

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These are challenging times for the EU. The term “crisis” has often been used to describe European integration as the EU is a political system in a state of quasi-permanent crisis. But the term crisis seems to have become truly meaningful in the last couple of years. Indeed, the EU is facing a “polymorphic crisis”. Since 2009, the ongoing economic crisis has called into question one of the central pillars of the European project’s legitimacy, i.e. the economic prosperity it is supposed to bring to its citizens. More recently, the migration crisis evidences the division of European leaders and their inability to solve urgent issues, feeding the arguments of sovereigntist parties for closed borders and returning to the nation state. The EU is also facing a value crisis with governments in some countries calling liberal democracy into question and the rise of radical right parties in several Member states. And of course, Brexit attests to the rejection of the European project by a (small) majority of British citizens. As one Member state has decided, by referendum, to leave, the EU is now facing an existential crisis.

Such a period provides fertile ground for the galvanization of opposition to Europe. And it is not surprising that the 2014 EP elections saw the unprecedented success of Eurosceptic parties. Euroscepticism has become a staple of European politics but with the complex crisis, the integration process has entered a new phase characterized by the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism: anti-EU rhetoric and arguments stressing the need for major reforms have become commonplace across the continent, including among mainstream political parties.

Against this backdrop, these are not only challenging times for the EU but also very interesting times to be an EU-scholar, especially if one is interested in opposition to Europe. This research was initiated partly out of academic interest but mostly out of personal curiosity. I was surprised by the fact that people opposing the European Union would want to seat in the European Parliament. This seemed to me to be a paradox: Why are there Eurosceptics in the European chamber? I also was curious as to how they see their job. How do they deal with the tension between the Eurosceptic platform they ran on and the tasks and expectations arising from the representative mandate? What are their strategies once inside the institution? Rather than focusing on the sources of Euroscepticism, I wanted to understand and explain the behaviours of Eurosceptics in the EP.

Gathering data and meeting more than a hundred Eurosceptic MEPs were quite time-consuming. But it is, I believe, the best way to fully grasp the paradoxical situation of these actors. This research provides a detailed picture of the strategies of Eurosceptics in the EP and the motivation behind their behaviour. But it also provides food for thought on the implications of their presence at the heart of the EU and on what these actors can bring to the table to contribute to alleviating the EU's democratic deficit.

The research and writing process can sometimes be a lonely path. But I was lucky to be able to count on the help and support of colleagues and friends. Over the course of this project, I have received many useful suggestions that have helped me improve the analysis and arguments presented in the chapters of this book. I would like to extend a special thanks to Olivier Costa, Jean-Benoit Pilet, Jean-Michel De Waele, Kris Deschouwer and Simon Usherwood who provided insightful comments on various parts of this research. This research would not have been possible without the help of many MEPs, parliamentary assistants and EP civil servants, who I would like to thank.

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