Chapter 8
Conclusion and Discussion

It would seem that European Politics are currently enrolled in a constant flux of uncertainty and anxiousness. The Institutional Matrix and Community of states that make up the Union seemingly cannot catch a break as they meander through a succession of crises and challenges. These are taking their toll on the EU, its unity in decision making, and countries’ commitment to ever closer Union. The sovereign debt crisis and so-called Greek Euro Crisis shook the tacit belief in the current economic architecture of the bloc and questioned the belief in intra-European solidarity. Shortly thereafter, the refugee crisis saw European States adopt ad hoc and sometimes contradictory measures for border control which peaked with the bringing into question of the current Schengen architecture and the long-held commitment to open borders on the continent. Then came the long and convoluted saga of Brexit. With its continuous series of negotiations, exit treaties, and successions of Governments, it reached its conclusion with the exit of UK from the bloc—the first secession in the history of the EU. With the decade coming to a close, European society assumed and hoped that that would constitute the final stress test of 2010s, only for the global pandemic to wreak havoc to the economy that was recovering from the financial crisis’ fallout. The EU’s Covid rescue package negotiations led to renewed souring of relations among the member states as the prospect of wealth transfers and Eurobonds irked nationalist politicians in many member states. Against the background of increasing politicization of Europeanization and polarization of European society (Goldberg, van Elsas, & de Vreese, 2020), Europe’s political systems brace themselves for further success by Eurosceptic parties.

Discussions about Eurosceptic and populist success are currently a rather timely topic (Mudde, 2012), but policy positions opposing European Integration are not an entirely new feature of the politics of the continent. Eurosceptic success was, however, more incremental and grew more slowly in the past. Given that the data used in this study goes back to the 80s, the book explores Eurosceptic contagion in times and circumstances which were less conducive or favourable to Euroscepticism than today. For a range of reasons, opposition to European Integration has not been
used as a political weapon to its full potential from the get-go. It had a comparatively low salience even if the premise among the electorate was there for more conflictual positions on the issue. The salience of regional integration has grown over time, and the issue has gone from being a marginal one in the 80s to one of the most important ones over the past decade. Given that I find evidence for Eurosceptic contagion even in times when the social and political ground was less fertile for it,1 then what is in store for Europe now and in the near future when populist parties seem set to influence the political agenda even more?

In investigating the interplay between populist behaviour and the question of regional integration, this study situates itself within the growing literature and discourse on populist programmatic contagion (Meguid, 2008; Mudde, 2004; Rydgren, 2005; Schumacher & van Kersbergen, 2014; van Spanje, 2010), general party position shifts (Adams, Ezrow, & Leiter, 2012; Ezrow, De Vries, Steenbergen, & Edwards, 2011; Somer-Topcu, 2009), and that on the growth of Euroscepticism (de Vries & Edwards, 2009; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008). It provides further evidence that fringe parties can and do influence the political systems in which they operate, as well extending the argument about the growing potential of Euroscepticism as a political force. Moreover, given this work’s focus on fringe party performance, the text also contributes directly to the literature on the influence of Niche Parties over the political mainstream, including that on Green and Environmentalist Parties (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Spoon, Hobolt, & de Vries, 2014).

The state of the art on populist parties and parties’ position shifts is in constant enrichment; nevertheless, no other studies have taken up an ample investigation of Eurosceptic Contagion besides the one present here and that of Meijers (2015). By touching upon issues of wider and consequential political change in Western Europe, this text offers a link to each of these literatures while at the same time linking up a wider discussion on more ample social and political evolution in Europe (Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Kriesi et al., 2012; Manow, Palier, & Schwander, 2018; Mudde, 2004).

Evolution of European Dissensus

I argue here that the evolution of political parties from mass parties to catch-all parties (and their ideological convergence in the ideological centre)2 helped create a niche for anti-polity, anti-establishment, and anti-EU political positions. The tacit and consensual approach to regional integration sidelined the need to cater to public attitudes towards the EU and that in turn helped foster the public impression of it as distant, unresponsive, and unaccountable. Social, economic, and historical changes helped bring back populist parties and gave them a new lease on life. All these

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1 Across the period described by the CHES, including the late 1980s and early 1990s.
2 In combination with the depoliticized character of integration, especially in the pre-Maastricht period.
parties had to do was to tap into public discontent about catch-all mainstream parties, the EU, and globalization in order to benefit from the niche and political capital that was available. In threatening the established political order, Eurosceptic parties thus forced mainstream parties to be more reflective of the electorate’s less Europhile attitudes (mainstream, moderate parties now finding themselves forced to adjust their positions in order to cater to voters’ own policy preferences). Thus, political conflict is ignited (and grudgingly accepted) on the dimension of Integration.

Ever since David Marquand coined the term ‘Democratic Deficit’ in reference to yesteryear’s European Community in 1979 (Marquand, 1979), it has become a widely discussed topic in the literature on European Politics. Discussion surrounding the democratic deficit is multi-faceted and refers among other things to the unelected position of various offices in Brussels, lack of input legitimacy, the weakness of representative institutions such as the EP, the insulation of technocratic decision-making, and last but not least the seeming absence of political conflict and choice over Europe in its incipient phases, something that has alienated many citizens over time.

According to those who worry about the aforementioned democratic deficit, the continuous, slow but steady integration of the European Union witnessed in the second half of the twentieth century has been an ‘elite project,’ driven by a Europhile, pro-Integration political elite (so common wisdom dictates), which maintained a consensual discourse on the European level. This period in the development of the EU is often referred to as the so-called Permissive Consensus (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970) of the incipient stages of the European Community. As Mair (2007, 1) noted: ‘In the absence if any serious outbreak of opposition, agreement was taken as given. This was the essence of the so-called permissive consensus: there was a consensus in the sense that here was agreement across the political mainstream that European integration should be furthered, and it was permissive in the sense that high levels of trust in the political elites during these years ensured thee was almost always popular deference to their commitments.’

The initial ‘quiescence’ of the masses (especially pronounced in the immediate post-war period) and the apparent consensus (sometimes referred to as collusion) within the mainstream political elites that more integration is intrinsically desirable fed into themselves in a sort of self-reinforcing process whereby lacking discussion, debate, and conflict over Europe and overlapping policy preferences by political actors strongly hampered party competition over ‘Europe.’ For some authors (Katz & Mair, 1995), developments on the EU level (whose influence feeds back into the national arena) can also be seen as symptomatic of a greater change in national democratic politics. The democratic deficit can also be seen as an interaction between the transnational level of Union building and distinctive processes of party evolution at the national levels. Political parties are intrinsic to modern representative democracy, and the nature of political parties has changed over time. The characteristics of parties have changed, their modus operandi evolved, as well as the behaviour of their leaderships and target constituencies. According to Katz and Mair, some of these key characteristics of party behaviour that have varied over periods have cast a strong influence on the terms of inter-party competition.
Originally, mass parties evolved from forms closer to grassroots manifestations often built around well-defined social groups (e.g. the working class), constituting in a way a part of civil society. Political parties evolved as agencies through which these groups (implicitly their members) participate in politics and make demands of the state, hoping even to put their own representatives in key offices. This, however, started to change with the appearance of Kirchheimer’s so-called ‘catch-all party,’ which challenged the idea of the party as a representative of a predefined social group, sector, or strata of society. With time traditional, established political parties in Europe have—simultaneously—lost most of their initial grassroots manifestations and increasingly changed from being organizations meant to represent constituencies into organizations whose main role has become the formation of government and running of the state. Concomitantly, the main objective for most parties became the winning of as many votes as possible in elections, to effectively ‘catch-all’ votes, hence the tag. Parties and the governments they formed are faced with increasingly many principals. Besides their standard constituencies of partisan voters, catch-all parties are now vying for as large a segment as possible of the electorate that is growing increasingly de-aligned (see André, Depauw, & Beyens, 2015). The prospect of government necessitates that parties are at the same time responsive to a swath of private and public organizations, within national borders and outside them. There is a plethora of international fora which states must comply with today (most importantly the EU), not to mention the commitments towards other countries, all the while the electorate is ever more fragmented. On the one hand, the proportion of partisans and nonpartisan voters in society is changing. As society is becoming more atomized, and as traditional clusters of social groups are drifting apart, parties have to respond to an ever diverse electorate, wherein people are less committed to voting consistently for only one party (due to personal family or class histories, as was common in the past) which encourages voter de-alignment.

In their vying for as great a share of the distribution of votes as possible parties have moved increasingly more towards the centre of the political spectrum, attempting to cover as wide a political space, and reach as many voters, as possible. The upshot has been that by doing so, most of these parties helped accentuate the perception that party leaderships are sealed off from society, that they (their members, their leaders, i.e. the political elite) have started to resemble each other increasingly more and ever less with their constituents. As Van Biezen (2004) states, mainstream parties came to resemble something like public utilities in the delivery of good governance. As the parties have moved closer together and the supply of policy alternatives shrank in terms of range, especially so on the issue of Integration which was limited to begin with, so did the alternatives available to voters to the point of limiting the apparent scope for a real choice on EU issues. Those ‘elites’ held responsible for maintaining a consensual discourse on the EU level were the same ones charged with creating the seemingly depoliticized architecture of the European Union, the mainstream politicians, and the leadership of catch-all parties. The fact

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3Kirchheimer (1957); Kirchheimer in Krouwel (2003).
that they seemed to function ever less as representative entities (but as governing and administrative ones instead) for the masses did not help matters, especially when viewed in combination with the reduced competition space for EU policy preferences.

**Opposition to ‘Europe’**

From the Eurocautious, or Eurosceptic perspective, the development of the European level of decision making played a role in the hollowing out of policy competition between parties at the national level. Firstly, ‘Europe’ limited the policy space available to competing parties when policies are harmonized and different policy areas face convergence within the Union. Europe was charged with also limiting the capacities of national parties in government by reducing their policy repertoire and their range of available policy instruments. While national governments may still vary from one another in how they interpret the demands for policy convergence (within a certain margin), the result is often policy that seems to differ too little across moderate/mainstream parties. When decision making is delegated from the national to supranational level, it is most often delegated to nonmajoritarian institutions, from which parties and politics are excluded by design. When this happens, policy is usually decided according to various legal and expert principles, but not subject to opposition politics. This has thus helped reduce the stakes of competition between political parties, to mute the potential differences brought by successive governments and to limit the scope for classical opposition. When policy competition is dampened down in this way, elections become less decisive in policy terms. This also has the effect of making political parties converge, increasing the potential political space/niche for parties willing to criticize the system.

Part of the appeal of populist antisystem Eurosceptic Parties can and should be viewed also from the perspective of avenues made available for opposition of different kinds with time. The development of opposition in Europe (in relation to the processes of European Integration and Enlargement) can be made sense of from a perspective based on Kirchheimer’s now widely quoted and famous essay about the ‘waning’ of Opposition in Western Europe (Kirchheimer, 1957). In it, Kirchheimer described various types of political opposition. The first one, defined as ‘classical’ opposition, reflects a system where those who are not in government opposed and offered alternatives to the policies pursued by the government. The opposition accepts the constitutional order of the polity; it accepts the right of those in power to govern and acts as a shadow (or potential) government which could itself find itself in power in the near future. What it opposes are the individual policies themselves. ‘Opposition of principle’ on the other hand is defined by Kirchheimer as opposition to the polity itself. This opposition rejects the constitutional order ‘out of principle’ and rejects the right of government to govern; in other words, it denies the legitimacy of the system of government and does not wish to be a part of it. Antisystem opposition, or opposition of principle, is undermined when more
scope is afforded to classical opposition. People are less likely to oppose a political system when they are afforded the alternatives to choose from within it (and the possibility to say yes or no to various elements and policies within that political system). When voters are able to express opposition to policies within the polity or are offered an electoral choice that represents opposition, they are less likely to sway by opposition to the polity. When the possibilities to organize classical opposition are limited, the likelihood grows that critics will mobilize around an opposition to the polity itself, out of principle, hence the name.

In its incipient phases, the lack of real consistent opposition to European Integration (whole, or parts of it) enhanced the feeling of ‘elimination of opposition.’ The growing salience of Europe and the initial convergence of political parties in the middle of the political space created a growing niche for ‘opposition of principle.’ As the weight of the EU grew, as its reach into the domestic sphere extended into and impacted national politics, that too helped foster the sentiment of democratic deficit and implicitly the perception of limited possibilities for traditional opposition in relation to the apparent collusion of mainstream politics and lack of critical alternatives at the ballot box. Because of the lacking possibility for real opposition ‘within the system’—i.e., the mainstream parties, the political niche was opened to opposition ‘to the system,’ which new political entrepreneurs are more than happy to exploit it in the wake of growing concerns about state sovereignty, integration, immigration, and economic woes. Such Eurosceptic policy entrepreneurs have also speculated the seeming lack of accountability of decision-making at the EU level, accountability which—as Gustavsson, Karlsson and Persson (2009, 171) have argued—has been of questionable strength. Cathernie De Vries (2007, 364) states that ‘European Integration has motored full speed ahead’ with the expansion of the Union’s jurisdictional authority over a range of policies (from market integration and employment policy to immigration and the adoption of the single currency, Eastern Enlargement, and the negotiation of a proposed ‘Constitution’ for the entire bloc). At the same time, Loveless and Rohrschneider argue that ‘at the core, the democratic deficit is founded on the idea that it is difficult for Europeans to care about a Union whose identity was for so long nebulous or at least limited, but which over time appears to increasingly impinge upon every aspect of their existence’ (Loveless & Rohrschneider, 2008, 15). The development of EU has been characterized by long periods of absence of political conflict on questions of European Integration. More often than not, political contestation on the issue of Europe was muted, and traditionally there was basically little to no Eurosceptic option available to the voter unless she was prepared to go completely outside of the mainstream, an option that was rarely utilized for a variety of reasons.

Another factor must not go unmentioned. In the past, it was harder for populist parties to legitimize themselves, given that less time had passed since the second World War. It was harder to vote ‘nationalist’ and to justify voting for populists. The extreme right was discredited by the memory of the 1930s and 1940s, and the left

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4Especially in light of the growing politicization of the European question.
(to some degree) by the ongoing reality of the cold war. Arguably, the presence of external geopolitical threat helped gel the then members of the EEC together. Due to the outside threat, the permissive consensus was better legitimized. This helped ‘enshrine’ the consensus, as it not only made politicians more amenable to consensus on the EEC, but the ‘people’ more amenable to compromise on the existence and the workings of EU. As one moves further through time though, the safety cushion of cartelized mainstream politics eroded, and certain types of political actions or concepts underwent a change in their acceptability and interpretation, aided by certain exogenous developments. First, memories of past years faded, the cold war (and communism as a perceived threat) fizzled out, nationalists distanced themselves from the World War, and ever-larger populations of immigrants helped give a new lease on life to those parties promoting populist or nationalist stands. Time and historical change offered a new platform for those promoting the nationalist ideas not as an expansionist message, but a more communitarian one, wishing to ‘conserve’ the nation, its ethnic unity and its values. The losers of globalization saw transnationalism sap into their livelihood, supranational decision-making was presented as encroaching upon communities (Kriesi et al., 2008), and the new far right made the masterstroke of promoting welfare chauvinism (De Lange, 2007)—protecting the welfare state and its social democratic policies against immigration, foreigners, globalization, and its strongest expression: the EU. The relegitimized fringe parties of the far right and far left now had the potential to offer a credible challenge and alternative to the mainstream that designed European Integration in its present manifestation. Increasing visibility and contestation of the integration process brought to light the discrepancy between voters and the voted on the desired speed of integration, and this perception of discrepancy perfectly plays into fringe parties’ populist ideology, whose core tenets likewise use the claim that ‘ordinary politicians do not represent the people.’

Cas Mudde (2004, 543) has referred to populism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’ and ‘an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonte generale.’ Central to populist discourse is an ‘us versus them’ categorization of political forces and political relations. When the ‘them/they’ group is constituted and constructed to mean the political leadership of a country (the members of moderate political parties) and equated with elites, the charge is made that the group is unrepresentative and unresponsive to ‘the people’ (or worse, opposed to furthering the interests of the latter) and that the situation—the political landscape of the polity—must be rectified. When the members of grassroots, fringe, or radical parties brand themselves as being part of the ‘us,’ a collection of potential politicians untainted and corrupted by the ‘elitism’ of those in the political centre, they are attempting to show themselves on the side of the people, the ‘us’ in the struggle against the out-group of elites.
Successful Challengers

Norris suggested (Norris, 2005, 15) that the spatial spread of mainstream parties all across the ideological spectrum constrains the opportunities for the radical right or left to expand. It is in those countries where the major parties of the left and right converge in the moderate centre of the political spectrum, and where major parties failed to address the issues of race relations, immigration, and free-market economics (that concern the electorate), that the most space is allowed for the radical right or left to maximize their support in. Such a policy space with a large open niche for policy entrepreneurs opened with ever-growing Europeanization, in a manner similar to how shifts by social democratic and socialist parties on economic and social issues altered the political opportunity (and expanded it) for right-wing populists in some countries (Spies, 2013; Spies & Franzmann Simon, 2011). Following the work of Hooghe and Marks (2009) and Meguid (2005), issue promotion is more often than not the territory of small parties or parties on the fringes of the political spectrum (most often, these go hand in hand). Hobolt and De Vries (2015) argue that the most likely issue entrepreneurs tend to be fringe and radical parties (while the mainstream—especially governing parties—are less mobile and innovative). These new political parties typically lie on the periphery of political party systems, often displaying more grassroots characteristics than mainstream parties and offer an alternative policy position to the central parties EU position that was previously missing. Thus, they exploit the demand for opposition to Integration, for an alternative position previously missing. Moreover, parties on the fringes of the political spectrum have a strong interest in restructuring contestation to broaden their voter base, because their extreme position on the left/right dimension is likely to provide a low ceiling to their support base. As a result, these parties have an incentive to find some alternative issue that beats the winner. Problematizing European Integration and an attitude more sceptical of the EU offers them a weapon with which to punish the political mainstream for its lack of flexibility over Europe. The sort of issues that parties on the extreme left and right can be expected to pick up would be those maximizing consistency with their ideological platforms, while at the same time minimizing positional distance to some untapped concern of the public. The EU issue shapes up nicely to be such an issue because Euroscepticism is ideologically consistent with these parties’ general scepticism of the economic and political status quo, and public opinion is generally more Eurosceptic than mainstream elites (Costello, Thomassen, & Rosema, 2012)—a situation which Hooghe (2003) refers to as ‘Europe Divided.’ Thus, opposition to European Integration should enhance extremist parties ‘credibility’ since it fits well with their existing ideological profile (although euroscepticism is not exclusively limited of the far right or far left) and taps into voters positions on the issue. The erosion of the permissive consensus (and other conditions) set the scene for these parties to capitalize on the situation and capitalize they have. Eurosceptic parties have in various ways managed to surprise the establishment with their results at the ballot box, and with every passing election, surprise is slowly turning into panic.
The growing success of populist parties has not remained undocumented in the field of electoral politics. Pippa Norris (2005) offers a detailed account of why conditions have become so ripe in Western European polities to make possible the threat of Mudde’s Populist Zeitgeist (Mudde, 2004). Formulated in Downsian parlance, the position of the mean voter is not static, but changes with time (sometimes more rapidly, sometimes more slowly for a variety of reasons). Such changes may be gradual, cumulative long-term shifts, or induced by external shocks and changes in the political–economic environment. Norris argues that the impact of globalization acts like such a ‘shock’ to public opinion, driving the rising demand for cultural or economic protectionism (Norris, 2005, 23). The rising salience of cultural protectionism, with its affiliates, globalization, immigration, etc., has altered public agendas in various countries, across countries. It is developments such as these that inform theories like those of Marks and Wilson (2000) according to which the new concerns about Europeanization are assimilated by fringe parties, ‘worked on top and into’ the preexisting political ecology.

For Norris (2005, 24), radical right parties have best responded to this change in public opinion by articulating concerns and supplying policies about cultural protectionism, thereby meeting public demand. Rydgren (2004, 475) argues that the new populist right has managed—in the wake of new fears induced by globalization, immigration, and the likes, to promote a new ‘master frame’ of issues which distinguished it from the old European right and managed to draw voters away from more established parties. According to the author, this success was contingent and dependent on certain political opportunity structures provided by the political system in the form of catch-all party convergence. Facilitating demand-side explanations for such changes in the electorate, one cannot discount the phenomena of partisan de-alignment and increasing political dissatisfaction, which make it easier to defect from the traditional mass parties. Survey evidence indicates a loosening of the lifelong bonds tying loyalists to mainstream parties in many established democracies (Norris, 2005, 13). The dynamics of party support have changed insofar as the electorate consists ever less of party partisans. Parties themselves, in their conversion to catch-all parties (see Katz & Mair, 1995), have relinquished their dependence on a certain core of devoted voters. In the process, everyone has become a potential voter for every party and a swing voter. These weakened ties of voters to certain particular parties have made it easier for voters to become dissatisfied with politicians, which they felt are no longer represented by them. Thus, the convergence of catch-all parties, voter de-alignment, and the depoliticized architecture of EU integration helped reinforce one another and, under the auspices of globalization and discontent with it, offered fringe parties the targets required for populist discourse and attacks.
Globalization and the Changing Landscape of Party Politics

At the beginning of the new millennium, Mark Franklin and Cees van der Eijk (2004) used the metaphor of a ‘sleeping giant’ to warn about the perils of Euroscepticism and the potential it had to disturb traditional European Politics. The giant was said to be asleep because it had not yet been activated, and tapped in as a political force, it was not yet properly relevant to political competition. It was a giant because of the great potential power it harboured, to uproot and change politics in Europe—if awakened. The authors claimed that the distribution of voter preferences on the alternative issue and dimension of political conflict does not overlap with that on the traditional, economic dimension of politics, but is instead orthogonal to it. The implication was that if elections were actually run the basis of such political conflicts and issue agendas, it could unearth the structure of politics in Europe as we know it. While many may deem such changes and evolution of Europe’s political landscape as unfortunate, some have not missed the opportunity to specify that Euroscepticism is in a sense part of the democratization of the EU (de Wilde & Trenz, 2012). According to them, ‘Euroscepticism points towards the emergence of elements of popular democracy in a system that is not fully reached or accessed by conventional procedures of representation’ (de Wilde & Trenz, 2012, 550).

Opposition to regional integration is becoming a relevant political topic and position, the electorate and public are voting in accordance, moderate parties are losing their voters and power base, while populist Eurosceptic parties are turning into a determining force of political competition. Hooghe and Marks’ (2009) Post-Functionalist Theory of European Integration has at its heart the idea the European Integration, the EU, and European politics have entered a new (post functionalist, posteconomic) phase of political engagement and dynamics. According to their thesis, future conflict about European Integration will be no longer be determined by economic considerations, but by questions of identity (see also Börzel & Risse, 2009; Schmitter, 2009). In a rejoinder to Hooghe and Marks (2009), Kriesi (2009) compares the former’s depiction of identity as the basis for new political conflict to his own assessment of culture (the cultural dimension) as the catalyst for new political dynamics.

Whether one refers to culture, identity, or some other concept that can describe the new cleavage of the contest, it is clear that European Politics has entered an era where political parties have far less room to manoeuvre and are under more pressure with regards to their political message and actions towards Europe. These changes vis-à-vis support and opposition to European Integration are mirroring those described by the likes of H. Kriesi, Romain Lachat, or Edgar Grande, when discussing political and social changes in Western Europe from a wider perspective. In a way, the entire problem of Eurosceptic Contagion can also be seen as a part/parcel of this wider perspective. In the view of Edgar Grande (2012), globalization has led to a ‘fundamental’ change of cleavage structures, parties, and party systems in Western Europe. These changes occurred at several levels—at that of societal
conflicts (their structure and conflict-determined political space), that of political parties, and even that of entire party systems and their respective competitive dynamics. While globalization has long been seen as a result and outcome of agency, of decision making, the phenomenon has now begun to transform the very basis of politics in Western Europe. For Lachat and Kriesi (2008, 275), the basis for this change has been a transformation of political party competition ‘from an essentially economic to an increasingly culturally determined confrontation.’ Globalization has fuelled and set the basis for a new line of conflict whose characteristic, specific issues are with time picked up, used, and articulated by various political parties. Cultural issues have become ever more relevant for explaining the structure of party positions, and such issues that materialize around problems of globalization (such as questions of European integration) become increasingly salient. These changes and transformations are said to reflect changes taking place in the structure and political attitudes within the electorate. These changes, the new line of conflict, are turning Europe’s political landscape into one that is moving away from the old one-dimensional (economic) one towards one that is multidimensional. The new, second dimension is one that Kriesi et al. term ‘the integration–demarcation’ dimension, and this line of conflict will—the authors argue—determine not only voters’ attitudes but also their voting choices. This is the basis of the now famous ‘New Cleavage Hypothesis,’ which states that the new Cleavage will cast a strong influence on European Politics from now on. This new political cleavage, this new political faultline, which pits the supporters of globalization against those of renationalization and those of integration against those of demarcation, is predicted to influence politics in Western Europe in the years to come. Looking at the current presidential race in the USA, we might have reasons to assume that the New Cleavage Hypothesis could even hold across the ocean.

The findings in this book show that the alternative political dimension is already influencing politics in Europe in line with the above-mentioned work referring to the multidimensionality of European Politics. The political establishment in Western Europe is forced to acknowledge the electorate’s fatigue and irritation at the project of ever closer Union and forced into political choices it was able to avoid until the present day. For better or worse, European Integration is now politicized. While the work referenced above describes the wider changes to those social cleavages that inform and influence politics in the Western world, this project focused instead on a narrower and more minute aspect of these changes in European Politics: how Eurosceptic policy position spread in Europe’s party system due to the rational vote seeking logic followed by political parties. It focuses on the behaviour of political parties and the factors that influence the manner in which they adjust and adapt to the challenge of Eurosceptic policy entrepreneurs. While works such as those of Kriesi et al. paint the entire socio-political landscape, this study attempts to draw the portrait of some of the actors in that landscape and—in the process—explore their interactions and their behaviour in the electoral contest.

Given mainstream and moderate parties traditional attachment to European Integration, this book also argues that while Eurosceptic contagion might be happening, while mainstream parties are indeed sliding in a Eurosceptic direction, the
fact that such changes are not tactically instrumental gives advocates of European Integration some measure of hope. If moderate centrist parties adjust in such a way that steals the populists’ thunder and maintain enough public support to keep the latter locked out of power (which is no longer a definite given, considering the continent’s volatile political environment), it could be possible to see not a rollback of European Integration, just a stalling and halting of it. Even in such a scenario, the near future might be a bumpy ride. In the introduction, I brought up the bicycle metaphor often used for the European Union, based on the assumption that it must constantly progress in order to not fall. Progress is becoming more difficult as present developments are showing. It is becoming increasingly fashionable in political science and economics to postulate and prophesize the limits of globalization given the inherent centrifugal tensions and stresses it entails for nation states. These tensions and forces have been used repeatedly in various heuristics that plot the difficulties in reconciling integration and ebbs of public preferences. Dani Rodrik (2011) has popularized the so-called globalization trilemma (by full name, the ‘inescapable political trilemma of the world economy’), an impossibility theorem presented as a paradox which argues that states cannot pursue in full all three of economic globalization, liberal democracy, or nation state sovereignty at the same time. One option is global federalism, within which democratic politics meet a globalized economy, at the expense of nation state-based politics (national economic rules tend to become redundant when they are subordinate to supranational economic rules that take precedence). Combining deep economic integration with the sovereign nation state (keeping the sovereign nation state but making it responsive only to the needs of the international economy) results in what he terms a ‘golden straightjacket’ of the type that the gold standard afforded. In such scenarios, domestic considerations sacrificed (e.g. independent monetary policy). Finally, in the view of Rodrik, states could roll back the ambitions of globalized economics in a manner approximating the Bretton Woods compromise where globalization is kept in check for the sake of state sovereignty and democratic politics (Fig. 8.1).

Lord Ralf Dahrendorf, a prominent liberal politician and member of both the German Parliament and the British House of Lords (1995), offers a similar perspective on globalization. In his view, states cannot pursue at the same time and in full liberal democracy, economic globalization, and social cohesion (this element substituting in his variant of the theorem Rodrik’s sovereignty corner). The dynamics of economic globalization are, accordingly, such that governments are eventually faced with tough choices that are to be made. Instead of reneging on the economic growth that comes with economic globalization, some more authoritarian regimes opt to reduce the scope of liberal democratic principles, promising in exchange do deliver stability and prosperity and protect social cohesion. This is in other words the ‘social’ pact between quasi authoritarian politics and communities. Other polities go down the road of maintaining the democratic principles that underlie liberalism, but must come to terms with the weakening of social cohesion. This occurs as certain socio-demographic groups, constituencies, or social classes are put under increasing economic strain and the threat of economic exclusion, while more mobile constituencies (the winners of globalization) acquiesce to the more fluid environment. In the
process, social bonds and the premise and basis for social policy (the welfare state) are weakened (Fig. 8.2).

The two theorems overlap because they are at a fundamental level the same. While it is obvious how economic globalization and liberal democracy equate in the two theorems (see also Buti, 2019; Buti & Pichelmann, 2017), it might at first sight seem that the third corner is intrinsically different. However, it must be recalled that social cohesion at the societal level is intrinsically tied to the possibility of a ‘community of shared fate’ to pursue together, and enact, economic—and implicitly also social—policy. Such communities are more likely to see the state as an
instrument or vehicle through which they can enact social policy. For this, a sovereign capacity to enact policy without external restrictions, culminating in a welfare state, is necessary. National welfare states are put under strain when polities can no longer pursue Keynesian courses of action, or when their monetary and fiscal manoeuvring room is reduced by external factors—such as those that arose following the European Monetary Union, Banking Union, and the sovereign debt crisis. Where there are less social cohesion and horizontal social trust, universal welfare systems face a more difficult time (means-tested measures may in such circumstances be more resilient). National institutions and adherence to them will thus erode more quickly. National Social Cohesion, the possibility of social policy and the potential to use what Gustavsson (2014) terms ‘legitimate protectionism’ are all intertwined.

In a way, these impossibility theorems share a strong similarity to an impossibility theorem that is perhaps better known among economists and students of political economy: the ‘impossible trinity’ of free capital flow, fixed exchange rates, and a sovereign monetary policy (Fig. 8.3).

From some perspectives, the impossible trinity reflects to quite a degree the current issues facing the architecture of the Eurozone. There is a common (nonsovereign) monetary policy that is the realm of the European Central Bank, free capital flow (one of the fundamental freedoms of the common market), and a fixed exchange rate (the Euro, functioning from some points of view as a gold standard). Material and institutional differences between the economies of the Eurozone (differences in industrial profiles, competitiveness, historical legacies, and types of welfare systems) result at times in difficulties to find a matching ‘one-size-fits-all’ monetary policy. Current debates about the need to advance or complete fiscal union or to deepen the redistributive mechanisms within the current architecture in a quantitative manner if not in a qualitative way leak into negotiations.
between net spenders and receivers within the Union or between various groups of countries. In fact, this is recently the situation in the case of the Coronavirus recovery mechanism or the latest EU budget negotiations.

Just as Rodrik’s Trilemma and Dahrendorf’s Quandary were shown to overlap above, the so-called impossible trinity overlaps partially, although not completely, with the former two. The impossible trinity describes the challenge in reconciling unfettered capital flows, sovereign monetary policy, and fixed currency exchange rates. Free capital flows can stand for economic globalization—unfettered economic exchanges. Independent monetary policy would stand for the sovereign nation state (and social cohesion in the Dahrendorfian treatise on the issue), while fixed exchange rates constitute the noncommon element. Just like the previous two ‘paradoxes,’ the trinity implicitly makes a prediction about the future of united Europe and globalization as a whole—the ‘bicycle’ of Integration must advance from the current shape and format, or roll back, since the current set-up is suboptimal, according to it.

How such a paradigm resonates with the current economic and political stresses that manifest themselves in Western Europe is easy to see. Europeanization is the strongest form of globalization, a form of ‘globalization on steroids’ if you will. No other region in the world is as interlinked (from all points of view), and no other integration project is as advanced. The EU displays a strong commitment to the unfettered freedoms of goods, services, people, and capital to cross national borders without restrictions, in its endeavour to achieve a ‘complete single market.’ Moreover, a majority of EU members are members of the European Monetary Union and share the Euro as a common currency, with all its advantages and disadvantages.

The phenomenon of Eurosceptic Contagion is highly significant and consequential. It is significant and in a manner that transcends the mere debates of academic curiosity, since it carries the potential for strong distributive and geopolitical consequences. The future of globalization and perhaps even the entire enlightenment project is at stake. A series of authors have approached the current tensions of nationalism and Euroscepticism from the perspective of the failure to complete the triangles described above, or—as in the words of Dahrendorf, of squaring the circles. O’Rourke (2014) sees the current tensions inherent in the architecture of European Monetary Union and the Eurosceptic contestation as representation of the inherent stresses in the Trilemma. According to Merler (2018), European Integration has failed to square the circle of the Quandary, and the tensions between Europeanization and Democracy and Cohesion should be seen from this perspective of a currently untenable (in the long run) position. Wolfgang Streeck, one of the earliest and best-known critics of the EMU, has also discussed the current centrifugal forces from this same perspective, of the difficulty in reconciling democracy, the maintenance of social cohesion, and economic transnationalization (Streeck, 2018).

Their perspectives all come down—fundamentally—to a similar question: how far can European Integration advance and resist the current pressure exerted on it before mainstream politicians will decide to ‘slow down’ or give up on the aim of ‘ever closer union’? This book argues that that process has already begun and that European leaders are now paying ever more respect to Eurosceptic positions.
While that can be counted as a ‘win’ for democracy, it also entails the prospect of a fundamental change in the way EU integration has proceeded until now.

A Break with the Past in European Party Politics?

Historically, the structure of political conflict and the shape of political parties have often also been a function of wider societal political change. From Weltanschauungsparteien to the Mass Party in the era of expanding enfranchisement, and from Kirchheimer’s Catch-all Party to the Cartelization of Parties in more recent times, the nature of the contest between parties has been a function of the changing landscape of constituencies and dynamics of public opinion. Western polities are increasingly characterized by the simultaneous weakening of party ties, discontent with traditional politics, and the growing gap between supporters and opponents of globalization, integration, denationalization. The main conclusion or take away of this project is that as Eurosceptic parties grow successful enough, the other parties will move to copy, at least to some degree, elements of their discourse or policy positions. I also imply that while this might slow down the process of Integration, it will not reverse it, provided that mainstream, Europhile parties manage to remain at the helm of political decision making and keep Eurosceptic parties out of power. That, however, is no certainty in the present environment of European Politics. In closing, it merits to take a second and postulate on the changing structure of inter-party conflict as well as the evolving landscape of European Politics. In a number of countries, political parties and actors that previously lay on the fringes of the political scene are mounting an ever-growing challenge for the centre stage of the electoral race. The causes are multiple and intertwined, ranging from voter dissatisfaction with the cartelization of politics, to the erosion of party-constituency ties, to growing apprehension about globalization, and—as is increasingly popular to argue—heightened polarization. One of the consequences of said developments is the growing success of populist or fringe parties and growing polarization of policy preferences within the landscape of public opinion. Significantly, it is not just the rise of populist and Eurosceptic parties that demands attention, but also parties that are positioning themselves in opposition to them, at the progressive pole—parties such as Social Liberal ones and the Greens.

Consider Austria, where a recent presidential election produced a run-off result where neither of the two candidates came from one of the two main established parties of Austrian politics (the candidates of the SPÖ and the ÖVP came 4th and 5th, respectively). Not only was there a poor showing by the historical Volksparteien, but the two candidates that made it to the second round represent what is arguably the poles of the political landscape: Norbert Hofer of the right-wing Austrian Freedom Party and Alexander Van der Bellen, nominally an independent candidate but actually a member of the Green Party. Such tendencies are present in many other western polities. A process of a somewhat similar flavour is animating German politics, where the last legislative elections witnessed significant losses by
both the CDU as well as the SPD, with the AfD and the Green Party gaining at their expense. Opinion polarization has been galvanized by issues such as the Euro crisis and the recent refugee crisis, with political actors and segments of society taking sides on a cleavage defined seemingly ever more by a cosmopolitan–nativist (pro/anti-immigration, refugees, EU) divide where the AfD stands at one pole and more progressive forces (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) at the other.

Italy went through a phase recently in which the two main poles of power in the country were the far-right Lega and the progressive, left-wing populist Five Star Movement. The last French presidential elections were characterized by a situation in which of the top four candidates, only one came from the historical political establishment of Republicans/Gaullists and Socialists. One came from the far left (Jean-Luc Mélenchon), one from the far right (Marine Le Pen), and one came from a new liberal movement which won the run-off election (E. Macron).

In the USA, among the last three persons vying for candidacy nomination in the 2016 presidential race (D. Trump having already secured Republican nomination and B. Sanders and H. Clinton fighting over the Democratic one), one advocated policy views often decried as far-right populist, while another ran on a populist left-wing platform. Both presented the idea of ‘turning away’ from mainstream politics in a break with the past and the political establishment. In the course of the Trump presidency, the progressive and far-left wing of the democratic party has arguably become stronger and more mobilized under the conditions of new leadership, such as that of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. In Great Britain, the UK Independence party not only mobilized the issue of European Integration and forced debate about it to the very centre of the political agenda, but also managed to achieve and accomplish its raison d’être: the UK has voted to leave the European Union. At the same time, the two main political parties (reflecting developments across the ocean) were forced to put up with internal tensions that reflected wider voter apprehension with mainstream politics as their then-leaders in the run-up to Brexit (Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn) came under increasing pressure within their own parties due to the tensions between the radical and moderate wings within the parties.

The landscape of public opinion and political preferences has become such that voters are abandoning the political centre for the fringes of the political spectrum. This phenomenon is not isolated. This thinning of the centre is instead part and parcel of a larger wave of political discontent with mainstream politics combined with an apparent polarization of public opinion and political preferences (especially/more so along the lines of alternative political dimensions). This manifests itself as growing voter defections whereby individuals are taking their all-precious vote either to a resurging populist far right that espouses communitarian, conservative, anti-immigrant, antiglobalization as a political message, or a left-wing scene (often populist as well) that combines a traditional focus on social equity and redistribution with progressive positions on immigration, environment, and bottom-up decision making. Green Parties and Far-Right Parties have positioned themselves as polar opposites on the pro/anti-EU dimension (as well as a few others). During recent election campaigns in Germany, for example, AFD posters quite commonly sported the following slogan: ‘Grün ärgern? Blau wählen!’ That would translate in a summary
fashion as ‘do you wish to annoy the greens? Then vote for blue’ (blue is the colour of the AfD within the German electoral landscape). This was meant as a signal to voters that the AfD is the right choice for anybody who is opposed to the culturally and politically pluralist positions of the German Green Party. Thus, while the far right has become increasingly Eurosceptic, Green parties have become increasingly pro-EU, in a reversal of the situation from a few decades ago. At the same time as this ‘rotation’ has been going on, both sets of parties (along with the far left in several countries) have been gaining winning over voters at the expense of the political centre. In the parallel process of making their electability be ever more about ‘for’ and ‘against’ European integration, and making themselves ever more appealing to various constituencies and voterships, these party families have brought about elections that are truly European in an unexpected, out-of-left-field fashion. These recent electoral developments on various levels (local, regional, national, and even European) have led to developments that seem to confirm Anthony Downs’ postulation about elections becoming truly European.

Centre-Left and Centre-right parties are forced to cohabitate in ‘grand coalitions’—lest they break the cordon sanitaire that is a tradition in many countries (Downs, 2002). These coalitions are themselves no longer so grand—in some countries, they are barely able to hold on to the parliamentary majority, while in others, all the old volksparteien together are unable to muster enough seats for coalition building. They thus come to approach and approximate each other again—Social Democratic and Christian Democratic positions on integration become harder and harder to distinguish, as they collectively morph into one large pro-EU collective/pole. This, however, can help fuel politicization and, somewhat ironically, carries the prospect of further aiding anti-EU forces down the road. In a more recent piece on structural change in Western Europe’s party systems, the ‘initiators’ of the Postfunctionalist research agenda on European Integration, Hooghe and Marks (2018), state in an article that paid homage to the great Stein Rokkan that European politics may be due for another fundamental ‘break’ or reset of the party-political landscape. Because of the immobilism of traditional, established, and large political parties, the evolution of party systems is characterized not by ‘slowing’ evolution, but something more akin to episodic, paradigmatic breaks with the earlier periods caused by the apparition and success of new parties that usher in the new eras. One could easily see the current changes in European Politics light of precisely these shifts, lending credence to their perspective. On the other hand, the main idea of this book is that mainstream parties CAN adjust and qualify their positions in a manner that copies those of policy and issue entrepreneurs. The question is how well and convincingly they can do it. If they navigate the electoral pressures well, they may still maintain their politically central position.
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