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# Reformation of Attitudes towards the European Integration

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## Abstract

This study reviews the growing far right movements as the basis of Euroscepticism and reforming attitudes towards the European integration process by focusing on the Netherlands during the period of 2004-2009. It is argued that Euroscepticism indicates ‘a model of spiral type cause-and-effect chain’ both at the national and supranational levels. In light of the findings of the study the following hypotheses are verified: “H1- Since 2004, there has been a more salient Euroscepticism general in Europe through the Eurosceptic tendencies of some leading EU member countries such as the Netherlands.” “H2- Despite the visible influence of public-based one, party-based Euroscepticism has been the prominent driving force in the Netherlands.” This research aims to shed light on future analyses on the increasing far right and strengthening Euroscepticism in the other European countries by evaluating the reasons and most probable end results of this processes.

## Keywords

Euroscepticism, European integration, the Netherlands, far-right political attitudes

## Introduction

There has been a growing interest towards the right-wing policies and parties in Europe over the past decade. This attitude has generated a sweeping political change across a number of countries such as the Netherlands, France, and the UK which have special importance for the European integration, because they are still the biggest driving forces of the European Union (EU). The effects of this right-wing political orientation on the distribution of power among the EU institutions and member countries, on the patterns of European integration and collective European identity-formation remain unclear, despite the growing scholarly researches and analyses aiming at to figure out these outcomes. However, it is possible to point out some direct effects even today. As noted by Adam and Maier (2011) the European Parliament (EP), one of the key decision making bodies of the Union together with the ordinary legislative procedure (formerly the co-decision procedure) presents the obvious examples of the rightist tendencies in the EU.

The evolution of the composition of the EP depending on the last two election results show that the far right, anti-immigrant and anti-EU political parties are getting impetus among the European citizens as observed in 2009 EP elections in which the Party for Freedom (PVV) from the Netherlands gets 16.97 percent of the total Dutch votes (the second largest among all Dutch parties) and in 2014 EP elections in which the National Front (FN) from France gets 24.86 percent of the total French votes (the largest among all French parties). Owing to the fact that the EP is the only directly-elected EU institution, national policies and especially extreme right tendencies are more likely to affect the general political configuration of the EU in the future than before.

Contrary to the common knowledge that reduces the rise of extreme right tendencies and its repercussions on the future of the EU to patriotic feelings and identity perceptions only, skeptical attitudes towards the EU are multidimensional (Werts, Scheepers and Lubbers 2012, Boomgaarden et al. 2011, Garry and Tilley 2009). At this

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point, the main questions that arise are ‘what are the motivations that foster such skeptical attitudes about the EU and European integration at the domestic level and which of these motivations stem from the EU-level and EU governance per se, and what are the intended and unintended policy outcomes of these motivations?’

While determining the causes of these motivations first of all it is crucial to identify and to differentiate Euroscepticism at the national as well as at the supranational (EU) level. Evaluating the recent developments in the EU, Hartleb (2012, p.46) mentions of “*the dawning of a new era of renationalization*” under the shed of Euroscepticism specifically after the rejection of European Constitution in 2005 by the French and Dutch citizens. The EU Constitutional process provided a unique context during which both the EU’s system of governance and the EU as a political project including the notion of growing collective identity-formation have been politicized by some of the key politicians of the time as in the Netherlands. As emphasized by Hobolt and Brouard (2011, p.309); “(p)aradoxically, the constitutional process was (...) halted by citizens of member states traditionally seen as among the most pro-European. This raises the question of whether these votes reflected a tide of Euroscepticism or whether we should look for the answer elsewhere: in domestic politics (...)”.

While studying Euroscepticism and its effects on European integration, this study analyzes specific processes and developments within a two-dimensional model by taking the Netherlands as a case study for both the national level and the EU level, comparatively. In this context, the study focuses on the general side effect of the domestic tendencies on the EU by formulating the hypotheses below:

H1- Since 2004, there has been a more salient Euroscepticism general in Europe through the Eurosceptic tendencies of some leading EU member countries such as the Netherlands.

H2- Despite the visible influence of public-based one, party-based Euroscepticism has been the prominent driving force in the Netherlands.

## **Changing attitudes of member countries and their multi-dimensional features**

Aiming to improve general understanding regarding the widely discussed changing attitudes towards the EU and Euroscepticism, it is prominent to make a distinction between the driving forces of these attitudes at the national and supranational (EU) level.

At the supranational level there are five prevalent dimensions of EU attitudes adopted by many scholars: *performance*, *identity*, *affection*, *utilitarianism*, and *strengthening* (Boomgarden et al. 2011). These dimensions are the main indicators of the general positioning of the European citizens about the future of the EU and particularly the process of European integration. According to Van Spanje and De Vreese (2011), we can talk about an anti-EU attitude or Euroscepticism among EU citizens when one or more of the following issues are prevalent: if the evaluations of the EU’s democratic performance are poor, if the evaluations of its policy performance are bad, if there are negative affections towards the Union, if there is an opposition to further EU integration in terms of deepening and enlargement, or if there is a lack of adherence to EU identity, then it means there is a growing anti-EU attitude and Euroscepticism among the European citizens. Recent studies and exploratory factor analyses have verified each of these assumptions (Werts et al. 2012, Garry and Tilley 2009).

These and some other studies have also shown that at the national level there are several antecedents of these attitudes like economic conditions, domestic politics, nationalist feelings as well as patriotic movements, social and cultural differences, and so on with diversifying degrees. Among those factors listed above, probably the most salient and decisive one in analyzing the public attitudes towards the EU is the economic conditions (Garry and Tilley 2009). However, in practice, attitudes are not always related to the economic conditions only. Whereas the economic situation of the country and of the Union and future expectations about European integration play an important role in the French public, socio-cultural and identity based topics have become more prominent in the discussions about the EU and European integration in the Netherlands.

Regarding current economic conditions of the member countries and the expected end results of further integration, cost-benefit analysis and losers versus gainers perceptions are also identified as significant predictors (Boomgarden et al. 2011, Garry and Tilley 2009) especially after the Maastricht Treaty. This point of view has transformed the EU from an economic community to a political union. Either by economic, cultural or political reasons, under different

domestic circumstances at the national level, these antecedents turn into Eurosceptical attitudes and exercise influence upon the choices of voters in the member countries.

Arguably, political parties, both the mainstream and the extremist ones, can have increasing authority on the public opinion and the political choices of voters specifically in times of elections both at the national and supranational level, even if those parties do not follow the same or similar discourses. For instance, radical right parties usually use a negative rhetoric regarding the European integration and collective European identity-formation in order to increase the number of their supporters. Vasilopoulou (2011, p. 226) argues that “(d)ue to the nationalistic elements of their ideology, these parties consider supranationalism as an enemy of the nation-state”. Referring to the analyses of Taggart and Szczerbiak, she categorizes the radical right parties and in general terms “Eurosceptics” into three patterns of opposition towards the European matters: “*rejecting, conditional and compromising*” (Vasilopoulou 2011, p. 229). Accordingly, some radical right parties (rejecting Eurosceptics) look for the withdrawal of their country from the EU and harshly reject further integration, although they accept common cultural, historical and religious European characteristics. However, some of them (compromising Eurosceptics) criticize the system of the EU and argue that European integration is not an indispensable process, although some of its aspects (particularly the ones about financial issues) are beneficial to the state. Finally another group of radical right parties (conditional Eurosceptics) come up with conditions under which they would support cooperation for further integration and they accept the common European heritage, although they have objections to the policies and institutions of EU governance.

In his doctoral dissertation, titled ‘Politicizing Europe: Patterns of party-based opposition to European integration’, Von Sydow (2013) studies politicizing European integration by focusing on public and party based Euroscepticism in some selected EU member countries’ party formations in a specific time period (1984-2009). Depending on the Expert Surveys used in his study, he approves that Euroscepticism is on the rise in Europe in general either on the extreme left or the extreme right of the party systems. And these tendencies are mostly observed in the leading EU member countries such as France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK.

For the Netherlands, it is possible to mention all patterns of oppositions as mentioned before in different periods of the Dutch political history under the different right wing party formations as studied in the following chapters. Yet, shortly, the most well-known far-right Dutch political party with an extreme right party rhetoric “the PVV” can be identified as a “rejecting Eurosceptic” since the beginning of its foundation.

## **A More Politicized EU and More Eurosceptic European Publics**

Since the Maastricht Treaty, the political issues regarding European integration have not only been discussed by the national elites alongside supranational/intergovernmental dimension at the EU level but also by ordinary citizens who are more or less interested in the politics of the EU also at the national level. It is because of the fact that the issue of European integration, which directly or indirectly affect all the European citizens, are becoming increasingly questionable. Furthermore, at the domestic level, the topic of the EU has become politicized through referendums, national elections or the EP elections (Adam and Maier 2011).

At the EU level, Euroscepticism, as one form of politicization, is generally attributable to intensified deepening and widening of the European integration process since the 1990s. The European single market, the European Economic and Monetary Union and its single currency; the ‘Euro’ have had a direct impact on the daily life of European citizens throughout this period. Parallel to this process, domestication of EU policies has increased public concerns about the negative consequences of European integration like actual and perceived immigration flows as a result of eastern enlargement and its social, cultural and economic consequences.

According to Garry and Tilley (2009, p.363), “*citizens who reside in states that are net contributors to the EU are particularly likely to have views on the EU that are shaped by their exclusive identity. This is because in such states citizens’ identity-related concerns will not be offset by monies arriving from the EU; rather, their concerns will be augmented by the fact that the EU is effectively redistributing the taxes of their national group to other national groups*”. This attitude is identified as economic xenophobia by these scholars and has a strong impact on EU integration in wealthy states.

Besides macroeconomic factors mentioned above that might constitute national attitudes, Garry and Tilley (2009) stress “exclusive” national identity as another important element that shape opinions on the EU. They argue that “(i)t

*may be possible to be strongly British and strongly pro-European, but it is an exclusive sense of national identity (if one feels solely British and has no other identity) that is likely to be the root of Euroscepticism” (Garry and Tilley 2009, p.67).*

At this point, it is necessary to identify clearly the term Euroscepticism in order to build up a sound basis for our research. Depending on some of the well-known dictionaries such as Oxford or Macmillan, a ‘Eurosceptic’ can be understood as the person who is opposed to increasing powers of the EU. Thus, Euroscepticism means opposition to an EU more powerful than the individual European member countries. By referring many scholars like Delwit, De Broewer, Handley, or Jansen, De Prat (2009, p.62) identifies Euroscepticism as *“the rejection of an undefined and unlimited process of continuing delegation and transference of state powers to the EU”*. However, probably the shortest and most unequivocal definition belongs to Paul Taggart, who mentions Euroscepticism as a *“touchstone of dissent”* across Europe (Taggart, 1998). This definition has been extended in the following years depending on the changing attitudes and policies of the member countries towards the EU and a distinction has been made between principled (hard) and contingent (soft) Euroscepticism (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008). While hard Euroscepticism rejects European integration in total, soft Euroscepticism only expresses doubts and concerns about some of the policies conducted by the EU and integration processes such as common foreign and security policy or single currency. Therefore, hard or principled Euroscepticism creates a strong dissent for further integration, including the notion of a stronger collective European identity-formation.

In one of their research conducted in 2002, Szczerbiak and Taggart categorize EU member countries in two different groups according to the party based hard or soft Euroscepticism existing at that time in these countries. Accordingly, Greece, Belgium, Sweden, France, and Denmark belong to the group of hard Eurosceptics, while Italy, Ireland, Finland, Germany, Portugal, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, and the UK take place in the group of soft Eurosceptics. However, since 2002, domestic party formations with the right wing tendencies and the level of public support provided for them have changed substantially. Therefore, some of the member countries listed above should be switched in between those two groups taking into account the current political tendencies in these countries. For instance, the Netherlands, as the case of this study, can easily find seat among the hard Eurosceptic members with the help of its extreme right political party PVV which is the third biggest party among all Dutch parties.

When we explore the underlying causes of changing attitudes, we return back to attitudes and encounter again with the economic evaluations, issues of national identity, and issues of migration and ethnic threat. Lucassen and Lubbers (2012, p.549) predicate their analyses on the realistic group conflict theory which indicates that *“in every society scarcity exists, and social groups have conflicting interests over these scarce goods”*. Although this brings about attitudinal evaluation through economic perspective, Lucassen and Lubbers also focus on different dimensions like conflicting interests on cultural values and concerns over national identity. In the framework of party politics and far right support, according to Lucassen and Lubbers (2012, p.552), *“certain social classes are more likely to perceive that their interests are under pressure from immigrants than others”*. Manual workers are especially included in their categorization since they face insecurity in case of further enlargement not only because of growing number of new manual workers but also because of the similarities of their skills with the those of the existing immigrants in Western Europe.

Euroscepticism gained strength with the first steps taken on the way towards single currency in 1999 and the EU enlargement waves in 2004 and 2007 that brought about the first signals of redistributive conflicts and identity problems in the EU. First enlargement waves in 1990s were including in the Western European countries that were historically, economically and politically European, however the successive expansions that took place in 2004 and 2007 respectively, meant the accession of relatively less prosperous Central and Eastern European countries with different economic and social systems as well as with different historical and political experiences. Increased differences and divergences in the enlarged Union eventually paved the way for burgeoning skeptical feelings about future of the EU. The skeptical feelings generally focus on the impact of enlargement on domestic job markets along with increasing globalization and such feelings are usually observed in old EU members such as France, Luxembourg, and the UK more than new EU members with some exceptions like the Czech Republic and Poland owing to the threat of cheap labor, low labor standards, and also unfair taxes.

However general trend towards the radical right-wing voting is not only provoked by Euroscepticism stemming from economic depression but also by perceptions of ethnic threat and political distrust in politicians, national parliaments,

and the EP. Hence, further European enlargement and subsequent integration pave the way for the increased focus on Europe, which may increase fears about losing national traditions, and also losing cultural values owing to increasing number of immigrants (Werts et al. 2012).

In addition to the transformation of Europe and the EU through processes of deepening and widening, the overall political evaluation of the EU governance on grounds of its democratic legitimacy by the elites and masses both at the European and national level strongly affect the general perception of Euroscepticism.

Different interpretations of the EU institutional system and its shortcomings as well as concerns about the EU eventually becoming a federal super-state have figured a lot during the Constitutional debate of 2004-2005. Indeed this debate intensified political salience of EU issues and increased politicization of European integration at the domestic level. Moreover, it evoked growing support for the far right political tendencies especially in the founding members of the EU like the Netherlands and France.

While evaluating the causes of constitutional debate and Dutch rejection of the EU constitution, Hooghe and Marks (2006) argue that a European constitution meant further European integration not only for the Dutch political parties, but also for the Dutch people, and it meant weaker national sovereignty, diffused self-rule, and undermined national community for them. Therefore, contrary to the expected causes such as parties' classic left/right positions on the basis of economic distribution and their stance on European integration, economic issues were not the main predictors at that moment. "*Commitment to national symbols and defense of national identity (was) associated both with the libertarian/authoritarian dimension and with attitudes towards European integration*" (Hooghe and Marks 2006, p.247).

## **Liberals and Democrats versus Far Right in the Netherlands**

Since the beginning of European integration, the Netherlands has taken part among the Europhile countries that are strongly supporting further economic and political integration. However, as stressed by Vollaard and Boer (2006), this attitude is not always prevalent to the same extent for the governments, political parties and voters.

One of the largest net contributors of the EU, shaping common agriculture policy and budgetary issues, the Netherlands, is among the most salient members of the Union not only with its aforementioned features but also with its Eurosceptic characteristics, especially since 2004. In order to understand the current political divergence between liberal democrats and the far right in the Netherlands on European integration and the EU in general, it is useful to overview the postwar Dutch political history.

Since 1919, the Dutch political system has been dominated by three families of political parties: the strongest family is the Christian democrats represented by the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), the second is the social democrats represented by the Labour Party (PvdA), and the third is the liberals represented by the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). Until the 1940s Dutch governments had pursued a national independence policy in general. At those times, social-democrats and liberal conservatives had suspicions about being part of a continental and predominantly Catholic community (Vollaard and Boer 2006).

As highlighted by Vollaard and Boer (2006), during and after the WWII, American and British military support was of utmost importance for the security of Western Europe against the Soviet threat. The equally important imperative of fostering and sustaining the economic recovery and growth of European countries required a collaborating and integrating European community. Economic cooperation and trade agreements with the neighboring countries like Benelux and West Germany were specifically important for the Netherlands under these circumstances. Nevertheless, the Dutch governments in general were not in favor of a supranational or federal union during that time even if it was required for the security and economic prosperity. However, in spite of the fear of Catholic or French dominance, the creation of an economic union and the pooling of sovereignty was eventually accepted by the Netherlands, considering the overall political and financial situation in the continent (Vollaard and Boer 2006). The fear of French dominance was linked to the fear of smaller country to protect its national interests in a larger community, which has been a permanent feature of the Dutch governments' European policy. Nevertheless, as stated by Vollaard (2012, p.12, cited in Van Poelgeest, 2011) "*European integration did not matter much, if at all, in coalition formations in the period from 1980 until 2002*".

Right-wing extreme tendencies gradually appeared in the late 1980s in the Netherlands, because until 1980s a solid majority on European integration had not existed among the Dutch political parties (Vollaard 2012). The opposition to European integration existed only among the small, extreme-left Dutch political parties before 1980s. At the beginning of this period, the extreme rightist movements started to find political aspirations in the country. Center Party (CP) was the most prominent one among all because it managed to participate in the parliamentary elections in 1982.

In the 1990s, for the first time the Dutch political elite lost enthusiasm for the EU and further integration, which was evidently set out by the conservative/liberal Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). German and French plans for further integration were severely criticized by this party (Startin and Krouwel 2013), and by its distinctive leader Frits Bolkestein who argued that national identity could not be replaced by a European political community, and European integration should not move much beyond economic and monetary union (Vollaard 2012). In general, party based Euroscepticism started to grow up remarkably in the Dutch political parties such as the extreme-right Center Democrats (CD), the General Elderly Alliance (AOV), and Union 55+.

Even though those and some similar party statements sound quite extreme, racist or xenophobic, they have somehow found public support starting from the 2000s. There has been a clear decline of support for the pro-European and pro-integration parties like Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and the Labour Party (PvdA) as the two mainstream parties during that period.

The 2002 parliamentary elections was important to indicate the shift and divergence among not only political elites but also the general public opinion in the Netherlands. While left wing, liberal or conservative parties lost electoral support, extreme left wing parties and newly formed populist movements get extra impetus in that period such as the Socialist Party (SP), Livable Netherlands (LN) and the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) (Jones 2002). Among the winners, the Pim Fortuyn List, an expired political party, gained prominence with its extreme right stance. One of the main political focuses of the party was tougher action against immigrants, who were not assimilated into the Dutch culture. Since the 2000s, the Party for Freedom (PVV) has become the most controversial of all the Dutch political parties with its well-known leader Geert Wilders who was a VVD member of the parliament previously. Wilders had left VVD in 2004 by rejecting further integration and the accession of Turkey to the EU and he formed PVV in 2005. PVV won six percent of the votes in November 2006 elections and get nine seats in the House of Representatives. The campaigns were focused on the "Islamisation" of the Netherlands before the elections and the party in general was opposed to the established political order and against the political elite (Davidović et al. 2008).

The primary aim of the PVV is still to fight against Islam and mass migration. Party supports full immigration ban for people from Islamic countries, no new mosques, no Islamic schools, ban on burqa and the Qur'an, tax on wearing headscarves, and so on. Between 1999 and 2006, the Netherlands experienced the fall of governments for four times. In the 2006 elections, the PVV with Geert Wilders get 5.9 percent of the votes. Similar to the previous pre-election period and related campaigns in 2002, some news were reverberated in mass media a week before the 2006 elections about the Dutch soldiers arguing that Iraqi prisoners in Iraq were tortured by them back in 2003, which created another wave of political turbulence and for sure influenced the public votes (BBC News, 2006). The Dutch community was split one more time, and headed towards the far left or right parties against the Democrats. Those events classified the Netherlands as one of the Eurosceptic countries in the EU, because as long as the Dutch citizens and opposition parties regarded the ruling parties and government with disfavor, this was associated with growing skepticism about the EU and further integration. As previously mentioned, political distrust and perceived ethnic threat were also added to growing Eurosceptical attitudes (Werts et al. 2012), and party based Euroscepticism started to be supported with the public based Euroscepticism in the Netherlands.

Since 2012, another Eurosceptic party has become one of the members of the Dutch political family which is 'Article 50'. The name of the party quite clearly reflects the political stance of it, because it is named after the article 50 of the Maastricht Treaty. This article mentions on the member states freedom to withdraw from the EU depending on their constitutions when they need. Both Party for Freedom and Article 50 advocate that the Netherlands should not be the part of the EU, and they try to create a Eurosceptic block by creating an alliance among the Eurosceptic parties in the Union (Koppe 2014).

In his study regarding the politicizing European integration Von Sydow (2013) examines 14 EU member countries in terms of 'public Euroscepticism (by asking if it is a bad thing to be a member of the EU)' and 'Eurosceptic vote' of

these countries in three different periods. The last period of his analysis, covering the years in between 2003-2009, shows that public Euroscepticism gradually increases in the Netherlands. In almost all other EU member countries examined in that study, the level of incongruence between public Euroscepticism and Eurosceptic vote stays quite high, whereas in the Netherlands this level stays relatively low. Moreover, Eurosceptic vote in national and European elections after 2004 goes beyond the public Euroscepticism in the Netherlands, which implies despite the growing influence of public-based Euroscepticism, party-based Euroscepticism has been the most prominent driving force in the Netherlands in terms of changing attitudes towards the European integration. However the future success of the party-based Euroscepticism is still affiliated with more prevalent approval of the party politics in Europe and wider cooperation among the similar initiatives from the other EU countries like European Alliance for Freedom, since the influence of Eurosceptic party formations of leading EU member countries such as France and the Netherlands is still low when compared to the other political formations.

## **The Eurosceptic Netherlands versus the EU**

As previously mentioned, since the beginning of 2000s there has been a general negative or skeptic attitude towards further integration in several EU countries like the Netherlands. It is for sure that there are several different reasons in different countries behind those attitudes. The distinctiveness of the Netherlands is that it mostly bases on the cultural, social and national perceptions stemming from threat of Islam, cultural degeneration and uncontrolled immigration coming from the east and the south east. The rise of far right in the Netherlands was sudden and unexpected despite its earlier traces in the Dutch political history. Contrary to the Netherlands, far right could not secure the votes with big percentages in the other salient powers of the EU like Britain or Germany, and for long the voters have seen it as beyond the pale (Wilson and Hainsworth 2012), although these countries respectively had much more emigrants, increasing income gaps and obvious opposition of further integration and enlargement than the Netherlands.

Meanwhile, the 2004 EP elections, in which CDA got 24.4 percent of the votes and 7 seats; PvdA got 23.6 percent of the votes and 7 seats, while VVD got 13.2 percent of the votes and 4 seats, showed that the changing attitudes towards the EU through the growing Euroscepticism started to be visible also at the supranational level. Similarly in the 2009 EP elections CDA got 20.05 percent of the votes and 5 seats; PVV got 16.97 percent of the votes and 4 seats; and PvdA got 12.05 percent of the votes and 3 seats, in which radical-right wing PVV left behind the social-democratic PvdA compared to the 2004 EP elections. The growing success of the far right political parties in the election of the EP will have a significant negative impact on the future of European integration. Although today the Eurosceptic Member of Parliaments represents the minority in the EP with only a slow-down effect on the decision making process, their number is gradually increasing which means their effect will be more visible in the near future.

Far right perceptions have critical importance for the Dutch political history as well as for the EU, which symbolize the divergences not only in the Netherlands but also in between the Netherlands and the Union on several issues among which the European constitution was the most prominent one. In the referendum held by the Dutch government in 2005, 61.6 percent of the participating Dutch public opposed the adoption of the European Constitution and it was not the only issue polarized in the country during those years (Lubbers and Jaspers, 2010). As also emphasized by the Startin and Krouwel (2013), the rejection of the EU constitution brought about the galvanization of Eurosceptic political parties (especially the ones with radical right tendencies), as well as created bigger cleavages among the mainstream political elites and their followers. Depending on several data analyses, Hooghe and Marks (2006) explain the driving forces of these perceptions in the Netherlands with the increased salience and contentiousness of European integration, in brief politicization, since the Maastricht Treaty, through which European issues have become more prominent in the media, in the social movements, and also in the national elections Franklin, Mark and Van der Eijk (2004). They argue that owing to politicization and populism regarding the European issues and mostly European integration, territorial identities came into prominence more than economic issues because publics were not aware the economic consequences of integration as elites or interest groups did, hence it was easy for some parties to focus the public attention to exclusive national identity (Hooghe and Marks 2006).

With a similar point of view, grounding on the 2005 Eurobarometer Flash data, Startin and Krouwel (2013) stress that Dutch citizens with lower level of education, citizens who belong to the group of manual workers and finally citizens who were unemployed had particularly voted 'no' in the referendum for EU constitution and became far less supportive of EU integration in general.



Financial problems in all over the Europe since the EU member countries started to use single currency “Euro” at the beginning of 2000s was also added to that shifting process in the upcoming years, which pushed forward the discussions of the pros and cons of further integration, wider enlargement and the need for a stronger collective identity-formation. According to the main critical idea behind the financial issues was that the Netherlands was contributing too much to the EU budget (Schout and Wiersma 2012).

Since the beginning of 2000s, there was a “*harsh criticism of the speed of integration and eastward enlargement*” in the Netherlands as stated by Startin and Krouwel (2013, p. 70) but the Eurosceptical feelings on the base of threatening national or cultural values were not the only reason behind that. First of all, national currencies were being changed in the EU member countries from local currencies to the Euro. Against the new currency ‘Euro’ the Dutch guilder was one of the most undervalued currencies when compared to other currencies like the German Mark (Startin and Krouwel 2013). When the expected negative consequences of eastward enlargement for the Dutch labor market were also added to the process, the effects and repercussions of the far right political tendencies in the Netherlands gained more impetus than before.

Although, today, it is difficult to find a complete consensus by both the member states and the EU’s institutions on whether it is possible to have an ‘ever closer union’ or not, it has been already seen as impossible by the Dutch authorities according to The Economist (2013). Because of the Dutch attitude: ‘European where necessary, national where possible’, the Netherlands has been described as Eurosceptic as a whole by the Economist (2013), even though there are still Europhilia and Euroscepticism in the Dutch public with different proportions.

Obviously the Dutch authorities do agree with the necessity of further cooperation in the fields of energy, climate change and migration; however there are some policy areas on which it is more difficult to agree with the Union and other members, especially after the growing skeptical opinions on several issues such as the policy of enlargement of the EU.

The Dutch government made opposition also about giving €440bn to the Eurozone as bail-out fund to help the EU members to resolve financial crisis in the past years, it strongly tried to block the EU enlargement towards western Balkans and was almost isolated in that policy and finally it put pressure on EU authorities in Brussels to improve the Union’s asylum and migration policies for the north African refugees on Europe’s shores (Spiegel 2011). As a result of those political stances, the Netherlands was either isolated as part of the group of Eurosceptic countries or caused political divergences among the member countries as well as between the EU and itself.

## **Conclusion**

There has been a reformation process of the political attitudes reaching to Euroscepticism from time to time towards the internal authority and the external power of the EU, as well as towards the European integration for the last couple of decades. As summarized in the previous chapters those attitudes originate from several reasons like economic, social or cultural, and create a model of spiral type cause-and-effect chain between the publics and political parties at national level, as well as between the EU member countries and the EU at supranational level.

In terms of Euroscepticism, causes and results are becoming intrinsic at a point and this situation makes it possible to mention a kind of vicious cycle when the historical background of the current political issues are analyzed in the leading European countries such as the Netherlands. As observed in the case of the Netherlands, the repercussions of Euroscepticism and the power of far right performed an increasing consolidation in the period of 2004-2009. This trend is leading to a more effective Euroscepticism regarding further European integration when it takes place in the leading EU countries. During that period, although the EU related issues and particularly the issue of European integration have become more politicized among the Dutch people owing to negative effects of economic depression, uncontrolled migration, increasing unemployment and above all the perceptions of ethnic and cultural threats, the right wing tendencies and Euroscepticism has been growing still on the party based.

In this context, public support and electoral outcomes are carrying crucial importance for the future success of the right-wing parties in the Netherlands, particularly the PVV. Therefore, depending on the level of public support and electoral outcomes, it is probable to observe further initiatives towards the international alliances gathering Eurosceptic formations from the other EU members such as the European Alliance for Freedom initiated by the Dutch

right-wing (PVV) in order to obtain further support for the right-wing policies against the EU and for Euroscepticism in general.

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