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REDEFINING EUROSCEPTICISM HAS THE NETHERLANDS BECOME MORE EUROSCEPTIC SINCE 2002?

Redefining the understanding of Euroscepticism. The current categorisations of party Euroscepticism are insufficient in qualifying the actual positioning of parties regarding the different dimensions of the European Union. A more refined approach, looking at a policy-specific level, is presented that gives a better understanding of the actual position of political parties concerning the EU, and areas which are taboos for these parties to cooperate or, conversely, not to cooperate. This fine-grained analysis also allows the tracing of changes in the positioning of these parties or government over time. In order to substantiate this, a qualitative content analysis of the party manifestos of the political parties in the Netherlands over the period 2002-2017 is conducted.

1. INTRODUCTION

Are the European Union member states becoming more Eurosceptic? This is a question many would intuitively answer in the affirmative. Their answer might be on the basis of oversimplified statements from political leaders, or is based on the current categorisations which do not deal with the substantive position of political parties, but offer rather general statements on the nature of support for the European Union. What this paper offers is a scale of quantifying Euroscepticism, by looking at specific policy areas and indicating the extent of Euroscepticism or non-Euroscepticism. While the current study examines the Netherlands, the same framework and methodology may also be applied across time and space, i.e. in other member states and with a larger or small time horizon. The specific research question analysed in this paper is: *Have political parties the Netherlands become more Eurosceptic between 2002 and 2017?* Or put in a different way: Have Dutch political parties moved away from European cooperation and integration?

The core argument of the research question has already been analysed by Harryvan and Hoekstra (2013), namely whether the political parties in the Netherlands have become more Eurosceptic, in parallel to the Dutch public's increasingly critical position towards the EU. The time difference is that those authors employ the categorisation of Flood (2002) to attribute a level of Euroscepticism (or Europeanism) on a party-level basis. Harryvan and Hoekstra use this categorisation to look at the general position of parties towards the EU, and also to quantify the position of parties to the extent that they are in favour or disapprove of EU competences in the financial-monetary dimension. The current study employs a different approach towards this question, by creating a scale of Euroscepticism according to the concrete policy positions of the political parties in the Netherlands. The purpose of the paper is to test the conclusions of earlier studies of party Euroscepticism in the Netherlands by employing a different model of evaluation.

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This paper proceeds with a discussion of the concept of party Euroscepticism and offers an alternative approach to the evaluation of party-based Euroscepticism. The next section goes into the methodological considerations and the criteria for the selection of the policy positions. Then the results will be presented and discussed. The conclusion reflects on the hypothesis and the benefits of the current approach.

2. TOWARDS A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO PARTY-BASED EUROSCEPTICISM

The EU has become a politicised issue in the domestic political debate. According to Hooghe and Marks (2009), since the Maastricht Treaty the EU has become more politicised as a consequence of its increased salience and the mobilisation of political entrepreneurs. On the other hand, there appears to be an incentive for mainstream parties to keep the European Union off the political agenda, because the incentives to do so are missing. Two factors would facilitate the politicisation, namely if an issue would lead to the prospect of electoral gains, and if the issue could be integrated “into the left-right structure of party competition” (Green-Pedersen, 2012: 126). However, Hooghe and Marks argue rather that the “giant has awakened in an era of constraining dissensus”, where the politicisation of the EU “escape[s] mainstream party control” (2017: 23). The political entrepreneurs Hooghe and Marks (2008) spoke of are thus the Eurosceptic parties that use Eurosceptic frames for strategic, vote-seeking purposes (Abbarno and Zapryanova, 2013: 583). An answer to this question firstly requires a discussion of what is meant by the term Euroscepticism.

The current literature on defining party Euroscepticism focuses on categorising party parties on the basis of the certain dimensions of resistance to the EU. Taggart and Szczerbak (2002) distinguish broadly on the basis of soft and hard Euroscepticism; Kopecky and Mudde (2002) differentiate between two dimensions, namely the support for European integration and for the EU (in general); and there are a number of more refined categorisations (Flood, 2002; Conti, 2003; Vasilopoulou, 2009; Vollaard and Voerman, 2015) that focus on some form of degree of Euroscepticism; while still others focus on the drivers, or motivators, of Euroscepticism (Sørensen, 2008; Leconte, 2010; Skinner, 2012). The aim here is to go beyond these conceptualisations and empirically test whether member states have become more Eurosceptic over time or not.

Taggart and Szczerbak (2003) distinguish between core and periphery EU policies, but are dependent on subjective perceptions. Leconte clarifies that it depends on the specific context, “whether opposition to specific EU policies is an expression of a broader type of Euroscepticism” (2010: 7). She distinguishes between four types of Euroscepticism: “utilitarian Euroscepticism, which expresses scepticism as to the gains derived from EU membership at individual or country level; political Euroscepticism, which illustrates concerns over the impact of European integration on national sovereignty and identity; value-based Euroscepticism, which denounces EU ‘interference’ in normative issues; and cultural anti-Europeanism, which is rooted in a broader hostility towards Europea as a continent and in distrust towards the societal models and institutions of European countries.” (2010: 43) The varieties of Euroscepticism that Leconte proposes do not reflect a degree of Euroscepticism, but instead represent the underlying causes of the different types of Euroscepticism that there exist. The typology offers valuable insights into what causes Euroscepticism, yet do not indicate how much these different varieties mean for the overall sense of Euroscepticism among a political party, or the political establishment in a country.

Furthermore, there are two categorisations, where some form of hierarchy in levels of Euro-scepticism (Europeanism) is presented, that are used specifically in the case of the Netherlands of which the results are shown in table 1. Harryvan and Hoekstra (2013) use an adaptation of Flood's (2002) categorisation²:

- EU-maximalist	4
- EU-positivist	2
- EU-minimalist	0
- EU-renationalist	-2
- EU-rejectionist	-4

The second category is by Vollaard and Voerman (2015) and differentiates support for the EU into 4 categories:

- Europhile parties envision a further development of a supranational union with European citizens. This does not necessarily exclude any criticism towards the EU though.
- Europragmatic parties see the national member states as the primary political actors and want to maintain this balance. They see European integration as an instrument to serve the domestic public interest and the national interests; if integration does not serve this purpose, then these parties might aim for less integration.
- Soft eurosceptic parties resist deeper European integration by opposing a further sharing of sovereignty and extending the European free market
- Hard eurosceptic parties unequivocally oppose at least one of the core principles of the EU - a European free market and sharing national sovereignty
(Vollaard and Voerman 2015, 101-103)

In Table 1, the general position of the political parties in the Netherlands are categorised by using the typologies of Harryvan and Hoekstra by Vollaard and Voerman. The former selected the election cycles of 2002 and 2012 for their categorisation, and the latter focused on 2 defining moments in the recent history of the Netherlands; namely the shock of the 2005 'no' vote in the referendum held in the Netherlands for the ratification of the EU Constitutional Treaty, and the aftermath of the 2010 debt crises across the EU (Vollaard and Voerman 2017). The last column are the labels of the present author on the basis of party manifestos for the 2017 general elections, according to the typology of Vollaard and Voerman.

² Rejectionist: positions opposed to either (i) membership of the EU or (ii) participation in some particular institution or policy. Revisionist: positions in favour of a return to the state of affairs before some major treaty revision, either (i) in relation to the entire configuration of the EU or (ii) in relation to one or more policy areas. Minimalist: positions accepting the status quo but resisting further integration either (i) of the entire structure or (ii) of some particular policy area(s). Gradualist: positions supporting further integration either (i) of the system as a whole or (ii) in some particular policy area(s), so long as the process is taken slowly and with great care. Reformist: positions of constructive engagement, emphasising the need to improve one or more existing institutions and/or practices. Maximalist: positions in favour of pushing forward with the existing process as rapidly as is practicable towards higher levels of integration either (i) of the overall structure or (ii) in some particular policy areas. (Chris Flood's original categorisation, 2002)

Between Harryvan and Hoekstra's and Vollaard and Voerman's results there are marked differences. This could be due to the different categories they employ, or their different interpretations of the same content. Whereas Harryvan and Hoekstra use party manifestos as the core of their data analysis, Vollaard and Voerman also use parliamentary debates and news analysis. A notable difference is in the rating of the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the centre-left liberal party, D66. The former is considered to be Euro-maximalist in the case of Harryvan and Hoekstra, while Vollaard and Voerman rates the party Euro-pragmatic, the second 'level' after Europhile. In the case of D66 the difference is inverted; for Harryvan and Hoekstra the position of D66 was not Euro-maximalist but only Euro-positivist, irrespective of the fact that the D66 in their 2002 election programme states that it favours a Federal Union. At the same time, one should note that the variable time is important in case of the EU, since different political parties will react differently to the changes in the dynamics and events that occur in the EU. As such, the current study aims to further clarify parties' positions on EU-level cooperation and European integration.

Table 1

Party	2002 (Harryvan & Hoekstra)	2012 (Harryvan & Hoekstra)	post-2005 (Vol- laard & Voer- man)	post-2010 (Vol- laard & Voer- man)	2017 (author)
50+	-	-	-	Soft Eurosceptic	Europragmatic
CDA	4	4	Europragmatic	Europragmatic	Europragmatic
CU	-	-	Europragmatic	Soft Eurosceptic	Soft Eurosceptic
DENK	-	-	-	-	Europragmatic
D66	2	4	Europhile	Europhile	Europhile
FvD	-	-	-	-	Hard Eurosceptic
GL	2	4	Europhile	Europhile	Europhile
LPF	-	-	Soft Eurosceptic	-	-
PvdA	3	4	Europragmatic	Europragmatic	'Soft' Europhile
PvdD	-	-	Soft Eurosceptic	Soft Eurosceptic	Soft Eurosceptic
PVV	-2	-4	Hard Euroscep- tic	Hard Euroscep- tic	Hard Eurosceptic
SGP	-	-	Soft Eurosceptic	Soft Eurosceptic	Soft Eurosceptic
SP	0	2	Soft Eurosceptic	Soft Eurosceptic	Soft Eurosceptic
VVD	0	2	Europragmatic	Europragmatic	Europragmatic

Topaloff argues that Euroscepticism "has become a fundamental component of the political portfolios of the marginal parties"; which are tapping into the increased politicisation of the EU and "the ensuing death of permissive consensus", thereby "carving out of a niche for themselves in the political spectrum" (Topaloff, 2012: 74). As such, this paper will test the following hypothesis this the new methodology that focused on specific party positions, thus measuring

Euroscepticism on a substantive basis: *Political parties in the Netherlands have become more Eurosceptic between 2002 and 2017.*

3. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this paper Euroscepticism will be calculated on the basis of *the relative amount of concrete policy positions that indicate (1) preference towards approaching a policy area within the national sphere rather than with EU-level cooperation (policy areas) or (2) preference to move away from the EU-level back to the national level (institutional change)*. The criteria for the selection of the specific policy positions from the content analysis are described in the methodology section.

In order to assess whether Dutch political parties have become more Eurosceptic over time, the focus should not only be on the negative support for European integration and the EU as such, but also on the positive assessments of membership to the EU and related benefits. This holds true especially when creating a scale of Euroscepticism. While much of the debate in terms of the support of parties towards the EU and European integration is on Eurosceptic parties, the debate on pro-EU parties (see Adam et al, 2016) is understudied, especially after the penetration of the Eurosceptic debate in EU studies.

This paper will look at the policy positions that reflect a position on European integration or the EU of all the parties in the Dutch parliament over the period 2002 to 2017. The research design is a qualitative content analysis of the national election party manifestos of all the political parties represented in the Dutch upper chamber, the Tweede Kamer. For all the party statements related to the EU, the question that is asked is: “Does this mean that the party supports (or rejects) deeper and/or wider EU cooperation, and/or influence of the supranational institutions?” Important to note is that policies that reflect an influence of the national parliament do not have to imply a decreased role of the EU, but rather a stronger control mechanism of the government’s actions. When political parties refer to the European Union in their party manifestos, these statements are not necessarily specific policy positions, where parties articulate what they think should be done with regards to issues relating to the EU. Most parties have general statements on the EU like, “As the Netherlands, we need a strong and effective Europe to protect our interests and strengthen our position” (CDA 2017: 34), or “Europe is struggling with itself and its ideals” (CU 2017: 87). These are cases where there is an explicit reference to the European Union, yet without a specific policy position.

The author agrees with Leconte (2010) and Taggart and Szczerbiak (2003) that the perception of a lack of European integration and/or democratic accountability being perceived as Euroscepticism misses part of the point, namely that the most Europhile politicians may refer to such insufficiencies. One of the oft-used statements of political parties regarding the European Union is the need to cut red tape, and to increase the transparency of the EU institutions, particularly the European Commission (for instance in the year 2017, 10 and 7 of the 13 parties in the Dutch parliament referred to these issues in their party manifestos, respectively). However, such issues of reform may not qualify as being Eurosceptic, if by Eurosceptic we specifically refer to widening/deepening of integration and cooperation - as stated above. Invoking the subsidiarity principle is another such position. The same holds true when referring to the notion of a democratic deficit in the EU - before the Maastricht Treaty the term was used in the overwhelmingly pro-European

sense, yet since then the Eurosceptics have come to use it as a political rhetoric against the EU (Leconte, 2010: 54-55). As such, these issues would need to be viewed within a specific context, and the general position regarding the EU of the party in question; which is out of the scope of the paper.

Furthermore, other policy positions that will be omitted in the reflections are those that relate to reforms of specific policies, like the need to reform the Common Agricultural Policy to be more environmentally sustainable, or the need to cut red tape. If a party is in favour of such a position, then that does not imply a Eurosceptic or pro-European position. Also, the party position should not be an ideological or domestic policy position that is packaged into an issue that relates to the EU, like support for the free trade agreements between the EU and the US (TTIP), and the EU and Canada (CETA), or whether the EU should include human rights as a condition when signing association agreements with third countries. Such issues relate to party ideology and do not causally relate to support for deeper European cooperation.

Unambiguous policy positions are positions that refer to issue areas where more/less cooperation is desirable, like dealing with environmental issues, migration, economic stability, innovation, international crime, energy-related concerns, defence and foreign policy coordination. Another group of positions refers to integration: more/less competences to the European Commission or European Parliament, the creation of a Federal Union, more/less veto powers for member states, increased thresholds for transfer of sovereignty, decreasing the number of EU agencies, enlargement, and looking into, or having referendums on, exits from the EU or Eurozone.

Yet another point to consider is the element of time and its consequences on the evolution of the European Union. Global, regional and national political developments shape public opinion, party politics and, subsequently, the course and shape of European integration. Given that some policy issues were not relevant in 2002 but are salient in 2017, the majority of the weight of positioning should not be on the policy areas *per sé*, but rather on those issues that were the most salient at the time. In the specific case of the Netherlands, one fruitful way to do so is by analysing those issues which are recurring in most party programmes in the respective election years.

The above serves the purpose of limiting the amount of party positions that shall be considered. A limitation of the current study might be that it excludes the differences in the perceptions and degrees of desired cooperation in the policy areas mentioned. This is in fact not necessarily a limitation, since the motivation to cooperate is the decisive factor in determining Euroscepticism.

For the purpose of this paper, the election years between 2002 and 2017 will be looked at - election years were 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2017. The election year 2002 was turbulent in Dutch politics. The assassination of Pim Fortuyn turned into a wave of support for his - leaderless - party, and a government was formed that lasted for less than 3 months. It is however an interesting year to look at when considering developments in the EU, since the process of drafting a new EU Treaty had been initiated at the European Council meeting in December 2001, and the debate on the big 2004/7 EU enlargement was ongoing.³

³ The author is aware that there was an election in the year 2003; however, all parties either added short updates of their 2002 election programmes, or did not publish any new documentation.

The current study is in part based on Pellikaan and Louwerse's confrontational approach to the measurement of policy positions, where "[t]he basic assumption of the method is that it is possible to capture policy positions of political parties by determining their positions on a small number of specific policy items on which, in principle, divergent positions can be taken" (2015, 198). This paper will depart from Pellikaan and Louwerse by focusing only on policy positions on European integration, in contrast to their study of 12 issue dimensions. Missing data in this paper is treated in the same way as Pellikaan and Louwerse treat it, namely that missing data gets a score of zero (0) (2015, 206). The lack of an exact positioning by parties of policy areas related to the EU need not necessarily imply a lack of issue salience of the EU. Since only a select number of statements on the EU in party manifestos reflect a "Eurosceptic" position, if political parties choose to deliberately blur their position on these policy areas as a strategy to not unnecessarily distance the party from its voters (Rovny, 2013; Adam et al, 2016), this is not a sufficient qualification to question the salience of the EU for this party. These parties may devote more attention to the EU in general terms.

4. RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the amount of unambiguous policy positions that the different political parties in the Netherlands have over time expressed in their party programmes for the general elections of 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2017. Those occasions where political parties referred to a particular issue but did not express a clear position are excluded from this data set. The data are presented as percentages, where 100% means that all of the policy positions for that election cycle answered the following question in the affirmative: "Does this mean that the party supports (or rejects) deeper and/or wider EU cooperation for this policy area, and/or increased influence of the supranational institutions?"

The total amount of policy positions in the election cycles are shown in Table 2.

Figure 1: Degree of (1-euroscepticism) (%)

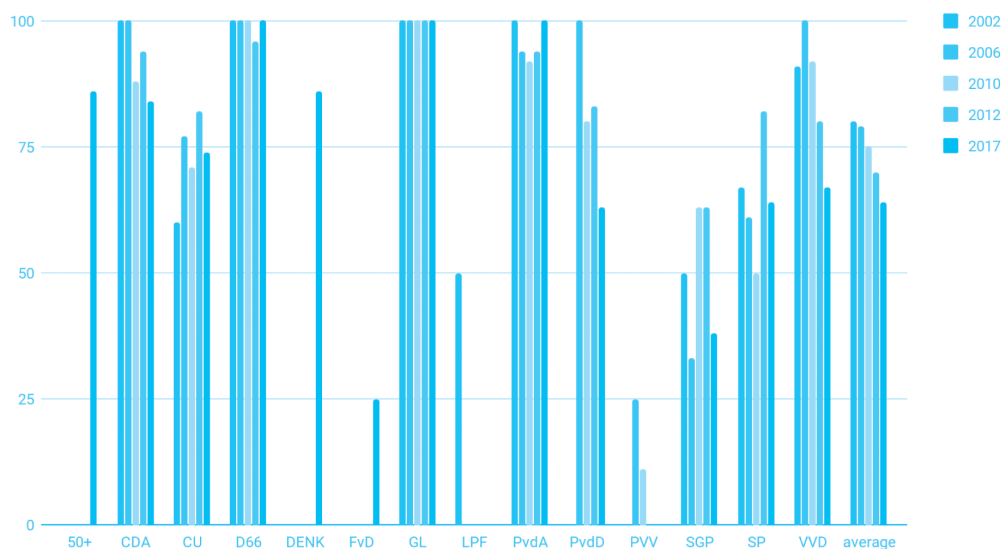


Table 2

Election year	Number of parties in parliament	Number of policy positions
2002	9	26
2006	10	28
2010	10	28
2012	11	38
2017	13	36

5. DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that *the positions of political parties in the Netherlands have become more Euro-sceptic between 2002 and 2017*, is answered in the affirmative, but it has certain conditions to it.

What cannot be read from the figures above are the explanations behind specific trends. From Figure 1 it is visible that the ratio of Eurosceptic versus non-Eurosceptic statements has increased over time (as visible by the decrease in the averages in the subsequent election cycles). This has to do more with an overall increase in the number of policy positions of Dutch parties that are against cooperation or favour institutional change that limits rather than extends the influence of the EU institutions. This however does not signify that the amount of positions that are favourable towards the EU have decreased. While there is no clear increasing trend in the amount of positions from one election cycle to the next, all the parties that were represented in parliament throughout the period 2002-2017 had a higher absolute amount of positive references to the EU in 2017 than in 2002. As such, the total amount of positive policy positions increased, but what explains the decreasing ratio in the (1-Euroscepticism) variable is the increase in the amount of positions of parties that were for a decreased role of the EU (as such Eurosceptic).

One clear point of continuity over the years is the overwhelming support by all the parties, except for the hard-Eurosceptic PVV (the hard-Eurosceptic FvD joined parliament only after the last elections), to cooperate in those policy fields that are of an international dimension, like climate change, terrorism and international crime, economic and financial (in)stability, migration movements and world political issues (Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Common Security and Defense Policy).

Harryvan and Van der Harst (2017) identify three governmental “manifestations of Eurocriticism” (4-6), the start of the lengthy campaigning for a decrease in the national contributions of the Netherlands to the EU (starting early 1990s), the focus on subsidiarity and thus a more critical position towards the transfer of competences away from the member state (starting in the early 2000s), and thirdly the further drive to hold back the transfer of competences in the Rutte I cabinet in 2010. Rutte I was a minority cabinet of a corporatist liberal party (VVD) and the Christian Democrats (CDA), with permanent parliamentary support by the far-right nationalist party PVV. The current qualitative content analysis finds a recurrence of these “manifestations of Eurocriticism” in a number of party programmes over the years.⁴ A recurring theme for an

⁴ See the appendix for those specific policy positions in which at least half of the parties, who refer to it unambiguously, have a Eurocritical position.

increased number of parties is the reference to a transfer of competences back to the member states. No less than 6 of the 13 parties in 2017 referred to this in their manifestos as compared to only 2 of 9 parties in 2002. Three policy positions are viewed critically by at least half of the parties that explicitly refer to it - the aforementioned transfer of competences back to the member state, a decrease in the contributions of the Netherlands to the EU, and Federal Union.

The debate on the decrease of contributions of the Netherlands is an 'old' position, in that the debate on this started already in the early 1990s, when the Netherlands was the largest per capita net contributor to the EU budget of all the member states (Harryvan and Hoekstra, 2013). The debate on a Federal Union, implying far-reaching supranationalism, has been held on the political level ever since the start of the EU project, and came under increasing scrutiny with the end of the permissive consensus of the public towards the EU since the early 1990s (Hooghe and Marks, 2008).

6. CONCLUSION

While political parties in the Netherlands continue to support deepened and widened cooperation on the EU-level on those issues that are widely considered as having an international dimension - like migration flows, economic and debt crises, terrorism and international crime, and the environment - this paper finds that there is an increase in the amount of references that political parties directly make 'against' the EU. In light of earlier findings on the movements within (Dutch) political parties (notably Vollaard and Voerman, 2015, and Harryvan and Hoekstra, 2013), this result can be seen as a further support for the observation of increased Eurosceptic positions in the Netherlands over time. A similar finding on the state of party Euroscepticism in the Netherlands was reached, thereby using a different methodology - a process called triangulation.

Additionally, this paper presents a new way of measuring Euroscepticism, going beyond the current categorisations of Euroscepticism, thereby exploring the actual ratios of Eurosceptic policy positions against those favouring more cooperation and deeper and/or wider integration. While this method of measuring Euroscepticism is time-consuming, building a database of the exact positions of political parties across the European Union could provide insightful lessons in history, comparative politics, and the (d)evolution of European integration. As such, future research, conducting elaborate content analyses of the party programmes in the European Union, would offer a comparative dimension to the study of Euroscepticism across time and space.

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APPENDIX

This table shows the policy positions where at least half of the parties who explicitly stated a preference to have less EU-level cooperation on that issue or where European integration was perceived negatively.

2002	Nr of negative - positive positions
Decrease national contributions	1-0
EU army	3-1
Federal Union	3-3
Transfer of competences back to MSs	2-0
2006	
Decrease national contributions	2-0
Federal Union	4-1
Tax harmonisation	1-0
Transfer of competences back to MSs	3-0
2010	
Decrease national contributions	7-0
EU army	3-2
Federal Union	1-1
Transfer of competences back to MSs	3-0
2012	
Decrease national contributions	4-0
ESM emergency funds should not be extended	5-1
Eurobonds	2-2
Federal Union	4-1
Pension systems	4-0
Stop EU agency creation	1-0
Transfer of competences back to MSs	2-0
2017	
Decrease national contributions	4-1
EU army	4-2
Federal Union	1-1
Greece to leave Euro	1-0
Greece out of Schengen	1-0
Healthcare	1-0
Leave Schengen	2-0