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*To Grandma Elsa, teacher of life.
Where I walk, in my every goal, there are you.
In my eyes and in my heart.*

*A nonna Elsa, maestra di vita.
Dove io cammino, in ogni mio traguardo, ci sei anche tu.
Nei miei occhi e nel mio cuore.*

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Abstract

Alla base di questo studio vi è l'analisi dell'Euroscetticismo, un'ideologia che ha le sue origini con la nascita dell'Unione Europea. Com'è possibile dedurre dal termine - composto dalle parole *Euro* (ovvero relativamente all'Europa) e *Scetticismo* (assumere un atteggiamento dubbioso) - essere euroscettico significa criticare l'istituzione dell'UE e tutto ciò che la riguarda: in concreto, gli esponenti di questo pensiero sono in genere contrari al processo di integrazione europea, all'apparato istitutivo di quest'organizzazione e alle politiche da essa promosse.

I motivi che mi hanno spinto ad approfondire questo tema sono diversi: in primis, si tratta di un argomento estremamente attuale e trasversale; secondariamente si è di fronte ad un fenomeno che si è diffuso in modo esponenziale in pochi anni in quasi tutti gli Stati Membri dell'UE; infine, trovo che la corrente euroscettica sia stata in grado di fondere diverse discipline, interconnesse sicuramente tra loro, ma chiaramente differenti - come ad esempio storia, sociologia e politica - riuscendo a creare un risultato variegato, ma coerente, che ha di fatto preso piede nella società odierna.

Questa tesi ha quindi come obiettivo quello di studiare l'impatto che l'Euroscetticismo ha avuto e ha tuttora sulla sfera sociale, in particolare su tre diverse, ma fondamentali, 'dimensioni' di essa: la popolazione, la politica e i mass media.

È di fatto impossibile poter parlare di Euroscetticismo senza prima ripercorrere la nascita e i passaggi fondamentali dell'evoluzione dell'UE.

Le prime correnti di pensiero relative al progetto europeo si diffusero in modo più capillare e concreto effettivamente nel periodo successivo alla fine della Seconda Guerra Mondiale. Tra tutte le teorie presenti, fu l'approccio funzionalista pensato da Monnet ad emergere: secondo questo politico, di base, per dare vita alla Comunità Europea, era necessario procedere a piccoli passi. Proprio così quindi, partendo dalla dichiarazione di Schuman, passando per la nascita della Comunità Europea del Carbone e dell'Acciaio istituita nel 1951 con il Trattato di Parigi e per il fallimento della creazione della Comunità Europea di Difesa, si arrivò infine agli avvenimenti che hanno portato all'elaborazione dei progetti per la Comunità Europea dell'Energia Atomica e per la Comunità Economica Europea, formalizzati poi con la firma del Trattato di Roma nel 1957.

Il vero 'punto di non ritorno' - se così si può definire - però si raggiunse nel 1992, con la firma del Trattato di Maastricht, che da un lato diede origine ad un'iniziale forma di vera e propria Unione Europea, ma dall'altro contribuì inoltre ad una prima effettiva diffusione del fenomeno euroscettico. Da questo momento in poi infatti, il lavoro dell'organizzazione fu impostato per cercare di rafforzare sempre più non solo l'unione economica della Comunità, ma anche quella politica e infatti

rispettivamente nel 1996 ad Amsterdam e nel 2000 a Nizza vennero firmati due Trattati che avevano come obiettivo principale quello di migliorare il livello di integrazione, operando sull'assetto istituzionale europeo. Questo poi in realtà nel 2007, con la firma del Trattato di Lisbona - un atto che si divide in due accordi, ovvero il Trattato sull'Unione Europea e il Trattato sul Funzionamento dell'Unione Europea - venne abolito e rimpiazzato da un ordinamento che prevedeva una nuova divisione delle competenze tra l'UE e gli Stati Membri.

È proprio nel primo tra questi due importanti documenti che è stata definita la fisionomia attuale del sistema istituzionale europeo, che include organi regolarmente attivi nel processo decisionale e altri invece che esercitano solo funzione consultiva. Il lavoro di questi organismi non è sempre stato apprezzato, e anzi al contrario molte volte è stato usato dagli euroscettici per i loro discorsi di dissenso: in particolare, sono stati ampiamente sfruttati i momenti di crisi vissuti dall'Unione, come ad esempio la crisi finanziaria del 2008 - responsabile dell'aumento dell'Euroscetticismo soprattutto nei paesi del Sud dell'Unione, maggiormente colpiti - e quella migratoria, più recente.

A livello teorico, è possibile inquadrare il fenomeno euroscettico in modi diversi.

Una prima classificazione è stata definita da una ricerca di Taggart e Szczerbiak, che distinguono tra una forma di Euroscetticismo più 'dura', i cui punti chiave sono la totale opposizione all'UE e la conseguente uscita dall'organizzazione, e una invece più 'morbida', che esprime preoccupazione solo relativamente a determinate politiche europee, che non mettono al centro gli interessi dei singoli stati, e non nei confronti della Comunità in generale. Per approfondire maggiormente poi, Schäfer e Gross hanno identificato tre diversi livelli di analisi dell'argomento: il primo si basa sul soggetto che assume il comportamento euroscettico, il secondo si focalizza sull'oggetto della critica, infine il terzo approfondisce la modalità e l'intensità della contestazione.

È precisamente considerando il primo livello di questo studio che è possibile distinguere tra Euroscetticismo popolare, diffuso quindi tra i cittadini, ed Euroscetticismo partitico, che concerne la politica.

Per comprendere le ragioni che hanno portato all'aumento di un sentimento di sfiducia nei confronti dell'Unione Europea tra i cittadini, è necessario contestualizzare i cambiamenti avvenuti nell'opinione pubblica, prendendo in considerazione il periodo storico e le fasi del processo di integrazione europea. Ciò che i ricercatori del settore hanno quindi scoperto è che con l'effettivo sviluppo sovranazionale dell'istituzione sono emersi punti di vista contrastanti: se i primi decenni della storia dell'Unione sono stati caratterizzati da un cosiddetto 'consenso permissivo', cioè un atteggiamento di sostegno, o al massimo di indifferenza, nei confronti del progetto europeo, negli

anni '90, soprattutto dopo il trattato di Maastricht, la situazione è cambiata e protagonisti sono diventati sentimenti di opposizione all'UE, dinamica definita 'dissenso vincolante'.

L'Euroscetticismo partitico invece è diventato un campo di studio autonomo solo negli ultimi decenni. Le concettualizzazioni relative ai partiti che promuovono il pensiero euroscettico sono varie, ma ciò che in questo scenario emerge maggiormente è che quest'ideologia non è più strettamente legata alle realtà estremiste di destra e sinistra, com'è stato fino a qualche tempo fa, ma oggi influenza anche quelli che sono considerati i partiti più tradizionali. Di conseguenza, non è più possibile identificare la posizione di un partito in merito alla questione europea in base alla famiglia ideologica a cui esso appartiene, dato che le concezioni politiche possono variare nel tempo.

In tutto ciò, è fondamentale prendere in considerazione il mondo dei mass media poiché questi ricoprono un ruolo importante nella diffusione del fenomeno euroscettico, sia a livello popolare che a livello partitico.

L'Euroscetticismo infatti è strettamente collegato alla copertura mediatica che viene data all'UE; in altre parole quindi, il potere di quest'ideologia si rafforza o diminuisce a seconda delle informazioni che i cittadini degli Stati Membri ricevono dai mass media sulle varie questioni europee. Tuttavia, il grado di incisività di questi strumenti dipende da due fattori: la pervasività delle notizie che vengono esposte in modo strategico e le caratteristiche individuali delle persone, come ad esempio il personale livello di sofisticazione politica. Ciò significa che un individuo è maggiormente influenzabile se la sua conoscenza delle dinamiche politiche è limitata. Questo aspetto è da tenere presente anche, e soprattutto, quando si tratta il tema delle fake news: da anni l'immagine dell'Unione viene regolarmente danneggiata da tabloid che, nella maggior parte dei casi principalmente a scopo di lucro, pubblicano notizie di fatto false contribuendo all'aumento della disinformazione nella popolazione. In merito a ciò, l'UE cerca di combattere attivamente questa piaga garantendo l'accesso a messaggi veritieri sui siti istituzionali.

In questo quadro, quello che potrebbe sembrare un excursus, ma che invece è un argomento necessario da trattare è il chiaro legame che esiste tra populismo ed Euroscetticismo. Nel contesto europeo, i populistici hanno diverse ragioni per opporsi all'Unione: in primo luogo, l'UE può facilmente essere considerata un'organizzazione elitaria, disinteressata alla realtà dei cittadini comuni; in secondo luogo, il processo decisionale delle istituzioni europee, estremamente complicato e opaco, non riflette la volontà della popolazione; infine, si pensa che Bruxelles metta a rischio l'autonomia decisionale degli Stati membri. Queste critiche all'Europa danno quindi luogo a una sorta

di relazione simbiotica tra populismo ed Euroscetticismo, che partendo dal dibattito politico arriva ai cittadini tramite i media.

Infatti, poiché il successo dei partiti populistici ed euroscettici è in costante crescita, negli ultimi anni le discussioni mediatiche hanno dato un taglio sempre più populista alle informazioni trasmesse.

In questo scenario, aggiungendo anche il tassello relativo al populismo, è quindi possibile rafforzare il delineamento di questa sorta di relazione interdipendente esistente tra i corpi informativi e la politica euroscettica.

Considerando questa macro tematica è inevitabile mettere in luce il caso Brexit, che conferma effettivamente quanto esposto precedentemente.

Oltre ad aver rappresentato una vittoria per gli euroscettici britannici, il referendum ha evidenziato come le idee dei cittadini del Regno Unito, influenzate dalla propaganda politica e dai media, si siano gradualmente spostate verso una forma di rifiuto nei confronti dell'UE. Infatti, attraverso l'analisi della figura di Nigel Farage - l'allora carismatico leader dello UK Independence Party - e del cosiddetto 'effetto Murdoch' - una campagna mediatica anti-UE messa in atto con molta cura sfruttando i vari giornali e le emittenti televisive appartenenti all'impero mediatico gestito appunto da Murdoch - è stato dimostrato che è possibile direzionare l'opinione pubblica di un intero paese, contribuendo a sviluppi che alcuni decenni fa erano considerati impensabili.

Una volta formalizzato infatti, questo referendum ha delineato un punto di svolta non solo per la Gran Bretagna, ma anche per l'equilibrio del continente, dato che ad esempio anche Francia e Italia, da sempre tra i maggiori sostenitori dell'UE, ad oggi stanno sperimentando un cambio di mentalità, muovendosi verso idee più euroscettiche.

Per concludere, i tre ambienti in cui si manifesta l'Euroscetticismo - l'opinione pubblica degli abitanti, i partiti politici e i mass media - sono strettamente collegati tra loro ed è la scarsa conoscenza dei cittadini sull'UE che porta la popolazione a dipendere dai mass media per formulare opinioni sull'argomento. I mass media utilizzano un framing che dà maggiore copertura mediatica agli eventi negativi legati all'UE e ne evidenzia gli aspetti critici, portando ad aumentare il sentimento di insoddisfazione dei cittadini nei confronti dell'integrazione europea. Per questo motivo, i partiti politici adattano il loro programma alle opinioni diffuse tra i cittadini, in modo da aumentare la loro compatibilità con l'elettorato e ottenere vantaggi elettorali. Esiste quindi tra questi tre attori una spirale consequenziale - un vero e proprio circolo vizioso - che può essere bloccata solo attraverso una corretta educazione all'Unione Europea, magari proposta fin dalle giovani generazioni, in modo da permettere ad ogni cittadino di sviluppare un pensiero indipendente.

List of Abbreviations

- AFL: Anti-Federalist League
- BCW: Burson Cohn & Wolfe
- CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy
- CJEU: Court of Justice of the European Union
- EAEC/Euratom: European Atomic Energy Community
- EC: European Commission
- EC: European Community
- ECA: European Court of Auditors
- ECB: European Central Bank
- ECSC: European Coal and Steel Community
- EDC: European Defence Community
- EEAS: European External Action Service
- EEC: European Economic Community
- EFSF: European Financial Stability Fund
- EFTA: European Free Trade Association
- EMS: European Monetary System
- EMU: European Monetary Union
- EP: European Parliament
- ESCB: European System of Central Banks
- EU: European Union
- GAL: Green Alternative Libertarianism
- GAMM: Global Approach to Migration and Mobility
- JHA: Justice and Home Affairs Council
- MEPs: Members of the European Parliament
- MS: Member States
- NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- OEEC: Organization for European Economic Cooperation
- RRP: Radical Right Parties
- SEA: Single European Act
- TAN: Traditional Authoritarian Nationalism
- TCA: Trade and Cooperation Agreement
- TEU: Treaty on European Union

- TFEU: Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
- UKIP: United Kingdom Independence Party

Introduction

“In recent years, Euroscepticism has moved towards mainstream political and popular culture, with a strength that has come as a surprise to many”¹. This phrase, freshly read and heard numerous times, may seem obvious to lots of people, but in reality, it perfectly describes today’s real social situation. The term ‘Euroscepticism’ refers to a critical orientation towards the European Union, its policies and its political class. This current of thought, as mentioned above, has spread unchallenged throughout Europe and has indisputably revolutionized the international scene, but also the dimension of the individual.

In view of the above, therefore, the aim of this work is to study the impact that the Eurosceptic ideology has had and still has on the social sphere, in particular on three different, but equally fundamental, features of it: the population, politics and the mass media.

This thesis is structured in four main chapters, which serve not only to provide an answer to the research question of this dissertation, but also to reconstruct the historical background of the phenomenon, to rework its theoretical framework and to demonstrate what is exposed through the analysis of the Brexit case, that is - for the moment - the Eurosceptic victory par excellence.

To give a brief overview, the first chapter of my work will focus on the path that led to the birth of the European Union, pointing out that from a project that was initially designed to be a mere commercial association, the great politicians of that period instead moved on to a concrete idea of economic and social union.

The key to understand how Euroscepticism has begun to spread is indeed inherent in the moment when, with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the European Union and its institutional apparatus have actually been created. In fact, the Member States have been asked to cede part of their jurisdiction to this organization, thus making it a supranational body; the issue of national sovereignty though has always been extremely delicate and slippery and the countries have, since the dawn of time, crooked their noses when asked to touch it.

It was not only this aspect, however, that contributed to the increase in the crack in support of the European project: over time actually, the EU has had to face some crises, such as the financial crisis

¹ Eavi Staff, “What is Euroscepticism?”, in: *eavi – MEDIA LITERACY FOR CITIZENSHIP*. Available: <https://eavi.eu/what-is-euroscepticism/> [Accessed: 12th June 2022].

of 2008 and more recently the migration crisis, but the problem response mechanism was not effective enough and thus general discontent has disseminated.

In the second chapter, based on the work of scholars in the field, I will theoretically outline the phenomenon of Euroscepticism, with all its definitions and categorizations.

Mainly then, I will focus on the analysis of two types of Euroscepticism: the popular one, which concerns the public opinion of the citizens, and the party-based one, which refers to the political sphere.

With regard to public opinion, this is an element that is increasingly taken into account in studies and debates related to the reality of the European Union. The causes of the decline in public support for the EU are varied and, sometimes, they even are interpreted differently by the disparate experts. However, the fact is that first the increase in the competences conferred on the Union at the beginning of the 1990s and then the idea of also creating an economic union led part of the citizens to take a step backwards in support of Community integration, causing a concrete consolidation of the Eurosceptic thinking.

As for Euroscepticism in politics, over time in Europe it has been possible to observe the increase of the so-called ‘challenger parties’, that is, “political entrepreneurs without government experience seeking to disrupt the dominance of mainstream parties”². Euroscepticism, however, is very much present in both of these two political categories; there are then two main opposition dimensions - the hard one, which is contrary to the European project itself, and the soft one, which is mainly opposed to the policies emanating from the organization - and four different types of specific parties that apply the Eurosceptic ideology differently in their program, based also on whether they belong to the Left or to the Right faction.

In the third chapter I will consider how Euroscepticism has spread in the world of mass media and, today, also in the reality of social networks.

In this context it is interesting to note how the media have been influenced by this phenomenon, but also how they in turn have fostered further expansion of Eurosceptic thinking, exploiting first the link that exists between this ideology and populism and then using fake news to strengthen any doubts and insecurities in public opinion. This in particular represents a real scourge towards which the European Union has been actively fighting for years.

² Catherine De Vries and Sara B. Hobolt, *Challenger Parties and Populism*, in “LSE Public Policy Review”, 2020, vol. 1, p. 1. Available: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/105787/1/3_43_1_PB.pdf [Accessed: 12th June 2022].

To conclude, in the fourth and final chapter of this thesis, I will substantiate what exposed earlier by considering Brexit, the most important Eurosceptic success of these times. I will reconstruct the historical dynamics of British Euroscepticism and then, by considering all the facets of the political and media landscape of the period and its repercussions on the population, I will highlight how actually the “Leave”³ came out as a result of the referendum.

³ (Anonymous), “Results”, in: *BBC News*. Available: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/politics/eu_referendum/results [Accessed: 12th June 2022].

Chapter 1 – The European Integration Process

1.1 The initial phases of integration

In order to fully understand the emergence and the expansion of Euroscepticism, it is essential to study the ‘background canvas’ of the European Union or, in other words, the history of European integration; in fact, this helps us not only to have conscience of the past and to fully understand the present of the reality in which we live, but it also makes us reflect on the future of the Union.

In this chapter I will therefore review the essential stages which led to the birth and to the development of the European Community, highlighting both its successes and its failures. Indeed, it is the latter that plays an important role in the decline of support from citizens and political parties for this supranational organization.

According to Giuliana Laschi, from a geopolitical point of view, Europe is a territory that has faced many difficulties: competitiveness, wars and the inability to reach mediation have always hindered a common project⁴. Coexistence between the different powers of the continent has therefore always been quite hard, given that each State was eager to impose its political and military control both in Europe itself and elsewhere. In this context the two World Wars are the testimony of what is affirmed, and indeed given the heavy situation, already after the first conflict the need to overhaul and strengthen the interstate relations started to emerge; between 1920 and 1930, however, dictatorial regimes were established in several European states, such as Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy, therefore, it was only after the Second World War that more precise currents of thought regarding the European project appeared. In this period in fact devastation reigned in Europe: millions of people had died, entire cities were destroyed, secular trade links had been broken and the economy was on its knees; as a result, “the continent was now relegated to playing second fiddle on the international stage owing to the increased might of the United States and the Soviet Union”⁵. Due to irreconcilable ideological differences, some tensions inevitably born and the rivalry between those two countries resulted in a further dispute, less bloody, but certainly longer and more insidious: the Cold War. This divided Europe into two zones of opposing influence and it was precisely in this

⁴ Giuliana Laschi, “Storia dell’Integrazione europea nel contesto globale”, in: *YouTube*, 19.10.2021. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsz-drpjvhQ> [Accessed: 13th June 2022].

⁵ (Anonymous), “1945–1949 The pioneering phase”, in: *CVCE.eu by Uni.Lu*. Available: <https://www.cvce.eu/en/recherche/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/e50703eb-142f-4770-a6a5-b1a7f0cac450> [Accessed: 13th June 2022].

perspective that pro-European movements came into action, rejecting the idea of a further conflict on the continent and supporting the plan of European unification as the only way to survival.

In these circumstances, what is important to underline is the fact that the political class of the time was characterized by men who in the majority had fought and lived in first person both World Wars and therefore they knew well the impact of combat on one's own life and affections⁶. These politicians then could look beyond the schemes and they divided into three main currents of thought: confederalist, federalist, and functionalist. The first suggested cooperation between states, without affecting their sovereignty; supporters of the form of confederation were political personalities such as Charles De Gaulle or Winston Churchill; the latter, in fact, in 1946 at the University of Zurich declared that a remedy existed for Europe to "dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom"⁷ and this actually consisted in his personal call for the "United States of Europe"⁸. The idea of federation was instead supported by the Italian Altiero Spinelli and the French André Voisin, who wanted to completely deprive the states of their sovereignty and create indeed a new federation. In this regard in fact, it was just Spinelli who wrote in the early 1940s with Ernesto Rossi, the Ventotene Manifesto⁹: the document imagined the birth of a future European Federation with a democratic government and a parliament elected by universal suffrage; this act is considered one of the founding texts of the European Union. Finally, according to those who were functionalists, European unity could only have been created through sectoral integration, especially in the economic field, and this would have subsequently led to political integration and to the depletion of national sovereignty¹⁰. Among the functionalists we remember Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, fundamental figures in the history of France and considered the architects of the European integration project¹¹ because of the major role played in the genesis of the unification of the continent.

The first European integrated moment was held in 1948 during the Congress of Europe: chaired by Winston Churchill, it was attended by representatives from 17 different nations and belonging to a wide political spectrum, including for example De Gasperi, Mitterrand and Adenauer; the event was

⁶ Laschi, "Storia dell'Integrazione europea nel contesto globale".

⁷ Commissione Europea, *I Padri Fondatori dell'UE*, in "Le Politiche dell'Unione Europea", 2013, p. 11 Available: <https://www.europedirect.unisi.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2015/11/I-padri-fondatori-dell%E2%80%99UE.pdf> [Accessed: 13th June 2022].

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ (Anonymous), "Il Manifesto di Ventotene compie 80 anni", in: *Agenzia per la Coesione Territoriale*. Available: https://www.agenziacoesione.gov.it/news_istituzionali/il-manifesto-di-ventotene-compie-80-anni/ [Accessed: 13th June 2022].

¹⁰ See Roberto Santaniello, *Capire l'Unione Europea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016.

¹¹ Commissione Europea, *I Padri Fondatori dell'UE*, pp. 19-22.

also open to intellectuals, journalists and trade unionists. The objectives were pretty ambitious since in the first place the participants wanted to demonstrate that there was effective support for the European Union in public opinion and secondly, they aimed at creating initiatives to change the relations between the states and rebuild Europe. As a matter of fact, shortly after in the same year the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) was created, with a view to jointly administering funds from the Marshall Plan. Also known as European Recovery Program, the Marshall Plan was a U.S. plan of action which provided financial aid in order to rebuilt Western Europe after the devastation caused by the World War II.

The OEEC was certainly a starting point in the unification process, but the road to a balance was still long and certainly other steps had to be taken. Therefore, the following year in 1949, the Council of Europe was established by the Treaty of London. This was the first international organization “consisting of a committee of representatives of governments and of a consultative assembly”¹² composed of ten founding countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom; the purpose of this institution was to promote democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and a European cultural identity and unity in order to seek solutions to “economic, social, cultural, scientific, legal and administrative matters”¹³, spreading common ideals and principles and facilitating economic and social progress.

And it was indeed in the economic sphere that the real unification of Europe began: in 1950 in fact the French Foreign Minister Schuman held a very important speech with the aim of smoothing the historical rivalry between his country and Germany, sustaining that “Europe [would have] not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It [would have been] built through concrete achievements which first [would have created] a de facto solidarity”¹⁴. The Schuman Declaration actually envisaged the integration of the industrial sector between the two countries, which would have organized their production of coal and steel, very important resources for the arms industry, under the control of a common High Authority, “within the framework of an organization open to the participation of the other countries of Europe”¹⁵. The project was conceived by Jean Monnet and it was subsequently approved by the French Government and, on the German side, by the Federal

¹² Council of Europe, *Statute of the Council of Europe*, London, 1949, p. 1. Available: <https://rm.coe.int/1680306052> [Accessed: 13th June 2022].

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Foundation Robert Schuman, *Declaration of 9th May 1950 delivered by Robert Schuman*, in “European Issue”, 2011, n. 204, p. 1. Available: <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/questions-d-europe/qe-204-en.pdf> [Accessed: 13th June 2022].

¹⁵ Ibidem.

Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer; primarily, this was undoubtedly the first concrete step in the direction of implementing the European integration project from the functionalist perspective¹⁶ and secondly, this political and economic design would have also allowed Germany to emerge from the position of ‘defeated country’. Thus, on 8 April 1951, with the Treaty of Paris, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was born and it was also joined by the Benelux countries, namely the customs union established between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg enshrined in the London Convention in 1944, and Italy; on the other side, England decided not to join the plan, as Churchill believed that it had the power to undermine national sovereignty¹⁷. For the proper functioning of the Community in fact, specific shared supranational institutions were created:

- The High Authority¹⁸, an independent collegiate body consisting of nine members who were required to fulfil their role for six years; this organism had decision-making powers and made recommendations, or delivered opinions, on matters relating to the modernization and upgrade of production, the development of exports and the improvement of working conditions in industries. If deemed necessary, the High Authority could be assisted in the decision-making process by a Consultative Committee composed of representatives of workers, producers, traders and consumers.
- The Assembly¹⁹, formed by 78 members representing their national parliaments: 18 each for France, Germany and Italy, 10 each for Belgium and the Netherlands and 4 for Luxembourg. The Assembly exercised mainly a power of control on the work of the Community.
- The Council²⁰, consisting of six representatives, one for each national government of the signatory states; the Presidency of the Council was held alternately by each ECSC member state for three months. The task of the Council was to merge the work of the High Authority with the national economic policy of the states that decided to participate in the Community.

¹⁶ Giuseppe Mammarella and Paolo Cacace, *Storia e politica dell'Unione Europea*, Roma, Laterza, 2005, p. 51.

¹⁷ Lee H. Burke, *Britain and the EEC*, in “World Affairs”, 1967, vol. 130, p. 166. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/20670927?saml_data=eyJzYW1sVG9rZW4iOiJlNzI1ODZiMC1hNTk0LTQyZDYtODE2NC04ZDgxYmM2ZWNmMTYiLCJlbWFpbCI6Ijg1ODYwOEBzdHVkLnVuaXZILmIiwiaW5zdGI0dXRpb25JZHMjOlsiZjFjOTRmYzQtZDRhMS00MmYwLTk0ZWVtMGU2NmRkZDBiMGNjIl19&seq=3 [Accessed: 14th June 2022].

¹⁸ *Trattato istitutivo della Comunità Europea del Carbone e dell'Acciaio*, Paris, 1951, pp. 21-28. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11951K/TXT&from=IT> [Accessed: 14th June 2022].

¹⁹ Ivi, pp. 29-31.

²⁰ Ivi, pp. 32-34.

- The Court of Justice²¹, comprising seven judges appointed for six years. This body ensured that the provisions of the Treaty were correctly interpreted and applied.

These institutions can de facto be considered as the precursors of the current governing bodies of the European Union: the High Authority for the European Commission, the Consultative Committee for the European Economic and Social Committee, the Assembly for the European Parliament, the Council for the Council of the European Union and the Court of Justice for the Court of Justice of the European Union²². The ECSC then was definitely “a courageous and hugely significant leap forward Europe” (Prodi, 2002)²³ and it represented one of the major achievements of the post-war generation. However, unfortunately, not all the proposals aimed at greater integration were accepted. Another highlight for the process of European integration came indeed in 1952, when the French Prime Minister René Pleven proposed the creation of common armed forces, organized and directed by the European institutions and by a European Minister of Defence. Therefore, the discussion concerned the possible birth of the so-called European Defence Community (EDC), a sort of establishment that was based on the idea of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a political-military Euro-Atlantic organism that was born in 1949 in the context of the Cold War. Even if this proposal was made following the outbreak of the Korean War, which was thought to herald a Soviet offensive on the continent, the plan found opposition on several fronts, first from the United States of America and England, then from Germany. Later, France found itself in serious political difficulties because of its involvement in the Indochina War; consequently, in 1954 the EDC project was definitively rejected also by the French National Assembly. This constituted therefore a sort of failure, so the only possible way forward to unify the states of Europe was clearly sectoral integration and this brought again the attention on functionalist thinking, to the detriment of the supporters of the federalist change. Following this direction then, in 1955 at the Messina Conference, an Intergovernmental Committee composed of specialists led by the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Paul-Henri Spaak, was set up.

²¹ *Trattato istitutivo della Comunità Europea del Carbone e dell'Acciaio*, pp. 35-41.

²² (Anonymous), “Trattato che istituisce la Comunità europea del carbone e dell'acciaio, trattato CECA”, in: *EUR-Lex*. 2017. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/IT/legal-content/summary/treaty-establishing-the-european-coal-and-steel-community-ecsc-treaty.html> [Accessed: 14th June 2022].

²³ See (Anonymous), “Fifty years at the service of peace and prosperity: the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) treaty expires”, in: *European Commission*, 2002. Available: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_02_898 [Accessed: 14th June 2022].

The aim was to study the possibilities of integration in certain economic sectors and to examine the possibility of the creation of a general common market²⁴. During the Venice Conference held the following year, the final report of this research was presented, and this contained proposals for the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) and of the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom); in 1957, with the signing of the Treaties of Rome, these two institutions were officially established and from 1 January 1958 the two commissions began to operate.

The primary aim of the EEC was to create a common market in which goods, people, capital and services could move freely and with respect for competition, without customs barriers between the six founding countries of the ECSC. Secondly, the objective was also to increase the development of sectoral policies common to the Member States (MS), so as to reduce the economic gap between the various regions of the EEC, to improve the living and working conditions of their citizens and to guarantee stability and peace throughout Europe. Those shared policies that the Treaty outlined regarded mainly the agricultural field (artt. 38 to 47)²⁵, the commercial sphere (artt. 110 to 116)²⁶ and the transport sector (artt. 74 to 84)²⁷.

The Euratom project was instead designed to stem the persistent problem of the period related to the “shortage of traditional energy”²⁸ and thus achieve energy independence. Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands therefore decided to move towards atomic energy and, in order to cover the necessary investment costs, they joined forces. The Treaty in general aimed at the development of a European nuclear research and industrial apparatus, which would have strictly worked in the civil and peaceful nuclear field, guaranteeing safety for the population and, at the same time, energetic supply for the Member States.

²⁴ (Anonymous), “The Intergovernmental Committee created by the Messina Conference”, in: *CVCE by Uni.Lu*. Available: <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/264c5f52-00f5-4205-8be2-3460b0afcabd> [Accessed: 14th June 2022].

²⁵ *Trattato che istituisce la Comunità Economica Europea*, Roma, 1957, pp. 41-47. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11957E/TXT&from=IT> [Accessed: 14th June 2022].

²⁶ *Ivi*, pp. 92-95.

²⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 65-68.

²⁸ (Anonymous), “Trattato che istituisce la Comunità europea dell’energia atomica (Euratom)”, in: *EUR-Lex*, 2007. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:xy0024> [Accessed: 14th June 2022].

The economic advantages deriving from these two unifications were soon apparent and the EEC became an industrial power in the world and a “major player in international relations”²⁹. This also convinced other countries to join this organization: in 1973 in fact Great Britain, Denmark and Ireland decided to adhere and afterwards, with the accession of Greece in 1981 and of Spain and Portugal in 1986, the European Union counted twelve MS.

1986, however, was not only an important year for the enlargement just mentioned above, but also because in the same year, more precisely on 17 February in Luxembourg, the Single European Act (SEA) was signed. The general premise for the elaboration of this document was to complete the project of the internal market by 1 January 1993, therefore some considerable changes were made to the Treaties of Rome, in particular as regards the powers and the decision-making process of the various European institutions. The SEA therefore substantially introduced qualified majority voting, rather than unanimity, as the new norm to overcome the problem of the “frequent delays inherent to the search for a unanimous agreement among the then 12 member countries”³⁰; moreover, it established the European Council, so as to formalise the meetings of the Heads of State. In addition, it should be noted that this agreement also had the objective of drawing up a forerunner of the Common Foreign and Security Policy; in this regard, defining a joint foreign strategy was clearly an important step in the project of political cooperation between States, which was therefore becoming increasingly concrete.

1.2 The Maastricht Treaty: a major breakthrough

In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the reunification of Germany in 1990 and the end of the Cold War in 1991, 1992 marked an important turning point for Europe since with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union (EU) was officially established, replacing the EEC. A few years earlier, the SEA had already given a clear push to the idea of a political union which could cooperate alongside the EEC, but it was only during the extraordinary European council meeting held in Dublin in April 1990 that it was decided to try to set up this project, seeking to reconcile the perspectives and interests of the different Member States. It was then in December 1991

²⁹ (Anonymous), “The EEC as a major player in international relations”, in: *CVCE.eu by Uni.Lu*. Available: <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/93a428c8-b278-4256-ba88-309de9cae64f> [Accessed: 14th June 2022].

³⁰ (Anonymous), “The Single European Act”, in: *EUR-Lex*, 2018. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:xy0027> [Accessed: 15th June 2022].

in Maastricht that the actual work of elaborating a treaty that could give concrete form to this aim began, which eventually consisted of 252 articles, 17 protocols and 31 declarations³¹.

With the entry into force of the Treaty of Maastricht, the expression EEC was replaced by the saying European Community (EC) and the powers of this organisation were extended to include, for example, areas of research and technological development policy, the environment, the development of communication networks, education and culture, health and social policy³².

The new EU institutional framework was based on three pillars: the European Community, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA). Within the first pillar, the greatest innovation was the creation of the European Monetary Union (EMU), a body useful for achieving the single currency and for making it work properly through the delineation of the requirements that each Member State should have met in order to join the euro zone. Based on specific economic indicators, these requirements are called ‘convergence criteria’ or ‘Maastricht criteria’, they are well defined in Article 121 of the Treaty and they relate to issues of inflation, public debt and public deficit, exchange rate stability and the convergence of interest rates³³. Specifically, then, a country wishing to enter the EC must have:

- Price stability³⁴: the price trend should be sustainable and it should have an average inflation rate that does not exceed by more than 1,5 percentage point that of the three best performing Member States.
- Sound and sustainable public finances³⁵: the country should not be subject to an excessive deficit procedure.
- Stability of the exchange rate³⁶: in order to demonstrate that the country can manage its economy without resorting to excessive currency fluctuations, the participation in the exchange-rate mechanism under the European Monetary System (EMS) is mandatory for at least two years. During this period, it is important not to have serious unease, in particular without devaluations against the euro.

³¹ Mammarella and Cacace, *Storia e politica dell’Unione Europea*, p. 233.

³² *Ivi*, p. 236.

³³ (Anonymous), “Convergence Criteria (Maastricht Treaty)”, in: *INSEE – Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques*, 2021. Available: <https://www.insee.fr/en/metadonnees/definition/c1348> [Accessed: 15th June 2022].

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

- Stability of convergence³⁷: the nominal long-term interest rate should not exceed by more than 2 percentage points that of the three best performing euro zone countries in terms of price stability.

These principles were obviously designed with the aim of ensuring that countries within the European Union were in a situation of financial and economic balance among themselves, so that tensions would not arise and that an even closer relationship could be established between the peoples of Europe. With this in mind, the second pillar, the provision of cooperation in the field of security and defence, was particularly innovative, as it allowed the European Union to promote peace and stability throughout the territory, including at regional level; equally important was the work of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, which was extremely useful for the development of judicial and criminal cooperation and worked for creating a European area of freedom, security and justice inside the Union.

The further innovation introduced was the principle of subsidiarity, defined in Article 5 of the Maastricht Treaty. It ensures that the action to be taken at community level is justified and close to the needs of the citizen; basically, the European Union can only intervene in matters relating to its areas of competence, within the limits of the functions conferred and the purposes assigned by the Treaty, unless its work is considered to be more effective than that which could be undertaken at local, regional or national level³⁸. This principle is closely linked to the principle of proportionality, according to which the work of the European Union must be strictly proportional to the objective that needs to be achieved; in other words, community action does not go beyond what is necessary³⁹.

Thus, extending the scope of the European Union in this consistent way, the Maastricht Treaty marked the definitive transition to a political dimension of the Union⁴⁰, representing a sort of hinge between the two major European integration phases: the one that started with the CECA institution and that is still going on, opened precisely with the entry into force of this treaty on 1 November 1993. Clearly, all these events led to a significant turning point also in terms of greater awareness of the European

³⁷ (Anonymous), “Convergence Criteria (Maastricht Treaty)”.

³⁸ (Anonymous), “Sussidiarietà”, in: *EUR-Lex*. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:subsidiarity#:~:text=Concretamente%20C3%A8%20il%20principio%20per%20nazionale%2C%20regionale%20o%20locale> [Accessed: 15th June 2022].

³⁹ (Anonymous), “Principio di proporzionalità”, in: *EUR-Lex*. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/IT/legal-content/glossary/proportionality-principle.html> [Accessed: 15th June 2022].

⁴⁰ Mammarella and Cacace, *Storia e politica dell'Unione Europea*, p. 257.

entity by the population, the parties and the media: this revived the political debate and marked the beginning of the development of the Eurosceptic sentiment.

However, following the trend of unification and in order to strengthen the sense of belonging to the same political community, the Schengen Agreements also entered into force in 1995. Formed by an agreement signed in June 1985 by Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands and by a convention adopted in 1990 which laid down the conditions and the guarantees attached to this establishment, they provided for the free movement of persons within the Union, without more border controls⁴¹. The European Community was therefore becoming an increasingly progressive reality and in fact many countries expressed the desire to become member states: in 1995 also Austria, Sweden and Finland officially joined the EC. So, it was not by chance that, in the years that followed, precisely in order to meet any challenges and needs arising from new enlargements, the Treaty of Maastricht was the subject of further observation and was revised twice: first in 1997 with the Treaty of Amsterdam and then again in 2001 with the Treaty of Nice.

The first was drawn up mainly for the purpose of integration, allowing the strengthening of the value of human rights within the Union, establishing that the Schengen agreements, initially born outside the community context, were incorporated into the European treaties and emphasising the importance of taking decisions in foreign policy⁴². Although progress at the institutional level was limited, an important innovation was the introduction of the so-called ‘enhanced cooperation’, an instrument by which some Member States could have initiated deeper sectoral integration between themselves under the supervision of the European institutions⁴³.

The Treaty of Nice was instead designed to make up for the difficulties that might have arisen in view of future enlargements: therefore, what was mainly changed was the way in which future MS were accepted into the Union. In addition, the composition of the European Commission and the European Parliament were also slightly replaced and qualified majority voting was further expanded as in a constantly enlarging Europe it was increasingly problematic to achieve unanimity. Finally, it should be noted that the Nice European Council, in December 2000, also proceeded with the proclamation

⁴¹ (Anonymous), “Schengen (accordo e convenzione)”, in: *EUR-Lex*. Available: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:schengen_agreement [Accessed: 15th June 2022].

⁴² (Anonymous), “The Treaty of Amsterdam”, in: *CVCE.eu by Uni.Lu*. Available: <https://www.cvce.eu/en/recherche/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/56e15a9a-7508-4a2b-9bbe-b5c3d2605ae4> [Accessed 16th June 2022].

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union⁴⁴, a document which was subsequently treated as a community treaty, which provided a complete picture of the principles and rights protected within the European Community.

2002 was another year that represented a further step forward for the European Union. Euro notes and coins in fact became the official and legal currency of almost all the members of the Union: ‘almost all of them’ because some states preferred to keep the national currency; among them certainly the most famous case was that of Great Britain.

In 2003, Cyprus, Malta, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and Slovenia signed the accession treaty in Athens and officially became members of the Union the following year; in 2007 Romania and Bulgaria also joined the European Community. Finally, in 2011 the European Parliament approved the accession of Croatia, which joined the European Union in 2013. To date, in 2022, the European Union is made up of 27 states; until a few years ago there were 28, but the Brexit of 2020, that has made official the exit of the United Kingdom, has changed the game.

This supranational organisation does not have a unified constitution, but is based on the Treaty of Lisbon, signed in December 2007. This was intended to make some changes to the Treaty on European Union (TEU), which contains all the changes and updates made over the years to the Maastricht Treaty, and to the Treaty establishing the European Community, hence the Treaty of Rome and the respective corrections; later, this same agreement took the name of ‘Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union’ (TFEU).

What the meeting in Lisbon produced was the elaboration of salient institutional reforms: among the most important, firstly the three pillars into which European policies were divided and organized in 1992 were replaced by a single structure; secondly, the European Parliament gained more legislative powers; then, qualified majority voting was also adopted for the European Council, which was formally recognised as an institution, and the office of President of the Council was then created; finally clauses were established in matters of foreign policy, security and defence, for example the solidarity clause, which provides that “if a Member State suffers armed aggression, the other States must help it and assist it with all the means at their disposal”⁴⁵. The reality of the European Union

⁴⁴ (Anonymous), “The Nice Treaty of 26 february 2001”, in: *CVCE.eu by Uni.Lu*. Available: <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/d5906df5-4f83-4603-85f7-0cab24b9fe1/0e3b27d7-d897-4e29-960f-8b1c2f23ceec> [Accessed 16th June 2022].

⁴⁵ (Anonymous), “Il Trattato di Lisbona”, in: *Parlamento Europeo – Ufficio in Italia*. Available: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/italy/it/scoprire-l-europa/il-trattato-di-lisbona> [Accessed: 16th June 2022].

had become massive and complicated, so in the TFEU the competences that would have belonged respectively to the European Union as an institutional body, then those which would have remained matter managed exclusively by the member countries and in the end those that instead would have been shared between the two levels were clearly defined.

Over the years the free and democratic signing of all these treaties by the Member States inevitably increased the democratic accountability of the EU, consolidating its rule of law and its legal personality⁴⁶. The protection of human rights is an essential foundation of the Union: in Lisbon, the role played by the Charter of Fundamental Rights was strengthened; among these entitlements, for example, noteworthy are the right not to be discriminated against on grounds of sex, race, religion, age, sexual orientation, the right to the protection of personal data and the right of access to justice⁴⁷. Due to the above, therefore, it is not surprising that the work of this organization led it to be awarded the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize, “for helping to transform most of Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace”⁴⁸.

1.3 The European Institutions

I believe it is necessary to dedicate a section of my work to the institutional structure of the European Union, not only because it represents a large part of the development of this organization, but also because it actively and regularly exercises executive, legislative and judicial power. As demonstrated above, the European institutions in detail are varied, some play a decision-making role in the community policy, while others only exercise a consultative role. Below I will focus mainly on those listed in Article 13 of the TEU⁴⁹: the European Parliament (EP), the European Council, the Council, the European Commission (EC), the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the European Court of Auditors (ECA).

⁴⁶ (Anonymous), “The Treaty of Lisbon”, in: *CVCE.eu by Uni.Lu*. Available: <https://www.cvce.eu/en/recherche/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/d7da2396-d047-4c4e-ae1b-f9edb47e3739> [Accessed: 16th June 2022].

⁴⁷ (Anonymous), “L’Unione Europea – Che cos’è e che cosa fa”, in: *Commissione Europea*, 2021. Available: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/eu-what-it-is/it/> [Accessed: 16th June 2022].

⁴⁸ EU Affairs, “EU wins 2012 Nobel Peace Prize: ‘This prize is for all EU citizens’”, in: *European Parliament*, 2012. Available: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/eu-affairs/20121012STO53551/eu-wins-2012-nobel-peace-prize-this-prize-is-for-all-eu-citizens> [Accessed: 16th June 2022].

⁴⁹ *Trattato sull’Unione Europea (Versione Consolidata)*, in “Gazzetta Ufficiale dell’Unione Europea”, 2012, p. 22. Available: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0017.02/DOC_1&format=PDF [Accessed: 16th June 2022].

Proceeding by order, the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are directly elected by the citizens; this gives this institution democratic legitimacy. The Treaty of Lisbon set a ceiling of 750 MEPs plus the President, but Brexit has changed the situation and currently the maximum number of members of the EP is 705. On the basis of the demographic distribution criterion, the number of Members of Parliament for each State is treated in the same way as its population and, as indicated in Article 14 of the TEU, it is “degressively proportional”⁵⁰, with a minimum number of seats for a State of six and a maximum of ninety-six.

Initially, the Treaty of Rome provided that the tasks of the European Parliament were extremely limited, since the only basic duty it had to perform was to issue a mandatory, but not binding opinion, on any proposal drawn up by the Commission, before the Council of Ministers took a decision. As time went on, Parliament’s powers were extended to the point of making it a co-legislator and, consequently, one of the fundamental institutions for the functioning of the EU; the decision-making powers of the EP mainly concern three areas: the adoption of legislative acts, democratic control over all EU bodies and budgetary decisions⁵¹.

As regards legislative acts, Parliament operates under the ordinary legislative procedure, first introduced in 1992 in Maastricht. It is made up of several steps⁵²; in short: the European Commission has the right of legislative initiative; therefore, it submits a proposal to the European Parliament and to the Council. These two bodies then discuss the motion and adopt it at first or second reading, after agreeing on the various amendments. If the two institutions fail to reach an accord after the second scrutiny, a conciliation committee is convened; this must work to agree on a draft that is acceptable. If this is the case and the text is approved at third reading, the legislative act is finally adopted. With regard to the above-mentioned democratic control exercised by Parliament, this is mainly a matter for the Commission: in practical terms, the EP can approve or reject the appointment of European Commissioners and, in addition, it can collectively censure the Commission. In the same context, the EP also exercises power to appoint the members of the Court of Justice and the Court of Auditors.

⁵⁰ *Trattato sull’Unione Europea (Versione Consolidata)*, p. 22.

⁵¹ Governo Italiano, “Parlamento Europeo”, in: *Dipartimento per le Politiche Europee*. Available: <https://www.politicheeuropee.gov.it/it/istituzioni-europee/quadro-istituzionale/parlamento-europeo/#:~:text=Il%20ruolo%20dei%20parlamentari%20europei,Stato%20membro%20in%20cui%20risiedono.> [Accessed: 17th June 2022].

⁵² (Anonymous), “La procedura legislativa ordinaria”, in: *Consiglio Europeo – Consiglio dell’Unione Europea*. Available: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/council-eu/decision-making/ordinary-legislative-procedure/> [Accessed: 17th June 2022].

Finally, together with the Council of the Union, it has the power to decide to modify Community expenditure.

The EP seat is in Strasbourg and the current president is Roberta Metsola.

The European Council was born from the conferences which brought together the Heads of State or Government of the Member States of the European Community; more precisely, it was after the Paris Summit in 1974 that it was decided to institutionalize these meetings and call them the 'European Council'. With the Treaty of Lisbon, the figure of the President of the European Council, elected every two and a half years, was created; today, to fill this role is Charles Michel, elected for the first time in 2019 and reconfirmed for a second term last March.

This body became one of the most important for the functioning of the EU since it represents the highest level of political cooperation between EU countries⁵³. To date, it is possible to find sitting in the Council the various Heads of State, but also the President of the European Commission; the discussions, that usually take place four times a year in Bruxelles, are devoted to EU foreign and security policy issues, to more sensitive governance themes, but also to any other important topic on the Community agenda. In other words, the Council defines the guidelines and the political priorities of the Union⁵⁴. Only Heads of State or Government can vote and the decision-making mechanism is largely based on consensus, but in some cases the procedure of simple voting is provided for, either by unanimity or by qualified majority.

The Council is the Council of Ministers of the European Union; it is therefore composed of a minister per each Member State that must be competent in the matter of discussion. This implies that, for example, the Foreign Ministers will meet in the formation of the Council called 'Foreign Affairs', those of agriculture will meet under the 'Agriculture Council', those competent in economic matters will be part of the 'Economic/Finance Council' and so on⁵⁵. The frequency of meetings is also influenced by the subject matter, so some issues are given priority rather than others: for example, the Economic/Finance Council generally meets monthly, whereas transport issues take place up to a

⁵³ (Anonymous), "Consiglio Europeo", in: *Unione Europea*. Available: https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/institutions-and-bodies-profiles/european-council_it [Accessed: 17th June 2022].

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ (Anonymous), "Il Consiglio della UE", in: *Ministero dell'Interno*. Available: https://www1.interno.gov.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/sezioni/sala_stampa/speciali/cittadini_europa/scheda_146_90.html [Accessed: 17th June 2022].

maximum of four times in a year⁵⁶. The office of President shall be held alternately by each Member State on a six-monthly basis and it is essential for the organization of all proceedings.

This body has always exercised legislative and executive powers: as regards the first, each session brings together the ministers of the various EU countries, who are responsible for analysing the Commission's proposals and decide whether to amend or adopt them, supporting the European Parliament in its work. On the basis of the subject under discussion, the Council's deliberations may be taken either by simple or qualified majority, or also by unanimity. The exercise of executive power is mainly linked to police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters and to the Common Foreign and Security Policy⁵⁷.

The European Commission is probably the body that can be regarded as the most important institution for the EU, given its wide range of powers and responsibilities; it is certainly the organism that has worked the most for the success of the process of European integration. As provided for in the Treaty of Nice, the Commission is composed of one representative from each Member State; the appointment procedure has been amended several times over the years: initially, the Treaty of Rome stipulated that the governments of the EU states should nominate both its members and the President, but later, the Maastricht Treaty decided that the designation procedure should be carried out by the European Council. Subsequently, the EP also began to play a more involved role in the formation of the European Commission and finally, the last revisions were made to the procedure of appointment of the President by the Lisbon Treaty. To date, since 2019, it is Ursula von der Leyen to occupy this position in Bruxelles.

The Commission has two structures: the College of Commissioners, composed by the representatives of the 27 MS, and the Directorates-General⁵⁸, consisting approximately in 32000 officials; this makes it the institution with the highest number of officials among the European bodies. The EC has several functions: it draws up new legislative proposals which will then be submitted and, in case, approved by the Council and the European Parliament; it manages policies and allocates EU funding; it ensures that EU legislation is respected; it represents the EU on the international stage⁵⁹. Leaving aside the

⁵⁶ (Anonymous), "Il Consiglio della UE".

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ See Santaniello, *Capire l'Unione Europea*.

⁵⁹ (Anonymous), "Commissione Europea", in: *Unione Europea*. Available: https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/institutions-and-bodies/institutions-and-bodies-profiles/european-commission_it#:~:text=La%20Commissione%20europea%20C3%A8%20il,del%20Consiglio%20dell'Unione%20europea. [Accessed: 17th June 2022].

first function, which has been thoroughly clarified previously, with regard to the second assignment, specifically the Commission manages the EU budget, applying, if necessary, preventive or repressive measures; continuing with the analysis, concerning the third task, the Commission can very well be defined as the “guardian of the Treaties”⁶⁰ since it monitors the application of the various European legislative acts. Finally, with respect to the representation of the EU, the EC is mainly interested in acting as a spokesperson for the European ideology in international organisations and in negotiating agreements to establish new economic relations, common commercial policies or humanitarian aid management lines⁶¹.

The Court of Justice of the European Union is the body that ensures that European law is respected, both in its interpretation and in its application; it has its seat in Luxembourg.

This institution is divided into two different courts: the Court of Justice and the General Court⁶². The first consists of twenty-seven Judges, one from each Member State, assisted by nine Advocates-General; the term of office lasts for six years and appointments to both these posts are decided by common accord by the governments of nations, who make their choice among the personalities with the most competence and experience in the field of law. The President and his Vice are then elected by this same body of jurists for a period of three years. The General Court instead consists of two judges per Member State.

Given that each MS has its own language and the need to guarantee its case law in the most effective way, it is interesting to note that the Court of Justice of the EU is a multilingual body and therefore any official language can be adopted as the language of the case⁶³.

The European Central Bank was established in 1998 by the Treaty on the European Union; its task at the time was essentially to implement the single monetary policy and to defend the euro; to date, the ECB adopts an annual report on the activities of the European System of Central Banks (ESCB) and on the monetary policy.

⁶⁰ (Anonymous), “Guardian of the Treaties”, in: *CVCE.eu by Uni.Lu*. Available: <https://www.cvce.eu/en/collections/unit-content/-/unit/d5906df5-4f83-4603-85f7-0cab24b9fe1/28d57ad3-6f5e-4f9c-82a8-be9535febad5> [Accessed: 17th June 2022].

⁶¹ (Anonymous), “Commissione Europea”.

⁶² (Anonymous), “General Court”, in: *EUR-Lex*. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/general-court.html> [Accessed: 17th June 2022].

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

This institution works through three decision-making bodies: the Executive Board, the General Council and the Governing Council. The first consists of the ECB President, the Vice-President and four other expert members appointed by the EU Heads of State for an eight-year term of office; the General Council is formed by the President and the Vice-President of the ECB together with the Governors of the national central banks of each Member State; the third comprise all the members of the Executive Board and of the General Council⁶⁴.

The seat of this body is in Frankfurt and the president in office since 2019 is Christine Lagarde.

Finally, the European Court of Auditors is the body responsible for supervising the finances of the European Union, examining the regularity of its revenue and expenditure. It carries out its work from Luxembourg.

This institution was created in 1975, but it was in 1992, with the Maastricht Treaty, that it actually became a European body, acting as financial controller; it consists of 27 judges, one from each Member State, appointed by the Council after careful consultation with the European Parliament. The term of office of the Members of the ECA shall be six years, renewable, while that of the President, who shall be chosen from among one of the Members, shall last for three years⁶⁵.

These institutions and their work must be taken very seriously because they are the driving force behind the whole European policy; understanding how and why they work makes it possible to analyse more deeply the evolution of public opinion towards the EU. In relation to this, surveys regarding the major current political and social issues present in the area have been conducted regularly by the European Commission since 1974. Over the years, this instrument, which took the name of ‘Eurobarometer’, has been perfected and, particularly since 2007, has become of fundamental importance. We can mainly identify two different study categories: the ‘Standard Eurobarometer’ and the ‘Special Topic Eurobarometer’⁶⁶. If the latter can be considered relevant because it deals with issues such as health, poverty, the world of work, the use of biotechnology and

⁶⁴ Governo Italiano, “Banca Centrale europea”, in: *Dipartimento per le Politiche Europee*. Available: <https://www.politicheeuropee.gov.it/it/istituzioni-europee/quadro-istituzionale/banca-centrale-europea/> [Accessed: 20th June 2022].

⁶⁵ Governo Italiano, “Corte dei Conti europea”, in: *Dipartimento per le Politiche Europee*. Available: <https://www.politicheeuropee.gov.it/it/istituzioni-europee/quadro-istituzionale/corte-dei-conti-europea/> [Accessed: 20th June 2022].

⁶⁶ (Anonymous), “Standard and Special Topic Eurobarometer”, in: *Gesis – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences*. Available: <https://www.gesis.org/en/eurobarometer-data-service/survey-series/standard-special-eb> [Accessed: 20th June 2022].

immigration, the first is essential; the reason for this is that, twice a year, one in autumn and one in spring, through it, it is possible to draw up data on studies on the general tendencies of popular sentiment within the EU, on the confidence that the population has in the institutions, on the possible views regarding any European parliamentary elections⁶⁷.

Researchers try to always keep the same survey content so they can then compare the results over the years and see the various changes. For example, taking an analysis of the data shown in the report of the ‘Standard Eurobarometer 96’⁶⁸, carried out in winter 2021-2022, what emerges is that, overall, the European population does not have excessive confidence in the European institutions and in their work. Comparing these statistics with those of the ‘Standard Eurobarometer 91’⁶⁹, carried out in spring 2019, what is deductible is that today both the tendency ‘to trust’ and that ‘not to trust’ have increased respectively, while the attitude of being indifferent to the issue has decreased. From this it can be inferred that the population turns out to be more aware because more informed, and also more involved in the European reality.

1.4 The European Union crises

For the purposes of this thesis, it is imperative to provide an all-round perspective on the European Union: it must therefore be highlighted that, despite its successes, this organization has also experienced moments of crisis, which have inevitably affected the expansion of Euroscepticism. Hence, mainly it is necessary to talk about the economic crisis of 2008, which lasted for several years, and about the refugee crisis that began approximately in 2014, due to the inability to manage the increasing number of asylum seekers.

Proceeding with order, I will now outline the events that have characterized these two crises and highlight the critical issues that have emerged from them within the European Union.

In light of the first hardship mentioned above, in particular, concurrently with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2008, a financial crisis began to spread in Europe. This was the consequence of

⁶⁷ (Anonymous), “What is Eurobarometer?”, in: *European Parliament*. Available: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/it/be-heard/eurobarometer> [Accessed: 20th June 2022].

⁶⁸ See European Commission, “Public opinion in the European Union”, in: *Standard Eurobarometer 96 Winter 2021-2022, European Union*. Available: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2553> section: Attachments – Data annex [Accessed: 20th June 2022].

⁶⁹ See European Commission, “Public opinion in the European Union”, in: *Standard Eurobarometer 91 – Spring 2019, European Union*. Available: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2253> section: Attachments – Annex, [Accessed: 20th June 2022].

the previous global economic and financial catastrophe born in the United States of America, which had a not negligible impact⁷⁰.

In order to understand the origins of this crisis, however, it is necessary to go back to the 1990s, when the Maastricht Treaty decided to create a monetary union in Europe, with the aim first of giving greater weight to the Union in international affairs and then of further promoting a feeling of belonging to a single community. Of course, for some time already, most of the politicians and economists of the period had been convinced that Europe's monetary structure should not have been so fragmented, because this made the continent weaker and unable to cope with the consequences of the collapse of the Bretton Woods system⁷¹; therefore, the breakthrough given by EMU was wanted and considered as something that would have brought benefits. Specifically, the creation of the monetary union implied the introduction of fixed exchange rates between Member States; in other words, the latter could no longer respond to collapses in demand by lowering interest rates and devaluing national currencies. What was expected at this point was that the European countries with lower productivity would have reformed to adapt to greater competitiveness, but this did not happen. What occurred instead was that, in order to avoid risks, the States used the possibility of receiving capital loans, on very favourable terms, on international markets. The banks classified these debt instruments, issued in euro, as risk-free and thus "this mechanism led to an increase in public and private indebtedness in relation to GDP in many countries, which then faced a severe financial and sovereign debt crisis"⁷². It was mainly Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain which were the protagonists of this complicated situation.

In 2008 the failure of Lehman Brothers was the largest in the history of the United States of America and it made the world stock exchanges precipitate with devastating effects on the entire economic-financial system; what happened in Europe was that a mechanism that led to think that the states which had requested loans were unable to meet the maturity of their debts was triggered and so interest rates grew considerably, causing a crisis of solvency. The first country to declare its inability

⁷⁰ See John Sewel, *Origini e conseguenze della Crisi dell'Euro - Progetto di relazione generale*, in "Assemblea parlamentare della NATO – Economia e Sicurezza", 2012, p. 4. Available: https://www.senato.it/documenti/repository/lavori/affariinternazionali/nato/2012_Tallin/056_ESC_Sewel_IT.pdf [Accessed: 20th June 2022].

⁷¹ Negotiated in 1944 in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, this agreement provided that gold was the basis for the value of the US dollar; the other currencies were consequently anchored and influenced by this mechanism. This system remained in use until the early 1970s, until President Nixon decided to abolish it. See James Chen, "Bretton Woods Agreement and System", in: *Investopedia*, 2022; available: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/brettonwoodsagreement.asp#citation-1> [Accessed: 20th June].

⁷² Ibidem.

to meet its obligations was Greece, which then began a work of mediation and bailout with creditors; later, even the poor national economic growth of Italy and Spain created strong concerns. The work agenda of the European Union was then modified and steps were taken in order to implement strategies to try to overcome the crisis, elaborating instruments of financial solidarity towards the States most affected, to avoid that this disaster put at risk the stability of the entire euro zone: for example, in 2010 the European Financial Stability Fund (EFSF) was born and it was intended to help the worst-off countries by providing loans, recapitalising banks and buying sovereign debt in the form of government securities⁷³. In 2012, however, the Standard & Poor's Corporation, an American privately owned company involved in financial research and analysis of stocks and bonds, questioned the effectiveness of the European policies that had been developed to try to stem the crisis and at that point this officially became a generalized European problem, which was called the "Euro Crisis". Even today, in 2022, the economies of some countries are carrying the consequences of this financial disaster.

The migration and refugee crisis, on the other hand, is an extremely complex and delicate subject to deal with, mainly because it is a phenomenon in continuous evolution; if taken under analysis in fact, this issue involves many factors to consider: among these, for example, it is enough to mention the characteristics of migrants, the routes they follow, the reasons why their migration takes place, the countries of origin and transit and their political and social contexts⁷⁴.

However, to draw a general line, this crisis began around 2013, when due to some conflicts, such as the Syrian and the Libyan civil wars, or ethnic-religious contrasts, the number of asylum seekers began to increase dramatically. The journeys that were and still are made to arrive in the territory of the European Union start principally from Asia, from the Middle East or from Africa and often include long exodus through Turkey and southeastern Europe or risky crossings of the Mediterranean Sea⁷⁵. And it is in reference to a bad accident that happened in the central-southern Mediterranean

⁷³ (Anonymous), "Uno sguardo al Meccanismo europeo di stabilità - Che cos'è e come funziona il Fondo salva-Stati", in: *Banca Dati Amministrazioni Pubbliche*. Available: <https://openbdap.mef.gov.it/Home/FondoSalvaStati> [Accessed: 21st June 2022].

⁷⁴ Maura Marchegiani, *Antico mare e Identità migranti: un itinerario interdisciplinare*, Torino, G. Giappichelli Editore, 2017, p. 1.

⁷⁵ (Anonymous), "2015: L'anno della crisi dei rifugiati in Europa", in: *The UN Refugee Agency – Italia*, 2016. Available: <https://www.unhcr.org/it/notizie-storie/storie/2015-lanno-della-crisi-dei-rifugiati-in-europa/> [Accessed: 21st June 2022].

Sea, which caused the death of almost a thousand people⁷⁶, that the European Union concretely opened its eyes on the problem, which then became a central theme on the European political agenda for several years.

Clearly the EU regulated immigration in its territory through certain provisions contained in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (for example Art. 78⁷⁷ and Art. 80⁷⁸), but what was stated was not correctly implemented and the situation quickly turned into a real humanitarian emergency. Migrants have sought asylum mainly in Germany, Sweden, France and Italy; if in 2010 there were 43,700,000 people to escape from war and misery, in 2014 this number amounted to 54,900,000⁷⁹. The problem in the European Union arose when the attitude towards this emergency was not unified, but rather deeply divided: the northern European countries argued that there was not enough security within the borders of Schengen; those of southern Europe would have preferred to have amended the Dublin Regulation, according to which they should have welcomed all migrants arriving on their territory without distinction; finally, the countries of eastern Europe wanted to prevent migrants from crossing European borders⁸⁰.

It should be noted that already in 2011, following the imbalances in North Africa and those in the Middle East, there was a need to call for new approaches to immigration policy and in fact the European Commission had drawn up a document, ‘The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility’ (GAMM), arguing that it was necessary to devise a migration policy more suited to the needs of the time, that had as its focus the migrant and his human rights and that it had “stronger links and

⁷⁶ Marco Pasciuti, *Naufragio 18 aprile 2015, le vittime sono 1.000. Il ragazzo con la pagella e gli altri morti che la politica cerca di dimenticare*, “Il Fatto Quotidiano”, 18.04.2018. Available: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/04/18/naufragio-18-aprile-2015-le-vittime-sono-1-000-il-ragazzo-con-la-pagella-e-gli-altri-morti-che-la-politica-cerca-di-dimenticare/4294850/> [Accessed: 21st June 2022].

⁷⁷ See “Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union - PART THREE: UNION POLICIES AND INTERNAL ACTIONS - TITLE V: AREA OF FREEDOM, SECURITY AND JUSTICE - Chapter 2: Policies on border checks, asylum and immigration - Article 78”, in: *EUR-Lex*. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12008E078&from=EN> [Accessed: 21st June 2022].

⁷⁸ See “Article 80”, in: *EUR-Lex*. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12016E080&from=EN> [Accessed: 21st June 2022].

⁷⁹ Gustavo Gozzi, *I migranti e l'Europa: una sfida per il futuro dell'identità europea*, in “Educazione Interculturale”, 2016, vol. 14, n. 1. Available: <https://rivistedigitali.erickson.it/educazione-interculturale/archivio/vol-14-n-1/i-migranti-e-leuropa-una-sfida-per-il-futuro-dellidentita-europea/> [Accessed: 21st June 2022].

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

alignment between relevant EU policy areas and between the external and internal dimensions of those policies”⁸¹. The GAMM was based on four focal points:

1. The organisation and facilitation of legal migration and mobility⁸²: in particular this aspect was linked to the mobility of, for example, students and researchers and the issuance of work visas more quickly;
2. The prevention and reduction of irregular migration and human trafficking⁸³: basically, there was a need to implement border controls to protect the victims of trafficking;
3. The promotion of international protection and the strengthening of asylum policy⁸⁴: the aim here was to create a rescue and solidarity network for displaced persons common to all EU Member States;
4. Maximizing the impact of migration and mobility on development⁸⁵: to further involve migrants in projects launched to help their country of origin to develop.

The principle was therefore to try to develop a common system to give asylum and protection in Europe and in fact, with these premises in mind, in 2013 the European Parliament had adopted the Asylum Package, which contained all the rules that should have been followed within the Union and some improvements introduced to the existing rules. These included, for example, the introduction of mandatory personal interviews for all asylum seekers and better representation for unaccompanied children or granting asylum seekers an application to the court for an expedited procedure to remain in the territory during the appeal against a negative decision taken on their case⁸⁶.

However, the EU’s efforts were unsuccessful because the influx of migrants in 2014-2015 was huge and consequently made these strategies useless and obsolete; moreover, during the crisis, some EU countries applied policies of repression and control of migrants⁸⁷, many times causing even more chaos.

⁸¹ European Commission, *The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility*, Brussels, 2011, p. 3. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0743&from=en> [Accessed: 22nd June 2022].

⁸² Ivi, p.12.

⁸³ Ivi, p. 15.

⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 17.

⁸⁵ Ivi, p. 18.

⁸⁶ (Anonymous), “EU adopts ‘Asylum Package’: All eyes turned on implementation”, in: *European Council on Refugees and Exiles*, 2013. Available: <https://ecre.org/eu-adopts-asylum-package-all-eyes-turned-on-implementation/> [Accessed: 21nd June 2022].

⁸⁷ Sandra Lavenex and Rachel Stucky, “Partnering for Migration in EU External Relations”, in: Rahel Kunz, Sandra Lavenex and Marion Panizzon (eds.), *Multilayered Migration Governance. The Promise of Partnership*, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 116.

Over the years, immigration to Europe has decreased compared to the two-year period 2014-2015, but it remains a major issue in the political debate of the Union. In August 2021, European countries hosted more than 655,000 refugees and migrants, a number significantly higher than in 2020⁸⁸. Due to the continuing deterioration of the global humanitarian situation, it is estimated that this number will continue to grow in the coming years⁸⁹, so it will be crucial for the EU to manage any inflows and overcrowding by coordinating with national governments.

1.5 The future of the European Union: some considerations

The European Union is an institution that has experienced many changes over the years and has faced as many obstacles. The work carried out by the institutional bodies in order to optimise the functioning of the EU is a demanding one and it is principally based on trying to find a balance and a greater integration between the various Member States, inevitably different from each other for many factors such as their historical past, their resources, their economic and social situation.

With regard to the reflections on the future of the Union, back in March 2017 the Commission published the White Paper on the Future of Europe, which had and still has the objective of highlighting the main issues that the European Union could have addressed in these years and until 2025. Among the matters to be addressed, for example, were included climate change, migratory flows and also the rise of populist and nationalist rhetoric⁹⁰.

In addition, another interesting project announced by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, was the convening of the conference on the future of Europe, which began in April 2021 and ended in May 2022. This convention is unique because, through an innovative multilingual digital platform, it has enabled European citizens to discuss their ideas about the future of the Union, thereby actively collaborating to shape an idea of a common future. At the end of the Conference, a final report was presented, containing 49 proposals on various topics, such as health,

⁸⁸ (Anonymous), “Refugee and Migrant Crisis in Europe”, in: *UNICEF*, 2022, p. 2. Available: <https://www.unicef.org/media/112256/file/2022-HAC-Refugee-and-migrant-crisis-Europe.pdf> [Accessed: 22nd June 2022].

⁸⁹ Ivi, p. 2.

⁹⁰ (Anonymous), “Libro bianco sul futuro dell’Europa: I motori del futuro dell’Europa”, in: *Commissione Europea*. Available: https://ec.europa.eu/info/future-europe/white-paper-future-europe/white-paper-future-europe-drivers-europes-future_it [Accessed: 22nd June 2022].

employment, the environment, safety, etc., elaborated thanks to the contribution of more than 700,000 participants⁹¹.

The European institutions will now examine these proposals and then, theoretically, select some of them and include them in the future work programme.

This conference was an important moment in the process of European integration for several reasons: firstly, it helped to strengthen the link between the citizens of the various Member States; secondly, it has brought these same citizens closer to the European institutions and their work; finally, it has laid the foundations for Ursula von der Leyen's project of "incorporate participatory democracy into the politics and legislative process of the European Union"⁹².

⁹¹ (Anonymous), "Conference on the Future of Europe", in: *European Commission*. Available: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/conference-future-europe_en#:~:text=The%20Conference%20on%20the%20Future,presented%20in%20a%20final%20report. [Accessed: 22nd June 2022].

⁹² *Ibidem*.

Chapter 2 – The principles and the nuances of Euroscepticism

2.1 Euroscepticism: the origins

‘Eurosceptic’ is the individual who supports a political doctrine “that advocates disengagement from the European Union”⁹³. This expression certainly plays an important role in today’s political vocabulary, given that in the last couple of years the European scene has definitely changed, moving progressively towards a reality opposed to the establishment of the EU.

However, it was not the word ‘Eurosceptic’ that emerged first, but rather the term ‘Euroscepticism’, which appeared in the weekly ‘The Economist’ in December 1992, to clarify the feeling of hostility towards the EU that was taking hold in Germany, following the imposition of the obligation to amend certain rules concerning the production of beer⁹⁴. Actually then, this denomination began to be used more frequently in the journalistic and political world mainly by the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, which, as already mentioned, on the one hand marked one of the greatest turning points in the process of European integration, but on the other side made the forces opposing the formation of a European Union a ‘pan-European’⁹⁵ phenomenon, no longer confined to a single nation or region.

In the coming years the situation has not only not improved but, with the Great Recession and the consequent crisis of the Eurozone, these anti-unitary sentiments have only strengthened throughout the continent, seeing the creation of real movements and parties which make these anti-European feelings some of their cornerstones. In this context, the 2016 victory of the ‘Leave’ to Brexit in the United Kingdom and that of the so-called coalition ‘Gialloverde’, composed by the Lega Nord and the Movimento 5 Stelle, in Italy in 2018, do not go unnoticed and in fact, they have represented a watershed from which Euroscepticism and populism have passed from occupying a purely marginal position, to recovering the role of first interpreters on the international political scene in Europe.

⁹³ Michael Ray, “Euroscepticism”, in: *Britannica*. Available: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Euroscepticism> [Accessed: 27th June 2022].

⁹⁴ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, *Sources of Euroscepticism*, in “Acta Politica”, 2007, vol. 42, p. 120. Available: https://garymarks.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13018/2016/09/hoghe_marks_sources-of-euroscepticism.pdf [Accessed: 27th June 2022].

⁹⁵ Definition of Pan-European: “of, relating to, or involving all or most of the nations of Europe”.

See (Anonymous), “Pan-European”, in: *Merriam Webster*. Available: [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Pan-](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Pan-European#:~:text=Definition%20of%20Pan%2DEuropean,a%20Pan%2DEuropean%20economic%20union)

[European#:~:text=Definition%20of%20Pan%2DEuropean,a%20Pan%2DEuropean%20economic%20union](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Pan-European#:~:text=Definition%20of%20Pan%2DEuropean,a%20Pan%2DEuropean%20economic%20union) [Accessed: 27th June 2022].

2.2 Euroscepticism and its different categorisations

The phenomenon has not yet been well framed by scholars, but to better understand the meaning of what is under the broad hat called ‘Euroscepticism’, and particularly according to Simona Guerra, academics must constantly monitor the context in which this concept grows and is formed, similarly to the research on the theme of populism, since this notion is still volatile and multifaceted by different means and divergent purposes from nation to nation⁹⁶.

In this perspective, if the basis of this expression is the opposition to the European project, at the same time, according to Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, it may have more specific connotations⁹⁷: in fact, it is possible to consider Euroscepticism as the set of critical positions towards the process of European integration, but also as a real dissent towards the EU and everything that characterizes it, in other words the principles on which it is based, the institutions that govern it and the policies enacted.

Going further into the subject and mainly taking into account the above second overtone, in 2002 still Taggart and Szczerbiak identified the nuances of hard and soft Euroscepticism. According to them “hard Euroscepticism is where there is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived”⁹⁸, while “soft Euroscepticism is where there is not a principled objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that ‘national interest’ is currently at odds with the EU’s trajectory”⁹⁹. To put it in another way, what has been said so far implies that the European question is evaluated by the hard Eurosceptics just as negative as, for example, capitalism was considered by the communists, while soft Eurosceptics claim

⁹⁶ Simona Guerra, “Eurosceptic Voices: Beyond Party Systems, Across Civil Society”, in: Manuela Caiani and Simona Guerra (eds.), *Euroscepticism, Democracy and the Media: Communicating Europe, Contesting Europe*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 25.

⁹⁷ Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, *Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe*, in “European Journal of Political Research”, 2004, vol. 43, p. 3. Available: <https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2004.00143.x> [Accessed: 27th June 2022].

⁹⁸ Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, *The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States*, in “SEI Working Paper”, 2002, n. 51, p. 7. Available: <https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sei-working-paper-no-51.pdf&site=266> [Accessed: 27th June 2022].

⁹⁹ Ibidem.

that the European Union becomes a problem only when its actions go against their interests or the policies they support¹⁰⁰.

Another study that has made an important contribution in framing Euroscepticism is that of Schäfer and Gross¹⁰¹. These two political scientists in fact have identified three different levels of analysis of the subject: the first focuses on the actor who assumes the Eurosceptic attitude, the second refers to the object of criticism and, last but not least, the third studies the modalities and the intensity of this opposition.

- ❖ Taking the first level into consideration, according to the two scholars, the main actors that can express Eurosceptic sentiments are the political parties and the citizens: in the first case, therefore, it is possible to speak of ‘party-based Euroscepticism’, referring to the political ideologies of certain anti-EU parties; while to better identify the tendencies of public opinion against the European project the expression ‘popular Euroscepticism’ is used¹⁰². Specifically, in order to fully understand the latter concept just mentioned, it is helpful to bring up the definition provided by Serrichio et al., who considered popular Euroscepticism as a “subset of negative attitudes towards the European Union and/or European integration”¹⁰³.

Indeed, it was precisely these sentiments that were the topic of the first studies concerning the EU; in particular, at the beginning, what the sector researchers wanted to analyse was whether there were positive and supportive orientations for the process of European integration. Subsequently, with the actual development of the supranational institution, conflicting point of views emerged, so researchers began to focus on the evolution of public opinion, also considering the opposition to the EU. They noted that the first decades of the Union’s history had been characterized by a so-called “permissive consensus”¹⁰⁴, that is, an attitude of support, or at most indifference, towards the European project; in the 1990s, however, especially after

¹⁰⁰ Taggart and Szczerbiak, *The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States*, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ See Constantin Schäfer and Martin Gross, “Euroscepticism in Times of Crisis: a Macro-Level Analysis of the Euro Crisis’ Effects on Public Opinion and Party Competition on European Integration”, in: Marco Baldassari, Emanuele Castelli, Matteo Truffelli, Giovanni Vezzani (eds.), *Anti-Europeanism – Critical Perspectives towards the European Union*, Berlin, Springer, 2020, pp. 31-55.

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ Fabio Serricchio, Myrto Tsakatika and Lucia Quaglia, *Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis*, in “Journal of Common Market Studies”, 2013, vol. 51, n. 1, p. 52. Available: https://pure.mpg.de/rest/items/item_1567722/component/file_1935866/content [Accessed: 28th June 2022].

¹⁰⁴ Leon N. Lindberg and Stuart A. Scheingold, *Europe’s Would-be Polity: patterns of change in the European Community*, Hoboken, Prentice-Hall, 1970, p. 62.

the Maastricht Treaty, the situation changed and it switched to the concept of “constraining dissensus”¹⁰⁵.

Party-based Euroscepticism has only become an autonomous field of study in the last decades; to date, there are two main schools that analyse the hostile party attitude towards the EU¹⁰⁶: the ‘Sussex School’ and the ‘North Carolina School’. The first is mainly based on the work conveyed by Taggart and Szczerbiak and it carries out qualitative analyses, taking as the main object of study the official literature of the parties in question; the second is based on the works of Hooghe and Marks and, every four years, it organises surveys involving leading experts in the field, from different countries, who are asked to place the various existing parties on a scale of values ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 indicates a feeling of strong opposition to the European integration process, while 7 a strong support. What emerges from the work of these schools is that Euroscepticism is no longer a phenomenon linked only to the extremist realities of the right and the left, as it has been until some time ago, but today it is part and it influences even those which are considered the most traditional parties.

- ❖ Turning now to the second detected level of analysis, the EU and its political regime and the process of European integration are the two possible objects of criticism. With regard to this second focus specifically, it is important to underline the existence of a further deepening elaborated by Hobolt and De Vries that should be kept in mind: in fact, when talking about European integration it is necessary to take into account both the “regime support”¹⁰⁷, the support of citizens to regime, authorities and political communities, and the “policy support”¹⁰⁸, which concentrates instead on the decisions and actions taken collectively by EU actors.

¹⁰⁵ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, *A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: from Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus*, in “British Journal of Political Science”, 2009, vol. 39, p. 5. Available: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-political-science/article/postfunctionalist-theory-of-european-integration-from-permissive-consensus-to-constraining-dissensus/60EA0C58491C06327A235761B08878D6> [Accessed: 28th June 2022].

¹⁰⁶ Schäfer and Gross, “Euroscepticism in Times of Crisis: a Macro-Level Analysis of the Euro Crisis’ Effects on Public Opinion and Party Competition on European Integration”, pp. 31-55.

¹⁰⁷ Sara B. Hobolt and Catherine De Vries, *Public Support for European Integration*, in “Annual Review of Political Science”, 2016, vol. 19, p. 416. Available: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291943482_Public_Support_for_European_Integration [Accessed: 28th June 2022].

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*.

- ❖ Finally, arriving at the third level to take under examination, the political scientists Kopecký and Mudde have elaborated a “two-dimensional conceptualization of party positions on Europe based on the distinction between ‘diffuse’ and ‘specific’ support for European integration”¹⁰⁹. The first refers to the idea of European unification and integration on a general basis; the second instead considers indeed a more specific dimension of the EU, focusing on the development process promoted by the institution.

Making a link between this concept and that of hard and soft Euroscepticism defined by Szczerbiak and Taggart, previously mentioned, it can therefore be inferred that diffuse support is the parallel and opposite dimension of hard Euroscepticism, as if on the one hand there is total approval and on the other there is total rejection toward the EU; and, similarly, the specific support relates to soft Euroscepticism, which in fact would accept the process of European integration, but not according to the current modalities and policies of development.

2.3 Popular Euroscepticism

In this third section of the chapter, I will dwell on the theme of popular Euroscepticism. Consequently, first I will deepen the passage, already mentioned above, from the phase of ‘permissive consensus’ to that of ‘constraining dissensus’, strongly linked to different historical periods and the progress of the European integration process; then I will bring to light some of the main theories that over the years scholars have elaborated to try to understand and explain why citizens have changed their views on European issues. Thus, I’m going to talk about the utilitarian approach, the identity approach, and the ‘cue-taking & benchmarking’ approach.

2.3.1 From ‘permissive consensus’ to ‘constraining dissensus’

It is mainly thanks to the Eurobarometer surveys, conducted from the 1970s in the various Member States, that we have been able to observe the changes of Euroscepticism in public opinion over time.

In the first decades of EC history, the population felt a general sentiment of acceptance towards this organization, which was developing with promises of prosperity and well-being; however, it must be said that even if there were no negative or opposed feelings about the project, as explained by A.

¹⁰⁹ Petr Kopecký and Cas Mudde, *The two sides of Euroscepticism. Party positions on European integration in East Central Europe*, in “European Union Politics”, 2002, vol. 3, p. 299. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1465116502003003002> [Accessed: 28th June 2022].

Eppler and L. Anders¹¹⁰, a partial obstacle was the fact that this institution was somehow perceived as a reserved plan for political elites, therefore very distant from the daily life of the individual. Consequently, the support was timid or passive, and many were even indifferent. This explains the meaning of the expression ‘permissive consensus’, coined by L. N. Lindberg and S. A. Scheingold. The signing of the Maastricht Treaty, which was inserted in the context of the end of the Cold War and of the resulting reunification of Eastern and Western Europe, was intended to strengthen the economic union and create a political unification. The changes that occurred subsequently to this, discussed in the previous chapter, greatly changed the cards on the table in the European scenario and this was also perceived by public opinion. The European Union was in fact no longer just a plan to promote free trade between its Member States, but a real institution, with its own well-organized political apparatus, which took away powers from national governments to manage them at a higher level, that of the Community. From this moment then, something began to change: R. C. Eichenberg and R. J. Dalton identify in this turn the moment of the birth of the so-called “post-Maastricht blues”¹¹¹, or the development of a growing scepticism towards European integration, which was also accompanied by what S. Usherwood and N. Startin¹¹² define as a phase characterized by the growing perception of the gap between the public and the political elites. As a result, this became the stage of ‘constraining dissensus’, a concept defined by Hooghe and Marks, which then became more evident in the referendum for the ratification of the 2005 European Constitution. On this occasion, in fact, the majority of both Dutch and French citizens voted against the adoption of this document, which would have granted additional powers to the Union, definitively blocking its entry into force¹¹³.

¹¹⁰ Annegret Eppler, Lisa H. Anders and Thomas Tuntschew, *Europe’s political, social, and economic (dis-)integration: Revisiting the Elephant in times of crises*, in “IHS Political Science Series Working Paper”, 2016, vol. 143, p. 8. Available: https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/52102/ssoar-2016-eppler_et_al-Europes_political_social_and_economic.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2016-eppler_et_al-Europes_political_social_and_economic.pdf [Accessed: 29th June 2022].

¹¹¹ Richard C. Eichenberg and Russell J. Dalton, *Post-Maastricht Blues: The Transformation of Citizen Support for European Integration, 1973–2004*, in “Acta Politica”, 2007, vol. 42, p. 139. Available: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/palgrave.ap.5500182> [Accessed: 29th June 2022].

¹¹² Simon Usherwood and Nicholas Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon*, in “Journal of Common Market Studies”, 2012, p. 3. Available: https://openresearch.surrey.ac.uk/esploro/outputs/journalArticle/Euroscepticism-as-a-Persistent-Phenomenon/99511010002346?institution=44SUR_INST [Accessed: 29th June 2022].

¹¹³ Koert Debeuf, 2005: *France and Netherlands vote against the Constitution*, “euobserver”, 23.12.2020. Available: <https://euobserver.com/20th-anniversary/150019> [Accessed: 30th June 2022].

The anti-European ideals spread further in public opinion, effectively creating fertile ground for the consolidation of the Eurosceptic populist movements that still today march against the European Union, threatening its stability.

2.3.2 The theories for the analysis of Euroscepticism in public opinion

The studies of the changes in public opinion on the European issue began to be placed in a specific literature during the 1990s. There were mainly three approaches used by political scientists to explain the change in the degree of support of the population: the 'utilitarian', the 'identity' and the 'cue-taking & benchmarking' approaches.

The first is a purely economic approach, which is based exclusively on the measure of the costs and of the benefits that an individual can obtain through European integration. For this theory, the studies of M. Gabel and C. Anderson & M. Reichert, both based on Eurobarometer analysis, represent the milestones of the field. According to the first scholar were “the partisan context of integrative reforms and the utilitarian consequences of integrative policy which [provided] robust explanations for Variation in support”¹¹⁴; further, he held that political values and cognitive mobilization, other two elements that at the time were considered as exchange factors, in reality had only a slight impact on the support¹¹⁵. In the second analysis, instead, Anderson and Reichert noted that the highest level of support was expressed in the states whose individuals had indeed had more economic benefits thanks to the birth of the EU; consequently, they were also more in favour of the European integration project¹¹⁶.

With regard to the population, the utilitarian view holds that there are two groups of different individuals: the first is formed by people with a higher level of human capital, expressed in terms of education, instruction and work, and a higher income; the second group, on the other hand, includes people with lower human capital, work skills and income.

The thing to consider in this context is that according to Hooge and Marks, “trade liberalization increases the international substitutability of labor because firms are more able to shift production

¹¹⁴ Matthew Gabel, *Public Support for European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories*, in “The Journal of Politics”, 1998, vol. 60, no. 2, p. 333. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2647912> [Accessed: 30th June 2022].

¹¹⁵ Ivi, p. 351.

¹¹⁶ Christopher J. Anderson and M. Shawn Reichert, *Economic Benefits and Support for Membership in the E.U.: A Cross-National Analysis*, in “Journal of Public Policy”, 1995, vol. 15, no. 3, p. 236. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4007534> [Accessed: 30th June 2022].

across borders, and this intensifies job insecurity for less-skilled workers”¹¹⁷; from this it can therefore be inferred that market integration at European level has had a different impact on citizens. In general, it is the members of the second group who are Eurosceptic, as they are more disadvantaged by the removal of barriers to trade. This thinking can be done in parallel at the national level, so mainly the countries that benefit most from European economic exchanges have a higher percentage of support for the EU and a lower degree of Euroscepticism.

Moving on to the identity approach, this emerged following the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, when the European Union was made official and acquired competences.

The concept on which this theory is based is that of ‘identity’; in particular, Hooghe and Marks argue that “the European Union meshes national and European governments in a system of multi-level governance”¹¹⁸ which no longer only affects the single market, but also the transfer of a certain degree of sovereignty of the member states, blurring the boundaries between the different national communities and fostering multiculturalism¹¹⁹. At this point, what comes into play is the citizen’s attachment to his own nation and the perception that this has of other cultures; numerous analyses have been made on the issue thanks to the data collected with the Eurobarometer tool. For example, S. Carey in his study showed that strongly nationalist individuals are more Eurosceptic¹²⁰; subsequently, McLaren also believed that hostility towards other cultures and the feeling of intolerance about immigrants or minority groups are directly proportional to the growth of Euroscepticism¹²¹; a very similar thesis is also supported in the work of De Vreese and Boomgaarden, who, thanks to survey data, showed that “anti-immigration sentiments, economic considerations and the evaluation of domestic governments are the strongest predictors of both attitudinal support for

¹¹⁷ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, *Calculation, Community and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration*, in “European Union Politics”, 2005, vol. 6, p. 421. Available: https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/22892/ssoar-eup-2005-4-hooghe_et_al-calculation.pdf?sequence=1 [Accessed: 30th June 2022].

¹¹⁸ Ivi, p. 423.

¹¹⁹ Hobolt and De Vries, *Public Support for European Integration*, pp. 420-421.

¹²⁰ Sean Carey, *Undivided Loyalties: is National Identity an Obstacle to European Integration?*, in “European Union Politics”, 2002, vol. 3, p 393. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1465116502003004001> [Accessed: 30th June 2022].

¹²¹ See Lauren M. McLaren, *Identity, Interests and Attitudes to European Integration*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

integration and individuals' propensity to vote 'yes' in a referendum on the enlargement of the European Union"¹²².

What is really interesting to notice is that according to the two political scientists Hooghe and Marks, there are people who conceive the idea of having multiple identities, for example some individuals can consider themselves Venetian, Italian and European, and in this case both the national and the European identity gain in the same way; others instead are focused only on their national identity and in this case, they tend to be more sceptical about Brussels¹²³. Therefore, to put it in another way, the relationship between European integration and national identity is a kind of double-edged sword¹²⁴.

Moving on to the last part of this analysis, the cue-taking & benchmarking approach is structured around the idea that the population is de facto disinterested in the EU and in issues relating to the integration process, because they are considered too intricate, but also too distant from everyday life. People are therefore more focused in national politics rather than in European politics, and it is precisely within the confines of the national political discourse that people receive, for example from political parties or the media, excerpts of what is happening in the Union. Indeed, in Europe the political elites exercise a great influence on their voters, who are generally inclined to follow the position of the party supported at national level also at European level: for example, according to D. Druckman "public opinion often depends on which frames elites choose to use. For example, citizens' opinions about a Ku Klux Klan rally may depend on whether elites frame it as a free speech issue or a public safety issue"¹²⁵. John Zaller also researched this topic and developed a theory on the dynamics of public opinion, applicable to a wide range of subjects, from foreign policy to racial equality. This theory is based on four fundamental premises: the first is that individuals are mindful of politics, and affected by it, in a different way¹²⁶; the second is that people are able to react critically to political communication only if they have the right tools of analysis, in this case therefore they must know the language of politics¹²⁷; the third is that generally people don't have fixed opinions

¹²² Claes H. de Vreese and Hajo G. Boomgaarden, *Projecting EU Referendums: Fear of Immigration and Support for European Integration*, in "European Union Politics", 2005, vol. 6, p. 59. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1465116505049608> [Accessed: 5th July 2022].

¹²³ Hooghe and Marks, *Calculation, Community and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration*, p. 423.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁵ James N. Druckman, *On the Limits of Framing Effects: Who Can Frame?*, in "Journal of Politics", 2001, vol. 63, pp. 1041. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2691806> [Accessed: 5th July 2022].

¹²⁶ John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 6-39.

¹²⁷ Ivi, pp. 40-52.

about specific issues, rather they construct them by discussing with others¹²⁸; the fourth is that, for building these opinions, people use ideas that are closer to their interests¹²⁹. In all these steps, the role of the political elites is powerful because, according to Zaller, these can frame the political discourse that then reaches the population¹³⁰; in short, they represent the balance needle. On the other hand, as stated by Brigevich, many political parties adapt to public opinions and use them for their own purposes, mainly to avoid losing consensus, especially among radical voters¹³¹.

Quickly considering another dimension, with regard to the mass media, in general it is possible to observe the fundamental role that they play in the process of dissemination of political information, so it is logic that they contribute in the expansion of popular Euroscepticism too. This topic will in fact be discussed more in detail in the next chapter.

2.4 Party-based Euroscepticism

As mentioned above, party-based Euroscepticism has been analysed for several years by political scientists who have classified it according to various definitions. In the first part of this sub-chapter, therefore, the most important of them will be deepened in order to better illustrate the theoretical background of the phenomenon; I will then go on explaining some of the behaviours that can generally be related to Euroscepticism but, in reality, they do not necessarily make a party truly Eurosceptic. In the second subsection I will then briefly list the characteristics of the four main types of Eurosceptic parties that exist in Europe, combining them with some concrete examples and, to conclude, in the last segment of this subchapter, I will take into consideration the European party system and its two dimensions, Left/Right and GAL/TAN, in order to bring to light the link between these two facets and Euroscepticism.

2.4.1 What is and what is not ‘party-based Euroscepticism’

Over the years, political scientists have formulated different definitions and classifications about the phenomenon of party-based Euroscepticism, emerged after the popular one, but not for this reason less important.

¹²⁸ Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, pp. 118-150.

¹²⁹ Ivi, pp. 216-264.

¹³⁰ Ivi, pp. 97-117.

¹³¹ Anna Brigevich, *Cueing the radical voter: The impact of economic, immigration and integration cues on public fear of the EU*, in “Party Politics”, 2018, vol. 26, p. 745. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1354068818808324> [Accessed: 5th July 2022].

The first theorization was given by Taggart in 1998, who defined the issue as a concept that “expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration”¹³². Later, in 2002, on the basis of what was said, again Taggart, but this time together with Szczerbiak, further deepened the theme, making a distinction between “party-based hard opposition” and “party-based soft opposition”¹³³: basically, the first group is made up of those parties which wish to withdraw their country from the EU, while the second group includes political groups which are not permanently opposed to the process of European integration, but believe that the plans of the European Union are not in line with the national perspective.

This dichotomy, however, has been criticized by other researchers: for example, Kopecký and Mudde proposed an alternative conceptualization, arguing that the one identified by Taggart and Szczerbiak was too generalist and inclusive; these therefore branched party-based Euroscepticism into four categories: “Euroenthusiasts”, “Europragmatists”, “Eurosceptics” and “Eurorejects”¹³⁴. These typologies are based on two main conceptual distinctions: the first is the one related to parties that support the principle of the transfer of sovereignty to supranational bodies and those that oppose it; the second concerns the parties that brace the planning of a further extension of European sovereignty and those that reject it. Thus, Euroenthusiasts and Eurorejects are at the opposite poles, respectively totally pro and against the EU, while in the middle it is possible to find Eurosceptics and Europragmatists, the first pro-integration as it is organized now, the second willing to find a new way. To make it clearer, the four groups mentioned above can be summarised in the following table:

| | |
|---|---|
| Euroenthusiasts (pro-integration and trajectory) | Europragmatists (anti-integration, pro-trajectory) |
| Eurosceptics (pro-integration, anti-trajectory) | Eurorejects (anti-integration, anti-trajectory) |

Table 1. Source: Szczerbiak and Taggart¹³⁵

¹³² Paul Taggart, *A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems*, in “European Journal of Political Research”, 1998, vol. 33, p. 366. Available: <https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1475-6765.00387> [Accessed: 6th July 2022].

¹³³ Taggart and Szczerbiak, *The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States*, pp. 16-34.

¹³⁴ Kopecký and Mudde, *The two sides of Euroscepticism. Party positions on European integration in East Central Europe*, p. 303.

¹³⁵ Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, *Theorising party-based Euroscepticism: problems of definition, measurement and causality*, in “SEI Working Paper”, 2003, p. 3. Available: http://aei.pitt.edu/6562/1/001513_1.PDF [Accessed: 6th July 2022].

A further interesting classification of this phenomenon was developed by Flood; this scholar, however, deliberately decided to avoid the use of the expression “party-based Euroscepticism”¹³⁶, and limited himself to identify six different categories of parties, that approach Europe differently. First of all, there are the “rejectionists”, who are totally opposed to the EU and its institutions and policies; then it is possible to find the “revisionists”, who do not support the current frame of the EU and would be more in favour of a return to the status prior to the revision of the treaties; the “minimalists” are those who accept today’s institutional structure, but reject a further step forward in the process of European integration; then there are the “gradualists”, who are in favour of greater integration, provided that it is gradual and thought; the “reformists” are the political groups that highlight the need to improve the European institutional system and its work; finally the “maximalists” are those who call for the process of European integration to be pursued as quickly as possible¹³⁷.

Over the years then, political scientists interested in the subject have tried to enrich its literature as much as possible, starting from a generic initial concept, but identifying increasingly detailed nuances.

Inevitably, together with the classifications of the various behaviours of the Eurosceptic parties, political positions, which may be erroneously associated with Euroscepticism, have also been identified. Some examples on this have been shown again by the work of Taggart and Szczerbiak.

The first case is that of parties that criticize the EU because of a disinterest on the part of the organization towards the national dynamics of the Member States; this complaint in fact can also be exposed by pro-Europe parties, which perhaps only tend to want to emphasize the role played by each individual country in the institution¹³⁸. This is therefore not a sufficiently important factor for classifying whether certain parties can be Eurosceptic or not.

The second case arises when a political party is opposed to a particular policy adopted by the EU; for example, this could happen for a specific economic, defence or environmental policy, but this does not imply that the party that expresses its disagreement on this issue is then Eurosceptic. Even if there is not a specific number of policies that a party must oppose to in order to be classified as Eurosceptic, according to Taggart and Szczerbiak, for it to fall into this category, it will still have to express its

¹³⁶ Christopher Flood, “The Challenge of Euroscepticism”, in: Jackie Gower (ed.), *The European Union Handbook*, London/Chicago, Fitzroy Dearborn, 2002, pp. 73-84.

¹³⁷ Taggart and Szczerbiak, *Theorising party-based Euroscepticism: problems of definition, measurement and causality*, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Ivi, pp. 8-9.

dissent towards numerous policies, and certainly not one or two¹³⁹. One aspect to keep in mind, however, is the type of policy that the party rejects: in fact, the “core policies”, that are the fundamental ones in the European program, are distinguished from the “peripheral policies”, which are those that can be considered in the background or of secondary importance¹⁴⁰. This distinction helps to put more weight on a party that, for example, disagree on economic and monetary policy, rather than on a party that is against the new provisions on fisheries: the first circumstance is in fact an indication of greater Euroscepticism than the second.

The third case is that of parties opposed to the opening up and enlargement of the EU¹⁴¹. This position is not closely related to the Eurosceptic current since, for example, the strong support that some British Conservative MPs expressed for the enlargement of the EU during the past years was actually hiding the will to destroy the organization itself at the grassroots and from within.

Finally, the fourth and final case refers to party that criticise the low level of democracy and integration promoted within the EU¹⁴². This shortcoming is mainly underlined by the emerging left-wing parties, which while on the one hand support a greater transfer of powers at supranational level, on the other they demand a high level of democratisation of the EU. In this situation, parties can be categorized as Eurosceptic or not, according to the tools they propose to use in order to achieve the proposed objective: in concrete terms, if a revision of the treaties was proposed in order to restore powers and responsibilities to national governments, then this party could be regarded as Eurosceptic; alternatively, should the parties call for a strengthening of the European institutional system, this could not be considered an attitude of opposition to the EU.

With these clarifications, Taggart and Szczerbiak wanted to highlight the fact that relating to Eurosceptic behaviours must not be always taken for granted, but in some cases determined conducts can be instead identifiable as “Eurocritical” attitudes¹⁴³.

2.4.2 Eurosceptic parties: four different types

On the basis of the above exposed analysis, Simon Usherwood and Nick Startin were able to identify four different types of Eurosceptic parties¹⁴⁴.

¹³⁹ Taggart and Szczerbiak, *Theorising party-based Euroscepticism: problems of definition, measurement and causality*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁴¹ Ivi, p. 10.

¹⁴² Ivi, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴³ Ivi, p. 11.

¹⁴⁴ Usherwood and Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon*, p. 6.

The first is that of the pro-sovereignty parties, those who want to maintain strong national sovereignty and therefore reject the idea of European integration. Consequently, they are opposed to the transfer of national powers to communitarian or supranational bodies and to the dynamics of globalisation; what they actively support are the prerogatives of their state¹⁴⁵. Taking up the above observations, according to Szczerbiak and Taggart, theirs is the typical example of hard Eurosceptic discourse¹⁴⁶. To this group belong: the British UK Independence Party (UKIP), founded in 1993 and now led by Neil Hamilton; the Spanish Party VOX, born in 2013 from a union of some dissident members of the People's Party and led by the neo-franchist Santiago Abascal¹⁴⁷; the Irish Party Fianna Fail, among the most important conservative parties in the country¹⁴⁸, founded in 1926 and at whose command today is Micheál Martin.

The second type of Eurosceptic party is that of the Radical Right Parties (RRP). Central to their political agenda is the opposition to the European Union, which manifests itself through a continuous questioning of the work of Brussels, especially on migration; this speech is being actively carried out by the various parties which are trying to broaden their consensus at national level, exploiting the weaknesses of the EU and attacking certain categories of subjects, bearing the responsibility for the crisis¹⁴⁹. In this case then, to the basic Eurosceptic discourse also the anti-immigration one is added. In this group it is possible to find:

- the extreme right German party founded in 2013, Alternative für Deutschland, presented as “anti-euro”¹⁵⁰, often spokesman of xenophobic positions and chaired by Jörg Meuthen and Alexander Gauland;
- the French Party Rassemblement National, founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen and led today by his daughter Marine Le Pen, who is strictly opposed to the Schengen Area. She

¹⁴⁵ Usherwood and Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon*, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ Taggart and Szczerbiak, *The Party Politics of Euroscepticism in EU Member and Candidate States*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁷ Guido de Franceschi, *Cosa dice e vuole Vox, la destrissima spagnola amica di Meloni*, “Il Foglio”, 12.10.2021. Available: <https://www.ilfoglio.it/esteri/2021/10/12/news/cosa-dice-e-vuole-vox-la-destrissima-spagnola-amica-di-meloni-3141680/> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

¹⁴⁸ Michael Marsh, “Fianna Fáil”, in: *Britannica*. Available: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fianna-Fail> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

¹⁴⁹ Usherwood and Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁵⁰ (Anonymous), “I principali partiti euroscettici in Europa”, in: *Beta Italia*, 2019. Available: <https://italy.beta-europe.org/2019/04/10/i-principali-partiti-euroscettici-in-europa/> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

sustains that French citizenship should be given “by inheritance or merit”¹⁵¹ and that “the restoration [...] of the «Europe of Nations», a sort of diluted cooperation between sovereign States”¹⁵², where national law takes precedence over European law, is necessary;

- Forza Nuova, Italian party of extreme right, defined by some also as “neo-fascist”¹⁵³, founded in the late nineties by Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello;
- always from Italy, it is necessary to include in this category Lega Nord, founded in 1991 and led today by Matteo Salvini, who has been pursuing for several years a tough anti-immigration policy, especially for the migratory movements of the Mediterranean. This leader is also known to oppose the EU, both from the institutional point of view, because it rejects the supranational reality of the organization, and from the economic one, since he has long advocated the abolition of the single currency and the return to the Lira¹⁵⁴. In 2019, following his absence at a meeting on the migrants’ crisis held in Paris, Salvini was attacked by the French President Macron, and reacted by declaring: “Italy has raised its head, it does not take orders and it does not play lady in waiting: if Macron wants to discuss on immigrants, he can come to Rome”¹⁵⁵; this indicates the strong nationalism promoted by this party, which therefore rejects the idea of a European decision-making process to solve problems.

The third type is left-wing Eurosceptic parties, which are essentially opposed to the process of European integration because of the neoliberal direction this project has taken in recent times; they therefore propose “an alternative vision of a more social Europe with a clearer global vision”¹⁵⁶ which is nevertheless appreciated by the electorate, especially in recent years. This group includes: the

¹⁵¹ (Anonymous), “I principali partiti euroscettici in Europa”.

¹⁵² Gabriele Rosana, *Elezioni in Francia, Le Pen fa tremare Bruxelles: «Con lei all’Eliseo a rischio Recovery e sanzioni ai russi». A rischio il trattato del Quirinale*, “Il Gazzettino”, 10.04.2022. Available: https://www.ilmazzettino.it/esteri/elezioni-francia-macron-le-pen-bruxelles-recovery-plan-pnrr-sanzioni-6620710.html?refresh_ce [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

¹⁵³ Marco Preve, *Assalto alla sede di Forza Nuova: domani i neofascisti in piazza*, “La Repubblica”, 18.05.2007. Available: <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2007/05/18/assalto-alla-sede-di-forza-nuova-domani.html> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

¹⁵⁴ (Anonymous), “I principali partiti euroscettici in Europa”.

¹⁵⁵ (Anonymous), *Migranti, Salvini risponde a Macron: "Non prendiamo ordini da lui"*, “TGCOM24”, 22.07.2019. Available: <https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/mondo/migranti-salvini-risponde-a-macron-non-prendiamo-ordini-da-lui-3221716-201902a.shtml> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

¹⁵⁶ Usherwood and Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon*, p. 7.

German party Die Linkspartei, founded in 2017 on the ideological wave of democratic socialism¹⁵⁷ and whose current co-presidents are Susanne Hennig-Wellsow and Janine Wissle; the Danish party Socialistisk Folkeparti, born 1959 and led today by Pia Olsen Dyhr, who speaks of values such as equality and solidarity and whose goal “is a society built on socialist and green values with the biggest potential for welfare, wealth, freedom and opportunities for all people”¹⁵⁸; the Portuguese Bloco de Esquerda, founded at the end of the Nineties, led by Catarina Martins and promoter of a not Eurocentric and not Eurocrat mentality¹⁵⁹.

The fourth type of Eurosceptic party includes those traditional parties that can easily be linked to the historical concept of centre-right and centre-left. Even within them, in fact, in recent years, Eurosceptic discourses have emerged and, wanting to deepen the theme, in this case the reference is made to the soft form of Euroscepticism¹⁶⁰. In concrete terms, therefore, the opposition manifests itself, for example, in matters relating to the future of Europe, its budget or the possible consequences of future enlargements. Examples of parties belonging to this fourth classification are the Italian party Forza Italia, founded in 2013 and led by Silvio Berlusconi; the German Freie Demokratische Partei, a “centrist political party that advocates individualism, capitalism, and social reform”¹⁶¹, founded in 1948 and led by Christian Lindner; the Czech Civil Democratic Party, born at the beginning of the Nineties thanks to Václav Klaus, led today by Petr Fiala and considered to be a “Euro-realist” party, in the sense that for example “it refuses tax harmonisation on the European level, but supports deeper economic integration”¹⁶².

2.4.3 The European party system: the link between Euroscepticism and the Left/Right - GAL/TAN dimensions

¹⁵⁷ Kate Connolly, *Die Linke Party wins German votes by standing out from crowd*, “The Guardian”, 17.09.2009. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/17/german-elections-die-linke-party> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

¹⁵⁸ (Anonymous), “About Socialistisk Folkeparti”, in: *Socialistisk Folkeparti*. Available: <https://sf.dk/om-sf/about-sf-in-english/> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

¹⁵⁹ (Anonymous), “Bloco de Esquerda”, in: *The Left in the European Parliament*. Available: <https://left.eu/groups/delegation/bloco-de-esquerda/> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

¹⁶⁰ Usherwood and Startin, *Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶¹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Free Democratic Party”, in: *Britannica*. Available: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Free-Democratic-Party-political-party-Germany> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

¹⁶² (Anonymous), “Civil democratic Party”, in: *CEE Identity – National identities*. Available: <http://www.cceidentity.eu/database/manifestoescoun/civic> [Accessed: 8th July 2022].

In dealing with this subject, one cannot fail to consider the research work carried out by Hooghe, Marks and Wilson in 2002, which is still relevant today. The questions these authors wanted to answer were “How is contestation on European integration structured among national political parties? Are issues arising from European integration assimilated into existing dimensions of domestic contestation?”¹⁶³. The aim was to identify possible links between the positions taken by certain parties on the European issue and their positioning in the Left/Right dimension. What then emerged, however, is that, according to these scholars, there is another more recent facet that has characterized the party system lately: the GAL/ TAN sides¹⁶⁴.

Taking both these dimensions into account, and using data deriving from a database developed by experts from the University of North Carolina, a thorough analysis of the European party system was carried out. The researchers asked experts from each EU country to assess, on a scale of 1 to 7, the position of their national political parties on the European integration process. In this scale, 1 is the lowest score and indicates strong opposition to European integration, while 7 is the highest and indicates strong support for the project. The database contains 125 different positions from 14 EU Member States, based on an average of 9 interviewed experts per country¹⁶⁵. Drawing on a research work previously carried out in 1999 by Leonard Ray¹⁶⁶, and with the aim of carrying out research as clear and specific as possible, Hooghe, Marks and Wilson used a series of questions about the degree of party support in seven specific areas of EU policy: the broadening of the powers of the European Parliament, fiscal policy, foreign policy, cohesion policy, asylum policy, employment policy and environmental policy¹⁶⁷.

As already mentioned, Hooghe, Marks and Wilson first and foremost wanted to understand what could be the relationship between the positioning of a political party in the Left/Right dimension and its ideas regarding the EU.

¹⁶³ Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks and Carole J. Wilson, *Does Left/Right structure Party positions on European Integration?*, in “Comparative Political studies”, 2002, vol. 35, no. 8, p. 965. Available: <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.470.4968&rank=1&q=Does%20Left/Right%20structure%20Party%20positions%20on%20European%20Integration?&osm=&ossid=> [Accessed: 9th July 2022].

¹⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 970.

¹⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 966.

¹⁶⁶ See Leonard Ray, *Measuring party orientations towards European integration: Results from an expert survey*, in “European Journal of Political Research”, 1999, vol. 36, pp. 283-306. Available: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1007009106184> [Accessed: 9th July 2022].

¹⁶⁷ Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, *Does Left/Right structure Party positions on European Integration?*, p. 967.

What emerged was that extremist parties on both sides generally share Eurosceptic views, while the centre parties (for example, Liberals and Social Democrats) tend to be more supportive of the European integration process. All these collected data can be graphically summarized using an inverted U-curve, as shown in the chart below, which is related to four specific policy areas.

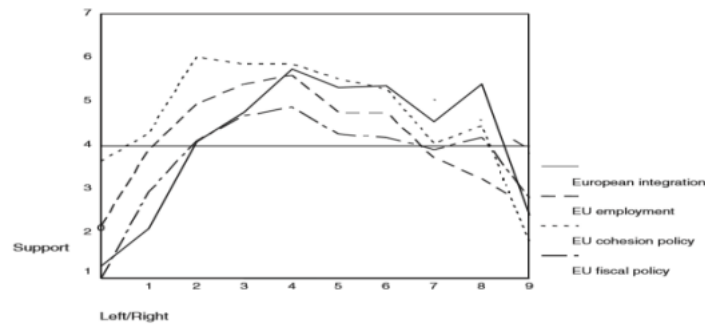


Chart 1. Source: Hooghe, Marks & Wilson¹⁶⁸

The explanations regarding the shape of this curve are different, but I will take into consideration mainly two.

The first derives from the work of William Riker, which basically shows that successful parties in the political structure are not interested in radically opposing the European project, because they do not want to lose consensus and votes; on the contrary, parties with the lowest election results, those that could be defined as the weakest and as those excluded from the government of a country, could decide to change their strategy and maybe consider new aspects, such as opposition to the European project, which could easily attract more consensus¹⁶⁹.

The other elucidation provided by Hooghe, Marks and Wilson is based on the contribution of Ernst Haas. Basically, since the European Union was conceived and built thanks to the long work of centrist political forces - therefore belonging to the centre-right, the centre and the centre-left - it is normal that, if considering the extremes of the party dimension, discordant positions emerge, which are therefore more Eurosceptic¹⁷⁰. In this context in fact, it is no coincidence that the three researchers stress the importance of not forgetting that the EU is a project that was born with the idea of creating a free market, which would guarantee the continuous movement of goods, services, capital and individuals, and this idea was opposed by the wing of the extreme right parties; on the other hand,

¹⁶⁸ Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, *Does Left/Right structure Party positions on European Integration?*, p. 970.

¹⁶⁹ See William H. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation*, New Heaven, Yale University Press, 1986.

¹⁷⁰ See Ernst B. Haas, *The uniting of Europe: political, social, and economical forces, 1950-1957*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1958.

those of the extreme left rejected the fact that this market was in some way based on a form of “regulated capitalism”¹⁷¹.

However, as already mentioned above, the work of Hooghe, Marks and Wilson did not stop only at the analysis of the Left/Right dimension, because as they have shown, over the decades the focus was also put on new issues concerning for example nationalism, immigration, cultural diversity and ecology¹⁷²; this new ‘wave’ can be defined, according to the expression of Inglehart, “post-materialism”¹⁷³. On the basis of this consideration then, the three scholars identified a new political extent, that is distinct into two poles: the GAL, which includes ecological positions (Green), alternative ones, such as the concept of participatory democracy (Alternative) and Libertarianism; and the TAN, which on the other hand take in all parties that express support for traditional values (Traditional), opposition to immigration (Authoritarian) and the defence of the national community (Nationalism)¹⁷⁴.

What the researchers then asked themselves was whether there was a link too between the GAL/TAN dimension that a party advocates and the possible position it may take towards European integration. “One of the chief consequences of European integration is weakening the authority of national states”¹⁷⁵, therefore it is possible to argue that, in general, the parties belonging to the TAN pole oppose the process of European integration. For the parties belonging to the GAL pole instead, the situation is different and perhaps more complex: in fact, the debate is still open because European integration is a way of introducing common policies such as the one for the protection of the environment, but at the same time it can be considered as a tool to weaken democracy.

In this scenario it is possible to make three different considerations:

- Firstly, the radical right-wing and populist right-wing parties, which belong to the TAN pole, are resolutely Eurosceptic since they believe that it is necessary to strengthen the national sovereignty of the Member States and to oppose the single market and the immigration policy; these are the key points of their political manifesto, which in recent years has ensured a significant electoral increase¹⁷⁶. There are many examples of parties belonging to this classification that can be mentioned, for example Rassemblement National and Lega Nord.

¹⁷¹ Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, *Does Left/Right structure Party positions on European Integration?*, p. 969.

¹⁷² Ivi, p. 976.

¹⁷³ See Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989.

¹⁷⁴ Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, *Does Left/Right structure Party positions on European Integration?*, p. 966.

¹⁷⁵ Ivi, p. 977.

¹⁷⁶ Ivi, pp. 978-979.

- Secondly, according to the three researchers, even conservative parties with a leaning towards the TAN pole, tend to be Eurosceptic. In fact, also these, although not as extremist as the radicals, pay attention to the defence of national identity and culture, which are values considered as needing protection. The difference with the former is that they are not calling for withdrawal from the Union, but are proposing to give less powers at Community level¹⁷⁷. Examples of this current are the Portuguese Popular Party, the British Conservative Party and Forza Italia.
- Finally, there are the Green parties, which fall under the GAL pole and take uncertain positions on European integration. As Bomberg pointed out, the main criticism on the Union is its institutions, which often, according to these parties, are not transparent enough¹⁷⁸. On the other hand, the Greens strongly support the European environmental policy, as well as the migration policy and they are in favour of an increase in the competences reserved for the Union. It is therefore possible to categorise them as pro-Europe and certainly not as Eurosceptics¹⁷⁹. The German Bündnis 90/Die Grünen party, the French Europe Écologie Les Verts party and the Italian Europa Verde party are examples of this last category.

In conclusion, it can be considered that the Left/Right and the GAL/TAN dimensions are de facto very linked to the support that the parties of the Member States may or may not express towards the EU. However, while political parties have established ideologies that guide them in adopting certain positions for or against the European project, on the other hand, it is the elaborated electoral strategies that show whether a party has decided to focus on the issue or not, in order perhaps to obtain greater support from public opinion and, consequently, to have a better result in the elections. In this context actually, it is important to mention again the contribution of Taggart and Szczerbiak, who basically believe that there are two main factors which influence the position of political parties towards the issue of European integration: first the ideological profile and the values carried forward, then the interest perceived by supporters¹⁸⁰. Based on these two elements, the two scholars then distinguished two different categories of parties: those “goal-seeking” and those “office-seeking”¹⁸¹. The former enjoys an organized and strong ideological structure and therefore they give priority to the first factor

¹⁷⁷ Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, *Does Left/Right structure Party positions on European Integration?*, pp. 981-983.

¹⁷⁸ See Elizabeth Bomberg, *Green Parties and Politics in the European Union*, London, Routledge, 1998.

¹⁷⁹ Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, *Does Left/Right structure Party positions on European Integration?*, pp. 983-984.

¹⁸⁰ Taggart and Szczerbiak, *Theorising party-based Euroscepticism: problems of definition, measurement and causality*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

in the elaboration of their ideas towards integration; the latter, instead, more clientelist, will give priority to the second factor and it will assess the right attitude to be taken towards this issue, paying close attention to the preferences and opinions of their supporters, in order to avoid losing consensus¹⁸². What emerges from the study, then, is that it is not possible to take a party's position for granted by taking into account only its ideology, which can be modified according to the needs of the party itself. With respect to this, in recent years, several parties have placed more emphasis on the phenomenon of Euroscepticism mainly because it reflects more the situation of growing opposition to the EU expressed by the population; the link between increasing popular Euroscepticism and expanding party opposition to the EU is therefore very strong.

2.5 The link between the Euro crisis and Euroscepticism

Before developing the subject of this sub-chapter, it is important to make a clarification: given that the migration crisis is still a situation in continuous transition, the impact it has had on the Eurosceptic phenomenon will not be deepened.

As detailed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the 2008 Euro Crisis was a moment of extreme instability, which led to discontent in the European Union. Many political scientists have therefore tried to identify a link between this failure and the phenomenon of Euroscepticism: in general, what has emerged from the various studies is that the EU sees its consensus grows if it experiences a phase of prosperity and economic expansion, while on the contrary, during a period of economic depression, the institution is strongly criticized and accused of malfunctioning and mismanagement¹⁸³. Still, the extent to which this crisis has affected public opinion and the political sphere is different, so the link between it and these two dimensions of Euroscepticism, previously examined, is different.

Starting with the analysis of the link between the 2008 financial crisis and popular Euroscepticism, among the many researches conducted, that of Schäfer and Gross is one of the most relevant. To understand to what extent a country has been hit by the crisis, the two scholars have taken into account the unemployment rate, an indicator that is able to provide detailed socio-economic information¹⁸⁴. Concretely, what has emerged is that since 2008 unemployment has continued to increase only in the countries most affected by the crisis; a turning point occurred in 2013, when small improvements in

¹⁸² Taggart and Szczerbiak, *Theorising party-based Euroscepticism: problems of definition, measurement and causality*, p. 16.

¹⁸³ See Daniele Caramani, *Scienza politica*. Milano, Egea, 2015.

¹⁸⁴ Schäfer and Gross, "Euroscepticism in Times of Crisis: a Macro-Level Analysis of the Euro Crisis' Effects on Public Opinion and Party Competition on European Integration", pp. 31-55.

the world of work began to be seen. However, the two scholars have come to the conclusion that the rise in popular Euroscepticism is strongly linked to the rise in the unemployment rate due to the crisis, especially in the most affected southern European countries¹⁸⁵.

Another important contribution to the literature related to this theme was given by Serricchio, Tsakatika and Quaglia, who used the data obtained from the Eurobarometer to calculate the degree of Euroscepticism present at the popular level in the various European countries; specifically, what has been used to measure this extent is the negative attitude expressed by the population towards a country's accession to the EU¹⁸⁶. For its part, this negative approach has been weighted on the basis of the question, inserted in the surveys since 1970, "Generally speaking, do you think that (country interviewed)'s membership of the EU would be...?"; to date the possible answers to be given are five: "a good thing", "a bad thing", "neither good nor bad", "don't know" and finally there is the possibility of spontaneously refusing to answer the question¹⁸⁷. After a careful analysis of the collected data, in a historical perspective, the final results have led to the conclusion that there has indeed been an increase in the Eurosceptic phenomenon since the crisis of 2007-2008 and that this growth was more pronounced in the Member States, rather than in those countries which were not part of the EU. This is also shown in Chart 2 below, which manifests the evolution of Euroscepticism since the signing of the TEU:



Chart 2. Source: Serricchio, Tsakatika and Quaglia¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Schäfer and Gross, "Euroscepticism in Times of Crisis: a Macro-Level Analysis of the Euro Crisis' Effects on Public Opinion and Party Competition on European Integration", pp. 31-55.

¹⁸⁶ Serricchio, Tsakatika and Quaglia, *Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis*, p. 54.

¹⁸⁷ See European Commission, "Public opinion in the European Union", in: *Standard Eurobarometer 96 Winter 2021-2022, European Union*.

¹⁸⁸ Serricchio, Tsakatika and Quaglia, *Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis*, p. 57.

Another important consideration made by these three researchers is that the increase in Euroscepticism appeared to be stronger in the Member States admitted to the EU after 2004 than in the countries that have been part of the Union for a longer time¹⁸⁹. Finally, the other relevant aspect of this research is that, according to the three scholars, it was possible to divide countries into three different groups, according to their degree variation of Euroscepticism:

- In the first group it was possible to find countries that saw a sharp increase in Euroscepticism in the post-crisis period, such as Greece (+23%), Portugal (+13%), Slovenia (+12%), Lithuania and Spain (+9%), Cyprus (+8%) and Ireland (+7%)¹⁹⁰;
- The countries of the second group, such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Poland, saw a moderate increase in the level of Euroscepticism, between a minimum percentage of +1% and a maximum of +6%¹⁹¹;
- Finally, the members of the third group are all those states in which the level of Euroscepticism has remained unchanged, or even decreased. Serricchio et al. then included in this category Austria and the United Kingdom, always constant, and France (-1%), Finland (-3%) and Sweden (-6%)¹⁹².

As for party-based Euroscepticism, it is interesting to take up the analysis of Schäfer and Gross¹⁹³, who studied the effects of the 2008 Euro crisis both on public opinion and in party competition at European level. As I have already pointed out, the impact of this crisis has been strong throughout Europe: at political level, one of the first consequences was the birth of the so-called “challenger parties”, which became representatives for the Eurosceptic vision¹⁹⁴. These parties have developed in both the Left/Right dimensions of the European party system and, in recent years, they have increased their consensus, benefitting from the so-called “exodus of votes”¹⁹⁵, that has moved on them coming from traditional parties, which instead saw a decline in support from the population. Among the challenger parties it is possible to mention the Movimento 5 Stelle, an Italian party born in 2009, now

¹⁸⁹ Serricchio, Tsakatika and Quaglia, *Euroscepticism and the Global Financial Crisis*, p. 56.

¹⁹⁰ Ivi, p. 57.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem.

¹⁹² Ibidem.

¹⁹³ Schäfer and Gross, “Euroscepticism in Times of Crisis: a Macro-Level Analysis of the Euro Crisis’ Effects on Public Opinion and Party Competition on European Integration”, pp. 31-55.

¹⁹⁴ See Sara B. Hobolt and James Tilley, *Fleeing the centre: the rise of challenger parties in the aftermath of the euro crisis*, in “Western European Politics”, 2016, vol. 39, p. 972. Available: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402382.2016.1181871> [Accessed: 13th July 2022].

¹⁹⁵ Ivi, p. 985.

led by the ex-premier Giuseppe Conte, which expresses Euroscepticism in a moderate form. However, in this scenario, as noted by Rohrschneider and Whitefield¹⁹⁶, even the mainstream parties have reinforced their critical position towards Brussels and therefore overall, as stated by Schäfer and Gross, after the crisis of 2008, there has been a kind of general downsizing towards the EU¹⁹⁷.

This analysis first has helped to reinforce the position of Szczerbiak and Taggart according to which political parties react following the desires of their voters; secondly, it is inevitably clear that crises are being exploited by opposition parties to take even more critical positions towards the EU; finally, the parties that were already making themselves representatives of Eurosceptic positions use crises to further strengthen them, often using as a strong point of their discourse the worsening of the European economic situation. In this context, in particular, the extreme left parties have been able to strengthen their anti-capitalist positions, while those of the extreme right are lashing harder at the loss of national sovereignty in favour of the European reality.

¹⁹⁶ Robert Rohrschneider and Stephen Whitefield, *Responding to growing European Union-skepticism? The stances of political parties toward European integration in Western and Eastern Europe following the financial crisis*, in “European Union Politics”, 2015, vol. 17, p. 140. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1465116515610641> [Accessed: 13th July 2022].

¹⁹⁷ Schäfer and Gross, “Euroscepticism in Times of Crisis: a Macro-Level Analysis of the Euro Crisis’ Effects on Public Opinion and Party Competition on European Integration”, pp. 31-55.

Chapter 3 – Euroscepticism through the media

3.1 A brief definition of today's context

By its very nature, political communication, and consequently the narrative that normally surrounds it, is constantly evolving; starting from the era of TV, which like never before has brought politics and politicians closer to people, “popularizing them”¹⁹⁸ and making them part of everyday life, we come to the last twenty years where the Internet, thanks to its increased efficiency and usability, has become the medium of choice through which representatives interface with the constituency. In this sense, social media have been the perfect mean to interact in a way never seen before with the electorate, and in fact, according to the Twiplomacy Study 2018, published by Burson Cohn & Wolfe (BCW)¹⁹⁹, ninety-seven percent of world leaders are active on at least one social media account²⁰⁰.

Among all, principally Twitter, thanks to its fast, direct and concise nature, has become the social choice of political communication in the twenty-first century; in particular, it has become “an essential channel for populist politic actors”²⁰¹, especially in recent years, where this policy-making and party ideology has seen a sudden rise in popularity throughout Europe. Just considering as examples the Movimento 5 Stelle and the Lega in Italy, Podemos in Spain, Rassemblement National in France, UKIP and the Brexit Party in England, it is clear that the social media component has therefore proved vital for the survival of these parties that have managed to convey their message directly to voters, by completely cutting out the intermediaries, delivering a message of Euroscepticism that has begun to take more and more hold in the old continent.

In the last twenty years, in fact, precisely because of the extremely rapid development of the Internet in vastness and ease of use, many newspapers have created their online space, publishing articles not only via the traditional printed publication, and then have used social media to get more visibility.

¹⁹⁸ Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Anna Sfondini, *Politica Pop: da “Porta a porta” a “L’Isola dei famosi”*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009, p. 13.

¹⁹⁹ Burson Cohn & Wolfe is a New York-based PR company, established in February 2018 by the merger of Cohn & Wolfe and Burson-Marsteller. For the study mentioned above, BCW analyzed the activity of 951 accounts of government and foreign ministries and heads of state from May 2017 to May 2018.

²⁰⁰ (Anonymous), “Twiplomacy Study 2018”, in: *USC Center on Public Diplomacy*. Available: <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/story/twiplomacy-study-2018> [Accessed: 2nd August 2022].

²⁰¹ Laura Alonso-Muñoz and Andreu Casero-Ripolles, *Populism Against Europe in Social Media: The Eurosceptic Discourse on Twitter in Spain, Italy, France, and United Kingdom during the Campaign of the 2019 European Parliament Election*, in “Frontiers in Communication”, 2020, p. 3. Available: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2020.00054/full> [Accessed: 2nd August 2022].

Thus, even the theme of Euroscepticism has had a constant growth of resonance on the public scenario, as the chart “Articles published on Euroscepticism” below shows.

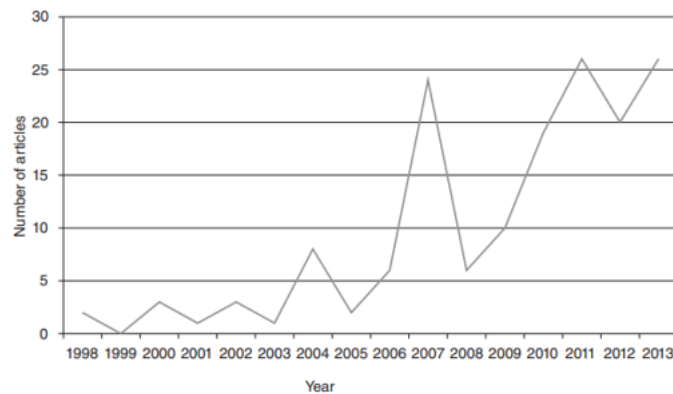


Chart 3. Source: Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart²⁰²

Before developing the content of this chapter however, it is right to make a premise: as stated above, certainly in recent years the way of communicating has changed, and it is quite possible to think that newspapers no longer play a crucial role in the propagation of information. However, in order for my work to be as complete as possible, my next exposition will hinge upon the mass media in all their forms.

3.2 The role of the media in the dissemination of the complaint to the EU

Coming now to the heart of the matter, in the previous chapter, the Eurosceptic phenomenon related to the population and to the political sphere was analysed; however, to be able to fit all the components of this puzzle and have a thorough overview of the issue, it is necessary to examine Euroscepticism in relation to another ‘environment’, namely the media. According to Hobolt and De Vries in fact, “the national news media is a crucial source of political information for citizens”²⁰³ and this is precisely the reason why it is necessary to examine how media coverage can direct and influence the population’s views of the European Union.

²⁰² Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, “Contemporary research on Euroscepticism: The State of the Art”, in: Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin and Simon Usherwood (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, London, Routledge, 2018, p. 12.

²⁰³ Hobolt and De Vries, *Public Support for European Integration*, p. 422.

In this chapter, mainly based on the analysis carried out by De Vreese²⁰⁴, I will first deepen the role of the media in the spread of Euroscepticism; then, I will highlight the relation between Euroscepticism and populism and how all this is linked to the mass media world; finally, I will consider the function of fake news, often created at the desk to be deceptive, which are intended to foster doubts and insecurities in public opinion. In this regard, both the national and European institutions, with the aim of curbing this problem, are actively engaged for some years in a work of dissemination of real data and information that therefore help to distinguish the true news from the false ones. On the website of the European Commission, for example, it is possible to find a large collection of fake news that have been disseminated over the years²⁰⁵.

As previously mentioned, in this context, the work elaborated by De Vreese in 2007, is an excellent starting point for reasoning; the scholar indeed brought to light the fact that, until that time, almost all the research had focused on trying to give an explanation of the decline in support for the European integration project, analysing this circumstance, for example as Gabel did²⁰⁶, in relation to the socio-demographic characteristics and political ideologies of a certain state or, in any case, more generally, of the European population. Alternatively, in the study carried out by Anderson and Reichert²⁰⁷, the link between the spread of Euroscepticism and the European economic trend was emphasized; again, De Vreese himself and Boomgaarden²⁰⁸, or even McLaren²⁰⁹, identified in the most nationalist, xenophobic and anti-immigration population fringes, those who most strongly opposed the EU. Hence, if so far the argument had been related to the political, economic, social and demographic dimensions, according to De Vreese what was necessary to do as next step was “to look beyond

²⁰⁴ Claes H. de Vreese, *A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media's Fault?*, in “Acta Politica”, 2007, vol. 42, pp. 271-286. Available: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/255649872_A_Spiral_of_Euroscepticism_The_Media's_Fault [Accessed: 2nd August 2022].

²⁰⁵ For further information, see “Tackling Online Disinformation”, in: *European Commission*. Available: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/online-disinformation> [Accessed: 2nd August 2022].

²⁰⁶ See Gabel, *Public Support for European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories*, pp. 333-354.

²⁰⁷ See Anderson and Reichert, *Economic Benefits and Support for Membership in the E.U.: A Cross-National Analysis*, pp. 231-249.

²⁰⁸ See De Vreese and Boomgaarden, *Projecting EU Referendums: Fear of Immigration and Support for European Integration*, pp. 59-82.

²⁰⁹ See Lauren M. McLaren, *Public Support for the European Union: Cost/Benefit Analysis or Perceived Cultural Threat?*, in “Journal of Politics”, 2002, Vol. 64, pp. 551-566. Available: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2691861> [Accessed: 2nd August 2022].

traditional' explanations"²¹⁰ and consider a further aspect of the issue that had not been taken into account until then, namely the role of the mass media.

What De Vreese then elaborates is an analysis of the relationship between the 'framing' of the mass media and the cynicism expressed by public opinion towards the process of European integration. For "framing"²¹¹ reference is made to the structure that is used by the mass media to indeed frame a particular piece of news, so as to condition in a certain way the public opinion in the interpretation of its content. This strategy is therefore of fundamental importance but, in order to understand the link that exists between framing and Euroscepticism, it is necessary to make a further clarification and also introduce the notion of 'strategic news', which according to the explanation of K. Jamieson, "focuses on winning and losing, is driven by 'war and games' language, emphasizes 'performers, critics and audiences', focuses on candidate style and perceptions, and gives weight to opinion polls"²¹².

The starting point of De Vreese's dissertation is the observation that some experimental studies, carried out by J.N. Cappella and K.H. Jamieson during 1997 in the United States of America, revealed that the individuals exposed to strategic news expressed a level of political cynicism higher than the people who were exposed to news reporting in a neutral and objective manner²¹³. Moreover, in 2002, De Vreese and Semetko developed a study showing that public exposure to the media reporting strategic news about the 2000 referendum on Denmark's accession to the European Monetary Union had contributed in increasing the level of Euroscepticism among citizens²¹⁴. Precisely from these reflections and observing the growing Euroscepticism present in the various Member States of the Union at that time, De Vreese then decided to deepen the role of the media in shaping public opinion on the issue of European integration. According to the scholar, however, not only the media are able to impact on the ideas of the population as a whole, but also on the individual dimension of the citizen. To demonstrate this, he performed two different experiments, which are named respectively "Study 1" and "Study 2"²¹⁵.

²¹⁰ De Vreese, *A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media's Fault?*, p. 272.

²¹¹ Ivi, p. 273.

²¹² Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction, and Democracy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 194.

²¹³ See Joseph N. Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism. The Press and the Public Good*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997.

²¹⁴ Claes H. De Vreese and Holli A. Semetko, *Cynical and engaged: strategic campaign coverage, public opinion and mobilization in a referendum*, in "Communication Research", 2002, vol. 29, n. 6, p. 615. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/009365002237829> [Accessed: 3rd August 2022].

²¹⁵ De Vreese, *A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media's Fault?*, pp. 274-275.

- ❖ Study 1 focuses on the analysis of the news broadcast by television, the tool that the Eurobarometer 56 survey had identified as the most important source of political information²¹⁶. The experiment was conducted on 83 respondents, men and women of different ages, included in the 15-67 age range, and with different levels of education; the subject of the interview was the 2007 EU enlargement news reported by a national broadcaster. This news was presented in two versions: one was framed in strategic terms, while the other focused on the substantive and objective aspects of the story. At random, the respondents were shown one of the two versions and later, they were made to fill out a questionnaire, structured on the example of the research elaborated by Cappella and Jamieson²¹⁷. Thus, four expressions were used to measure the perceptions of the test participants:
- a. “Politicians are too superficial when dealing with enlargement”²¹⁸;
 - b. “Politicians are too concerned with public opinion about enlargement”²¹⁹;
 - c. “The debate about enlargement is more about strategy than content”²²⁰;
 - d. “Politicians are clear and honest in their arguments about enlargement”²²¹.

The data obtained have been recoded to a scale of political cynicism ranging from 1 to 5, as shown in the chart below.

²¹⁶ See Thomas Christensen and Renaud Soufflot de Magny, “Eurobarometer 56.2 - Variable Report”, in: *Gesis – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences*. Available: <https://www.gesis.org/en/eurobarometer-data-service/survey-series/standard-special-eb/study-overview/eurobarometer-562-za-3627-oct-nov-2001> section: Documents and Data – Archive Variable Report [Accessed: 4th August 2022].

²¹⁷ See Cappella and Hall Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism. The Press and the Public Good*.

²¹⁸ De Vreese, *A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media’s Fault?*, p. 276.

²¹⁹ Ibidem.

²²⁰ Ivi, p. 277.

²²¹ Ibidem.

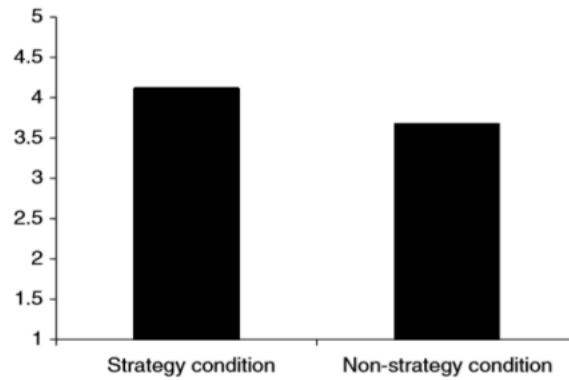


Chart 4. Source: C.H. de Vreese²²²

The expectation was that exposure to European policy-related strategic news would produce a higher level of Euroscepticism than exposure to neutral news. As it can be seen from Chart 4 above, this idea has been confirmed since the participants in the questionnaire to whom the news reported in a strategic way was displayed had been more cynical than the participants in the survey who were shown a news formulated in objective way²²³.

- ❖ Study 2 instead analysed the dynamics of Euro-cynicism²²⁴. After careful analysis, what was shown was that the effects of strategic news on the theme of opposition to the European project depended first on the “pervasiveness”²²⁵ of the same strategic news, in other words on their ability to spread, and secondly on the level of “political sophistication”²²⁶ present among the population, meaning that a person is more or less influenced by a certain news based on its knowledge and skills in the political field. The effects of the media therefore tend to vary from individual to individual precisely on the basis of this political awareness.

To demonstrate the above, during the experiment De Vreese took under consideration some variables that, according to previous studies, could influence the level of cynicism of a person: “political efficacy”, in other words the conviction of citizens to play a fundamental role in the political decision-making process of the EU; the EU-related assessments made by the government in office in the interviewed’s MS; its knowledge of politics²²⁷.

²²² De Vreese, *A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media’s Fault?*, p. 279.

²²³ Ivi, p. 278.

²²⁴ Ivi, p. 275.

²²⁵ Ibidem.

²²⁶ Ibidem.

²²⁷ Ibidem.

This study was conducted in two countries, Denmark and the Netherlands; what's important to underline is the fact that the context chosen was that of the 2002 December European Council meeting happened in Copenhagen. A comparison between the news that were transmitted by the media in the two countries was done: in particular, the most watched public broadcasting news programmes and the front-page of the five most widely read dailies in Denmark and in the Netherlands were placed under observation²²⁸; the attention was obviously focused on EU-related news. Account was taken of the individual's gender, age, level of education, knowledge of politics, its assessment of government, and finally the level of cynicism expressed before viewing these materials, so that it was possible to see any change that could occur²²⁹.

What emerged from this second study was that in Denmark, where the summit took place, there was much more news about European policy than in the Netherlands. In addition, exposure to strategic news was significantly higher in the Netherlands, and to a greater extent, for example, reference was made to policy makers' actions as solely aimed at consolidating their position, the competence of the European political class was questioned and expressions from war and game situations were used²³⁰. Therefore, in the Netherlands, the country with the highest level of strategic news, media exposure contributed to the increase of Euro-cynicism, while in Denmark, less exposed, the opposite situation took place and political cynicism decreased. A further important point to note is the fact that it was demonstrated that in Denmark, the link between low political sophistication and strategic media exposure represented a positive indicator of increased cynicism towards the EU²³¹.

To conclude then, De Vreese's studies are of fundamental importance in this context as they show that Euroscepticism also depends on how citizens receive information about the work and the future of the European Union from the mass media. This concept seems to support the cue-taking & benchmarking approach to Euroscepticism, analysed in the previous chapter of this thesis, according to which the European question and everything connected with it is considered by the population as something far from everyday life and therefore it is often not given proper attention and involvement. European citizens therefore do not 'study' the situation themselves, but they rely on other actors,

²²⁸ De Vreese, *A Spiral of Euroscepticism: The Media's Fault?*, p. 277.

²²⁹ Ibidem.

²³⁰ Ivi, p. 278.

²³¹ Ivi, p. 279.

especially the media, to assess the actions and the choices made by the EU institutions. After what seen above however, it is a certain fact that the media coverage related to the European Union can provoke changes in the level of Euroscepticism; in this perspective then, what needs to be carefully considered, and not underestimated, is that this coverage can still have a double role: depending on what is decided to be communicated and how this message is conveyed, Euroscepticism can in fact increase, as well as shrink.

3.3 The connection between Populism and Euroscepticism

The terms ‘Euroscepticism’ and ‘Populism’ are widely used in the context of current European policy. According to Matthijs Rooduijn and Stijn van Kessel in fact, at the conceptual level, these two expressions are both considerably close and “inherently distinct”²³².

The meaning behind the first word so far in this work has been thoroughly deepened in all its nuances, so it is now necessary to focus more on that of the second. In this regard, it must be said that for several years historians and political scientists have not been able to find an agreement in circumscribing the issue; however, to date, the definition most used to explain the phenomenon of populism is that of Cas Mudde, who appraised the concept as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”²³³. Therefore, substantially, demagogic exaltation is the pillar of populism, which then “claims the return of sovereignty in the hands of the popular masses”²³⁴; these, in fact, are the only depositories of exclusively positive values and consequently they should be directly involved in the political decision-making process.

Comparing all this with what has been said previously about Euroscepticism, it is possible to identify some differences, but also some correspondences, between the two currents.

²³² Matthijs Rooduijn and Stijn van Kessel, “Populism and Euroscepticism in the European Union”, in: *Oxford Encyclopedia of European Union Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 1. Available: <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/60753/van%20Kessel%20Populism%20and%20Euroscepticism%202019%20Accepted.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y> [Accessed: 8th August 2022].

²³³ Cas Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*, in “Government and Opposition”, 2004, vol. 39, p. 543. Available: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/government-and-opposition/article/populist-zeitgeist/2CD34F8B25C4FFF4F322316833DB94B7> [Accessed: 8th August 2022].

²³⁴ Maria Letizia Fiammenghi, “Il forte legame tra populismo ed euroscetticismo – Parte 1”, in: *Civitas Europa*, 7.07.2021. Available: <https://civitas.europa.com/2021/07/07/il-forte-legame-tra-populismo-ed-euroscetticismo-parte-1/> [Accessed: 8th August 2022].

Starting from the dissimilarities, first, as opposed to those belonging to Euroscepticism, the central ideas of populism do not refer to specific political areas or institutions, but rather to the relationship between the two constructs ‘people’ and ‘elite’. The specific interpretation of this connection then varies depending on the context in which it is analysed: for example the radical right-wing populists ‘construct’ the population on the basis of their ethnicity and culture and therefore they criticize the liberal elites who promote the decay of traditional social norms, for instance by supporting immigration; on the contrary, left-wing populists reason on the aforementioned relation in a socio-economic key and therefore they criticize the privileged elites acting against those who are economically oppressed²³⁵.

Talking about parties then, it seems clear that populism, like Euroscepticism, is closely linked to the political sphere. In the European context, populists have several reasons to oppose the Union: firstly, the EU can easily be regarded as an elitist organisation, disinterested in the reality of ordinary citizens; secondly, the decision-making process of the European institutions, extremely complicated and opaque, does not reflect the will of the population²³⁶; finally, both populists and Eurosceptics think that Brussels puts at risk the decision-making autonomy of the member states. These criticisms of Europe therefore give rise to a sort of symbiotic relationship between populism and Euroscepticism. Adding an additional piece to this dissertation, by analysing the political discourse in the area of Western Europe, what has been observed by Rooduijn and Akkerman is that in general populism is directly proportional to whether a party is radical or not: in other words, both right-wing and left-wing radicals are more prone to employ populism²³⁷.

²³⁵ Rooduijn and Van Kessel, “Populism and Euroscepticism in the European Union”, p. 5.

²³⁶ Ivi, p. 6.

²³⁷ Matthijs Rooduijn and Tjitske Akkerman, *Flank attacks: Populism and left-right radicalism in Western Europe*, in “Party Politics”, 2017, vol. 23, p. 195. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1354068815596514> [Accessed: 8th August 2022].

With regard to this, it is important to underline the fact that populist parties nevertheless express different levels of Euroscepticism: in fact, according to the study by Sofia Vasilopoulou, who focused exclusively on radical right-wing parties, there are three different types of opposition to European integration: “rejecting, conditional and compromising”²³⁸. These have been identified thanks to a careful analysis of the parties’ position towards four factors, linked to the European integration project, which are “a common cultural definition of Europe, the principle of cooperation at a European multilateral level, the EU policy practice and the desire to build a future European polity”²³⁹. Going to the bottom of the issue then:

- Rejecting opposition is a view “that implies acceptance of common cultural, historical and religious European characteristics. However, there is [...] rejection of the principle of cooperation within the EU framework, disagreement with the European institutional and policy status quo and resistance to the future building of a European polity”²⁴⁰; hence the desire to withdraw from the EU and restore sovereignty at national level.
- Conditional opposition “entails an acceptance of the common heritage of European peoples, approval of the principle of European cooperation but hostility to the current policy practice as well as the future building of a European polity”²⁴¹. Again, therefore, state sovereignty plays a fundamental role and in fact, the decisions taken at supranational level are not accepted, since they often do not reflect the will of the governments of the MS. In general, conditional Eurosceptics tend to talk about “an institutional framework resembling a confederation”²⁴².
- Finally, compromising opposition “comprises acceptance of a common European culture, support for the principle and the practice of integration but opposition to the future building

²³⁸ Sofia Vasilopoulou, *European Integration and the Radical Right: Three Patterns of Opposition*, in “Government and Opposition”, 2011, vol. 4, p. 224. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/44482217?saml_data=eyJzYW1sVG9rZW4iOiI3M2VjNzdhNy1hOGRhLTRkOTAtOTQwMi0yMGMyNjIhMGlyNWQlLCJlbWFpbCI6Ijg1ODYwOEBzdHVkLnVuaXZILml0IiwiaW5zdGI0dXRpb25JZHMiOlsiZjFjOTRmYzQtZDRhMS00MmYwLTk0ZWEtMGU2NmRkZDBiMGNjIl19#metadata_info_tab_contents [Accessed: 8th August 2022].

²³⁹ Ibidem.

²⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 232.

²⁴¹ Ibidem.

²⁴² Ivi, p. 233.

of a European polity”²⁴³. In short then, compromising Eurosceptics recognise that some aspects of integration can bring benefits to member states, particularly in the economic sector.

For clarity, what explained above can be summarised in the table below.

| <i>Aspects of European integration</i> | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Patterns of opposition</i> | <i>Cultural definition</i> | <i>Principle of cooperation</i> | <i>Policy practice</i> | <i>Future EU polity</i> |
| Rejecting | In favour | Against | Against | Against |
| Conditional | In favour | In favour | Against | Against |
| Compromising | In favour | In favour | In favour | Against |

Table 2. Source: Sofia Vasilopoulou²⁴⁴

Another important factor linking Euroscepticism and populism is the interest for moments of difficulty: in fact, the 2008 Eurozone crisis, that of the migrants and also Brexit have had a strong impact on the political scenario, inevitably fuelling these two ideologies. These plights, dissimilar in nature, have had different consequences, causing socio-economic and socio-cultural problems in the European MS and raising many doubts about the process of European integration²⁴⁵.

The effects of the economic crisis were “momentous and widespread”²⁴⁶ and revealed the low level of pan-European solidarity; the increase in poverty and unemployment contributed to the decline in the well-being of the population, which was therefore dissatisfied with the work of the political elite of the time, that for its part, for many years, had been unable to lift the difficult situation with the right interventions. According to a study by Algan, Guriev, Papaioannou and Passari, there is a strong correlation between the growth of unemployment, the decline of confidence in national and European institutions and the increase in voting for populist parties, therefore it is clear that economic insecurity acts as a substantial determinant of populism²⁴⁷.

²⁴³ Vasilopoulou, *European Integration and the Radical Right: Three Patterns of Opposition*, p. 233.

²⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 234.

²⁴⁵ Andrea Pirro, Paul Taggart and Stijn van Kessel, *The populist politics of Euroscepticism in times of crisis: comparative conclusions*, in: “Politics”, 2018, vol. 38, p. 2. Available: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/77106/3/77106.pdf> [Accessed: 9th August 2022].

²⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 3.

²⁴⁷ Yann Algan, Sergei Guriev, Elias Papaioannou and Evgenia Passari, *The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism*, in: Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, 2017, p. 309. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/90019460?saml_data=eyJzYW1sVG9rZW4iOiIyYjhhYjYWFjMy0zNzhILTRiMDItOTNjYi02ODVjNGFIZGU2ZTYiLCJlbWFpbCI6Ijg1ODYwOEBydHVkLnVuaXZiLm10IiwiaW5zdG10dXRpb25JZHMtOlsiZjFjOTRmYzOtZDRhMS00MmYwLTk0ZWVtMGU2NmRkZDBiMGNjIl19#metadata_info_tab_contents [Accessed: 9th August 2022].

The problem of uncontrolled migration instead has had specific effects on certain states. The humanitarian crisis had long been a central theme in international politics, so when the situation reached the point of no return, the politicization in a negative sense of this issue was extremely easy, especially in the countries of first arrival, such as Hungary or Italy, or in those that represented the most popular destination for migrants, such as Germany²⁴⁸. In this context, the EU lack of a prompt response to the problem further fuelled feelings against the European political class, thus providing an opportunity for populist and Eurosceptic parties to increase their relevance in the European political scenario.

Finally, Brexit, which I will analyse in detail in the next chapter of this thesis, was instead a seemingly harmless “sui generis and context-specific”²⁴⁹ crisis. In reality, its complex aftermath caused the mobilization of all populist and Eurosceptic parties around Europe, which saw in this radical change the opportunity to concretize some fundamental points of their political program.

In reaction to the European crises then, the populist parties have organized to strengthen their Eurosceptic discourses, criticizing European integration more harshly “for its malign socioeconomic consequences, its threat to national sovereignty or cultural homogeneity, the creation of an illegitimate supranational system of governance”²⁵⁰; there is therefore a de facto and concrete connection between populism and Euroscepticism, which are two ideologies that, in the last decade, have been internalized more and more in European countries such as France, Hungary, Italy and Spain²⁵¹.

3.3.1 Populist and Eurosceptic political parties in Europe

As proof of what said above and of the link between these two movements, it is interesting to observe how some parties can be classified both as Eurosceptic and populist.

One example is the French party Rassemblement National, previously mentioned, which has been fighting against the EU for years and which can also be ranked on the wing of populist parties because

²⁴⁸ Pirro, Taggart and Van Kessel, *The populist politics of Euroscepticism in times of crisis: comparative conclusions*, p. 3.

²⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 4.

²⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 5.

²⁵¹ Fiammenghi, “Il forte legame tra populismo ed euroscetticismo – Parte 1”.

of some central issues in its political agenda, such as the defence of the weak against the powerful and the anti-parliamentarism²⁵².

Moving East, in Hungary, the Fidesz party is the spokesperson for nationalist, anti-immigration and anti-European positions; in addition, for years, this faction is lashing out against “a liberal globalist elite determined to destroy the sovereignty of Hungary [...] and cancel populist economic policies”²⁵³ sponsored by the party.

In Italy, the populist and Eurosceptic parties are many; for example, it is enough to think about the Lega of Matteo Salvini or the Movimento 5 Stelle. In this regard, Franco Zappettini and Marzia Maccaferri, taking into account the digital communication used by these two parties during their campaigns for the European Parliament elections in 2019, noted that, although with different nuances, both aligned themselves with the populist vision, supporting the ideas of a sovereign Italy and delegitimizing Europe, discrediting its elitist political class and suggesting as a new strategy of political management the incorporation of the issues of the European agenda into the national one²⁵⁴. The populist strategy used by these two parties had such a determined impact that it meant that, in a short time, Italy went from being a Europhile country to one of the most Eurosceptic.

Finally, in Spain, it is ‘Podemos’ that can be identified as populist and Eurosceptic. This political party in fact, born in 2014 as an “anti-political manifesto”²⁵⁵, has proclaimed itself against the caste and in favour of a redistribution of wealth in society; moreover, it has strongly criticized the austerity policies imposed by the EU following the economic crisis of 2008, arguing that it is necessary to shift the focus back to national interests²⁵⁶. These political ideas caused the party to have a dazzling rise, winning more than a million votes in 2015.

²⁵² Maria Letizia Fiammenghi, “Il forte legame tra populismo ed euroscetticismo – Parte 2”, in: *Civitas Europa*, 15.07.2021. Available: <https://civitaseuropa.com/2021/07/15/il-forte-legame-tra-populismo-ed-euroscetticismo-parte-2/> [Accessed: 9th August 2022].

²⁵³ Gabriella Peretto, “In Ungheria l’inizio della fine dei populistici?”, in: *L’Indro*, 1.04.2022. Available: <https://lindro.it/in-ungheria-l-inizio-della-fine-dei-populisti/> [Accessed: 9th August 2022].

²⁵⁴ Franco Zappettini and Marzia Maccaferri, *Euroscepticism between Populism and Technocracy: The Case of Italian Lega and Movimento 5 Stelle*, in “Journal of Contemporary European Research”, 2021, vol. 17, p. 240. Available: <https://www.jcer.net/index.php/jcer/article/view/1184/908> [Accessed: 9th August 2022].

²⁵⁵ Irene Tinagli, “Un’analisi su Podemos e il fenomeno populista in Spagna”, in: *irenetinagli.eu*, 23.01.2016. Available: <https://www.irenetinagli.eu/unanalisi-su-podemos-e-il-fenomeno-del-populismo-in-spagna/> [Accessed: 9th August 2022].

²⁵⁶ Alexis Tsipras and Pablo Iglesias, *Con Syriza e Podemos, la sinistra europea riscopre la patria*, in “Limes – Rivista italiana di Geopolitica”, 10.03.2015. Available: <https://www.limesonline.com/con-syriza-e-podemos-la-sinistra-europea-riscopre-la-patria/76240> [Accessed: 9th August 2022].

Up to this point then, and taking under consideration the European party system as concrete evidence, it is transparent that populism and Euroscepticism, albeit with different origins and characteristics, are two connected phenomena, which develop on a common ground and exploit the same expedients, mainly moments of crisis, to feed their range of action.

3.3.2 Populism and the media

In examining this topic, it is important to consider the relationship that exists between populist movements and information institutions.

In a 2003 study by Mazzoleni, Stewart and Horsfield, carried out in eight different states, it was noted that the mass media, although with varying degrees of intentionality, cause populist leaders to have media overexposure that, if exploited properly, often allows them to gain consensus in the population²⁵⁷. There is, however, a differentiation that needs to be made in the world of the media: in fact, on one side, there is that kind of so-called ‘tabloid’ press or television and, on the other, there are the ‘mainstream’ media, which are the more established ones, that enjoy greater credibility. The former relies on sensationalism and shock titles to attract a wider audience, so they willingly give space to news about political parties and leaders which, through provocations, can easily create scandal and break the routine of political news²⁵⁸; the latter, on the other hand, are more careful to convey the positions of the political and intellectual elites, thus providing a more measured information coverage of the most resonant political phenomena²⁵⁹. No matter what, however, populist movements gain visibility and in fact this happens because of what can be defined as a “concordance of needs”²⁶⁰ between the media and the populist wing, which although for different purposes, have as their common goal to get the attention of the masses. According to Rooduijn actually, in recent years the media debates have given an increasingly populist cut to the information transmitted, precisely because the success of populist parties is constantly growing²⁶¹. In this scenario, it is therefore

²⁵⁷ See Gianpietro Mazzoleni, Julianne Stewart and Bruce Horsfield, *The Media and Neo-Populism: A Contemporary Comparative Analysis*, Westport, Praeger, 2003.

²⁵⁸ Gianpietro Mazzoleni, *Media e Populismo: un ambiguo connubio*, in “Comunicazione Politica”, 2003, vol. IV, n. 2, p. 134. Available: https://www.academia.edu/31657581/Media_e_populismo_un_ambiguo_connubio [Accessed: 9th August 2022].

²⁵⁹ Ibidem.

²⁶⁰ Ibidem.

²⁶¹ Matthijs Rooduijn, *The Mesmerising Message: The Diffusion of Populism in Public Debates in Western European Media*, in “Political Studies”, 2014, vol. 62, p. 740. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-9248.12074> [Accessed: 10th August 2022].

possible to refer to almost a sort of interdependent relationship existing between the information bodies and populism.

However, it is important to underline the fact that, regardless, it is the media that have ‘the knife on the handle side’, since, if they have the need to defend their status quo within the media landscape, they can decide to stop the transmission of news related to a movement that might have been pumped before.

Anyway, recently the way of communicating has changed: “we have migrated from a communication society - the era of the mass media, where information travelled from one to many - to the conversation society - the era of personal media, with the exchange of information from many to many”²⁶². It was Barack Obama, called by his staff “Internet President”²⁶³, to understand in 2008 the potential of the use of social platforms in the political field. In a short time, the situation changed radically: if at the beginning journalists were the “gatekeeper”²⁶⁴ of information and democracy, today thanks to social networks such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, politicians are able to spread their thoughts directly, avoiding journalistic mediation. In this scenario, it seems that populist parties have managed to understand how to use social media in the most effective way, keeping through their posts, which sometimes can also be not entirely true, many people loyal²⁶⁵; just these people then mobilize and share the news, making it viral.

The populist wave indeed, which advocates an anti-elite and anti-system policy, has managed to convey to the population a feeling of distrust of the traditional media and has won the masses, arguing that it should be the citizens to make information, exploiting the freedoms granted by the web²⁶⁶. In support of this, the data show that in Germany, where the percentage of confidence in the classical media is around 50-60%, populist parties are not very successful, while exactly the opposite happens in France and Italy, where wariness is greatest and social media is used to keep abreast of world news on a daily basis²⁶⁷. The belief that only truthful news can be found on the

²⁶² Marco Pratellesi, “Così i social media sono diventati i megafoni dei populismi”, in: *AGI – Agenzia Giornalistica Italia*, 26.06.2018. Available: <https://www.agi.it/blog-italia/marco-pratellesi/social-media-populismo-societa-conversazione-internet-day-4062179/post/2018-06-26/> [Accessed: 10th August 2022].

²⁶³ *Ibidem*.

²⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁶⁵ Federico Quadrelli, “Il populismo ai tempi dei social network: quali relazioni?”, in: *CILD – Coalizione Italiana Libertà e Diritti Civili*, 13.06.2017. Available: <https://cild.eu/blog/2017/06/13/populismi-social-network/> [Accessed: 10th August 2022].

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

Internet, however, is completely wrong and in fact, as I will analyse in the next section of this chapter, the spread of disinformation and fake news is one of the biggest bugs of this society.

3.4 The scourge of fake news and the European action to defeat it

Among the main causes of the increase in popular Euroscepticism is certainly the role played by fake news, which in turn represent a fundamental element in the analysis of the function played by the mass media in the impact on public opinion.

The expression ‘fake news’ became part of our everyday vocabulary in the first decade of the 21st century, and has been widely used since 2016, thanks to the excessive employment of this neologism made by Trump in his campaigns against the media²⁶⁸. This term however is only apparently modern, because in reality the origins of this argument can be identified in the Greek and Roman era, for example examining the letter of Pausanias, reproduced by Thucydides in the first book of the ‘Peloponnesian War’, where this Spartan general allegedly declared his intention to betray the Greeks and go to the service of the Persian king Xerxes. “The plausibility of the letter prevailed over the legitimate doubt of its veracity”²⁶⁹ and Pausanias was accused of high treason. Another similar example is that of Pericles, one of the most important strategists in Athenian political history, whose family and friends underwent several trials whose sole purpose was to create a sensation and damage his image in the political scenario²⁷⁰.

Over time the communication system has increasingly evolved, even today it can be considered in continuous transformation, and its ramifications have become more and more numerous; consequently, the risk of transmission of fake news has also increased. What this expression refers to is factual or partly false communications, articles or commercials that contain deceptive information, but apparently plausible, intentionally or unintentionally disclosed with the purpose of disinforming the reader and arousing media resonance. Fake news is designed to attract the attention of those who read and, once reached the target, the aim is to distort the political, economic and social vision of the context in which this person lives; it is a real plague, which can hit anyone, even regardless of the level of education, because it is able to act on feelings that are innate in man, such as fear and hatred. Nowadays this news is transmitted regularly, and often anonymously, on the Web, on social networks,

²⁶⁸ (Anonymous), “Fake News”, in: *Treccani*. Available: <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/fake-news/> [Accessed: 4th August 2022].

²⁶⁹ Maria Vella, “Da Pericle a Trump, passando per Dumas: alle origini delle fake news”, in: *Vita International*. Available: <http://www.vita.it/it/article/2019/07/10/da-pericle-a-trump-passando-per-dumas-alle-origini-delle-fake-news/152185/> [Accessed: 4th August 2022].

²⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

but also by the mass media that sometimes fall victim to a fallacious mechanism. Fake news has so much spread also thanks to the technique of ‘click-baiting’, “whose purpose is to attract more users and convince them, with catchy titles, to click on certain links on a page to read the promised content”²⁷¹. This is a source of profits for those who create this news, so the higher the number of clicks, the higher the revenues.

The most effective way to try to stem the current chaos of the world of communication then is correct information, since only knowledge allows to make aware choices. It is necessary to instruct and educate the population to the right use of the media and the web, providing a conscious orientation useful for recognizing reliable sources or not, so as to make people able to distinguish a true news from a false one.

For the purpose of this work, I will investigate the fringe of fake news disseminated to discredit Brussels, the European Union and its work. The aim of this news is mainly to point out the organization as solely responsible for all the political, economic and social problems that are present on the continent. However, the EU has not let itself be caught off guard, and for some time now, the national and European institutions, with the aim of making their citizens more clued up, have been actively engaged in actions to defeat misinformation.

In 2015, for example, as part of the European External Action Service (EEAS), in order to “address Russia’s ongoing disinformation campaigns”²⁷², the Task Force East StratCom was established with the aim of “communicating EU policies and decisions correctly to the eastern neighbours”²⁷³. In concrete, first a collaboration network between the EU institutions, the governments of the Eastern Partnership countries (including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) and the civil society actors operating in the sector was created to strengthen the media environment present in the territory; secondarily a work of development of communication products and campaigns, designed to better explain the EU values, policies and interests to the people of the Eastern Partnership countries is carried out; finally the Task Force exposes the disinformation

²⁷¹ Patrizia Maimone, “Click baiting, cos’è? Quando è meglio evitarlo e perché?”, in: *Doweb*, 1.09.2020. Available: <https://doweb.srl/news/click-baiting-cose-quando-e-meglio-evitarlo-e-perche-179> [Accessed: 5th August 2022].

²⁷² (Anonymous), “Questions and Answers about the East StratCom Task Force”, in: *European Union External Action*, 2021. Available: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/questions-and-answers-about-east-stratcom-task-force_en [Accessed: 5th August 2022].

²⁷³ (Anonymous), “Contrastare fake news e interferenza elettorale dei Paesi stranieri”, in: *Parlamento Europeo*, 2019. Available: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/it/press-room/20191007IPR63550/contrastare-fake-news-e-interferenza-elettorale-dei-paesi-stranieri> [Accessed: 5th August 2022].

narratives, studying their trends and raising public awareness of the negative impact caused by the disinformation itself, and consequently, by fake news²⁷⁴. Starting from 2021, the team has 16 employees, trained in different professional disciplines, such as communication, journalism and social sciences.

The theme of fake news in Europe, however, has been under the magnifying glass especially since 2017, when the German law against fake news and online hate speech was approved. Proposed by the German Minister of Justice Heiko Maas, this provides for sanctions of up to 50 million euros for platforms that will not agree to remove or make inaccessible, within 24 hours of a report made, contents deemed false, defamatory, slanderous and inciting hatred and violence²⁷⁵. This measure was an important statement and helped to activate a chain of further European initiatives, including, for example, the ‘Code of Practice on Disinformation’, launched in 2018 by the European Commission. This is a self-discipline tool that web giants such as Google, Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok and Microsoft have voluntarily adhered to in order to try to defeat the phenomenon of fake news²⁷⁶. These self-regulatory rules have focused especially on five areas of action²⁷⁷:

- The interruption of advertising revenue to accounts and websites responsible for spreading misinformation;
- The increase of transparency of political publicity;
- The issue of fake accounts and online bots;
- The facilitation of the procedure to access to sources of information that publish truthful and authoritative content plus an improvement of the instruments for reporting any fake news;
- The provision of permission to research communities, in compliance with privacy regulations, to access data collected by platforms, to be able to monitor online disinformation.

Following the continuous leakage of fake news during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021 the Commission published 44 Commitments and 128 specific measures to strengthen the code and

²⁷⁴ (Anonymous), “Questions and Answers about the East StratCom Task Force”.

²⁷⁵ (Anonymous), “Germania: via libera del governo alla legge contro le fake news”, in: *SkyTg24*, 5.04.2017. Available: <https://tg24.sky.it/mondo/2017/04/05/fake-news-legge-germania> [Accessed: 5th August 2022].

²⁷⁶ (Anonymous), “Codice di buone pratiche sulla disinformazione: la Commissione esprime soddisfazione per nuove future adesioni ed esorta a una revisione decisa e tempestiva”, in: *Commissione Europea*, 2021. Available: https://italy.representation.ec.europa.eu/notizie-ed-eventi/notizie/codice-di-buone-pratiche-sulla-disinformazione-la-commissione-esprime_it [Accessed: 5th August 2022].

²⁷⁷ Governo Italiano, “Disinformazione online, codice di condotta per le piattaforme digitali”, in: *Dipartimento per le Politiche Europee*, 2018. Available: <https://www.politicheeuropee.gov.it/it/comunicazione/notizie/disinformazione-online-codice-di-condotta-per-le-piattaforme-digitali/> [Accessed: 5th August 2022].

fill some of its gaps in certain areas, identified following some evaluations carried out²⁷⁸. The new code therefore aims to:

- further cut financial incentives for disinformation providers through greater joint action between advertisers²⁷⁹;
- further implement transparency in political advertising by providing more efficient news labelling and by creating a well-organized and easily searchable political advertising library²⁸⁰;
- strengthen the measures implemented to oppose the manipulative tactics used to spread disinformation by providing periodic updates for signatories on new strategies to apply²⁸¹;
- empower users, researchers and the fact-checking community respectively enhancing the tools to recognise disinformation, ensuring automated access to the platforms' non-personal public data and extending the coverage of fact-checking to all Member States and in all EU languages, ensuring that controllers have a fair financial contribution for their work²⁸²;
- ensure greater transparency in the implementation of the measures of the Code, thanks to the work of the Transparency Centre and the involvement of the relevant task force, composed by experts in the field and set up specifically to keep the rules up to date with the changes that occur in the world of the media²⁸³;
- strengthen the monitoring framework of the Code, studying, among other things, its effective impact on disinformation, using the reports that signatories will begin to provide on the subject by the beginning of 2023²⁸⁴.

This 'updated' code represent a key element in the fight against disinformation for the EU, and the European Commission has a lot of expectations in it.

Of great importance is also the 'Action Plan against Disinformation', published in 2018 by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy²⁸⁵. This plan includes a series of 10 initiatives whose aim is to coordinate the European

²⁷⁸ (Anonymous), "The 2022 Code of Practice on Disinformation", in: *European Commission*. Available: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/code-practice-disinformation> [Accessed: 5th August 2022].

²⁷⁹ Ibidem.

²⁸⁰ Ibidem.

²⁸¹ Ibidem.

²⁸² Ibidem.

²⁸³ Ibidem.

²⁸⁴ Ibidem.

²⁸⁵ *Action Plan against Disinformation*, Brussels, 2018. Available: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/action_plan_against_disinformation.pdf [Accessed: 5th August 2022].

institutions in their action against the dissemination of fake news. For example, with Action 1, it is stated that “the High Representative, in cooperation with the Member States, will strengthen the Strategic Communication Task Forces and Union Delegations through additional staff and new tools which are necessary to detect, analyse and expose disinformation activities”²⁸⁶; with action 3 instead, it is expected that “the Commission and the High Representative, in cooperation with Member States, will establish a Rapid Alert System for addressing disinformation campaigns, working closely with existing networks”²⁸⁷; and again, with action 6 of the Action Plan it is stated that “the Commission will ensure a close and continuous monitoring of the implementation of the Code of Practice. [...] The Commission will carry out a comprehensive assessment at the conclusion of the Code’s initial 12-month period of application. Should the implementation and the impact of the Code of Practice prove unsatisfactory, the Commission may propose further actions, including actions of a regulatory nature.”²⁸⁸; finally, Action 8 is a kind of call to action for Member States that are asked to “support the creation of teams of multi-disciplinary independent fact-checkers and researchers with specific knowledge of local information environments to detect and expose disinformation campaigns across different social networks and digital media”²⁸⁹.

The above indicates some of the most important EU actions to combat the expansion of fake news, but to have a thorough picture on the issue it is also appropriate, for the sake of completeness, to take into consideration the 2019 European Commission report, which studied the misinformation present at the European Parliament elections, held in May of that same year. On the basis of the analyses carried out, Federica Mogherini, Andrus Ansip, Věra Jourová, Julian King and Marija Gabriel²⁹⁰, in a joint statement, declared that, up to that moment, citizens’ interest in the issue of European democracy had increased and that the efforts made, enhancing a closer coordination between the EU

²⁸⁶ *Action Plan against Disinformation*, p. 6.

²⁸⁷ Ivi, p. 8.

²⁸⁸ Ivi, p. 9.

²⁸⁹ Ivi, p. 11.

²⁹⁰ At the time, Federica Mogherini was the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the European Commission; Andrus Ansip was the European Commissioner for the Digital Single Market; Věra Jourová was the European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality; Julian King was the European Commissioner for the Security Union and Marija Gabriel was the European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society.

and the MS, to limit the impact of fake news have not been in vain²⁹¹. However, “the European elections were not after all free from disinformation”²⁹² and in fact “evidence of coordinated inauthentic behaviour aimed at spreading divisive material on online platforms” had been reported²⁹³. With this review, therefore, the Commission wanted to underline how the influence of the debate that took place on the web, especially on Google, Twitter and Facebook, had a strong impact on the European elections. In the light of this and in order to allow for a healthy and proper political debate in the future, the Commissioners have appealed to these web giants to further strengthen the tools used to tackle this problem, for example providing more detailed information to allow the identification of malign actors and intensifying their cooperation with fact checkers²⁹⁴.

The issue of fake news is unfortunately still relevant, so even if much has been done by the European and national institutions, it is necessary to continue in this direction in order to eliminate the problem at its root.

3.5 The media and Euroscepticism: a vicious circle

The aim of this chapter was to give an overview of the role of the mass media, be they television, newspapers, the Web or social networks, in the spread of Euroscepticism.

What has emerged is that the greater is the knowledge of European institutions and policies, the greater will be the ability to interpret EU-related information in the correct way, thus managing not to be influenced by the cut that is given to a news.

The media are a very powerful tool but it is not immune to the fascination of market mechanisms, therefore a part of what will be transmitted to the population, will be carefully thought out also to attract audience. This is why in recent years much space has been given to news of a populist and Eurosceptic policy, given that these two ideologies, although with different origins and developments, have as common character to know how to exploit the moments of weakness in order ‘to go against the current’ and, in doing so, catalyse the masses.

In this context, fake news, a very powerful tool used to distort public opinion, has started to invade the media scene more and more and, over the years, they have become a serious problem to deal with.

²⁹¹ (Anonymous), “A Europe that protects: EU reports on progress in fighting disinformation ahead of European Council”, in: *European Commission, Press Release, Brussels, 2019. Available: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_2914 [Accessed: 7th August 2022].*

²⁹² Ibidem.

²⁹³ Ibidem.

²⁹⁴ Ibidem.

The only way to defeat them is to provide people with the right tools to be regularly and correctly informed about EU issues; it is no coincidence that national and European institutions have been working hard for years to develop new strategies, or reinforce the existing ones, to combat this scourge.

At this point it is interesting to note that we are facing a vicious circle. In fact, the media need some 'juicy' news to get shares, so they willingly make use of the actions and statements of populist and Eurosceptic parties to create a stir; in other words, they exploit party Euroscepticism. In doing so, however, they exert a very strong influence on public opinion, contributing, whether voluntarily or not, to the propagation of more anti-EU sentiments, in fact increasing popular Euroscepticism. At this point, it is important to recall the fact that, as demonstrated earlier, in recent decades many political factions have changed the points of their electoral program, inserting populist and anti-EU ideologies, with the aim of gaining more support from the electorate. To achieve this, however, it is necessary to have media visibility.

This way the circle closes and repeats itself likewise continuously, emphasizing the fact that our society has thus passed from a traditional politics, to a media driven politics, where visual and consensus are intertwined.

Chapter 4 – The Eurosceptic Success: Brexit

In the vastness of this extremely topical and dynamic subject, according to Meccaferrri, the UK provides a typical case study and one of the best examples to analyse Euroscepticism²⁹⁵. This chapter then aims at deepening the British shade of this political belief, indeed considering the perspective of Brexit.

According to Quentin Peel, this above-mentioned belief finds its origin with Churchill, who referring to the first idea of Europe, stated that “Great Britain and the British Commonwealth, along with the US and USSR, should [have been] ‘friends and sponsors’²⁹⁶ of the project”²⁹⁷; the Prime Minister therefore never openly referred to the fact of the UK becoming a member itself, rather in this context he wanted his country to play a supporting role. Later, around 1973 when the UK became part of the EEC, Edward Heat, the PM of the time, tried to bring about change in Great Britain, promoting it “as an integral part of European history, culture and tradition”²⁹⁸, but this vision was never actually welcomed by citizens, who instead always kept a rather suspicious attitude. Consequently, in the United Kingdom Euroscepticism is certainly not a fledgling political phenomenon and indeed it has been extensively analysed by contemporary literature.

Starting from a reconstruction of the main historical background that led to the referendum, and coherently with the work carried out in the previous chapters, taking into account the political and the media scenarios, I will provide a detailed overview of the subject, highlighting how Brexit has represented both the greatest success for Eurosceptics and a radical change for the European Union, that some have defined as a defeat.

²⁹⁵ Marzia Maccaferri, *Splendid isolation again? Brexit and the role of the press and online media in re-narrating the European discourse*, in “Critical Discourse Studies”, 2019, vol. 16, p. 393. Available: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17405904.2019.1592766> [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

²⁹⁶ La Bussola, “Winston Churchill - Speech delivered at the University of Zurich, 19 September 1946”, in: *INASA*, 29.01.2019. Available: <https://www.inasaroma.org/en/6634-2/> [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

²⁹⁷ Quentin Peel, *Historic misunderstanding underlies UK-EU relationship on Churchill anniversary*, “Financial Times”, 19.09.2016. Available: <https://www.ft.com/content/3d6bbabc-7122-11e6-a0c9-1365ce54b926> [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

²⁹⁸ Roberto Bertinetti, *Brexit, storia e protagonisti dell'euroscetticismo britannico*, in “Scritture Migranti”, 2015, vol. 9, p. 66. Available: https://www.argomenti2000.it/sites/default/files/SCRITTURE_MIGRANTI.pdf [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

4.1 The history of British Euroscepticism

As previously pointed out, the origin of British Euroscepticism can be traced back to Churchill; it was however the Labour party, under the premiership of Clement Attlee, that had to manage the beginnings of the European integration process. In fact, in 1950 Schuman had proposed the idea of the ECSC, which in the United Kingdom though had aroused many feelings of disbelief, mainly due to its supranational character and to the possible hegemonic role played by France in this organization. While at first the British did not obstruct this project, in the mid-1950s their attitude towards the European reality became much more hostile. The UK in fact had not taken part in customs unions or free trade areas with Western Europe mainly to preserve trade relations with the Commonwealth, as about 50% of British trade took place in these areas²⁹⁹; when the Six began to think about the common market, the United Kingdom found itself stuck in a situation in which both the success and the failure of this plan would have weighed on the national balance. In the first case, British influence in Europe would have certainly diminished, as would trade links with the Six, and the United States of America would have shown dissatisfaction; the second scenario would have weakened Europe in the face of the Soviet threat³⁰⁰. After the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, when the EEC really came into being, tariffs between the six internal markets fell and an external tariff was created, that inevitably put British industries at a disadvantage. The British countermove was to take part in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), with which a loose trade area was created between Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and indeed the UK; this design, however, turned out to be not very dynamic and so, especially because of the growing economic difficulties present in the early 1960s, the Conservative Prime Minister Macmillan applied for membership of the EEC. However, this accession was blocked by President De Gaulle, who in fact feared that British entry into the Community would compromise its French mark³⁰¹.

It took three requests for annexation, the resignation of De Gaulle and the rise of the pro-European PM Heath to gain belonging in the EEC in 1973. The post-joining phase however was characterized by a substantial dichotomy between the socio-cultural and the political spheres.

²⁹⁹ Andrea Pareschi, “La tradizione eurosceppica in Gran Bretagna e lo UK Independence Party – prima parte”, in: *PandoraRivista*, 2016. Available: <https://www.pandorarivista.it/articoli/la-tradizione-eurosceppica-in-gran-bretagna-e-lo-uk-independence-party-prima-parte/> [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

³⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

³⁰¹ Andrea Pareschi, “La tradizione eurosceppica in Gran Bretagna e lo UK Independence Party – seconda parte”, in: *PandoraRivista*, 2016. Available: <https://www.pandorarivista.it/articoli/la-tradizione-eurosceppica-in-gran-bretagna-e-lo-uk-independence-party-seconda-parte/> [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

In this period, in fact, thanks to music, fashion and the desire to travel and see the world, young people brought Europe closer to the island³⁰². The curiosity and the general will to know were however mutual: the French, the Spanish, the Germans and the Italians left for London to fully experience the pop revolution, appreciating the works of Peter Blake and David Hockney, listening to the songs of the Beatles and of the Rolling Stones, admiring the clothing of Mary Quant and Vivienne Westwood; at the same time, even the British began to move southwards, coming into contact with the continental culture, particularly with the excellent cuisine and with the Italian and French haute couture. In a short time, there was an important turning point: a general passion for Europe was born and so, at the identity level, the UK young citizens of the period began to feel both European and British³⁰³.

If this was the socio-cultural scenario, the political situation was completely different though: already in 1975, only two years after joining the European project, mainly due to continuous requests by the government for a renegotiation of the conditions for membership, the Labour PM Harold Wilson called for a referendum to determine whether the population wanted Britain within the EU or not³⁰⁴; despite a strong campaign of opposition to the Community, in this case the will of the citizens had been in favour of the previously happened annexation to the EEC. In the period 1979-1990, however, something changed because at the head of the country rose Margaret Thatcher, the so-called 'Iron Lady'³⁰⁵, who among other things, according to Charles Moore, her official biographer, inspired a new generation of Eurosceptics with her choices in foreign policy³⁰⁶. Thatcher was indeed interested in exploiting the economic advantages of the single market, in other words she was in favour of the free movement of persons, goods and capital; on the other side though she was firmly opposed to the

³⁰² Bertinetti, *Brexit, storia e protagonisti dell'euroscetticismo britannico*, p. 53.

³⁰³ Ivi, p. 54.

³⁰⁴ Toby Helm, *British Euroscepticism: a brief history*, "The Guardian", 7.02.2016. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/feb/07/british-euroscepticism-a-brief-history> [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

³⁰⁵ This appellation was attributed to Margaret Thatcher, mainly because of her anti-communism ideals and her toughness, originally from the Soviet Defence Ministry newspaper 'Red Star'. Later translated into the English common-known expression by Robert Evans, this title became in a short time widely used in the British mass media world, so much so that the same PM called herself 'Iron Lady' during a speech at Selborne Hall in London, de facto championing her new nickname. See Max Fisher, 'Irony Lady': How a Moscow propagandist gave Margaret Thatcher her famous nickname, "The Washington Post", 8.04.2013; available: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/04/08/irony-lady-how-a-moscow-propagandist-gave-margaret-thatcher-her-famous-nickname/> [Accessed: 16th August 2022]. For the above-mentioned speech, see the film extract from "Margaret Thatcher Speech to Finchley Conservatives", in: *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*; available: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111324> [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

³⁰⁶ Charles Moore, *Did Margaret Thatcher pave the way for Brexit?*, "The Economist", 4.10.2019. Available: <https://www.economist.com/podcasts/2019/10/04/did-margaret-thatcher-pave-the-way-for-brexit> [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

contributions to the European budget, as the United Kingdom was one of the main backer among the nine MS and paid twice as much as France³⁰⁷ and to the transfer of national sovereignty to the Community³⁰⁸; as proof of this, in 1990 during a session at the House of Commons, in the middle of a discussion on the European Council's meeting held in Rome a few days earlier, the Prime Minister declared: "Yes, the Commission does want to increase its powers; yes it is a non-elected body and I do not want the Commission to increase its powers against this House. [...] Of course, the President of the Commission, Mr. Delors said at the press conference the other day that he wanted the European Parliament to be the democratic body of the Community, he wanted the Commission to be the executive and he wanted the Council of Ministers to be the Senate. No, no, no!"³⁰⁹. The echo of these 'No' to the European bureaucracy, thanks mainly to the tabloids, resounded continuously on public opinion, impacting especially on the older, less educated and more conservative part of the population, helping to keep alive the myth of insularity and the nationalist sentiment. This moment marked the actual entrance of the Eurosceptic thought into British politics; afterwards this became so mainstream that, during the 1990s, several representative groups of this ideology emerged.

A turnaround came in 1994 when Tony Blair became the Labour leader "promising to lead a British government committed to the EU and which would even consider joining the euro if conditions were right"³¹⁰; also Brown, in office from 2007 to 2010, was pro-Europe, but unlike its predecessor, he was not a supporter of the single currency therefore the Euro was never adopted. During this period the opposition to the EU was always present, but it found little success; it was the European treaties, which proposed an even deeper integration between the Member States, that changed the game once again. "Tory Eurosceptics began to talk openly of EU exit"³¹¹ and when David Cameron took over the country, he found himself facing a major political crisis, since most of the colleagues of his faction called for a referendum for the people to decide whether or not to stay in the Community. It was

³⁰⁷ Pareschi, "La tradizione eurosceptica in Gran Bretagna e lo UK Independence Party – seconda parte".

³⁰⁸ Eleonora Vasques, *Margaret Thatcher, trent'anni fa finiva l'era della lady di ferro 'madrina' della Brexit*, "Il Fatto Quotidiano", 22.11.2020. Available: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2020/11/22/margaret-thatcher-trentanni-fa-finiva-lera-della-lady-di-ferro-madrina-della-brexite/6011541/> [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

³⁰⁹ "Margaret Thatcher on Europe: 'No! No! No!'", in: *YouTube*, 29.06.2019. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVt_1ByddUQ [Accessed: 16th August 2022].

³¹⁰ Helm, *British Euroscepticism: a brief history*.

³¹¹ *Ibidem*.

indeed Cameron himself who shortly after promoted this referendum, defining it, in that context, both as something inevitable and as “the right thing to do”³¹² towards the population.

4.1.1 2016-2020: the years of the Brexit

Cameron’s campaign was pro-Europe and the main reasons for remaining in the Community were purely socio-economic. In fact, first of all it was important to maintain the benefits deriving from the free movement of people, goods, capital and services across borders; secondly it was necessary to consider the fact that the European Union was the main destination of UK exports; finally, the last key point of the pro-European campaign was that the exit from the EU would have destabilised the British economy so much that it would have led to an increase in poverty in the long term³¹³. On the other hand, some fellow members of the same fringe of the PM, such as Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, carried out quite other ideas, mainly exploiting the themes of national pride, security and sovereignty, and thus, by doing so, the issue of immigration, the European debt crisis, terrorism, the possibility of future enlargements and the too much EU bureaucracy became the points of strength of their fight against the EU³¹⁴.

The referendum in 2016 had a turnout of 72.2% of the population and resulted in a vote in favour of exit: in fact, while the ‘Remain’ received 48.1%, the ‘Leave’ was voted by 51.9% of the citizens³¹⁵, making the so-called ‘Brexit’³¹⁶ materialise. In the image below it is possible to observe, at a geographical level, how the British population has chosen which side to stand on.

³¹² (Anonymous), “Cameron, sulla Brexit ho fallito ma Boris fu orribile”, in: ANSA, 16.09.2019. Available: https://www.ansa.it/europa/notizie/rubriche/altrenews/2019/09/16/cameron-sulla-brexit-ho-fallito-ma-boris-fu-orribile_3e884cd8-08aa-4c4c-bd14-3f0d5ae56ad5.html [Accessed: 17th August 2022].

³¹³ Adam Hayes, “Brexit”, in: *Investopedia*, 2021. Available: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/b/brexit.asp#toc-arguments-for-and-against-brexit> [Accessed: 17th August 2022].

³¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

³¹⁶ The expression ‘Brexit’ is a neologism formed by the words “British” and “exit”; it was coined to refer to the UK’s decision to abandon the EU.



Image 1. Source: Adam Hayes³¹⁷

Given the outcome of the referendum, Cameron resigned, leaving the role of Prime Minister in the hands of Theresa May. On 29 March 2017 she invoked Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, which is the clause that clarifies the procedure to be followed if a Member State of the EU decides to leave the bloc voluntarily. In fact, the first point of the article affirms that “Any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements”³¹⁸ and in the second, particularly relevant, it is stated that “A Member State which decides to withdraw shall notify the European Council of its intention. In the light of the guidelines provided by the European Council, the Union shall negotiate and conclude an agreement with that State, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union. That agreement shall be negotiated in accordance with Article 218(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It shall be concluded on behalf of the Union by the Council, acting by a qualified majority, after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament”³¹⁹.

Formally, this was the moment of the beginning of the negotiations for the exit of the United Kingdom from Europe. Theresa May tried three times to get the House of Commons to approve a possible deal arranged with the EU, but she always failed and therefore in 2019 she decided to resign; the following

³¹⁷ Hayes, “Brexit”.

³¹⁸ “Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union. Title VI – Final Provisions. Article 50”, in: *Eur-Lex*. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012M050> [accessed: 17th August 2022].

³¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

month Boris Johnson was elected Prime Minister. Officially, the United Kingdom left the European Union on 31 January 2020 at midnight, without having defined an agreement to regulate future relations with the Community.

At this point, given the circumstances, the country began a transitional period, that lasted about eleven months, during which the United Kingdom continued to apply Union law, but no longer had representation in the European institutions and decision-making power over EU actions. The only objective was therefore to draw up a new trade agreement; the issues that needed to be resolved were, for example, security cooperation, common fisheries, tariffs, customs and border controls between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland³²⁰. In addition, one circumstance to be handled gently was that of migrants: before Brexit, between workers and students, about three million European citizens lived in the UK and vice versa, for the same reasons, about a million Britons were spread across Europe³²¹. During the transitional period then, these people were granted the right to cross borders every time they had the need, but at the end of it, they too were subject to the visa requirement. Finally, on 24 December 2020, not without obstacles, the two parties reached a commercial agreement useful to replace the EU's single market and its customs union. Known as the 'Trade and Cooperation Agreement' (TCA)³²², approved by the British Parliament and by the European Parliament respectively in January 2021 and in April 2021 and officially entered into force on 1 May of the same year, this document guarantees tariff and quota-free trade in goods, but with customs checks. According to Hayes, this condition means that now "commerce is not as smooth as when the U.K. was a member of the EU"³²³; nevertheless, Brexit represented a major turning point for the United Kingdom and gave new life to Eurosceptic movements across Europe, which saw in this victory the possibility of concretizing their political plan.

4.2 The political landscape at the dawn of Brexit

Before dealing specifically with the party that has played a key role in the Brexit scenario, it is right to give a brief overview of the characteristics and of the functioning of the British party system. This is based on two main parties, the Labour party and the Conservative party, which from the Second World War to the present day usually alternate at the administration, succeeding in obtaining an

³²⁰ Will Kenton, "Article 50", in: *Investopedia*, 2021. Available: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/a/article-50.asp#toc-what-is-article-50> [Accessed: 17th August 2022].

³²¹ *Ibidem*.

³²² For further deepening, see "Trade and Cooperation Agreement", in: *Eur-Lex*. Available: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L.2021.149.01.0010.01.ENG> [Accessed: 17th August 2022].

³²³ Hayes, "Brexit".

absolute majority in the elections of the 650 seats in the House of Commons, thus forming a “one-tone”³²⁴ government. The third traditional British party is the Liberal Democratic Party, which normally gets a few dozen seats in the House of Commons, thus not representing a major problem for the British political balance; a very similar role is reserved to the Scottish National Party or the Welsh and Northern Irish formations, which in the House are numerically insignificant.

For legislative elections, the electoral formula known as ‘first-past-the-post’ is used. In a nutshell: the national territory is divided into single-member constituencies according to the seats to be filled; each voter can express only one choice; the ballot is in a single round and a minimum threshold of votes is not required; in each seat therefore the candidate who obtains the relative majority of the voting is elected³²⁵. This system is extremely simple to manage, but it favours bipartism, that is a political structure characterized by the predominance of two parties, which from time to time assume the role of government or opposition, depending on the percentages obtained in the elections. In this way, minority parties are unable to assert themselves, partly because very often this mechanism increases the tendency to vote strategically.

In the next section of this chapter, I will take under consideration the party that made the biggest contribution to the realization of Brexit, the UK Independence Party. I will deal with the main passages of its evolution and then I will deepen its ideology, highlighting its links with the right-wing thought and with populism. Another part of the work will then be specifically dedicated to the analysis of the profile of Nigel Farage, the head of the party from 2010 to 2016, a highly charismatic figure who has been able to fully exploit his personal appeal to reach the population and concretize his goals.

4.2.1 The United Kingdom Independence Party

UKIP, the acronym of ‘United Kingdom Independence Party’, has passed in little more than twenty years from being an anti-federalist minority party in the early 1990s, to covering a role of first interest on British soil, occupying in 2015 the third square, as most voted.

The party was born in 1993, but its history began two years earlier with the founding of the Anti-Federalist League (AFL), a group led by Alan Sked³²⁶ whose aim was to make the Tories turn against

³²⁴ Pareschi, “La tradizione euroscettica in Gran Bretagna e lo UK Independence Party – prima parte”.

³²⁵ Ibidem.

³²⁶ Born in 1947 at Cathcart, Alan Sked graduated at the University of Glasgow and took his D.Phil. at the Merton College in Oxford. He was then appointed to the Department of International History at the London School of Economics where he remained until his retirement in 2015. He is a convinced Eurosceptic and in fact he is famous for the foundation of the AFL and for having been the first leader of the UKIP in the period 1993-1997.

the process of European integration. The role that this party has carved out in British political life is definitely unbelievable because, as explained by Whitaker³²⁷, despite the numerous internal earthquakes that have shaken the group in the years, this has seen its consensus increase with a stable rise, starting from the 1997 General election and, as shown in the chart attached below, moving in the same direction also at European level.

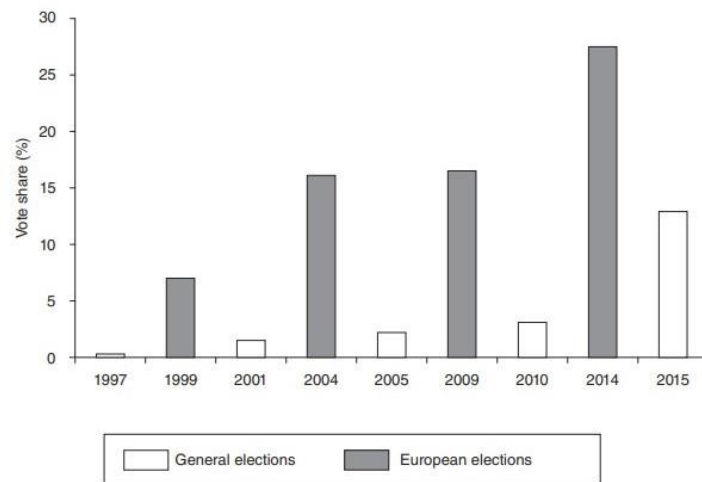


Chart 5. Source: Richard Whitaker³²⁸

Referring to the above, although it is possible to notice a general steady growth, in the first years on the national soil the party did not have so much success. This happened mainly because various elements played against it, including for example organizational difficulties and the promotion of a monothematic political program, focused on the rejection of the European question, which, however, was still not resonant in public opinion and was also thoroughly treated by the much more popular Conservative Party.

Quite another situation has emerged at European level, mainly because, unlike the national ballot, in this case the electoral formula is proportional, so minority parties get representation too. In particular 1999 was a year of changes for UKIP, which finally saw the possibility of emerging and abandoning its position as a pressure group; in fact, in the European elections held that same year, this managed

³²⁷ Richard Whitaker, “The UK Independence Party and other primarily Eurosceptic parties”, in: Benjamin Leruth, Nicholas Startin and Simon Usherwood (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Euroscepticism*, London, Routledge, 2018, p. 102.

³²⁸ *Ibidem*.

to achieve good results, obtaining 7% of votes and making three MEPs elected³²⁹. Hence the turning point: the faction was joined by Robert Kilroy-Silk, a university lecturer and the host of a program of interviews with the BBC, with Labour ideas; thanks to his charisma and his propaganda against the political establishment of the time considered far from the interests of the people, Kilroy attracted new members, financiers, but especially new voters, who indeed at the next European elections in 2004 made the party won 16.1% and a number of 12 seats in the EP³³⁰. A very similar result came in 2009, when UKIP obtained 16.5% of the votes from the population; this outcome anyway arrived also thanks to the scandal that emerged regarding expenses reimbursements, which involved representatives of the three main parties³³¹ and thus led public opinion to modify its political preferences. Finally, the culmination for UKIP came in 2014, when in the European elections it won 26.6% of the vote³³²; this was a real success.

Over time, the elements of Euroscepticism that UKIP employed in the election campaign have changed and evolved, getting harder and harder. Initially the party was against the federal feature of the European Union and, in order to create support for its thesis, it resorted to historical arguments typically used by the conservative Eurosceptic right, such as the idea that in the 1975 referendum politicians had managed to mislead the population by making it believe that the European project was merely an economic plan to promote free trade. Later, as time passed by, the main theme for the political struggle became arguing about a loss of national sovereignty in favour of EU institutions: in fact, it was believed that the European legislation on, for example, health, education, the environment and employment only created disadvantages for the UK; consequently the current Brexit strongholds, such as excessive expenditure, unregulated immigration and the threat to the national identity became the focus of the Eurosceptic discourse of this party.

With regard to the issue of immigration, the hostility coming from this faction has no racial basis, but rather identity ones, since the aim is to put an end to the phenomenon of multiculturalism. Among the measures designed by the group to contain immigration there is: the fact that immigrants are denied the faculty to apply for welfare benefits before having contributed to the state coffers for at

³²⁹ Andrea Pareschi, “La tradizione euroscettica in Gran Bretagna e lo UK Independence Party – terza parte”, in: *PandoraRivista*, 2016. Available: <https://www.pandorarivista.it/articoli/la-tradizione-euroscettica-in-gran-bretagna-e-lo-uk-independence-party-terza-parte/> [Accessed: 19th August 2022].

³³⁰ Ibidem.

³³¹ Ibidem.

³³² Ibidem.

least five years; the possibility of receiving permanent residence only after a period of ten years lived in the country; the limitation of the arrival of unskilled immigrants³³³.

As explained above, it seems clear that there is a sort of right-wing Tory political legacy in the UKIP doctrine, and this is also evident from the fact that these two blocs share a common ideology also for matters such as the rejection for theories on climate change, the opposition to the development and use of renewable energy, the increase in expenditure on defence and the resistance to any military intervention that is not dictated by national interests, including any necessary humanitarian actions in the world³³⁴.

If, as noted so far, there are similarities between the Eurosceptic nature of UKIP and the conservative right principles, this party is also the perfect example to highlight the link between Euroscepticism and Populism, a theme I dealt with in the previous chapter. In this regard, a fundamental point of the party's programme is the harsh criticism of the unjust political elites at the head of both the British and the European system, in either case considered inadequate since they are too detached from the 'common' population and focused instead only on the interests of the middle class³³⁵. This purely populist argument, along with the identification with the masses, plays a prominent role in the electorate 'grabbing' process, since according to Whitaker in fact, the bands which preferred UKIP were found among the elderly, the low bourgeoisie and the poorly educated, in other words all that part of the population which is deeply sensitive to the issue of lack of representativeness³³⁶. Thanks to this stratagem, joined to the political propaganda and to the British reality that saw inequalities continue to grow among the population, geographically speaking, the party that initially had support mainly in the South of the country, managed to penetrate also the industrial zones of the north of England, historically Labour.

In this scenario, what's really ironic is that, despite all the aversion to the EU, UKIP used just the European Parliament as a launching pad for its ideas: from the benches of Brussels in fact, the leader

³³³ Rowena Mason, *Farage backs five-year state school ban on UK immigrants*, "The Guardian", 16.03.2015. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/15/farage-backs-five-year-state-school-ban-uk-immigrants> [Accessed: 20th August 2022].

³³⁴ Pareschi, "La tradizione eurosceettica in Gran Bretagna e lo UK Independence Party – terza parte".

³³⁵ Ferren Winarto, "The Facilitated Rise of UKIP and How Economic Discontent Ignited the British Populist Flame", in: *The Politica – Boston University*. Available: <https://www.thepolitica.org/post/the-facilitated-rise-of-ukip-and-how-economic-discontent-ignited-the-british-populist-flame> [Accessed: 20th August 2022].

³³⁶ Whitaker, "The UK Independence Party and other primarily Eurosceptic parties", p. 110.

of the movement, Nigel Farage, managed, through his sharp rhetoric, to pass in a very effective way his message.

4.2.2 Nigel Farage

Born in Kent in 1964, after an excellent course of study, for many years Farage dedicated himself to brokerage in the City district of London. Politics, however, has always been present in his life, and after interrupting his relations with the Conservative Party when the UK entered into the EU, in 1993 Farage was a founding member of UKIP.

His career within the faction took off quickly, since already in 1997, this man had been the first candidate to cross the 5% threshold in a single-member constituency. During the second half of the nineties Farage then devoted himself completely to the activity of the party, becoming its secretary from 1998 to 2000 and assuming a decisive role in its internal crises; inevitably all this won him over, both in the political field and in the public sphere, a significant degree of personal legitimacy, also evident from the results of the European elections of 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014, which have always seen him get a seat as an MEP. Farage was party leader for the first time from 2006 to 2009, but the real turning point for his career came in 2010 when, following the resignation of the UKIP leader Lord Pearson of Rannoch, he defeated the competition and regained the leadership of the group. At this point, Farage “did not shy away”³³⁷ and he used everything in his power, also pivoting on the weaknesses of Europe, to deliver his message loud and clear to the population.

As Jay Elwes states in his article, “Farage’s appearance, and his ability to play the everyman, has been crucial to Ukip’s appeal [...]. He smokes, goes to the boozier, wanders up to people outside pubs for a bit of banter. None of the other three party leaders could dream of doing likewise. The whole Farage character is central to the notion that Ukip is a break with the past [...]”³³⁸. This man then will go down in history for having taken a party, once described by the PM David Cameron as “full of fruitcakes and loonies”³³⁹, and turning it into one of the most influential political movements of this time. In fact, thereabouts, it is important to notice that this faction has turned tables in regards to the British politics because, if on the one hand the other coalitions had to adapt and react to the Eurosceptic idea now on the public square, on the other hand this political group have inspired other parties and new ways of understanding the governmental scene.

³³⁷ Winarto, “The Facilitated Rise of UKIP and How Economic Discontent Ignited the British Populist Flame”.

³³⁸ Jay Elwes, *Ukip’s appeal - it’s all about identity*, “Prospect”, 10.10.2014. Available: <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/ukips-appeal-its-all-about-identity> [Accessed: 20th August 2022].

³³⁹ George Parker, *Nigel Farage: Eurosceptic scourge of the ‘political elite’*, “Financial Times”, 12.12.2016. Available: <https://www.ft.com/content/ab8b3b98-be3a-11e6-8b45-b8b81dd5d080> [Accessed: 20th August 2022].

Nevertheless, after the victory of the “Leave”, it was assumed that the party had run its course, also given the numerous obstacles on the way to the ratification of Brexit; however, the difficulties of the then British Prime Minister Theresa May to obtain consensus for her exit agreement with the UE were a godsend for Farage, who, having always insisted on considering the negotiations concerning the conditions for the United Kingdom to leave humiliating for the British political class, could cleverly capitalize on the situation of uncertainty to shout at the scandal, calling it “the great Brexit betrayal”³⁴⁰, and launch its new Brexit Party, the spiritual successor of UKIP.

It’s therefore necessary to give credit to Farage’s political instinct that, exploiting the frustration of people deriving from what at the time seemed a promised - but never maintained - Brexit, made this man find a way to maintain the spotlight on the English politics scene, flaunting a very similar message as UKIP, but with a strong accent on the inadequacy of the current governmental class, that could immediately be understandable by the discontented masses.

The Brexit Party, then, was born in January 2019 and was modelled on the basis of the Italian party Movimento 5 Stelle³⁴¹. In fact, already in 2015 Farage went to Milan to have an exchange with Casaleggio and Grillo, the founders of the Movement, and he was fascinated by how they were using the Internet and social media for political communication. “Five Star members were discussing and voting on policy and nominating and electing each other to run for office while being steeped in party propaganda, all on a single online platform. This made supporters feel as if the movement’s identity was emerging organically from their online interactions, while Casaleggio and Grillo could guide those interactions with messaging from above.”³⁴² Based on this therefore, since then Farage’s new party makes very careful use of “slick digital ads and [...] supporters can apply to be candidates via an online portal”³⁴³; so, it is possible to talk about ‘digital democracy’.

Anyway, back on the Brexit Party again, which actually later was renamed ‘Reform UK’, the members of this British political group consider themselves as a democratic movement whose aim is

³⁴⁰ Karine Tournier-Sol, *From UKIP to the Brexit party: the politicization of European integration and disruptive impact on national and European arenas*, in “Journal of Contemporary European Studies”, 2020, vol. 29, p. 385. Available: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14782804.2020.1785849> [Accessed: 22nd August 2022].

³⁴¹ Paul Lewis, *Rage, rapture and pure populism: on the road with Nigel Farage*, “The Guardian”, 19.05.2019. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/19/nigel-farage-brexit-party-on-the-road-populism> [Accessed: 22nd August 2022].

³⁴² Darren Loucaides, *Building the Brexit party: how Nigel Farage copied Italy's digital populists*, “The Guardian”, 21.05.2019. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/21/brexit-party-nigel-farage-italy-digital-populists-five-star-movement> [Accessed: 22nd August 2022].

³⁴³ Ibidem.

to attract those voters supporting the UK exit from the European Union. This party's political program is not well detailed, but it is centred basically on two main fundamental ideas: the first is that the EU legislation basically acts just "thinking about the benefit of a few States"³⁴⁴ and the second is that both the Labour and the Conservative Parties have failed in governing the country, since they permitted the UK to lose its sovereignty. According to the Brexit Party, the only way for their country to "recover its reputation in the world"³⁴⁵ and to solve this situation, which does not allow the UK to legislate on fundamental issues, related for example to borders or employment, was indeed Brexit.

Farage is therefore a politician who, in addition to having repeatedly shown that he knows how to make the most of his strengths to achieve his goals, also knows how to continuously rebrand himself. The last hurdle for him was to try to become a political figure able to transcend the left-right British political spectrum, but in reality, suddenly Farage has completely disappeared from the radar, deciding in 2021 to leave the political scene permanently, holding only the position of honorary president of the party he created.

At this point what comes naturally to wonder is whether and how in the coming years we will feel the influence of Farage on the political scene. Either loved or despised, with his overflowing demagoguery, his ultra-traditionalist style, having been able to awaken the most innate and, at times, 'murky' instincts of voters, having never made a mistake at rallies³⁴⁶ and having always supported his ideas, right or wrong, regardless of any criticism, this man enjoys a recognizable image not only in politics but also among public opinion and in the media world, which for a good decade has given him a prominent role, making him the subject of headlines.

Considering all this, therefore, according to Dr. Andrew Roe-Crines, Farage has done much more than working in the political scenario; this man has left an indelible mark that will affect modern society on a larger scale: with his toil in fact, within this new emerging environment in which, thanks to the web and the social media, all kinds of speech are allowed, Nigel Farage "is likely to adopt the role of chief advocate of freedom of speech"³⁴⁷.

³⁴⁴ Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripolles, *Populism Against Europe in Social Media: The Eurosceptic Discourse on Twitter in Spain, Italy, France, and United Kingdom during the Campaign of the 2019 European Parliament Election*, p. 7.

³⁴⁵ Ivi, p. 8.

³⁴⁶ Antonello Guerrera, *L'addio alla politica di Nigel Farage, il re degli euroscettici: "Fatta la Brexit, non ho più obiettivi"*, "La Repubblica", 7.03.2021. Available: <https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2021/03/07/news/farage-290840486/> [Accessed: 22nd August 2022].

³⁴⁷ Andrew Roe-Crines, "The legacy and renewal of Nigel Farage", in: *UK IN A CHANGING EUROPE*, 12.03.2021. Available: <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-legacy-and-renewal-of-nigel-farage/> [Accessed: 23rd August 2022].

4.3 The British media on the European Union

In line with the analysis previously made in chapter three of this thesis, I will dedicate this section of my work to the study of the English media landscape and how this has contributed in shaping public opinion's ideas about the European Union and Brexit. Following this reasoning, I will then examine in depth the phenomenon of the 'Murdoch effect', which is fundamental for the change of perception of the European issue by the media; finally, I am going to briefly investigate the specific picture of the political propaganda happened in 2016 on Twitter, organized to push the vote towards the exit.

In this scenario it is important to consider the essay published in 2012 by the political scientist Oliver Daddow, where the relationship between the British media and the idea of European Union that had spread in public opinion in the United Kingdom is analysed. What emerges from this publication is that the various British media have in fact passed from the so-called "permissive consensus" phase towards the project of European integration, to that instead of "destructive dissent", which has developed in parallel with the expansion of Euroscepticism in politics and in the population³⁴⁸. Daddow points out that the widespread media support that persisted against the EU during the 1970s and 1980s was closely linked to the economic dimension that this organisation had, in other words, what was being actively backed was the European single market; but as the Community began to take fewer and fewer economic forms and instead began to take on more and more policies, this feeling of media approval has been replaced by a very strong hostility³⁴⁹.

Looking at the mediatic landscape in detail, in 1975, when a referendum was held in the UK to see if the citizens really wanted to continue to be part of the EEC, all the main mainstream newspapers, namely the traditional ones, following the political propaganda of the time, were in favour of the country's participation in the European project. Two exceptions were represented by the 'Morning Star' and by the 'Daily Express'; the latter in particular was against British membership in the EEC mostly because it was believed that this would have compromise the role of world leader played by the UK, which instead was necessary to safeguard.

³⁴⁸ Oliver Daddow, *The UK media and 'Europe': from permissive consensus to destructive dissent*, in "International Affairs", 2012, vol. 88, n. 6, p. 1222. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/23324911?saml_data=eyJzYW1sVG9rZW4iOiI2MzM0NzNiZi1iODVjLTQ4M2EtYjE5Zi1iMzY3N2FkZTljZDMiLCJlbWFpbCI6Ijg1ODYwOEBzdHVkLnVuaXZlLml0IiwiaW5zdGl0dXRpb25JZHMiOlsiZjFjOTRmYzQtZDRhMS00MmYwLTk0ZWVtMGU2NmRkZDBiMGNjIl19#metadata_info_tab_contents [Accessed: 24th August 2022].

³⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 1224.

Even with reference to television broadcasters, during this period the majority of them, including ‘BBC’ and ‘ITV’ - information channels with a no indifferent follow-up and therefore capable of reaching a wide public - were in favour, or at most neutral, with regard to the European development. So, to sum up, the dissemination of many reports approving the continuation of membership and the resulting support of the media, led British citizens to vote for their country’s accession to the EEC.

After this first stage, however, characterized then - using the term coined by Lindberg and Scheingold - by a feeling of “permissive consensus”³⁵⁰, you can see a radical reversal in what is transmitted by the British media.

During the nineties, in fact, as Vivien Schmidt observed, due to the difficulties resulting from the complicated process of adaptation to integration³⁵¹, in the United Kingdom, Eurosceptic discourses increased and the negative aspects of European policies began to be stressed in a very insistent way. According to the political scientist Chris Gifford, this change in mentality has been accompanied by a strong search for national identity on the part of British citizens; this has intensified much especially in the period following the signing of the Maastricht Treaty³⁵².

In this new parable it is therefore possible to speak of ‘destructive dissent’, and this can also be noted by the fact that newspapers that had previously expressed positions in support of the EU began to change their opinions, while those who had always been doubtful about the Community further strengthened their denial. The ‘Morning Star’ even acted as representative for the ‘No Campaign’, a Eurosceptic crusade born around the 2000s thanks to Nick Herbert, a British Conservative Party politician, who hired Dominic Cummings, a British political strategist who has also worked for the PM Boris Johnson from July 2019 until November 2020, to oppose the UK’s adoption of the Euro. The slogans were immediate and easy to understand and, as can be seen in the image below - in which there is Cummings in London in 2001 holding the manifesto of the campaign - they often only recited ‘no. europe yes. euro no’.

³⁵⁰ Lindberg and Scheingold, *Europe’s Would-be Polity: patterns of change in the European Community*, p. 62.

³⁵¹ See Vivien A. Schmidt, *Adapting to Europe: Is it Harder for Britain?*, in “British Journal of Politics and International Relations”, 2006, vol. 8, n. 1, pp. 15-33. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-856x.2006.00228.x> [Accessed: 25th August 2022].

³⁵² See Chris Gifford, *The rise of post-imperial populism: the case of right-wing Euroscepticism in Britain*, in “European Journal of Political Research”, 2006, vol. 45, pp. 851-869. Available: <https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00638.x> [Accessed: 24th August 2022].



Image 2. Source: gettyimages³⁵³

Subsequently, the 2008 Eurozone crisis led the British media to take even sharper positions. In November 2010, the ‘Daily Express’ launched a campaign called “Get Britain out of Europe”³⁵⁴, with the aim of raising the awareness of readers to require to the political class - including by signing a special petition - to return national sovereignty to the United Kingdom. This was promoted with the idea that since the European project was failing, continuing to be part of it would not have brought benefits, but instead more problems. This thought fits in perfectly with the hard Eurosceptic discourse, argument discussed earlier in chapter two of this thesis, since here the British media have de facto begun to question the legitimacy of every European treaty, law and directive, thus feeding into the population the belief that to every ‘more Europe’ action corresponds a ‘less Great Britain’ consequence.

³⁵³ David Levenson, “Dominic Cummings Portrait Session 2001”, in: *gettyimages*. Available: <https://www.gettyimages.ae/detail/news-photo/dominic-cummings-holds-a-poster-saying-yes-to-europe-no-to-news-photo/1177397881> [Accessed: 25th August 2022].

³⁵⁴ The Daily Express, *Get Britain out of Europe*, “Express”, 25.11.2010. Available: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/213573/Get-Britain-out-of-Europe> [Accessed: 25th August 2022].

4.3.1 *The Murdoch Effect*

For the sake of greater completeness of this work and to this day with the awareness of its results, in this chapter it is right to treat also the phenomenon of the ‘Murdoch effect’.

It is however not possible to talk about this subject without deepening the figure of Rupert Murdoch, from whom the aforementioned phenomenon takes its name. Australian magnate, specialized in television and publishing, according to a standing made by Forbes, in 2022 this man was ranked 83 among the richest people in the world, with a wealth that amounts to 19.3 billion dollars³⁵⁵. Murdoch is the founder and current owner of the ‘News Corporation’, an economic conglomerate in the media industry. This company controls several others, such as the newspaper ‘New York Post’ and the television channel ‘Fox Broadcasting Company’, both American and world-famous. In the United Kingdom, Murdoch’s group controls the newspapers ‘The Sun’, ‘The Sunday Times’ and ‘The Times’, while in the television world it owns the channels ‘Independent Television’ and ‘Sky Digital’.

As explained by Daddow, through these channels Murdoch has actually influenced the way to bring back to readers and viewers news related to European issues, activating a real “vigorously anti-European agenda”³⁵⁶, highlighting the negative aspects coming from the UK membership in the Community. In this regard, one of the most striking examples happened in 2004, when the European Constitutional Treaty was being discussed: on this occasion in fact Rupert Murdoch published on ‘The Sun’ a front page that on one side urged the rescue of the country and on the other it accused Blair, the prime minister of the time, to hand over Great Britain to Europe³⁵⁷. Following this, also the Harmsworth Group, which owns the newspapers ‘Daily Mail’ and ‘Mail on Sunday’, and the Telegraph Group, which instead controls the ‘Daily Telegraph’ and the ‘Sunday Telegraph’ decided to undertake this same road and follow the footsteps of Murdoch. This was also demonstrated by Menno Spiering who, in one of his works, harshly criticized the fact that some publishers and broadcasters had tried to represent the European Union as a group of foreign institutions, whose sole intent was to impose absurd rules on the UK, to dominate and destroy it³⁵⁸.

³⁵⁵ See “Rupert Murdoch & family”, in: *Forbes*. Available: <https://www.forbes.com/profile/rupert-murdoch/?sh=270eb55cb1af> [Accessed: 25th August 2022].

³⁵⁶ Daddow, *The UK media and ‘Europe’: from permissive consensus to destructive dissent*, p. 1225.

³⁵⁷ Bertinetti, *Brexit, storia e protagonisti dell’euroscetticismo britannico*, pp. 54-55.

³⁵⁸ See Menno Spiering, *British Euroscpticism*, in “European Studies”, 2004, vol. 20, pp. 127-149. Available: <https://dokumen.tips/documents/european-studies-20-menno-spiering-robert-harmsen-euroscpticism-party-politics.html?page=128> [Accessed: 25th August 2022].

At this point what remains to be clarified are the reasons why Murdoch decided to spread Eurosceptic news on the media channels he owned. And in reality, behind this complex work of piloted news broadcasting, in addition to the political ideas of this man, there were primarily his economic and commercial interests. Thus, Murdoch chose to use the tabloids to spread discouraging information on the effect that Brussels could have on the daily life in the UK, leading public opinion to turn what was previously only uncertainty into a real “alarmist call to arms against Europe”³⁵⁹. The magnate has therefore effectively utilized strong media tools that have contributed to generating and increasing public scepticism, so much so that even politicians at one point became convinced that a serious debate on the European question could damage their political career and the future fate of their party³⁶⁰.

Clearly, in this context, there was what can be defined as an opposition. According to Daddow, in fact, to provide a sort of antidote to the ‘Murdoch effect’ there were newspapers such as the ‘The Guardian’ and the ‘Financial Times’, and weeklies such as ‘The Economist’, which have always been committed to transmitting the news in a neutral way, making the British media landscape more balanced³⁶¹. As regards television, according to Dykes and Donnelly, after Murdoch’s acquisition of the ‘Sky’ channels, to play the role of objective and impartial broadcasters towards the EU remained ‘ITV’ and the ‘BBC’, that over the years have often been criticized by Eurosceptics who considered them too pro-European³⁶².

However, despite the efforts, these pro-European British media were caught off guard and failed to convince the public that participation in the European project could be something positive; in other words, they have proved incapable of facing the debate with their Eurosceptic colleagues, not finding a “coherent alternative narrative” to provide to the citizens³⁶³.

It is therefore possible to deduce that the creation of the media empire of Murdoch, begun in the sixties, and its style in exposing the news about the work of the European Union are indispensable factors to understand how the British mass media have become strongly Eurosceptic. This media Euroscepticism has thereby primarily influenced the British population - especially people with little knowledge of the mechanisms of European politics which, as previously demonstrated, are for this

³⁵⁹ Daddow, *The UK media and ‘Europe’*: from permissive consensus to destructive dissent, p. 1235.

³⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 1236.

³⁶¹ Ivi, p. 1226.

³⁶² Hugh Dykes and Brendan Donnelly, *On the edge: Britain and Europe*, London, Forumpress, 2012, p. 70.

³⁶³ Ibidem.

reason those most exposed to Euroscepticism - and secondly it has changed the dynamics of the political debate, so that in fact the result obtained in the 2016 referendum was reached.

As proof of this, below are two examples of the front pages, respectively of 'The Sun' and of the 'Daily Mail', sent to print in the period immediately before the vote for the referendum; in both the message is clear and it urges citizens to vote to leave the EU.



Image 3. Source: Ferren Winarto³⁶⁴

4.3.2. The Brexit debate on Twitter

Continuing with the development of my argument, I decided to focus on the political debate that happened particularly on Twitter, since this is “the largest micro-blogging service with more than 300 million active users and approximately 500 million new messages generated per day”³⁶⁵. For these reasons in recent years this platform has proved to be the perfect and most direct tool for making propaganda.

³⁶⁴ Winarto, “The Facilitated Rise of UKIP and How Economic Discontent Ignited the British Populist Flame”.

³⁶⁵ Kenneth Benoit and Akitaka Matsuo, *Network analysis of Brexit discussion on social media*, in “The Eu Engage Working Paper Series”. Available: http://www.euengage.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Benoit_Matzuo_last.pdf [Accessed: 26th August 2022].

The truth is that on Twitter, after a bitter confrontation, the verdict of the referendum of 23 June 2016 had already been decided by the public opinion long before the actual vote. Politicians, entrepreneurs, influencers, students, economists, but also ordinary people tweeted in favour of Great Britain's exit from the European Union, with several hashtags such as “#Brexit, #Leave and #Takecontrol”³⁶⁶ and so, as the Brexitometer report - an analysis of 2.7 million data generated by the activity of the most prominent figures in the political field - revealed³⁶⁷, the Eurosceptic forces have actually conquered the social media.

Deputy Farage's 2016 plan of action was four and a half times more influential than that of Cameron or Corbyn³⁶⁸; in fact, as explained before, UKIP's communicative strategy followed mainly a provocative approach: politicians such as Theresa May, Jeremy Corbyn or Tony Blair, who publicly sustained the UK permanence in the EU, have been fiercely criticized. On Twitter, one of the most popular slogans promoted by the party was “#MakeBrexitHappen”³⁶⁹. Immediately after the victory of the 'Leave' for the referendum, Farage tweeted expressing satisfaction for the victory of ordinary people against banks and business and inviting other countries such as Austria and Italy to follow in the footsteps of the UK³⁷⁰.

Other than the party, on Twitter among the most clicked pages in 2016 was definitely “Vote Leave”, which posted daily about the risks that the UK would have faced remaining in the EU and that had seventy-eight percent share. To date the account is inactive, since the last post was published in 2016³⁷¹. On the contrary, “Leave.eu”, in 2016 attended by 84.800 followers, but today with a following of almost 280.000 users, continues to post actively on relevant current British affairs³⁷²;

³⁶⁶ Angelica D'Errico, *Su Twitter vince la Brexit*, “La Stampa”, 22.04.2016. Available: <https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/2016/04/22/news/su-twitter-vince-la-brexit-1.35016702/> [Accessed: 26th August 2022].

³⁶⁷ Albéric Guigou, “Brexit, sui social vince il Sì”, in: *HuffPost*, 15.06.2016. Available: https://www.huffingtonpost.it/alberic-guigou/brexit-sui-social-vince-il-si_b_10475864.html [Accessed: 26th August 2022].

³⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁶⁹ Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripolles, *Populism Against Europe in Social Media: The Eurosceptic Discourse on Twitter in Spain, Italy, France, and United Kingdom during the Campaign of the 2019 European Parliament Election*, p. 8.

³⁷⁰ (Anonymous), “Brexit, euroscettici in movimento per seguire l'esempio. Da Le Pen in Francia e Salvini in Italia, esultanza su Twitter”, in: *HuffPost*, 24.06.2016. Available: https://www.huffingtonpost.it/2016/06/24/brexit-reazioni-internazionali_n_10648152.html [Accessed: 26th August 2022].

³⁷¹ See “Vote Leave”, in: *Twitter*. Available: https://twitter.com/vote_leave [Accessed: 26th August 2022].

³⁷² See “Leave.EU”, in: *Twitter*. Available: <https://twitter.com/leaveeuofficial> [Accessed: 26th August 2022].

during the Brexit campaign, this page particularly railed against Obama’s policy of interference and the pro-European stance of British Prime Minister David Cameron³⁷³.

Focusing on the international scenario, the media wave following the British referendum saw encouraging tweets by the most important Eurosceptic leaders of the EU, such as Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, who made an analogy, and spoke respectively of the necessity of Frexit and Nexit; in Italy Salvini, the Lega leader, stressed the importance of the courage of the British citizens and even the deputy Toninelli, member of the Movimento 5 Stelle, was happy for the victory of “democracy over the Europe of banks”³⁷⁴.

One year after the approval of Brexit, Expert System has carried out a study using Cogito cognitive technology on about 160.000 tweets, aimed at investigating the feelings of citizens among EU regarding the European Union itself: sentiments of distrust, stress, desire for greater dynamism and need for confrontation emerged³⁷⁵. Therefore, not by chance, considering again the case of the UK, it is not surprising that, on the ‘Reform UK’ Twitter page, the majority of the published messages shows pictures of party leaders surrounded by citizens, in order to demonstrate the popular enormous consensus that the party gained despite its short history³⁷⁶.

³⁷³ D’Errico, “Su Twitter vince la Brexit”.

³⁷⁴ (Anonymous), “Brexit, euroscettici in movimento per seguire l’esempio. Da Le Pen in Francia e Salvini in Italia, esultanza su Twitter”.

³⁷⁵ Expert.ai Team. “L’Europa di Twitter a un anno dalla Brexit”, in: *Expert.ai.*, 2017. Available: <https://www.expert.ai/it/resource/leuropa-di-twitter-un-anno-dalla-brexit/> [Accessed: 26th August 2022].

³⁷⁶ See “Reform UK”, in: *Twitter*. Available: https://twitter.com/reformparty_uk [Accessed: 26th August 2022].

Conclusion

This thesis aimed at deepening the macro theme of Euroscepticism.

A certain fact is that the bibliography on the subject is wide. It was therefore necessary to conduct a careful analysis of the available materials in order to limit the focus of my work, that is, the impact that the Eurosceptic phenomenon has had and still has on society, in particular on three branches of it: the population, politics and the mass media.

Moving in an orderly fashion, it is first of all fundamental to stress the importance of the role that the history of European integration plays in this study. It is indeed essential to know both the dynamics that led to the elaboration of the European project and the particularities relating to the institutional apparatus on which this is based because, without either these factors in fact, Euroscepticism would not exist today.

Specifically then, the moment of maximum development and diffusion of anti-European ideals was in the phase after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, when the European Community evolved in the European Union; with this change, the competences of this organization further expanded, and consequently they triggered the emergence of sovereigntist feelings not only in the political class, but also in the population.

Over the years, therefore - relative to the sphere of public opinion – in order to try to identify the specific causes of the occurrence of this situation, three different approaches have been elaborated by various scholars: the utilitarian one, the identity one and the cue-taking & benchmarking one. According to the first current of thought, the European Union has brought improvements only for people with a higher level of income and human capital, penalizing all other categories of individuals; the identity ideology, on the other hand, is based on the core concept that with the birth of the EU, with the aim of increasingly unifying the Member States among themselves, multiculturalism - a question that has always created opposition in part of the population - has been insistently promoted; finally, the cue-taking & benchmarking trend starts from the observation that the subject of the European Union is considered distant from the lives of citizens, that in most cases then decide to inquire about the work of this institution through third parties, such as mass media or social networks, without investigating about the veracity of the news or the reliability of sources.

Whether for economic reasons, for cultural motivations, or for what could be defined ‘intellectual laziness’ then, Eurosceptic sentiments have developed and spread in public opinion since the early 1990s, outlining what can be termed as ‘Popular Euroscepticism’.

Starting from the considerations related to the cue-taking & benchmarking approach, it is possible to outline the strong causal link that exists between Euroscepticism in public opinion and that present in the media environment. The latter is actually a rather slippery terrain, as the media may decide to 'frame' a message according to their purposes, whatever they are aiming to sell a news at all costs or direct the audience to a certain thought, influencing all those people who may have a reduced wealth of political knowledge. Moreover, the development of social media - it is sufficient to consider Twitter or Facebook - has guaranteed information an even wider and more immediate spectrum of dissemination, so the risk that any fake news published by a tabloid will spread in a capillary way is actually high.

Then, it is not by chance that just thoroughly analysing the theme of fake news about the European Union, in this dissertation I concretely demonstrated the influence of the media on public opinion: in this regard in fact, for years the Community has been actively fighting to try to limit the damage to its image by publishing denials and reliable data on institutional sites.

In this extremely diverse framework, if the Eurosceptic ideology affects the population and the media, surely this is also present in the political dimension.

In particular, it is possible to make two types of examinations with respect to the party system: a first, a more predictable one, relative to the faction's pole of belonging, and a second, more specific, with which one can categorize the type of party according to the objective that it wants to achieve.

The first analysis branches into two different offshoots: the classic Left/Right dimension and the more recent GAL/TAN facet. Considering the first breakdown, Eurosceptic thinking is promoted more by extremist parties, regardless of whether they are right-wing or left-wing, while the centre groupings appear to be more sympathetic towards the EU. Looking further into the other extent then, it emerged that the coalitions belonging to the GAL pole, although critical of some European policies, are the main supporters of the European integration process, while on the contrary, with reference to the TAN bloc, the RRP together with the conservative right-wing groups are inclined to take strongly sceptical positions towards the Union.

The second inquiry, on the other hand, foresees that the parties can further differentiate themselves according to whether they are 'goal-seeking', with well-rooted ideologies that can hardly change, or 'office-seeking', namely factions that instead study the cost-benefits ratio to understand on which values it is most convenient to base the election campaign. It is therefore not the general ideology of a political cabal - since this is in any case malleable - the factor that determines the position towards the European project, but it is the choice whether or not to use the European issue as an element of electoral propaganda that actually clarifies the Eurosceptic attitude of a party.

This decision is taken in order to seek consensus, depending on the preferences of public opinion; therefore, given the recent growing Eurosceptic tendency in the population, it is not surprising that the various political groups are increasingly promoting anti-European ideals, also pivoting on populism and critical issues that emerged during the periods of crisis that the EU has had to face. With reference to the latter point, it is de facto enough to consider how Eurosceptic factions have exploited to their advantage the general discontent that emerged after the financial crisis of 2008.

The ideas of political movements and their leaders are obviously transmitted to the population through the media, so it is clear that popular, party-based and media Euroscepticism are linked to each other in a consequential, inseparable and interpenetrating way: the actions of one actor influence and have consequences on the behaviour of the other, thus creating a vicious circle of which it is important to understand well the mechanisms, in order to have a complete knowledge of the Eurosceptic phenomenon.

This has been proven by the deepening of the dynamics of Brexit, which have highlighted how the ideas of British citizens, influenced by political propaganda and the media, over time have gradually shifted towards the rejection of the EU. Through the study of figure of Nigel Farage and of the so-called ‘Murdoch effect’, it has been shown that an anti-EU campaign put in place by a sufficiently charismatic leader and his political party, supported by a media empire, can direct and guide the public opinion of an entire country, contributing to developments that were unthinkable a few decades ago.

In the conclusions of this dissertation, regardless of the ideas of each individual and generally speaking, I find it constructive to emphasize how important and necessary is to provide a proper historical-political education of citizens. Although it may seem obvious, it is essential that each person is at the same time able to recognize a correct information and fight against a distorted one: this is the only way for everyone to have the possibility to benefit of a complete picture of all circumstances and thus develop a personal and autonomous thought.

This thesis has helped to further expand my knowledge of this subject and it has been extremely stimulating to scroll through the various works published on the topic by distinguished historians and political scientists.

A suggestion for future focuses of investigation could be to research in an even more specific way the phenomenon of Euroscepticism in the media landscape. Whereas this world is constantly

evolving, perhaps it could be thought-provoking to consider the reasons that drive newspapers and broadcasters to implement an anti-European campaign, also coming to understand if effectively there are benefits deriving from this approach. Then, considering social media, it would be interesting to understand if and how communication experts, be they politicians or journalists for example, have changed their language to make the most of the various platforms.

In addition, as mentioned previously in this disquisition, Nigel Farage took inspiration from the Movimento 5 Stelle to organize his own 'Reform UK' party, so I, as Italian, concretely am of the opinion that it might be extremely fascinating to examine the Eurosceptic historical-political dynamics present in our country, highlighting any differences or similarities between the British and the Italian Euroscepticism.

Considering then the truly multifaceted nature of this issue and how widespread its ideology has become in recent times, there is nothing to prevent analysing the Eurosceptic dynamics present in the various European states, trying to trace the events that the future could reserve for the European Union: will this organization be able to return to a situation of balance or will its internal fragmentations further increase?

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Il sostegno datomi da ognuno di voi è stato per me davvero importante.