the states of the South of the Union" (Cardosi – Comitato No Tunnel TAV).

Interestingly, the M5S and the League stress a change in the parties' positions towards the EU as a community of shared values. During its initial phase, the M5S strongly opposed the euro, but later shifted toward advocating for "a social Europe" and "a European Union closer to the citizens of reference" (Quattromani – M5S). Similarly, during its initial phase, the League was openly opposed to the euro, pushing for Italy's exit from the EU. Indeed, the League claimed that the EU represented "everything that was opposed to the core ideals of the party: attention to territorial specificity" (Santini, the League), and called for the independence of the so-called Padania, both from Italy and from the EU. After 2018, the League opted for a more moderate position focused on "rethinking the Union with a focus on the specificities of the individual territories" (Santini – League).

Forza Nuova is the only organization that stands out for its rejectionist attitude toward EU politics. This party is strongly opposed to any kind of foreign or supranational governance, while stressing the need for robust national sovereignty. Forza Nuova openly rejects the euro, as is clearly indicated in the words of Luca Castellini: "We as FN wish us much more than just leaving the euro for Italy, we want to do like the United Kingdom, we want a Brexit for Italy, an Italexit or whatever you want to call it". This general disaffection and detachment from the EU's core values is not confined to associations or civil society organizations, but rather a

common trend among the ordinary citizens involved in the focus groups. Indeed, upon hearing the EU anthem, focus group participants claim it communicates a general message that does not reflect the reality of the EU: "There are passages inside of this anthem that are almost ironic. The differences in unity make me think of sad irony hearing this anthem. It is not an anthem that I feel my own. The first thing that comes to my mind is a nice dream" (FG – Padua: ordinary citizen). This general perception is common to all participants, regardless of their ideological standpoint or role in society (i.e.: representative of an organization vs. ordinary citizens). Only one participant feels the anthem is her own, relating it both to her work and her childhood memories: "for me it was the favorite song in middle school to play on the flute or the pianola, I remember it was beautiful. It is curious how I then became a pro-European. I feel it as my anthem also because from this year the Tuscan region opens all the sessions in plenary with both the Italian and European anthem. So it's probably linked both to my past as a child and to my work" (FG – Florence: Volt).

A similar pattern is recognizable also when participants were asked about their personal experience of the EU and their way of talking about the EU in everyday life. Participants articulated the positive effects of the freedom of movement enabled by the Schengen agreement, and in some cases they also stress the positive aspects of the Erasmus program. However, the general feeling that participants express is the one of distance: "concerning my friends and family I think that they feel distant. We do not feel any closeness to the EU or its offices in Brussels or Strasbourg" (FG – Padua: Azione Studentesca). This distance reflects difficulties in creating a shared European identity: "In terms of the identity, I go further, in my opinion it is impossible to create a European identity. In history, it has never been possible to create a state from scratch, Egypt tried it with Syria and it lasted 5 years, the Soviet Union tried it and lasted 70 years. Create a state that goes from Spain to Hungary, and from Italy to Sweden without a common language without anything, is it possible, when has this ever happened in history? I don't remember it" (FG – Padua: ordinary citizen).

5.4.2. The lack of a political Europe

A second aspect that emerged from the investigation is the diffusion of a general critique of European political integration that relied on both reformist and rejectionist frames. Reformist frames articulated a substantial lack of democratic transparency and a need to increase the European Parliament's power, while also eliminating the Council's veto power and reducing the powers of the non-elected European Commission. The League's right-leaning exponent

stresses the fact that the EP should “become a real democratic agora with greater powers than the powers that the various representatives of national governments have, in this sense I am obviously referring to the Council” (Santini – League). The only organization expressing a rejectionist position is again Forza Nuova, whose representative openly rejected European institutions, while also not presenting a clear image of what the final structure of the EU should look like. Indeed, FN proposes to transform the EU into a sort of intergovernmental set of relationships between sovereign member states regulated by a “superstructure that facilitates trade between states”, claiming that “this structure should perform the sole function of making goods and people circulate more easily” (Castellini – FN). According to FN, each member state should regain control over some competencies, particularly “printing money” and regulating immigration. Such criticism becomes even harder when FN’s exponent referred to EU immigration policy. Indeed, according to Castellini, the EU’s immigration policy constitutes a conspiracy against the people of the EU people, consisting of “forced migration which no longer allows states to close their borders and which aims at an invasion of Europe and an ethnic substitution of peoples”.

Concerning the relationship between the organizations included in the interviews and the European Union, we might observe that all of them tend to have disagreements with their counterparts at the European and international level. All the interviewees stress the problems related to the Covid-19 pandemic that slowed down initiatives at national, supranational and international levels. This general perception of the lack of a political union is also articulated by focus groups participants, who highlight the lack of a clear vision of EU reform: “The problem is precisely to understand if the European Union can be reformed otherwise, we are talking about exit. The problem as a leftist person is that the left does not have a clear idea of what is going on. When he says "let's reform Europe", well he doesn't have clear ideas. In my opinion it is not possible to succeed in reforming” (FG- Florence: Comitato No Tunnel TAV). This perception of the absence of an easy way to reform the EU is likely also related to its perceived complexity and the general blame shifting toward the supranational level: “I have never heard anyone tell me “how beautiful Europe is”. It is very complex to explain the successes of the EU. On the other hand, it is very easy to use the EU to provide easy answers to complex problems. It is from there that all the conspiracy theories and Euroscepticism arise” (FG – Florence: M5S).

Participants expressing a reformist position referred to the EU using the image of distance, articulating a sense that the EU is distant from its citizens, even in democratic terms. Indeed, the lack of a proper institutional setting able to represent EU citizens in a democratic fashion justifies the rise in abstentionism in the EP elections: "the abstentionism makes us understand how distant the Italians feel toward the EU. There is a great distance that comes from both the lack of identification with the idea of the European Union and the effectiveness of this vote, as well as how much it is worth and can shift the political balance" (FG – Rome: Ordinary citizen). Furthermore, participants seemed to understand the lack of participation is related to a general malaise regarding EU political integration: "in my opinion there is one thing missing in our society that is the cause of the death of political culture even at the European level, which is participation" (FG – Florence: 6000 Sardine). Similarly to the results obtained in the interviews, the EP is seen as essential to democracy. Voting at the EP elections is perceived as something "necessary. You can express your position and have it represented at the European level" (FG – Florence: Ordinary citizen). Besides this general positive view of the EP as an arena of democratic participation, focus group participants were also aware of its lack of power. Indeed, if they could propose a reform of its structure: "What I would change is to give the EP legislative capacity. Now the EP makes some resolutions but does nothing. It has no real representative role. It could be the first major change in the EU that could bring people closer" (FG – Rome: League).

Besides these reformist perspectives, a small number of participants in the focus groups belonging to the extremes of the ideological spectrum rejected political integration and proposed alternatives such as the left-leaning EuroStop: "I am much more pro-exit than him (Azione Studentesca). The less I see the Germans, the better off I am […]. We are for the construction of the Euro-Mediterranean dawn. Being able to build an economic system in which exchanges must not take place in money but in a currency that measures the hours of work. That is, an hour of my work is worth as much as an hour of work for a Greek" (FG – Padua: EuroStop). Interestingly, in this notion of a "Mediterranean union", the extreme left and extreme right are closely aligned, albeit with differing motivation, namely nationalism and sovereignty in the case of the extreme right, and rejection of the liberal economic values of the EU and protection of worker rights in the case of the extreme left.

Interestingly enough, the focus group participants relate EU political integration to a cultural dimension that is intertwined with the handling of migration. When confronted with a visual stimulus,[xliii] the participants stress that political integration might lead to cultural assimilation:

“The first image (Muslim woman with the European flag), for example, gives me the idea of a girl who arrived on a scholarship, with a language certification, she came here and we are grateful to heaven that she came here. The second (riots in the Banlieue) is a model of assimilation from which the colonial history of the European Union emerges. We are stained with blood all of us” (FG – Padua: Ordinary citizen). In other words, European cultural integration is filled with contradictions and paradoxes stemming from political decisions that have been taken over time. Besides the existence of this paradoxical situation, participants are still aware of the difficulties of cultural integration, stressing that: “cultural integration was already complicated 80 years ago with a much more homogeneous population. The same difficulties that you find in a nation you find also in Europe obviously with a different level of severity” (FG – Rome: League).

Not surprisingly, however, all the FGs participants belonging to the extreme right completely rejected any sort of cultural integration on ethnic grounds: “the single individual together with the national community recognizes something superior which is the nation and together with the other peoples of Europe recognize a community of states (…). Here we are talking about an attempt at cultural integration and to ensure that more peoples and more ethnic groups can live together, these are the results and they are chaos” (FG – Padua: Azione Studentesca). Interestingly, with reference to this last assertion, what emerges is not only the impossibility of integration based on ethnonationalist justifications, but also a need for order which is counterposed with the supranational chaotic EU integration. This last assertion is surely coupled with a rejection of EU immigration policy which is perceived as creating ethnic substitution and increasing international instability: “concerning illegal immigration, well our idea is to create a naval blockade off the coast of Libya or North Africa. Regarding illegal immigration, the people who come here when they have to look for work and are offered work in the agriculture and are paid two euros per hour, certainly with a lower salary, in this way also the Italians lose their jobs, isn’t it?” (FG – Padua: Azione Studentesca). This is to say that right-leaning participants completely reject EU immigration policy, which is perceived as a supranational intrusion in national issues. Indeed, these participants believe that migration policy, and the consequent integration of migrants in the territory of each member state, should be a matter of exclusively national control. This discussion moves even further in the realm of human rights protection. Indeed, right-wing participants rejected EU political integration (or intrusion) in sovereign decisions of each member state on the basis of human rights protection, specifically mentioning the case of Hungary and Orbán: “The fact that the European

Commission, for example in the case of Hungary, wants to impose infringement procedures because Orbán has decided to enact anti-LGBT laws, I find it abhorrent especially with the excuse that the Hungarian government is anti-democratic. But Orbán was elected and has the right to impose his agenda on his people. While the commission was not elected by an Italian or a Hungarian" (FG – Padua: Azione Studentesca). While extreme right participants reject any form of supranational imposition of power based on nationalistic stances, they also stress the lack of a sufficiently democratic integration directly deriving from a gap in democratic accountability of the EU elite. However, it is still not clear how this contradiction should be solved in practice, or at all.

Interestingly, these criticisms of EU political integration and the cultural dimension of the EU contrast with the feeling of identity expressed by focus group participants. Indeed, when they are confronted with a graphical representation of citizenship (local, national, European or global - see figure 5.D in the methodological appendix), almost all our interviewed participants feel themselves to be simultaneously citizens of their own city and country and Europe (and even the world overall). Furthermore, most of the participants, independently from their ideological standpoint, stress the fact that the concept of citizenship is a relational one that varies according to the point of reference: "it is difficult to reply to this question. I need something else to understand what I am a citizen of. I would probably feel like a Roman citizen in Milan, I would feel like an Italian citizen in Sweden, I would feel like a European citizen in Iran, maybe in an alien invasion I would feel like a citizen of the world. Surely if I had to answer with a single option I would feel like an Italian citizen" (FG – Padua: ordinary citizen).

5.4.3 Economic critiques of the EU

One final theme that arises from our research, observed in both focus groups and interviews, is criticism of European economic integration. This criticism is prevalent across the ideological spectrum and encompasses civil society organizations as well as everyday citizens. Undoubtedly, this criticism stems from diverse motivations and perspectives that are influenced by ideological beliefs. Left-leaning civil society associations and citizens expressed an apparently left-leaning stance, criticizing the lack of social protection, particularly during times of crisis that were exacerbated by EU crisis management. The right rejects economic integration based on views ranging from the liberal-inspired EU economic integration, where the EU is sometimes depicted as an economic dictatorship, to nostalgia for a past in which nation-states

could control the socio-economic processes of their country. For instance, criticism from the extreme right cast the EU as a "Union of banks and private institutions" in which financial governance is an "eternal noose around the neck of countries" (Castellini, Forza Nuova). On the contrary, left-leaning participants rejected EU economic integration, expressing criticism of the differential treatment of EU citizens, and citing inconsistent pay for the same job across different member states. This pushes some participants to define economic integration as a "joke, since how come wages are different in different nations? A factory worker in Italy earns 1200 euros while in Germany the same worker earns more than 2000 euros. We have taken States with totally different economic conditions and put them together … so I find that it is not true that there is economic integration" (Aldo, EuroStop Padua).

In general, as mentioned before, there is a general perception that the economic union is an "attempt of equality between unequals. If it continues like that it will never succeed. Before we had an asset whose name was European Community, nowadays we do not have it anymore. So, either we get back to the Community or we will never succeed" (Five Stars Movement Florence). The perception of disparities between member states is linked to homogenous economic integration, which pressures diverse member states to conform to certain quantitative criteria. The produced differences are then translated into unequal treatment of member states, with more importance given to capitals (i.e.: large groups, banks or lobbies) over the people: "In my opinion this is a common point, despite the differences of ideology. In my opinion, there has been an excessively accelerated economic integration and some data also tell us about the euro issue. There is a 2019 study that says that in Germany there were 23,000 euros per capita with a positive impact, while in Italy there is a negative impact of 75,000 euros per capita. This is one of the big problems of the European economy and economic integration. There was talk of the devaluation of wages, but we can also speak of the loss of purchasing power. The famous "one was better off when there was the lira". It must be said that in any case the Union is concerned with serving the interests of large groups and lobbies, and this is not surprising at all" (FG – Padua: Azione Studentesca). As this viewpoint illustrates, even criticism of EU economic integration is intertwined with a harsh opposition to an unaccountable EU elite (i.e., lobbies and banks) that dictates how integration should proceed without having a democratic mandate to do so.

As already mentioned, criticism of EU economic integration cuts across the ideological spectrum of both civil society associations and ordinary citizens. The case of milk quotas is a pragmatic example of the negative effects of one-size-fits-all EU economic policies that

disregard local specificities: “my opinion it is so evident that there may be milk production quotas divided for the various countries. We agree that it is crazy but for many people it is not, whoever thought it thought it was a brilliant idea” (FG – Rome: ordinary citizens). Furthermore, if it is on the one hand true that economic integration comes with tools and resources provided to the European member states and to their citizens, some of the participants stress the inability or sometimes even the impossibility to use such resources. This is the case with European cohesion funds for local and regional economic development. Such funds are indeed scarcely used in Italy due to the lack of knowledge of the national political class: “as regards the cohesion policy which concerns the regions and not the states, it is very beautiful in words, but the fact is that in general, our decision-makers, those who have the structural funds in their hands, have no idea where to put their hands. In short, how much is the fault of our political class or the supranational system?” (FG – Florence: Vox).

5.5 Conclusion

As stressed in the introduction, Italy has moved away from a substantially pro-European or Euro-enthusiast position. This is confirmed by the findings of this study. In other words, Italy currently shows a variety of positioning toward the EU alongside criticism of the various dimensions of European integration. Opposition to the EU, generally defined as Euroscepticism, reveals itself as a multidimensional concept; while almost all the participants accept the general ideas of the EU and its integration processes, this does not mean that constructive criticism is not present. What emerges strongly from the analysis of the data derived from both interviews and focus groups is the strong interconnection between the contextual (culture, economy and politics) and political (policy, politics and polity) dimensions of EU integration.

The emerging images of the EU can be divided between right-leaning and left-leaning actors (both meso level and individual level). Indeed, while left-leaning parties and movements endorsed a lower degree of integration (or even rejection, as in the deviant case of FN) in favor of a confederative or more intergovernmental transformation of the EU, right-leaning organizations participants proposed alternatives to the current state of the EU and opted for a pragmatic type of opposition (see the case of the Five Stars Movement or even the League). Interestingly, even the pro-integration MEF, in favor of a federal European structure, expressed

some reformist frames, articulating the need for a social Europe that would be rebuilt in departure from its founding values. More specifically, left-leaning actors proposed increased solidarity between member states, coupled with a decrease in the democratic gap. Concerning this last aspect, and the possibility for the EU to become more democratic, all parties and associations used reformist frames to address EU politics. In other words, they stress the importance of the EP and its elections, while being aware of the fact that the EP currently has a low degree of independence and power, despite being the only truly democratic institution of the EU. The only exception is that of the extreme-right FN, who always use rejectionist frames that refuse any sort of supranational EU integration. The party, indeed, prays for Italy to regain control of its borders and core policies eventually accepting targeted cooperation with other countries that are in turn fully responsible for their borders and core policies.

Lastly, it is interesting to note that citizens involved in focus group discussions showed a general awareness of aspects of the EU, while not possessing a deep understanding of its technicalities. Ordinary people use reformist frames to express a general sense of distance between EU institutions and the people at large, stressing the importance of EP elections as a way to fill the democratic gap. Indeed, the EP is perceived as an institution through which people's voices can be heard. Furthermore, the general feeling of distance between EU institutions and citizens is coupled with a sense of the EU not working in the right direction. In other words, 'ordinary citizens' involved in the discussions stressed the fact that the EU social sphere either does not exist or is not represented by EU institutions. When talking about the need to involve ordinary people's grievances in EU politics, focus group participants used rejectionist frames to depict the EU of the banks and big economic powers. In other words, they stressed the role of the unaccountable and morally corrupted elite in contrast to citizens' needs.

In conclusion, firstly, Euroscepticism is a complex and multifaced concept, widely framed as negative even in the academic environment. However, as emerges from this study, not all criticism coming from below should be framed in a negative way and considered as a malaise for European society. Some of this criticism is indeed pragmatic, aiming to achieve a greater level of integration, albeit in a different manner. Moreover, there are overlapping aspects in influencing the positions toward the EU, which encompass the individual, organizational and contextual level, often simultaneously. Therefore, further research in the field should involve a more comprehensive examination of these overlaps, with a particular emphasis on the inclusion of individual frames and perceptions and attribution of meaning within meso level party politics or social movement studies.

Secondly, this study demonstrates how the public perceives the current state of the EU as distant and insufficiently democratic. While it is not true that individuals and organizations are begging for Italy to leave the European Union (except for some marginal cases), this general sense of distance and lack of representation should be at least mitigated, otherwise it will probably transform into a complete rejection. In other words: "[p]olitical scepticism is likely to cumulate, in that, specific discontent (à la Easton) should translate into generalized discontent and should spill over from authorities to regime or to the political community itself" (Weßels 2007, Carlotti 2021). An increase in both the inclusion of citizens within EU decision-making processes, coupled with a stronger diffusion of education concerning EU integration processes, should be key objectives of politicians at both the national and the supranational level.

Lastly, a particular recommendation can be directed, based on what seen for the Italian case, toward the ruling elite both at the national and European levels, in particular those politicians belonging to the so-called 'Brussel bubble', as called by our interviewees, and generally recognized by the participants of this study as technocrats or eurocrats. Indeed, to avoid the transformation of reformist criticism into outright rejection, or the instrumentalization of them by regressive forces, the only viable option is to collect, analyze and include constructive criticism into any potential reform of the EU, alongside its institutional structure. To construct a truly democratic process at the EU level, it is necessary to include critical voices and stances, embarking on a new trajectory of change within the EU. This would mitigate rejectionist voices that, if left unheard, could lead to the disruption of the EU integration project.

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Chapter 6.

To join or not to join? The case of North Macedonia.

Abstract

North Macedonia as part of the Western Balkans is, since 2005, a candidate for membership in the EU. The ambitions and mood of the establishment but also of the citizens in North Macedonia over the years moved quite high in the direction of Euro-enthusiasm. However, a Eurosceptic sentiment diffused among political parties as well as in other social sectors is on the increase. This chapter investigates this development, buy shedding light on the dynamics of Eurosceptic trends in North Macedonia. As seen the primary basis of Euroscepticism is deeply rooted on controversial historical issues of the country.

Introduction

North Macedonia, part of the Western Balkans, has been a candidate for EU membership since 2005. Over the years, the ambitions and mood of the establishment and the citizens in North Macedonia have moved in the direction of Euro-enthusiasm. Indeed, the EU was seen as a significant asset for the survival of the state, the economy and the identity of the dominant Macedonian ethnic population (including the primarily Albanian minority). However, primarily due to the illiberal approach in politics set in place during the government of Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO – DPMNE) (2006 – 2017), a Eurosceptic sentiment diffused among political parties as well as in other social sectors. Such sentiments diffused in the political debate, pleading for alternative models not only for the political system, but also for the state's prospects regarding

the EU. During and after VMRO-DPMNE's rule, new Eurosceptic political parties and informal groups have mushroomed throughout the country, holding strong potential for disrupting the path of European integration.

This chapter investigates these developments and the dynamics of Eurosceptic trends in North Macedonia over the last five years, a period that saw the diffusion of illiberal Eurosceptic trends via fragmented initiatives outside the governing parties' organism. Indeed, this illiberal government style created an impaired sense of social responsibility brought identity perspectives into public discourse. Currently, the primary basis of Euroscepticism is the perceived permissiveness of the European elites towards Bulgarian demands to include compromises on controversial historical topics in the terms of the negotiations.

6.1 The context

Over the years, in parallel with the development of Euro-enthusiast discourse, Eurosceptic tendencies have also started to emerge in North Macedonia, both from political parties and the public at large. The illiberal approach of the VMRO – DPMNE between 2006 and 2017 was a significant contributor to the spread of Eurosceptic sentiments.[4] Following the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 and the Greek veto on North Macedonia, regressive processes were set in motion regarding the practice of democracy and governance that resulted in illiberal practices in a democratic state. That approach introduced Eurosceptic sentiments into the political debate and raised the question alternative models of political system and the future of Macedonia, not necessarily as an EU member.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the sources and dynamics of Eurosceptic trends in North Macedonia in the last five years. Within this period, illiberal trends were not promoted by the government, as was the case during the rule of VMRO-DPMNE, but by fragmented initiatives outside the party organism. However, the earlier, illiberal way of governing and the government's introduction of polarizing elements into society created a basis for a reduced sense of social responsibility and for introducing national-identity-related perspectives into public discourse.

[4] In 2010, the Minister of European Integration, Vasko Naumovski, emphasized that there is no such thing as Euroscepticism, but rather euenthusiasm .https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/2100030.html

6.2 Method and sources

The chapter relies on a mix of desk research, five semi-structured in-depth interviews, national surveys, and five focus groups organized with grassroots civil society associations, party members and representatives of the main parties in the country as well as ordinary citizens (for details see the appendix). The survey data derives from the Eurothink – Center for European Strategies, which has been measuring the public mood regarding EU and other contemporary political issues via representative telephone surveys since 2014 (see Eurometer 2023). To examine the views of citizens regarding Euroscepticism or Euro-enthusiasm, five focus groups were conducted in the cities of Veles, Skopje, Struga, Tetovo and Stip in 2021, cities that vary in size, geographical location, economic prosperity, and level of education. 33 participants from all demographic categories participated in the focus groups. The questions that were asked to have the character of guiding questions and included the following: What does Europe/the EU mean to you? What are the advantages/disadvantages of EU membership? What would you change about Europe/the EU? (see table 6A in the North Macedonia appendix for further information[5]).

6.3 Euroscepticism in Macedonian public opinion

From the results of desk-research and data analysis, we can highlight 3 positions that developed over the years. The first one is pro-EU, where the advocates of this position are generally the political parties in power, but also parliamentary parties, most of the civil society and the non-governmental sector. For them, the EU has the potential for liberal and minority-inclusive perspectives, security in a close relationship with NATO and systemic liberal democracy. The second position, and for this study the most significant, is the Eurosceptic position. The proponents of this discourse are some political parties alongside with initiatives and associations from so-called (un)civil society. 'Edinstvena Makedonija', (United Macedonia) is one of the main components of some of these discourses. It rejects the EU on political, economic, ethical, and civilizational grounds, and direc attention to an Eurasian Union. This

[5] For details about the interviewee partners in the Macedonian case, who mostly requested full anonymity, see the website Eurothink (https://eurothink.mk/home/) or contact the Coordinator of the project Dimitar Nikolovski (dimitar.nikolovski@eurothink.mk).

political party also has close relations with the political party in power in the Russian Federation, United Russia. Another political party, 'Rodina' (Fatherland) believes that: "Artificial war-mongering creations such as the EU and NATO are falling apart as we speak, and our programmatic goal is to prepare Macedonia for the upcoming geostrategic reality and the only natural option for the next 100 years minimum – Euroasia from Lisbon to Vladivostok, as a community of free and sovereign peoples." Other promoters of Eurosceptic narratives include organizations, associations and initiatives that, over the years, have protested againstthe bilateral agreements with Bulgaria and Greece. These groups continue to promote the Eurosceptic content in different forums. Online podcasts are one of the more significant platforms for the dissemination of political views promoting illiberal political views and Eurosceptic discourse. Their ideological and political profile is extreme (or radical) right-wing, built around concepts of identity, sovereignty, history, pride, honor and traitorship. During the pandemic, their podcasts had a significant impact on the public in general, and on young people's views on the European Union in particular.

The third position is ambivalence towards the strategic integration options of North Macedonia, a perspective held by the political party 'Levica' (The Left). Their ambivalence stems from their rejection of the NATO alliance, of which North Macedonia is already a member, but the party claims publicly to not be opposed to EU membership.[6] The public approach of this party is populist, and in recent years they have taken a turn from left inclusive populism towards right, mono-ethnic, nationalistic, and anti-establishment positions. As an instigating agent of Euroscepticism in recent years, polls show that it is not only the internal instances in the country, but also the ways in which the European Union manages the process of integration of the Western Balkans into the EU. The agreements concluded with Bulgaria and Greece leave the impression among some citizens that the prolongation of the accession process and the early Bulgarian veto allude to a more general disinterest in expansion and inclusion.

Fig. 6.1 HERE

[6]With regards to the protests against the French proposal in July 2022, Levica's president emphasized that there is an alternative to the EU; while not directly stating that he is in favor of union with Russia, he pointed to the conditionality for membership in the EU, pointing to the importance of identity of the nation. See: https://nezavisen.mk/apasiev-veli-ima-alternativi-za-eu-sdsm-i-dui-vednash-go-osudija/

The graph, derived from Eurometer research from 2014 to 2021, shows the rising line of the idea that joining the European Union would be a "good thing". In 2014, the perspective that membership would be a good thing is held by 59% of the population, while in 2021 that figure is 70%, the highest during the years that the research was conducted.

Fig. 6.2 HERE

When asked if they think the European Union is the best option for North Macedonia, the answer varies over the years. In 2014, the support for this position was 41%, and in 2021 that support increased to 57%, with fluctuations in the intervening years. Between 2014 and 2016, the population seems to oscillate between the position that EU accession is the best option for North Macedonia, and the opposing view that the country 'should find its own model for development outside of the EU' After 2016 support for this latter position slowly falls, reaching 35% in 2017 and 32% in the spring and autumn of 2019, before rising to 36% in 2020 and 38% in 2021.

Breakdown by ethnic group shows that 47% of ethnic North Macedonians hold the view that the EU is the best option for North Macedonia, while 48% support the view that it should find a model for development outside of the EU. In contrast, 82% of ethnic Albanians believe that the EU is the best option, while 16% think that the state should find a new model for development outside the community. In the category of others ethnic groups, support for the EU is at 60%, while support for an alternative model is at 34%. The total ratio is 57% in favor of EU accession and 38% in favor of an alternative model.

Figure. 6.4 HERE

According to the same survey, to the question 'If a referendum was held this Sunday with the question "Are you in favor of the integration of N. Macedonia in the EU", how would you vote?', from 2015 to 2021 the height line of answers with Yes is quite high with a variation of 66% to 71%. The 'No' responses range from 21% to 12% (2015=18%, 2016=21%, 2017=18%, 2018=19%, 2019 Spring=14%, 2019 Fall=16%, 2020=16% and 2021=12%). Other options, such as 'I don't know yet' and 'I would not vote' have below 7% support. Regarding the EU's attitude towards North Macedonia, 47.4% of respondents consider it to be unfair, arrogant, and

blackmailing, while 26.7% of respondents perceive it as fair, friendly and correct. In the following sections, the findings of five interviews with Eurosceptic and Euroenthusiast actors and five focus groups held in the cities of Shtip, Veles, Struga, Skopje, and Tetovo in North Macedonia will be presented.

6.4. Motivations for Euroscepticism: political parties, intellectuals, and civil society organizations in Macedonia

A series of six semi-structured interviews were conducted, comprising one interviewee who is an EU-optimist op-ed writer and five individuals who serve as right-wing founders of political parties or proponents of political party establishment initiatives (for the list of interviews see the appendix table 6D). The questions were adapted to each of the interviewees. Basic questions referred to the role of European vs national identity, attitudes towards various aspects of the EU, pluralism, and basic rights.

6.4.1 A problematic relation: Europe, EU and North Macedonia

In all the interviews conducted, the interviewees equate Europe with the European Union. For Macedonian people the issue of European identity is intertwined with their approach to the EU and self-identity (the definition of the 'us'). In most of our interviews the discrepancy between North Macedonian and so-called European identity is clearly highlighted: according to the respondents 'it is the EU who oblige [us] to meet its expectations and fulfill tasks'. One respondent stated that "everything has changed with us, everything that was required by the Union has been adopted, we have changed the name and identity and history, tradition and culture of the Macedonian people and the assurance, that one day we will become a member of the Union is still a bare promise" (Interview with JB). "The EU, as a superior instance that put obligations on us, also has the function of disfiguring us. (…) is a union with false values, a union that, according to its agenda, decided to create a new demos, Europeans, at the expense of all European peoples" (Interview with LJP). Another respondent claims that the relation of the EU towards 'us' is also considered as the relationship of an organization that has no idea what to do with itself, claiming "the EU should define its concept of how it will look like in the future" (Interview with SG) Hence, according the respondents, while the EU puts itself in a position of superiority, constantly pushing for changes to the North Macedonian identity, it is in fact the EU that has an identity crisis.

It can be concluded that there are three groups of respondents: those who are not in favor of negotiations and entry into the EU by any cost; those who are in favor of entry into the EU but resent the EU because of the high price that the state has to pay in compromising its identity; and those who only see in the EU a way out of the menace of non-inclusive policies by the rising right.

6.4.2. EU optimism vs. EU skepticism

Euroscepticism is one of the dominant attitudes among right-wing nationalist circles and parties. In encouraging EU-skepticism, actors highlight the so-called conditionalities of the EU and the impression that "we" have suffered the consequences of the arbitrariness of the EU. Thus, "we are not pro-EU, we are Eurosceptics, but Eurosceptics precisely because of the ideological foundations of this kind of Europe and its consequences, which the Macedonian people felt directly" (Interview with LJP). In this regard, one of the interviewees sees EU-skepticism as a consequence of the non-expansionist motives of the EU and the arbitrary demands on North Macedonia, especially in terms of identity, but also in terms of politics "..however, I am a sceptic, and even if North Macedonia fulfills all that is required, the question is whether they will accept us (in the EU)" (Interview with JB).

One of the interviewees sees skepticism as a consequence of insufficient reforms both in the state and in the EU to counteract undemocratic tendencies. In that direction, "we are not against the EU, but we are sceptical. If we don't make changes in the political system, we will continue to sink into populism." Hence, the appearance of various populist and EU-sceptic manifestations in the country is seen because of a lack of enthusiasm for reforms, both in the EU and in North Macedonia. One of the EU-optimistic positions sees EU accession as logical succession to NATO membership and the alliance with the USA. " We as 'Democrats' are for Europe, we are pro-European ... we know who our strategic partners are now, that is Europe, America, NATO" (Interview with JO). Another EU-optimistic attitude views the inclusive model of the EU and the possibility of enlargement as a way of countering the danger of the emergence of strong nationalist and right-wing options. Thus, "the idea of Europe and of our

country, of our state, is to get involved and go towards a certain path, towards a certain route because, otherwise, we have chances to fail in our local racisms" (Interview with NJ).

6.4.3 Soveregnity and EU Alternative(s)

Sovereignty is one of the most represented concepts in three out of five interviews. The loss of sovereignty and decision-making autonomy is seen not only as a fundamental part of nation states but also as part of the EU. One of the interviewees indicated that "Europe should stop being an American or Anglo-Saxon vassal, Europe should start from De Gaulle" (Interview with LJP). Following this logic, respondents concluded "our" sovereignty had collapsed, and viewed the USA as the greatest enemy. The problem of sovereignty is a key factor prompting interviewees to consider alternatives to the EU, with one interviewee pointing out that when starting the discussion on joining or not the UE we should "define how far the sovereignty of the states goes and to what extent states pledge their sovereignty within the EU." (Interview with SG).

EU scepticism generates an argument for alternatives, and EU-optimism generates counter-arguments. The construction of the attitudes of the interviewees has a consistent logical framework and follows the concept of national sovereignty, and the relationship of the EU as an instance of power over ‘us’. A Eurosceptic interviewee had an alternative view, and perceived Europe as a continental and geographical entity. "With equal membership of Russia in the EU, as a union of sovereign nations, European industry, knowledge, technology and a huge concentration of people in a small territory and Russian resources will make Europe literally the strongest economic and political power, and I can say that also China invests on the continent and a strong, Euro-Asian policy will be born again" (Interview with LJP). According to another interviewee, this alternative does not only include geographical, but also value and cultural elements: "that is our determination to ally with people who respect traditionalism, national identity, religious identity, family, name, identity, sovereignty" (Interview with JB). The same interviewee emphasizes anti-NATO sentiment as a pillar an alternative alliance: "we are the only party that is against NATO in North Macedonia and we are a party that advocates the establishment of close relations with Russia and the Euro-Asian Union" (Interview with JB). This alternative is framed in terms of support for national sovereignty: "In the past 30 years, Russia has in no way questioned our name and identity, history, tradition, culture, it respects sovereignty" (interview with JB).

On the other hand, another two interviewees articulated a positive attitude towards EU membership, both in geographic and value-based terms. Interviewees supported this view with reference to political and legal frameworks: "The Western world offers the rule of law, it offers a legal state, it offers cooperation with civil society organizations, it offers individualism, the Western world even has sympathy for dissidents" (Interview with NJ). In line with these priorities and necessities, the same interviewee stressed that "Europe's alternative is Euroscepticism, Europe's alternative is a new nationalism, Europe's alternative is even greater corruption, and finally, Europe's alternative, i.e., non-Europe, is a new war (Interview NJ). Another interviewee emphasized the geographic and political need for the state to move towards the EU with reference to an economic framework: "Europe is powerful, it unites both economically and in terms of area and people... when we go abroad to work, we want to go to Germany... we don't go to Vietnam. First, geographically, we belong to Europe" (Interview with JO).

Table 6.1 HERE

6.5. Constructing a collective European identity or negotiating Europe? the Focus groups

Four main attitudes towards Europe emerged from the focus groups. These categories corresponded with the analytical categories illustrated in chapter 1, suggesting the validity of the academic debate on Euroscepticism and its related concepts, including the analysis of Euroscepticism in new member countries (i.e., the Balkans). *The first category* is *Euro-enthusiast* and comprises positive views on concepts such as the free market economy, culture, diversity, freedom of choice, the sense of a United Europe, an end to nationalisms, and carbon-free future. Those whose views corresponded with this category tended to stress the social dimension when articulating their sense of the meaning of the EU. When asked what benefits the EU could offer, one participant stressed that the EU means for them "better life, primarily financially, better health, because I work in the hospital, I have been abroad I have seen what kind of health care they have. Better education - 100% that we will get, life without corruption, mobbing, discrimination. More respect for workers' rights (FG Skopje). Another added that EU stands for "Equal access and a large number of opportunities for all equally and freedom of choice (FG Skopje).

The right to choose is seen as one of the most important rights alongside to the rule of law. In North Macedonia, many hold the view that the state apparatus and the institutions of the state do not function well, and it has a kind of influence on the relationship with democracy and the democratic mood. The notion of freedom is also applicable in the Euro-enthusiast hierarchy of values. Freedom of movement, choice and life in the general sense of the word. The respondents were saying that: "Respecting the rules of the game was my second point (…), If there are rules of the game, we should all respect them, at the moment those rules don't apply to 10 people" (FG Skopje). Other two respondents underlined the concept of freedoms: "As far as I think now, in Europe, to be a European means to be free, without borders ... " (FG Tetovo). "The positive thing that Europe offers ... Freedom of movement, we have it now, but right, you are limited to say. Consequently, freedom of movement is also one of the motives and synonyms for the EU" (FG Struga).

For some of the participants in the focus group, national identity is not in conflict with European identity, as one of the respondents stressed, there is "no real conflict between being Macedonian and being European" – (FG Veles). Although the participants have the impression that the European administration and EU member states are not satisfied with the performance of the citizens of North Macedonia as far as the values of the European Union are concerned. "European politicians, in general, and European citizens, show a high level of moral responsibility to themselves and to the society in which they are active as actors, whether they are from one side or the other of politics. "(FG Skopje)

The second category of attitudes refers to the positive approach of focus group participants toward the EU; however, accompanied with pointing to some cynical and hypocritical behavior of the EU towards North Macedonia. The respondents expressed, for example, their disappointment with the "double standards" of the EU enlargement policies, because of which the country is still "stuck in the waiting room" (FG Tetovo). EU requirements for Northern Macedonia as a country are unfulfillable, not because of the inability of the country to fulfil them, but because of the constant dissatisfaction of the EU. As one of the respondents said, the EU "propagate European values, but then deny our right to self-determination and tolerate Bulgaria's absurd demands" (FG Shtip). Another added that "We are too obedient to others; we need to start thinking for ourselves" (FG Shtip). So "We're technically European, but still not quite…" (FG Skopje). The changes are not seen as a necessity only in the EU, but in relation to the dispute between North Macedonia and Bulgaria. As one of the respondents said: "In

general, the dispute must be resolved first, and then we must go to the European path, because now it is our reality, otherwise we can only have a dream. (FG Skopje).

The third category encompasses negative aspects of the EU, including stereotypes and logical inconsistencies with the attitudes and values that are preferred by the EU, but also noticed in the official structures of the organization. According to this view, the EU is a negative benchmark of value, culture and even national-political models. The rejection of differences and the destruction of traditional values emerged as one of the main remarks of the EU's influence in North Macedonia. The respondents pointed out that "Youth is already Europeanized here, i.e. they follow all the negative trends from the EU" – (FG Shtip). Some also disapprove the marriage equality, by saying "So I think maybe that's how I see it, but the EU has some laws that I could not accept at all, here are those male-to-male weddings, female to female, it could not be surviving at all for a man. Why choose like that, they will be only male and only female, neither Adam nor Eve would exist, accordingly. That's one thing I would never vote for, but there are many other laws I would accept, such as cycling. (FG Tetovo). Another respondent agreed: "In the last 5-6 years I have not been in Europe, I have been more here in the Balkans. According to my colleague, about those marriages between a man and a man, a woman with a woman, I am not for that. "(FG Tetovo). Still, another one put it in a broader context, saying that "even now, Europe does not look down on us, I look down on the EU, because they have no moral values, family values. (…), what are those paedophile things out there" (FG Skopje). Finally, the way of life in the EU, according to the respondents, is somehow different form the life in North Macedonia, as one of the interviewee said, "With European working hours, we cannot maintain our traditional values". (FG Struga). Also, the EU's inclusivity toward minority groups is seen as a problem that cannot be avoided. "Yes, the EU has some values, respect for minorities, respect for human rights, etc." (FG Struga), however it "gives too many rights to bicycle riders; we the car drivers are discriminated against" (FG Tetovo).

The fourth category pertains to alternative perspectives and potential solutions concerning the challenges experienced or problematic viewpoints expressed by participants within the focus group regarding the European Union. In certain focus groups, attempts are made to convey the notion that EU membership has alternative options, often considering countries such as the United States, Russia, China, Brazil, and the Eurasian region as potential alternatives. For example, one of the respondents noticed that "the EU for us is the closest natural and

geographical partner. However, the problem is if they do not want to integrate us… There are countries as, Norway, Switzerland that are not members, but are in close cooperation. Close relations, so if they do not want you, you must look for an alternative, whether it will be America, whether some relations with China, with Russia with the great powers, you have to have an alternative. (FG Tetovo). "For everything in life, there is always an alternative, another respondent said, (…) so there is always an alternative, whether that alternative will be China, Russia, I do not know how these people imagine, what it means now, we will - if we change, if we are not with the EU we will be with China, what? (FG Skopje). Some of the respondent preferred the alliance with the EU, but also looked for the alternatives, as the one person form Skopje, who said "I am pro-EU and I will fight to the end for North Macedonia to be part of the EU, but when we talk realistically, there must always be an alternative". (FG Skopje). But the other said that "Full membership is an illusion, but we should at least get into the common market" (FG Skopje).

6.6 Conclusion

The situation of Euroscepticism in Macedonia is complex. A general support for the accession is high but much higher among ethnic Albanians than ethnic Macedonians: if one scratches the surface can find a huge portion of population in the country highly ambivalent regarding positions towards the EU for various reasons linked to ethnic cleavages. The Macedonians generally stand for the EU- YES support, however they have problems with certain EU member states (i.e., the issue of pre-conditionality) and some European 'liberal' values. In addition, the current Russia's influence plays a role.

Eurosceptic narratives in North Macedonia primarily stem from a sense of weariness due to the prolonged and unpredictable accession process, as well as the concessions required by the country, such as the Agreements with Greece and Bulgaria. Thus, the 'threat' to national identity is seen as the most important argument of Eurosceptic narratives in North Macedonia. Despite the proliferation of Eurosceptic and pro-Russian parties and movements in recent years, the attractiveness of such viable alternatives as the Eurasian Union has not seen a significant rise, as is attested in public opinion surveys and focus groups. Nevertheless, the interviews conducted with party and movement leaders suggest that the length and uncertainty of the accession processes create fertile grounds for these options to gain more prominence. In sum, some main mechanisms of Euroscepticism can be identified in this potential new member and

waiting country, which resemble factors of Euroscepticism already found in old members (mainly in the West), but also show some specificities: (a) European identity is seen as antagonistic to national identity; (b) European identity is linked to geopolitics (i.e. the alliance with Russia, which is seen as a guarantor of national sovereignty and as one of the most viable alternatives); (c) National Sovereignty (more than other economic or cultural factors) is one of the key concepts espoused in opposition to the EU (especially by right-wing actors).

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Chapter 7.

Anticipating the (European) future while revisiting the (troubled) past: the Case of Bosnia Herzegovina

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), a post-conflict Western Balkan country (WBc), where the question on the membership in the European Union (EU) is not as straightforward as in other WBc. Stemming from this, the first part of the chapter will contextualise the institutional architecture of BiH, which influence, will argue, the European frames, and highlight the tension between the two autonomous entities vis-á-vis the historical trajectory of the EU accession process of BiH. The final section of the chapter presents and discusses the findings of the various forms of Euroscepticism found.

7.1 Introduction

In 1995, the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) put a lid on a war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) that had seethed for three year prior. While acknowledging that the DPA has managed to end large-scale violence on the ground, it has prescribed the post-conflict dynamics of the BiH along ethnic lines (Kasapović and Kočan, 2022). One of the most striking examples of this is the Annex IV, a constitution of BiH that pivots on the categorization of the three main ethnic groups – Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosnian Croats – as ‘constituent peoples’, considering everyone else to the ‘Others’ category. Furthermore, the DPA has managed to institutionalize the division of the country by forming two coequal ‘entities’ – the majority-Serb Republika Srpska (RS) and the mostly Bosniak-Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH).

Those two entities are not only important because they reflect upon the segregation of the everyday life along ethnic lines, but also because of their 'power' vis-à-vis the state (BiH); they have their own parliaments, governments, and veto rights over all national policies (Kapidžić, 2020, p. 85). In this respect, the institutional division of post-conflict BiH – i.e., consociational model of power-sharing among the ethnopolitical elites, alongside with the mutual veto rights and communal autonomy (Belloni, 2009, p. 359) – is what makes BiH's political system as "one of the most difficult to comprehend due to its complexity" (Kapidžić, 2020, p. 81).

Within such constellation, the main aim of the European Union (EU) in BiH was not only to achieve peace via the de-antagonization of the relations between former adversaries (e.g., Brljavac, 2011; Blagovčanin, 2016), but also to achieve genuine conflict transformation on both socio-political and institutional (polity) level (e.g., Juncos, 2005; Gromes, 2009; Kappler and Richmond, 2011; Cooley, 2018). Such conflict transformation is best apprehended within the process of European integration, which BiH is subjected to from 1999 onwards via the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP), aiming to secure eventual EU membership for the country (Aybet and Bieber, 2011). The final aim of the process, which constitutes the framework of relations between the EU and post-Yugoslav states, is to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA), marking an important step of a potential candidate country toward full EU membership. However, in the case of BiH, this was not as straightforward as in other post-Yugoslav countries (e.g., Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia), as the 2005-2007 SAA negotiations were (mis)used by the ethnopolitical elite in RS in order to present both the 'internal Other' (i.e., Bosniaks and official Sarajevo) and 'external Other' (the EU and Office of the High Representative) as existential threat for RS (Kočan, 2022). Such political dynamics are also vivid in the latest (2022) opinion pool regarding the support for the membership of BiH in the EU; on paper, 77,4% of the people support the membership, but the nature of this support is rather asymmetrical when comparing it between the entities (54,4 % of support in Republika Srpska in contrast with the 90,1 % support in Federation of BiH) (Klix, 2022).

This does not come as a surprise, as there are many scholarly works that touch upon the weak support for the EU on the level of Republika Srpska and strong support on the level of Federation of BiH. Authors such as Toal (2013), Turčilo (2013), Zdeb (2017) Kočan and Zupančič (2022) demonstrate how the EU in general and EU enlargement process in specific became an instrument in the hands of the political elite – particularly coming from RS – for further antagonization of the relations between the constituent peoples. While Kočan and

Zupančič (2022, p. 115) argued that the EU's agency in BiH was framed as "serving the Bosniak cause" (against Bosnian Serbs and Republika Srpska), Turčilo (2013, p. 7–8) pointed out that there are at least three arguments for the lower support for integration in Republika Srpska in comparison with the Federation of BiH: (1) the EU accession process is perceived as something that could jeopardize the existence of the RS; (2) the EU accession process is perceived as something that could guarantee the continuation of BiH as a state, and (3) the EU accession process is perceived as something that could offer an external solution to the internal division of BiH.

In all of the above-mentioned cases, the focus was on the top-down perspective, i.e., how the (ethno-)political elite frame the EU in their discourse, which gives us rather incomplete perspective on how such (ethno-)politicised discourse (e.g., Bargués and Morillas, 2021; Mochtak and Muharemović, 2022) on the EU 'resonates' in overall perceptions of the 'ordinary citizens' (people not holding any important political, economic or socio-cultural posts), which are exposed to it. Stemming from this, the main research goal of this chapter is to offer a bottom-up perspective on how ordinary citizens frame the EU in their discourse, thus filling the gap in reflecting upon the question of how the discourse by the political elite on the EU resonates with the audience (i.e., ordinary citizens). To do this, we rely on the results of focus groups and in-depth interviews with ordinary citizens conducted in the period between 2018-2021 and analyze it with the theoretical framework established by Pirro and Kessel (2018) and Caiani and Weisskircher (2021). Here, we focus on frame categories – socioecomic frames, political frames and cultural frames – that offer us a robust analytical framework for the analysis of the everyday discourse of the ordinary citizens of BiH on the EU.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first briefly introduces and discusses the historical trajectory of the EU accession process of BiH from the perspective of socio-political and institutional (polity) level, while reflecting upon the obstacles posed by the (ethno-)political elite that underpinned these processes. The second explains the methodology and the conceptual framework that supports this study. The third offers the results of the analysis and results of the analysis and discussion. And the fourth – the conclusion – reveals the conceptual and empirical implications of the case study besides formulating some recommendations for both academic and non-academic sector(s).

7.2 Between conflict transformation and re-antagonization of the relations between former adversaries: The Context

Even though that there were many (internal and external) actors that expected the (re)action of the EU already during the Bosnian war, the ”intergovernmental reality” of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy prevented its involvement (Dover, 2005). In this regard, it does not come as surprise that the EU's representative was 'only' co-chairman along with the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Russian Federation during the negotiations for the signing of the DPA. While one could argue that the EU ”only observed the Bosnian war as by-stander” (Kočan et al., 2020, p. 6), the DPA itself laid down conditions for the international involvement in BiH, which in turn enabled the EU to shape and implement the post-war incentives in years to come. This was particularly vivid until 2008, when the EU became – alongside with the Office of the High Representative (OHR)[7] – the most involved external actor in the country. In general, the post-conflict efforts of the EU in BiH in the period between 1996 and 2008 could be interpreted as a period in which the EU strived for the successful implementation of the DPA, while at the same time focusing on the ”Euro-Atlantic integration” of the country. To do so, the EU focused on three broader sets of activities, namely: i) constitutional reforms; ii) police reform; iii) transitional justice (e.g., Arvanitopoulos and Tzifakis, 2008; Rangelov and Theros, 2009; Perry, 2015; Juncos, 2017).

When discussing the nature of the constitutional reforms, one should reflect upon the fact that they were at least two-folded. First, the Prud and Butmir process(es)[8] (Kasapović and Kočan, 2022) marked an attempt by the EU to – through administrative and institutional dimension – reduce the visibility of the division into political entities along ethnic lines and strengthen the central government (Kočan et al., 2020). Second, the proposed military and intelligence reforms[9] aimed at achieving sustainable peace vis-à-vis the security dimension (e.g., Juncos, 2017). The second broader set of activities was the police reform, which was at that time considered as the main priority of the EU. This was also reflected in the fact that the European Commission considered this reform as the ”last remaining obstacle for launching the negotiations over SAA” (Kočan et al., 2022, p. 7). As demonstrated by Dover (2005), the reform

[7] The OHR was established in order to oversee the civilian implementation of the DPA. The OHR soon received wide-ranging powers to impose decisions (so-called Bonn powers) in cases where the authorities were unable to agree. As Majstorović and Vučkovac (2016) showed, the OHR has – until 2005 – dismissed a total of 119 officials, issued 757 decisions and imposed 286 laws.

[8] The idea of the Prud and Butmir processes (2008–2009) was to achieve the needed constitutional reforms that would strenghten the central (Bosnian and Herzegovinian) government.

[9] The Defence and inteligence reforms (2003–2005) established unified Armed Forces in BiH (Staples, 2008).

suffered from limited outcome(s) due to the unpreparedness of the political elite in RS to integrate its police structures with those of the FBiH and District Brčko into one centralized police force. Here, it is also worth mentioning the fact that the police reform coincided with the employment of the EU Special Representative in BiH, EU Monitoring Mission in BiH, EU Policy Mission and the EU peacekeeping force EUFOR (e.g., Dover, 2005; Juncos, 2013).

Finally, the third broader set(s) of activities were consisted of efforts within the field of transitional justice, meaning that the EU invested its efforts in addressing the troubled past of BiH by trying to bring those accused of war crimes to justice after the Bosnian war. While it took approximately nine years – after the end of the war – for the political elite in RS to start handing over war-crime indictees to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the EU presence in BiH directly contributed to restructuring the judicial system of BiH. By doing this, the War Crimes Chamber of the State Court and the Special Department for War Crimes in the Bosnian Prosecutor's Office were opened (Meernik and Barron, 2018). Furthermore, in the same year, the European Parliament adopted its first Declaration on Srebrenica,[10] which aimed at facilitating the conditions for reconciliation. However, as Milošević and Touquet (2018) pointed out, this decision in turn further entrenched the positions of ethno-political parties in BiH. This was also reflected by Toal (2013), Zdeb (2017) and Kočan (2022), who showed that the EU (and international community in general) was discursively framed as a platform that 'serves Bosniak interest'. Here, the (ethno-)political elite framed the reform incentives sponsored/endorsed by the EU (such as the Prud and Butmir processes) as something that could 'endanger the position of RS in BiH' (Noutcheva, 2012).

In essence, the period after 2008, which was marked with the signature of the SAA between the EU and BiH, was understood as 'a period of regression' (Kočan et al., 2020). The EU efforts during this period, which again coincide with the idea of conflict transformation via the institutional (polity) level, were met by (strong) resistance by the (ethno-)political elite in RS. Noutcheva (2012) and Biermann (2014) for example showed how opting for the above-mentioned constitutional reforms in 2008-2009 opened the 'Pandora's box' of a power-sharing system that no one was fully satisfied with but the (ethno-)political elites refrained from it. An important indicator of that was the secessionist rhetoric of then the Prime Minister of RS Milorad Dodik, who started discussing the potential of the independence of the RS from BiH (Mušinović, 2015). As shown by Biermann (2014, p. 502), the logic of 'coercion by imposition

[10] The European Parliament adopted three different declarations on Srebrenica from 2009 until 2015 (Milošević and Touquet, 2018).

by the EU'[11] in the period after 2008 onwards was scaled down and the EU's footprint in BiH significantly decreased. This could be traced at least on the two levels, namely the reduction of the size of EUFOR troops[12] and the termination of the EU Police Mission in BiH in 2012 (Palm, 2017).

Here, it is also worth mentioning that this period is marked with the EU's shift from security and socio-political to economic initiatives, as the only visible EU efforts after 2008 were the visa liberalization (2008/2010) and the introduction of EU's Economic Reform Programme and Competitiveness and Growth Programme (2014/2015). The resistance towards the EU by the political elite reached its peak in 2015/2016, when Milorad Dodik held unconstitutional referendum on the National Day of RS, which caused strong reactions by the EU officials (Rettman, 2017). In all of the above-reflected processes that directly involved the EU, one could trace both the idea of the de-antagonization of ethnic relations and achieving (genuine) conflict transformation by addressing the institutional framework of BiH, where the divisions along the ethnic lines are 'cemented' via the DPA. However, all of the incentives proved incapable of achieving its goals, primarily because the (ethno-)political elite (mis)used the EU's presence in order to maintain the institutional[13] (polity) *status quo*; the latter being maintained by promoting narratives with an aim to reduce 'the inherent instability and inconsistency of internal self-narratives' (Rumelili, 2015, p. 67).

This is also something that was seen in part of the civil society actors, which seemed unable to facilitate and/or support (genuine) conflict transformation. Authors such as Sejfija (2015), Puljek-Shank and Fritsch (2018) and Milan (2019) showed that programs supporting non-governmental organization development on the one hand strengthened the sector, but on the other hand it diminished its (emancipatory-wise) prospect as the dependence on those programs (and finances) made them "inflexible for the potential interventions" in broader socio-political landscape. The empirical reality supports that, as most of the protests and interventions were "rather short-lived, single-issue demonstrations", focused on workers' struggles against privatization and factory closures throughout the 2000s (Touquet, 2015). In all of the cases (particularly in 2008 protests in Sarajevo and in 2014 protests in Tuzla), the protesters, which facilitated the potential for non-ethnic mobilization in BiH, were quickly discredited through

[11] A good example of this is the EU's demand for the revision of the Dayton constitution according to the European Court of Human Rights Sejdić-Finci ruling in 2009, which called for electoral reform of the tripartite Presidency of BiH and the House of People as they were reserved only for ethnic Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats (Kočan et al., 2020).
[12] From 7000 troops in 2004 to 2000 troops in 2010.
[13] Here, we are referring to the idea of the 'continuation' of Republika Srpska as an autonomous entity.

counter-frames, labeling protesters ”as uncivil and violent mob, directed by political parties and supported by foreigners” (Puljek-Shank and Fritsch, 2018, p. 138). In this respect, the potential of genuine conflict transformation by promoting trans-ethnic or non-ethnic narratives, which would in turn facilitate the space to de-antagonize the main political cleavage in BiH – i.e., ethnopolitcs vs. non-ethnopolitics – was (quickly) lost.

To conclude, the (ethno-)political rhetoric that underpinned the EU accession process of BiH from the perspective of socio-political and institutional (polity) level was primarily driven by the political elite from RS, with Milorad Dodik being the main ‘Eurosceptic’ protagonist. In this regard, it does not come as a surprise that the support by the citizens living in RS of the BiH’s membership was comparatively lower than in those leaving in Federation of BiH throughout all these years. The data gathered by the Directorate for the European integration (*Direkcija za evropske integracije*)[14] from the period from 2008 until 2022 showed that the support by the EU was rather ‘stable’, meaning that approximately 85 to 90 % of the citizens in FBiH supported the membership in the EU in contrast with the 50 to 55 % of the citizens in RS. Before we unpack the logic behind such gap between the citizens by reflecting upon the ‘guiding’ frames when it comes to the perceptions on the EU, we use the next section to highlight the employed methodology and operationalization of the research.

7.3 Methodology and operationalization of the ‘zoom’ on BiH

This chapter follows the operationalization as proposed by Pirro and Kessel (2018) and Caiani and Weisskircher (2021), namely the so-called socioeconomic, political and cultural frame categories that we illustrated in the introduction of the book. The main rationale for operationalizing the research via the above frame categories is the idea that those frame offer an explanation on ”the construction of collective identities and the creation of alternative systems of meaning at the public level” (Pirro and Kessel, 2018, p. 3). Drawing on the above-discussed (ethno-)politicization of the EU’s presence, we understand such rhetoric as a ‘discursive stratagem’ (ibid.) by the domestic political elite to link the EU’s presence with something (potentially) harmful for the institutional (polity) framework as laid down in the DPA. Stemming from this, these frame categories are understood as an ‘interpretative schemata’ (ibid.) that help us understand what kind of narratives are constructed by the ordinary

[14] See: DEI. (2022). Public opinion research. Available at: https://www.dei.gov.ba/bs/istrazivanja-javnog-mnijenja.

citizens when it comes to the membership of BiH in the EU. Here, we follow the three frame categories as proposed by Pirro and Kessel (2018). The first one being the socioeconomic frame, which interprets the EU through economic and financial arguments, both in terms of the positive and negative consequences attached to the economic dimension of the EU (membership). The second one being the political frame, which focuses on the question of sovereignty and legitimacy, both in terms of what the EU represents as a polity, how 'legitimate' are its policies vis-à-vis both its member states and potential member states (candidates), and how the EU is understood through the lens of what Pirro and Kessel (2018, p. 4) frame as 'delocalization, transfer of decision-making and centralization'. Finally, the last frame being the cultural one, which links to the multicultural nature of the EU and the process of 'Othering' (Us-Other dialectics).

We rely on qualitative research of the focus groups (N=9) and in-depth interviews (N=20) in order to understand the construction of the narratives within those frames by the ordinary citizens. In this regard, focus groups and in-depth interviews were chosen because they are not structured "in themselves", meaning that they serve as a non-standardized surveying and/or observation techniques that offer us insight into what, how, and why (Klemenčič and Hlebec, 2007, p. 8). When planning focus groups and in-depth interviews, we were particularly focused on the decision on the composition of focus group participants as one of the five[15] elements of planning (Klemenčič and Hlebec, 2007, p. 8). In this respect, the composition of focus group participants went into the direction of the so-called homogeneity – achieving common experiences of the participants in order to give insight into their narratives – , which in turn offered the consistency in line with the demographic characteristics (e.g., Greenwood, Ellmers and Holley, 2014). Because the focus is on BiH, which is consisted of three constitutive nations (Bosniaks, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats) living in two co-equal autonomous entities (i.e., Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska), special focus was given on the question of ethnicity, place of residence, age and gender.

In line with this, four of the focus groups were executed in Republika Srpska (i.e. Serb Republic), while five of them in Federation of BiH. Even though that – in all of the focus groups – we followed "ethnic homogeneity" in order to avoid potential tensions that derive from everyday sociopolitical cleavages in BiH, we implemented two focus groups in the rural part

[15] Other elements are: i) determining the members of the group that will prepare and conduct focus group meetings; ii) decision on the number of focus groups; iii) formulation of questions to be discussed in focus groups; iv) planning of place, time and appropriate spaces (Klemenčič and Hlebec, 2007, p. 17).

of both entities (Čaplje in FBiH and Janja in RS), two focus groups with the youth (Sarajevo in FBiH and Pale in RS), and two focus groups consisted of (only) women (Tuzla in FBiH and Janja in RS). Two of the focus groups were conducted with Bosnian Croats (Vitez and Tuzla in FBiH), three of the focus groups were done with Bosniaks (two in Sarajevo and Čaplje in FBiH) and four of them with Bosnian Serbs (Banja Luka, Eastern Sarajevo, Bijeljina and Janja in RS). To achieve proportional representation of the constituent peoples (50.1% of Bosniaks, 30.8% of Bosnian Serbs, 15.4% of Bosnian Croats and 2.7% of Others), we conducted 11 in-depth interviews with Bosniaks, 4 in-depth interviews with Bosnian Serbs (because they were 'overrepresented already via the focus groups), 3 in-depth interviews with Bosnian Croats and 1 in-depth interview with the Other (Bosnian and Herzegovinian).

Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted in the period between 2018 and 2021, both within the Horizon 2020 project entitled RePAST, and as part of PhD project. While the interviews were (except one)[16] conducted in November 2018, the focus groups occurred between April 2019 (5/9) and April 2021 (4/9). In both cases, there is a representation of the citizens living in both entities, which will enable the analysis of the frame categories not only in BiH in general, but also in comparative (Republika Srpska vs. Federation of BiH) terms. The questions for both the in-depth interviews and focus groups went beyond mere evaluation of respondents' perception on the EU; however, in both cases, there was specific section devoted to the questions regarding the EU. The questions – alongside with a detailed report on methods and data used in the country-specific chapter – can be apprehended in detail in the methodological appendix that covers the Bosnian and Herzegovinian case.

7.4 The framing of the EU by BiH citizens

When reflecting upon the socioeconomic frame, the analysis of both the interviews and focus groups showed that there are at least three views on what EU represents, spanning from (i) 'romanticizing' the EU, (ii) 'criticizing' the EU; (iii) 'rejecting' the EU. When talking about the narratives that fit into the first 'bracket', the first observation is that it comes primarily from the citizens living in Federation of BiH. Here, the narratives go into the direction that the "EU represents the 'créme de la créme', an ideal in political, economic and social sense" to which the BiH should strive for (FGA-01, 2019). Some interviewees (FGP-03, 2019) also narrated the meaning of the EU through "work, order, and discipline", "safety, strength, unity" (D05, 2019)

[16] One of the interviews occurred in July 2019.

and ”luxury, travel, monumental buildings and money” (FGR-02, 2019). Even though that the majority of respondents from FBiH discursively equated the EU with socioeconomic growth and development (e.g., BA-01, 2018; FGR-04, 2019), there were some voices that were more critical towards the EU. This was even more vivid in responses by the citizens living in RS. For example, they have highlighted that the EU is ”not the ‘land of milk and honey’, and that you have to work hard only to assure your existence” (FGA-03, 2019; BA-05, 2018; BA-13, 2018). One of the respondents also highlighted his own experience, arguing ”that he had to work for eight months without real break”, which solidified his view on why it is ”better for him and his family to return back to BiH” (ibid.). In social sense, there were also several critical voices towards the EU, primarily when it comes to what the EU has offered to BiH in terms of reconciliation between former adversaries and overall progress. While certain respondents argued that the EU ”has failed to offer a genuine ‘European perspective’ to the peoples in BiH and focused more on the political aspect of everyday life” (FGE-03, 2019), some of them also reflected upon the fact that the EU ”gives the money, but they do not see it” (FGE-02, 2021), and that the ”majority of the EU money goes to NGO’s and local embassies, which are detached from the everyday reality of the country” (FGL-03, 2021). Within the third identified bracket (i.e., rejectionism), we could observe the dominance of it among the citizens living in RS. Here, the citizens that argued that they are against the membership of BiH in the EU, emphasized that the EU ”blocks the export of fruits, vegetables and meat produced in BiH” (FGN-01, 2021), ”that the EU would mean bigger taxes that would again lower the standard of the citizens” (FGN-03, 2021), and that the ”membership in the EU would– also economy-wise – be like entering into a bad marriage” (FG0-05, 2021).

The second scrutinized frame category is the political one. Within this frame, there are two predominant views when it comes to the question of sovereignty and legitimacy. The first one being the view that the membership in the EU would mean the ‘(re)solution for the institutional (polity) framework of BiH, as the latter could ”move forward”. This was particularly vivid in words of four respondents/interviewees, which argued that the ”EU would force BiH to implement new laws and improve the constitution, which are at the core of the problems in BiH” (FGA-05, 2019; FGP-03, 2019; BA-05, 2018; BA-09, 2018). Within such discursive frame, it is safe to reflect upon the idea that the membership – in minds of people – still carries the idea of conflict transformation on institutional (polity) level, as it would go directly to the ‘heart’ of the post-war everyday (sociopolitical) life, as set in stone by the DPA. While the idea of the EU as a (re)solution for the institutional (polity) framework of BiH was primarily

observed among the citizens living in FBiH, the narratives on the question of sovereignty and legitimacy vis-à-vis EU were somewhat the opposite. The main reason for this lies in the (political) status of RS as an entity, which is – as Björkdahl (2018) argues – a socially constructed and imagined space of (exclusive) belonging for Bosnian Serbs in BiH. However, while having in mind the latter, the discursive frames of the citizens living in RS go into two direction, namely: i) the membership in the EU as something that could solidify the existence of RS; ii) the membership in the EU as something that could put an end to the RS's existence.

Within the first direction (i.e., solidifying the existence of RS), the idea is at least two-fold. First, the respondents argued that "one of the main politics of the EU lies in regionalization" (FGS-02, 2021), meaning that RS would be understood as one of (many) EU regions. Here, two of the respondents argued that the "RS would never vanish, as it is in the case of Flanders and Wallonia, two of the regions in Belgium" (FGS-03, 2021; BA-18, 2018).[17] While the first idea is more externally-driven, emphasizing both the EU approach (regionalization) as such and realities of certain member states (Belgium), the second one is more 'domesticized', meaning that it relies on the domestic structures when arguing why the membership of BiH would not 'endanger' the existence of RS. At least three of the respondents argued that "the assurance lies in the DPA, which *de iure* guarantees the existence of RS, which would then be only solidified when BiH enters the EU" (BA-06, 2018; FGE-02, 2019; FGS-03, 2021). However, one of the participants within the same focus group quickly argued that "everything will depend of the interpretation of the DPA within the EU and of the countries" (FGO-02, 2021), and that "he fears that if the BiH would join the EU, this would mean the end of the existence of both the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska" (ibid.).

Such argument – which was given with certain preauction – informs well the second direction of the above-outlined discursive frames, which is the idea that the membership of BiH in the EU could put an end to the RS's existence. Here, the respondents argued that "they are well aware that this would mean the end of RS, FBiH and District Brčko" (FGN-02, 2021), which would mean that "we would all become BiH" (ibid.). Within this argument, there were also some respondents that tied this question with the potential membership of Serbia in the EU, arguing that "if Serbia would not come into the EU with BiH, that would mean a massive exodus of the Bosnian Serbs from RS to Serbia", and that "if RS ceases to exist, there will be no other options but to go living in Serbia" (FGN-03, 2021; BA-12, 2018). There were even certain

[17] One of the respondents argued that through the perspective of the Bavaria region (D04, 2021).

respondents that argued that ”this is the end-goal of the membership”, meaning that ”they – the EU – want to put an end to the RS’s existence” (FGN-O1, 2021). Here, we should also pinpoint an identity-driven argument that feeds the ‘rejectionist’ frame, as one of the respondents said that BiH in general but RS in specific should not join the EU as ”we all know what EU member states did to us [RS], what the EU member states did to Serbia and how many Serbs died because they [EU member states] have bombarded them” (FGO-O2, 2021). While this is the only narrative schemata that would fit into the category of the ‘historical frames’, it is important as it reflects the usage of history and historical memories to justify the rejectionist frame, i.e., the rejection of the EU and/or European integration of BiH.

Within the political frame, one could also observe the absence of the left-right division not only in BiH in general, but also when it comes to the responses. The main reason behind this is the predominance of the ‘ethnopoliticized discourse’ and ethnopolitics as such being the predominant political axis of the BiH’s everyday sociopolitical life. In this respect, the most important cleavage(s), when it comes to the division, is the division between ethnopoliticised and non-ethnopoliticised frames. This is something that was particularly vivid from the respondents from FBiH (primarily Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats), which perceive the European integration and membership in the EU as such as a ”platform that would go beyond ethnopolitics” and facilitate space for meaningful dialogue and coexistence between the constituent peoples. On the contrary, most of the respondents from RS utilized ethnopoliticised narrative schemata – promoted by the domestic ethnopolitical elite – to legitimize the rejectionist frame, particularly when it comes to the question of sovereignty. In this respect, the political frame somehow only confirmed that the biggest political cleavages between the people(s) do not derive from the left-right axis, but rather ethnic – non-ethnic axis (e.g., Hromadžić, 2013).

Finally, reflecting upon the cultural frame as the third scrutinized frame category, one can trace the existence of at least two edges, which touch upon (i) the citizens of BiH as part of the EU cultural framework and (ii) the multicultural nature of the EU. Within such constellation and the fact that BiH is not an EU member state, it does not come as surprise that the respondents focused more on the question of ‘how the EU both perceives and frames them’ within its own cultural architecture. There were respondents who argued ”that they do not feel Europeans and part of the broader EU process” (FGN-03, 2021), that the ”EU does not perceive them as Europeans” (FGO-03, 2021), and that ”the EU is not ready to grant them membership and unity on equal footing” (BA-12, 2018). In a similar vein, there were also some respondents who

emphasized that ”they are happy that they are not European” (FGL-04, 2021), and that the EU perceives them as ”savages” (I16, 2018) and ”the Balkan region as a jungle” (FGR-05, 2019). One even argued that the ”benefits that come with the membership are only economic, and that the national and ethnic identity would be damaged during the process” (FGB-03, 2021). While such voices came from the citizens from both FBiH and RS, there were also some respondents who argued that they ”want to become an EU members because of the system of values and the personal liberties that come from it” (BA-17, 2018), and that ”the membership of the EU would signal broader cultural belonging of the BiH’s citizen to broader E(U)ropean picture” (BA-14, 2018).

While the-above reflected process (i.e., BiH as an object *vs*. the EU as subject) was highlighted the most, there were also some respondents that touched upon the multicultural nature of the EU. While one of them contextualized the multicultural frame as an ”achievement that could serve as an ideal of how different ethnic groups can co-exist together” (BA-4, 2018), the other highlighted that ”while Serbs consider themselves as an old European nation, the latter has nothing to do with the contemporary Europe” (FGN-02, 2021). He continued that ”when you go to France, you believe that it is Africa and Asia, not Europe”, and that ”he is not bothered with that, but that everything is out of order” (ibid.). Similar was argued by another respondent, who said that ”in 10 to 20 years, there is not going to be any French or Swedish peoples, as they will be replaced by foreigners” (FGS-02, 2021), while one continued with such idea by reflecting upon the case of Germany. He argued that ”ten years ago, Germany has identified 6 millions of Turks, and now they have welcomed more than 6 million militarized migrants” (FGN-03, 2021), aiming to securitize the question of migration. However, it has to be pointed out that the multicultural nature of the EU was not used as an argument for rejecting the membership of BiH in the EU. This was traced only on the level of (domestic) national/ethnic identity vis-à-vis the EU, meaning that they problematized more how the membership of BiH in the EU would damage the position and the future of their own national identity within broader community of nations that epitomizes the EU (e.g., FGE-04, 2019; BA-11, 2018).

In this respect, in all the reflected frames, the most ‘mobilized’ narratives went into the direction of the socioeconomic frame, as most of the citizens reflected upon the economic dimension of the EU. Stemming from this, the questions regarding the standard of living, economic opportunities, EU funds, and other narratives were primarily attached to the EU, while in other cases, such as the cultural one, one could observe the interplay between (broader) Europe and the EU. (Un)surprisingly, the frames regarding Europe and the EU coincided, meaning that

most of the interviewees/respondents – when first asked about Europe and then about the EU – put an equation between Europe and the EU. However, there were also some of them that did not equate the two concepts, and most of them emphasized that ”they understand Europe strictly as a geographical term” (e.g., BA-10, 2018; FGE-03, 2019; FGN-02, 2021). In doing so, they have highlighted that ”BiH is – geographically speaking – part of Europe”, which in turn opened the question if and how is BiH part of Europe in political terms. This is – as reflected primarily in the cultural frame – something on which some of the respondents/interviewees touched upon, primarily from the perspective that ”they do not feel European” and that ”the EU does not perceive them as Europeans/part of Europe”. Here, it also must be emphasized that the cultural frames were least mobilized, when compared with the socioeconomic and political one(s).

7.5 Conclusion

The main research goal of this chapter was to offer a bottom-up perspective on how ordinary citizens frame the EU in their discourse, thus filling the gap in reflecting upon the question of how the discourse by the political elite on the EU resonates with the audience (i.e., ordinary citizens) exposed to it. In order to achieve this, we relied on the results of focus groups and in-depth interviews and operationalize the research via the (theoretical) framework of frame categories – socioeconomic frames, political frames and cultural frames. In careful employment of such analytical framework, this chapter offers an insightful analysis of the everyday discourse of the ordinary citizens of BiH on the EU and facilitates the needed space for formulating some recommendations for both academic and non-academic sector(s).

The results have shown that the (ethno-)politicized discourse on the EU – particularly the one that comes from Milorad Dodik – is becoming internalized by the audience (i.e., ordinary citizens) that is exposed to it since 2008. In this respect, the analysis within the socioeconomic frame shows that there are (at least) three views, which narrate the meaning of the EU. In FBiH, the most present discursive frame is the one that ‘romanticizes’ the EU, meaning that the latter is perceived as an ‘ideal’, as a place of ‘safety, strength and unity’, alongside with the ideas of ‘luxury, travel, monumental buildings and money’. There were certain respondents who framed the EU within more realistic frame with elements of criticism and narrated it as a place where you have to work hard only to assure your existence. Furthermore, the analysis has showed that within this frame, the citizens criticized the EU for not doing more in offering a genuine platform for the reconciliation between former adversaries and not doing more in offering the

needed European perspective to the peoples in BiH. Within such dynamics, it does not come as a surprise that the predominant frame of the citizens living in RS went into the direction of rejection, postulating the latter on the socioeconomic dimension. While the idea that the EU finances initiatives and projects exclusively through NGOs and embassies that rarely have a genuine impact on the everyday life in BiH is more in the 'criticism' paradigm, there were particularly two narratives that go directly against the EU; the first one being the idea that the EU blocks the exports of fruits, vegetables and meat produced in BiH, and the second one being that the membership in the EU would pave the way towards more taxes that would in turn lower (the already low) standard of the ordinary citizens.

The analysis also reflected upon the political frame, where the results have determined two commanding discursive scaffolds that exist among the ordinary citizens in BiH. The first one being the idea of the EU as being the solution for the complex institutional (polity) framework of the country. While the primary drivers of such narrative were the citizens in FBiH, they perceive the EU as a platform that could change the DPA-driven trajectories of the country, meaning that it would make BiH as a more functional (polity-wise) country by implementing new legislature and changing parts of the constitution that prescribes everyday life along the ethnic lines. Contrary to this, the second discursive scaffold, which was predominantly advocated by the citizens in RS, was postulated on the idea of the EU signalizing the end of the autonomous political capabilities of RS. The latter means that the ordinary citizens narrated the potential membership of BiH in the EU as the 'end of the existence of RS as an autonomous entity'. While both discursive scaffolds somehow stand on the opposite side of the spectrum, there were also citizens who narrated their view on the potential membership – vis-à-vis the question of sovereignty and legitimacy – somewhere in between the both frames. The latter went into the direction that the politics of the EU promotes regionalization, which would in turn only solidify the status of RS as an entity or autonomous space. Within such framing, the citizens also opened an 'alternative narrative' to the predominant ones on the axis between the (ethno-)political elites and its audience (citizens). The idea of regionalization that would only solidify the existence of RS could in turn function as a counter-narrative to the ones promoted by the political elites in RS.

Finally, the analysis also touched upon the reflection of the BiH's citizens that informs the cultural frame (category). Here, the results highlighted certain specificities as BiH is not a member state, meaning that the citizens focused more on the question of 'how the EU both perceives and frames them'. Within such framework it does not come as a surprise that they

emphasized that they ”do not feel European and part of the broader EU process”, and that the ”EU does not perceived them as Europeans/part of Europe”. While such narrative matrix was typical for the respondents from both FBiH and RS, the citizens living in the latter have – to a certain extent – engaged more into the question of the multicultural nature of the EU. Stemming from this, there were certain narratives by the citizens in RS that went into the direction that ”everything is out of order when it comes to the question of multiculturality”, arguing that ”in 10 to 20 years, there is not going to be any French or Swedish peoples, as they will be replaced by foreigners”. However, the multicultural nature of the EU was not used as an argument for rejecting the membership of BiH in the EU; such logic was only employed on the level of national/ethnic identity vis-à-vis the EU, highlighting the idea that they problematize more how the membership of BiH in EU would damage the position and future of their respective identity within broader community of nations. Here, it is also important to reflect about the fact that the biggest differences among the respondents/interviewees – when it comes to geographic, demographic and ideational criterions – could be traced on the level of: i) ethnicity and ii) place of living. In this respect, we could observe that Bosnian Serbs living in Republika Srpska were more prone to employ rejectionist frames, while Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats living in Federation of BiH were more prone to employ pro-EU frames.

The above-reflected results are not only important because they offer a bottom-up perspective on how ordinary citizens frame the EU in their discourse, but also offer a schemata for formulating some recommendations in the exposed frame categories. When reflecting upon the socioeconomic frame, the recommendation – that could serve as a counter-narrative – goes into the direction of focusing/financing the initiatives and projects outside the predominant institutional frames. In practice, this would mean that the EU could also finance individual (citizen-centric) projects that would promote collaborative nature of everyday life of the citizens. Here, they could focus on places where most of the daily practices occur, such as marketplaces, cinemas, theatres, sporting events, and companies. Within those places, the supported projects would solidify the perception that the money from international community in general and the EU in particular ‘reaches ordinary people’. Within the second frame category, namely the political one, the EU should focus more on the already developed alternative ‘counter-narrative’, which primarily touches upon the perceptions of citizens living in RS. In this respect, the EU should promote more its main politics of regionalization, meaning that they could ‘take’ the most important discursive instrument in the hands of the political elite in RS, which builds on the idea of ‘protecting the existence of RS, which guarantees the existence of

Bosnian Serbs in BiH'. Finally, when it comes to the third frame category – i.e., cultural – the focus should be on two narratives, namely: i) national and ethnic identities in BiH are part of broader European cultural framework; ii) the membership in the EU only strengthens the national/ethnic identity. Those two counter-narratives can be solidified via the EU programmes such as Erasmus+, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) and Creative Europe, which would financially support projects that would reach out to the broader audience (citizens in BiH) and solidify their perception that they are a part of Europe and that their identity is not less important than any other national/ethnic identities.

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Chapter 8. Conclusion

Varieties of Euroscepticism: between parties and social movements, Left and Right, old and newer members

This last conclusive chapter is structured around three main sections. The first one summarizes the obtained findings making a comparison between the countries included in the analysis. It stresses differences and similarities between member and non-member states and East and West European countries.

The second section provides a theoretical reflection aiming at bridging branches of the literature that scarcely communicate among each other with a particular focus on the lack of communication between international relations, political parties and social movement literature. In doing that the chapter contributes to a conceptualization of Euroscepticism from below which identifies **five general paths**: i) poor integration and rise of illiberalism-Euroscepticism in the EU crises context (Slovenia); ii) Euroscepticism beneath the surface (Poland); iii) strong support for the EU coupled with a contemporary hard opposition to the EU (Italy); iv) moderate Europhilia and strong doubts about accession (North Macedonia); and v) between strong Europhilia and moderate to hard Euroscepticism (Federation of BiH). The third and final section the chapter delineates some directions for further investigation in the field. It also also reflects on some recommendations that are particularly aimed at practitioners (e.g.: political entrepreneurs or policy-makers) to either normalize or counterpose Eurosceptic narratives developing around Europe.

Today in the old EU member states, politicians argue that the candidate countries and even the new member states are not ready to play by the rules of the EU; in the new member states, politicians argue that they did not agree to become second-class citizens in the entity which they increasingly compare to Moscow or Belgrade; and in the candidate countries, political elites argue that there is more and more conditionality placed upon them to prevent them from becoming EU members (expert interview, 20/04/2022).

Since the start of civilization, people around the world communicate stories, through narratives and 'frames', namely cognitive schemata that facilitate the interpretation of social and political realities, helping people to reduce complexity and give meaning to their actions (Caiani 2023) - be it Brazil's president Jair Bolsonaro telling the story of the "practically untouched" Amazon rain forests, or climate activist Greta Thunberg angrily speaking about collapsing ecosystems and "the beginning of mass extinction". From a constructivist perspective, this refers to the symbolic construction of the social and political reality by collective political actors; and Europe and the European integration process is not an exception to that.

In this book, we have looked at how people talk about Europe, which Europe they construct, which Europe or better Europe(s) they support or, vice-versa criticize. We started from the assumption that support for Europe is not only a multidimensional (and contested) concept, but also an 'imagined' (Anderson 2020) community. It includes very different images of Europe, both existing and desired (della Porta and Caiani 2009; della Porta 2020), and different models of possible integration. It is also a dynamic and mutating concept, which is constantly challenged and re-signified by different types of political actors (social movements, political parties, new hybrid movement- parties, etc.) in different phases of the European integration process, with the stops, starts and critical junctures (della Porta 2022) affecting its progress. Such phenomena might however open opportunities and constraints for support and/or Euroscepticism toward Europe, as well as the empowerment and disempowerment of new and old actors (such as for instance radical right and conservative actors, as seen in this book).

For more than a decade, the European Union has been in a state of (almost) permanent crisis, the so-called 'polycrisis' (Zeitlin et al., 2019). These crises have on the one hand, threatened the community's well-being and risked endangering cohesion among its members. On the other hand, they have served as catalysts in opening new windows of opportunity for further EU integration. This is of major importance, and it is particularly salient in relation to the countries and societies of the Balkans, as the future of the EU is highly dependent on the willingness of its member states and citizens to share risks with each other (Baute et al., 2019). Moreover,

citizens' preferences for transnational solidarity are also relevant for voting decisions, both nationally and at the EU level (Pellegata and Visconti 2021). Therefore, a change in these preferences could substantially alter the political direction of the EU (Katsanidou et al 2022).

For this reason, we have not limited ourselves to looking at the influence of the political and cultural (also historically-driven) opportunities and resources for support of (or Euroscepticism on) Europe in the various countries analyzed, according to traditional realist and/or functionalist theories; instead, we have taken into account the perceptions of the agents of these opportunities and constraints, as well as the interpretative frames through which different types of actors, institutional and non-institutional, look at Europe, and interpret it, and give meaning to it. And therefore, justify their positions. Moving from an effort of bridging party politics and social movement studies, toward a much more actor-centered and constructivist approach to 'Euroscepticism', the point of departure of this study has been: what kind of Euroscepticism? Which Europe(s)? How many Europes do the various actors, in the various countries, criticize or stand for?

With extensive fieldwork based on semi-structured interviews with political actors - political parties, social movements and civil society groups - and focus groups, archival material, analysis of electoral manifestoes and organizational (offline and online) documents, in this book, we have moved beyond Euroscepticism, instead investigating **European narratives from below**, from the Right to the Left, in **five European countries**: two candidate-countries for accession to the EU – North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and three member states (one founding member and two that joined the Eu in the 21st century): Italy, Poland and Slovenia. The set of countries is not coincidental. The two candidate countries represent a variety of political, socioeconomic and ethnic conditions in the Western Balkans. The three existing members are those where Eurosceptic forces have – in the observed period – become main government parties. Still, as opposed to Hungary, Eurosceptic parties have not captured the state, and democratic forces, including civil society, remained strong.

In fact, we discovered that reasons for discontent are framed differently by different actors, with different actors constructing different images of economic (liberal), social (solidary) and political (democratic or corrupt) Europe, which sometimes resonate with typical explanations of the European integration (such as realism, inter-governmentalism, functionalism), other times seem related to current trends affecting all European democracies such as liberalism/illiberalism or backsliding. Support and opposition in the members and future member states thus tend to refer not only to the integration process itself, but also to its form

and content, as for example in terms of the various policies discussed and decided at the European level and /or in terms of the institutional architecture of the European 'democracy'. From our surveys of the focus groups and interviews, conducted in different regions of our five selected countries (urban vs. peripheries; rich areas vs. poor; left-wing vs. right-wing dominated; men vs. women, etc.) we have observed a range of images of Europe, through which positions toward this strange beast are constructed, communicated and justified, and used as the basis for collective action - be it the starting of a new political party, the emerging of social movements, street protest, or even voting.

We discovered an increase in criticism of existing EU institutions. This criticism was articulated at the level of (1) politics, with the democratic deficit perceived as increasing both during recent European crises and during recent global crises, with which the EU is inescapably intertwined. The criticism was also articulated about (2) policy, in terms of welfare, social protection and solidarity. Finally, the criticism was articulated with regards to (3) polity, with proposals to go 'beyond Europe' (see also della Porta 2020, della Porta and Caiani 2009). We also saw a distinction between 'anti-nationalist Europeans' and 'pro-European nativists', which was particularly elucidating with regards to contemporary parties' and movements' relationships to Europe (see also, Caiani and Weisskircher 2022). These two groups were similar in their simultaneous identification with and criticism of 'Europe' but differed in terms of their perceptions of the European acceptance of non-European cultures, as well as in their attitudes toward nationalism or the nation state.

Furthermore, moving beyond the notion of Euroscepticism, our study sheds light on recent developments of Eurocritical frames from below, showing **different paths and trajectories** of support for Europe, according to a complex process of symbolic appropriation of the concept of Europe, which brings about an extension of conflict definition. Thus, this book is not just about attitudes towards Europe/the EU, but about co-existences of *different* Europes, outlining the variety and richness of perspectives of Europes/EUs past, present and future. This is what we will try to summarize in the next sections.

8.1. Euroscepticism between East and West, member and non-member states

In policy analysis, the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) embraces the analysis of narratives and their impact on the policy process. A narrative has specific content, which varies depending

on the context and the policy issue. First, narratives can be used to enlarge or reduce the scope of conflict. Second, policy actors can use their narratives to portray opponents as evil and themselves as heroes (devil–angel shift). Third, narratives can be strategically constructed to establish causal links between a policy problem and its cause, thereby assigning responsibility or blame (so called 'causal mechanisms'; Shanahan et al., 2017). This volume, exploring frames and narratives on Europe and European politics, policies and polity, in relevant European countries, makes three important contributions (see table 7.1 for a summary of our findings).

Firstly, it presents a comparative examination of how various narratives are employed to discuss Europe and how Euroscepticism is conceptualized. Through this comparative analysis, we uncover both similarities (such as the emphasis on sovereigntism-nationalism and a desire for a 'looser' union) as well as differences across the countries we studied. These differences include variations between Eastern and Western countries, as well as disparities between new and longstanding EU members. We observed that reformist and progressivist visions associated with left-wing politics are less prominent in older EU member states, while socioeconomic concerns play a central role in candidate countries. This offers insights into the evolution of Eurosceptic perspectives within and beyond the issue of the EU.

Table 8.1 HERE

Secondly, this volume shows that countries are not unitarian actors as regards to Euroscepticism. Instead, different types of actors within a particular country can be differentiated according to various positions, articulated based on different material and cognitive resources (della Porta and Diani 2006). Looking at the **differences and similarities in the framing** (critical or supporting) of Europe, whether critical or supporting, we found that, from the ***party politics*** perspective, the first and most obvious similarity between observed countries is that Euroscepticism is mainly situated at either end of the political spectrum (according to the explanations referring to the Left/Right aspects referred to in chapter 1). However, this does not mean that they are ***fringe parties***. On the contrary, in the analysed countries, they receive substantial support and even form government coalitions, like the League, Law and Justice and Slovenian Democratic Party (often they are the so called 'populists in power', Caiani and Graziano 2021). These parties usually merge their anti-European stance with promoting illiberal values and populism. These parties are also increasingly transnational and trans-European actors (although they do not support Europe). For instance, they attempt to

collaborate on the European level, working on common platforms and organising conferences like the Warsaw Summit in December 2021 or the Congress of the European right-wing parties in Madrid in January 2022. The purpose of these meetings was to establish closer cooperation between their respective parties in the European Parliament, including "organising joint meetings and aligning the votes on common issues, such as protecting the sovereignty of member states" (Warsaw summit declaration 2021). In Madrid, the politicians pointed out that this cooperation between right-wing parties is necessary because of "the growing threat of the EU becoming an ideologically charged federalist super-state; a corporation that disregards national identity and sovereignty and therefore democracy, pluralism and the interests of the peoples that make up the Union" (cited after TVN 24, 2022). Interestingly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has undermined this cooperation since the parties differ from one another on their stance toward Russia.[18] The Eurosceptic narrative by these parties has two purposes. The first is to weaken European integration, reduce the competences of EU institutions and "self-appointed elites, [because] only the sovereign institutions of the states have full democratic legitimacy" (Warsaw Summit Declaration 2021). The second objective is to use Eurosceptic narratives to mobilize voters and fight opposition parties in the domestic arena.

Thirdly, this uncovers many specificities across the analyzed countries, which can be explained by referring to some of the (country level) hypothesis illustrated in chapter concerning Euroscepticism and international relations; liberalism/illiberalism; different political and discursive opportunities for euroscepticism in Old Europe and in the Balkans. For instance, about backsliding, as showed, in Slovenia the (narrative on) changing geopolitics (assertive Russia, China's growing role) could help to inform debates about national sovereignty and democratic backslides, and the EU's transformative growth plan to address the socioeconomic concerns. We saw several important differences between Italy and the member states from Central and Eastern Europe. First, in the case of the latter, support for the EU is still very high, despite the fact that the ruling parties in several of these countries openly adopted Eurosceptic rhetoric and clashed with EU institutions over issues such as the rule of law. This can be explained by the fact that citizens of these countries appreciate the resources and benefits offered by the EU, ranging from something as simple as the absence of borders between most EU countries, which is useful for holiday travel, to the free movement of goods, people,

[18] This finding is also confirmed by a recent study on the case of Italy showing differences in the League and Brothers of Italy's position toward Russia before and after the Ukrainian invasion (Carlotti 2023).

services, capital, and being a net beneficiary of the EU's agricultural, cohesion and other structural funds. What is more, the EU is still an important source of identity for citizens of these countries, and a source of legitimacy for the political elites. Western Europe remains a symbol of welfare and a place to which they want to belong or feel that they finally belong. Moreover, in several cases (such as Slovenia and Poland – see respective chapters), support for the EU among opposition parties and civil society has been directly mobilized by tensions between EU institutions and Eurosceptic ruling parties over interference with independent institutions, pressures on civil society and media. In response, government parties often attempted to depict their domestic critics as remnants of the former communist regime and related illiberal structures, accusing them of exporting lies to the outside world and accusing EU institutions of a lack of understanding for the specific local context. At the same time, Eurosceptic governments also accused individual EU institutions and politicians of advancing centralist, globalist and cultural Marxist agendas that deny liberal principles of self-determination, democratic control and traditional social structures, thus blurring the liberalism-illiberalism debate. More conservative parties (e.g. PiS and certain hard-right non-parliamentary parties in Slovenia) like to use the concept of "Europe of Homelands" (Sienko 2021: 29-48), or Europe of nations, claiming that EU elites are trying to put the community on the path to federalisation, which is both unwanted by the citizens and undesirable from the perspective of the member states and the EU as a whole.

The second difference between Italy and CEE countries is that, in terms of the organizational milieu (see chapter 2) within which the emergence and battle among Eurosceptic frames can be located, political parties play a much more important role in latter member states, a phenomenon that causes political opportunities (i.e. Political Opportunity Structures) to interact with the 'resources of the actors' (namely types of actors, political parties vs. civil society; Left vs. Right). Political parties in these member states typically control the economic and financial resources, as the role of the state in economy is still quite strong. They may also exert strong direct and indirect control and influence over media and civil society. Quite often, institutions such as media and civil society are quasi-independent and play an instrumental role, i.e. they are simply an extension of party politics. This has to do with the transition and democratization process, which was often superficial, focused mainly on the formal features of liberal democracy such as multiparty systems and free elections, and which failed to bring about the necessary change to various subsystems and informal aspects of democracy. EU accession and Europeanisation processes were for a long-time key drivers of democratization process in the

CEE. With the EU crises, the process stopped and even reversed, as domestic elites in the CEE attempted to consolidate their position by strengthening their grip over economic and political resources and putting pressure on their critics to stay in power. This resulted in tensions between Brussels and those governments over issues such as the rule of law, sparking a specific type of supply side Euroscepticism that questioned the input legitimacy of Brussels-based institutions.

An additional difference between the various countries analyzed is that output legitimacy, often associated with socioeconomic issues such as economic growth, jobs, wages, available and accessible commodities - is much more important in CEE member states and candidate countries than 'old' Europe. There are several possible explanations for this, ranging from (a) the legacy of the former communist period in which output performance was a key source of legitimacy for the one-party regimes, while the importance of checks and balances, transparency, and individual freedoms was downplayed; (b) the strong socioeconomic transformation these countries underwent, which created various dependencies and fragilities, combined with still lower overall levels of welfare, causing CEE citizens to assign greater significance to the output performance of the EU-level market economy. As a result, in the 'new Europe', socioeconomic failures tend to represent the most fruitful grounds for Euroscepticism (Lovec et al., 2019). At the same time, due to stigma related to the interventionist policies of the former regime and due to new dependencies and fragilities, the rhetoric of governmental Eurosceptic actors in the CEE is often focused on other issues such as migration and sociocultural change, even though these, especially the former, can hardly be seen as the main challenges in those countries.

While there are important differences between the analyzed EU member states, the cases of the (Western) Balkan countries somehow became 'the test case studies', as they lie somewhere between both blocks. Two reasons stand out in this regard, namely: (i) they are yet to become EU member states, and (ii) the relations between the EU and the (Western) Balkan countries are characterized by stabilization efforts, aiming to achieve the de-antagonization of (bilateral) relations not only among the states in the region but also on an (inter-)societal level. As they are yet to become EU member states, the logic with which they narrate the EU differs from those citizens that are already EU citizens. Here, the cases of BiH and North Macedonia show that there are at least three layers on which the idea of the European integration of the (Western) Balkan countries is built. The first is the 'romanticization' of the EU, meaning that the EU is perceived as an 'ideal', as a place of 'safety, strength and unity', alongside ideas of 'luxury,

travel, monumental buildings and money'. The second layer is more realistic and incorporates elements of criticism, as it frames the EU as a place where you must work hard only to ensure mere existence. The last layer feeds into Euroscepticism, as is based on the rejectionist frame.

While the cases of BiH and North Macedonia differ in terms of the core reasons behind rejectionist frames, the common denominator lies to maintain (ethnic/national) identity through the processes of European integration. However, the nature of the relationship between the EU and the (Western) Balkan countries, also reveals differences among the case studies. In this respect, the observed narrative schemata is postulated around the idea of EU (integration) becoming a '(re)solution' for the antagonisms among the peoples. This feeds the so-called 'old Europe narrative', which became appealing to many post-communist states as it reflects upon the (institutional) stability of the (western) EU member states via reconciliation. In this respect, European integration in general and the membership in the EU, which lost its appeal in many post-communist states after 2004 enlargement, is still – to a certain extent – understood as a 'peace project' (Manners and Murray 2016: 188–9). To summarize, the case studies of the (Western) Balkan states indicate differences primarily because they are yet to become EU member states, thus the citizens observe and evaluate the EU and process of European integration as 'outsiders', both in terms of policy and polity.

In summary, we identified five paths of opposition towards Europe that can interact and enrich the classical categories for interpreting Euroscepticism. They are: *i.* poor integration and rise of illiberalism-Euroscepticism in the context of EU crises (Slovenia); *ii.* Euroscepticism beneath the surface (Poland); *iii.* strong support for the EU coupled with a contemporary hard opposition to the EU (Italy); *iv.* moderate Europhilia and strong doubts about accession (North Macedonia); *v.* between strong Europhilia (Federation of BiH) and moderate to hard Euroscepticism (Bosnia & Herzegovina). The varieties of Euroscepticism found in movements and parties in different member states and in non-member states confirm that the position toward the EU is a multidimensional concept (Caiani, della Porta 2009) and that Europe has different meanings depending on the actor looking at it.

8.2 Euroscepticism across Left and Right, and some normative reflections on the quality of EU democracy

While the traditional ideological cleavage of left vs right wing parties has continued to play a role, it has been impacted and, often, overshadowed by the new cleavage between sovereigntist and globalist views. European integration and globalization have constrained the role of traditional ideological divisions and supported the position of more centrist, liberal and pro-integration forces. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that Eurosceptic voices, particularly hard Eurosceptic and Eurorejectionist voices, are most vocal on the margins of the political spectrum. While Eurosceptic parties from the political left and right share certain basic views such as the need to have more national independence, to re-stablish more direct democratic accountability, to support socioeconomic welfare and strengthen sociocultural fibers, some important differences remain. On the left, rather than rejecting deeper international cooperation, parties reject neoliberal-technocratic governance that strengthens the position of international finance and corporations vis-à-vis labor unions. On the right, rejection seems to be related to the role nation states should play, while shallow market integration is typically welcomed. From the legitimacy perspective, on the right, especially in the member states from the CEE and candidate countries, some of the liberal political features such as pluralism, checks and balances, the role of independent institutions and human rights are downplayed or even rejected as 'ideological' and 'Western-biased' and opposed to their own views of democracy that build on electoral support and strong leadership. On the left such (semi)authoritarian views are rejected and are even the source of support for the EU. On socioeconomic issues, right-wing parties blame overregulation and state interference into issues such as climate and environment. They are critical towards redistributive policies that target non-nationals and other countries. In contrast, left-wing parties are supportive towards the global agenda of advancing socioenvironmental sustainability. Finally, regarding cultural issues, right-wing parties see migrants and the LGBTQ+ issues as one of the biggest threats to society, while left-wing parties use more inclusive and progressive rhetoric.

Since the 19th century, international solidarity has been a cornerstone of left-wing ideology, linked to its core dimensions of equality and internationalism (March & Mudde, 2005). The focus on international solidarity is also reflected in the long history of left-wing visions of Europe. Especially after the First World War, activists of the labour movement in Europe, from German trade unions to Leon Trotsky in Russia, formulated a variety of coherent visions of European cooperation and integration (Buschak, 2014). When the process of European integration substantially deepened in the 1990s, left-wing players increasingly questioned the extent to which the EU embodies their political visions. Initially, it was especially the radical

left that critically scrutinized the EU and called for alternative developments – strongly connected to their fundamentally critical stance towards capitalism, the key difference between the radical and centre left (March & Mudde, 2005). In the shadow of the Eurozone crisis, many left-wing social movement players have become even more critical. This development has also been caused by declining political opportunities at the EU level – therefore, some activists have even shifted their political action from the EU to the national level, targeting the EU to a lesser extent (Della Porta & Parks, 2018). Left-wing players have put forward alternative visions on a variety of issues, most prominently a 'social Europe' that goes beyond mere market expansion, and a 'democratic Europe' that would allow for the pursuit of such. Other classical left-wing issues have also been relevant for left-wing players, most importantly the issue of immigrants' rights. Typically, many of these issues have been simultaneously important to campaigners. So far, most left-wing players have not denounced EU membership when promoting alternative visions of Europe.

This perspective mirrors recent scholarship on far-right parties: it is argued that the Rassemblement National (known as the Front National prior to 2018) uses European integration as an 'ideological resource' to draw legitimacy in public discourse, linking Europe to values such as sovereignty, self-rule, and autonomy (Lorimer 2020a, see also Lorimer 2020b). Similarly, Pytlas (2020) argues that the Rassemblement National, Alternative für Deutschland, and Fidesz should not be regarded merely as Eurorejectionists, but rather notes that these parties draw on counter-European claims as a 'tactical resource' that links their nativist ideology with positive references to Europe. In sum, several scholars have coined terms or identified concepts defined by simultaneous criticism of the EU and positive identification with Europe.

Firstly, our findings also demonstrated an increase in **positive identification** with Europe on the part of political actors (both parties and social movements) on the (radical) Right; various '**visions of Europe**' (Caiani and Weisskircher 2020) beyond Euroscepticism or euro rejectinism, also in this traditionally nationalistic area; and finally that, contrary to what has been shown by previous studies, European integration can be an 'ideological resource' linking old and new frames, even for radical right or conservative-regressive forces (della Porta forthcoming 2023). More specifically, we found a trend from traditional 'nativism'/nationalism to 'civilizational struggle' in the frames on Europe of the radical right/conservative political parties and movements analyzed, with the development of culturally exclusive European identities based around the notion of saving Europe from itself (Brubaker, 2017). This emerged

as a new trend among populist reactionaries in (especially Eastern and Balkan) Europe, presenting their positions toward Europe according to a mix of Christian and secular values, such as pro-free-speech and women's right (Brubaker, 2017). These actors present themselves as the true defenders of (Western) European identity. Our main conclusion is therefore that groups in the two categories both identify with and criticize "Europe". However, they have different perceptions of both European openness towards toward non-European cultures, and European attitudes toward nationalism or the nation state.

In this sense we can also say that the notion of liberalism/illiberalism is at the centre of contemporary Euroscepticism. The main reason for this is the crisis of globalization and of the so called liberal international order, associated with the free market economy, pluralist societies and the primacy of certain norms and rules such as the individual's economic, political, social and cultural rights. The European Union has long been seen as a liberal political project that has advanced the ideas of liberal internationalism, such as those of liberal market policies and strong supranational institutions that have stepped up the socioeconomic and cultural transformation of individual societies. At the outset, Euroscepticism was reserved for radical left- and right-wing parties and individual voices of discontent, which were marginalized and depicted as backwards by the increasingly centrist and pro-EU agenda of the dominant parties. However, crises associated with global and EU governance eventually turned the tide against the so called 'liberal-centrist' hegemony. As a result, sovereigntism became the most important and influential framing within contemporary Euroscepticism, shared by parties and social movements from the political right and left, as seen also from the case studies presented in this book.

Secondly, Eurosceptic voices often questioned the input legitimacy of the existing elites on the grounds of the chronic detachment of internationalized decision-making from the ordinary citizens' democratic will, resulting in corruption and systemic contradictions between (international) governance and (democratic) representation. This shows that globalization and global crises have provided an impetus to anti-elitist and populist framings. Those frames have even before the recent phase of globalization had a legacy of tensions with traditional liberal features such as pluralism, representative democracy, and individual rights. All those elements are visible in the cases presented in this book. Thirdly, socioeconomic pressures brought about by (neo)liberal governance have contributed to dissatisfaction not only at the margins of the political body but also at its core, triggering demotivation of the middle-class centrist pro-EU

voters. Socioeconomic crisis did not just bring the return of the new generation of radical left parties such as The Left in Slovenia or Five Start Movement in Italy, and the adoption of anti-trade rhetoric by centre-left forces such as Social Democratic parties; quite the opposite, perhaps the most dramatic change socioeconomic pressures brought about took place on the centre-right, where many liberal-conservative parties lost their ground and turned towards nationalism and anti-immigration rhetoric in search of traditional supporters such as small business, rural and suburban classes.

Fourth and final, even though cultural backlash, as seen in the rhetoric of anti-immigration and pro-traditional values, often appeared as a superficial cover or a substitute for more complex issues, it demonstrated profound insecurity and instability created by the new era of global and EU governance, the abstractness and emptiness of the liberal values and of the EU as an organization, and a genuine quest by the socio-political body for more concrete, proximate and familiar sources of identity, regardless of how irrational and romanticized they might be. The case of candidate countries such as BiH, which face further issues associated with an ethnically divided post-conflict society, affirm to a degree the arguments outlined above, particularly when it comes to the question of pluralist societies and he primacy of norms pertaining to individuals' rights. In this respect, ethnonationalist forces – primarily in RS – combine the question of sovereigntism, decision-making at the level of international/EU governance and national/ethnic identity, bringing the existing logic of European integration into relation with the domestic constituency of ordinary citizens. While one could observe that the rhetoric deployed by the ethnopolitical elites is instrumentalized to conceal their own failures of reform, it is still successful in entangling European integration with the question of maintaining the existence of the political identity of RS and the ethnic identity of Bosnian Serbs.

While in the new member states there is a strong link between globalization, illiberalism and Euroscepticism, in the old member states (namely Italy), liberal-democratic reformist concepts such as that of the democratic deficit are more salient. Indeed, the rhetoric concerning the unaccountable European elite remains prominent among the people at large. In other words, the supranational European elite are perceived as distant from an ideal European democratically accountable elite. If at the very beginning this feeling was to be found only at the margins of politics, nowadays it has contributed to the spread of negative voices from within the political mainstream. Furthermore, if we think about cultural and societal reactions to this picture, we see that the diffusion of anti-immigration and pro-traditional values moved from the margins

of politics toward its centre. Delving deeper in the Italian context and focusing on the political scenario emerging from the last round of national elections (and in particular from the last round in 2023), it is clear that parties from the right or extreme right moved from a marginal position toward a mainstream one. Brothers of Italy or the League are two examples of parties that moved from potential coalition partners to governing parties in a matter of a decade. This tendency is a signal of a general insecurity and eventual instability brought about by the new European governance. As a countertendency, this crisis of liberal values is coupled with a return to more traditional values that are more proximate to normal people's identity.

8.3 Euroscepticism: bridging political parties and social movement literature

Since the 1990s, European integration has become increasingly politicized. Following this period, certain premises have become important to the study of Euroscepticism: First, from a normative point of view, 'Europeanization' does not necessarily represent a consensus toward the EU among political parties and social movements. Furthermore, regarding Liberal/illiberal Eurosceptic perspectives, it is important to highlight the presence of diverse interpretations of democracy, including deliberative and participatory models (such as the EU-level mini-public experiments and ECI initiatives). Third, Eurosceptic and populist parties often overlap, but they are not necessarily convergent. Fourth, there is a paradox of populists in power in many western democracies, including those studied in this book, a paradox in which "the idea of a people-oppressing elite is retained but channelled towards the EU, progressive intellectuals, minorities, the LGBT community" (Enyedi 2020).

In this sense, where party politics literature focuses primarily on political parties and Euroscepticism, our study also sheds light on 'movement-parties', namely new hybrid actors that lie in between protest and electoral politics. Where the main 'factors' explaining Euroscepticism are found in theories of party competition, challengers, incumbency, the Left/Right continuum, and 'opportunities' at the state level, our study sheds light on the recent '3 crises' paradigm (the financial crisis, the refugee crisis, and Brexit). If studies of Euroscepticism mainly relied on surveys of electors, expert surveys, and party manifestoes (for exceptions see Taggart and Szczerbiak 2018), methodologically our book tried to grasp Euroscepticism with qualitative variables and data, as well as looking at four main frames through which EU is contested in European states. From a social movements' perspective, our findings underlined the important role of social movements and civil society actors in the

process of European integration (and its contestation and legitimacy); context and justifications (i.e. the ways in which actors formulate claims, frames, and justifications about European institutions); the interaction between Euroscepticism & Europeanization (in terms of action, frames, organization); and finally, frames and the voices of the 'agents'.

To return to our main research question of this study: Talking *about* Euroscepticism or talking *to* Eurosceptics? In this book, we found Euroscepticism to be a multidimensional concept traversing politics, policies and polity, and consisting of political, economic and cultural criticism but also support of the idea of the EU. Going back to the categories illustrated in chapter one, we have found a general diffusion of traditional **Euroscepticism manifesting as both** contingent or qualified opposition to European integration (soft Euroscepticism) **and** rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration **(hard Euroscepticism)**. We found this particularly in right-wing parties, especially traditional-governmental (Poland, Slovenia) as well as in social movements (Poland, Slovenia). While, at the beginning, Euroscepticism was conceived as a phenomenon at the margins of the ideological and political spectrum, in CEE member states (or in those countries that are not yet part of the EU) parties seem to use the EU issue to express Eurosceptic stances independently of their role in government or their ideological position[19]. We also found '**Euroenthusiasts'** (those who support European integration both in theory and in practice) among anti-government and pro-EU movements in CEE and candidate countries. Finally, we found more specific categories such as **'Eurorejectionists',** who disapprove of both the European idea and its reality,[20] even if they represent a marginal group of radical or hard-right exponents.[21] **'Euro-realism' (**as a feeling of separateness from the Europe of the euro, which is seen as a necessity rather than as

[19] As seen in the (Western) Balkan countries, political parties tend to be one of the most – if not *the most* – important drivers of Euroscepticism. Such logic is confirmed by the cases of (ethno-)nationalist political actors from North Macedonia and BiH, who frame the EU in general and the process of the European integration in particular as endangering the national and/or ethnic identities of the peoples (Macedonians and Bosnian Serbs in particular). However, the nature of social movements in BiH and North Macedonia differ greatly; while in the case of North Macedonia, discussions of the EU were sporadically at the forefront in the last couple of years, the case of BiH proves that social mobilization is possible only when domestic challenges are at stake (e.g., social justice, standard of living).

[20] However, when examining the left-right divide within the realm of political parties, the primary framework that emerges is that of 'ethnopolitics.' This implies that the left-right division is not as reliable in predicting Euroscepticism as it is in older and/or newer EU member states. Conversely, in older member states, the left-right ideological distinction continues to play a significant role. Parties or associations positioned on the fringes of the ideological spectrum tend to display Eurorejectionist positions, disapproving of both the concept of Europe and its practical implementation.

[21] This is the case of the Italian extreme left EuroStop, who proposed exiting from the EU to build a union between Mediterranean members, or the case of the extreme right Forza Nuova, who reject the core values of the EU and promote a nationalistic view.

a source of concrete advantages) (Diamanti and Bordignon 2002) was particularly present among respondents in the Serb Republic, as well as in old member states such as Italy, particularly in populist parties like the right-wing Italian League and the left-wing Five Stars Movement. These did not exhibit rejectionist frames but were still very critical towards the potential benefits of EU membership. **Euroalternativism** and **'Critical Europeanism'**, both characterized by rejecting certain EU policies while also proposing reforms to EU policies and politics, have been predominantly observed among left-wing actors. Examples of this can be seen in the Italian context, as well as among supporters of the Left in Slovenia and North Macedonia. Finally, what emerges strongly from our study is that the pure form of **Euroenthusiasm** has become a sort of "empty signifier". Indeed, none of the individuals or groups we examined (political parties, civil society organizations, and the public) seem to completely support European integration in theory and practice.

Highlighting the varieties of Euroscepticism, our study has indicated some guidelines for promising future research on the subject. bridging social movement studies (and Europeanization), international relations (and EU integration and politics), party politics and Euroscepticism - branches of literature that scarcely communicate with each other. Especially with the advent of new types of political actors in most of the European political systems – such as the so-called 'movement-parties', which lie between electoral and protest politics (della Porta et al. 2017) - this study stresses the need for a more comprehensive theoretical framework. Specifically, a 'unified approach' is needed, able to empirically grasp the phenomenon and understand it in a comprehensive fashion considering various critical junctures (della Porta 2022) that recently developed in Europe and beyond (such as the pandemic crisis and the Russo-Ukrainian conflict). Methodologically, this also requires, as this study has shown, the integration of a mixed method approach with various techniques (and epistemologies) of data collection, qualitative and quantitative, and formalized. Our analysis of frames from a constructivist perspective, as well as the ethnographic and interactionist approach embodied in the focus groups and more rarely used to research political parties, institutional actors and Europe, proved to be useful for empirically grasping more nuanced visions of European identities.

By observing the evolution of the concept of Euroscepticism and its commonly attributed explanations, such as ideological affinity or the role of political parties within institutions (e.g., contrasting governing and opposition parties), we can identify differences between member

states. While Euroscepticism was initially located at the margins of the ideological and political spectrum, in CEE member states parties seem to express Eurosceptic stances independently from their role in government or their ideological position. In Western member states, this distinction is still visible, however some clarifications are needed. Indeed, nowadays harsher forms of critique or even rejection of the EU are confined to the real extremes of the ideological spectrum, and still in niche parties and civil society associations (see the case of the extreme left EuroStop or the extreme right FN). What is really interesting to notice is that in Italy, one of the oldest member states, criticism of the EU is widely diffused across the whole ideological spectrum, as if it has become a "praxis of politics" (see footnote 5 for further information).

8.4. Future research ahead and some recommendations for practitioners

Finally, this study also helps to formulate some policy recommendations that may complement its theoretical contribution. These recommendations are directed towards practitioners (e.g., politicians or policymakers) who seek to normalize, counterpose, or simply understand the spread of strong Eurosceptic sentiments among the public. The contestation and politicization of the EU should not be rejected or suppressed, as this would not only be counterproductive, but would go against certain legitimate concerns regarding the democratic deficit of the EU. On the contrary, the EU should embrace stronger politicization and should strive towards developing ways to constructively involve opposing views into political debates on and across different levels. To a certain extent, this has already been achieved and has had positive results. In response to the Eurozone and migration crisis, Juncker's Commission proposed different modes of integration such as differentiated integration, which served as a catalyst for more moderate Eurosceptic voices. Juncker's Commission also reached out directly to citizens by launching citizen dialogues. Later on, the growing role of Eurosceptic parties in parts of the EU triggered critical reflection and calls for more integration, which became more pronounced during recent geopolitical challenges and during the pandemic, when EU citizens became aware of the potential threat of European disintegration. The Recovery and Resilience Facility, intended to boost sustainable transformation, and the Conference on the Future of Europe were used to reach out directly to the citizens and address some of their expectations. However, more institutional and policy innovation is needed to make the EU's complex democratic system functional. If ideas such as spitzenkandidaten are to work, cross-border cooperation between political parties should become stronger. There is a need for a better connection between the

work of the EU parliament and national parliaments, as well as stronger participation of civil society and citizen dialogue on the EU level.

The book contributes to the practice of democratic and civic participation. Indeed, it firstly provides a view on Euroscepticism from a bottom-up perspective, thus including stances toward the EU that are diffused among grassroots movements and ordinary citizens at large. In doing so it sheds light (empirically) on some normative crucial issues of the functioning of the EU, such as its legitimation from below, the development of a European public sphere, and the function of social movements for Europe, with their critical social capital (della Porta and Caiani 2009). It also stimulates reflections on the link between EU representation and governance, or the legitimacy of the output or the input (Shapf, 99). This is because, as we have shown, a better understanding of the policy-making processes that emphasize the benefits of EU membership always needs to be brought into dialogue with the importance (especially for some collective actors) of European values of solidarity and inclusion. Finally, the book provides an updated perspective on the diffusion of Eurosceptic tendencies in parallel with the most recent crisis-related developments of the EU and the European integration project. Indeed, the book was developed during the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, while also witnessing the unfolding Russo-Ukrainian crisis. This latter event changes the dynamic of accession to the EU, with Ukraine becoming a potential new candidate for accession and overtaking North Macedonia and BiH's process of accession, and potentially contributing to the diffusion of discontent among the population.

When outlining potential recommendations, the book adheres to its theoretical framework by suggesting a comparative analysis (e.g., between different member states) in terms of the insights derived from the examination of the three frames employed. With reference to the first frame, the socioeconomic dimension, it is evident that there is a widely diffused and generally negative perception that the socioeconomic action of the EU causes disparity among member states and their citizens. As in the case of Italy, the socioeconomic dimension of integration surely enough attracts criticism from the whole political spectrum and from citizens at large. Moreover, such general critique from below is to be connected to a limited understanding of the EU among the wider public. In other words, people are still not well informed about the positive aspects of socioeconomic integration, while being aware of the negative aspects. These negative aspects are used strategically by parties and grass-roots organizations to organize their consensus campaign. Consequently, strengthening citizens' involvement in the EU's day-by-

day policymaking in the socioeconomic field could have a twofold positive effect: on the one hand, it could lead to a general feeling of democratic transparency of EU policy-making, reframing the general perception of the “unaccountable” European elite. On the other hand, it could help spread an “informed solidarity” among citizens of the various member states. To put it more simply, the more you know about it, the less principled and more pragmatic your critique becomes.

With regards to the political dimension of the EU, once again the case of Italy highlights a prevailing sense of a "democratic gap," indicating a disconnect between the EU's institutional sphere and its citizens. Interestingly, the participants in the Italian case use reformist frames, especially concerning the EP. This latter should be conceived of as a truly democratic European arena, and no longer a façade institution. In parallel to this historic reform of the EU, it is evident that stronger cooperation between parties and associations in a pan-European context should be bolstered and facilitated through initiatives implemented at the supranational level. Lastly, with reference to the cultural aspects of European integration, the example of Italy suggests the need for stronger solidarity-oriented action that follows two lines of intervention: firstly, it should stress and reinforce the potentiality of a multi-identity or multi-ethnic EU; secondly, it should go in the direction of protecting and strengthening national and sub-national ethnicities. Indeed, the only way to avoid the instrumental use of migration and EU migration policies, is to inform the public about the potentialities of “diversity” in pragmatic terms (e.g.: via the construction of pan-European projects). In other words, the EU should transform the motto “united in diversities” into a common everyday reality.

The socioeconomic frame is of particular significance, given the critical juncture of the Ukrainian context and the ongoing challenge of recovery from the pandemic, as seen in our case studies. In this context, financing initiatives and projects outside of predominant institutional structures could create a strong counter-narrative. In practice, this would mean that the EU could also finance individual (citizen-centric) projects promoting the collaborative nature of the everyday life of the citizens. Here, they could focus on locations where daily practices occur, such as marketplaces, cinemas, theatres, sporting events, and companies. Within these spaces, the supported projects would solidify the perception that the money from the international community in general and the EU in particular ‘reaches ordinary people’. Regarding the political frame, the EU should focus on so-called regionalization, in order to undermine the discursive power of ethnonationalist and right-wing politicians, who deploy

sovereigntist frames in order to frame the EU as an 'out-of-touch globalist project' that endangers the existing social and material environments, such as in the case of the Serb Republic (BiH). Finally, when it comes to the cultural frame, the focus should be on financing bottom-up projects that promote the idea of national and ethnic identities being (an equal) part of the broader European cultural framework, and that membership in the EU only strengthens national/ethnic identities.

Future research ahead

Based on the results obtained through the comparison, two avenues of further research relate to both political science and to a potential hybridization of the disciplines. Concerning political science, and as stressed throughout this book, it is evident that a conceptual gap is present when dealing with opposition to the EU. In other words, what is needed is a comprehensive theoretical framework capable of grasping the nuances of opposition and its evolution through time and space. This is not to say that we should leave behind everything that we know from previous research in the field. Rather, on the contrary, we should develop an instrument that is flexible enough to encompass variations in dimensions and strength of opposition to the EU.

The second point to be stressed is a hybridization of the scientific approaches used to study the phenomenon of opposition to the EU. Indeed, the cross-contamination of political science with other disciplines could help in studying the development of such a complex phenomenon. For example, the question of how ethnography relates to the upsurge and spread of Euroscepticism. Furthermore, such hybridization of disciplines could represent both a way to study European integration but also a channel through which EU values can spread. For example, can the cultural dimension and the creation of a proper pan-European integration culture lead us to decrease the upsurge of extremism leading to EU disintegration, supporting instead the diffusion of solidarity? How can the fusion between different disciplines help us with this?

In sum, there are at least two future avenues for the research on Euroscepticism from below. While the first one is 'staying' within the broader political science literature, the second one engages with the literature on critical security studies within the international relations discipline. The first one is the question of so-called disobedient Euroscepticism (Bortun, 2022), as the examined cases and identified narrative matrixes not only engage with the rejectionist, conditional and/or expansionist frames, but also with disobedient ones. On multiple occasions,

the results of the analyzed case studies pinpoint not only that disobedient Euroscepticism is present on a political party-level, but also on a societal level (citizens). Here, the idea is that future research on Eurosceptic narratives from below should move away from the theoretical 'reform vs exit' dichotomy and focus more on (existing) practices of European cooperation. This is supported by findings that most people still support the principle of European integration but disagree its practices, meaning that they would support future integration only if the practice of cooperation changes. Furthermore, while the general logic of European integration/cooperation is not contested *per se*, compliance with the current rules of European integration is a point of contention. In this respect, future work on Euroscepticism from below should tend to grasp and offer further conceptualisation of disobedient Euroscepticism as the 'fourth way' of Euroscepticism, using rejectionist, conditional and expansionist frames as the predominant approach to the subject.

The second potential research avenue lies in a critical constructivist reading, which could be tied to ontological security studies, which aims to understand how individuals, societies and states maintain a 'stable Self' within broader European integration processes. In this respect, questions such as the neoliberal economy, immigration, financial crises, COVID-19 or the crisis of liberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe could be analyzed in terms of how the EU narrates itself vis-à-vis the crises and how the EU as a polity can answer the challenges of twenty-first century global politics, challenges that generate a sense of fear and anxiety in the daily lives of EU citizens. In this respect, the question of understanding the nature of Euroscepticism(s) from below could follow the ontological security apparatus to understand how several risks and insecurity patterns on the EU level are 'translated', observed and evaluated by ordinary citizens who do not engage in the policy and polity challenges the EU is facing.

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Figures and Tables_All chapters

Chapter 1

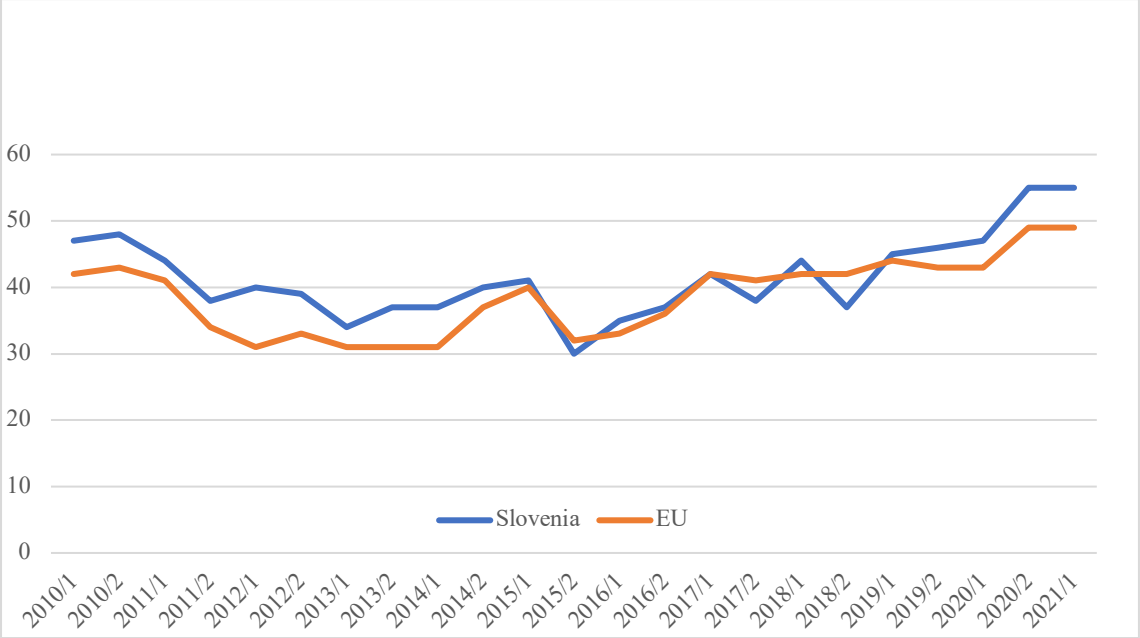
Table 1.1: The complexity of Euroscepticism conceptual alternatives in the literature

“Critical Europeanism (della Porta & Caiani 2009)
Cultural, legitimacy, socioeconomic and sovereignty frames (Pirro & van Kessel 2018)
“Euroalternativism” (della Porta & Caiani 2007, FitzGibbon 2013)
“Euro-disenchantment” (Zamponi 2020)
Europe as an “ideological resource” (Lorimer 2020a)
Europe as tactical resource (Pytlas 2020)
Radical Eurocricism(Milan 2020)
Visions of Europe (Caiani & Weisskircher 2021)

Source: Caiani and Weisskircher 2021

Chapter 3

Figure 3.1. Share of respondents who trust the EU (%)



Source: Own elaboration based on Standard Eurobarometer (2022).

Legend: the percentages represent share of respondents who trust the EU (combined share of answers “totally trust” and “trust”

Table 3.1: Selected Eurosceptic parties in Slovenia in the 2018-2021 period

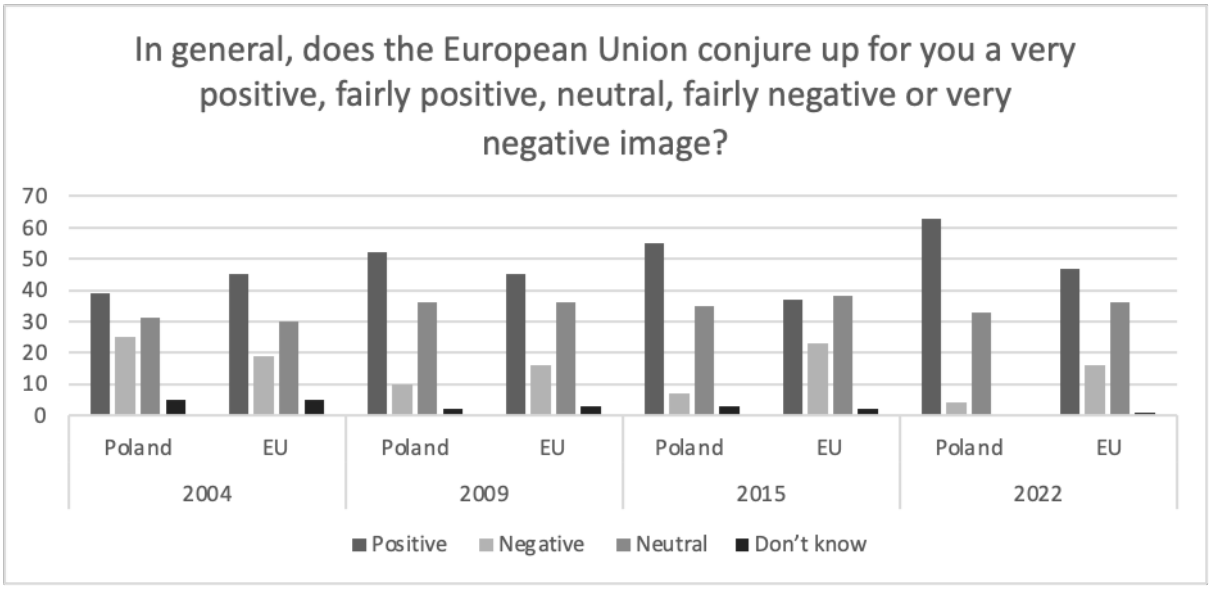
Party	Sovereignty	Legitimacy	Socioeconomic	Culture
United Slovenia	Against transfer of sovereignty to international organisations such as EU or NATO. 19 European countries are not EU members and Slovenia should join those.	EU hinders national sovereignty. Against European federation and highlights absence of directly elected institutions. European politicians are described as "criminals and thieves".		Migration policy is considered "genocide against Europeans".
Slovenian national party	Slovenia should make decisions independent from those of foreign actors; decisions relevant to it should be made in Slovenia and not in the EU or USA.	Supports Slo-exit to prevent negative impact of trade agreements and enable to engage in stronger trade relations with the Russian federation.	Against deepening of the trade between EU and USA (i.e. TTIP) to prevent foreign investors interfering with the right to regulate and negative impact on agriculture, economy and environment.	

Homeland League	Against centralisation and Brussels based governance, federalisation.	EU is important for Slovenia and its economy but should be reformed.		Against progressive principles related to migrants and LGBTQ+.
The Left	For sovereignty so that states can determine their economic/trade policies.	Against joining PESCO. EU should demilitarise and cut ties with NATO.	Against the existing regulation that constrains a more social union and enables companies to avoid taxation.	
Socialist party of Slovenia	Supports Slo-exit, EU is a "fascist organisation" headed by Germany. Other states are losing their sovereignty and follow dictate of German elites.		Supports return of own currency, stronger cooperation with BRICs and Russia.	

Source: national Party manifestos of Slovenian Eurosceptic and illiberal parties that ran at the 2018 Parliamentary or 2019 European elections, retrieved from their websites in 2021 (see Methodological Appendix to Chapter 2 for details).

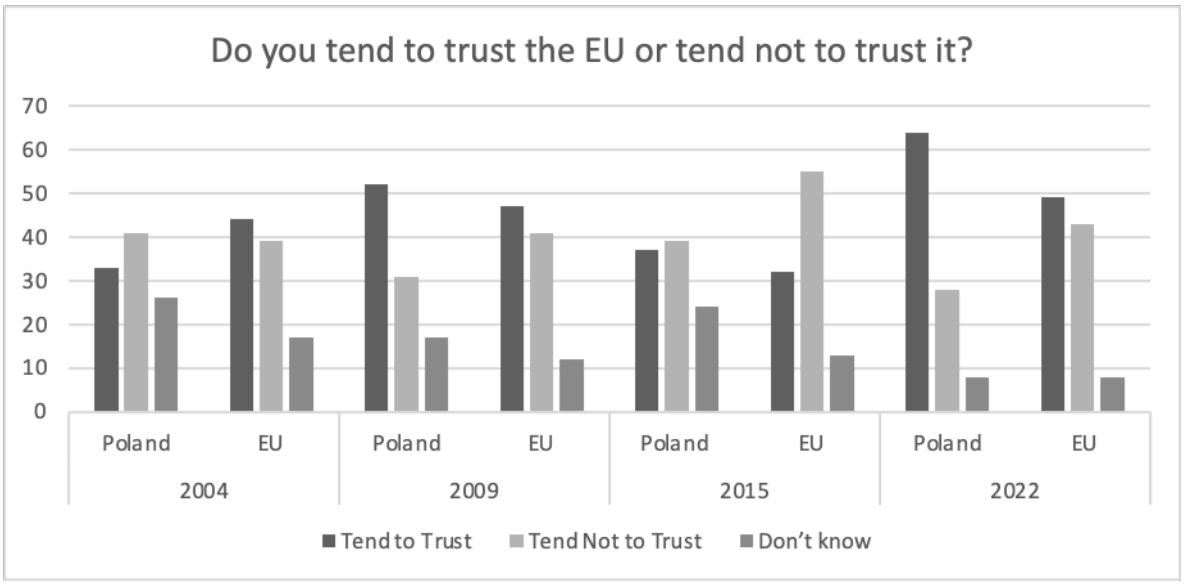
Chapter 4

Figure 4.1. EU image. Polish citizens compared to the EU average



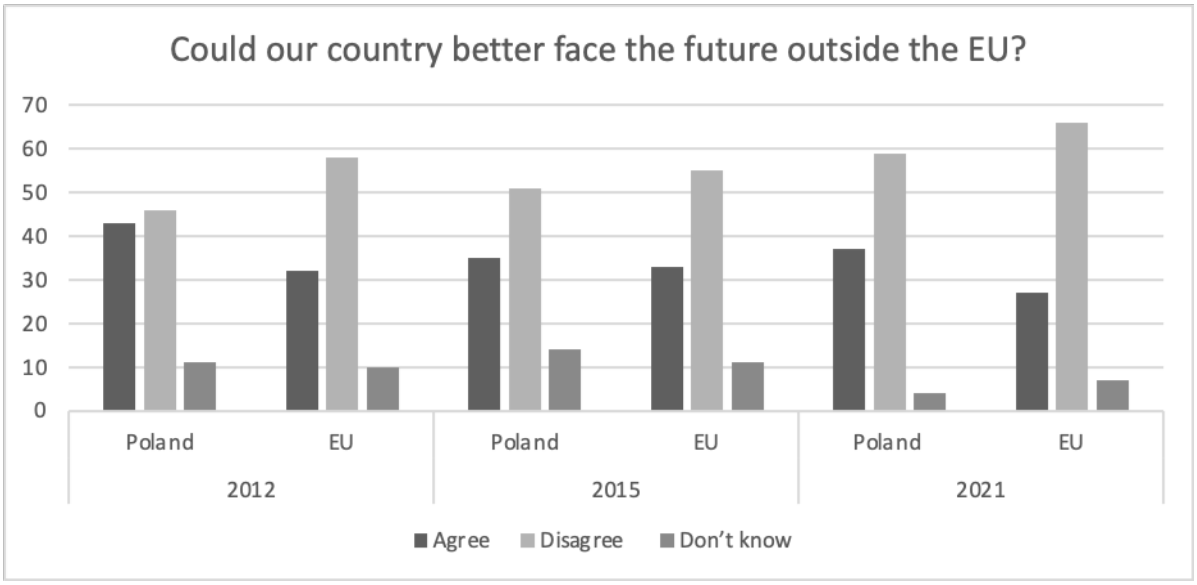
Source: *Standard* Eurobarometer (2022).

Figure 4.2. Level of trust to the EU. Polish citizens compared to the EU average.



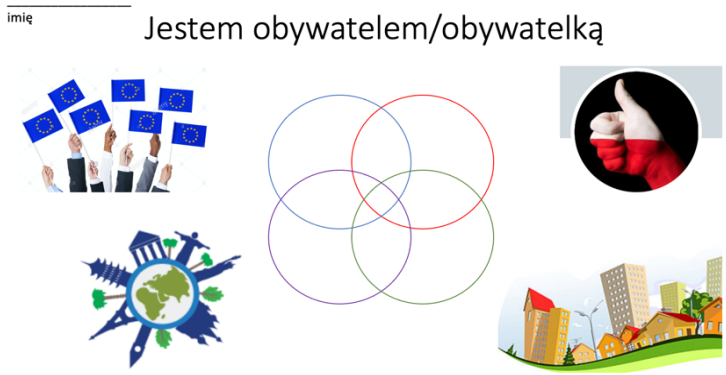
Source: Standard Eurobarometer (2022).

Figure 4.3. Facing of the Future Challenges within or outside the EU. Polish citizens compared to the EU average.



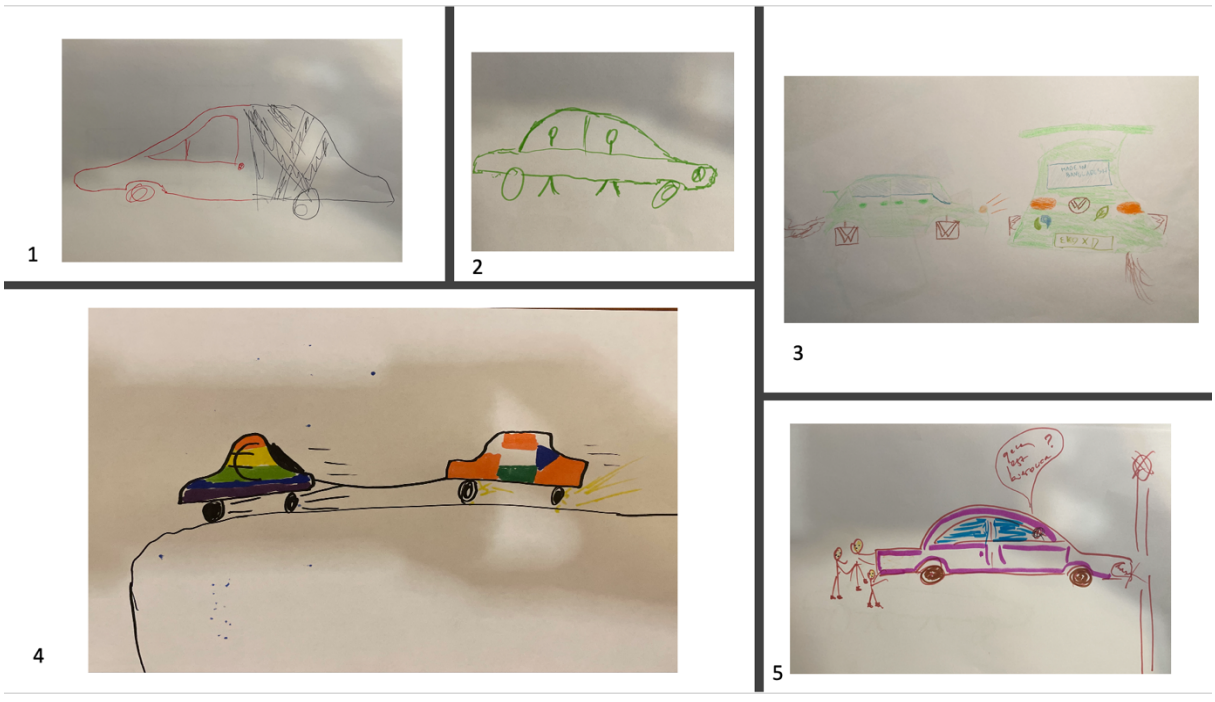
Source: The Special Eurobarometer 500 "The Future of Europe" (2021).

Figure 4.4. The worksheet for the focus groups participants



Note: (translation) The respondents were asked to place themselves within the circles, in response to the sentence: "I am the citizen of…." The pictures depict, as was explained to the participants starting in the upper left corner: European Union, Poland, local community, the world.

Figure 4.5. European Union depicted as a vehicle by the participants of the focus groups



Source: focus groups

Table 5.1. Differences between cases (core values and grievances on the EU by Italian civil society social movements/associations)

Organization name (participant name)	*Core values*	*Ideology*	*Represented grievances*	*Key claims/frames on Europe/the EU*
Greenpeace Italia (Alessandro Gianni)	- Independency (rejection of funds from the European Union) - Non-violence	Apolitical Environmentalism	Different sectors of the society	No specific identification of the category of people represented: "…all those who care about the future of this planet, in short, the planet we live on."
Movimento Federalista Europeo (Giulio Saputo	- Freedom - Democracy - Political participation - Social justice	Apolitical Europeanism	Create Europe from below	- bottom up mechanism of European democratization - pro-European and federal stances - Against Euroscepticism but constructively Euro-critical - Fight against the exit of Italy from the EU. - Recover and spread the core values of the EU
Movimento Cinque Stelle (Dario Quattromani)	- Environmental sustainability - Democracy - Democratic participation - Honesty, - Legality - Direct democracy	No specific positioning along the left-right continuum	- representation of citizens rather than territories -Creation of an active civil society	- Environmental sustainability - Europe of values not just economic enterprise - Representation of the marginalized sectors of the society

			- Representation of the 'left-behind' -Use of technologies to better understand peoples' positioning	- More citizens' involvement in the democratic game - direct democracy - horizontal decisions
Comitato No Tunnel TAV Firenze (Tiziano Cardosi)	- Anti-fascism - Anti-racism	Left leaning/radical left	Satisfying the needs of the metropolitan city	- consensus method needed - stop a project that "deems essentially wrong" - Participation from below
League (Michael Santini)	- Identity (local identity) - Federalism - Respect of the rules	Right leaning	- Representation of the whole Italian population. - Representation of the interest of little entrepreneurs	- Change over time of the party according to changes in the represented values and grievances - Higher degree of integration within the national context needed. - differences between the ethno-regionalist nature of the party vs. the nationalist one.
Forza Nuova (Luca Castellini)	- Rejection of capitalism - Rejection of communism - National sovereignty - Military independency	Radical Right	They represent Italians in general, what they refer to as "decent italians"	- Expression of the radical-right - Support of the "third position" with outright rejection of

	- Traditional family			capitalism and communism - Rejection of the opposition between the Western and the Eastern blocks. -

Sources: In depth interviews

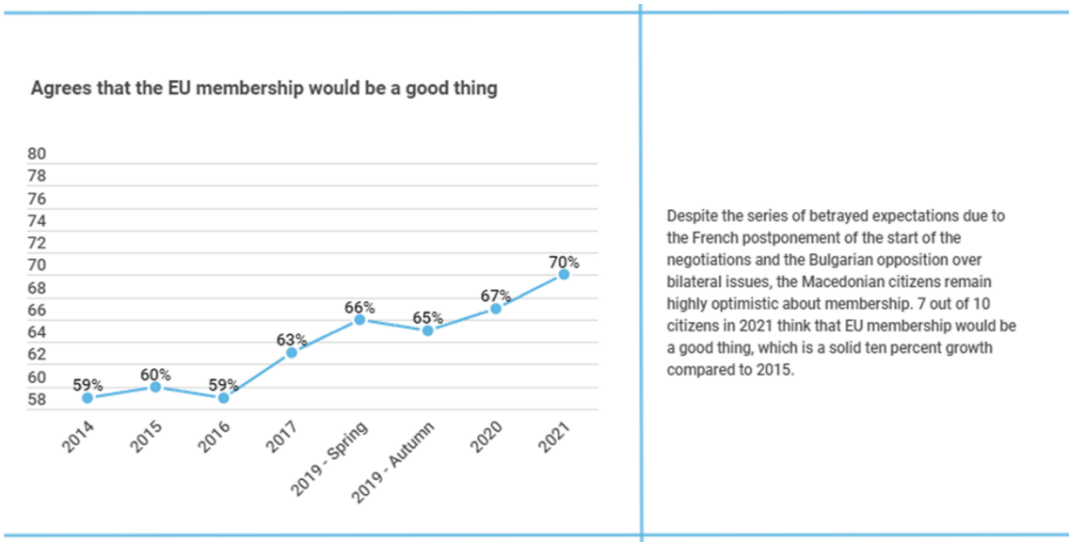
Table 5.2. Main 1Narratives/frames on Europe in Italian political parties, social movement sector and ordinary citizens: A summary

Dimension/justification for support/criticism toward the EU	*Main type of actors*	*Reformist*	*Rejectionist*
Cultural	*(political parties)* • The League • Forza Nuova • Azione Studentesca	• Against the «*cultural homologation*» of the EU «*treating different member states in the same way disregarding local specificities*» (Michael Santini, the **League**)	• Strong opposition toward the EU-immigration policy framed as "*invasion of Europe with the aim to achieve an ethnic substitution*" (Castellini, **FN**) • EU immigration policy taken as starting point for European Cultural integration rejection

Economic	*(both political parties and social movements)* All actors	• All actors: Need for more equality between member states	• The EU as a "*Union of banks and private institutions*" where the financial governance is an "*eternal noose around the neck of countries*" (Castellini, **FN**)
Political	*(both political parties and social movements)* All actors	• Democratic deficit in EU institutions • "*lack of real engagement of citizens in the European decision process*" (Tiziano Cardosi, **Comitato No Tunnel TAV**) • The EU as "*an open contrast between the recognition of civil and human rights and dynastic rights*" (Giannì, **Greenpeace**)	• Need of some supranational structure divided by different arguments BUT sovereignty should be in the hands of each nation state. The EU should be "*structure which core aim is to enable the circulation of goods and people. The emission of money should be given back in the hands of each nation state*" (Castellini, **FN**)

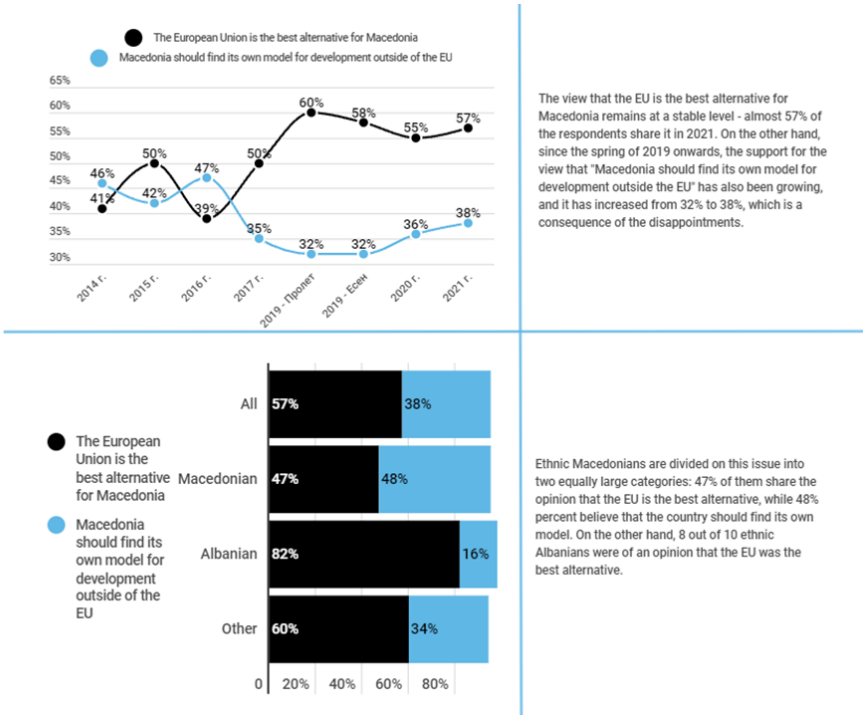
Sources: In depth interviews and focus groups

Figure 6.1. Macedonian Citizens 's position toward EU-membership



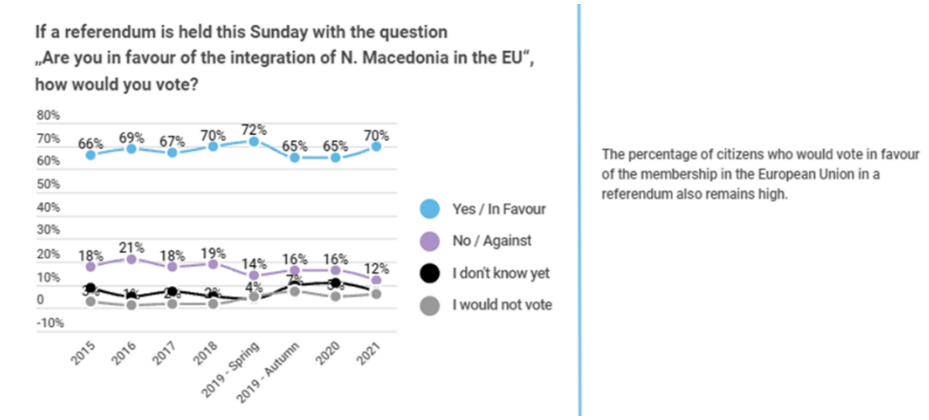
Source: own elaboration based on the data collected by Eurothink in the period between 2014-2021. (positive responses are showed)

Figure 6.2. Surveying Macedonian citizens on Europe: "Which is the best Alternative for Macedonia: becoming a member of the EU or keeping national sovereignty?



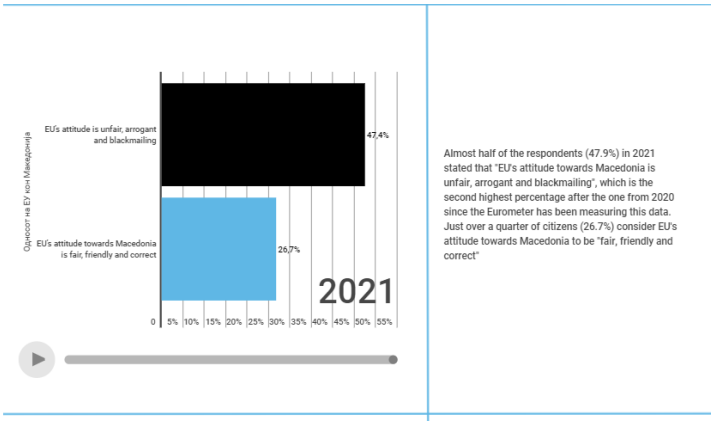
Source: own elaboration based on the data collected by Eurothink in the period between 2014-2021. Data are displayed in aggregated form (first half of the graph and by ethnic groups.

Figure 6.3. Surveying Macedonian citizens on Europe: "If a referendum is held in this Sunday with the question 'Are you in favor of the integration of N. Macedonia in the EU' how would you vote?"



Source: own elaboration based on the data collected by Eurothink in the period between 2014-2021.

Figure 6.4. Surveying Macedonian citizens on Europe: "How would you describe EU attitude toward Macedonia?"



Source: own elaboration based on the data collected by Eurothink in the period between 2014-2021. Available answers: 1) EU's attitude is unfair arrogant and blackmailing; 2) EU's attitude towards Macedonia is fair, friendly and correct.

Table 6.1. Interviews with Macedonian civil society organization: Summary of the key findings

Key findings of interviews:

- The European identity is seen as confronting National identity.
- European identity associated with the EU;
- The most of Macedonians doesn't feel positively about the EU and the overall attitude is influenced by identity erasure and deprivation of sovereignty
- Alliance with Russia seen as guarantor of national sovereignty as one of the biggest alternatives
- National Sovereignty is one of the key concepts

Source: own elaboration based on the interviews conducted in the period between May and June 2021

Table 8.1. Key frames, actors and narratives of Euroscepticism in the case countries

Country	**Frames**	**Actors**	**Narratives (diagnosis, prognosis, motivation)**
Slovenia	Sovereigntism (as an overarching frame, or 'master frame') across the political spectrum (left v. right). Output legitimacy much more important than input legitimacy Prominence of socioeconomic issues (economic welfare, jobs and wages); Ethno-cultural issues and frames and migration important for hard-right	Political parties are key actors Civil society often playing an instrumental role On the Left: acceptance of EU liberal economic governance On the Right: mainstream parties switched to Eurosceptic, illiberal and hard right rhetoric	On the radical left, EU as a 'neoliberal', 'impersonal-technocratic' project On the hard right, EU as a 'bureaucratic-centralist' non-democratic' actor advancing 'globalist' and 'neomarxist' agenda

	parties for justifying their support/criticism of the EU		
Italy	Reformism as main frame (i.e. reform of EU institutions to fill the democratic gap in particular in the EP Rejectionist frames (mainly on the extreme left and right, i.e. alternative Euromediterranean union)	Political parties as main Eurosceptic actors. Civil society associations active on the ground and mainly following a reformist approach (i.e. Eurocriticism). Extreme right and extreme left associations as rejectionist	Funding values of the EU as core values Current EU institutional asset criticized EU economic integration rejected on the basis of a perceived lack of solidarity (left-leaning actors) or nationalism (right-leaning actors). Cultural integration rejected by extreme right actors on the basis of nationalism and EU immigration policy
Macedonia	Euro-enthusiasm (the EU as a significant thread for the survival of the state, the economy and the identity of the dominant Macedonian ethnic population) Eurosceptic sentiments arguing for alternative models not only for the political system, but also for the state's prospects regarding the EU.	Political parties as well as other social sectors. New Eurosceptic political parties and informal groups	Reduction of the sense of social responsibility coupled with nationalism and identity perspectives Euroscepticism as the perceived permissiveness of the European elites towards the Bulgarian demands to include compromises on controversial historical topics within the negotiating structure

	Strong potential for disrupting the path of European integration.		
B&H	Predominant socioeconomic and political Eurosceptic frame The question of the 'unitarization' of BiH and loss of specific ethnic identities	The most important actors are political parties; adoption of Eurosceptic and illiberal positions by main party in RS (SNSD).	EU as an 'ideal', as a place of 'safety, strength and unity' (predominantly Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats from FBiH) vs. EU membership as 'the end of the existence of RS as an autonomous entity' (predominantly Bosnian Serbs from RS).
Poland	Predominance of sovereignty (Europe of Homelands instead of federalisation) and cultural frames (EU perceived as a threat to traditional values) Moderate presence of legitimacy and socio-economic frames (old EU members states as more powerful and dominant vs new states, weaker and ignored and the concept of "unelected bureaucrats") Economic benefits appreciated and valued;	Right-wing political parties including government, Law and Justice (PiS) and its younger coalitional partner Solidarity Poland (SP). Nationalistic organisations. No left-wing Euroscepticism.	The EU as a Germany and France-dominated entity; EU elites disconnected from the citizens of the EU, imposing a leftist agenda that stands against traditional Christian values. Germanophobia. EU membership desirable for as long as Poland benefits financially.

	however, strong opposition towards adopting the Euro.		

Appendix

This section of the book reports the details concerning the sources and tools of data collection (e.g. questionnaires, etc.) used in the book.

Chapter 3 (Slovenia)

List 3A. Electoral paty manifestos analysed (2018- 2019)

Domovinska Liga (2021) Program Domovinske Lige. Accessible at https://domovinskaliga.si/program/ (19.06.2021).

Levica (2021) Program Stranke Levica za Državnozborske Volitve 2018. April 2018. Accessible at http://www.levica.si/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Levicavolilniprogram2018.pdf, (19.06.2021).

Slovenska Nacionalna Stranka (2021) Program SNS. Accessible at http://www.sns.si/program-sns/ (27.06.2021).

Socialistična Partija Slovenija (2021) Program Socialistične Partije Slovenija. Accessible at http://www.spslo.si/p/program.html (20.06.2021).

Zedinjena Slovenija (2021) Program. Accessible at https://www.zedinjenaslovenija.si/program (20.06.2021).

Table 3A. Questionnaire used for the focus groups

Focus Groups design and questions
- Introduction (5-10min)
○ Explaining of the background and purpose of the rsearch as well as data management. Participants sign their consent.
- Warm-up round (5-10min)
○ participants present themselves and their basic demographic information. This is followed by a warm-up question: What do sou see as the basic problem of you community is used as a warm up.
- First part: identity (10-20 min)
○ Do you see yourself as an EU or Slovenian citizen; is there a contradiction between the two? (flags are used to stimulate emotions). What does the EU mean to you?
- Second part: Sovereignty (10-20 min)

o Is the EU currently going in the right direction?
o What should it do according to you?
o Who can achieve this and who is against it?
- Third part sociocultural issue (10-20min)
o What was the impact of EU membership through time and in different policy areas, both in positive and negative terms?
o Can you explain any concrete impact in your community?
o Who is actually responsible for that sort of impact?
- Fourth part: legitimacy (10-20 min)
o Do you trust established politicians, institutions, media and experts?
o What is more important to you, a strong leader or dialog between individual views?
o Who is representing best your views (either individual or party)?
o What are your key sources of information?

Table 3B. List of participants to the focus groups

N.	Age	gender	location	education	profession	Party
FG A (May 2021):						
1	62-old	male	Ptuj area	vocational education	toolmaker	voter of SNS
2	47-old	male	Ptuj area	vocational education	locksmith	SNS-voter
3	33-old	female	Ptuj area	vocational education	employed in services	voter of Homeland League
4	27-old	male	Ptuj area	secondary education	student	no expressed party preferences
FG B (June 2021):						
5	31-old	male	Ljubljana area	BA degree	project manager	voter of Levica
6	36-old	female	Ljubljana area	MA degree	high-school teacher	no expressed

						party preferences
7	22-old	female	Ljubljana area	secondary education	student	voter of Levica
8	28-old	female	Ljubljana rea,	PhD candidate	junior researcher	no expressed party preferences

Table 3C . Questionnaire for the semi-structured in depth interviews with representatives of civil society, including

Questions were accommodated to each of the interviewees. Interviews lasted 60 minutes+
- Introduction (5min)
o Explaining of the background and purpose of the rsearch as well as data management.
o What do you and your organization do, where do you encounter the EU at work?
o How important is the European identity in the country compared to the national identity?
o How important is the topic of the EU in political and public debates in Slovenia?
o What is the attitude of the public towards the EU in Slovenia?
o How do you see the current development vision of the EU?
o Who is it addressing in Slovenia, who supports it and who opposes it?
o What are the key views or visions of the EU in Slovenia?
o Who are the key players - which parties, public authorities, the media, the profession?
o Which constituencies or interest groups are they appealing to?
o Which are the key groups that use or have lost with EU membership?
o How do you assess the relations between parties in Slovenia and joint EU institutions?
o What role do relations between individual parties in Slovenia and abroad play?
o How do you assess the role of fake news in Slovenia?
o How do you assess the attitude towards independent institutions (state institutions, media, civil society, the profession), the multi-party system and fundamental freedoms in Slovenia?

Table 3D. Semi structure interviews with representatives of social movements and civil society associations mobilizing on European issues. List of participants

No	Name and surname	Position	Organisation	Date and place of the interview
9	Samo Uhan	Head of	Centre of public opinion and mass communications research, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of social sciences	Ljubljana, 24.6.2021
10	Adriana Aralica	Project Coordinator	Platform of non-governmental organizations for development, global education and humanitarian aid	Ljubljana 9.7.2021
11	Ana Pavlič	Programme director	Institute for Gender Equality	Ljubljana, 9.7.2021
12	David Ažnoh	Vice-President	Confederation of Slovenian trade unions	Ljubljana, 12.7.2021
13	Marjan Vešligaj	Journalist	Radio-Television Slovenia	Ljubljana 15.7.2021

Chapter 4 (Poland)

Table 4A. Questionnaire used for the semi structure interviews with party and civil society representatives mobilizing on European issues

1. Can you please tell me few words about the organization/party/institution that you represent.
2. What is your attiture towards the European Union. Do you support Polish memebrshi in the EU?
3. Can you please name the advantages and disadvantages of the Polsih membership in the EU?

4. Do you see the need to reform the EU? Are there any areas/issues that could be improved?
5. Are there any organisations, political parties, media oultels that your party/organization/institution collaborate on the state or European level?
6. Who are your political opponents? What are their political motivations Do you think that they could change their mind on the EU issues?

Table 4B. Semi structure interviews with representatives of social movements and civil society associations mobilizing on European issues. List of participants

ID	Political association/connection	Profession	**Interview's date**
INT 01.	All-Polish Youth (nationalistic youth organistaion)	PhD student	11 February 2022
INT 02.	New Left	Academic	17 February 2022
INT 03.	Civic Platform	former president of one of the biggest Polish cities	17 February 2022

Table 4C. Media interviews used for the text analysis (Eurosceptic politicians, journalists, academics).

Name	*Profession*	*Link*
Aleksandra Rybińska	Journalist	https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/484985-brexit-stal-sie-faktem-a-ue-wciaz-nie-stac-na-samokrytyke (31 January 2020)
Marzena Nykiel	Journalist	https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/557164-konserwatywna-odpowiedz-na-ideologiczna-przemoc-ue (2 July 2021) https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/566451-nie-moze-byc-zgody-na-uzurpatorski-dyktat-brukseli (15 September 2021) https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/569497-manipulacja-tuska-polexitem-poraza-chcemy-pl-w-ue-ale (10 October 2021)
Paweł Lisicki	Journalist	https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/opinie/weto-w-ue-ludzie-wladzy-otwarcie-mowia-juz-o-polexicie-nie-mowia-tylko-co-dalej/sqphfkc (23 November 2020)

		polskieradio24.pl/130/6257/Artykul/2841547,Pawel-Lisicki-o-czlonkostwie-Polski-w-UE-dyskusja-na-ten-temat-jest-uprawniona (5 November 2021) https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/234148/lisicki-wystapil-podczas-kongresu-katolicy-a-wolnosc-religijna.html (2 December 2021)
Krzysztof Bosak	MP Leader of Confederacy	https://kresy.pl/publicystyka/wywiady/bosak-dla-kresy-pl-polityka-wielowektorowa-to-praktyczna-realizacja-dumy-narodowej/ (29 February 2020) https://wideo.wp.pl/krzysztof-bosak-o-spaleniu-flagi-ue-sposob-na-wyrazenie-opinii-6316448020326017v (13 November 2018) www.radiowroclaw.pl/articles/view/106929/Krzysztof-Bosak-Polske-stac-na-to-zeby-nie-przyjmowac-unijnego-Funduszu-Odbudowy (14 October 2021) www.polskieradio.pl/7/7630/Artykul/2828301,Czy-Polska-obrala-kurs-na-polexit (7 October 2021)
Robert Winnicki	MP Leader of Confederacy	https://www.rp.pl/wydarzenia/art12538061-ankieta-rzeczpospolitej-robert-winnicki-ruch-narodowy-miejsce-1-okreg-nr-10 (1 April 2014) https://www.radiomaryja.pl/informacje/tylko-u-nas-r-winnicki-ue-jest-narzedziem-liberalow-lewicowcow-nihilistow-i-globalistow-niszczy-czlowieka-rodzine-i-narod-na-wszystkich-poziomach/, (17 April 2019) https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/117955/winnicki-o-ewentualnej-wspolpracy-z-pis.html (20 October 2019)
Jarosław Kaczyński	MP, Leader of Law and Justice	https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/opinie/artykuly/519688,jadwiga-staniszkis-chwali-wystapienie-jaroslawa-kaczynskiego.html (3 May 2016) https://forsal.pl/swiat/unia-europejska/artykuly/8202445,le-pen-kaczynski-orban-salvini-partie-prawicowe-z-europy-podpisaly-wspolna-deklaracje.html (2 July 2021) www.euractiv.pl/section/demokracja/news/kaczynski-le-pen-orban-salvini-meloni-deklaracja-ue-liberalizm-rewolucja-kulturalna/ (2 July 2021)

		https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/raporty/raport-priorytety-ue-w-dobie-pandemii/aktualnosci/news-kaczynski-traktaty-w-ue-przestaly-obowiazywac,nId,5726588 (23 December 2021)
Zbigniew Ziobro	MP, Justice Minister, Solidarity Poland	https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2021-05-07/zbigniew-ziobro-w-graffiti-ogladaj-od-godz-740/ (5 May 2021) https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art18464921-zbigniew-ziobro-obecnosc-polski-w-unii-europejskiej-nie-za-wszelka-cene (5 August 2021) https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/8221814,polityka-zbigniew-ziobro-unia-europejska-tsue-polexit.html (6 August 2021)
Jacek Saryusz Wolski	MEP representing Law and Justice	https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/1414560,saryusz-wolski-o-eurowyborach-2019.html (28 May 2019) https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/575796-saryusz-wolski-niemcy-chca-narzucic-swoj-ustroj-calej-ue (27 November 2021) https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/246679/jacek-saryusz-wolski-to-byl-ten-pierwszy-zly-sygnal-w-ue.html (3 January 2022)
Ryszard Legutko	Academic, MEP representing Law and Justice	https://www.radio.kielce.pl/pl/post-83992 (1 April 2019) rp.pl/polityka/art18913641-legutko-w-ue-panuje-nieslychana-pogarda-dla-regul-i-prawa-a-takze-unijnych-traktatow (13 Septemebr 2021) https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1223/Artykul/2837651 (31 October 2021) https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/579933-wywiad-prof-legutko-swiat-bez-regul-tak-wyglada-ue (30 December 2021)
Zdzisław Krasnodębski	Academic, MEP representing Law and Justice	dw.com/pl/krasnodębski-w-die-welt-niemcy-twardo-forsują-swoje-interesy/a-48156588 (2 April 2019) https://wszystkoconajwazniejsze.pl/prof-zdzislaw-krasnodebski-europa-jako-wyzwanie/ (8 March 2020) https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/578379-krasnodebski-zwolennicy-federalizacji-chca-konca-polski (24 December 2021)
Andrzej Zybertowicz	Academic, adviser to the president Andrzej Duda	https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/kraj/news-zybertowicz-o-upadku-zachodniej-czesci-unii-europejskiej,nId,2405840 (13 June 2017) https://tvn24.pl/polska/polska-a-unia-europejska-andrzej-zybertowicz-i-pawel-kowal-komentuja-5097713 (18 May 2021)

Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski	Academic, adviser to the president Andrzej Duda	https://wydarzenia.interia.pl/raporty/raport-unia-europejska/polska-w-ue/news-prof-przemyslaw-zurawski-vel-grajewski-zostalismy-brutalnie-,nId,4886564 (30 November 2020) www.polskieradio24.pl/321/9021/Artykul/2642391,Rok-pod-znakiem-naciskow-UE-na-Polske-Prof-Zurawski-vel-Grajewski-im-chodzi-po-prostu-o-rzad-PiS (23 December 2020)

Table 4D. Outline of the questionnaire used for recruiting Focus Group participants.

Introduction: *In the research project 'Perceptions of the European Union in Poland, North Macedonia, Slovenia and Italy' we are looking for respondents for a focus group study. Your answers will be confidential and will only be used to select people for the study.* *Please tick one answer in each question.*
Part 1. Sociodemographic questions about the participants: gender, age, education, political views, intended participation in the general election, political party that the respondent supports
Part 2. Questions about the respondents' attitude towards the EU, EU integration process, EU influence on Poland and Polish politics in defined matters.
Part 3. Request of the contact details: *Thank you very much for your time. If you are selected for the study, we would like to contact you and invite you to take part in Focus. To do so, please provide us with a telephone number where we could be contacted.*

Table 4E. Outline used for the Focus groups

Objectives for the Focus Groups:
Study group: 6-8 people in each focus group
Purposive sampling – hard, medium, and soft Eurosceptics took part in the focus groups. The participants were selected based on previously conducted interviews, in a form of questionnaire.
Duration of the focus 2 hours
Location – Toruń (October 28, 2021), Rzeszów (November 19, 2021), Wrocław (December 8, 2021)
Introduction:

Greetings to the participants. Acknowledgement for coming introduction of the research aim, and the moderator.
The aim of the project is to find out about and discuss the perceptions of Poles, Slovenes, Macedonians and Italians about the European Union. On the basis of the questionnaires, you filled in, we selected you to explore your views on the European Union and Poland's place and future in the Community. Thank you for agreeing to take part in the focus group study.
Participants introduce themselves
Questions. The tool for the focus group was divided into three main parts:
1) **Warm-up**, where the questions about assessing political situation in Poland was raised, to learn more about the views of the respondents and their political stance. And to ask them a simple question for a start. Then we asked about identity: local, national, European, or world, and conducted the discussion on the interpenetration or exclusion of these identities. (worksheet no 1 was given to the respondents to mark their identity spot – see chapter 3, figure 3.4).
2) **European Union, but what kind of a Union? Poland and me in the EU.** The aim of the second part of the research was to learn about the perception of the European Union. The first question was veery general: what is the European Union for you? What do you associate with the EU? Then we develop this thread by animating the discussion on advantages and disadvantages of being a member of the European Union, one from the respondents' point of view - we asked about their personal experiences, and two, we asked to assess the benefits and drawbacks for Poland. A question on adopting Euro was included in this part of the research. In the last part of the second block, we divided respondents in dyads or triads (depending on the number of respondents in the group but also, we matched them according to their level of Euroscepticism, that we assessed in the survey and confirmed on the bases of the already held discussion), and used a projective technique, by asking a question: And if the European Union was a vehicle, what kind of vehicle would it be? And why? They also got a task to draw the vehicle (see chapter 3, figure 3.5).
3) **To leave or to stay, that is the question.** The third part of the focus concentrated around the issue of potential Polexit. The respondents were given a mock ballot paper with a question taken from the British EU referendum of 2016:
Should Poland remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?
1) Remain a member of the European Union
2) Leave the European Union
and were asked to mark their answer. Then the discussion was held on the motives and rational behind their decisions. Additional questions were asked about the proffered model of the European Union and ways of its integration.

List 4F. Focus group's participants

Focus group1: Toruń, October 28, 2021

- [T1]: male (46-55), businessman, moderate Eurosceptic, supporter of Law and Justice
- [T2]: female (46-55), works in a bank as an expert, soft Eurosceptic, supporter of Confederacy

- [T3]: female (46-55), works in a bank, very soft Eurosceptic, supporter of Civic Platform
- [T4]: male (26-35) works as a warehouse worker, soft Eurosceptic, supporter of Confederacy
- [T5]: male (26-35), businessman, hard Eurosceptic, member of a political party – Confederacy
- [T6]: female (18-25) student, soft Eurosceptic supporter of Confederacy
- [T7]: female (26-35), works in public administration, hard Eurosceptic, supporter of Confederacy
- [T8]: male (18-25), student, hard Eurosceptic, supporter of Confederacy

Focus group2: Rzeszów, November 19, 2021

- [R1]: male (36-45), works at the University, hard Eurosceptic,
- [R2]: male (26-35), PhD student, hard Eurosceptic, member of the right-wing youth organization, supporter of National Movement
- [R3]: male (46-55), businessman, moderate Eurosceptic, supporter of Law and Justice
- [R4]: male (18-25), student, moderate Eurosceptic supporter of Confederacy
- [R5]: female (18-25), student, moderate Eurosceptic, supporter of Confederacy
- [R6]: female (18-25), student, hard Eurosceptic, supporter of Law and Justice
- [R7]: male (36-45), works in the public administration, hard Eurosceptic, supporter of Confederacy

Focus group3: Wrocław, December 10, 2021:

- [W1]: female (18-25), student, soft Eurosceptic, wants to stay in the EU, supporter of Poland 2050.
- [W2]: female (26-36), works in the public sector, moderate Eurosceptic, however wants to leave the EU, doesn't support any party
- [W3]: male (26-35), businessman, worked for some time abroad, hard Eurosceptic, but does not want to leave the EU, supporter of Confederacy
- [W4]: male (18-25), student, hard Eurosceptic, wants to leave the EU, supporter of National Movement
- [W5]: female (18-25), student, soft Euroenthusiast, wants to stay in the EU, supporter of New Left

- [W6]: female (18-25), secretary, soft Eurosceptic, wants to stay in the EU, supporter of Confederacy
- [W7]: male (36-45), works in the public sector, moderate Eurosceptic, wants to stay in the EU, supporter of Law and Justice

Chapter 5 (Italy)

Table 5A In depth Interview outline

Disclaimer: This guide is thought for an interview that follows the core criteria asked by the project while trying to provide the interviewee some space to express her/his and her/his association's thoughts.
Type of interview: semi-structured.
Proposed duration of the interview: 30/40 minutes.
Place of the interview: in person/online according to the contingent needs,
First presentation with the interviewee (thanks the interviewee for the participation).
Brief introduction about the project (text to be elaborated if needed).
Start the interview
1. Can you tell me something about the organization/party that you represent? For example, can you provide me some details about your values, your visions, and the people/grievances that you represent?
2. What is your organization/party's view about the European Union? Which are the pros or cons of the EU membership?
3. Does Europe need to change according to the organization/party that you represent? If yes how and which aspects need to be changed?
4. Talking about the EU as a political system which aspects does your organization/party oppose or support and why?

5. Having seen your organization/party's position concerning the EU, can you explain to me which actions or initiatives does your organization/party sustain or organize in relation to the EU?
6. Now I am going to ask you some more details concerning your organization/party international and European activity: does your organization/party cooperates or, widely speaking interacts, with other organization/parties at the international level? And at the European level?
7. If there is any kind of tie can you please indicate me which are the actions/initiatives (if any) that your organization/party promotes/endorses at the international level? And at the European?

Table 5 B. Interviewees' information

ID	**Name and Surname**	**Association**	**Profession**	**Region**	**Interview's date**
INT-01	Giuliano Saputo	Movimento Federalista Italiano	Secretary of the Movimento Federalista Europeo	Tuscany	2nd of July 2021
INT-02	Tiziano Cardosi	Comitato NO Tunnel TAV	Retired	Tuscany	6th of August 2021
INT-03	Michael Santini	The League	Freelance	Tuscany	12th of August 2021
INT-04	Dario Quattromani	Movimento Cinque Stelle	Public employee	Lazio	1st of July 2021
INT – 05	Alessandro Gianní	Greenpeace	Greenpeace officier	Lazio	8th of September 2021

INT - 06	Andi Sendu	Volt Italia	President of VOLT Italia/ Freelance	Lazio	9th of September 2021
INT – 07	Giulia Sulpizi	Giovani Federalisti Europei	Section Secretary	Padua	12th of September 2021
INT - 08	Luca Castellini	Forza Nuova	Freelance	Padua	8th of July 2021
INT – 09	Giacomo Cusumano	Movimento Cinque Stelle	Politician	Padua	15th of July 2021

5 C. Focus group's outline

Introduction, thanks and greetings. A photo is taken for internal needs (brief explanation to the participants).
First part (Knowledge of Europe / European Union):
***Internal note:** This first introductory part of the focus group serves to understand the level of knowledge and political information on the European Union held by the participants in the focus group. The part consists of a total of 3 questions.*
Approximate duration: 40 minutes
Participants listen (and possibly also see on a PC or projector) an extract of the European Anthem (Ode to Joy), then they are asked the questions below
1) Do you know the melody we just listened to? What does that tell you? What is that?
2) When was the last time Europe / European Union entered your lives? For example, this last period of Covid comes to mind with, for example, the establishment of the green pass, apart from this have you had experiences of this kind? If so, which ones? I would ask you if possible to indicate concrete examples of your experience. Just to give you some examples, just think of the funds that are given to female entrepreneurs, or the use of funds for Erasmus programs (if I think of the university period, many of my friends have benefited from it). Or, more simply, it is enough to think about how we can travel as European citizens without passport control in the Schengen area.
3) Do you happen to talk about the European Union or Europe with your friends or relatives, or trivially during your daily activities such as at the bar, at the gas station, at the baker? Do you remember when was the last time this happened to you? How did you talk about it? In general, do you remember what your position was, if you were against or in favor

of the European Union? I would ask you if possible to talk to each other by providing concrete examples.
Second part (Beyond Euroscepticism: Positions / visions on European integration and justifications used).
***Internal note:** this part of the focus group focuses on understanding which frames are used by the participants to express their position for or against Europe. In other words, this part of the focus group aims to understand how the participants position themselves in relation to the various "dimensions" of Europe. In fact, for example, it is possible that a participant expresses consent to European policies but does not share European cultural integration. The first part of the focus group focuses on 4 European dimensions such as: 1) Cultural integration; 2) Political integration; 3) economic integration; 4) historical integration (history of the Union). The latter is considered as a residual dimension.*
The second step examines three dimensions of the European Union as a "political system" such as: 1) politics, 2) policies, and 3) politics. The third and final step is to understand how they identify themselves at the level of polity as citizens.
Approximate duration: 60 minutes
4) Participants are shown 4 sets of images present in Annex 1. Each set of images touches on four aspects of the European integration process (cultural, economic, political and historical). The questions that are submitted to the participants in the FG are the following:
- Cultural: We have seen two images that symbolize the cultural dimension of the European integration process, are you for or against this aspect of integration? How do you feel about this aspect? What would you change if you had to change something? What are the reasons that guide your position? I would ask you to discuss with each other and provide justifications for your position. (A brief explanation of the negative image of cultural integration is provided - Riots Banlieue Paris 2005.
- Economic integration: We have seen two images that symbolize the economic dimension of the European integration process, are you for or against this aspect of integration? How do you feel about this aspect? What would you change if you had to change something? What are the reasons that guide your position? I would ask you to discuss with each other and provide justifications for your position.
- Political integration: We have seen two images that symbolize the political dimension of European integration. The first related to the votes for the European elections and the second related to a pro Brexit demonstration. How do you feel about this political aspect of European integration? Are you for or against? What would you change if you had to change something? What are the reasons that guide your position? I would ask you to argue among yourselves and provide justifications for your position.
- historical: The images I have just shown you represent the history of the European integration process that goes from an agreement between states to the present day with an

ever closer "union" (pass me the term) between member states . What do you think of this aspect of European integration? Are you for or against? What would you change if you had to change something? What are the reasons that guide your position? I would ask you to discuss with each other and provide justifications for your position.
***Internal note:** in this case the research question seeks to investigate the positioning (for or against) of the participants in the FG towards the cultural, economic and historical aspects of the Union with particular attention paid to the reasons for the reasons used. The research question is: Are you for or against the cultural, economic and historical aspects of European integration?*
5) Participants are shown 3 sets of images present in Annex 2. Each set of images touches on three aspects of European integration / European union (politics, policies and polity). For each set of images, the following questions are asked:
Third part (showing images of Europe, Tab 4E)
- Politics: The images I have just shown you refer to the contrast between the nation state (such as, for example, Italy) and Europe understood as a supranational construct. What do you think of this aspect of European integration? Are you for or against this aspect? What would you change if you had to change something? What are the reasons that guide your position? I would ask you to discuss freely among yourselves expressing what you think.
- Policy: The images I have shown you now are related to the aspects of politics that influence our way of life in everyday life. As you know, the European Union has influence on these decisions. What do you think of this aspect of European integration? Are you for or against? What would you change if you had to change something? What are the reasons that guide your position? I would ask you to discuss freely among yourselves expressing what you think. Just to give you some examples, just think of agricultural policy and how the European Union has influenced and is influencing this policy (eg: measurement of the catch which is so much connected to some dishes of the Italian culinary tradition)
- Polity: The images I have shown you now refer to those aspects of European integration referring to the political identity and "borders" (pass me the term) of the community itself. These aspects are changing and have in fact changed throughout the history of European integration. What do you think of this aspect of European integration? Are you for or against? What would you change if you had to change something? What are the reasons that guide your position? I would ask you to discuss freely among yourselves expressing what you think.
Question to ask in general on all dimensions if it does not emerge during the discussion: In your opinion has your position changed over time? Or has it remained the same?
***Internal note:** this set of questions serves to understand the positioning of the people present at the FG towards three key aspects of the European "political system". The*

underlying research question is: "Are you for or against the polity, policies and politics of the European Union? Because?
6) Participants are shown a scheme representing three types of citizenship (united in the center), they are asked to place themselves in the scheme to understand their position towards European polity. The scheme is present in Annex 3. In relation to the last question I asked you, I would now ask you to place yourselves as citizens within the scheme that I am showing you now (brief explanation of the scheme provided if necessary). I would ask you to write down your position on the sheet and try to answer the following questions by sharing them with the other participants in the focus: What does it mean for you to be European? In your opinion, is it possible to be citizens of your city, Italians and Europeans or does a conflict arise? I would ask you to speak to each other and try to explain your position.
**** Internal note:*** *this question serves to understand the positioning of the participants in the focus group towards European citizenship.*

5 D. List of Focus group's participants (Florence, Padua and Rome).

ID	**Name and Surname**	**Association**	**Profession and info**	**FG region**	**FG date**
FGF-01	Tiziano Cardosi	Comitato no Tunnel TAV	Retired (69 y.o. male)	Florence (Tuscany)	2nd of September 2021
FGF-02	Giovanni Greco	6000 Sardine	Student (21 y.o. male)	Florence (Tuscany)	
FGF-03	Nicola Zeloni	Five Stars Movement	Public employee (51 y.o. male)	Florence Tuscany	
FGF-04	Elisa Meloni	Volt Europe	Project Officier (35 y.o. female)	Florence Tuscany	
FGF–05	Lorenzo Stefani	Ordinary citizen	Student (25 y.o. male)	Florence Tuscany	
FGF - 06	Martina Allegretti	Ordinary citizen	Student (22 y.o. female)	Florence Tuscany	
FGP–01	Stefano Sorgato	Azione Studentesca (Padua)	Student (18 y.o. male)	Padua Veneto	

FGP–02	Simone Stefan	6000 Sardine	Farmer (40 y.o. male)	Padua Veneto	9th of September 2021
FGP–03	Âldo Romano	EuroStop Padua	Programmer (63 y.o. male)	Padua Veneto	
FGP-04	Carlo Bano	Ordinary citizen	Cleaner (34 y.o.male)	Padua Veneto	
FGP-05	Francesca Cassaro	Ordinary citizen	Student (25 y.o. female)	Padua Veneto	
FGR-01	Dario Quattromani	Five Stars Movement	Public employee	Rome Lazio	16th of September 2021
FGR-02	Monica di Sisto	Stop TTIP	Journalist and Senior Polical Advisor (51 y.o. female)	Rome Lazio	
FGR-03	Lorenzo Zacchi	League	Public Employee (34 y.o male)	Rome Lazio	
FGR-04	Susanna Giannachi	Ordinary citizen	Student (28 y.o. female	Rome Lazio	

Figure 5E. The images used during the focus groups to stimulate the discussion

Examples: the visual content 2

Policy

Politics

Polity

Examples: the visual content 3

Examples: the visual content 1

Cultural Europe

Economic Europe

Political Europe

Chapter 6 (Macedonia)

Table 6A. Questionnaire used for the focus groups

Focus Groups design and questions
- Introduction (5-10min)
o Explanation of the background and rationale of the research as well as data management. Participants sign their consent.
- Warm-up round (5-10min)
o Participants are asked to present themselves providing some basic demographic information (i.e.: name, age and profession)
- First part: meaning of the EU to the participants (20 – 30 minutes)
o Participants are asked a first general question concerning the meaning of Europe/ the EU to them. Participants are left free to discuss among themselves. The asked question is: ▪ What does Europe/the EU mean to you?
- Second part: Personal positioning toward the EU (20- 30 minutes)
o Participants are asked two general guiding questions concerning their positioning vis a vis Europe/the EU. Participants are left free to discuss among themselves. The asked questions are: ▪ What are the advantages/disadvantages of EU membership? ▪ What would you change about Europe/the EU?

Table 6C. Questionnaire used for the semi-structured interviews

Questions were accommodated to each of the interviewees. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each
- Introduction (5min)
o Explaining of the background and purpose of the rsearch as well as data management.
o What are the purpose, core values and general stances toward the EU of your organization/party/association?
o What is your organization/party/association's position vis a vis the national identity?
o What is your organization/party/association's position vis a vis the European identity?
o Which are the stances of your organization/party/association toward the EU?

○	Which are the stances of your organization/party/association toward EU pluralism?
○	Which are the stances of your organization/party/association toward EU basic rights?

Chapter 7 (Bosnia Herzegovina)

Table 7A.Questionnaire for the interviews

Disclaimer*[22]*: *This guide is thought for an interview that follows the conceptual framework used in RePAST (H2020) project and PhD dissertation.*
Type of interview: *semi-structured.*
Proposed duration of the interview: *40/50 minutes.*
Place of the interview: *in person.*
First presentation with the interviewee (thanks the interviewee for the participation).
Brief introduction about the PhD project (text to be elaborated if needed). Both the PhD and RePAST project started in 2018 and ended in 2021. Interviews and focus groups were done in the period between 2018 and 2021.
Start the interview
Starting our conversation today I would like you to talk to me about your life… where were you born, where did you spend your childhood, where did you go to school….
Section B' – European Union
I would like now to discuss briefly a couple of things about Europe….
Tell me what you think about Europe… (spontaneous answer)
Tell me what you think about the European Union?

[22] Names and surnames of the respondents/interviewees are anonymized, meaning that we use the initials.

What does it mean to be "European"? Or to be the citizen of the EU? Do you feel "European"? Why yes or why no?
What's the role of European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina according to your opinion?
What do you expect from the European Union regarding the future of our country? Can you explain further?

Table 7B List of qualitative interviews conducted

ID	**Name and Surname**	**Profession**	**Entity/city**	**Ethnic identity**	**Interview's date**
BA-01	L.M.	Student	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	14th of November 2018
BA-02	S.E.	Student	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	17th of November 2018
BA-03	A.H.	Dentist	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	14th of November 2018
BA-04	M.M.	Parliament of BiH representative	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosnian and Herzegovinian	21th of November 2018
BA-05	M.S.	Associate Professor	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	15th of November 2018
BA - 06	V.B.	Journalist	Republika Srpska (Pale)	Bosnian Serb	13th of November 2018
BA– 07	H.P.	Translator	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	16th of November 2018
BA - 08	M.V.	Retired	Federation of BiH (Čapljina)	Bosnian Croat	22th of November 2018

BA – 09	S.S.	Head of translation agency	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	16th of November 2018
BA-10	M.Z.	Student	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	16th of November 2018
BA-11	S.D.	Student	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo	Bosniak	17th of November 2018
BA-12	Z.D.	Administrative worker	Republika Srpska (Pale)	Bosnian Serb	14th of November 2018
BA-13	A.M.	Student	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	17th of November 2018
BA-14	K.G.	Accountant	Federation of BiH (Mostar)	Bosnian Croat	20th of November 2018
BA-15	M.S.	Project associate	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	13th of November 2018
BA-16	G.D.	Social media and communication officer	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosnian and Herzegovinian	12th of November 2018
BA-17	F.M.	Administrative worker	Republika Srpska (Eastern Sarajevo)	Bosnian Serb	14th of November 2018
BA-18	T.J.	Student	Federation of BiH (Vitez)	Bosnian Croat	4th of July 2019
BA-19	B.O.	Communication assistant for social media	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosniak	12th of November 2018
BA-20	S.D.	Historian	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	Bosnian Serb	12th of November 2018

Table 7C Focus group's outline

Focus groups were consisted of four parts, the relevant one was the questions regarding the European Union and Europe in general. In this context, we are only pinpointing the questions that are going to be subjected to the analysis.
Introduction, thanks and greetings.
Approximate duration: 1,5 hours
PART II: Understanding the external 'Other': Europe and the European Union
1) What comes to your mind when you hear the word "Europe"?
• And what about the European Union?
2) What does it mean to you to be European?
• Are you happy to be European – or even proud?
• Could you imagine exchanging your national passport for a European passport?
• Do you feel closer to your regional roots, to your Bosnian and Herzegovinian roots or to Europe? Or do all of them have the same value for you?
3) How do you understand the role of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the end of the Bosnian war?
4) Should the European Union be more actively involved in the reform processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina?
5) Does the European Union have enough potential to alleviate the antagonism that currently reign between the three ethnic groups?

Table 7D List of Focus group's participants , per each focus group

ID	Name and Surname	Association	Profession and info	FG region	FG date
FGA-01	B.T.	Ordinary citizen	Student (24 y.o., male)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	
FGA-02	E.M.	Ordinary citizen	Student (21 y.o. female)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	
FGA-03	H.T.	Ordinary citizen	Journalist (24, y.o., male)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	

FGA-04	I.Z.	Ordinary citizen	Salesman (21 y.o. male)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	24th of April 2019
FGA–05	H.F.	Ordinary citizen	Student (20 y.o. female)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	
FGA - 06	L.A.	Ordinary citizen	Student (22 y.o. female)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	
FGP–01	A.B.	Ordinary citizen	Notary (28 y.o. male)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	23th of April 2019
FGP–02	A.F.	Ordinary citizen	Student (23 y.o. male)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	
FGP–03	K.T.	Ordinary citizen	architect (29 y.o. male)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	
FGP-04	F.B.	Ordinary citizen	student (25 y.o. female)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	
FGP-05	E.V.	Ordinary citizen	Student (22 y.o. male)	Federation of BiH (Sarajevo)	
FGR-01	S.D.	Ordinary citizen	High school professor (48 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Tuzla)	22th of April 2019
FGR-02	M.P.	Ordinary citizen	Music professor (36 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Tuzla	
FGR-03	N.P.	Ordinary citizen	Finance (40 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Tuzla	
FGR-04	I.K.	Ordinary citizen	Housewife (41 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Tuzla	
FGR-05	T.G.	Ordinary citizen	Police officer (45 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Tuzla	
FGR-06	L.V.	Ordinary citizen	Economist (39 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Tuzla	

FGE-01	M.P.	Ordinary citizen	Housewife (46 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Vitez)	25th of April 2019
FGE-02	I.M.	Ordinary citizen	Student (23 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Vitez)	
FGE-03	L.K.	Ordinary citizen	Accountant (28 y.o., male)	Federation of BiH (Vitez)	
FGE-04	M.A.	Ordinary citizen	Project manager (28 y.o., male)	Federation of BiH (Vitez)	
FGL-01	M.A.	Ordinary citizen	Retired (81 y.o., male)	Federation of BiH (Čaplje)	26th of April 2019
FGL-02	I.M.	Ordinary citizen	Retired (80 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Čaplje)	
FGL-03	A.B.	Ordinary citizen	Retired (63 y.o., female)	Federation of BiH (Čaplje)	
FGL-04	F.T.	Ordinary citizen	Without employment (38 y.o., male)	Federation of BiH (Čaplje)	
FGL-05	E.K.	Ordinary citizen	Without employment (34 y.o., male)	Federation of BiH (Čaplje)	
FGN-01	D.K.	Ordinary citizen	High School professor (37 y.o., male)	Republika Srpska (Banja Luka)	20th of April 2021
FGN-02	T.G.	Ordinary citizen	Legal associate (27 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Banja Luka)	
FGN-03	J.Č.	Ordinary citizen	Lawyer (32 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Banja Luka)	
FGN-04	S.B.	Ordinary citizen	Lawyer (40 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Banja Luka)	
FGN-05	P.G.	Ordinary citizen	Historian (33 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Banja Luka)	

FGO-01	D.Z.	Ordinary citizen	Retired (80 y.o., male)	Republika Srpska (Eastern Sarajevo)	21th of April 2021
FGO-02	Z.P.	Ordinary citizen	High school professor (63 y.o., male)	Republika Srpska (Eastern Sarajevo)	
FGO-03	M.G.	Ordinary citizen	Without employment (57 y.o., male)	Republika Srpska (Eastern Sarajevo)	
FGO-04	P.K.	Ordinary citizen	Student (28 y.o., male)	Republika Srpska (Eastern Sarajevo)	
FG0-05	D.K.	Ordinary citizen	Researcher (54 y.o., male)	Republika Srpska (Eastern Sarajevo)	
FGS-01	M.M.	Ordinary citizen	Intern at advocate firm (28 y.o., male)	Republika Srpska (Bijeljina)	26th of April 2021
FGS-02	S.J.	Ordinary citizen	Intern at advocate firm (29 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Bijeljina)	
FGS-03	N.P.	Ordinary citizen	Student (22 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Bijeljina)	
FGS-04	T.T.	Ordinary citizen	Student (19 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Bijeljina)	
FGB-01	N.Č.	Ordinary citizen	Retired (67 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Janja)	27th of April 2021
FGB-02	N.M.	Ordinary citizen	Police officer (43 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Janja)	
FGB-03	M.F.	Ordinary citizen	Without employment (49 y.o., female)	Republika Srpska (Janja)	

Figures and Tables_All chapters

Chapter 1

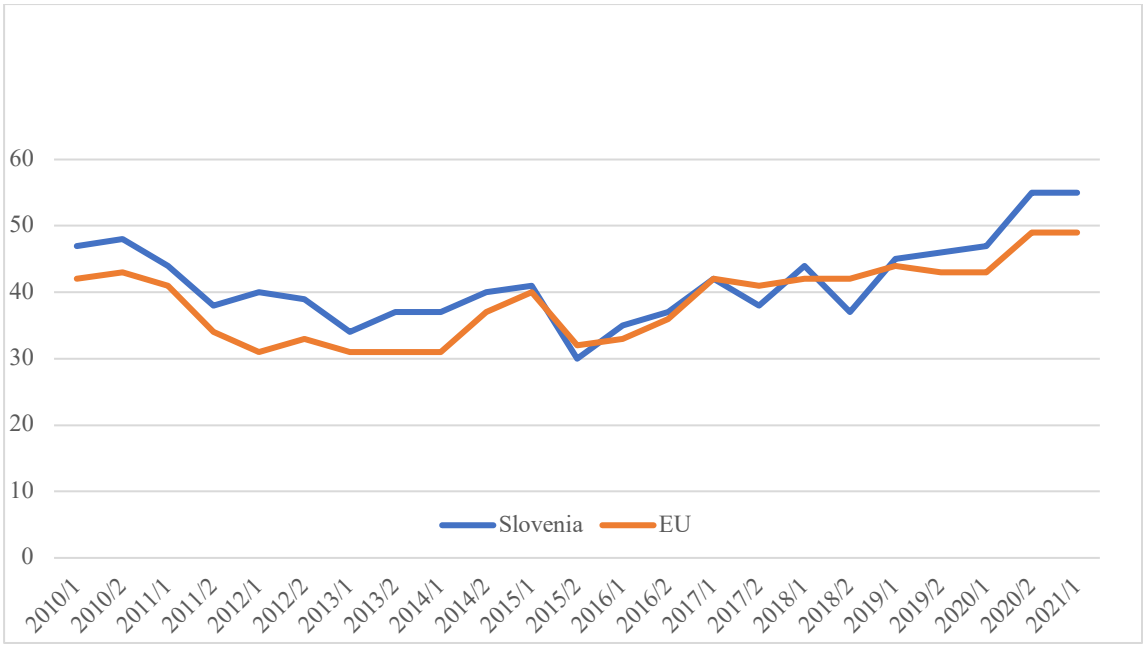
Table 2.1: The complexity of Euroscepticism conceptual alternatives in the literature

"Critical Europeanism (della Porta & Caiani 2009)
Cultural, legitimacy, socioeconomic and sovereignty frames (Pirro & van Kessel 2018)
"Euroalternativism" (della Porta & Caiani 2007, FitzGibbon 2013)
"Euro-disenchantment" (Zamponi 2020)
Europe as an "ideological resource" (Lorimer 2020a)
Europe as tactical resource (Pytlas 2020)
Radical Eurocricism(Milan 2020)
Visions of Europe (Caiani & Weisskircher 2021)

Source: Caiani and Weisskircher 2021

Chapter 3

Figure 3.1. Share of respondents who trust the EU (%)



Source: Own elaboration based on Standard Eurobarometer (2022).

Legend: the percentages represent share of respondents who trust the EU (combined share of answers “totally trust” and “trust”

Table 3.1: Selected Eurosceptic parties in Slovenia in the 2018-2021 period

Party	Sovereignty	Legitimacy	Socioeconomic	Culture
United Slovenia	Against transfer of sovereignty to international organisations such as EU or NATO. 19 European countries are not EU members and Slovenia should join those.	EU hinders national sovereignty. Against European federation and highlights absence of directly elected institutions. European politicians are described as "criminals and thieves".		Migration policy is considered "genocide against Europeans".
Slovenian national party	Slovenia should make decisions independent from those of foreign actors; decisions relevant to it should be made in	Supports Slo-exit to prevent negative impact of trade agreements and enable to engage in stronger trade	Against deepening of the trade between EU and USA (i.e. TTIP) to prevent foreign investors interfering with the right to regulate and	

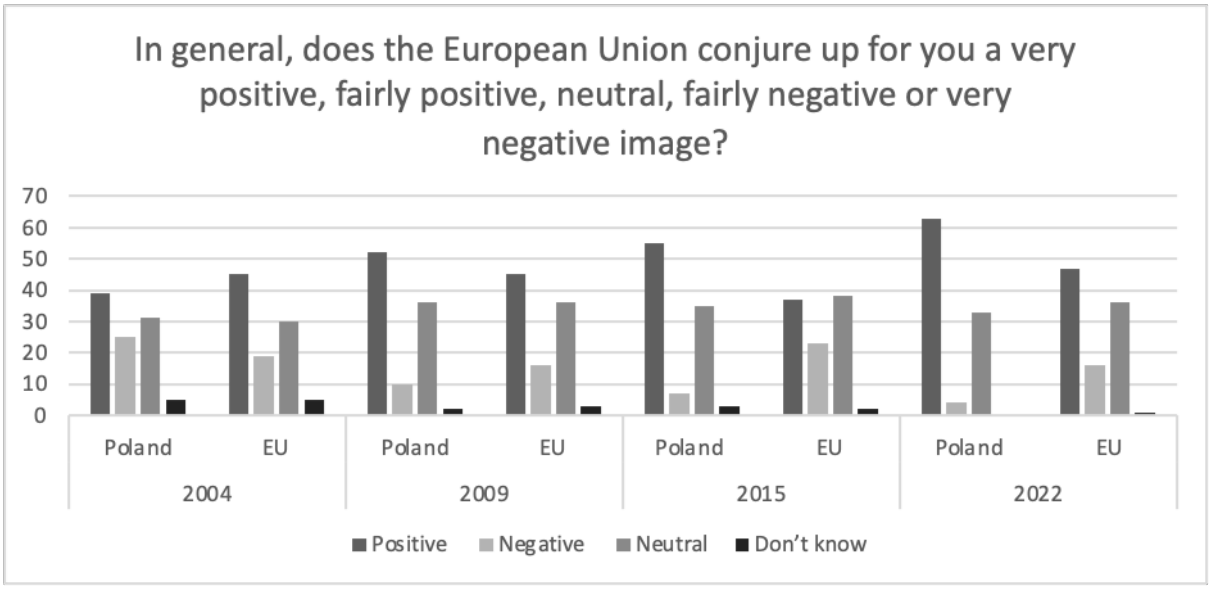
	Slovenia and not in the EU or USA.	relations with the Russian federation.	negative impact on agriculture, economy and environment.	
Homeland League	Against centralisation and Brussels based governance, federalisation.	EU is important for Slovenia and its economy but should be reformed.		Against progressive principles related to migrants and LGBTQ+.
The Left	For sovereignty so that states can determine their economic/trade policies.	Against joining PESCO. EU should demilitarise and cut ties with NATO.	Against the existing regulation that constrains a more social union and enables companies to avoid taxation.	
Socialist party of Slovenia	Supports Slo-exit, EU is a “fascist organisation” headed by Germany. Other states are losing their sovereignty		Supports return of own currency, stronger cooperation with BRICs and Russia.	

	and follow dictate of German elites.			

Source: national Party manifestos of Slovenian Eurosceptic and illiberal parties that ran at the 2018 Parliamentary or 2019 European elections, retrieved from their websites in 2021 (see Methodological Appendix to Chapter 2 for details).

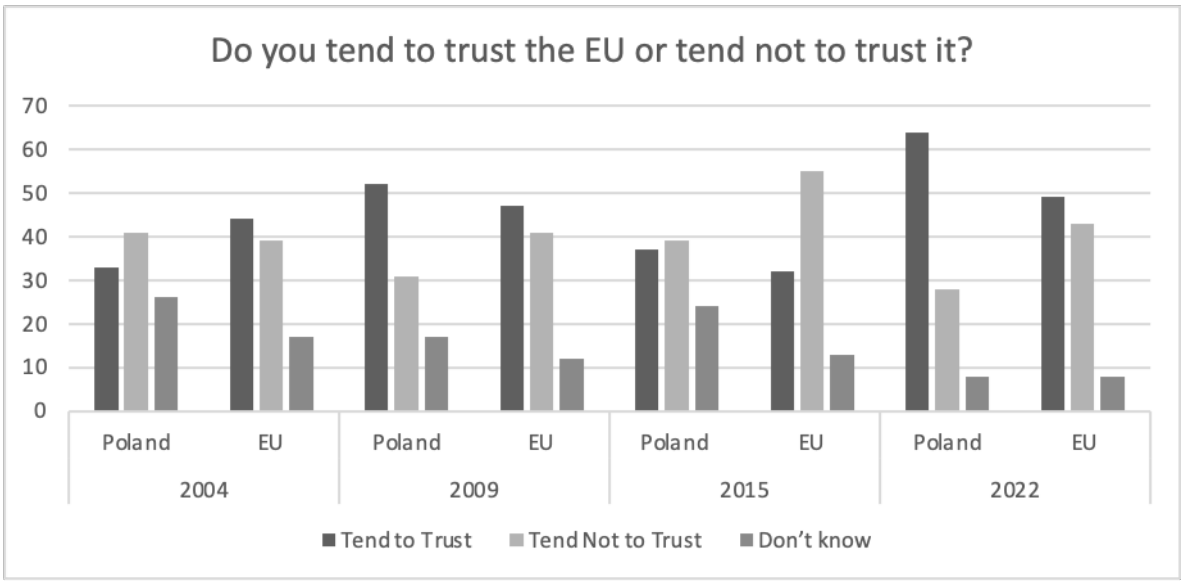
Chapter 4

Figure 4.1. EU image. Polish citizens compared to the EU average



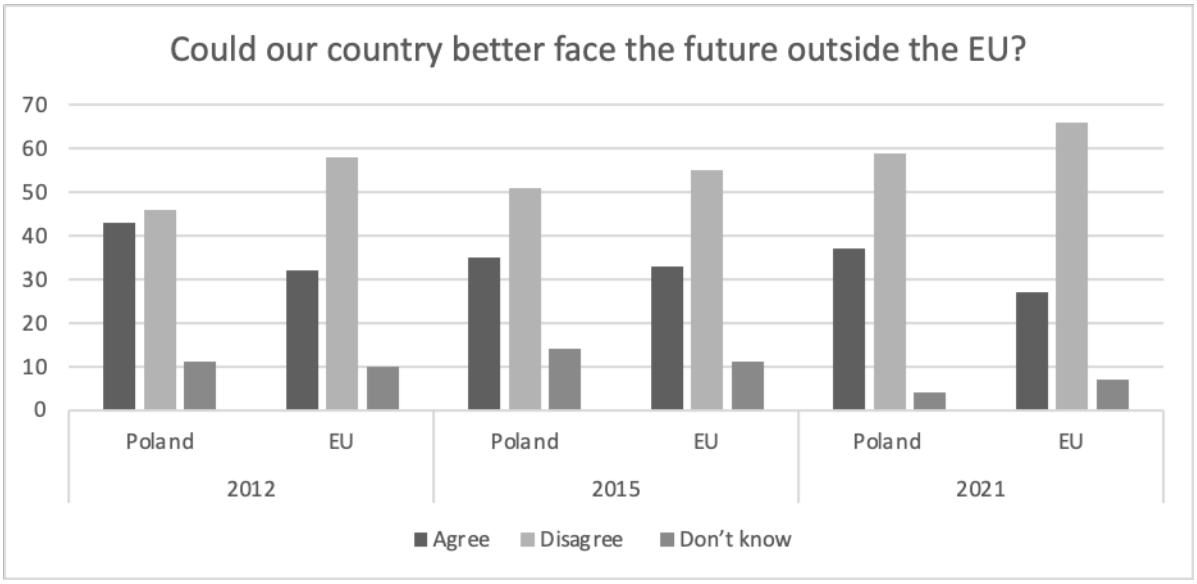
Source: *Standard* Eurobarometer (2022).

Figure 4.2. Level of trust to the EU. Polish citizens compared to the EU average.



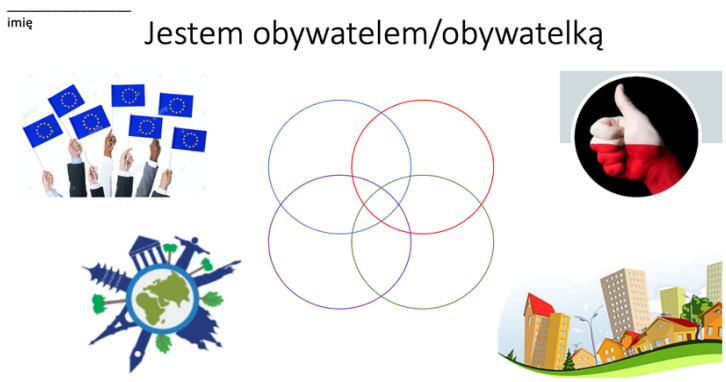
Source: Standard Eurobarometer (2022).

Figure 4.3. Facing of the Future Challenges within or outside the EU. Polish citizens compared to the EU average.



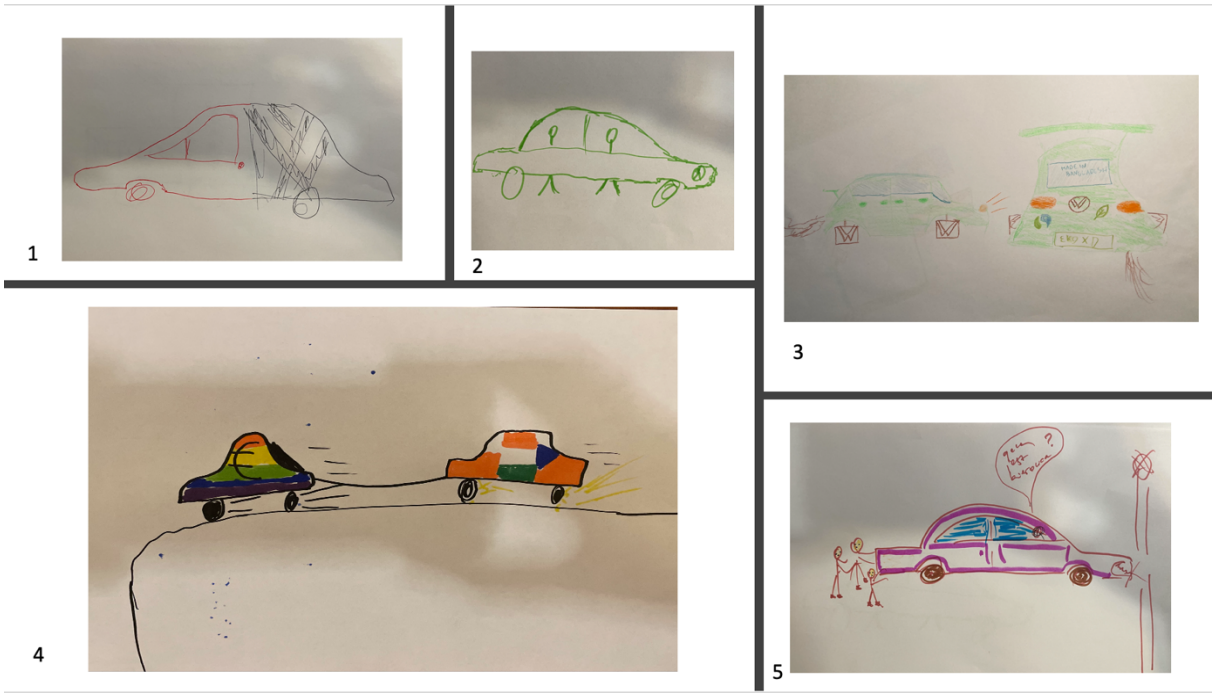
Source: The Special Eurobarometer 500 “The Future of Europe” (2021).

Figure 4.4. The worksheet for the focus groups participants



Note: (translation) The respondents were asked to place themselves within the circles, in response to the sentence: “I am the citizen of….” The pictures depict, as was explained to the participants starting in the upper left corner: European Union, Poland, local community, the world.

Figure 4.5. European Union depicted as a vehicle by the participants of the focus groups



Source: focus groups

Chapter 5

Table 5.1. Differences between cases (core values and grievances on the EU by Italian civil society social movements/associations)

Organization name (participant name)	*Core values*	*Ideology*	*Represented grievances*	*Key claims/frames on Europe/the EU*
Greenpeace Italia (Alessandro Giannì)	- Independency (rejection of funds from the European Union) - Non-violence	Apolitical Environmentalism	Different sectors of the society	No specific identification of the category of people represented: "…all those who care about the future of this planet, in short, the planet we live on."

Movimento Federalista Europeo (Giulio Saputo	- Freedom - Democracy - Political participation - Social justice	Apolitical Europeanism	Create Europe from below	- bottom up mechanism of European democratization - pro-European and federal stances - Against Euroscepticism but constructively Euro-critical - Fight against the exit of Italy from the EU. - Recover and spread the core values of the EU
Movimento Cinque Stelle (Dario Quattromani)	- Environmental sustainability - Democracy - Democratic participation - Honesty, - Legality - Direct democracy	No specific positioning along the left-right continuum	- representation of citizens rather than territories -Creation of an active civil society - Representation of the 'left-behind' -Use of technologies to better understand peoples' positioning	- Environmental sustainability - Europe of values not just economic enterprise - Representation of the marginalized sectors of the society - More citizens' involvement in the democratic game - direct democracy - horizontal decisions

Comitato No Tunnel TAV Firenze (Tiziano Cardosi)	- Anti-fascism - Anti-racism	Left leaning/radical left	Satisfying the needs of the metropolitan city	- consensus method needed - stop a project that "deems essentially wrong" - Participation from below
League (Michael Santini)	- Identity (local identity) - Federalism - Respect of the rules	Right leaning	- Representation of the whole Italian population. - Representation of the interest of little entrepreneurs	- Change over time of the party according to changes in the represented values and grievances - Higher degree of integration within the national context needed . - differences between the ethno-regionalist nature of the party vs. the nationalist one.
Forza Nuova (Luca Castellini)	- Rejection of capitalism - Rejection of communism - National sovereignty - Military independency - Traditional family	Radical Right	They represent Italians in general, what they refer to as "decent italians"	- Expression of the radical-right - Support of the "third position" with outright rejection of capitalism and communism - Rejection of the opposition between the Western and

				the Eastern blocks. -

Sources: In depth interviews

Table 5.2. Main 1Narratives/frames on Europe in Italian political parties, social movement sector and ordinary citizens: A summary

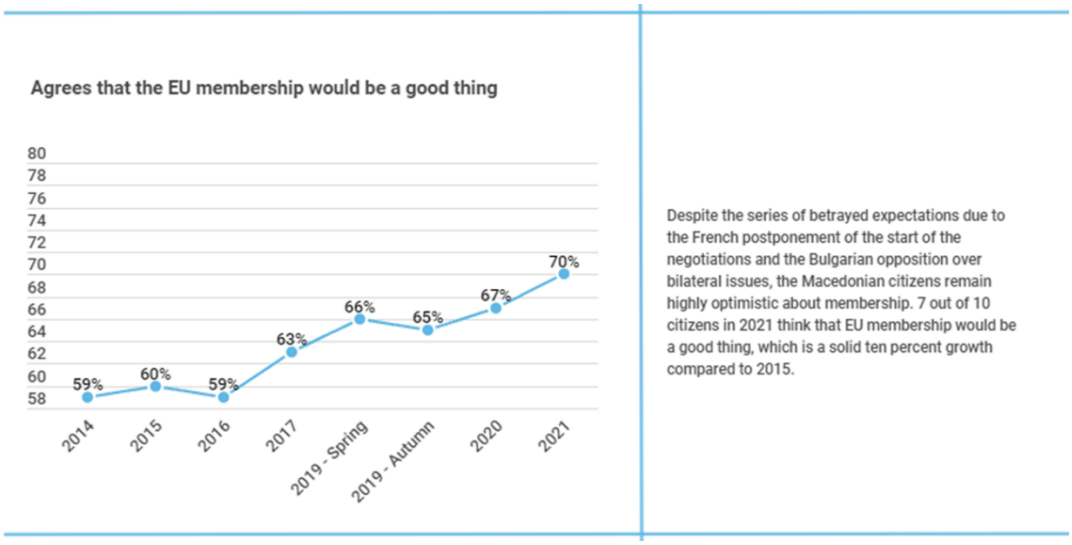
Dimension/justification for support/criticism toward the EU	*Main type of actors*	*Reformist*	*Rejectionist*
Cultural	*(political parties)* • The League • Forza Nuova • Azione Studentesca	• Against the «*cultural homologation* » of the EU «*treating different member states in the same way disregarding local specificities*» (Michael Santini, the **League**)	• Strong opposition toward the EU-immigration policy framed as "*invasion of Europe with the aim to achieve an ethnic substitution* " (Castellini, **FN**) • EU immigration policy taken as starting point for European Cultural integration rejection

Economic	*(both political parties and social movements)* All actors	• All actors: Need for more equality between member states	• The EU as a "*Union of banks and private institutions*" where the financial governance is an "*eternal noose around the neck of countries*" (Castellini, **FN**)
Political	*(both political parties and social movements)* All actors	• Democratic deficit in EU institutions • "*lack of real engagement of citizens in the European decision process*" (Tiziano Cardosi, **Comitato No Tunnel TAV**) • The EU as "*an open contrast between the recognition of civil and human rights and dynastic rights*" (Giannì, **Greenpeace**)	• Need of some supranational structure divided by different arguments BUT sovereignty should be in the hands of each nation state. The EU should be "*structure which core aim is to enable the circulation of goods and people. The emission of money should be given back in the hands of each nation state*" (Castellini, **FN**)

Sources: In depth interviews and focus groups

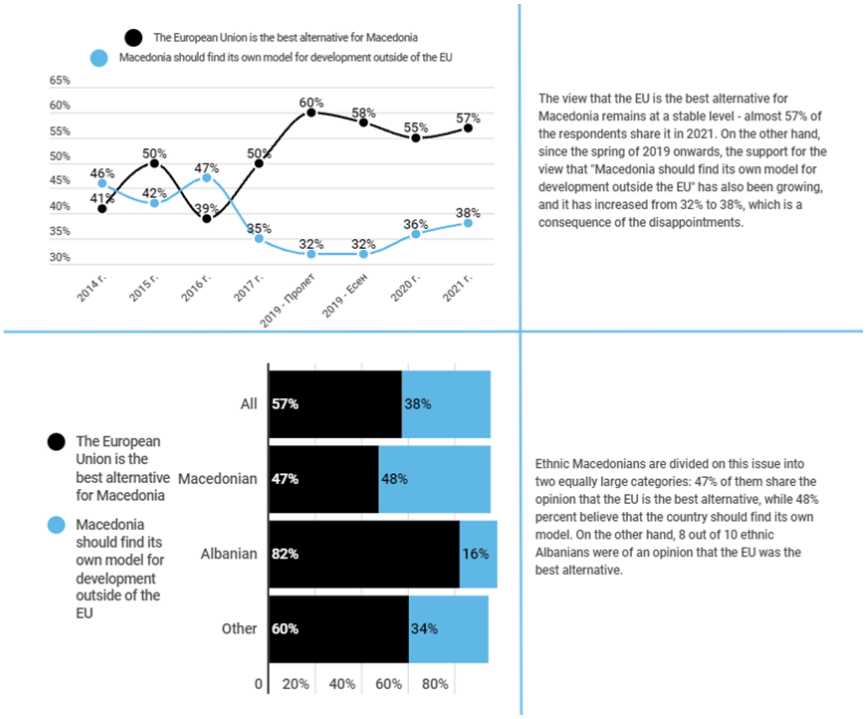
Chapter 6

Figure 6.1. Macedonian Citizens 's position toward EU-membership



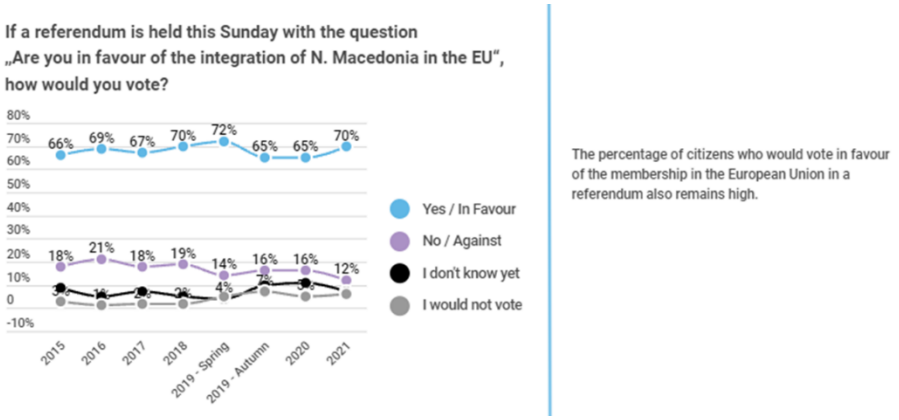
Source: own elaboration based on the data collected by Eurothink in the period between 2014-2021. (positive responses are showed)

Figure 6.2. Surveying Macedonian citizens on Europe: "Which is the best Alternative for Macedonia: becoming a member of the EU or keeping national sovereignty?



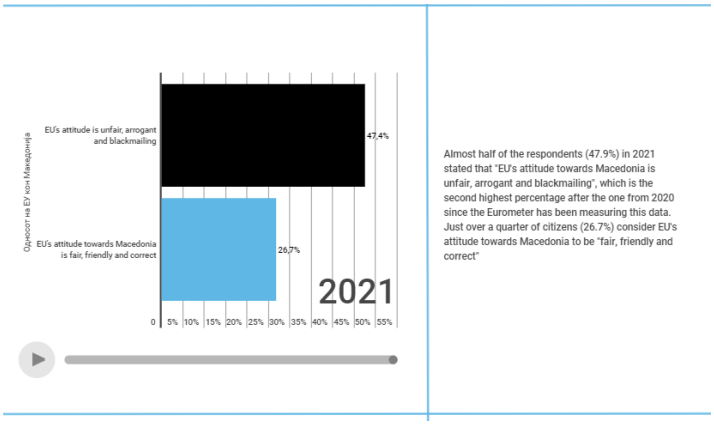
Source: own elaboration based on the data collected by Eurothink in the period between 2014-2021. Data are displayed in aggregated form (first half of the graph and by ethnic groups.

Figure 6.3. Surveying Macedonian citizens on Europe: "If a referendum is held in this Sunday with the question 'Are you in favor of the integration of N. Macedonia in the EU' how would you vote?"



Source: own elaboration based on the data collected by Eurothink in the period between 2014-2021.

Figure 6.4. Surveying Macedonian citizens on Europe: "How would you describe EU attitude toward Macedonia?"



Source: own elaboration based on the data collected by Eurothink in the period between 2014-2021. Available answers: 1) EU's attitude is unfair arrogant and blackmailing; 2) EU's attitude towards Macedonia is fair, friendly and correct.

Table 6.1. Interviews with Macedonian civil society organization: Summary of the key findings

Key findings of interviews:

- The European identity is seen as confronting National identity.
- European identity associated with the EU;
- The most of Macedonians doesn't feel positively about the EU and the overall attitude is influenced by identity erasure and deprivation of sovereignty
- Alliance with Russia seen as guarantor of national sovereignty as one of the biggest alternatives
- National Sovereignty is one of the key concepts

Source: own elaboration based on the interviews conducted in the period between May and June 2021

Table 8.1. Key frames, actors and narratives of Euroscepticism in the case countries

Country	**Frames**	**Actors**	**Narratives (diagnosis, prognosis, motivation)**
Slovenia	Sovereigntism (as an overarching frame, or 'master frame') across the political spectrum (left v. right). Output legitimacy much more important than input legitimacy	Political parties are key actors Civil society often playing an instrumental role On the Left: acceptance of EU	On the radical left, EU as a 'neoliberal', 'impersonal-technocratic' project On the hard right, EU as a 'bureaucratic-centralist' non-democratic' actor advancing 'globalist'

	Prominence of socioeconomic issues (economic welfare, jobs and wages); Ethno-cultural issues and frames and migration important for hard-right parties for justifying their support/criticism of the EU	liberal economic governance On the Right: mainstream parties switched to Eurosceptic, illiberal and hard right rhetoric	and 'neomarxist' agenda
Italy	Reformism as main frame (i.e. reform of EU institutions to fill the democratic gap in particular in the EP Rejectionist frames (mainly on the extreme left and right, i.e. alternative Euromediterranean union)	Political parties as main Eurosceptic actors. Civil society associations active on the ground and mainly following a reformist approach (i.e. Eurocriticism). Extreme right and extreme left associations as rejectionist	Funding values of the EU as core values Current EU institutional asset criticized EU economic integration rejected on the basis of a perceived lack of solidarity (left-leaning actors) or nationalism (right-leaning actors).

			Cultural integration rejected by extreme right actors on the basis of nationalism and EU immigration policy
Macedonia	Euro-enthusiasm (the EU as a significant thread for the survival of the state, the economy and the identity of the dominant Macedonian ethnic population) Eurosceptic sentiments arguing for alternative models not only for the political system, but also for the state's prospects regarding the EU. Strong potential for disrupting the path of European integration.	Political parties as well as other social sectors. New Eurosceptic political parties and informal groups	Reduction of the sense of social responsibility coupled with nationalism and identity perspectives Euroscepticism as the perceived permissiveness of the European elites towards the Bulgarian demands to include compromises on controversial historical topics within the negotiating structure

B&H	Predominant socioeconomic and political Eurosceptic frame The question of the 'unitarization' of BiH and loss of specific ethnic identities	The most important actors are political parties; adoption of Eurosceptic and illiberal positions by main party in RS (SNSD).	EU as an 'ideal', as a place of 'safety, strength and unity' (predominantly Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats from FBiH) vs. EU membership as 'the end of the existence of RS as an autonomous entity' (predominantly Bosnian Serbs from RS).
Poland	Predominance of sovereignty (Europe of Homelands instead of federalisation) and cultural frames (EU perceived as a threat to traditional values) Moderate presence of legitimacy and socio-economic frames (old EU members states as more powerful and dominant vs new states, weaker and ignored and the	Right-wing political parties including government, Law and Justice (PiS) and its younger coalitional partner Solidarity Poland (SP). Nationalistic organisations. No left-wing Euroscepticism.	The EU as a Germany and France-dominated entity; EU elites disconnected from the citizens of the EU, imposing a leftist agenda that stands against traditional Christian values. Germanophobia.

	concept of "unelected bureaucrats") Economic benefits appreciated and valued; however, strong opposition towards adopting the Euro.		EU membership desirable for as long as Poland benefits financially.

[i] https://www.dw.com/en/moldova-tens-of-thousands-gather-in-pro-eu-rally/a-65693417

[ii] This book is based upon material collected within the European project 2021-2022 "Tackling illiberal narratives and Euroscepticism from below", *Europe for Citizens Program* (number: 625696-CITIZ-1-2020-1-MK-CITIZ-CIV). We are enormously grateful to the coordinator of the project Dimitar Nikolovski (dimitar.nikolovski@eurothink.mk) and all the Eurothink team for allowing us to use the data on Macedonia. Chapter 6 is based on the report downloadable at: https://eurothink.mk/home/

[iii] Studies on collective political action have emphasized that levels and forms of mobilization by social movements, interest groups and citizens' initiatives are strongly influenced by so-called political and cultural opportunity structures (POS and COS), namely the set of opportunities and constraints offered by the institutional structure and political culture of the political systems in which these groups operate (e.g., Tarrow, 1994; Koopmans, 2005). From this perspective and focusing on positions and mobilization on Europe/European integration, we can derive, although we move from an inductive approach, a series of guiding hypotheses regarding differences among countries. Particularly relevant for a study focusing on narratives (on Europe) is the analysis of the discursive opportunities and constraints (see chapter 2) (Kriesi, 2004, p. 72). We can expect some alignments to and memories from the past (i.e. historical discourses on Europe/European integration in the

country), also depending on the political allies in power for social movements and in general the government at stake and the political elites discourses (which set the context of the dominant societal usable arguments). Beyond this, however, we can also expect discourses, narratives and positions on Europe be constrained by the various political actors' and organizations' own culture. The exact mix of opportunities and constraints that different country contexts imply for Euroscepticism/pro-European positions will be, in our view, exploited differently by different types of right-wing vs. left wing organizations and citizens. Indeed, as social movement research has stressed, strategic choices are influenced by the characteristics of specific actors, including their availability of material, as well as symbolic, resources (della Porta, 1995).

[iv] While some of our chosen countries (in Europe) are witnessing the emergence (or re-emergence) of (hard) Euroscepticism (such as Poland for example and partly Italy), others, such as Slovenia and North Macedonia are not obvious cases of strong Euroscepticism, while presenting a nuanced picture of pro and against Europe political discourses (the first already departed from the Eurosceptic agenda while the second is one of the most pro-EU candidate countries).

[v] Considering this, we expect to find important differences in the (degree and forms) of Euroscepticism among various organizations within the selected country contexts.

[vi] BiH signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement in 2008 and officially applied for membership of the EU in 2016. Amidst the war in Ukraine, BiH was granted candidate status in December 2022.

[vii] On average, it is two points lower (on scale from 2 to 10) than in comparable Eastern European countries (BTI Transformation Index, 2022).

[viii] Standard Eurobarometer nos. 73–95

[ix] Eurobarometer: Parlemeter 2020: A Glimpse of Uncertainty in Uncertain Times; Eurobarometer Survey 94.2 of the European Parliament: A Public Opinion Monitoring Study; "Democracy in the EU" Special Eurobarometer 507 – October – November 2020; Perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among the general public Flash Eurobarometer 489 2021; Corruption. Special Eurobarometer 502 December 2019; Rule of Law. Eurobarometer 91.3 April 2019; Lovec (2019).

[x] Slovenians constantly featured among those expressing the highest support in the EU for free movement. At the same time, in some polls (especially following the 2015–2016 migration crisis) immigration was seen as one of the key challenges. While support for asylum policies was the lowest among all policy initiatives listed in the polls, two-thirds of Slovenians were still in favour of further reforms in this area. Compared with the EU average, Slovenians associated EU-related free movement with more criminal activities and less control at the EU borders.

[xi] Special Eurobarometer 502, December 2019; Eurobarometer 91.3, April 2019

[xii] Special Eurobarometer 507 – October – November 2020

[xiii] Flash Eurobarometer 489, 2021

[xiv] Eurobarometer Survey 94.2

[xv] Eurobarometer 74 of 2020

[xvi] Some commentators pointed to the high ranking of Slovenia on various freedom indexes and argued that the behaviour of SDS is just a counterweight to the leftists who were exerting control through 'deep state structures' (Turk, 2020).

[xvii] ID2.1 further argued that leftist policy on migration is a matter of false solidarity and concern with human rights: "Communists used to shoot economic migrants while they are now accepting them with open arms". /…/ I support our Minister here, Mr Hojs, because this needs to be stopped at the border. Right from the start, when they come into those boats because half of them ... people are poor, half of them drown. It has to be stopped at the source".

[xviii] The concepts of soft and hard Euroscepticism are defined in line with Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004)-see chapter 1. The pandemic caused a substantial decrease in support for PiS in 2021 but the war in Ukraine stopped this trend ("rally round the flag effect"). In effect, at the end of 2022 PiS enjoyed the support of about 35% of decided voters. Meanwhile, Confederation's popularity oscillated around 7% of decided voters.

[xix] For instance, in the survey conducted in August 2022 by SW Research for the daily *Rzeczpospolita* 60% of all respondents (80% of decided voters) declared that in the case of a referendum on Poland's membership in the EU, they would vote "yes", while 15% would vote "no" (20% of decided voters) and 17% were undecided. Finally, 8% declared they would not participate in the referendum (*Co trzeci Polak…)*.

[xx] According to the Standard Eurobarometer (Summer 2022), almost 65% of Poles had confidence in the EU, while almost 30% of them did not and 4% did not have an opinion. By comparison, the EU's average saw trust at almost 50%, distrust at 43%, and undecided at 8% of respondents (Standard Eurobarometer, 2022).

[xxi] For instance, in the Eurobarometer conducted in winter 2021 (The Special Eurobarometer "*The Future…* 2021), only half of Poles tended to trust the EU and almost 40% did not. Around 12% did not have an opinion. Meanwhile, in summer 2022 this trust increased decisively.

[xxii] Nikola Petrović ascribes the prevalence of right-wing Euroscepticism in Poland to the legacy of the communist regime in the country (Petrović, 2019, pp. 363-384).

[xxiii] The government was created by PiS together with two very small parties that run on the same party list and work as part of a common political group in the parliament.

[xxiv] For more details on the tools and data collection used alongside sampling, see tables 4.A. – List 4.E in the methodological appendix related to the Polish case.

[xxv] According to the CBOS survey undertaken in June 2021, less than half of Poles endorsed achieving climate neutrality by 2050 (Rogulska, 2021).

In a survey published at the beginning of 2022 and conducted by DGP and RMF FM, almost 60% of Poles did not support a rise in energy prices to achieve this energy transformation (Osiecki and Żółciak, 2022).

[xxvi] As Jarosław Kaczyński put it in 2021: "It can be assumed that what is at stake here is a certain intensification of processes that do not lead to development of the EU, but to a deep crisis that is already ongoing, and to

phenomena that have nothing in common with the postulates of the founders of the EU and the practice from its initial years – to creation of a superstate, centralization, and a cultural revolution that is to destroy the existing social structures." (Jarosław Kaczyński cited from the article *Le Pen, Kaczyński, Orban, Salvini* … (2021)

[xxvii] In the Special Eurobarometer "The Future of Europe" conducted in autumn 2020, Europeans were asked if they would prefer a situation where more, fewer or the same number of decisions, respectively, were to be made by the EU in ten years' time. Around 45% of Poles were in favour of approximately the same number of decisions being taken by the EU as today, while almost 30% of Poles declared that they would like to see more decisions made by the EU. About 25% wanted less decisions. In comparison, almost 35% of EU citizens endorsed the status quo, while more than 40% were in favour of the EU making more decisions. Around 20% wanted a reversal of integration. The Special Eurobarometer (2021).

[xxviii] On the other hand, the most recent *Flash Eurobarometers* (2020-2021) suggest that most Poles endorse the adoption of the euro by Poland.

[xxix] According to Freedom House, a US foundation that has been monitoring political systems in the world since the beginning of the 1970s, Poland now finds itself on the verge of being relegated from the category of free to the category of partly free countries after 8 years of PiS at the helm.

[xxx] The opinions depend to a large degree on the questions posed by pollsters. In May 2022 almost 70% of respondents favoured the opinion that the Polish government should implement the EC prerequisites (Sitnicka, 2022). However, in June 2022 more than 60% believed the European Commission should transfer the funds even if Poland did not fulfil the requirements (Lasota-Krawczyk, 2022). In April 2022, in another survey, almost 35% of Poles believed that Poland should stop contributing to the EU budget if it did not receive its EU funds and only slightly more than 35% rejected this proposal. Naturally, this would have represented the nuclear option when it comes to Poland's membership in the EU (Arb, 2022).

[xxxi] As PiS MEP Jacek Saryusz-Wolski said in an interview: "It is not about a federal Europe, but about – to use an old language – an empire with a hegemon, or – in the new language – oligarchic centralism, in which elected political forces are to dominate others against their democratically expressed will." (*Co oznacza umowa* … 2021)

[xxxii] According to an opinion poll conducted at the end of April 2022, only slightly more than 25% of Poles believed that France and Germany, the key EU powers, would support Poland militarily in the case of Russian aggression, while around half of Poles did not subscribe to this opinion (Pur, 2022a).

Moreover, according to another poll released in the middle of May 2022, almost 40% of Poles believed that, because of the war, "Germany will change its policy towards Russia only a little, and that it will continue supporting Russia to a certain extent, both economically and politically." More than 25% believed that "nothing will change fundamentally, and Germany will continue supporting Russia same as before, both economically and politically." (Pur, 2022b).

[xxxiii] Polish conservatives and nationalists often use the term "Latin civilization" as a synonym for the West or Europe.

[xxxiv] In the comprehensive opinion poll "Religious Beliefs and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe", conducted a few years ago by the Pew Research Centre, more than half of Poles said they believed that there was

a conflict between their country's traditional values and those of the West, while less than 35% rejected this idea (only 5% completely). (Pew, 2017).

[xxxv] Robert Winnicki, a MP from Confederation, stated in an interview that "The EU is a tool for the liberals, leftists, nihilists, and globalists. It destroys the human being, the family, and the nation on all levels. It attacks people's gender identity, national identity, and religious identity." (*UE jest narzędziem,* 2019).

[xxxvi] Polish society suffers from a high level of Islamophobia (including, though to a much lesser degree, many liberals and leftists). This is considerably higher than in most EU countries. According to the opinion poll conducted by the Pew Research Centre in 2019, two-thirds of Poles expressed an unfavourable opinion of Polish Muslims, and only around one quarter had a positive opinion (Wike et al., 2019).

[xxxvii] The titles of the subchapters are quotations from "Wiadomości", the main evening news programme on Polish national television. They are cited from the article *"W Faktach…"* (2021).

[xxxviii] The focus groups did not discuss the war in Ukraine because they were organized before the war.

[xxxix] Social identity theory, as Golder explains, assumes that people are prone to associate with similar individuals. This gives them a sense of belonging to the social world, which is essential to their self-esteem and gives them a sense of pride (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). It can result in perceiving other groups as inferior to the individual's own group (Golder, 2016: 485).

[xl] For a complete overview of the latest release of the Eurobarometer Standard 96 Winter 2021 – 2022 (Italian report) see: Standard_Eurobarometer_96_Winter_2021-2022_National_Report_IT.pdf

[xli] For further details regarding the questionnaire for the interviews and focus groups, and the lists of participants, see tables 5.A-5D and Figure 5.A in the appendix.

[xlii] For further information concerning the images, see Figure 5.B and 5.C in the methodological appendix for the Italian case.

[xliii] See methodological appendix figure 5.B