



The Rise of Euroskepticism and Possible Responses prior to the 2014 European Parliament Elections

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1. Introduction

In recent years, negative attitudes towards the European Union have been on the rise in the majority of European societies. The criticism faced by EU institutions, among them the European Commission and the European Parliament, and the general apathy surrounding European Parliament elections threaten to decrease the legitimacy and prestige of the entire Union. Contrary to expectations, the fulfillment of the European Parliament's co-legislative role in the last decades did not result in acceptance and confidence for the decision-making institutions.

Skepticism towards the present and future of the Union is visibly affecting an increasing number of social groups. Because euroskepticism has a “tradition” of over forty years, it contains compounded layers of correlation. It can even appeal to highly educated demographics who can be viewed as the winners of integration. Today, critiques of the EU's operations are not only staples for radical organizations. Polls show that both contributing and benefiting states face increasingly prominent friction when they argue in defense of EU membership. The amount of voters criticizing or rejecting the European Union has mushroomed in both developed and developing countries. Both winners and losers experience this trend. This growth supports the notion that the euroskeptic attitude does not haunt existentially threatened demographics exclusively, but it is also prevalent among the beneficiaries of consumerism and European democratic systems. The emergence of euroskepticism today can be traced back to much more complex causes than in the 1990s or at the millennium.

Without understanding changing electoral mentalities it is impossible to prepare for the challenges the EU must confront and for the 2014 European Parliament elections. This study aims to map trends within euroskepticism, identify euroskeptic demographics, and make recommendations for reaching euroskeptic or apathetic European citizens.

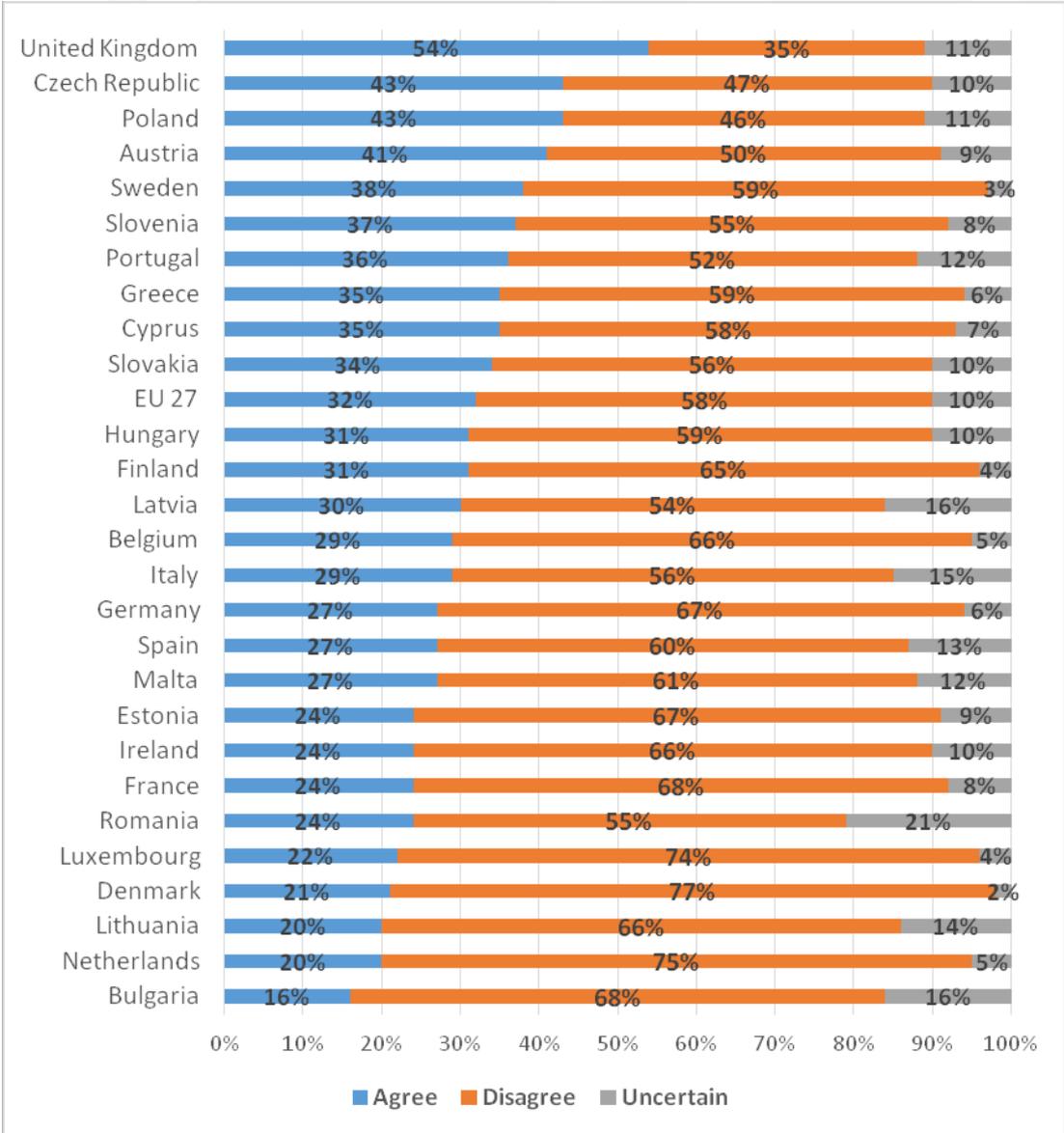
2. Perceptions of the European Union within the Member States

2.1. In or Out of the Union?

One of the best indicators for anti-EU or euroskeptical sentiments is the percentage of people in a given society who wish to see their respective countries outside of this European project of integration. Though no comprehensive survey exists on exit intentions from all 27 EU countries, the Eurobarometer opinion poll contains an indirect question related to this issue when it examines citizens' attitudes towards their countries' having a better chance of facing challenges outside of the Union.

Diagram #1 – Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statement:

(OUR COUNTRY) could better face the future outside the EU



Source: Eurobarometer 78, Fall 2012

The survey shows that a third of all European citizens believe that their countries could respond to future challenges better outside of the EU. 58% - a decisive majority – does not agree with this perspective. 10% of those asked do not declare a preference. The significance of the challenges facing the European Union is expressed clearly when we consider that every third European citizen thinks that his or her respective country could do better without the Union.

According to this data, the United Kingdom and Bulgaria comprise the two opposing extremities on the “in/out spectrum.” UK is the only EU Member State in which the majority of people (54%) believe their country would fare better without the Union, while in Bulgaria less than a third of the population shares this view. Bulgaria has the lowest value in this regard. However, Bulgarians, according to the answers provided to the question above, are not the most committed to membership. In addition to the low rate of support for the euroskeptic statement, their percentage of undecided citizens is the second highest in the Union.

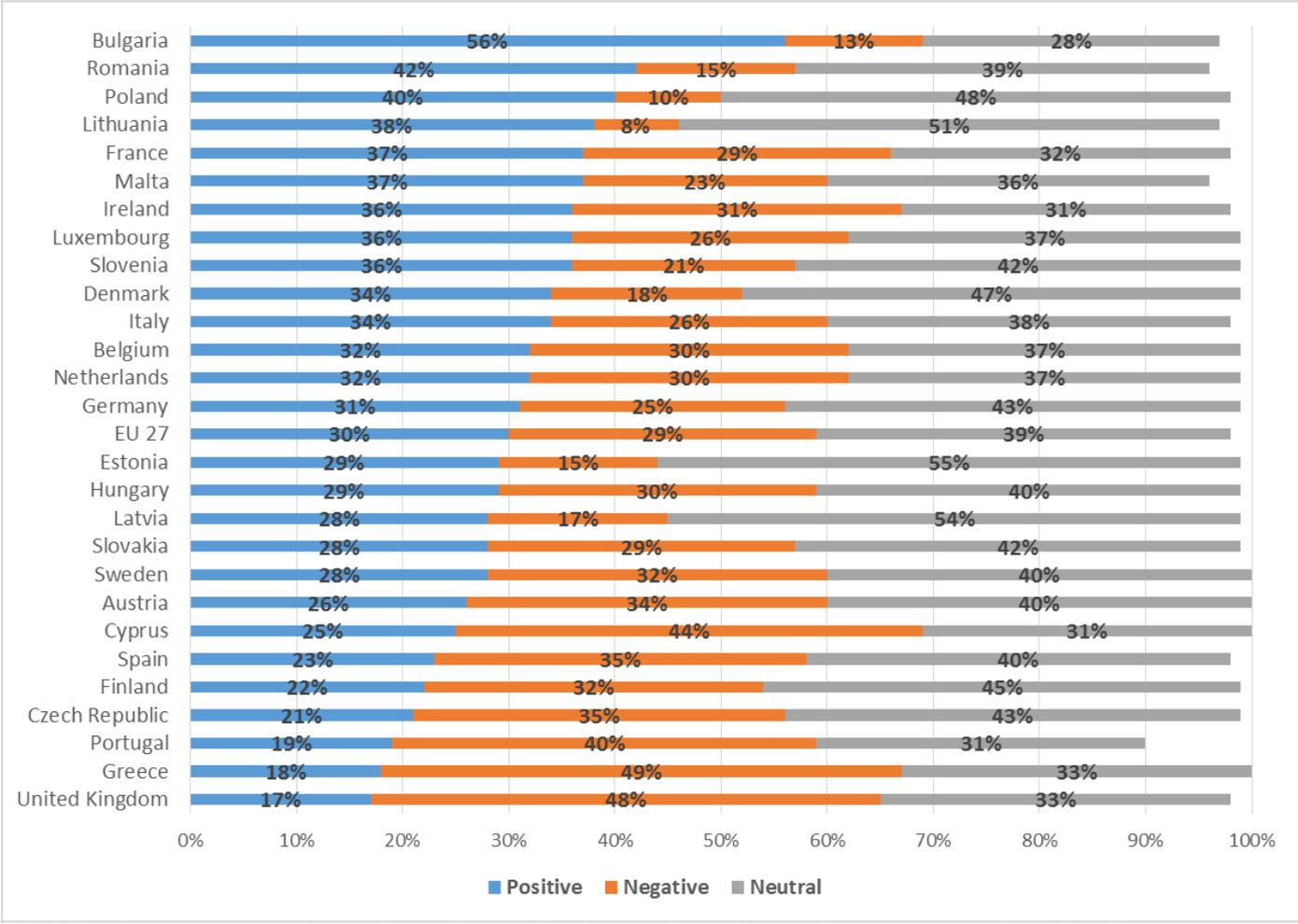
The survey shows Denmark as the country most dedicated to EU membership. 77% - more than three quarters – of the Danes disagree with the statement above, while only a fifth of them agree with it. Similarly to the Danish, the majority of populations in the Netherlands and Luxembourg also believe that their country is better equipped for the future as a part of the EU. In numbers greater than the European average, two third of the French, the Estonians, the Germans, the Lithuanians, the Irish, the Belgians, and the Finns disagree with the statement in addition to the Bulgarians. As such, the countries which signed the 1957 Treaty of Rome – the agreement serving as a foundation to European integration - are overrepresented amongst those most invested in membership. The only exception is Italy, where results are closer to the European average.

Not counting the United Kingdom, two relatively new Central Eastern European EU members – the Czech Republic and Poland - are among those who envision future struggles to be more fruitful outside of the EU. In Both states, 43% believes this to be the best solution. This number is only 4% and 3% less, respectively, than those who espouse the opposite view. These two member states are the most divided on the issue. It is also interesting to note that while less than a fifth of Greeks have a positive view on integration, only 35% trust in a better future without the European Union.

2.2. The European Union's Image

The poll shows that a relative majority of Union citizens do not have a distinctly positive or negative opinion about the European Union. Currently, 39% of voters see the European Union neutrally. 30% display positive attitudes, while 29% harbor negative perceptions. The last three years mark the emergence of negative trends. Those who doubt the EU doubled since the fall of 2009. Their numbers went from 15% to 29%. Coincidentally, the rate of those who approve of the EU went from 48% to 30%. We can identify the prolonged economic and Eurozone crisis as causes.

Diagram #2 – In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?



Source: Eurobarometer 78, Fall 2012

When examining individual member states, it is clear that their decisive majority is neutral towards the EU. In 15 countries respondents have neither a positive nor a negative picture of the Union. The absolute majority of inhabitants in the three Baltic countries have a neutral impression: in Estonia the number is 55%, in Latvia it is 54%, and in Lithuania it is 51%.

The neutral stance usually reflects unfamiliarity with the EU's operation. In these cases, the rules of domestic politics are definitive with regards to the EU's successes and failures – perceptions of successes are less prevalent while persistent failures in handling issues make a greater impression on citizens. Neutrality can also mean that in the affected countries the EU does not threaten distinctive national features or alternatives separate from the development of integration which are highly important to respondents. Such features are, for example, the interests surrounding abortion regulation in Poland or energy security in Lithuania.

According to the survey, four member states have a predominantly negative view on the European Union. The community is judged poorly by almost half of the population in the United Kingdom and Greece, while 44% in Cyprus and 40% in Portugal share the same attitude. Leading the small group of

countries which nurture positive emotions towards the European Union is, once again, Bulgaria, where 56% find the institution agreeable – a remarkably high number. Romania, a country which joined the EU with Bulgaria in 2007, comes in second with 42%. Furthermore, France and Malta have a 37% approval rate and Ireland has the same number at 36%. Though the high number of neutral citizens in Poland make those with an optimistic outlook a minority, 40% of Poles still hold the EU in high regard. This is the third highest index in Europe. It is visible that the countries of the Central Eastern European region have the most amicable opinions on European integration.

2.3. Is the European Union Headed in the Right Direction?

In 2012, the prevailing attitude about the EU showed a great deal of pessimism. Only 22% thought that things were headed in the right direction. At the same time, 52% believe that the EU is making the wrong decisions. 18% remained neutral. Cyprus and Greece were the most pessimistic. Only 6% of Cyprus' population considers the EU on the right track and 71% think the opposite is true. 74% of respondents in the economically devastated Greece are dissatisfied and only 9% are optimistic about the direction of the Union.

For the supporters of integration, it could be noteworthy that welfare states generally sport critical attitudes. Two thirds of Swedes and Belgians attest to such beliefs, while the rate in Luxembourg is 63% and 60% in Finland. Negative tendencies in developed countries can be explained by a decrease in solidarity among Member States and challenges related to specific policy and social issues. The first category includes a decreasing desire for net contributor nations to support their consistently lagging peers. On the other hand, they are faced with problems in the fields of immigration and consumer protection. They were only able to respond to these issues effectively by suspending cooperation in these issues. In contrast, every second Bulgarian, 40% of Lithuanians, and 38% of the Polish population consider the EU to be on the correct path.

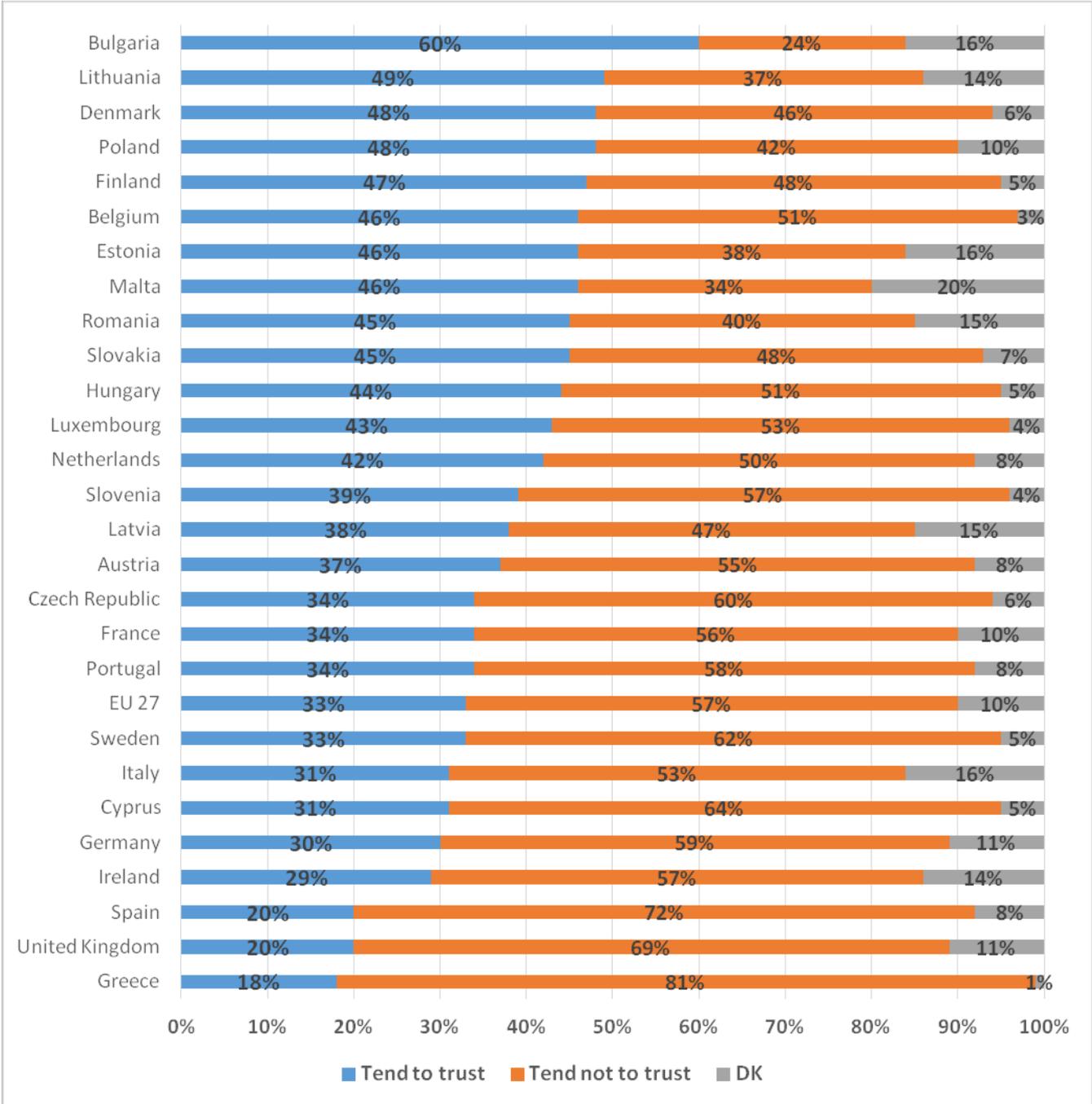
We can hypothesize that the economic crisis of recent years simplified attitudes towards the Union's future. People started to worry about their own existential well-being. Subsequently, the search for a scapegoat began to find something to blame for the decrease or stagnation in their own standards of living. In economically troubled states, the governments blamed austerity measures on the European Union. These negative notions damaged the EU's image significantly. The EU's performance would be evaluated more benevolently once again by the majority of voters if Europe would witness a decrease in unemployment and national debts and an increase in economic growth.

2.4. Confidence in European Union Institutions

Only a third of EU citizens invest their trust in the community, while their absolute majority – 57% - lack confidence in the European institutional system. There are considerable differences in levels of trust among Member States, but the prevailing trend is unfavorable. Out 27 states, only 7 have predominantly confident populations. In 18 countries, the reverse is true. It is not surprising, that the bailed out and thus austerity-stricken Greece has the least amount of faith in the European Union, but the 80% rate is still extremely high. An economically severely embattled Spain and a traditionally euroskeptic United Kingdom have similarly high numbers at 72% and 69%, respectively.

It is generally true that states which joined after 2004 are more confident in European institutions. In Central and Eastern Europe, optimistic states are more prevalent and, in a parallel fashion and with the exception of the Czech Republic and Slovenia, the number of skeptics is lower than usual.

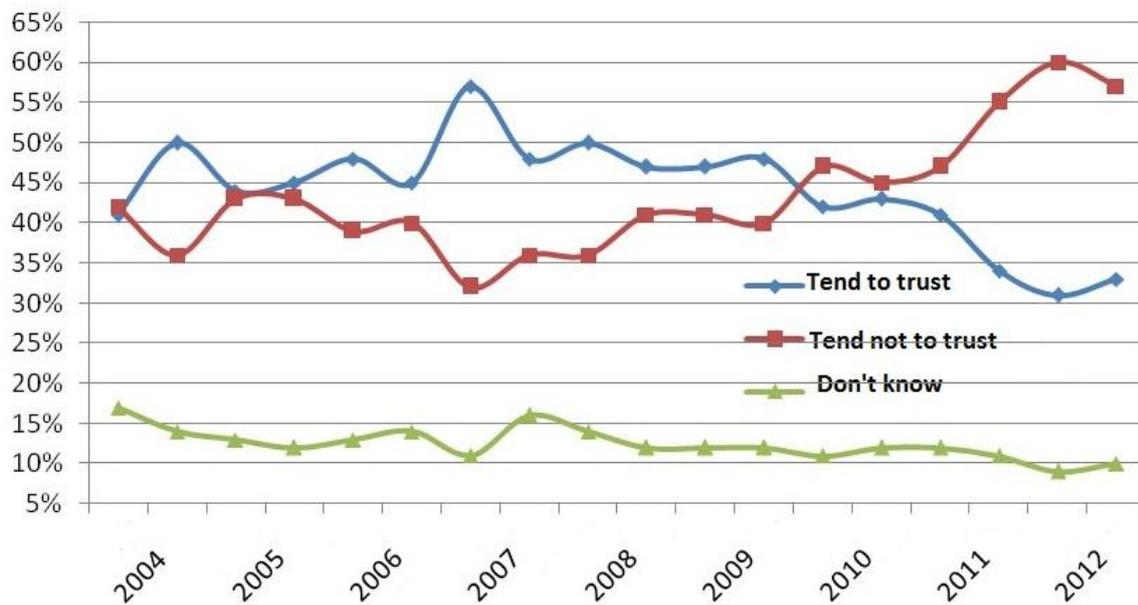
Diagram #3 – I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it. The European Union:



Source: Eurobarometer 78, Fall 2012

To better portray the attitudes of EU citizenry, it is beneficial to examine changes in confidence towards the European Union in terms of time as well.

Diagram #4 – Trust in the European Union 2003-2012



Source: Eurobarometer 2003-2012

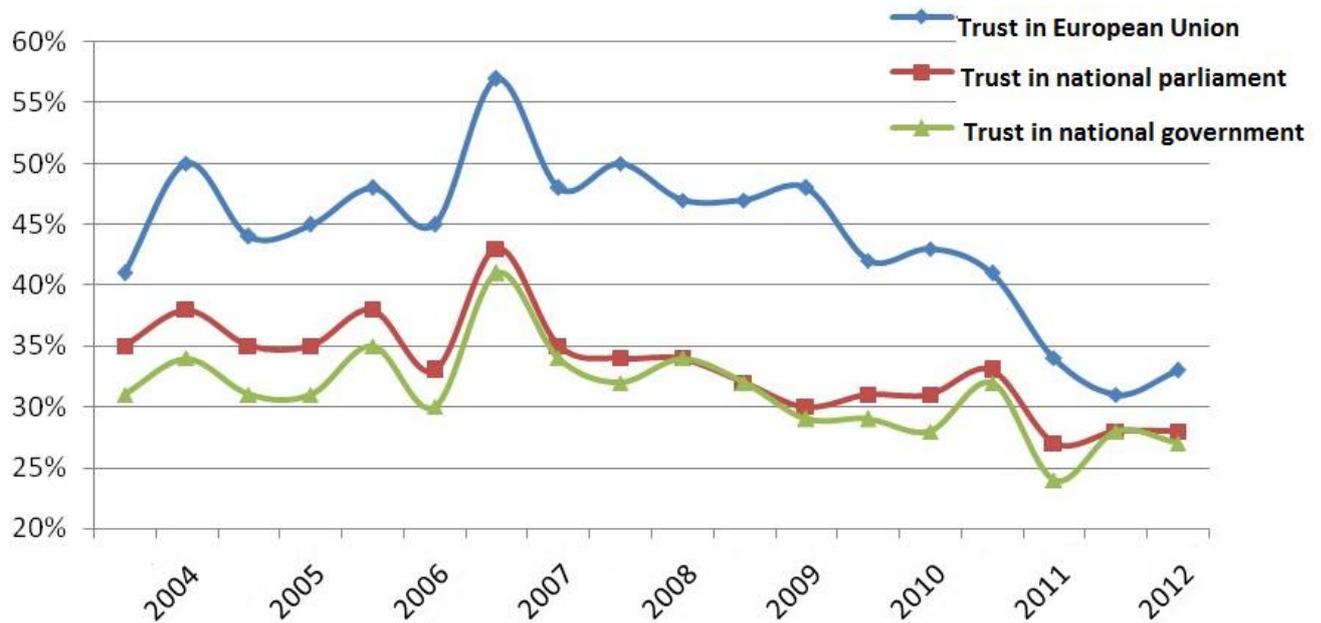
In the surveyed period (nearly a decade), fall 2009 and spring 2010 mark a turning point, where those distrustful became the majority. The previous positive trends shifted by 2010. This can be attributed to the prolonged international economic recession and, simultaneously, to the Eurozone's and the European Union's increasing woes. In the period between 2003 and 2009, we can attest to two larger jumps in confidence. During the two expansions, the newly added member states increased optimism in fall 2004 by 8% (to 50%) and in spring 2007 by 12% to (60%).

In the two-two and a half years after the 2009-2010 turning point, the number of the distrustful increased to 60%. Though in the first year the ratio between confident and doubting citizens seemed to stabilize, the amount of those turning away from the European Union ended up growing in previously unseen proportions.

The latest poll from fall 2012 shows moderate improvements. The ratio for the critical went from 60% to 57%, while the numbers for those who expressed confidence increased by 2% and thus the rates finally abandoned the decade's all-time low of 31%. Though most Europeans are still full of doubt, the 2 point increase gives cause for cautious optimism. A positive shift of equal proportions was last seen in spring 2008 before the outbreak of the economic crisis.

Because the EU's confidence index on its own is only suitable for the generation of conclusions in a limited manner, it is imperative to compare it with similar data in nation states in order to place the EU statistics in a broader context.

Diagram #5 – Changes in Trust in European Union and Nation State Political Institutions 2003-2012



Source: Eurobarometer 2003-2012

This chart shows that European citizens have constantly placed more trust in the European Union than in their own country's legislative or executive branches. As such, the EU enjoys high approval ratings compared to national governments. The cause for this must lie in the fact that voters are more acquainted with their own governments' actions on a day-to-day basis and that the EU's decisions trickle down through their own governments.

The curves for EU and national institutional approval are very similar, the only difference being that, until recently, the EU's rates surpassed national institutions by 10-15%. However from 2011, the levels for those confident in the EU approached the decreasing rates for national governmental approval. The 31% low point in EU confidence in spring 2012 was only 3 points higher than the approval ratings of Member State legislatures and cabinets. By this point, the citizens of the EU's 27 Member States lacked trust in both their national and European political institutions.

2.5. Euroskepticism and Member States

Due to the economic crisis, the Member States' relationship with the European Union was altered drastically. Today, in addition to United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, and - in an increasing manner - Hungary belong to the group of **euroskeptic countries**. In this group, current political conflicts and the inability to digest historic conflicts cause anti-EU emotions. A characteristic feature of this faction is that they not only generate conflicts within the community, but they also stick to their stances rigidly and are inflexible in terms of political compromises.

Countries skeptical because of the economic crisis form a separate bloc. The main cause of their skepticism or criticism lies in social tensions caused by the strictness of EU economic governance or budgetary regulations. The Mediterranean countries of Portugal, Spain, Cyprus, and Greece belong to this group. These states view the Union as the party which forced austerity measures upon them,

though their societies seem to be aware that their situation and prospects would be even worse without the community.

Certain countries **became critical of the EU due to differences in policies**. Based on polls measuring attitudes towards the EU, Estonia, the Netherlands, Latvia, and Poland can be categorized under this label. This bloc sports certain countries which had serious confrontations with the EU on the policy level in the past years, but the social interpretation of these conflicts did not make the institutions in Brussels a “distant enemy.” We can suppose that these countries view such tensions as necessary components of membership.

Member States who are **amicably critical** comprise a distinct assemblage. These countries view the community in a completely different light than the newer members or the Mediterranean nations. Surveys show that the majority of Swedes, Belgians, Luxembourgers, Finns, and Austrians believe the European Union is not developing in the right direction. The euroskepticism of these states suggests a differentiated political culture where the affected parties understand that the Union must primarily compete successfully on a global scale. When these members judge the European Union, policy and norm-related issues mix they do not oppose the EU due to matters of sovereignty. Instead, they believe that the community's institutional system is on the wrong track in terms of representing their own interests.

Bulgaria, Denmark, Romania, Lithuania, Malta, and France can be categorized as unequivocally **optimistic states**. Despite EU criticism, the public mood in Bulgaria, Romania and Malta is defined by the optimism of fresh membership. Notwithstanding France's social and economic problems, the country's role in the EU could be strengthened by the fact that it continues to emerge as a victor in the field of agriculture.

It is difficult to label Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ireland, Italy, and Austria. Germany's uniqueness does not mandate an explanation. As the EU's most important “engine,” it tries to handle the economic problems of members near collapse and maintain social consensus in an effort to ensure a leading position within the community. The situations of Slovenia and Slovakia are also extraordinary, because these countries had their share of economic successes and failures in the last years. Ireland could also be classified as traditionally euroskeptical, but the country's Union-financed bank bailout and the 2009 campaign which put an end to considerable prejudices seem to support the stability of its commitment. Italy cannot be grouped together with the Mediterranean countries, because the member state level handling of the economic recession was more successful here than in Spain or Portugal. As such, this Southern member state's euroskepticism is difficult to categorize and depends on the current achievements displayed in the handling of the crisis.

3. Types of Euroskepticism

The EU-skeptic conjuncture caused by the global economic crisis is well illustrated by opinion poll data. At the same time, euroskepticism did not only expand in size over recent year but also in variations. Along these developments, it is important to reevaluate and renew the Taggart-Szczerbiak categorization method which serves as a foundation for classifying euroskepticism. In this school, analysts differentiate between “soft” and “hard” versions. In our perspective, euroskepticism can be divided into four categories based on positive and negative attitudes and member state categorization.

Since the global economic crisis, **socially-based euroskepticism** could be the result of increasingly predominant existential issues. Multiple researches show that the support for euroskeptic political parties is not related to impoverishment. Still, in addition to accepting and maintaining this view, it can be stated that there is an increasing number of regions within the EU where impoverished communities will turn to (among others) blaming the European Union. This is especially true in the affected Eastern and Mediterranean countries. Increasing social tensions and widening gaps in cohesion funds between richer and poorer members amplify critical voices. While this negative identity did not form its own distinct category in the past, after 2008 it can easily become more definitive.

Euroskepticism based on prejudice: Over the past 5-10 years, a considerable debate on the success of multiculturalism took shape on the European and national level. Recent years saw the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments and prejudice towards migrants. This is a decisive issue on both the Union's agenda and with national governments. Anti-EU attitudes associated with the strengthening of nationalism can affect minorities or larger immigrant communities living in a given member state.

Rational euroskepticism: A well-informed disposition and familiarity with institutions characterize a generally rational critical attitude towards the EU. The affected group can precisely identify the benefits and disadvantages on both the state and individual levels. Voters in this category evaluate the social and economic risks of membership. The foundation of such an attitude is careful analysis at the focus of which are subjective factors. The supposed unfairness of Union market regulations or cohesion fund distribution could easily be behind this type of euroskepticism.

Norm-based EU criticism: It is commonly accepted, that during the EU's multi-decade operation it projected norms with increasing intensity. Though these values are a central part of the integration process, they often generate conflicts between Member States and the European Union. Let the subject be democratic norms or the situation of minorities, the EU initiates more and more proceedings against Member States in this regard. This form of euroskepticism concentrates not on the successes or failures of EU policy, but on the level and intensity of criticism from Brussels on domestic political institutions and social consensuses. In this instance of anti-EU activity, the underlying cause is the protection of post-material norms.

4. Mapping the Problems of Euroskepticism

To implement effective communication against the weakening confidence in European integration and institutional system, we must track the most important myths and challenges facing the European Union. The following section will detail these subjects.

Conflict between National Identity and European Cooperation

With the strengthening of euroskeptic and radical right-wing parties, narratives centered around surrendering national sovereignty and efforts for a strong state in favor of European cooperation are rampant. These political forces contrast “national historic greatness” with European Union membership which they portray as a subservient and submissive attitude. This rhetoric affects even the voters of net recipient states, according to whom the EU's regulations and recommendations limit leverage instead of allowing more freedom. This is true despite the fact that EU funds are largely responsible for development in these countries.

Image of a “Punitive Europe”

Since the outbreak of the crisis, the European Union acted primarily as a “punitive institution” in order to force the emergence of macroeconomic improvements more rapidly and effectively. Notions of democracy were often sacrificed on the altar of efficiency. An increasing number of recommendations and evaluations which euroskeptic parties saw as “dictates” came from Brussels, Berlin, and Paris. This popularized the idea that people are worse off due to the austerity measures demanded by the EU in most Member States, though restrictive measures would have been implemented even without these.

Democracy in the European Union

Despite the fact that European debates about norms are concluded rather slowly, a successful agreement can define the continent's social and economic development for decades. However, the EU can only react to challenges caused by the governments of Member States slowly. With the currently utilized tools, the Union has difficulties protecting democratic political institutions and handling the implementation deficit in certain Member States. Recently, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary raised serious concerns about the quality of democracy. The European Union does not have unified democratic standards. This can cause problems when aiming to preserve the political nature of the group.

Falling Short on Expectations

The fact that the expectations for Eastern expansion did not materialize causes problems in several Member States. This does not only apply to the expected quality of life – an irrational desire in newly admitted countries – but also to such policy initiatives as the free flow of the workforce.

5. Possible Messages against Euroskepticism

If we are acquainted with the types of euroskepticism and the conflicts of certain Member States with the EU, then we are able to word the most important messages which can be used against euroskepticism at European level. We will discuss these below.

A Transparent Europe

When voters think about the European institutional system, a slow, oblique, and bureaucratic black box can come to mind, however, community-level “governance” often works more effectively than delivery on the member state level. With the expansion of community competencies, the view that the European Commission only considers bureaucratic factors is becoming less prevalent. It is proven that in most issues – e.g. consumer protection, judiciary cooperation, or environmental protection – the EU-level protection of voters is just as important as the efforts of the Member States.

Another advantage of community-level execution is the visible decrease in corruption. Corruption is a severe problem in most member countries, especially so in Eastern states. It is not irrational to expect communal solutions to this problem. Naturally, this would affect the quality of national governance as well.

European Solidarity

Despite the communication which accompanies improvements achieved through European Union funds, the vast majority of people, especially in less developed countries, are not aware of the amount of progress, workplaces, and opportunities delivered to them by the EU. Relatively few sources of information detailing the prolific role of the European Union are available to the citizens of net recipient countries. Efforts must be made, especially in countries devastated by the recession, to inform people about European Union's numerous efforts to reinvigorate growth, create jobs, and initiate growth. The European Union should make the electorate understand that multi-speed integration does not mean the abandonment of solidarity. Making funds strictly conditional is necessary because political and economic risks have mushroomed globally, and Europe can only make it through the recession if the Member States hold themselves to their previous and voluntarily made commitments.

This is why it would be productive to highlight the percentage of developments made in member countries in a given year or budgetary cycle from EU funds and what important investments were made due to community financing. It would be an innovation if communications would also focus on what the European Union gave to member countries in terms of norms.

Europe in Crisis Management

Since the onset of the economic recession, a considerable portion of electors identify the European Union with austerity measures. To counterbalance this, it is worth to showcase what the EU did since 2008 to manage the crisis in the given member state. Contribution to economic development can in fact be introduced as a result, thus the EU does not become an entity that “takes away”, but one which helps Member States achieve their economic goals. It is important that the European Commission does not appear in a punitive role and that the EU reward and highlight the results of

states where improvement is made. European parties can contribute to this by issuing opinions on the results of the Member States and reacting to possibly misleading communications.



6. Communication Tools against Euroskepticism

There are a number of imaginable responses to the issues raised in the previous chapters. However, it seems clear that the skepticism towards the EU must be treated with systematic reforms in communication. The three elements of this could be the display of persons embodying the European Union, the improvement of the effectiveness of image and identity campaigns, and the polishing of institutional framework systems.

Showcasing Persons Representing the EU

One of the most important issues in the Union's communication is that the identity and roles of the representatives of the European Union are unclear. For pro-EU arguments it is imperative that specific proposals must correspond with member state or party-level communications – to systems which the electorate is already familiar with. If it is decided that outside of Member States the families of European parties will be the definitive communicators, efforts should be made to introduce the persons embodying the EU in all member countries. It can be hypothesized that in states that had regular conflicts with the European Commission, feelings of hostility can be attached to specific Commissioners or the leading politicians of certain member countries. The transformation of main communicators or the introduction of new actors is thus a primary role in popularizing the European Union.

Targeted Campaigns

Depending on the types of problems and the degree of euroskepticism, different campaigns could be effective in different countries. There is no single recipe for successful image building in all Member States. The system of argumentation must correspond to the specific region and the problems of perception in a given country. Campaigns must consider these factors and tailor their concentration according to them. Campaigns popularizing the European Union must be broken down to target groups similarly to other political and marketing campaigns, though in this case the target groups are the various euroskeptic factions within differing member countries.

Institutional Tools

Currently the institutional framework for the election of MEPs and European Commissioners is unclear. There is an obvious effort to make the candidate for Commission President a nominee from European political groups and to increase the role of EU political groups in Member States' EP campaigns. As we highlighted previously, if the institutions continue a unified communication policy could carry significant benefits, but it can also prove to be risky because European politicians are not necessarily identifiable in the majority of Member States.

The consolidation of the European idea can be aided by the reform of the European political party system. This can be achieved through the creation of truly European political groups. This mandates that the parties have their own membership and European parties have the major role in conducting EP campaigns in the Member States instead of the national ones. For the continuation of this process, reforming the relationship between European and national parties is paramount. The relationships must be truly bilateral. European political groups must be able to affect the European policies of member parties in their national parliaments. This would result in a clear distinction

between pro and anti-Europe forces. Such a situation would not allow either side to flaunt their stance without the use of real arguments. Subsequently, the result would be a more informed constituency.

As previous plans illustrate, the European institutional system could be further aided if the President of the European Commission was elected from amongst European party candidates. The obvious advantage of the proposal is that it would increase the legitimacy of the European Commission and would allow European political groups to become relevant actors in EU public discourse. The easiest way to get to voters is through the media. It is certain that if such a situation would arise, the media in Member States would cover electoral developments in an exciting and easily comprehensible fashion. A step which could further increase legitimacy could be if at least half of the Commissioners would be elected from MEPs. This proposal would symbolize equality between the EP and the Commission and would improve the Commission's democratic accountability.

Stronger Political Communication by European Parties

In those states which we categorized as euroskeptic “based on values,” the communication of European parties must be strengthened. The current neutral and reserved attitude allows euroskeptic politicians and parties to deliver untruthful statements about the European Union, while parties committed to the European idea do not possess sufficient answers to these political attacks.

For this reason it is essential to determine new directions in the communications of European organizations and even in the member state representation of the European Commission. Naturally, an objective style is still an important asset. At the same time, the possibility of political groups following political and policy debates in Member States and reacting to relevant political statements which reach a wide audience and disclose false information about the EU could be raised. European parties can respond to and take a stance on important political issues. However, it is also important for them to react to notions which make the bodies of the Union responsible for unpopular measures. In other words, they must disprove false political accusations against the EU.