Political Party Contestation over Europe in Public Discourses: Emergent Euroscepticism?

Paul Statham

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Abstract

This study examines party contestation over Europe in mediated public discourses across seven countries: Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and non-EU Switzerland. It uses an original and new type of data on party claims-making, drawn from media sources, to test leading hypotheses from the literature (Mair, Kriesi, Hooghe/Marks) on party contestation over Europe, its relationship to the left/right cleavage, and the nature and emergence of Euroscepticism. Cross-nationally, we generally find pro-European party debates at the aggregate level that are moving in the Eurosceptic direction, with Britain the exception, whose debates are pitched more towards Euroscepticism but becoming more pro-European. Party-level findings show pro-Europeanist stances strongly advanced by centre-left and liberal parties, compared to the centre-right, and Euroscepticism is significantly mobilised by four right parties: the Swiss Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP), British Conservative Party, Italian coalition il Polo della Libertà, and German Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU). Hence like Kriesi, we witness Euroscepticism not only at the margins, but increasing and mobilised by the mainstream right. With regard to whether this transformation is a modified ‘left/right’ (Hooghe/Marks) or ‘new’ (Kriesi) cleavage our findings are mixed. In addition, we consider that TAN (traditional-authoritarian-nationalist) ‘new politics’ themes are important to this Euroscepticism, but see TAN critiques to be grounded in civic-political rather than cultural and/or xenophobic opposition to European integration.

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Introduction

It is well known that contestation over Europe produces strange bedfellows, bringing together those who, as one activist candidly put it, ‘would not want to be seen dead in the same coffin’ (Forster 2002: 60). Opposition to Europe often comes from the far left and far right, whereas centre parties tend to suspend normal hostilities and advocate a generally pro-integrationist line. Outside this trend, at least one mainstream party, the British Conservatives, has experienced deep internal divisions over Europe that seriously threatened its existence. At face value, these examples show that party behaviour over Europe appears to be exceptional and atypical. This also poses deeper questions about parties’ European contestation, regarding its sources from among the parties, whether its contents is ‘strategic’ or ‘ideological’, whether patterns hold cross-nationally, and its potential for transforming the basis of party politics.

Such topics are much debated. One research field concerns the source of Euroscepticism and whether it comes from the periphery as a challenge to the core of the political system (e.g., Taggart 1998). Another related field questions the relationship of party alignments over Europe to traditional ones, and especially the left/right cleavage. For some, party contestation over Europe is largely issue-specific, with few ‘spill over’ effects and limited general ‘direct’ impacts on the format and mechanics of national party politics (Mair 2000). By contrast, for others, it constitutes part of the emergence of a new cleavage in the Rokkanian sense that is restructuring a transformation of the political space in Western Europe (Kriesi 2005/7; Kriesi et al 2006).

This article studies the ways that national political parties position themselves over European issues, relative to one another, within their mass-mediated public discourses. With the notable exception of Kriesi (2007, et al 2006), the media is surprisingly an underused data source for party positions. Peter Mair’s insightful
review argues compellingly for this research direction (2006:13/14): ‘in addition to the imputed location of a party’s core identity, and in addition to the evidence provided by formal policies which it adopts or is obliges to adopt, we need to know more about how Europe actually plays in national political discourse, as well as about the way in which it is conceived.’

Mass-mediated claims by political parties are an important source of data for party contestation, because it is through national public discourses that issues are made visible to citizens, and this is the medium through which parties attempt to mobilise their campaigns and get their message across to potential voters. This study uses an original data source of claims-making by actors with a party political identity. The sample includes seven Western European countries, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, and the non-EU Switzerland, and five years, 1990, 1995, and 2000-2.

It is not possible to address all aspects of this wide-ranging topic. The data is used in an analytic descriptive way to test leading positions in the emergent field of party contestation over Europe (see Mair 2006, and Marks 2004, for detailed critical ‘state-of the art’ overviews). The next section unpacks these main theoretical perspectives. After providing detail on the claims-making method, we undertake the analysis which applies a comparative framework (cross-national, cross-party family and cross-party). A first step looks at how national party debates vary in their overall stance over European integration, if this varies over time, and whether there are differences in the stances of governing and opposition parties. A second identifies which parties and party families succeed in making their claims over Europe visible in their mediated national public discourses. A third examines how they position themselves relative to one another through their claims-making by placing themselves in a political space on a pro-integrationist versus Eurosceptic axis, which also takes into account cross-national variations. Finally, to address the source and potential of
Euroscepticism, the contents of claims by the four parties which mobilised significant samples of Euroscepticism are analysed: the Swiss Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP), the British Conservative Party, the Italian coalition il Polo della Libertà, and the German Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU). This aims to deepen understanding of Euroscepticism’s ideological contents, beyond a location on a simple pro- versus anti-European integration axis. Also, considering that these are regularly parties of government or governing coalitions, we study their cases in detail to examine whether they mobilise Euroscepticism, opportunistically, or ideologically. From this, we speculate on the possible emergence of Euroscepticism from mainstream right parties, and its possible transformative impact on party cleavages.

Party Contestation over Europe: oppositional politics, the inverted ‘U’, and beyond?

Given the ‘second order’ nature of European elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980), and the restricted development of a European transnational public sphere of communication linking citizens and polities (Schlesinger 1999, Statham 2007), we follow those authors (Mair 2000, Marks and Wilson 2000, Hooghe et al 2004, Kriesi 2005, 2007) who consider that, at least for foreseeable future, important changes in party contestation over Europe will be located within, and generated by, national party politics. This means that we side-step issues concerning a possible emergence of supranational ‘Euro-parties’ (Hix 1999). Also, our emphasis is squarely on the ‘supply-side’ of politics, i.e., parties’ strategies in their claims-making, and not the ‘demand-side’ which would require examining their responses to electorates with regard to Europe (e.g., van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Another limitation is that we say little about cross-national variations in party systems, and the possible impact of this on opportunities (general and issue-specific) for mobilisation. The research follows a distinct tradition for assessing evidence on the ‘direct’ (Mair 2000)
Europeanisation of party politics: a field which has sought to identify parties’ positions and strategies on Europe, and speculate over their potential contributions to realignments within party systems (Taggart 1998, Hooghe et al 2004, Steenbergen and Scott 2004, Marks 2004, Kriesi 2005/7).

A key debate is over the relationship of pro-integrationist versus Eurosceptic contestation to the traditional left/right cleavage, and whether, and to what extent, this is a ‘new’ basis for party positioning. A salient thesis is that parties’ positions on Europe cross-cut left/right divisions, so that centre parties of left and right tend to be pro-integrationist, with Euroscepticism confined to the marginal poles of ‘extreme left’ and ‘extreme right’ – the famous inverted ‘U’ pattern. This inverted ‘U’ pattern for party alignments on Europe is confirmed as an observable ‘fact’ by many (Hix and Lord 1997, Taggart 1998, Aspinwall 2002, Hooghe et al 2004, Marks and Wilson 2000, Marks and Steenbergen 2004, Marks 2004). However, there are several interpretations, first, regarding the strategies which produce this type of party contestation, and second, its issue or ideological contents. This leads to differences over how, and to what extent, contestation over European integration is integrated into the left/right cleavage, and positions on whether this is: ‘nothing new’ (Mair 2000); or represents an important additional twist to the cleavage (Hix and Lord 1997, Hooghe et al 2004); or constitutes a fully blown ‘new’ cleavage (Kriesi 2005/7) for party politics.

A first set of explanations focuses on the strategic responses of parties, more than the ideological contents of European issues. For Scott, applying an approach inspired by Riker’s (1986) emphasis on parties’ as strategic actors (2001:6; cited Hooghe et al 2004:124), ‘each party attempts to strategically manipulate the European integration issue...to meet its goals’. Steenbergen and Scott (2004:166) extend this view into a thesis on the salience of Europe for parties: ‘issue salience of European integration across parties can be attributed to a considerable extent
to the strategic behavior of those parties.. parties that stand to gain from the issue, in whatever sense, try to emphasise the issue, while parties that stand to lose try to de-emphasise it.’ This ‘nothing new’ view is supported by Mair’s (2000) general stance that Europe offers little as a new dimension for party contestation. For him, Eurosceptic parties cannot be reduced to their issue-specific anti-European appeal, instead Europe constitutes only part of their general oppositional stance. It also finds support in Taggart’s (1998) study which locates Euroscepticism at the margins of the political system. Taggart describes European integration as a ‘touchstone of domestic dissent’. In this view, European issues provide a new opportunity and outlet for anti-systemic opposition, allowing for the mobilisation of the usual malcontents from the extreme left and right, and also sometimes from the ‘new politics’ dimension by green and populist parties. Marginal and excluded parties see Europe as an opportunity to strategically challenge the existing patterns of alignments in the party system. Europe as a potential cleavage is seen as relatively ‘contentless’. It is centre party consensus over Europe that offers a mobilisation potential for a ‘politics of opposition’ from the periphery.

Another set of explanations places more weight on the impact of the ideological contents of European integration on the ways that parties strategically position themselves relative to one another. In these approaches, the inverted ‘U’ is less of an observation, and more of a thesis. Theories are advanced for how European integration issues constitute an ideological axis for contention which cross-cuts the traditional left/right cleavage that has traditionally shaped party contestation in the nation-state. This transformation of the ideological space leads to new opportunities for mobilisation and strategic alignments among parties. However, there are important disagreements about the nature of this transformation of the political space.
Hix (1999) complements the idea of a ‘politics of opposition’ by marginal parties, by adding that parties from the political mainstream have interests in maintaining the ‘status quo’ by pursuing a strategy that incorporates European integration issues into the existing left/right axis of party contestation. Hix and Lord (1997) see European politics as increasingly two-dimensional, whereby left/right contestation in the domestic arena, principally over economic and socio-political issues (functional interests), is largely independent from contestation over ‘national sovereignty’ (territorial interests) that may range across positions that are either for or against more EU-integration. According to them, major parties prefer to contest left/right issues and try to avoid contestation over European integration issues by adopting a generally pro-integrationist stance. This leaves open a political space for opposition to European integration for minor parties from the ideological extremes of left and right. Actually, this stance is not too dissimilar to Taggart’s (1998) thesis on Euroscepticism as a ‘touchstone of domestic dissent’, but gives an ideological twist that offers an explanation for party behaviour more generally across the party system.

Hooghe, Marks and collaborators (2001, 2004) go beyond the straightforward inverted ‘U’ thesis and specify a different take on the transformation of the political space as a result of European integration. Their refinement emphasises that specific aspects of parties’ contestation over Europe are absorbed into their left/right contestation, whereas others are not. This is partly because EU competences relative to nation-states do not penetrate all policy fields equally. For them, the important axis for party contestation is over ‘regulated capitalism’ versus ‘neo-liberalism’. This means that the two dimensions (more/less integration; left/right) are not necessarily independent from each other, as Hix/Lord suggest, and leads to hypotheses about the varying positions of centre-parties over Europe.
Hooghe/Marks et al. argue that the more European integration focuses on ‘market-regulation’ as opposed to ‘market-making’, then the more centre-left social democratic parties, as supporters of *regulated capitalism*, defined as a ‘project to build environmental, social, infrastructural, and redistributive policy’ (Steenbergen and Marks 2004:9/10), become favourably disposed to integration. By contrast, when economic and monetary union is largely completed ‘those on the political right... become more opposed to European integration’ and pursue a *neo-liberal* project, defined as striving to provoke ‘regulatory competition among national governments within an encompassing market’ (Steenbergen and Marks 2004:9/10). This makes the right more sceptical to further integration. Importantly, this explains oppositional stances as a strategy defined by ideological commitment: ‘Euroskepticism of extreme parties arises... not only from their opposition to the EU’s policies, but also because they reject the ideology of the EU’s construction’ (Hooghe et al 2004:125). They consider that party support for Europe declines with distance from the centre of the left/right dimension, because peripheral parties are mobilising against the specific form that European integration has taken, i.e., market-liberal capitalism with limited regulation, which has been advanced by specific types of centre-right and social democratic parties.

In addition, this specification provides expectations for party variations across policy fields within European integration, dependent on the proximity of a policy field to the crucial neoliberal versus regulated capitalism axis. Thus, for example, on employment (Marks 2004: 242), ‘the further to the left a party is located on the left/right dimension, the greater its support for a European employment policy.’ It also predicts changes across time by left and right parties again contingent on the contents of advancing EU integration defined by the neoliberal/regulated capitalism axis. At present social democratic parties are seen as broadly pro-European because integration now means applying some regulatory mechanisms to a largely completed neo-liberal market model, whereas
in the previous phase of advancing unregulated markets they were more sceptical.

It is to the credit of Hooghe et al (2004) and Marks (2004), that unexpected findings when testing their main thesis, led to a further insight bringing the ‘new politics’ cleavage dimension to the fore. Placing parties on a GAL (green-alternative-libertarian) versus a TAN (traditional-authoritarian-nationalist) axis, they conclude that (Marks 2004: 244) ‘a party’s position on the new politics dimension is considerably more powerful than its position on the left/right dimension in predicting its support for integration.’ Here, the GAL parties are seen as pro-integrationist, with green parties taking such stances on environmental and asylum policies, but the correlation is much stronger on the TAN Eurosceptic side, which drives the overall relationship, and where the radical right and some traditional and authoritarian Conservative parties, defend national sovereignty from an ideological rather than a strategic standpoint. Hooghe et al (2004:140), however, restrict themselves to interpreting the implications of this insight as evidence that: ‘European politics is domestic politics by other means’, and call for further research.

Finally, Kriesi (2005/7) and collaborators (2006), building on these GAL/TAN insights, go much further by advancing a systematic view where party contestation over Europe restructures politics by transforming the basis of traditional left/right party contestation across Western Europe. Here, defence of national sovereignty is considered a response to globalisation. According to Kriesi, (2005:1)‘The mobilization of the potential winners and losers of this new structural conflict between ‘integration’ (into the European or global community) and ‘demarcation’ (of the national community) by the political parties is expected to have a profound impact on the national party systems.’ This view sees a new potential for party alignments in response to a political space that is transformed along the lines of a ‘new structural conflict’ between
the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in processes of competition over the consequences of globalisation or ‘de-nationalisation’ in politics (supra-national authority challenge), economics (market liberalization challenge) and culture (immigration challenge).

Unlike most others, Kriesi hypothesises not only about the sources of Euroscepticism, but its relationship to the overall level and dynamics of party mobilisation, (2005:2) ‘I expect that the issue of European integration has generally become more salient for Western European parties and that the mobilization concerning this issue has mainly been carried by the Eurosceptics who defend the losers’ point of view.’ As guardians of the ‘permissive consensus’, mainstream centre parties generally support European integration, with opposition coming from the radical left and right, but also importantly, from mainstream parties who have redefined themselves in response to de-nationalisation pressures. In contrast to the postulated Hooghe/Marks’ ‘regulated capitalism versus neo-liberalism’ axis of contention, Kriesi emphasises much more the cultural and identity basis for Eurosceptic potentials: (2005:5) ‘I expect the cultural aspects of the opening up of the borders to be more important for the mobilization of the ‘losers’ than the defence of their economic interests.’ This brings defence of national sovereignty as a salient collective identity to the explanatory forefront. As a result, Kriesi’s inverted ‘U’ becomes significantly asymmetrical, with conservative and radical right parties making efforts to mobilise against European integration more than parties dissenting against Europe on the basis of economic interests, namely, the classical ‘old’ or radical left. Thus Kriesi’s emergent brave new world for party politics sees (2005:5) ‘conservative and new populist right parties, who most successfully appeal to the fears of the ‘losers’ to be the driving force of the current transformation of the Western European party systems’.
Before testing some of these hypotheses, it is necessary to outline the methodological approach.

**Method and Data: Claims-making**

The need for innovative methods and new data sources is clearly outlined by Mair. His insightful review criticises the overuse of approaches based on ‘the sort of crude but easily accessible data provided by expert judgements’ and ‘analyses of the contents of party programs.’ Against this, he advocates, ‘What is really needed… given that this is a new and often exploratory avenue of research, is a much more systematic, inductive, and largely bottom-up comparison of political discussions at the national level’ (2006:13/14).

Without devaluing the obvious advances made by other approaches¹, we propose to move decisively in Mair’s proposed direction by coding newspaper coverage of political parties’ claims. We study parties’ stances over European integration from a systematically retrieved sample of cases that appear in mediated national public discourses across seven countries. One advantage is that this retrieves data for parties’ mobilisation from the actual interactive context which is produced by their strategic attempts to communicate with voters over specific issues, i.e. mass mediated political discourse. In an era of ‘mediatised politics’ or ‘audience democracy’ (Kriesi 2004), where voters depend heavily on the media for access to political communication (Swanson and Mancini 1996), mass mediated political discourse is a key location for party contestation. Not all attempts reach the public domain, however, since the media selects and reports on those events, claimants and opinions that by definition cross a threshold of public significance as important and/or contentious. Newspaper coverage records parties’ successful mobilisation attempts. It therefore constitutes an important and rich source for

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¹ Studying mediated claims by parties can be complementary to party programme based studies because it provides information on another aspect of parties’ existence. Instead of their range and
retrieving data on how political parties position themselves on issues and the ideological contents of the arguments they direct at voters.

Although established in the related social movements and public discourse fields, there are relatively few studies where newspaper coding is the central method for studying parties’ positions on issues and the salience of their mobilized campaigns.\(^2\) One reason may be the difficulty and costs for undertaking such data-gathering efforts, especially cross-nationally. Another may be a ‘path dependency’ for the application of methods within scientific fields. The most commonly aired general objections to using media sources refer to the media’s selection bias (journalists’ selection of events and issues) and description bias (journalists’ selection and depiction of relevant information about events and issues). Against this, the established tradition for taking newspapers as a data source for collective action has produced its own ‘cottage industry’ of researchers, assessing the impact of selection and description bias on the validity of newspaper data. Overall, such studies conclude that newspaper data does not deviate from accepted standards of quality (e.g., Earl et al 2004, Rucht et al 1998). In addition, some possible limitations of selection and description biases may be limited by drawing from more than one newspaper source (Koopmans et al 2005). However, the most compelling argument for this method comes from those who interpret the data in a way that uses media selectivity in its theoretical approach. In this perspective, non-reported events and issues are considered to be largely irrelevant, because if an actor’s political demands do not cross the threshold of relevance and become reported by the media, then they are not made visible, open, and accessible to wider publics, which is how they achieve a

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\(^2\) To our knowledge the only study which adopts a similar approach by coding newspaper sources to investigate party positions over Europe is by Kriesi and collaborators (Kriesi et al 2006; Kriesi 2005/7). It is worth noting that Kriesi attempted to replicate his findings using party election manifestoes, and in his words ‘failed completely’ (2005: 13), concluding that they are unsuitable as an indicator for party contestation over Europe, because they do not account for the mobilisation efforts by parties.
constituency-building impact. In short, if the public can’t see them, party’s claims can have little impact in shaping opinions. A methodological approach highly suited to producing data-sets that allow such interpretation is **claims-making analysis** (Koopmans and Statham 1999, Koopmans et al 2005).

Claims-making is an established approach for examining the public dimension of politics from newspaper sources. By making claims, collective actors strategically attempt to make their political demands appear more publicly rational and legitimate than those of their opponents, thereby potentially opening up policies and decisions to wider deliberation processes. Following ‘protest event’ analysis methods (Rucht et al 1998), the unit of analysis is not an article, but an individual act of claims-making. In contrast to media contents analyses which often study journalists’ representations of actors and events, claims-making analysis takes news as a ‘source’ for claims-making by reported ‘third party’ actors. Journalists’ own opinions are filtered out. Claims-making analysis takes reported news as a record of public events, and retrieves information on this aspect.

A claims-making act occurs in the public sphere. The definition for a ‘claim’ includes intentional public speech acts (including protest events) which articulate political demands, calls to action, proposals, and criticisms, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of claimants and/or other collective actors in a specific issue-field. For this study, acts are included if their claims concern the regulation or evaluation of events and issues relating to European integration. Given a focus on political parties within national politics, our sample includes all claims-making acts by national collective actors with a political party identity within their own national public sphere. Each claims-

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3 We code all acts in the issue-field of European integration, and all acts with a European issue scope in six strategically selected policy fields: two where EU competences have extended furthest (monetary, agriculture), two intermediary (immigration, troop deployment) and two where nation-
making act is taken as an intervention over European integration in the public sphere by a representative of a political party, regardless of specific actor-types (Prime Minister, MP, party activist etc..), or whether the party was in power, or not.

To give an idea of the type of information coded, claims-making acts are broken down into seven elements, for each of these a number of detailed variables are coded (See codebook, Koopmans 2002):

1. Location of claim in time and space (WHEN and WHERE is the claim made?)
2. Actor making claim (WHO makes the claim?)
3. Form of claim (HOW is the claim inserted in the public sphere?)
4. Substantive issue of claim (WHAT is the claim about?)
5. Addressee of claim (AT WHOM is the claim directed?)
6. Justification for claim (WHY should this action be undertaken?)
7. Constituency actor: who would be affected by the claim if it were realised (FOR/AGAINST WHOM?)

In a simple form: at a time and place (1.) an event occurs, where an actor (2.) mobilises a speech act (3.) that raises a claim about an issue (4.) which addresses another actor (5.) calling for a response, on the basis of a justifying argumentation (6.). The claim is made with reference to a public constituency, whose interests are affected (7.). For this article, the crucial information is retrieved from the substantive issue of the claim (4.) made by an actor (2.) and its justification (6.). Each claim is coded for whether it is for (+1), against (-1), or neutral (0) over European integration, and also in more qualitative detail for the language, issue-contents and its basis of justification.

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states retain most autonomous control (retirement/pensions, education), see http://europub.wz-berlin.de.
The claims-making approach produces analytic descriptive data-sets. Parties appear in the sample, not because they have been pre-selected, but only to the extent, and in the way (for or against Europe), that they successfully make interventions over Europe in the mediated party political discourse. Unlike methods which pre-select parties (party programmes; expert surveys), it is able to show the relative visibility and salience of parties’ successful mobilisation efforts as the basis for their positions over issues. This is an important consideration, because although we may learn from programmes and country experts that a specific party holds a Eurosceptic position, such information tells us nothing about the extent to which a party is actually successful at making those stances visible to the electorate. A further benefit is that this approach produces highly flexible data-sets that allows for a combination of cross-national and cross-party analyses, at different levels of aggregation.

Overall our sample for this article contains 2701 claims by political party actors, across the seven countries, ranging from 207 in the Netherlands to 563 in Germany. All aggregated analyses are weighted by country. The sample covers five years, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2001, and 2002.4 We exclude claims-making acts made in the name of party coalitions, firstly, because for most countries these were relatively few, a specific actor usually makes a claim, even when a party is a member of a coalition, and secondly, because we wanted to preserve clear party identities. Italy is an exception, since a large proportion of claims are made by actors in the name of the centre-right and centre-left coalitions, which can be

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4 An exception is the Italian case, where the transformation of the political party system between the earlier (90, 95) and later (00,01,02) time periods, led us to take only the years 2000-2 (for analyses with parties as unit), due to considerations of sample size, and a lack of continuity of parties across time.
seen as the major competitors in the post-tangentopoli political system, so these coalitions are coded as specific actors\(^5\).

To limit concerns regarding possible media selection biases, we coded four newspapers per country, which were rotated as sources. Where possible we selected two broadsheets with different (left/right) political affiliations, a popular/tabloid newspaper, and a regional newspaper per country, though this was adapted slightly to account for differences in national media landscape.\(^6\) Cases were retrieved from a sample determined by specific days selected in advance at regular time intervals within each year. This means that our findings are not based on exceptional or intense periods that may be driven by key events (e.g., the Haider controversy), or by elections, where specific dynamics may take place. Instead we focus on party mobilisation at the aggregate level across more ‘normal’ periods, though the impact of key events or elections on European positioning are still visible from our sample. The sample covers 52 days for 1990 and 1995, and 104 days for 2000, 2001, and 2002. On the sample days, all articles in the home news section of the newspapers are checked for relevant acts by political parties, i.e., the search is not limited to articles containing certain key words. Lexis-nexis or hard copy versions were coded by trained researchers using a standardized codebook. Conventional inter-coder reliability tests were applied for article selection and coding (reliability was high, see website for results), and researchers participated in regular discussions about difficult cases.

We now turn to findings, first, on national variations, and then on the visibility, positioning and contents of party claims-making.

\(^5\) The transformation of the Italian political system after the ‘tangentopoli’ scandals presented us with the ‘old’ now defunct parties in 1990, a technocratic government in 1995, and the parties of the new political system for 2000-2, broadly grouped into centre-left and centre-right coalitions.

National Variations in Mediated Party Contestation

Studies working with parties as the unit of analysis largely ignore cross-national differences. One benefit of our data is that it is also possible to describe national variations in mediated party contestation. This is important because it is within the national political settings that parties make their evaluations for deciding whether to publicly campaign over Europe, or not. Before analysing the parties, we examine three general dimensions of possible variation in national public discourses of party contestation: the axis of contention; its shift over time; and differences between government and opposition parties.

First, it is possible to compare the overall national party debates, relative to one another, by their absolute positions over European integration. Each claim is coded and given a score: -1 if it is against European integration, +1 if it is favour, and 0 if it is neutral, or ambivalent. The mean score for all parties’ claims-making gives a country’s overall position over European integration, on a scale from -1 for Eurosceptic, to +1 for pro-integrationist. The ‘all parties’ position’ column in table 1 shows this variation in the countries’ axes of contestation over Europe.

In general, except for Britain where it is neutral (+0.01), party contestation is over an axis of contention that is favourable to European integration. Party contestation in the three northern ‘founding fathers’ Germany (+0.40), France (+0.38), and the Netherlands (+0.30) is especially pro-European, which fits the image of a ‘permissive consensus’ among parties. Party debates in Britain (+0.01) are clearly distinct from others, containing significantly more Eurosceptic claims, and unconvinced about the overall value of European integration. The southern countries Italy (+0.24) and Spain (+0.15), and non-EU Switzerland (+0.20) have axes of party contention that are intermediary between these two poles.
Table 1: National Variations in Positions over European Integration:  
All Parties; Shift in All Parties over Time (t1: ‘90/5, to t2:2000-2);  
Governing Parties’ Distance from Opposition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All Parties’ Position (-1 to +1)</th>
<th>Shift in All Parties’ Position over Time (t1: ‘90/5, to t2:2000–2)</th>
<th>Governing Parties’ Distance from All Opposition Parties</th>
<th>n All Parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>+0.40</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>+0.13</td>
<td>563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>+0.38</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>+0.25</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>+0.30</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>+0.02</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>+0.24</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>-0.17*</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>+0.20</td>
<td>-0.32</td>
<td>+0.10</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>+0.15</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>+0.16</td>
<td>332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>+0.01</td>
<td>+0.17</td>
<td>+0.35</td>
<td>448</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aggregate overall mean position for all Parties is +0.24 (weighted by country)  
* includes only 2000–2 period due to old party system/technocratic government in earlier years

National party contestation over Europe may also change over time. The much discussed decline of the ‘permissive consensus’ and emergence of Euroscepticism (e.g., Mair, Kriesi) would predict debates becoming less favourable to European integration. Although the data are not continuous, it is possible to split the sample into two specific time-phases: t1 combines the years 1990 and 1995, and t2 the three later years 2000-2. The ‘shift in position’ column in table 1 shows the change of the overall position of party contestation, either in favour (+) or against (-) European integration. With the exception of Spain (-0.05), we see changes in all countries. And with the striking exception of Britain (+0.17) where debates become more pro-integrationist, the overall trend is towards more Euroscepticism. Non-EU Switzerland (-0.32) has an especially notable shift, indicating the onset of Eurosceptic party mobilisation during this period of referendums over entry and treaties. In Germany (-0.18), France (-0.13), and especially the Netherlands (-0.25), party contestation remains pro-European but
has become significantly less so over time. This indicates the decline of a ‘permissive consensus’ or at least the onset of more critical engagement evaluating European integration. Italy (-0.17) shares a similar trend, but the substantive transformation of the party system between the times makes comparison difficult. In Spain (-0.05) there has been least change, which suggests that critical debates have not taken off. Finally, Britain (+0.17) remains gloriously out of synch with the rest of our countries, her critical party contestation has become markedly more pro-European over time, while in aggregate terms remaining at a Eurosceptic gulf from our other countries.

A third feature of national party contestation concerns the stance of governing parties compared to opposition ones. It maybe that governing parties push for European integration, whereas those outside government oppose. This is the position of those who see Euroscepticism as oppositional politics. The ‘governing parties’ distance’ column in table 1, shows the distance of the governing parties’ position compared to all opposition ones, aggregated to include all five years, and taking into account changes of government. The score shows the overall distance in favour (+) or against (-) European integration of governing parties compared to opposition ones. In five countries, governments take a clear pro-integrationist stance compared to their oppositions. In Britain (+0.35), this is especially pronounced. This combined with the shift (+0.17) from the period of Conservative (t1) to Labour (t2) government, indicates that the Labour government have made strong efforts to make a more pro-integrationist case within the overall ambivalent party discourse over Europe. In France (+0.25) and Germany (+0.13), governing parties are pro-European cheerleaders within a (declining) pro-European setting, whereas in Spain (+0.16) they advocate Europe, within a debate that is changing less and mildly pro-European. In the non-EU Swiss setting, governing parties (+0.10) are also more pro-integrationist. By contrast, in the Netherlands (+0.02), we witness little difference between government and opposition parties, which occurs in an
overall pro-European setting but one that is becoming more critical of integration (t1 to t2, -0.25). This suggests a moving ‘consensus’ between government and opposition parties within Dutch politics towards a less favourable stance on Europe, but within a setting that still remains pro-integrationist. In short, the Netherlands shows a consensus that is becoming less permissive. Finally, the outlier is Italy (-0.17) where government parties are less in favour of Europe than opposition ones. This score is only from the sample 2000-2, since the earlier years had a different party system and then a technocratic government (see footnote 5). For Italy, this covers the specific time of the Berlusconi led coalition government il Polo della Liberà, which as we shall see later took a specific stance over Europe.

In sum, there are cross-national variations in mediated party contestation. In general, these debates are pitched on an axis that is in favour, but which appears over time to be becoming more critical of European integration. Britain is exceptional, where the debate is ambivalent to Europe, but becoming more favourable, pushed by the Labour government. Mostly, governing parties tend to be more pro-European than opposition ones. After outlining these broad national variations, we now examine party families and parties.

**Parties’ Visibility in Mediated Contestation**

A first step in assessing party contestation is to examine which political parties were able to mobilise claims successfully over European integration into their national public discourses. Table 2 shows the 39 parties across our seven countries that made claims over Europe. The full name of each party is given along with its acronym. To make sense of the range of parties in our sample, they are categorised by ‘party family’ in columns, and by country in rows.
The choices for the six party families – green, centre-left, liberal, centre-right, right and radical right- are made from existing literature, and the pragmatic consideration that for a ‘family’ to be represented, there should be at least three parties from at least of our two countries.8 The two French leftist parties and two Spanish regionalist parties that did not meet the criteria for a family are included as ‘Other Parties’ below the table. The scale for party family runs basically from left to right, though the parties from the ‘new politics’ dimension (GAL green-alternative-libertarian v TAN traditional-authoritarian-nationalist) are represented at the poles by ‘green’ and ‘radical right’. A distinction is made between ‘centre-right’ and ‘right’ that is represented by a dotted line. This attempts to distinguish two groups on the right of the political spectrum that, either follow a more ‘centrist’ line, often along traditional Christian Democratic lines (centre-right), or alternatively, which tend to place themselves further towards the right, through a more explicit adoption of neo-liberal or TAN themes (right).9

The ‘share’ row (bold) at the top of Table 2 shows a party family’s mean percentage claims-making share in its national party political discourse over European integration, weighted by the number of countries. The ‘n’ row gives the number of parties and countries producing a ‘family’. Each party’s share (%) in its national party claims-making is given after its name.

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7 The threshold for inclusion is that a party makes at least eight claims, i.e., more than 2% share in the average country’s discourse.
8 Although attempts at defining party families differ, they broadly agree on general categories. Huber and Inglehart’s (1995) study of political space in 42 countries used the categories: socialists; Christian democrats; conservatives; liberals; greens; radical left; extreme right; regionalists; and anti-europeans. Taggart (1998) adapted von Beyme’s (1985) classification for the categories: social democrat; Christian democrat; conservative; liberal; new politics; extreme left; new populist; neo-fascist; ethno-regionalist; agrarian; religious; and anti-EU. Such detail is less meaningful for our study since many smaller parties have little media presence and some categorisations are redundant for some countries (e.g. religious or agrarian in the UK). Like Kriesi et al (2006) we apply a more parsimonious categorisation that allows for comparison of parties and countries.
9 Like all such categorisations, there is some arbitrariness in our placement of parties in families. However, Table 2 makes our specific choices, made in consultation with national experts, open to scrutiny. These categorisations for party families are used in the analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share* (%)</th>
<th>Green</th>
<th>Centre-Left</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Centre-Right</th>
<th>Right</th>
<th>Radical Right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>N (parties; countries)</strong></td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 parties; 3 countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>8 parties; 7 countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>7 parties; 6 countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>7 parties; 6 countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>7 parties; 5 countries</strong></td>
<td><strong>3 parties; 2 countries</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Britain</strong></td>
<td><strong>Labour (Lab) 49.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>Liberal Democrats (LibDem) 2.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) 26.6; Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF) 13.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conservative (Con) 45.8</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>France</strong></td>
<td><strong>Les Verts (Verts) 2.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Parti socialiste (PS) 39.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Démocratie Libérale (DL) 3.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rassemblement pour la France (MPF) 3.0; Rassemblement pour la France et l'Indépendance de l'Europe (RPF) 2.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Front national (Fn) 2.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Germany</strong></td>
<td><strong>Die Grünen/Bündnis 90 (Grünen) 19.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) 42.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Freie Demokratische Partei (FDP –D) 5.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU) 20.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU) 12.1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Netherlands</strong></td>
<td><strong>GroenLinks (GL) 7.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) 30.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD) 26.4; Democraat 66 (D66) 16.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Christen-Democratisch Appèl (CDA) 17.3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Italy</strong></td>
<td><strong>Democratici di Sinistra (Ds) 4.0; l'Ulivo (Ulivo) 21.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>Democrazia è Libertà – La Margherita (Marg) 26.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Centro Cristiani Democratici (CCD) 2.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>Forza Italia (FI) 4.3; Casa delle Libertà (Libertà) 29.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alleanza nazionale (An) 2.9; Lega Nord (Lega) 3.1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spain</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) 28.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Partido Popular (PP) 54.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Centro</strong></td>
<td><strong>Forza Italia (FI) 4.3; Casa delle Libertà (Libertà) 29.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>Alleanza nazionale (An) 2.9; Lega Nord (Lega) 3.1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Switzerland</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz (SPS) 13.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>Freisinn-Demokratische Partei der Schweiz (FDP-CH) 35.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>Christlich Demokratische Volkspartei (CVP) 25.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP) 19.4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N claims (unweighted)</strong></td>
<td>134</td>
<td>928</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>569</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notes


* Mean share of claims by party of family type in national political party claims-making over Europe, weighted by number of countries (including only countries where such a party exists).
** For Italy, we exclude 1990 and 1995 due to transformation of political system, plus include Centre-left and Centre-right coalitions for 2000-2002 as representative of the new emergent political party system.
*** German party names given for CH.
An important indicator for contestation over Europe is the extent to which political parties are able to make their claims visible in their mass-mediated public discourse, not least since this is medium where citizens and voters gain access to parties’ stances. Of course, there is not a level playing field for gaining access to the media discourse for claims. It is well established that the media routinely cover the opinions of powerful and institutional actors, whereas the claims of marginal and non-institutional actors face higher barriers to be reported (e.g., Schlesinger and Tumber 1994). For parties, generally one would expect the centrist and established parties of government to be covered more routinely than radical (extreme) or marginal parties. However, if a small marginal party chose to campaign specifically on European integration, and was successful in thematising the issue as a challenge, this would be evident in mediated party contestation, and most likely draw responses from other competing parties.

The top of Table 2 gives an indication of which ‘party family’ types are able to successfully mobilise and make their claims visible. In general, mediated party debates over European integration appear to be dominated by party families with the potential to be in or join government. ‘Centre-left’ parties on average account for three-tenths (30.8%) of claims-making, whereas the ‘centre-right’ (22.8%) and ‘right’ (19.5%) together about four-tenths. In addition, ‘liberal’ parties make up on average about a sixth (15.7%). For mediated party debates, this shows that centrist parties are dominant, at least quantitatively, in making claims over Europe. This shows that if there is a ‘permissive consensus’ over Europe between the centrist parties, then it is not a publicly silent one, and that the main parties have much to say about Europe.

Of the smaller, radical or marginal party families, only the ‘greens’ were visible (9.7%) and this was largely due to strong national presences of the German Grünen and Dutch Groenlinks (GL). Regarding absentees from mediated party debate, it is surprising that we find so little presence for the parties from the left.
and right poles, even accounting for the easier channels of access to media discourse for mainstream centre parties. We find no ‘radical left’ party family making claims over Europe, the only party with such characteristics in our sample is the French Communist PCF (4.2%). Given their role as defenders of national workers against the impact of the EU’s neo-liberal market-making, the absence of other radical left parties, such as the German PDS, and Italian R.C, is surprising. Although we find examples of ‘radical right’ parties, the French Front National (Fn) 2.0%, and the Italian Alleanza Nazionale (An) 2.9% and Lega Nord (Lega) 3.1%, a similar point can also be made at this pole. Although in the Italian case, the An and Lega claims-making may occur within the Liberta coalition, this is not the case for the Fn. Overall, looking down the table at parties’ presence in national debates across the different countries, our data show that with the limited exception of France the ‘radical left’ and ‘radical right’ are largely absent.

In sum, from a public discourse perspective, Europe seems to be a debate that is dominated by the mainstream centrist parties. However, Table 2 also shows that these parties have much to say about Europe. It is therefore worth examining the contents of this mediated party debate to see the positions adopted by different party families and parties relative to one another, and whether these fit the image of a ‘permissive consensus’, or other views over party contestation.

**Parties’ Positioning over Europe**

One way of comparing parties is by their absolute positions over European integration, gauged from its claims. Each claim is coded and given a score: −1 if it is against European integration, +1 if it is favour, and 0 if it is neutral, or ambivalent. The overall aggregated mean score for a party, or party family, gives its *position* over European integration on a scale from −1 for Eurosceptic, to +1 for pro-integrationist. The overall national mean position is +0.24 (weighted by country) which shows that in an aggregate sense party political debates tend to be on an axis that is in favour of European integration. However, it is also
important to take into account that parties make claims within different national contexts with different axes for contention over Europe. The overall mean position for party claims-making varies cross-nationally. It ranges from relatively more pro-integrationist party debates in Germany +0.40, France +0.38, and the Netherlands +0.30, to more ambivalent ones in Italy +0.24, Switzerland +0.20, and Spain +0.15, to relatively more Eurosceptic ones in Britain +0.01. Clearly this is an important finding showing that the party debates in the Northern founder countries of the EU are relatively more pro-integrationist than southern countries, late-comers and non-members. It also means that making a claim within the British context is not equivalent to making one in the German context. Holding a +0.20 position in Britain would make an actor pro-integrationist at +0.19 above the national mean, but relatively Eurosceptic in Germany, at −0.20 from the all-party mean. To account for this we calculated an overall aggregated mean score for the distance of a party’s, or party family’s, claims-making position from its national mean. This shows how far an actor is from its national mean of party claims over European integration, and can be in the Eurosceptic or pro-integrationist direction.

Figure 1 places the party families in a two dimensional space, where horizontal differences represent the differences in aggregated positions between party families over European integration, and the vertical differences give their aggregated distances in position from their national mean positions. The horizontal distance between the party families gives their overall positions on European integration (from −1 to +1) relative to one another, with positions towards the left representing Eurosceptic stances, and towards the right, pro-integrationist. The vertical distance takes into account cross-national differences in mean positions over Europe, by calculating the extent to which all the parties in a specific family take a position relative to their national mean. This again provides a score that is pro-integrationist (+) or Eurosceptic (−) that can be aggregated overall for ‘families’. Thus, party families towards the top of Figure 1 can be seen as pushing
their national discourse in a pro-integrationist direction, whereas those towards the bottom push their national discourses towards Euroscepticism.

Figure 1: ‘Position’ and ‘Distance’ from National Mean Position in Mediated Party Claims-making over European Integration, by Party Family

Figure 1 shows clear party family differences. The liberals and centre-left are the vanguard for pro-integrationism, mobilising a favourable absolute position over European integration (position: liberals +0.43; centre-left +0.39) and pushing national discourses in this direction (distance: liberals +0.17; centre-left +0.14). Given their relatively high share in claims-making, it seems that the centre-left (30.8%) importantly drives pro-integrationism, as do the liberals (15.7%). In
addition, the greens mobilise a pro-European position (+0.43), but this is based on three parties, which have a less pro-integrationist impact nationally overall, with only the Dutch Groenlinks having a positive distance (+0.30), compared to the neutral German Grünen (+0.01) and negative French Les Verts (-0.15).

The main differences occur on the right of the political spectrum and are striking. In absolute terms, the centre-right is pro-integrationist (+0.33), though less so than the liberals and centre-left, but on average has little effect (distance: +0.05) in pushing the national discourse towards a pro-integrationist or Eurosceptic direction. By contrast, the right parties are against European integration (position: -0.27), in absolute terms and push national discourses strongly towards Euroscepticism (distance: -0.52). Beyond this group, the radical right appear at the bottom left, with on aggregate a strong Eurosceptic position (-0.54) and existing a long sceptical distance from the national mean position (-0.86).

In accord with Hooghe et al.s’ findings (2004) and Kriesi’s thesis, we see Euroscepticism being mobilised mostly by TAN right and radical right parties. However, it is important to recall that the mean level of successful mobilisation into mediated discourses of party contestation is much lower for the radical right parties (2.5%) than the right (19.5%). Thus our data shows that Euroscepticism is not only mobilised by the marginalised radical right, but more importantly by mainstream right parties who are established at the political system’s core. The famous inverted ‘U’ appears to have transformed, not only with the disappearance of the radical left, but also with a flattening of the gradation on the right to provide an intermediary stance between a pro-integrationist core and an Eurosceptic periphery. This aggregate finding generally supports Kriesi’s position that mainstream right parties have redefined themselves to adopt and advance Euroscepticism within national party contestation. In this limited sense, and counter to Mair (2000), we do witness a ‘direct’ consequence of European
integration on national party contestation. It seems that there is a division over European integration on the right of the political space. This division is not simply between the included centre and excluded margins à la Taggart (1998), but there is an important source of Euroscepticism among the mainstream ‘right’. With regard to whether this constitutes a Kriesian emergent trend, we need first to look at which mainstream right parties fit this ‘profile’, and whether it occurs across national settings, or is specific to a few, before examining the Euroscepticism that they mobilise.

Figure 2: ‘Position’ and ‘Distance’ from National Mean Position in Mediated Party Claims-making over European Integration, by Party (Parties>10% share)
Figure 2 gives information on mainstream parties’ contestation by placing parties with more than a 10% share of their national claims-making within the dimensions of position and distance. In addition, the vertical dotted line at +0.24 gives the overall mean party position (weighted by country), whereas by definition ‘0’ is the overall mean for distance.

Figure 2 illustrates national differences in party contestation over Europe. Most striking is the Swiss case where the centre-left SPS (position +0.74; distance +0.54) drives a pro-integrationist agenda in opposition to the right SVP (pos −0.43; dis −0.63) which drives a Eurosceptic one, with the liberal FDP (pos +0.24; dis +0.04) and centre-right CVP (pos +0.38; dis +0.18) coming in between. This bi-polar pattern of party contestation over Europe is repeated in Britain where the centre-left Labour (pos +0.25; dis +0.24) push for pro-integrationism and the right Conservatives (pos −0.28, dis −0.29) for Euroscepticism. It is worth noting that after the Swiss SPS, the British Labour party produces the highest pro-integrationist distance from its national mean position (jointly with the French centre-right RPR). This shows that although Labour has a less pro-integrationist position than the other centre-left parties (except for the Spanish PSOE), its mobilisation has a strong effect in shaping party political discourse towards pro-integrationism. Labour has one of the strongest pro-integrationist impacts on its national discourse but in absolute terms remains at the overall cross-national party political mean. This scenario fits that of a detailed study of Labour’s claims-making which showed that its pro-integrationism is substantively ‘Anti-Euroscepticism’ more than ‘pro-Europeanism’ (Statham 2005).

The Italian and German cases also show some elements of the type of contestation where right parties mobilise Eurosceptic positions relative to other parties. In Italy, the right coalition il Polo della Libertà (pos +0.02; dis −0.20) exists at a discursive distance from the centre-left l’Ulivo coalition (pos +0.38;
+0.16) and liberal Margherita (pos +0.35; dis +0.13) which cluster closely together advocating pro-integrationism. In Germany, the CSU mobilises a position (+0.06) which is neutral about the overall merits of European integration, but at a greater distance (-0.34) from its national mean than the British Conservatives. This strong Eurosceptic effect is mobilised in opposition to its own sister party the centre-right CDU (pos +0.48; +0.08), the centre-left SPD (pos +0.42; dis +0.02), and Die Grünen (pos +0.41, dis +0.01), which cluster closely together at the more pro-integrationist pole.

By contrast, the Netherlands is a consensual case with little evidence for contestation, with the centre-right CDA (pos +0.26), two liberal parties VVD (pos +0.29), D66 (pos +0.26) and centre-left PvdA (pos +0.27) remarkably clustered in extremely close proximity, around ‘0’ distance. Given that the only other Dutch party in our sample is the green Groenlinks (7.2% share; pos +0.60) which is more pro-integrationist than these mainstream parties, we find very little evidence for political parties representing Eurosceptic positions in Dutch public debates. For the Netherlands, it seems that party ‘consensus’ holds fast, at least for the time period of our sample, though earlier we noted that this ‘consensus’ has become significantly less ‘permissive’ over time. Since the emergence of the populist Liste Pym Fortyn party has significantly challenged the cross-party elite consensus and transformed contestation and alignments within party politics in subsequent years, one would now expect this lack of representation for Euroscepticism to be less evident. Perhaps what our data show, is that prior to 2002, Dutch party politics witnessed a decline in permissiveness over Europe, but one that was managed consensually across the parties and provided little space for mobilising Euroscepticism. This left open an opportunity for new political actors to come on the scene and criticise outright the value of European integration. Former Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers recognised this potential long before subsequent events made it a fashionable thesis, speaking to British journalist Hugo Young (1998:510) in 1996 he stated: ‘If I and others
went on television for a few nights, to make a case against the integration of Europe, I think the Dutch people could easily turn round.’

The French case differs again and most closely approximates the characteristics of the inverted ‘U’. Pro-integrationism is strongly mobilised by the two centre-right parties RPR (pos +0.62; dis +0.24) and UDF (pos +0.50; dis +0.12), along with the centre-left PS (+0.50; dis +0.11). In contrast to Italy and Germany, there appears to be no single emergent right party promoting Euroscepticism, but in contrast to the Netherlands, there are several small parties mobilising Euroscepticism, on the ‘right’ MPF (2.9%; dis -0.88), RPF (2.5%; dis -1.38), ‘radical right’ Fn (2.0%; dis -1.38), and on the ‘radical left’ PCF (4.2%; dis -0.38) and a ‘national socialist’ party MdC (2.0%; dis -1.01), and even the ‘green’ Les Verts are relatively ambivalent (2.7%; dis -0.11). Thus in France there is a permissive consensus at the centre over Europe, and opposition is voiced, but by fragmented sources at the periphery.

The Spanish case has some characteristics of the Dutch and French. Like the Dutch it is highly consensual, with the centre-right Partido Popular and centre-left PSOE, very tightly clustered together. However, like the French there is some opposition from the periphery but from regionalist parties, the Catalan CiU (8.7%; dis -0.08) and Basque PNV (5.7%; dis -0.15), but to a much more limited extent and degree. Overall, Spanish parties appear highly consensual over Europe.

Figure 2 shows, strikingly, the four right parties, the Swiss SVP, British Conservatives, German CSU and Italian Libertà clustered towards the bottom-left indicating a Eurosceptic position, combined with pushing the national party discourse strongly in a Eurosceptic direction. To some extent this supports the emergence of contestation over Europe within national party politics à la Kriesi, at least across some countries. Our data identify differences within the mainstream right of the political spectrum between the centre-right and right
parties. So far, however, we have examined parties’ positions only on a linear pro-integrationist versus Eurosceptic scale and at an aggregated level. To better understand such a cleavage, we now analyse the actual Eurosceptic claims-making by these four parties.

**Euroscepticism by the Mainstream Right: Opportunism or Ideology?**

Here a first scenario is *opportunism*, whereby right mainstream parties primarily use Europe strategically, as an issue to challenge other parties. They thematise Europe in response to opportunities for challenging a pro-integrationist centre party consensus, largely by co-optation (Gamson 1975), stealing the clothes of parties at the radical poles. This view leads us to expect Euroscepticism to be a somewhat eclectic and inconsistent set of claims expressed over specific European issues, and mobilised at specific times in response to events which provide an opportunity for challenging other mainstream parties. In general, we would see no emergent consistent pattern across countries. Again, this perspective draws from the assumptions of those emphasising the strategic basis of party contestation (Steenbergen and Scott 2004) and predicting ‘nothing new’ in the ideological contents of Europe as a basis for party contestation (Mair 2000).

A second scenario places more emphasis on Euroscepticism as an *ideology* through which right parties attempt to mobilise supporters and galvanise a public constituency of shared interests against European integration. This stance considers European integration to be a central and substantive part of the ideological terrain which political parties contest in contemporary liberal democracies. Here right parties would mobilise Euroscepticism as a coherent set of beliefs, by advocating market-making neo-liberalism according to Hooghe et al, and for Kriesi, by galvanising the ‘losers’ of de-nationalisation processes by constructing a defence of national identity within a ‘cultural’ rather than an
‘economic’ interest framework. If Euroscepticism is located within a deavage structure, either modifying an old one (Hooghe/Marks), or as the basis for a new one (Kriesi), one would expect to find traces of this emergent ideological trend across different national contexts.

Of course, the two scenarios overlap. Even if a mainstream party’s Euroscepticism is ideological, it will still be mobilised strategically in response to perceived opportunities for successful gains. Conversely, opportunistic adoption of issues by a party resulting in successful outcomes may in time lead to ideological conversion. The question becomes one of degree. As an ideology, one would still expect Euroscepticism to be mobilised more often than in the opportunism scenario, because it would constitute a core of a party’s campaigns, and be more consistent in substance and emergent over time, as it constitutes a growing general challenge.

A detailed analysis is now undertaken taken of the substantive contents of claims against European integration mobilised by the four rightist parties and coalitions, the Swiss SVP, British Conservatives, German CSU, and Italian il Polo delle Libertà. These are regularly parties of government and can be considered mainstream, but as our findings show, they position themselves as ‘Eurosceptics’ relative to other parties. But what does their ‘Euroscepticism’ mean, under what conditions does it arises, does it vary cross-nationally or over time, and to what extent is it opportunist or ideological?

Starting with the Swiss SVP, many Eurosceptic claims are mobilised within the specific political context of referendum campaigns over Switzerland’s possible EU entry and bi-lateral agreements. The SVP’s principal target is opposition to the ‘Oui à l’Europe’ initiative, which 326 of 328 SVP members vote against, and which citizens subsequently reject, leading to the party’s repeated calls for a withdrawal of EU accession demands. Although mobilised strategically in
response to the specific political opportunity for campaigns presented by the referendums, there is a consistent basis to the SVP’s claims’ contents. Opposition to Europe galvanises a populist appeal to the possible loss of power for the Swiss citizen, with a defence of perceived collective national interests. In addition, the ‘super-statist’ interventionism of the EU is rejected. The European Union is presented as a heavy-handed interventionist state which threatens the political and economic freedoms and liberties of Swiss citizens. The Swiss individual citizen will lose power, status and authority by joining a supranational EU state. Thus, Carl Blocher makes this emotive populist appeal, ‘one should search for one’s national salvation in oneself not within a bigger supranational building.’

Also the EU state’s supposed interventionist threat to national independence is most symbolically depicted by the alleged consequences for Swiss farmers: ‘EU agriculture regulations will corner small Swiss farmers and hinder the independence of the food supply.’ According to the SVP, the EU will remove Swiss direct democracy, it demonstrated its anti-democratic credentials by taking measures against Haider’s presence in the Austrian government, and joining monetary union will make the Swiss, and especially farmers, poorer. Nor does the continental security argument resonate with Swiss historical experience, for the SVP, ‘Europe can live in peace without the EU’.

British Conservatives are a longstanding and persistent source of Eurosceptic mobilisation, throughout our sample, as party of government (1990, pos –0.26; 1995, pos 0.00) and opposition (2000, pos –0.35; 2001, pos –0.21; 2002, pos –0.29). The Conservatives mobilise significantly more Eurosceptic claims than any

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10 Speech in inverted commas is directly quoted from the language of the claims (translated when not in English) from our data sample.
11 This refers to the ‘Haider’ controversy. In the 1999 Austrian Parliamentary elections, the Freedom Party led by Joerg Haider, a radical right party, achieved a second place victory and entered government. In response, the European Union issued diplomatic sanctions against Austria, which were lifted in September, 2000. This matter was highly controversial as it raised questions about the extent to which the EU could act in relation to events within the internal politics of a Member State. From the SVP’s perspective, its own parallels with the Austrian Freedom party were clear: it takes similar policy stances, for example, being strongly anti-immigration, and is also part of the governing coalition.
other party in our sample. In contrast to the SVP, EU membership means that political opportunities for mobilisation are regularly provided by summits and meetings with negotiations on proposals and treaties for further political and economic integration. Our sample clusters strongly, substantively and consistently around such events. Importantly, the Conservative Eurosceptics take these opportunities, by opposing each potential integration step. Regarding claims’ contents, Conservatives oppose political and monetary union by defending national sovereignty and advocating a free-market. Politically, the advancing Union is seen as a threat to the sovereignty of national political institutions, not least Parliament. Economically, the advancing Union is depicted as potentially re-introducing regulatory state-interventionism into a deregulated economy, and thereby threatening national interests. The Conservatives reject the social chapter and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is opposed as a threat to economic growth, prosperity and employment, as a ‘job destroying charter that should have been vetoed’. However, it needs noting that this Euroscepticism is not a uniform party stance but contested by other minority internal party factions. Our data indicate this for the Conservatives and SVP. The standard deviation for Conservative positions is high (0.70) compared to its main pro-integrationist opponent Labour (0.53). Similarly, the SVP has a higher standard deviation (0.83) for position, indicating greater internal party differences, than its pro-integrationist opponent the SPS (0.44). On this, the emergence of Eurosceptic critique appears to produce contestation within these right parties, as well as between them and their competitors, a trend that according to Kriesi (2005) one would expect for a mobilised new cleavage.

Like the SVP, the Conservatives substantively oppose the supranational EU as an actor. The EU is depicted as an interventionist ‘Federal EU superstate’, a ‘United States of Europe’, ‘anti-American, big government Europe’, and its state-like institutions are criticised for fraud, mismanagement, high cost and incompetence. All potential EU regulatory intervention is firmly rejected. At the
core of Conservative opposition to the EU is a strong market oriented neo-
liberalism that is combined with a defence of national political sovereignty and
institutions. Importantly, and to a greater extent than the SVP, this vision is not
reducible anti-globalist nationalism, but specifies an alternative international
world in contrast to the EU: economically, the Conservatives propose Europe as
a ‘free-trade area’, and politically, they advocate international relations between
strong sovereign nation-states, promoting activity for the British state within
NATO and the Commonwealth. Importantly, for the Conservatives, it is not
clear why internationalism stops at the borders of the EU. They want free-
markets and international cooperation between sovereign states everywhere.

We do find a few limited cases where Euroscepticism drifts into ‘little Englander’
xenophobia, for example, Minister Nicholas Ridley, claiming Monetary Union
was a ‘German trick to gain power’, or giving sovereignty to Brussels was
‘tantamount to giving it to Adolf Hitler’. However, it needs underlining that the
vast majority of Eurosceptic claims are reasoned arguments against the perceived
threats of declining political sovereignty and increasing market regulation.
Conservative Euroscepticism is only to a limited extent populist/cultural
(xenophobia/ethnic nationalist). For the most part it addresses core political (pro-
sovereignty/civic nationalist) and economic (pro-free market) substantive issues
with reasoned alternatives. This relative limited usage of ‘cultural/historical’
framing by Conservative Eurosceptic claims-makers is supported by Statham and
Gray (2005:75), who found that only a sixth of frames were ‘cultural/historical’,
and a seventh ‘economic’, and the remainder and vast majority were ‘political’.
In contrast to the SVP and the Conservatives, the German CSU’s Eurosceptic
claims are largely mobilised around a specific contingent event. The CSU are
strongly critical of the EU’s sanctions against Austria over the Haider affair,
arguing that the ‘EU may not interfere in the government of a member state.’
The defence of national sovereignty is limited to this argument that in this
instance the EU overstepped the limits of its authority. In addition, we find a
few cases that criticise the government for the weakness of the Euro, and oppose
EU membership for Turkey. Overall, however, CSU Eurosceptic claims are
mobilised intermittently, in response to specific exceptional political events.
Unlike the SVP and Conservatives, the CSU does not have a consistent critique
opposing the EU’s substance, either politically (e.g., ‘superstatism’), or
economically (e.g., ‘pro-regulatory interventionism’). The potentiality of CSU
Euroscepticism lies more in the opportunity provided by a specific type of
European integration event. For example, one could imagine the possible
accession of Turkey, with its potential domestic consequences, constituting an
opportunity that the CSU would use for mobilising Eurosceptic claims to
strategically challenge other mainstream parties. However, within our sample,
the CSU’s opposition to Europe is strongly limited to specific exceptional issues
and events.

Lastly, the Italian case of Berlusconi’s il Polo della Libertà coalition’s opposition
to the EU focuses on neo-liberal, anti-regulatory, anti-state elements. Thus
Berlusconi ‘dreams of a more free market-oriented Europe’ arguing for less
centralised government and regulation, and praising Mrs Thatcher’s approach to
Europe. In populist vein, the EU’s growth and stability pact is presented as
‘against the interests of Italian citizens’, whereas the Euro is criticised for raising
prices. Politically, the Libertà coalition is sceptical of EU enlargement on
grounds of national interest, arguing that development of Southern Italy ought to
take precedence. Il Polo della Libertà is an intermediary case: it enters debates
about European integration, more regularly than the CSU, and on a more
consistent basis, but makes fewer attempts than the SVP and Conservatives to
make Europe a central issue for political campaigns. Thus, although Libertà
proposes a neo-liberal agenda as a critique of the EU, political opposition to the
EU appears rather inconsistently on an ‘ad hoc’ basis, depending on perceptions
of whether Italy stands to benefit or lose from the proposed integration measure.
This eclecticism combining market rhetoric and nationalist populism is perhaps the hallmark of Berlusconi politics.

Comparatively, the British Conservatives’ Euroscepticism is a fully blown ideology, a core set of beliefs making substantive critique of the EU that is mobilised as consistent campaign in response to EU integration phases over time. Likewise, the Swiss SVP mobilise a coherent set of positions that consistently oppose entering the European project, often responding to the political opportunities presented by Swiss referendums and voting on bi-lateral and accession agreements. By contrast, the German CSU is opportunist in its limited Euroscepticism, opposing the EU’s stance against the rise of the Austrian far right, on Turkish entrance, and Euro price hikes. These Eurosceptic claims have some national populist appeal and to a limited extent co-opt radical right themes, but importantly, they fail to address the core and substantive aspects of EU integration, and the EU as a supranational actor, with a coherent critique. Also they tend to be mobilised in response to one-off exceptional political events in the EU story. The Italian Libertà comes in between, its populist cost-benefit ‘ad hoc’ basis for criticising aspects of European integration – enlargement threatening development in the South, Euro price hikes– that potentially threaten perceived Italian interests, combine with a vision of a neo-liberal Europe. In sum, we find evidence for ideological Euroscepticism especially by the Conservatives, who are most vocal, but also the SVP, to the extent that referendums and voting on accession and treaties brings the party regularly and coherently into the public debate over Europe. There is partial evidence for ‘latent’ ideological Euroscepticism in the Italian Libertà coalition, though it currently does not reach the coherence of an ideology, and is used strategically, whereas the German CSU appears only to move against Europe opportunistically.
Discussion: Whither Euroscepticism?

This article examined an original and new type of data source to test hypotheses on party contestation over European integration. The research focus has been on party visibility and positions within mass-mediated contestation, and the approach adds insight on successfully mobilised aspects of party campaigns, by providing information that cannot be retrieved by other methods. Here we summarise and elaborate on the main findings, by discussing their implications for general patterns of party contestation and the potential emergence of Euroscepticism.

In general, we found party debates that are pitched on an axis that is in favour, but which appears over time to be becoming more critical of European integration. This confirms the decline of a permissive consensus and the emergence of a critique of the value of European integration in most countries. Britain is exceptional, in having a party debate that is ambivalent to Europe in absolute terms and significantly more Eurosceptic than other countries throughout. However, pushed by Labour when in government (2000-2), it is becoming more favourable. Mostly, governing parties tend to be more pro-European than opposition ones, though the Netherlands’ ‘cosy consensus’ shows little difference between government and opposition parties, and Italy’s government are more Eurosceptic than their opposition.

Against the ‘no change’ thesis (Mair), and those who focus on party strategies (Taggart, Steenbergen and Scott), our findings point in the direction of an ideological basis for party contestation over European integration (Hooghe/Marks, Kriesi). Like Kriesi, we witness Euroscepticism not only at the margins, but increasing, and importantly mobilised by the mainstream right. With regard to whether this transformation is a modified ‘left/right’ (Hooghe/Marks) or ‘new’ (Kriesi) cleavage our findings are mixed. The ideological basis of contention appears to be broader than Hooghe/Marx’s neo-
liberalism/regulatory capitalism axis, but narrower than Kriesi’s cultural TAN/GAL emphasis (see below). Regarding the ‘newness’ (Kriesi) of this axis for contention, the outcome is at present open to academic interpretation, depending on whether one evaluates the evidence for political transformation, as a little, or a lot. A key factor in questions over the extent and nature of the restructuring of party politics in response to European integration, is the extent to which Euroscepticism becomes more visible and mainstream in time across different national political contexts, when at present it is limited largely to Britain and Switzerland. If mainstream Euroscepticism is an emergent trend, then at present, it still has some emerging to do.

This turns attention to a factor that receives little elaboration here, and similar research, but will be crucial for the emergence of party contestation: national variations in political opportunities. In this respect, referendums over European issues provide the clearest example of a ‘political opportunity’ that is potentially an important triggering event for the emergence of contestation, arguably more so than elections where domestic issues tend to dominate. The Swiss case shows how referendums, ‘making Europe public’, can lead to mainstream party campaigning. However, Switzerland is different because it is a non-member. In Britain, Europe has been a public issue from the outset, with two referendums in quick succession on entrance in the mid-70s, and elites divided over the European project ever since. Thus, in addition to opportunities, there needs to be something to provoke elite divisions over Europe within the public spotlight. Perhaps, the failed 2005 Constitution referendums in France and the Netherlands, will provide a watershed, with parties in the future more prepared to compete over Europe, now the collusive era of ‘permissive consensus’ has been exposed to public scrutiny and found wanting. For social science conceptualising the ‘political opportunities’ that account for observable cross-national variations will be an important explanatory step for future research.
Regarding Euroscepticism, if it has ideological properties, we need to specify its substantive contents. On our evidence, Euroscepticism opposes reductions in national political sovereignty, opposes supranational and foreign state intervention (regulatory in markets, power and bureaucracy in governance), and proposes borderless free-markets. European integration is characterised as a new threat of statist regulatory interventionism, whereas the alternative vision is a Europe of ‘negative integration’ (Scharpf 1996), unregulated free-markets across borders. It is up to sovereign nation-states to set the limits of market regulation, internally through domestic governance, and internationally, through cooperation with other nation-states.

In support of Hooghe/Marks, Eurosceptic critique limits itself to specific issue-fields of EU competences, and a central component is the political-economic ‘neo-liberal versus regulated capitalism’ axis. However, it is not simply reducible to this. Eurosceptic nationalism opposes most reductions in the political sovereignty of the nation-state, not just those relating to market-regulation. Also it is in some cases (especially the SVP) populist, emotively appealing to national peoples to rule themselves. This emphasises the importance of a TAN (traditional-authoritarian-nationalist) ‘new politics’ dimension to Euroscepticism.

For Kriesi, this cultural aspect of TAN is fundamental and explanatory (2005:13): ‘the relevance of Euroscepticism for the restructuring of the national political space depends on the deep cultural roots referred to by Diez Medrano (2003)… It is only in countries, where Euroscepticism, as in Britain and Switzerland, resonates with deep-seated national anxieties that it serves as the key for the restructuring of the party system – with conservatives or new populist right becoming the decisive restructuring force.’ However, Kriesi’s thesis also misses important elements.
First, Kriesi fails to recognise the global and internationalist vision of Euroscepticism: economically, neo-liberals want markets opened everywhere not just in the EU, and politically, they have a view of interacting nation states that again is not restricted to European borders (e.g., Conservatives emphasising NATO, Commonwealth ties, US links). Thus Eurosceptics do more than deliver an appeal to the ‘losers’ of de-nationalisation processes, they appeal also to some of its potential ‘winners’. Second, Eurosceptic nationalism cannot be reduced to cultural-nationalism, i.e., ‘deep cultural’ threats and xenophobia. It is highly questionable, and not empirically proven, that the British and Swiss are more beset by ‘deep seated national anxieties’ over globalisation issues, such as immigration, than other European countries, such as the French and Dutch. Leaving that assumption aside, we found only limited cases of populist cultural nationalist and xenophobic Euroscepticism and these constituted a small minority voice. Actually, most Eurosceptic nationalism finds expression as civic-nationalist claims about sovereignty. Defence of sovereignty is not necessarily a product of ‘deep-seated national anxieties’, nor is it logically linked to ‘immigration threats’ and ‘fear of foreigners’. Instead nationalism can be a form of ‘constitutional patriotism’ (Habermas’ Verfassungspatriotismus) located in advancing interests of the national community of citizens and belief in core political institutions. Again this stands for more than addressing a constituency of de-nationalisation ‘losers’. Eurosceptic civic-nationalism can appeal across internal divides (e.g., class, sectoral interests) standing for a cohesive national civic community, sharing common values. This is literally ‘conservatism’ in the face of Europeanization changes and need not drift into xenophobia. Indeed, the more Euroscepticism exists at the political mainstream, the less likely it is to be based on the appeal of ethnic nationalism. To succeed in a mainstream party, Euroscepticism has to be made appealing in the first instance to the ‘political classes’, which is more likely on the basis of civic nationalism and sovereignty than xenophobia.
In sum, following Hooghe/Marks, we consider that contestation over European integration remains importantly linked to the neo-liberal/regulated capitalism axis. In addition, we consider that TAN (traditional-authoritarian-nationalist) ‘new politics’ themes are also important to Euroscepticism. In contrast to Kriesi, we see the key sources of TAN critiques to be grounded in civic-political rather than cultural responses to European integration. The key question regarding mainstream right party Euroscepticism is the extent to which this TAN component is incorporated within and compatible with the neo-liberal component, or vice versa. Our leading example, the Conservative party, illustrates that this is achievable, but at a cost of internal divisions between ‘conservative’ (civic-political TAN) and ‘neo-liberal’ factions. The SVP exhibits similar features. Logically, this leads us to speculate that party contestation over Europe occurs over a rightist ‘neo-liberal/civic-political TAN’ versus a leftist ‘regulatory capitalism/civic-political GAL’ dimension. Further specification and finding evidence for its empirical grounding is a matter for future research.
References


Kriesi, H. (2005) “How national political parties mobilize the political potentials linked to European integration”, manuscript, University of Zurich.


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