

Equivocal Euroscepticism: How some radical right parties play between ‘reform’ and ‘rejection’ lines

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While the main Western European radical right parties have all espoused Eurosceptic positions since the turn of the twenty-first century, their Euroscepticism has come in varying degrees of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ opposition at different moments in time (Taggart and Sczcerbiak 2008). As Mudde (2007) noted in the middle of the 2000-2010 decade, few radical right parties were openly ‘Eurorejectionist’ and advocated that their countries should leave the EU. Instead, as he put it, ‘the majority of populist radical right parties believe in the basic tenets of European integration, but are sceptical about the current direction of the EU’ (Mudde 2007, 164). Although highly critical of Brussels bureaucracy and the idea of ‘ever greater Union’, these parties were largely what we could call ‘Euro-reformist’ rather than ‘Euro-rejectionist’.

This has changed however over the past decade. Most notably, if we take the principal radical right party group in the European Parliament, Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF), we find that two members – the French National Front (FN) and the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) – now present an unequivocal ‘rejection’ stance and call for their countries to withdraw from the EU. At the same time, the FN and PVV’s three main partners, the Flemish Vlaams Belang (VB), the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and the Italian Northern League (LN) have never explicitly advocated withdrawal. Given that we would expect party positions on European integration to play an especially important role in determining EP alliances, this raises the question: Are the European integration positions of some of the parties in the ENF on such a key issue as European integration really so incongruent?

In the case of the VB, its position is in reality not so surprising due to the economic importance of the EU institutions to the Flemish economy. However, those of the FPÖ and the LN seem more peculiar and are the focus of this paper. Specifically, we ask the question: how Eurosceptic are these parties? To answer this, we look at the positions and rhetoric on the EU of the two parties in the period immediately before and after the last European Parliament elections in 2014. The paper proceeds as follows. In the first section, we present the theoretical background to our study, in particular discussing the work on ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Euroscepticism developed over several publications by Taggart and Sczcerbiak. We also look at how the Chapel Hill study of parties’ European integration positions has estimated those of the LN, FPÖ

and its main current EP partners. We then proceed to our analysis of the two parties by looking, firstly, at their manifestos for the EP elections in 2014 and, secondly, at a sample of speeches from their respective leaders, Heinz Christian Strache and Matteo Salvini. We find that LN and FPÖ are neither consistently ‘hard’ nor ‘soft’ Eurosceptics but instead move between these two poles depending on the specific EU related issue and the type of communication. We conclude that Euroscepticism is not only a position in flux over time for these parties, but that the FPÖ and the LN practice what we term ‘equivocal Euroscepticism’. In other words, they espouse both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ Eurosceptic positions during the *same* time period, playing between the lines of Eurorejectionism and Euroreformism. Through equivocal Euroscepticism, parties give themselves the freedom to combine positions regarding a single issue, which seem otherwise contradictory.

HARD AND SOFT EUROSCEPTICISM

The distinction between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Euroscepticism introduced and then refined by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001; 2008) remains the most influential conceptualization of party-based Euroscepticism. In their 2008 volume (Taggart and Szczerbiak; 2008a: 7-8, bold by authors), they define these forms of Euroscepticism as follows:

*‘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’*

*‘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’*

Most notably, Kopecký and Mudde (2002: 300) have criticized Taggart and Szczerbiak, for example judging the category of soft Euroscepticism as too broad and as not doing enough justice to the fact that parties may mix criticism of the EU with support for it. Instead, Kopecký and Mudde propose four ideal types of party positions on Europe, ranging from enthusiastic backing for integration to outright rejection. They reserve the term ‘Eurosceptics’ for parties which

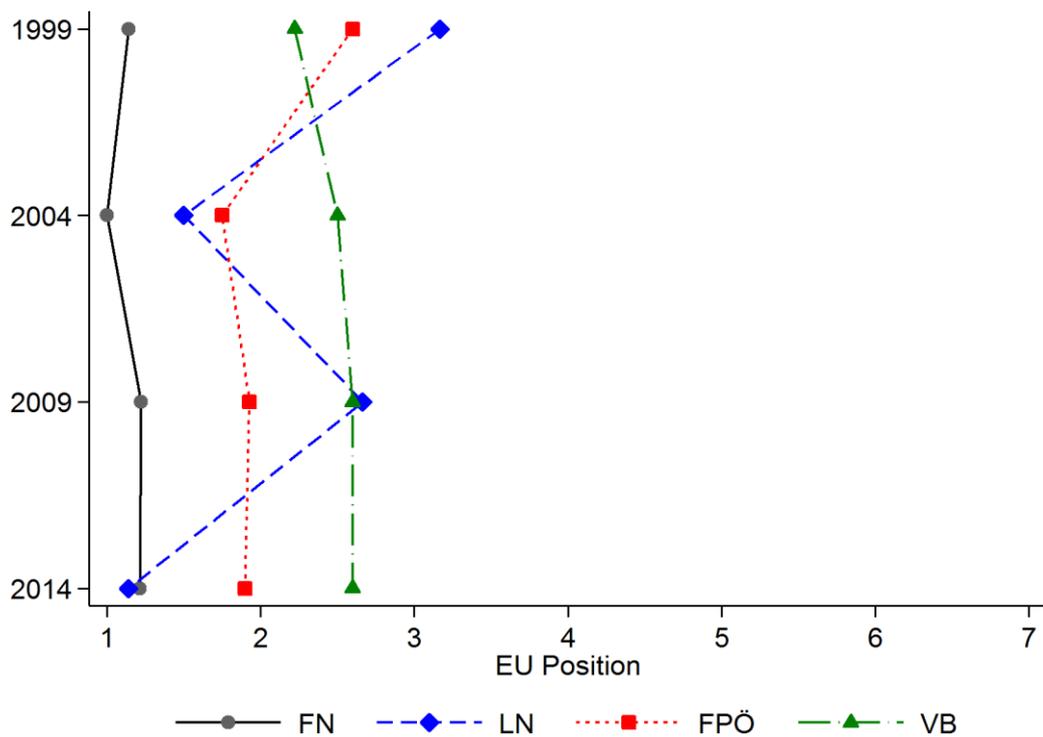
‘combine Europhile and EU-pessimist positions. They support the general ideas of European integration, but are pessimistic about the EU’s current and/or future reflection of these ideas’

In place of ‘hard’ Eurosceptics, they then identify what they term ‘Eurorejects’. These parties ‘subscribe neither to the ideas underlying the process of European integration nor to the EU’. Common to both approaches is a clear distinction between parties *either* rejecting the fundamental ideas of European integration *or* being more or less critical but not rejecting. Irrespective of their differences, the two approaches noted above raise the question of whether most radical right populist parties do fall neatly into these categories and if they do, whether they maintain such positions. In other words, are radical right parties clearly ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ (or, as Kopecký and Mudde would put it, ‘Eurosceptic’ or ‘Eurorejectionist’), at any one time and over time?

We can get an indication of whether radical right parties maintain positions *over* time by looking at the positions on European integration for four ENF parties according to the experts surveyed by the Chapel Hill expert survey from 1999 until 2014 (Bakker et al. 2015). In Figure 1 below, we can see that Front National (FN) has consistently taken very negative positions towards European integration, while the Belgian Vlaams Belang (VB) has a consistently neutral position. The two parties which we focus in this paper on, however, the LN and FPÖ, behave differently. The FPÖ has apparently struck a course between the VB and FN after moving from a more Europhile position almost two decades ago, while the LN appears to have zig-zagged between the two positions. This still leaves open the question, however, of the degree to which our parties’ positions on Europe are fixed at a given moment in time. For example, is a party that is considered ‘soft Eurosceptic’ consistently ‘soft’? Or can parties mix ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ positions contemporaneously? If this was the case, it

could explain the zig-zag measurement by party experts, making their placement dependent on which positions are most salient at the time. In the next sections, we will examine the position by looking at the 2014 European Parliament manifestos of the two parties and references to Europe and the EU in speeches by their respective leaders.

Figure 1: *Euroscepticism of four radical right parties, Chapel Hill 1999-2014.*



LN AND FPÖ 2014 EP ELECTION MANIFESTOS

The Euromanifesto project (Braun et al. 2015) codes the policy statements in party's electoral programs for the European Parliament elections. Every statement, called a quasi-sentence, is grouped by coders into pre-defined coding categories covering policy areas and governmental levels. The resulting data is the relative frequency for each coding category. The positions are calculated by subtracting the sum of relative frequencies of negative statements from the sum of relative frequencies of positive statements and dividing the result by the sum of all statements. Thus, positions range from 1 (all statements are positive) to -1 (all statements are negative). As the focus is

on European elections, the coding scheme covers a great variety of EU and European integration issues.

Table 1: EU positions of LN and FPÖ in their 2014 Euromanifestos

Party	EU principles	EU institutions	Enlargement	Policies	Euro
LN	-0.80	-0.03	-1	0.27	-0.94
FPÖ	0.53	-1	-1	-0.20	-1

Table 1 summarizes the positions of the LN and FPÖ on a variety of EU related dimensions. The statements regarding the principles of the EU and European integration are concerned with the idea of the EU, integration in general, the idea of further integration or its reversal. Statements regarding the EU institutions comprise what parties say about the EP, the Commission, the bureaucracy, the Central Bank etc. When the parties discuss issues of EU enlargement, this might include general positions as well as positions towards specific candidate countries. The EU policies cover positive and negative statements regarding EU economic policies, including the Structural Funds, and social policies, culture and identity politics as well as immigration. Thus, we cannot deduct any specific positions from this figure; instead it shows us whether these two parties talk about specific policies in a European frame and, when they do it, whether it is more positive or negative.

While the position of the Lega Nord regarding the principles of the EU and European integration is negative, the position of the Austrian Freedom Party is markedly positive. Closer inspection of the data shows that the negative position of the Lega Nord is based on the fact that only 2 percent of its manifesto contains positive but 18 percent contain negative statements. The most frequent negative statements of Lega Nord in this category call for decentralisation of power from the EU back to the country or rejection of further centralisation of power to the EU. The negative statements in the FPÖ Euromanifesto only make up 4 percent of the document. Furthermore, these statements are very general, either comprising ‘[h]ostile mentions of Europe or the EC/EU referring to the manifesto country in general’ (category 1-110, Braun et al. 2015: 35) or ‘[n]ational contributions to finance the EC/EU or its policies are criticized or rejected’ (category 1-1101, Braun et al. 2015: 35). Positive

statements about European integration, on the other hand, make up 14 percent of the manifesto. Most of these statements either oppose political decision-making at a lower than EU level or positively reference its own competence to govern at the EU level.

The two parties diverge again with their positions on the European institutions. The Lega Nord states a neutral position in its 2014 Euromanifesto. This is a combination of positive mentions of the European Parliament and criticism of the complexity of the EU system as well as the European Court of Justice. The sole point of criticism by the FPÖ is regarding the executive and administrative efficiency of the European Union.

Table 1 shows that both parties generally take very negative positions towards the enlargement of the EU. For the FPÖ, this is a general position against any enlargement into ‘geographically, culturally, religiously, or ethnically non-European’ areas (FPÖ 2014). Furthermore, the FPÖ expresses a clear rejection of the Turkish EU membership, making ‘Turkey not on board’ one of their catch-phrases. In the same way, Lega Nord expresses a clear stance against the Turkish accession, stating that Turkey is neither geographically nor spiritually European (Lega Nord 2014).

The overall finding regarding the policies of the European Union is that both parties discuss them in a generally balanced way, although the Lega Nord makes more positive and the FPÖ more negative statements. In particular, the FPÖ rejects EU regulations, environmental protection standards and protectionism. The LN positively mentions EU policies regarding infrastructure and agriculture, market regulation and protectionism, as well as culture and education. However, the party also criticises the Single Market, EU environmental protection standards and EU policies regarding immigration.

Table 1 also shows how LN and FPÖ discussed the Euro in their manifestos. Both parties show their clear opposition against the common European currency. The FPÖ states quite clearly that ‘should it not be possible to stabilise the Euro, this includes the possibility of an independent economic and monetary policy’ which includes the return to national currencies or the creation of a currency for countries with similar

national economies (FPÖ 2014). In line with this, the FPÖ advocates that ‘weaker’ national economies should leave the Euro in case the currency cannot be stabilised. Thus, while the FPÖ does not outright call for the end of the Euro, the proposed alternatives lead to a *de facto* end of one common currency. The LN on the other hand considers the Euro an irredeemable failure and urges member states to return to their previous national currencies.

In sum, the Lega Nord takes very negative positions on the principles of European integration and the Euro, a cornerstone of the EU project. On the other hand, EU policies are discussed in more positive terms and the LN begins its manifesto with a premise in which it states, firstly, that the debate about Europe and the Euro does not mean ‘that we are embarking on the path of populism and Euroscepticism that is against Europe as a whole’. Instead, the text continues, the LN wants ‘a more democratic Europe, that is closer to the citizens and their needs’. For that reason, it says it believes that ‘another Europe is possible: the Europe of the peoples and the regions’.

The FPÖ takes different positions but a similar approach. In particular with regards to the Euro, the Austrians do not state a reversal directly but propose alternatives that – if put into practice – would lead to the end of the common currency and pit North against South in the EU. Implementation of this proposal would logically lead to a foundational change within the Union, especially coming from a country that has introduced the Euro. Furthermore, the FPÖ is critical of how the EU makes decisions and which policy decisions it makes. At the same time, the Austrians do not express fundamental doubts about the foundational principles of European integration in the Euromanifesto. Both parties thus display a mixed message of not outright wanting to dismantle the European project yet stating criticism and proposing alternatives that point towards fundamental changes to the European Union as it is today.

LN AND FPÖ LEADERS' SPEECHES

This section investigates how the EU and European integration is discussed in speeches by the leaders of the two parties. The analysis for Lega Nord is based on 20 speeches by the party leader Matteo Salvini with a combined length of ca. 100,000 words. These are rally or campaign speeches that Salvini held in towns and cities across Italy between March 2014 and June 2015. They are, thus, mainly targeted at Lega Nord supporters and sympathisers. The analysis for the FPÖ draws on well over 100,000 words from the following five different types of speeches given by the leader of Austrian Freedom Party Heinz Christian Strache: 1) Ash Wednesday speeches, 2) televised in-depth interviews, 3) international speeches given at political rallies hosted by the Alternative for Germany (AfD), 4) televised debates during the 2013 national elections campaign, and 5) speeches on the floor of the Austrian parliament. These types vary by format but are structurally similar within each category, thus allowing us to examine both functional variation and internal consistency.

Speech analysis method

We first identified all statements about the European Union in each speech. Each statement was then coded in a three-step process. The first code was a binary assessment about whether the statement is positive or negative towards the EU or EU policies. In a second step, the statements were grouped into one of five content categories (EU and integration in general; EU institutions; EU enlargement; EU policies; the Euro). In a third step, the EU-related statements were analysed in an inductive sub-coding that captures a more fine-grained content.

Lega Nord leader Matteo Salvini

In the 20 rally or campaign speeches that Salvini held in towns and cities across Italy between March 2014 and June 2015, we identified 117 statements that referred directly to issues regarding the European Union. Each of the 117 statements contains one or two very closely related sentences.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the five main coding categories. We found that 95 percent of the statements are negative. All positive statements were towards the first category, i.e. the EU and EU integration in general.

Table 2: Distribution of five main categories in Salvini’s speeches

Content	Relative frequency in %	Absolute frequency
EU and integration in general	28.2	33
EU institutions	21.3	25
Special issues (enlargement, Turkey)	4.3	5
EU policies (incl. immigration)	23.1	27
the Euro	23.1	27
Total	100	117

Of these 177 statements, 88 were coded with a further level of sub-codes and, of those, 18 had two sub-codes. These sub-codes specify the content with more detail. This means that the statements about the Euro will not have further coding but all other codes have. Table 3 summarizes the content of all 106 sub-codes.

Table 3: Distribution issue sub-categories in Salvini’s speeches

Rank	Content	Absolute frequency
1	Sovereignty	17
2	Agriculture	14
3	Another Europe	12
4	Enemies (EU, EU bureaucrats, Brussels is the enemy)	12
5	Neo-lib EU	11
6	Regulation	11
7	Homogenising	10
8	Family	8
9	Enlargement	4
10	Turkey	4
11	Reforms	2

12	Immigration	1
Total		106

Within the five categories, a number of sub-codes are dominant. As noted above, all positive statements fell into the first category, EU and integration in general. These statements are sub-coded with the ‘Another Europe’ code. In them, Salvini switches from solely criticizing the existing European Union and mentions that an alternative unspecified European entity could be built. For example, he says: ‘We are not against Europe. Treviso is in Europe. Milan is in Europe. We are not in Canada or North Africa or somewhere else. But we want a different Europe, founded on work, on respect, on rights, on help for agriculture that is being massacred.’ (speech 4). Similarly, he says that ‘We will tour the squares of Europe to explain that Europe is something different from the one they are trying to force on us’ (speech 14). The other statements in this category are very negative. The two main contents are that Salvini criticizes the EU for its neo-liberal nature and the homogenising effect it has and is said to be seeking to impose. He makes regular statements such as ‘Europe is only based on business, the market and profit’ (speech 6) and also refers on several occasions to the ‘Europe of the banks’ that wants everything to be ‘big’.

Regarding EU institutions, Salvini’s emphasis on the loss of national sovereignty stands out. Furthermore, he stresses how EU officials are ‘enemies’, going so far as to calling them ‘criminals who want to destroy identities and diversity’ (speech 18) and referring to ‘the anti-democratic beasts that govern this Europe’ (speech 19). In one speech, he claims ‘I don’t think that Hitler and Stalin sitting down together at lunch could have come up with such a diabolically and craftily structured mechanism as Europe. They are robbing our rights, one by one’ (speech 11). Nonetheless, even as Salvini is damning Europe consistently across the speeches, he never says he wants Italy to leave the EU but only that he wants to (radically) reform it: ‘We will change Europe which is a criminal Soviet Union’ (speech 18).

While Salvini criticises all current enlargement negotiations in one statement, he concentrates on his opposition to Turkey in the remaining 4 of those 5 statements. He decries the amount of money the EU supposedly gives to Turkey in most of these statements (claiming this was a figure of 12 billion Euro, speeches 6 and 10), he also

says that '[s]ome crazy people want to let Turkey into Europe. First of all the Turks should apologise for the million [Armenian] deaths it caused and then we can talk about it.' (speech 14). He mentions on several occasions that the Turks are too smart to actually join the EU and are simply taking the EU's financial aid, which they use to fund businesses that then compete unfairly with Italian ones.

Salvini also complains very frequently about the amount of regulations the EU puts on Italian companies (11 statements). In particular, he focuses on the Italian agricultural sector, which – as he terms it – has been burdened with 'insane regulations' (speech 6) and 'massacred' (speeches 4 and 9) by the 'bastards from Brussels' (speech 8). Furthermore, the value of the traditional family plays a prominent role (8 statements), where 'Europe tells us that the family of the future is one with two mothers, two fathers, seven cousins and eight grandparents.' (speech 9)

FPÖ leader Heinz Christian Strache

503 of the 549 EU related statements in Strache's speeches were negative (92 percent). This clearly underscores the general Eurosceptical nature of the Austrian Freedom Party even if we consider that the extent of negative references varied by speech type and time.

Table 4 shows the distribution of negative statements across these five categories in Strache's speeches. Just as in Salvini's speeches, nearly all of positive statements were towards the first category, i.e. the EU and EU integration in general. In contrast to Salvini, the Euro plays a much smaller role in the FPÖ leader's speeches while the special issues are more diverse (see below) and take up more room.

Table 4: Distribution of five categories in Strache’s speeches

Content	Relative frequency in %	Absolute frequency
EU and integration in general	31.6	159
EU institutions	20.6	104
Specific Issues (Islam, migration, Enlargement, Turkey)	18.4	93
EU policies	21.2	107
the Euro	7.9	40
Total	100	549

Of particular importance for this paper is that, while strongly criticizing many aspects of integration and the EU, Strache simultaneously continued to emphasize that the FPÖ does not advocate Austria’s departure from either European Union or the Euro zone (‘AuXIT’ as it was termed).

‘No I have never spoken of AuXIT but I am confronted every time by journalists with this term and that you can check. ... Apparently, it is not welcome that we have a clear position. Namely that we want to reform the European Union...’ Ö1 Klartext, 23-11-2016

Instead of calling for Austria to leave the EU, Strache demanded that the European Union undergo different kinds of changes ranging from more limited reforms all the way to a complete deconstruction and devolution of the current system in favor of a federated economic community of sovereign nation states. As he put it:

‘No! We need a change in this European Union. Turn back toward the interest in peace in Europe like the founding fathers of the EU used to live it. It is this path [Europe] has left. And that is an ungodly path. Toward centralism, toward some federal state construct ... [where one] abolishes the sovereignty of states within the European Union.’ ZIB 2, ORF 24-10-2016

Table 5: Distribution of issue sub-categories in Strache’s speeches

Rank	Content	Parl Speeches	Other	Total
1	Immigration	82	20	102
2	Euro	46	15	61
3	Another Europe	24	36	60
4	Enemies (EU, EU bureaucrats, Brussels)	34	13	47
4	Reforms	29	18	47
5	Islam	28	14	42
6	Sovereignty	11	30	41
7	TTIP/CETA	11	18	29
8	Regulation	9	9	18
9	Neo-lib EU	9	8	17
10	Enlargement	1	11	12
11	Russia	8	3	11
12	Turkey	5	5	10
13	Greece	3	2	5
14	Agriculture	0	1	1
	Total	300	203	503

Outside the parliamentary debate, the top issue for the FPÖ is its preference for ‘another Europe’ as reflected in numerous demands for the EU’s transformation and for curtailing its power. This topic goes hand in hand with the second most frequently issue category in outside parliamentary debate, which are claims about the EU’s infringement on member state sovereignty. Strache argued that:

‘We need to concentrate again on economic cooperation and not to keep making the mistake of creating a politically centralist federal project in which everything from the configuration of tractor seats to the curvature of cucumbers is regulated, regulated by force, ...’. Parliament/136th Session, 6-7-2016

Prior to the refugee crisis, the Euro and associated issues such as the European Stability Mechanism were frequent targets of the Freedom Party. Strache was especially critical of the various bailout mechanisms and blamed the Southern economies as well as the policies of the European Central Bank and other European institutions for the problems that had ensued.

‘[The Greeks] cheated their way into [the Euro zone] through false and incomplete reporting. But when the EU noticed this, they did not follow through. ...then [the EU] was breaking the European treaties to advance in reality a debt union...’ Parliament/88th Session 17-07-2015

However, Strache seems to recognize that calling for a return to the Austrian Schilling would only be feasible if the Eurozone as a whole were to be dismantled and thus he rather advocated creating a North/strong and South/weak Euro currency instead.

Other prominent positions held by the FPÖ leader concern the reorganization of the EU in favor a community of sovereign nation states, criticism of Islam, the rejection of the free trade agreement between the EU and the US and Canada (TTIP/CETA), support for stronger ties with Russia, the condemnation of Turkey as well as highlighting the negative repercussions of EU enlargement. He regularly points out that neither Turkey nor Islam has an equal place in Europe, and more specifically in the European Union. As such, any future enlargement of the EU containing Turkey is an anathema to the FPÖ.

‘We have always said very clearly, Turkey should and must never become member of the EU.’ ORF Sommergespräch, 22-8-2016

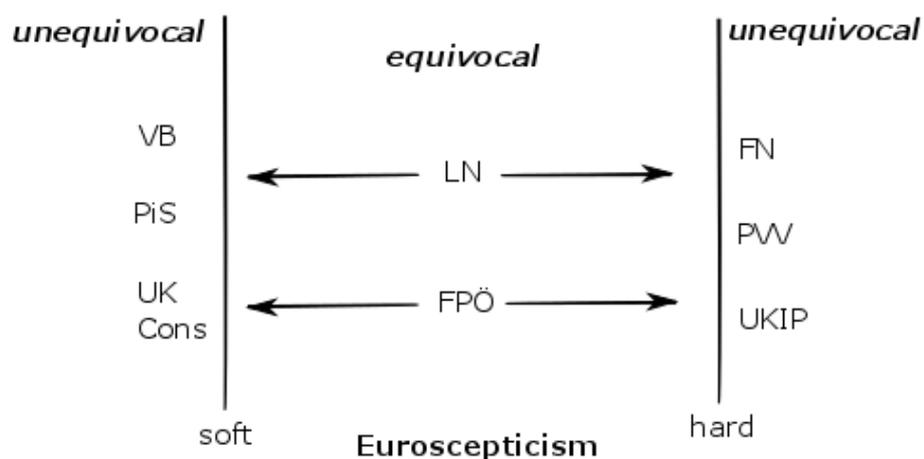
PLAYING BETWEEN THE LINES

Based on our analysis above, the LN and the FPÖ appeared to combine elements of both hard and soft Euroscepticism in the period we examined them. Neither party formally expressed a blanket and principled objection to European integration in the

ways that clear-cut cases of hard Eurosceptics like UKIP have done. Nor did either of the parties in their manifestos or their leaders in speeches express a desire for their countries to leave the European Union as Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen have. From this perspective, both the LN and the FPÖ seem to fall within the ‘soft’ Eurosceptic category. At the same time, however, if we recall the latter half of Taggart and Sczcerbiak’s ‘hard Euroscepticism’ definition, then we can ask whether – while couching their criticism of the EU in terms of urgent need for ‘reform’ rather than ‘rejection’ – these are parties ‘whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived’.

Rather than labeling them as either ‘hard’ or ‘soft’, however, our analysis suggests that we should instead consider these as parties which pivot from soft to hard Euroscepticism not only over time, but even within the same time period. In contrast to the unequivocal ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ Euroscepticism of other parties, the LN and the FPÖ play between the lines of the ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ or ‘Eurorejectionist’ and ‘Euroreformist’ positions which are unequivocally espoused by other Eurosceptic parties. Figure 2 below sets out this mechanism.

Figure 2: Theory of Equivocal Euroscepticism



The question that develops straight from our proposition of Equivocal Euroscepticism is why parties embark on such a balancing act instead of taking unequivocal positions towards European integration. The two main theoretical explanations for party behavior are voter considerations and political competitions. We will, thus, consider each for the FPÖ and LN in turn.

With regard to the behavior of the FPÖ, it is important to recall that the Austrian public has been remarkably Eurosceptical for a country with an open economy in center of the continent. For example, only five years after accession, Austrian support for membership plummeted to 34% and thus the third lowest rank of all member states according to Eurobarometer data. At the same time, the FPÖ is faced with the curious situation that, while public support for the EU is low among Austrians, their willingness to leave it is even lower. On average, 70% of Austrians want the country to stay in the EU. In fact, in some 50 polls taken on this question between 1995 and now, only an average of about 23% favored leaving (ÖGfE 2016, Schmidt 2016). What is more, issues such as the financial crisis and the refugee crisis have also exposed the limits of what a small country can do on its own. Thus, on the one hand, for the Freedom Party to do well in an election, it must be the relatively most credibly Eurosceptical of any of the party political choices available. On the other, it cannot simply reject European integration and openly pursue hard Euroscepticism without political peril.

A hard Eurosceptical position would lock the FPÖ into a minority position that was useful as long as it styled itself as an up and coming protest party. However in order to gain a majority in a national election and win the government, it needs to reach beyond its core voters and moderate just enough to be acceptable to people who are more mainstream. As a result, the politically most advantageous position is one that allows the FPÖ to pivot between different stances from a more hardline view to more nuanced criticism of the EU.

We may summarize the argument as follows: The baseline for the FPÖ's overall position on the EU is grounded in hard sovereignty-based and identity-based Euroscepticism. This forms the ideological predisposition of the party's activists and core supporters, anchoring the FPÖ's approach to Europe toward the far right end of

the political spectrum. This constraint ensures that the party leadership cannot move to a centrist position without peril and that the FPÖ returns to a hardline stance when it feels under pressure. At the same time, the FPÖ's specific themes and messages are shaped by the more heterogeneous views of the EU by the party's targeted electorate as well as the stances of the other parties. Thirdly, over time pressure builds in the party to seek government participation. It is understood that the necessary coalitions with other parties require a degree of 'mainstreaming' (cf. Akkerman, de Lange, and Matthijs Rooduijn 2015: 6-22) and thus the adoption of a softer position. This is tolerated among activists and core partisans presumably as long as the FPÖ remains the relatively more Eurosceptical choice. Given this constellation, a position between hard and soft Euroscepticism from where to shift into both directions would be reasonably the most preferable position.

In the case of the LN, Europe has long been an issue on which the party has felt able to quickly shift position according to the political needs of the time. In the mid/late 1990s, the LN was among the most Europhile parties in Italy (Quaglia, 2008) since it saw participation in European integration and the risks of Italy not meeting the criteria for entry into the Euro as a way of dividing the prosperous North of the country from the South. Yet, in the space of just a couple of years once Italy had been accepted into the first round of Eurozone countries, the LN quickly shifted to Eurosceptic positions as (a) the possibility of using failure to participate in the Euro as an issue to separate the North faded and (b) public discontent with the EU began to rise. Albeit in less dramatic forms, this tendency to zig-zag on the EU according to the political needs and opportunities of the time has continued over the past fifteen years as the Chapel Hill data presented earlier demonstrated. Unlike immigration, for example, this is an issue on which the LN has seemed to feel able to shift position and behavior quickly and without fearing the cost (for example, it voted for the Lisbon Treaty in parliament while regularly denigrating the EU outside). Our finding from the data for 2014-2015 that the LN is almost solely critical (and vehemently so) of the EU while never actually calling for Italy to leave is thus consistent with the party's historical approach to the issue.

CONCLUSION

The literature on Euroscepticism has a tradition of debating categorizations for different versions for being sceptic or rejectionist. One of the central features of these categorizations is that they make a clear distinction between parties that criticize the EU but do not reject it and those that reject the EU. While this differentiation seems plausible at first, our paper shows that parties can play both sides at the same time. This is because ‘rejection’ or ‘hard’ Euroscepticism does not only entail parties clearly stating that the whole European project should be abolished or their country should leave the EU, as parties like the French FN or the Dutch PVV do. Hard Euroscepticism also includes calls for reforms that would de facto alter the very nature of the European Union.

Analyzing the 2014 Euromanifestos of the Lega Nord and the Austrian Freedom Party as well as speeches by their leaders, we saw that these two parties not only combine positive references to parts of the European Union with very strong criticism of the EU. They also combine ‘reform’ proposals that would fundamentally alter the nature of the EU with dismissals of outright rejections of the EU, the Euro or European integration in general. Thus, while each of their individual positions towards the European project is unambiguous, these two parties jump between soft and hard Eurosceptic statements, expressing what we call ‘equivocal Euroscepticism’. This is not simply an issue of parties changing their positions over time. Instead, LN and FPÖ combine these positions at one point in time. Our results therefore indicate that the established categories of Euroscepticism do not capture all ranges of parties’ critical stances towards the EU. This is especially the case for the idea that there is clear distinction between ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ Eurosceptic parties at one point in time and an individual party falls into one category alone (i.e. practicing what we have called ‘unequivocal Euroscepticism’). In short, Equivocal Euroscepticism, where it can be practised, allows parties to have their EU cake and eat it.

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