

EUROSCEPTICISM: THE ROOT CAUSES AND HOW TO ADDRESS THEM

I. DEFINITION

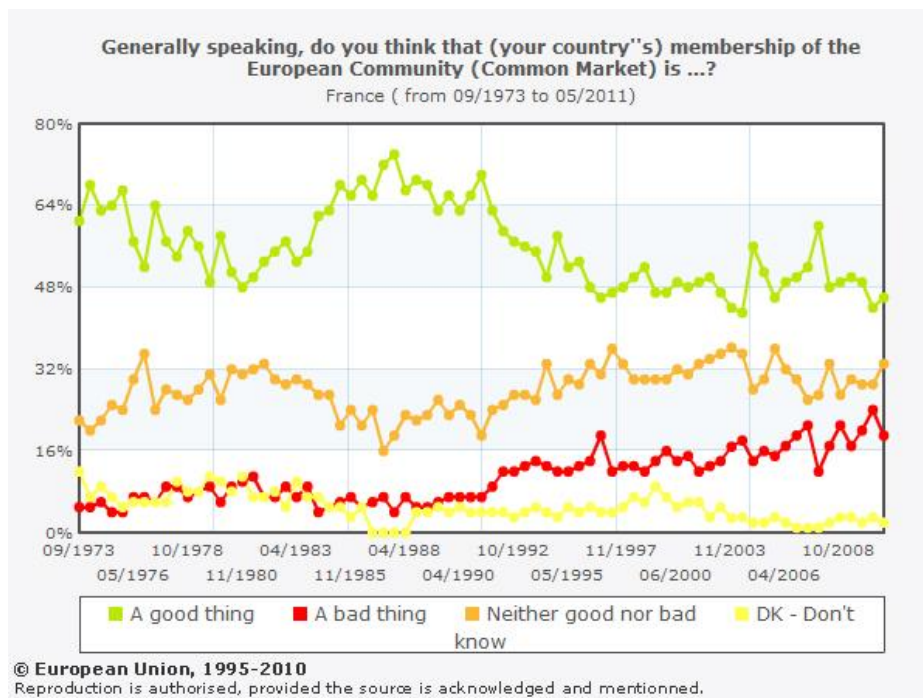
-Euroscepticism*: is a concept (*Ogden Richard*), that is to say a mix between a term, a meaning and some referents. Euroscepticism is synonymous to Euro realism, Euro pessimism, EU skepticism. This is among everything a **catch word**, created by the Times in 1985. It describes **a continuum** from a **HARD VERSION** - The European idea is entirely rejected - to a **SOFT VERSION** : only some of the European policies /institutions are criticized¹.

-Cause *: the producer of an effect, result, or consequence.

II. STATISTIC DATA AND PROBLEMATIC

Nota bene: The use of opinion polls cannot be seen as a perfect representation of mass opinion as Gaxie explained it. As far as people feel concerned by the questions, answers get sense. But if not, people do not get a very definite opinion. Their views can sway from one moment to another in time since they do not always understand correctly the meaning of the question.

Evolution of Euroscepticism in France, long term (chart 1):

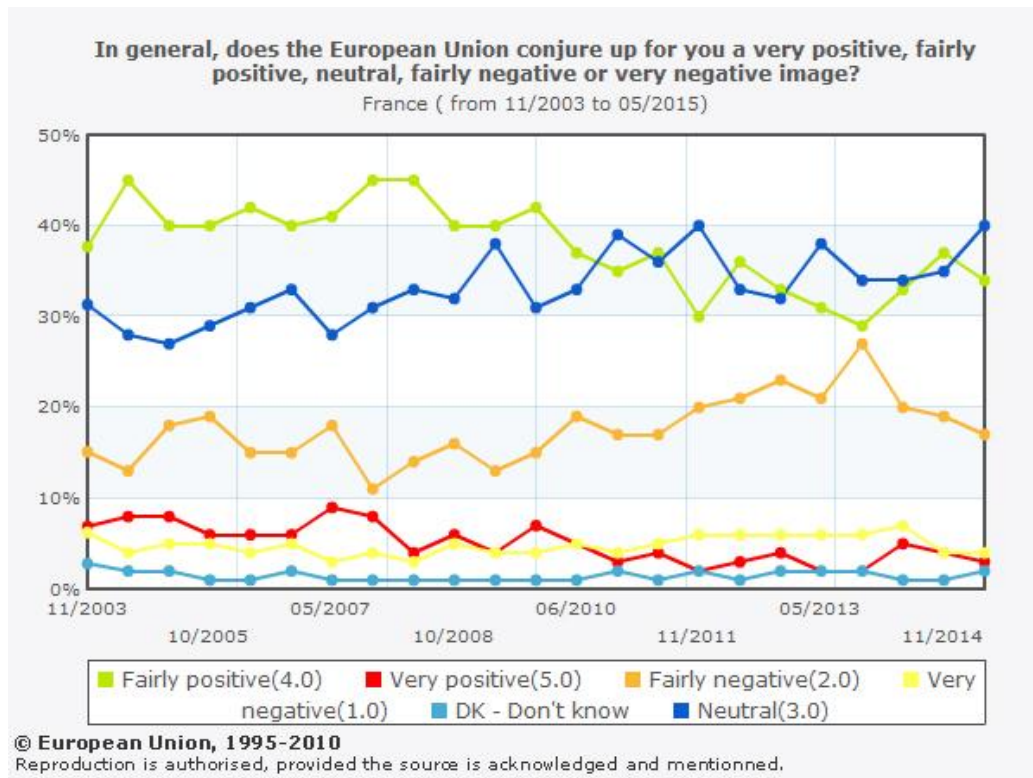


Graphic 1: From the European Commission's website on Public Opinion

¹ Szczerbiak, Paul A. Taggart 2002

The “good thing” answer is decreasing from 1973 to 1980 and from 1988 to 2008. The answer “a bad thing” is constantly increasing from 1988 and is sharpening since the 2000’s. The answer “neither a good nor bad” is remaining more or less stable during the studied period.

Evolution of Euroscepticism, short-term (chart 2):



Graphic 2: From the European Commission’s website on Public Opinion

The image of the EU has deteriorated. From 2003 to 2010 the “fairly positive” image of the EU is stable, but then it is decreasing. The “neutral image” of the EU has been growing slowly since 2003, and is overtaking the “good image” at the end of 2013. The “fairly negative” image has been rising generally since 2008. By the way, it corresponds to the beginning of the economical crisis. Finally the “very positive” curve is being overtaken by the “very negative” from 2010. There are few “neutral” opinions on the image of the EU.

French Euroscepticism does exist and had been evolving in the long term as well as in the short term.

What structural and short-term factors fuel Euroscepticism? How to explain the growing phenomenon of Euroscepticism in France? How the national background affects the configuration of Euroscepticism? How to transform the Euroscepticism trend to “Europtimism”?

III. VARIETY OF EUROSCEPTICISM IN FRANCE

In France there are mainly **3 types of Euroscepticism**:

1. **The Nationalist type (SOFT-MEDIUM EUROSCEPTICISM)**. This euroscepticism is composed by De Gaulle's descendants, and on the left side by the communists (Mélanchon nowadays) or one part of the socialists. They accept cooperation, but they are against integration. It has always been a problem for them to have a large and really integrated EU because it represents a threat to the nation and to sovereignty.
2. **The Euro-critic and disenchanted type = a utilitarian Euroscepticism (SOFT-HARD EUROSCEPTICISM)**. This kind of Euroscepticism is disappointed by the EU system and the way EU is conducted. One part is reformist; they aspire to change the EU system. They criticize the lack of democracy, the lack of transparency, and austerity policies etc. The other part is just disappointed, marked by apathy. Their attitudes toward the EU reflect their positioning toward the national political system.
3. **The populist type (HARD EUROSCEPTICISM)**. Euroscepticism is an extension to their national anti-system attitude. Rejection of centralization, elitism and bureaucracy are applied to the EU through their Eurosceptic position.

IV. STRUCTURAL AND SHORT-TERM CAUSES OF EUROSCEPTICISM

Factors of Euroscepticism in France are both structural and temporary.

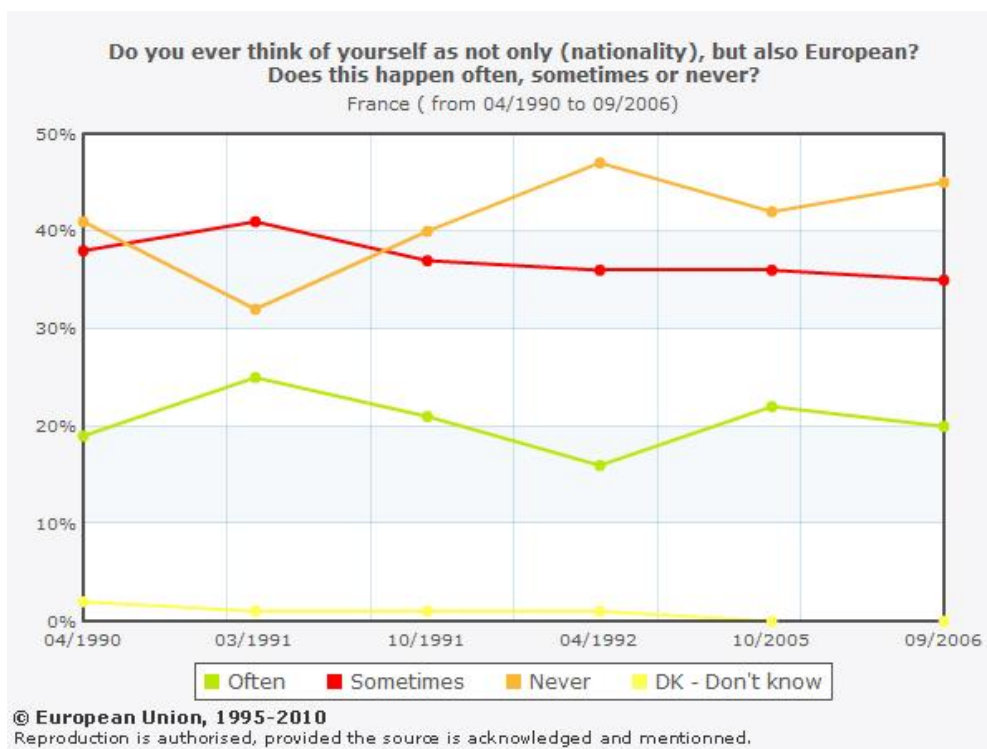
A. **STRUCTURAL FACTORS:**

- a. **National specificities and resistances regarding the EU construction.**

Political analyses are clear: the historical French background has always been partly tied to -for one side of the society- a sovereigntist's conception. The European Defense Community, a plan proposed by French politician René Pleven, failed to obtain the French ratification in 1954. De Gaulle imposed his vision of the EU through blockades in 1966. This political conduct led first doubts on the spill-over theory concerning the EU. Also, unlike Italia, the Communist party also rejected integration and pro-federalist orientations concerning the EU.

Another French specificity pertains to the utilitarian behavior that a lot of people get about the EU. Part of the population thinks the EU integration in terms of economical and social gain and

loss². This is really particular to France; the Maastricht Treaty was discussed in 1992 for economic and social reasons only. It is not the case for other countries where debates focus on values (abortion, secularism). A majority of the French citizens expects direct benefits of the EU. But the EU redistributes direct returns to few citizens: Erasmus students, farmers, and some people working on cultural projects. The EU financing is always complementary to national financing. Except people working in the administration field, citizens do not see the so-expected direct repercussion of the EU in their lives. Another explanation is the fact the EU is always presented as an economic object by politicians and the media that pretend to generate wealth for each EU members. Its diplomatic (Peace, influence in the International Relationship, Commune Defensive entity, etc) or cultural (Erasmus, Educational projects), and social aims (Gender equality at work: Defrenne, etc) are little relayed in the French public sphere. This relation to the EU corresponds also to the fact few people identify themselves as European above all (*see graph3 below*): generally speaking the national, regional, local or ethnic identities come first³.



Graphic 3: from the European Commission's website on Public Opinion

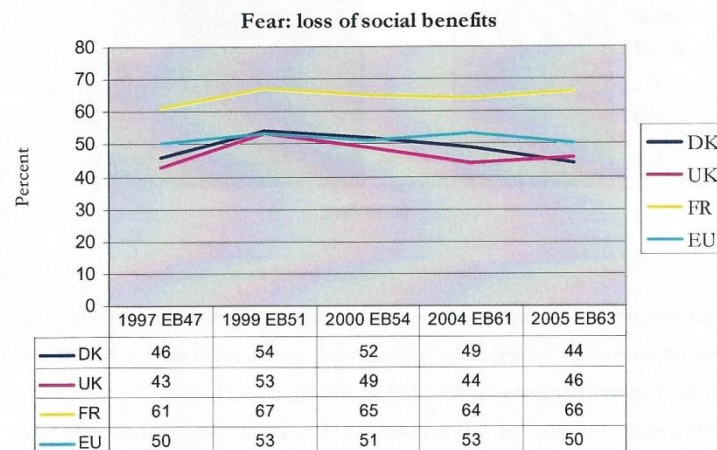
The last specificity of France is its concern about the Social⁴ sphere. As we can see below, matters for social losses in France are far higher than the average. According to Catharina Sorensen's thesis France has a certain level of Euroscepticism on social matters. This tendency remains stable in the long time perspective. Thus, the vestige of the Jacobinic tradition generates to some extent reluctances toward economic liberalism. In numerous polls, the call for

² see Cecile Leconte, *Understanding Euroscepticism*

³ See Kauffmann

⁴ see Catharina Sorensen PhD thesis on Euroscepticism

additional social actions and programs within the EU is evocated. This characteristic enlightens us on the specificity of French Euroscepticism.



Graphic 4: Graph from Catharina Sorensen, *Euroscepticism: a conceptual analysis and a longitudinal, cross-country examination of Public Scepticism towards the EU*, PhD Thesis

b. EU's incapacity to generate identity and massive support.

On the other hand, the EU itself does not succeed in generating a pro-european feeling upon citizens.

The EU institution and its disfunctionments gave arguments to Eurosceptics : democratic deficit, lack of information/communication to citizens (ex: the TAFTA), lack of transparency, complexity of the bureaucratic system, gap between EU-citizen's socio-cultural origin and MEP's socio-cultural origin (white male elites, ...), difficulties to promote a common european feeling of belonging. Some policies did not find support in society or within specific professional groups: the conditioned ecological subventions for farmers is an illustration of it.

Also, the EU is an Unidentified Political Object. Its frontiers are changing every decade, there is no common langage or common culture. The membership feeling is harder to construct than at national level. The EU has to work in that direction, to build an un-natural but fundamental feeling of identity.

B. SHORT-TERM FACTORS:

a. Economic crisis and increase of populism

The beginning of the economic crisis corresponds to the decrease of French optimism regarding the EU (*see graph 2*). Some citizens blame the EU for the economic situation or might connect it with globalization and so far with the EU. Since the crisis, people are more reluctant towards the EU; there is a tendency to withdraw into communities. France is part of that dynamic. More recently, the Greek debt crisis and the south Mediterranean debts have generated doubts on EU's capacity to generate profits. Part of French people might fear loss of their social status. To

their point of view, this impoverishment is partly caused by the EU membership. That is why the EU membership is questioned.

By connection, the economic instability paves the way for populists. This phenomenon has been proved in history. In France, the FN party shifts the blame onto the national leaders and the EU institution, using traditional arguments: lack of democracy, bureaucracy of elites, dangers of immigration, threat to French culture or to the nation. As an extension of the rise of populism, there is a rise of Euroscepticism. The FN is a protest-based party with Euroscepticism⁵. In a cultural perspective they turn away from immigration and national frontiers' abrogation enabled by the Schengen area. In a political outlook, they reject European institutions and decision making as a way to weaken the national power. At an economic level they repudiate the neo-liberal European system; they favor economic nationalism.

b. Media system and political discourses

Analyzing the political class speeches about the EU, it is obvious that European integration is not high on the French political agenda⁶. Few politicians talk about the EU. Their interventions are quite critical about the EU policies. Furthermore, the EU topic is mostly broached by the Front National (FN) party. The FN fuels a really negative discourse on the EU even if its arguments on it are not so advanced. They use a global rejection sales pitch and the French media pass it on. The role of the media is important especially as psychological analyses⁷ demonstrated. EU citizens make reasonable decisions despite their lack of information. They use references. The national political context – (more familiar to them) – serves as a yardstick to the issue of EU policy competence. The reference to the media or to the public debates is really important for them to make their opinion, much more than for the national issues. The monopole the FN got on EU's topic in the public sphere and in the media is contra productive to fabricate optimistic opinions on the EU.

V. HOW TO ADDRESS EUROSCEPTICISM IN FRANCE?

- Creating a **European identity** to enhance support for the integration.
- Setting up a real **social European model**. It is important for France, a country that got a high level of social expenditure.
- Adopting measures to **inform and educate** toward the functioning of the EU and the real costs or gains of European integration.

Nota bene: Karp “*The more people get the impression to understand EU politics, the more they have the feeling to be able to influence it and they are more optimistic on it*”. Karp verified empirically direct effect in France of educational policies upon the EU.

⁵ Taggart 1998

⁶ O.Costa

⁷ See the article of Alexandra MöBner in *Euroscepticism Image of Europe among mass publics and political elites*

These recommendations imply:

➔ **Action from the EU.** Some ideas:

- Readjusting some of the EU's financing: initiating direct funding from the EU to its citizens so people sees the direct plus-value of membership.
- Leading communication and educational campaign on EU citizenship.
- Imposing a shift in its guidelines toward more social policies.
- Creating innovative programs that develop a sense of being a member of the EU.
- Adopting striking symbols to strengthen the identity feeling.
- Putting into process participative programs with deliberation.

➔ **Action from the national political elites and media.** Some ideas:

- Developing communication and educational campaigns to explain the EU membership benefits.
- Fostering debates about the EU in the civil society with deliberative participation of citizens.
- Encouraging French political parties to grasp the opportunity to discuss about the EU in an objective way.