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## Denouncing European Integration Euro-scepticism as Reactive Identity Formation

Hans-Jörg Trenz and Pieter de Wilde



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## **Abstract**

The spreading phenomenon of Euroscepticism relates to particular discursive formations within the battlefield of collective identities that is opened by European integration. This paper first aims to highlight the reactionary nature of Euroscepticism. Secondly, it argues for understanding Euroscepticism as a discursive formation in the public sphere rather than as a collection of party positions or characteristic of public opinion. Thirdly, it points to the media as central players and amplifiers of Euroscepticism. In order to describe the dynamics of Euroscepticism, we need to understand how the polity worth of the EU is framed in public debates (the discursive contents of Euroscepticism). We further need to understand how and by whom Eurosceptic narratives are mobilized (the performance of Euroscepticism). Last but not least, we need to account for the public resonance of Euroscepticism and its dynamic expansion (the public salience of Euroscepticism). By emphasizing this dynamic element in the 'making of' Eurosceptic counter-narratives this paper therefore proposes to turn to the mediating infrastructures through which the European Union is challenged and contested in front of a wider public. This relates to the public and media sphere as the principal locus of analysis.

## **Keywords**

Discourse – European Public Space – Identity – Legitimacy – Media



## Introduction

'EU only pseudo-democracy', 'against EU-dictatorship', 'against the treaty of dishonour'<sup>1</sup> 'the representatives of the people and the traitors of the people', 'millions of people defenceless against EU-paladins', 'people or eurocrats?', 'inhuman EU'.

These slogans are not launched by a small minority party at the extremist fringes of the political spectrum. They are taken from the anti-EU-campaign fought by the *Kronen-Zeitung* and, as such, form the daily headlines of Austria's largest newspaper, which sells three million copies and is read by approximately 40 per cent of the Austrian population.<sup>2</sup>

What we find here in a condensed form are the ingredients of 'Euroscepticism', an element of political discourse based on propositions and arguments that repudiate the worth of European integration. Euroscepticism is not always as uncompromising and hostile as the examples above based on strong identitarian claims through us-them polarisations, non-recognition and negation of existence of the other. Yet, as the amplification of a mainstream newspaper voice indicates, Euroscepticism also appears to be less marginal than is often assumed. It can take a prominent place in political contestation, without necessarily being mobilised by political parties. It can express public opinion and identities without being itself rooted in individual preferences and attitudes.

The intention of this paper is threefold. Firstly, this paper highlights the reactive nature of Euroscepticism that correlates with ongoing integration and the initiation of a process of democratic legitimation of the EU. The existing body of literature on Euroscepticism is often biased contrasting European values and normative positions on European integration against the alleged Eurosceptic threat. This has sometimes resulted in strong evaluative statements on the aggressive nature of Euroscepticism that corrodes the European project or even predicts the end of European integration (Taylor 2008). Instead of a normative assessment of the Eurosceptic challenge, this paper focuses on the correlation between polity contestation, justification and collective identity formation. From the RECON perspective, this implies above all the need to qualify the status of Euroscepticism in relation to the broader transformation of political order in Europe and changes in democratic practice related to it. Secondly, this paper takes issue with those who have attempted to define Euroscepticism in categorical terms ranging positions on European integration on a scale from pro-European to anti-European (Hix and Lord 1997; Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Instead of scaling attitudes on European integration, we propose that Euroscepticism should rather be understood as a discursive formation in the making. As such, Euroscepticism is part of the general dynamics of contesting and justifying European integration that cannot be controlled by a single actor's strategy and choice. The assessment of the worth of European integration rather takes place through narratives and counter-narratives, which claim belonging and demarcate the boundaries of the emerging European social and political space. Thirdly, we draw attention to the media as one of the central players and amplifiers of Euroscepticism. In existing

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<sup>1</sup> 'Schandvertrag' was the wording used by the political right in the Weimar Republic to blemish the Treaty of Versailles.

<sup>2</sup> The 'Kronen-Zeitung' can be considered as Europe's most influential newspaper in terms of opinion-making. Our thanks to Christian Schwarzenegger (2008) for providing these insights.

surveys, Euroscepticism is mainly approached in terms of party politics (Hooghe et al. 2004; Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Marks and Wilson 2000; Marks et al. 2002; Ray 1999; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a; 2008b; Taggart 1998) or in terms of public opinion (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; 2007; Hooghe 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2007; Niedermayer 1995). We believe that political communication and media research is a useful supplement to research on partisan contention and voters' attitudes. More specifically, a media perspective can account for the public salience and resonance of Euroscepticism and for its cultural, ideological and historical specifics.

The analytical purpose of this paper is therefore not so much to assess the Eurosceptic narratives in terms of contents and consistency but rather to situate them within the competitive field of 'narrating' European integration. Euroscepticism relates to particular discursive formations within the battlefield of collective identities that are opened by European integration. In order to describe the dynamics of Euroscepticism, we need to understand how its discursive elements are constantly re-arranged to assess the polity worth of the EU (the discursive contents of Euroscepticism). We further need to understand how and by whom Eurosceptic narratives are mobilized (the performance of Euroscepticism). Last but not least, we need to account for the public resonance of Euroscepticism and its dynamic expansion (the public salience of Euroscepticism). By emphasizing this dynamic element in the 'making of' Eurosceptic counter-narratives we therefore propose to turn to the mediating infrastructures through which the European Union is challenged and contested in front of a wider public. This relates to the public and media sphere as the principal locus of analysis.

For further developing this notion of Euroscepticism as a discursive formation in the public sphere, we need to make sense of the specific dynamics of political contestation that takes place surrounding the EU and that are alien to the contestation of the settled political order of the nation state. As we want to argue in the first part of the paper, it is precisely the unfinished character of the EU polity and its permanent constitutionalization that opens up the possibility of a form of polity-contestation that in many of Europe's established nation states would be considered as highly exceptional and even illegal (Mair 2007: 4). This will help us, in a second step, to propose an analytical framework of how we might further study 'contentious polity making' through the justification practices unfolded in public and media debates. In a final part of the paper, we claim that polity contestation of the EU is intrinsically linked to the new salience of identity politics in Europe. Euroscepticism should in this sense be explored as a case of 'reactive identity formation' within and against the EU.

## **Euroscepticism as a form of polity contestation**

Since the early 1950s, European nation-states have increasingly pooled sovereignty in a process generally referred to as European integration. This process has currently taken form in the European Union (EU), but is arguably still continuing. Especially since the mid 1980s, the EU has made substantial steps from market integration to political integration and has entered into a more or less continuous and still unsettled process of constitutionalisation. Although there is no agreement on what kind of political entity the European Union is, it is now so complex and encompassing that it may be referred to as some kind of 'polity' or 'political system' (Hix 2005). Whether this polity should exist, what it should look like, how many competencies it should have and to what extent one wants to be a part of it, are questions of constant debate

and controversy. In other words, the polity of the European Union is an issue of political contestation throughout Europe.

This paper argues that any explanation of Euroscepticism has to be linked to this uncertainty of polity design that has marked the EU over the last two decades. Against the expectation of early functional theory, integration has not led to polity settlement. Fossum and Menéndez (2009) describe the 'integration paradox' as an almost inverse relationship between the duration of the integration process and the kind of consensus on what kind of entity the polity should build. In reaction to this inverse relationship, a legitimacy process has been set in motion that has further raised expectations of the democratic legitimacy of the EU, but has thus far only come up with insufficient solutions. As this paper will argue, the integration paradox needs to be understood foremost as a 'public communication paradox', meaning that an increase in political communication and information is frequently found to generate less public trust (Gaber 2009). In this new scenario, the promotion of the legitimacy of the EU through political communication and consensual politics has an ambivalent impact. Instead of being cast in a single integrated space of rational discourse, EU-legitimacy discourse encounters the contingency of multiple and diversified public spheres, in which rationality and emotion, information and misinformation, justification and denunciation always co-occur.

As this paper will elaborate, Euroscepticism needs to be understood as a counter narrative in which the worth of European integration is denounced. In this sense, its emergence correlates with the initiation of a process of democratic legitimation of the EU. The decisive difference to earlier decades is precisely that the EU has gone public in promoting its basic legitimacy since the early nineties. The citizens of Europe have become more involved in issues of European integration, which are increasingly recognized to be of 'general interest' (Hooghe and Marks 2005; 2009; Imig and Tarrow 2001). This citizen involvement happens most notably through the increased use of popular referenda to decide on membership and treaty revision, but also outside these formal 'constitutional moments'. Citizens have often been a brake on further integration as treaty revisions and membership questions have been voted down in referenda. Rather than a 'permissive consensus' on the benefits of continuous integration, the political climate in Europe has more and more turned towards a 'constraining dissensus' (Hooghe and Marks 2009).

As a starting point, we want to provide a working definition of Euroscepticism as a discursive practice of political opposition to the EU-polity. Euroscepticism does not oppose particular *policies*, i.e. the contents of actions taken by the EU, but the *polity*, i.e. the competencies and constitutional settlement of the EU (Mair 2007). Euroscepticism, in this sense, is different from 'normal' politics, understood as the regular contestations among actors and institutions about distribution and redistribution *within* the political system.<sup>3</sup> Primarily, our definition covers arguments against the widening and deepening of the EU in terms of level and scope. That is to say, against enlargement of the EU, against the powers of supranational institutions and/or against a further transfer of sovereignty. Euroscepticism can thus argue

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, an argument that the Common Agricultural Policy is not fair, not efficient or not environmentally friendly enough would not be counted as contributing to Eurosceptic discourse. However, an argument in favor of renationalizing agriculture, i.e. decreasing EU competencies in this field, would.

against the institutional and constitutional design of the polity and/or against the project of taking further steps in European integration. Furthermore eurosceptic discourse may also opt for fundamental opposition against the principle of European integration, which would imply the plea for a radical opt-out or the reversal of previous steps in integration.

Our definition further implies that Euroscepticism is not categorically linked to the expression of particular preferences of polity design for the EU. There are no substantive features that turn Eurosceptics into unapologetic defenders of the nation or into intergovernmentalists. We recognize, however, that there is a qualitative difference in EU legitimacy discourse between principled rejection of European integration, criticism of polity designs and projection of alternative paths of integration. Eurosceptic positions refer to a devaluation of worth in either one or several of these dimensions. It will be the task of future research backed by empirical, discourse analytical, data to come up with a qualification of the different positions to be taken along this continuum.

Why and under what conditions do such 'inversions of worth' take place? Why do actors within the EU-system of governance regularly opt for opposition against the EU and not for opposition within it? Why do they opt for principled opposition and not for regular politics? One explanation favoured by Mair (2007) is linked to lacking opportunities for becoming committed to regular politics, which results in either acquiescence or revolt. 'if political actors lack the opportunity to develop classical opposition, then they either submit entirely, leading to the elimination of opposition, or they revolt' (Mair 2007: 6). The explanation favoured by us analyzes Euroscepticism as part of the more general practice of assessing the worth of European integration. We expect denunciations of polity worth to correlate with justifications of polity worth. The EU is not only opposed in a particular way, it is also justified in a way that is different from the ways nation states are justified. The EU is neither an international organization, nor a nation-state, and has therefore been regularly described as the intermediary result of a unique - *sui generis* - process, or as a 'object politique non-identifié' (Delors, cited in Schmitter 2000: 2). Does this also imply that the quality of discourse of defending and challenging its basic legitimacy is unique? Is there a correlation between the uniqueness of the integration project and the types of political contention and justifications related to it? To approach these questions, Euroscepticism should be analysed as part of these basic operations of establishing the legitimacy of the EU against the taken-for-granted reality of the nation state.

## **Denouncing worth: The reactive nature of Euroscepticism**

Understanding Euroscepticism as a discursive formation - or constellation of arguments, performed by political actors in repudiating the worth of the EU-polity - provides a stepping-stone to emphasising the reactive nature of Euroscepticism. With 'reactive', we mean that Eurosceptic arguments are made in response to both the continuing European integration process itself and the justificatory discourse employed by political actors - particularly member state governments and supranational institutions - to legitimise this ongoing process.



Euroscepticism 'reacts' first of all to the substantial growth of powers and competencies of the EU. In some policy fields, like international trade and agricultural policy, the European Union even has exclusive powers. The decisions made at EU level have effects on citizens in the member states both directly, and indirectly through transposition and enforcement of EU regulations at the national level, in what is generally referred to as a process of 'Europeanization' (Börzel and Risse 2000; Olsen 2002). This significant political influence of decisions made at European level inevitably provokes responses from affected citizens. It feeds national politics and new forms of transnational alliances. These forms of *politicisation* of European integration may function to stimulate or inhibit particular policies or they may result in more critical scrutiny of the performance of political actors and institutions (De Wilde 2007). In the unsettled constitution of the EU, public contestations are frequently also about the allocation of competences and legal authority. They are about institutional and constitutional design, about questions of membership and about 'deepening and widening' of European integration. In its most general and accumulated form, Euroscepticism is bound to these contestations that go beyond 'regular politics' to oppose the existence of the EU polity as such, or membership thereof. This implies that Euroscepticism is not a marginal phenomenon, but rather stands at the heart of the more recent dynamics of 'post-functional' integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Euroscepticism is referring to a kind of contestation that is only possible in absence of polity consensus. The unfinished nature of the EU makes Euroscepticism possible and expectable.

Besides direct reactions to European integration that feed into Euroscepticism, we assume that Eurosceptic responses are often motivated by pro-European discourse. Since continued European integration, and particularly the continuous formal constitutionalization process in the form of Treaty revisions, requires a change of the political status quo, advocates and those responsible for the changes need to persuade constituencies and electorates to accept these changes (see Morgan 2005). These pro-European arguments may provoke domestic opposition in the form of Eurosceptic counter-arguments in quite a number of different ways. First, Euroscepticism can be responsive to the substantive arguments raised by pro-European actors. This opens the possibility of contesting the scope and contents of the EU constitutional settlement. Secondly, Euroscepticism can challenge the integrity of the political actors and institutions that are advancing the pro-European narratives. This opens the possibility of contesting the attitudes and performances of European elites and asking for their possible replacement. Arguments against single politicians cannot be understood as polity contestation, but arguments against the entire (political) elite can, as they form a more structural part of the regime (Hurrelmann et al. 2009). Finally, but not less importantly, Eurosceptic discursive formations may be a response to the *lack* of justificatory arguments provided by European actors and institutions. Thus, a Eurosceptic performance may exist of a demand for accountability in terms of providing sufficient justification of continued constitutionalization. Raising continuously the question about the 'nature' of the EU is at the same time enabling the spread of Euroscepticism as a reactive counter-discourse. European integration has opened a vicious circle in which the discursive building of legitimacy correlates with its own delegitimation. To put it more clearly: the constant and increased efforts to provide public justifications for European integration and to set the standards of democratic legitimacy of the EU, provide the breeding ground for Euroscepticism. As long as the actual constitutionalisation process continues and the legitimacy of the EU polity is debated, Eurosceptic counter discourse will persist. This implies that

Euroscepticism is not simply unfounded or unreasonable and as such could be defeated by arguments or overcome by more 'rational' forms of communication. One must even test out the possibility of a negative correlation in the sense that attempts to forge rational debate and 'democratic justification' of the polity character of the EU create a favourable environment for the spread of Euroscepticism. What is interesting, is the correlation between pro-European and Eurosceptic discourse, not that the one can (or should) exclude the other.

We may thus see Eurosceptic discourse as a reaction – and thus inextricably linked – to European integration and pro-European discourse. Pro-European and Eurosceptic arguments interrelate with each other and with actual developments in European integration and its effects on the nation-state through Europeanization. The rest of this paper will focus on the interrelation between pro-European and Eurosceptic arguments in discourse on European integration. In terms of discursive formations in the public sphere, we present an analytical framework for 'Eurosceptic discourse about European integration', rather than 'the discourse of Euroscepticism'. In other words, rather than understanding Euroscepticism as a separate discourse, we understand Euroscepticism as a quality of discourse on assessing the worth of European integration. In order to fully grasp its targets, meaning and effects, Eurosceptic arguments must be studied in relation to efforts in which the *worth* of integration is defended, i.e. the kind of higher common principle that European integration should serve. Euroscepticism is an element of judgements that put to the test the worth of the polity (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 127ff). It turns a *discord* over the content of policies or the performance of politicians into a *clash* about the very nature of the common good. 'In clashes, the discord has to do not simply with the worth of the beings present but with the very identification of beings that matter and those that do not, with the true nature of the situation, with reality and the common good to which reference may be made to reach agreement' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 224). The question of how the worth of the polity is assessed and contested will primarily concern us here. Euroscepticism is a particular practice (or performance) that emerges in the discourse on European integration. It is about which principles shall be applied, which arguments shall be used to support these principles, and what it is that makes these arguments convincing or less convincing in particular contexts.

By highlighting this 'constructive' role of public discourse, a different understanding of the EU's official discourse of legitimation can be developed as not different from but deeply involved in the making of Euroscepticism. The efforts of European actors and institutions to provide public justifications and to set the standards of legitimacy for the EU are not simply responsive but also provocative. The EU does not need to come up with justification and public communication to *react* to increasing negative attitudes of the public. The existence of a justificatory discourse through which the EU defines its democratic legitimacy is rather the enabling condition for the rise of Euroscepticism. Constitutional designing of the EU, i.e. the attempts to forge polity agreements and to deliver justifications about the worth of European integration bring Eurosceptic counter-discourse to the fore and partly account for its public salience. The EU has assumed the duty to engage in a discussion about the design of the polity. It is this engagement in justificatory discourse that enables Euroscepticism to unfold.

People engage in constitutional politics primarily through the mass media. As exposed by the EU-ratification failure, the need to become engaged in mass

communication is an inherent constraint to constitutional settlement, since compromise formulas cannot be upheld, achieved agreements are broken up again and de-contextualised arguments, extreme positions and fringe groups come to the fore (Trenz 2008) Meyer 2009). To systematically account for these media logics of EU constitutional settlements in terms of discourse and counter-discourse as one of the constraining conditions for building public legitimacy of the EU is one of the purposes of this paper.

One of the reasons for the salience of Euroscepticism over the last years lies precisely in the fact that there is a huge mobilisation potential on issues that affect European integration and that this potential, for many years suppressed, only starts to be exploited. As Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) argue, the political issue of European integration remains in many member states a 'sleeping giant'. This is not simply due to the latency of negative attitudes among citizens.<sup>4</sup> It is a sleeping giant especially because the search for democratic legitimacy opens a competitive field for the evaluation of the EU. The promotion of EU-legitimacy invites reactions and opposition that frequently go beyond the scope of consensual democratic politics. In this sense, the EU-legitimatory discourse rather reflects the collection of political garbage-can processes in which positioning takes place under conditions of ambiguity and as the result of the partially random coupling of independent streams of politics that are only loosely connected to the issues at stake (for instance the Constitution) (Cohen et al. 1972; Kingdon 1984). By mobilising Euroscepticism, different actors use various events (e.g. a referendum) as 'windows of opportunity' to come forward with very different problems and their perceived solutions. In such a situation of deep ambiguity, the EU as a target is a means to different ends that can signify quite different things.

In analyzing Euroscepticism we therefore need to group arguments in support of polity transformation with arguments opposing it. Justifications and denunciations of the worth of the EU-polity correlate in a particular way. Against Morgan (2005: 56ff) we would claim that this repudiating character of Euroscepticism does not need to embrace an explicit project of its own that has to meet the requirement of sufficient justification and argumentative consistency. The justification of worth and the denunciation of worth of the EU-polity rather operate at different degrees; the first is a constructive operation that propagates a new worth linked to a profound polity transformation. Faced with this progressive move, Euroscepticism is sufficiently expressed through a de-constructive operation: It can opt to remain simply passive and insist on the repudiation of worth and polity change. As such, it can operate, for instance, through irony or emotions. Eurosceptics can also explicitly block the 'progressive' move of polity transformation that is linked to federalization, transnationalisation or constitutionalisation, and give support to more 'conservative' variants of intergovernmentalism, functional integration or market integration. Last but not least, Eurosceptics can become transformative themselves and call for the withdrawal of their country from the EU.<sup>5</sup> In all these cases, to understand the

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<sup>4</sup> To distinguish our approach even further from attitudinal research on public opinion, we claim that the idea of the latency of negative attitudes is itself a discursive construct. It gains only significance through the public expression of negative attitudes either as the target of EU-legitimacy discourse or as the alleged source of Eurosceptic counter-discourse.

<sup>5</sup> In a slight variation of Morgan (2005) Euroscepticism would in this sense be considered as the regressive variant of transformative polity justifications and, as such, it needs to be distinguished from a progressive variant of EU-polity denunciation (for instance, by calling for a more radical change of

particular expression of Euroscepticism, it will become important to qualify positions along an evaluative continuum of EU polity worth that ranges from principled rejection of European integration, regime criticism and opposition to further integration. This can allow us in a second step, to reconstruct what kind of 'polity project' European integration is typically linked to and what particular worth is associated with it.

## **The 'making of' Euroscepticism in the public sphere**

We now argue, for three reasons, that there is a need for scientific research into how eurosceptic arguments unfold in the public sphere. First, the public sphere is relevant for public knowledge formation. It is in the public sphere that attitudes are given expression, ideas and normative expectations are tested out, and collective identities are shaped. This first aspect refers to the cognitive and evaluative repertoire from which people draw in interpreting the EU. Secondly, the public sphere is relevant for issue salience and selection. The question of what kinds of issues are given public voice will largely influence the course of European integration and the scope of policies embraced by it. This second aspect refers to actors' performances and competitions in interpreting the EU. Thirdly, the public sphere is relevant for public opinion and will formation. The question here is how the narratives of polity worth and their specific performances resonate with particular publics (national or transnational). A focus on the resonating effects of debates is important to understand the legitimating or de-legitimizing effects of public justificatory discourse of the EU. This third aspect refers to the normative evaluations, reflection and possible learning in the judgments relevant publics make of the EU and how these are ultimately transmitted towards policy formulation and decision-making.

Following this analytical matrix, research on Euroscepticism can be advanced in three directions: First, recall that Euroscepticism should be understood foremost as a quality of a discursive formation located in the public sphere. We speak of a discursive formation in the sense of ideas, interpretations and narrative contents that are arranged around a common target. This implies the need to reconstruct the narrative contents of Euroscepticism and to understand variances in its 'scripts', i.e. its codes of practice or guidelines for its public performance (for instance, ideological, national, etc.). Second, we propose to shed light on the competitive field, in which Euroscepticism is 'performed'. This implies the need to relate the 'players' of Euroscepticism (the opponents of EU-favourable discourse) to the 'players' of progressive Europeanism (the proponents of EU-favourable discourse). Third, we sustain that these performances of establishing the worth of European integration can only be understood by taking into account the mediating effects through which actors' performances are interlinked and meaning is transmitted to the potential audiences that pay attention and that applaud or criticize performances of establishing the worth of European integration.

By applying public sphere research we thus arrive at an analytical framework of the 'making of' Euroscepticism in terms of contents, performance and resonance of public debates. In the tradition of cultural sociology, we propose to analyze a) the narrative

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internationalism and solidarity against liberal market Europe or Fortress Europe and its protective character of welfare and security).

scripts, b) the social practices and c) the mediating effects of Eurosceptic discourse. In the following, each of these elements will be spelled out in more detail.

### **a) Euroscepticism as a discursive formation**

To analyze the contents of Euroscepticism as legitimating discourse, we need to understand primarily the order and dynamics of public mediated debates and not simply the dispositions of political actors and publics. We therefore shift from actors' preferences and citizens' attitudes to media discourse where these preferences are expressed and amplified. As such, we do not need to measure the latency of 'negative attitudes' on European integration among the population but we need to know to what extent and under what circumstances these negative attitudes are becoming manifest and are given expression in public debates that potentially affect the EU polity and its legitimacy. In this sense, we primarily need to analyse the kind of media where Euroscepticism is developing and taking form.

As a *discursive formation* that is translated into a narrative of worth of the polity, Euroscepticism assumes the function of a collective identity marker which re-establishes the social bonds, and controls the boundaries of social relations (Eder 2008). We further assume that scripts of Euroscepticism work better if they can be linked to a specific set of traditions (i.e. with established narratives). The discursive formation draws from a stock of knowledge, commonly held beliefs, or 'approved' interpretations of truth and value. This accounts for variances between and within nation states in the expression of Euroscepticism, but also for other possible variances, for instance, along ideological lines.

A discursive formation is different from a discourse that can be identified more or less coherently by core ideas, justificatory principles and targets. In a discursive formation, the kind of justification that needs to be delivered is more open. It is for instance still unclear whether democratic standards of justification need to be applied or whether transformative, reformative, transvaluative or reconciliatory arguments need to be put forward to justify the EU polity (Morgan 2005). In contrast to the ideal discourse, a discursive formation is thus not based on ordered justificatory arguments and dialogic sequencing but on floating signifiers, symbols and narrations. Narratives of worth of a composite polity are typically unfolding through such discursive formations rather than reflecting the disciplined and rule-following way of 'arguing' of ideal deliberative settings. They appear from the encounter of different justificatory orders (e.g. market, efficiency, public opinion, citizenry) that can be interchangeably used to either affirm or denounce the worth of the EU polity. There is not one single discourse to repudiate the worth of European integration but competing narratives that can be flexibly re-arranged into ready hand scripts and performances. Contextual variables and momentary actor constellations account for temporal and spatial variances in the expression of Euroscepticism.

In this sense, we do not intend to provide a single definition of Euroscepticism but an explanation of the particular constellation of Euroscepticisms (in the plural) as the variety of narrative constructs that become salient and that are variably linked to the performances of collective actors within a particular context. This theoretical understanding deviates from the common approaches, which treat Euroscepticism as a personal attitude or as strategic behaviour, in significant ways. The analytical task is to treat single expressions of Euroscepticism (for instance, as elements of an ongoing

debate) as a script, which is part of a more encompassing narrative that defines the worth of the EU-polity. In this sense, the single script comprises the possible elements of a public performance that establishes the negative worth of the polity. As such, it is intrinsically linked to the presence of other performances at the stage and can, in fact, only be encrypted when linked to the symbolic repertoire that is mobilised to establish the positive worth of the polity.

## **b) Euroscepticism as a public performance**

The analysis of the contents of Euroscepticism is intrinsically linked to the analysis of the dynamic public performances of Euroscepticism. We need to understand the dynamics of diffusion of Eurosceptic discourse. We argue that there is a need to understand the dynamic unfolding and the mobilization of Euroscepticism. Eurosceptic attitudes are only relevant in so far that they are publicly performed, for instance, through a referendum, an election or even an opinion poll that is commented upon and that is evaluated in a way that changes the course of events. To put it differently, we are interested in the various *practices of expressing and amplifying* Eurosceptic discourse, rather than its causes and origins in individual attitudes. These resonating effects can be measured in the ways eurosceptic arguments are advanced and articulated by societal actors in the public arena where the EU polity is constructed and maintained. It is here that political issues are publicly debated, and it is only through these public debates that collective opinion and will-formation can take place.

As *performance*, the variety of Euroscepticisms is turned again into social practices that unfold over time and space and compete in creating alternative narratives. In order to know what Euroscepticism is we should not create an inclusive or exclusive list of actors that we consider to be Eurosceptic. We should rather ask what kinds of practices are considered to be part of Eurosceptic performances. In this sense anybody could be involved in a Eurosceptic performance, who positively or negatively relates to scripts of European integration (e.g. also social actors emphasizing pro-European attitudes in arguing explicitly against Eurosceptic prejudices contribute to Eurosceptic narratives). Furthermore, such performances do not only need a script, they also need an arena. The question is thus how Euroscepticism is performed in a competitive organisational field in which actors build alliances or take distance from each other. As we would like to emphasize, this relational component of Euroscepticism in structuring a field of social practice is not so much built through strategic interactions but through the relation and recombination of narrative elements. The stories bind together and tell collective actors how to express their interests and sentiments in relation to European integration. At the same time, the stories are constantly being reshaped through ongoing practice accounting for the variance of Euroscepticisms within and across national arenas.

## **c) The public resonance of Euroscepticism**

The understanding of public discourse as a medium of political reflection and evaluation also gives us a clue to the public resonance of Euroscepticism. To speak of the resonating effects of Eurosceptic discourse is to put into question some causal assumptions about how the political efforts to define the EU's democratic legitimacy direct European integration. The public sphere is not just an arena where pre-existing attitudes are mitigated towards political decision-making. The public sphere is

primarily an arena for the 'making of' public attitudes by giving them expression and form but also by transforming them through debates where arguments are confronted with counter arguments. As such, attitudes on European integration do not exist independently from their public expression, they are not the raw material from which arguments are formed but they are themselves a product of discourse and may change with regard to the particular discursive constellation in which they find expression.

Moreover, we assume that the element of *publicness* is constitutive to these critical performances. The space in which Euroscepticism is performed is not only inhabited by those who are in dispute but also by anonymous observers. By providing *public* justification the legitimacy discourse is not limited to the dispute of competing actors. It is not primarily aimed at convincing *alter* in a debate, but always includes an unknown addressee. This anonymous public is included in the critical test of the worth of the polity. The justifications provided by EU actors in defence of European integration are not simply evaluated (accepted or rejected) by domestic actors, they are observed and judged by an anonymous public. In a similar vein, critical responses of domestic actors (denunciations of worth) do not straightforwardly refer back to EU-actors but take the public detour. It is only under this assumption of publicness that the common good rhetoric (i.e. something that is more than a contingent shared preference) can enter the scene as a way to forge agreement or compromise and to claim general validity.

By developing further this aspect of publicness, *mediatisation* and dramatisation need to be understood as an essential element of Euroscepticism (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Trenz 2008). Euroscepticism is performed through mass media. Its performance is primarily targeted to draw media attention. To receive this attention, Eurosceptic narratives must achieve *news value* and therefore dramatize emphasizing the threat of solidarity or security or wealth or whatever is mobilized as a justification for reshaping the social bond. These narratives are typically constructed around the distinction between enemy and foe, between true friends and false friends, between assumed perpetrators and real perpetrators that dramatize the stories, make them publicly salient and provoke societal resonance. In this last sense, Euroscepticism can be also understood as reactive identity formation which is operating against European integration perceived as a hostile environment, which threatens the collective worth of 'us' (Vetik et al. 2006).

## **Euroscepticism as reactive identity formation**

These conceptual clarifications have consequences for the relationship between Euroscepticism and collective identities. European identity is frequently measured through support of European integration (Bruter 2005; Fuchs et al. 2008; Kohli 2000). In Eurobarometer, for instance, identifications with Europe are measured through self-descriptions of the citizen respondents as Europeans or nationals. It is concluded that a European identity exists if the majority of Europeans feel attached to Europe and the EU and are proud to be European. On the other hand, attitudinal analysis also discerns a minoritarian group of citizens, who reject the idea of European or multiple identities and feel primarily attached to the national community. It is concluded that the expression of Euroscepticism reflects the strength of traditional national identity over the weakly developed forms of European identification of the citizens. The

vigour through which Euroscepticism is expressed would thus indicate the resilience of national identity within particular segments of the population (Fuchs et al. 2008). The Eurosceptic segments of the population are those who express an exclusive attachment to the national community and deny any support for the EU (which again through Eurobarometer can be differentiated as support of the present EU, support of enlargement and support of the project of political integration) (Fuchs et al. 2008: 104ff).

Our own concept corrects this common view on collective identities as the aggregation of individual attitudes in several important respects. A first caveat refers to the measurement of belonging through the subjective positioning of individual actors in terms of proximity and distance to the political community. The 'subjective identity paradigm' is based on the assumption that by providing citizens with good knowledge of the EU and good reasons to trust European institutions, individual identifications would follow automatically. It has been objected that there is a long way from individual identifications to collective identities (Eder 2008). A collective identity is different from what we measure with the degree of identification with a pre-established political category (such as the EU).

The discursive paradigm of collective identities does not take the indicators that are used to measure strong or weak identifications at face value but as part of the story telling of belonging to the political community (Eder 2008; Mach et al. 2009). Following this paradigm, the meaning of collective identities is not simply contested; the problem is rather that meaning is only constructed through such contestations. The political community as a reference object of collective identity is a projection of discourse, not its underlying basis (Laclau 2005). Euroscepticism can in this sense not be causally rooted in the feelings of belonging of a particular group of citizens. The groupness to which Euroscepticism relates and the strong feelings of attachment it presupposes do not exist prior and independently of Euroscepticism but because of its narrative constructs and performances. In this sense, Euroscepticism relates to a new contested field of performing collective identities without being rooted in any substantialist identities that would cause or underlie these conflicts.

We now argue that the discursive practice of contesting the basic legitimacy of the EU is at the same time to be understood as an identitarian practice of differentiating possible states of worth within that polity. In the evolution of modern societies, there is a direct link between degrees of societal complexity and the proliferation of collective identities as narrative constructs, which demarcate the boundaries of social relations and to establish rules of inclusion and exclusion (Eder 2008). A transnational, heterogeneous and internally differentiated setting such as the EU is therefore not in need of less but of more collective identities. European integration creates an imbalance between new hegemonic expressions of unity and the continuous strive for differentiation of its constituting parts. In debating the legitimacy of the EU, a new balance is searched between unification (integration) and differentiation, a process, which, for the time being, remains highly contested and non-concluded (the 'unfinished character' of the EU). The constitutionalisation of the EU therefore leads to a situation, in which Europeans, who can perceive themselves at the same time as nationals, regionals or even internationals, revitalize old narratives and test out new expressions of the self of the political community. The search for democratic legitimacy of the EU provokes substantialist identity claims in terms of



new practices of differentiation and new hegemonic expressions of the unity of the people.

Beyond this theoretical background, the reactive nature of Euroscepticism as outlined above becomes understandable as a reactive identity versus EU integration (Vetik et al. 2006). Reactive identities emerge 'in situations of imbalance between the processes of differentiation from and identification with the "other"' (Vetik et al. 2006: 1085). They reinforce the collective worth of 'us' by reacting against the dominance of narratives of unification with the 'other'. Euroscepticism is thus linked to reactive identity formation operating within European integration, which appears whenever the differentiation process of collective identities is suppressed by supranational unification. This explains the salience of Euroscepticism in the new Member States, where enforced integration weakens the parallel differentiation process that takes place in the consolidation of national identities. It also accounts for the link between Euroscepticism and populist movements in many of the old Member States, where unitary (and in this sense populist) references to the people are used to denounce the non-popular, elitist character of the EU (as expressed in the slogans quoted in the introductory remarks of this article: *Volksvertreter gegen Volksverräter*, the representative of the people against the traitors of the people).

The EU is arguably a moving target of reactive identity formation which differs across time and space as some countries have been members longer than others, various opt-outs apply to several countries, and national discourse evolves over time. European integration has also come at different phases of nation-state development, inviting different narratives relating for example to international redemption (Germany), modernization (Spain) or loss of empire (UK) (Diez Medrano 2003). In addition, the salience and the speed of integration affect the dynamics of reactive identity formation. The degree to which the EU provokes polity-resistance is high in times of attempts of constitutional settlement or during enlargement negotiations but might diminish when integration is rolled back.

We can conclude that as long as the perceived imbalance between unification and differentiation persists, European integration will provoke reactive identities. One important policy implication derived from this is that the search for the democratic legitimacy of the EU in terms of the 'right form' of balance between unity and diversity will, with all likelihood, also intensify expressions of Euroscepticism. EU justificatory discourse has opened widely the battlefield of collective identities. It has triggered off a dynamic for the confrontation of polity worth, in which justifications of why the European Union is good for 'us' and justifications of why European integration needs to be perceived as hostile to 'us' are intrinsically linked together.

Reactive identity claims are in this sense part of the democratisation of the EU. They result from the uncertainty about the quality and scope of the EU-polity and the fuzziness of the underlying demos. Reactive identities are one possible answer of how to apply the principle of popular sovereignty and locate the demos. As such, they point towards the emergence of elements of popular democracy in a system that can no longer be reached or accessed by conventional procedures of representative government. The efforts that are made to arrive at a democratic settlement of the EU will therefore continue to nourish popular discontent and scepticism. The problem is not only that this space of popular discontent is easily exploitable by populist parties of the right or the left. The problem is that this space still needs to be filled with

stories and narratives that help the Europeans to make sense of themselves and of their collective project.

## **Conclusion**

We have argued in this paper that scientific attention for Euroscepticism is important given its potential impact on the process of European integration and the democratic legitimacy of the European Union. While Euroscepticism in the majority of European countries has been kept out of politics by mainstream parties (Mair 2001; Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004), it has nevertheless penetrated the public and media agenda as an expression of reactive identities towards European integration. In this last sense, we argue that Euroscepticism has opened new spaces of popular democracy against imposed unification, in which different actors compete with expressions of popular sovereignty and differentiated claims of belonging.

In order to study Euroscepticism as polity contestation, research must analyze how narratives of polity worth emerge and proliferate (the scripts of Euroscepticism), how they are recomposed over time and applied in particular settings (the performance of Euroscepticism) and how they resonate within particular segments of society (the public resonance of Euroscepticism). For the study of EU-justificatory discourse, this implies the need to analyze the correlation between justifications and denunciations of polity worth in the negotiation of the legitimacy of the EU and not simply to discard Euroscepticism as irrational, emotional or marginal. Euroscepticism is not something to be solved or to be overcome by better or more rational ways of communicating with the public. It is something that will remain prominent for as long as the European Union seeks to consolidate its future.

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