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Concluding Comment: On Understanding the Relationship between Populism and Euroscepticism

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Both 'Populism' and 'Euroscepticism' are intrinsically problematic concepts, serving simultaneously as frames for bodies of academic literature and as labels in political debate. The precise definition and the overall scope of the two terms are thus matters of unresolved and perhaps irresolvable discussion. Yet, insofar as one may discern core usages of the two concepts, it is apparent that they refer to distinct but intersecting phenomena – in a manner which has not, as underlined in the introduction to this special issue, received the type of sustained scholarly treatment which one might have expected.

Populism, on the one hand, is both the wider and more well-established of the two concepts. Conventionally traced back to the American People's Party of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term has been applied to a wide variety of political movements across an equally broad array of political systems (see Taggart, 2000). Historically, the rise and fall of various populisms may be seen to have played an integral part in the development of the contemporary American polity (Kazin, 1998), while the category is also generally taken to encompass such movements as Argentine Perónism or the Prairie radicalisms of both the left (the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation) and the right (Social Credit) in Canada. The so-called 'new populisms', emerging from the 1980s onwards, similarly span a wide range of cases. If most prominently identified with West European parties of the extreme right (Betz, 1994; Mudde, 2007), the Reform Party in Canada, Pauline Hanson's One Nation party in Australia, Winston Peter's New Zealand First, or the Perot presidential candidacies in the United States further all readily fit the typology (Betz & Immerfall, 1998; Rydgren, 2004). The 'new populism' category also, more generally, may be seen to intersect with elements of the 'new politics' associated with Green movements and parties of the alternative left, all variably emerging as forms of 'protest politics' (Taggart, 1996).

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Relative to this rather diverse range of cases, that which holds the category together is a shared 'anti-elitism'. Insofar as a core set of populist tenets may be defined, these centre on a rejection of the national elite – the 'political class' – as a whole, in the name of 'the people' whose interests, it is argued, are being systematically ignored by this self-interested and insulated elite. Populist discourses are thus generally cast as an appeal to the interests and the wisdom of 'the common man', usually further amplified by a call to protect the national 'heartland' (see further below).

Euroscepticism, by way of contrast, is a correspondingly narrower and more recent phenomenon. Clearly confined to Europe alone, Euroscepticism in its contemporary guise largely dates from the early 1990s. While the term first came into use in the latter part of the 1980s in the specific context of Britain's historically awkward relationship with the project of European integration, its more general application to a range of contestations of European integration in both actual and potential European Union member states essentially dates from the debates surrounding the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (Harmsen & Spiering, 2004). In the ensuing two decades, virtually all states concerned have experienced the rise of some form of Euroscepticism – reflecting a growing politicization of European issues, though also, it should be acknowledged, the progressive (over-)stretching of the term itself (see Harmsen & Spiering, 2004; Lacroix & Coman, 2007; Neumayer et al., 2008; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008).

The interest of examining the intersection of these two literatures is thus evident. The growing contestation of an established elite consensus surrounding European integration – the end of the post-war 'permissive consensus' – has taken place against the background of wider patterns of protest politics. This is not to say that Euroscepticism may be understood as a simple sub-set of populism; it is not, insofar as one may identify critical European discourses which are not conventionally populist (particularly those of a more reformist hew, narrowly concerned with institutional questions of the democratic deficit). Nevertheless, opposition to European integration has unquestionably been shaped by wider anti-elite discourses, and in turn has served to reshape these discourses – as well as the parties which deploy them. It is in innovatively exploring this complex, reciprocal dynamic that the present collection makes its distinctive contribution. As detailed below, new light is shed on the logics of party competition which may both drive and limit the emergence of Euroscepticism at the (shifting) boundary between 'mainstream' and 'protest' politics; on the populist construction of Eurosceptic discourses; and on the uses (and limits) of Europe as an arena for the pursuit of populist politics. This, finally, is seen to link both to wider normative questions and an attendant research agenda.

Populism, Euroscepticism, and Logics of Party Competition

The broad mapping of the intersection of populism and Euroscepticism is one which has largely followed the findings of Taggart's seminal 1998 article identifying hard(er) Euroscepticism as a 'touchstone of dissent' – i.e. as being confined to the relative periphery of national party systems, principally (apart from intraparty factions) concerning 'protest parties' which were otherwise already demarcated from

national political mainstreams (Taggart, 1998). This analysis of a 'peripheral Euroscepticism' has found further confirmation in more general studies examining party positioning on European integration, which have largely stressed the essentially 'centrist' character of support for the European project. This graphically takes the form of the 'inverted U curve', in which 'pro-integrationist' positions tend to increase as one nears the political centre, while correspondingly dropping off as one moves to either the left or right pole of the traditional political spectrum (Hooghe et al., 2002). Following this conventional wisdom, it is thus easy to draw the conclusion that Euroscepticism may essentially be understood, borrowing Schedler's (1996) term, as an 'anti-political establishment' position, affording protest parties an almost made-to-measure issue in which they might cast themselves in opposition to the political class as a whole.

The findings of the present collection, it should first be stressed, do not call into question the broad contours of a 'European issue' which tends significantly to follow (to form?) the boundary between 'governmental' and 'protest' parties. It is clear that a basic acceptance of the European integration project, and even more a practical willingness to work within its policy constraints, constitutes a (arguably often *the*) litmus test of *Regierungsfähigkeit* (governmental fitness) across EU member states. Nevertheless, the detailed national case studies presented here point clearly to the need to adopt more nuanced understandings of these dynamics than that which might be suggested by the image of a hard boundary between 'populist Euroscepticism' on the one hand and a 'pro-European governmental consensus' on the other. Both 'mainstream' and 'populist' parties may variably adopt more or less critical stances as regards the European project in light of both ideological orientations and strategic opportunities. Moreover, the placement of the boundary itself – between 'legitimate criticism' and a putatively 'populist demagoguery' – may become an issue of political debate, in which the application or rejection of particular labels (such as 'Eurosceptic' or 'Euro-realist') emerge as significant political resources (see Neumayer, 2006, 2008).

This blurring of the line between 'mainstream' and 'populist' positions on Europe is highlighted in Emmaunelle Reungoat's study of French Euromanifestos in the 1999 and 2004 elections. On the basis of a systematic coding of the documents, she is able to demonstrate that – in terms of a literal populism – the use and conception of the term 'the people' does not appear subject to systematic variation as between (mainstream) pro-EU and (protest) anti-EU parties, apart from an as yet still somewhat tentative emergence of a more European 'character of the community' in the former case. Perhaps more interestingly, Reungoat's work also does not turn up a systematic distinction between pro- and anti- EU parties in terms of their more general deployment of anti-establishment themes. Here, however, a somewhat closer look would seem to be in order. In effect, the pattern which emerges is one in which a basic dividing line between 'mainstream' and 'protest' parties is intermittently cross-cut by a more immediate government/opposition logic. Thus, a comparatively strong anti-elite RPR (*Rassemblement pour la République*) discourse during the period of the '*gauche plurielle*' government in 1999 disappears five years later when its successor party, the UMP (*Union pour une Majorité Populaire*), firmly holds the reins of national power. At the same time, however, it is notable that the levels of such anti-elite discourse remain consistently high as one pushes to the relative peripheries of

the national party system – peaking in the Euromanifestos of the far left LCR-LO (*Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire-Lutte Ouvrière*).

The differing uses which may be made of European themes by parties, skirting a line between 'populist opposition' and 'mainstream critique', are explored in a different vein by Dorota Dakowska in her study of Polish conservative and radical parties. Dakowska's analysis centrally demonstrates the strategic incentives and constraints within which the Law and Justice Party (PiS) defined its 'soft Eurosceptic' position (see Szczerbiak, 2004). On the one hand, the party faced a 'barrier effect' (Harmsen, 2005), insofar as a frontal opposition to the European project would call into question its own legitimacy as a potential party of government. Yet, at the same time, the realities of partisan competition dictated that Law and Justice was also subject to a strong 'incitation effect' (Harmsen, 2005), pulling it in (or confirming) a more Eurosceptic direction. Relative to this double bind, the adoption of a comparatively critical or nationalist position allowed the PiS both to speak to the anxieties of its core electorate and to distinguish itself from its centre-right rival Civic Platform (PO), while remaining careful never to cross the 'thin line' of expressing an outright opposition to the principle of Polish EU membership itself. As Dakowska correctly underlines, the Polish case consequently reminds us of the need to understand Euroscepticism in 'relational' terms – i.e. relative not to fixed boundaries or categories, but as particular party positions adopted at particular junctures within the context of necessarily fluid situations.

Populism, Europeanisation and the Discursive Construction of Euroscepticism

The second set of distinctive findings from this collection concern the variable discursive constructions of Euroscepticism. In this regard, the present collection confirms the great diversity of positions which are (problematically) grouped under this label, pointing (as have others) to the manner in which the relatively indiscriminate use of the epithet has somewhat blurred the distinction between genuine oppositions *to* European integration and that which might more reasonably be regarded as a normal (and desirable) politicization of European issues within the framework of a multi-level polity. Across the various contributions, forms of Euroscepticism appear which clearly correspond to familiar populist discourses – invoking the need to defend the 'heartland' against an insidious external threat (see Taggart, 2000, pp. 91–98). Conversely, however, interesting evidence also emerges of a 'Europeanization of Euroscepticism' – denoting positions marked by fundamental opposition to the European project in its current form, but which advocate an 'alternative Europe', rather than basing themselves on the defence of national sovereignty or identity.

The cases of the League of Polish Families and Self-Defence (*Samobroona*), as analysed by Guerra and Fitzgibbon, provide striking examples of Eurosceptic positions defined in traditionally populist terms. In both cases, the parties relied on the construction of a mythical or idealized 'heartland', whose 'people' had to be protected against both predatory foreign interests and a complicit metropolitan elite. Much the same type of discourse is also identified by Emmanuelle Reungoat in the case of the French Front National (FN). As she stresses, FN discourse constructs a

notion of 'the people' which incorporates elements of both 'ethnos' and 'demos', creating a pointedly exclusionary conception of community in which the culturally defined nation also becomes the basis for legitimate political participation. This, in turn, further calls forth a defence of 'our traditions, our roots, our homeland inherited in common, our currency, our national identity'.

By way of contrast, as Reungoat notes, the construction of 'the people' in the Euromanifestos of left-wing Eurosceptic parties in France exhibits a relatively open character, referring in general terms to 'workers' or 'the oppressed' while eschewing a nationalist vocabulary. This, in turn, informs an opposition to the current project of European integration variably predicated on its 'anti-democratic' or 'neo-liberal' character, rather than in terms of the threats which it putatively poses for the preservation of national identity. It is, moreover, the development of this discourse of an 'alternative Europe' which is at the heart of Sophie Heine's detailed comparative analysis of extreme left opposition to the EU in France and Germany. As she convincingly argues, such opposition has come to be increasingly marked by a mixture of national and European references, in which a traditional national 'patriotism' has come to be qualified (if not occasionally displaced) by a 'Europatriotism' which seeks to preserve or establish particular socio-economic models through the further development of forms of European integration. At the limit, following Heine's analysis, this may be seen in the cases of Attac-Germany and the French LCR to have assumed the form of a genuine 'cosmopolitanism', in which principles of social solidarity are divorced from identification with a particular collectivity (be it national or supranational).

These broad trends need to be carefully contextualized. Certainly, one must be careful not simply to extrapolate a dichotomy between TAN (Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist) opposition to European integration rooted in classic populist discourses on the one hand and systematically Europeanized GAL (Green-Alternative-Libertarian) opposition on the other. The first part of this equation is broadly correct, as the earlier dalliances of the extreme right with an 'ethno-Europeanism' identified in Almeida's contribution to this collection have now largely been abandoned. Contemporary TAN Euroscepticism is essentially rooted in 'particularist' opposition to a 'universalist' project, and as such is fundamentally impervious to Europeanizing logics, with the possible exception of sub-national movements which may embrace Europe as a source of external leverage to be used against the national centre (see Hainsworth, 2008, pp. 82–85; Mudde, 2007, pp. 158–183). The second part of the equation, however, does not uniformly hold up under careful scrutiny. As Heine herself notes, the advocacy of an 'alternative Europe' continues to co-exist, on the far left of the political spectrum, with more traditionally nationalist discourses. In the case of France, it is as well to recall that the predominance of an 'alternative Europe' discourse on the left is a relatively recent phenomenon. As recently as the Maastricht Treaty debates, a more traditional Republican nationalism, most prominently associated with Jean-Pierre Chevènement, had continued to hold sway (Harmsen, 2010a). Equally, during the debates surrounding the Constitutional Treaty, it is noteworthy that the Dutch alternative left Socialist Party (SP) opted to campaign on the basis of a predominately 'soft nationalist' position, seeking to capitalize on diffuse concerns about a loss of national identity in an enlarged Union, rather than echoing a French campaign

directed against a 'neo-liberal' economic model (Harmsen, 2010b). Within the present collection, the diverging paths followed by Sinn Féin and the Greens in the Irish case might finally be noted. As Guerra and Fitzgibbon set out, the former has opted for the maintenance of a nationalist and socialist (if softened) Euroscepticism (in part reflecting its strategically difficult positioning across the two political systems on the island), while the latter has joined many of its counterparts elsewhere (with the exception of the Nordic region) in moving in a pro-European direction as it has also moved into national government.

One is thus again returned to the need for Euroscepticism, and populism, to be understood 'relationally' – i.e. in relation to the particular positions occupied by particular parties at particular times within their national party systems. However, the analysis, in its attention to Europeanization, also introduces questions surrounding the more complex dynamics introduced by the existence of a multi-level polity. It is this dimension of the subject which is treated in the next section.

Europe as an Arena for Populist Politics

We are thus left with the final question as to whether the emergence of a European-level political arena has itself created new, and potentially favourable opportunity structures for the development of forms of populist politics. Here again, the present collection has the merit of usefully confirming elements of the conventional wisdom in the extant literature, while also innovating in important ways.

Confirming a now well-established line of analysis (see Reif & Schmidt, 1980; Schmitt, 2005), Dimitri Almeida highlights the manner in which the 'second order' character of European Parliament elections has benefited populist and Eurosceptic parties. The underlying dynamics of these elections, viewed as a relatively cost-free opportunity to express discontent with national governing parties and often providing structural circumstances more favourable to smaller parties, have clearly allowed such 'protest' parties to make breakthroughs which they have found much more difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in 'first order' national contests. Yet, beyond this broad assertion, more research is required into the exact character of the 'protests' being expressed – in particular, seeking to understand better the specifically European dimensions of European elections. How, in other words, are both positive and negative representations of the European project constructed during EP campaigns and, in the latter case, how are these related to wider populist criticisms of the (national) political class as a whole? (see Harmsen & Schild, 2010).

Moving beyond this electoral protest dynamic, Almeida's paper more innovatively highlights the uses which have been made of the European arena by populist parties seeking to legitimate themselves within the domestic system. Here, the European arena has provided a perhaps somewhat paradoxical resource by allowing parties to define themselves in terms of both the alliances which they are willing to conclude – and even more those which they refuse to accept – in the formation of a parliamentary group. The French Front National, in particular, emerges as a singularly serviceable foil. The Italian MSI/*Alleanza Nazionale* and Northern League, the Austrian FPÖ, and the Danish People's Party all, at various points, have used a refusal to join a far right group including the FN as part of a

strategy to establish domestic respectability. As suggested by Dakowska, this use of supranational affiliations as domestic resources further played a significant role in the anchoring of post-transition party systems in Central and Eastern Europe. More specifically, involvement in transnational party structures played an important role in socializing national elites and, as a function of the alliances concluded, could also burnish domestic legitimacy with reference to European credentials.

If a useful source of legitimation for populist movements seeking to move towards governmental respectability, the European hemicycle has predictably proven to be rather less hospitable terrain for such politicians insofar as they might wish to exercise influence on the shaping of policy. As Almeida demonstrates, radical right MEPs have remained on the margins of the parliament, proportionately punching well below their numerical weight. This, of course, is largely to be expected – and significantly reproduces national patterns, in which populist parties tend to face a similar marginalization. Nevertheless, the functioning of the EP, predicated on broad cross-party agreements between the two or three largest parties and geared to maximizing its own institutional influence within a complex institutional triangle, likely exacerbates the degree of exclusion of those outside the reigning consensus. Systemic oppositions to the European project may thus, if anything, risk being reinforced, rather than softened by participation in the transnational arena – as arguably underlined by the repeated failures of the radical right to achieve even a minimal, self-interested cohesiveness at the European level.

Conclusion

Beyond the distinctive academic contributions of this collection, a final, somewhat more normative lesson might also be taken from the work. Much of the literature on populism has been cast in terms of understanding the phenomenon as a 'pathology of democracy'. As incisively laid out by Mény and Surel (2000, 2002), while such a 'pathological' approach to the study of populist movements may lead to their simplistic dismissal as themselves a form of 'disease', it also permits a more sophisticated treatment in which populisms are more likened to a 'fever' whose underlying symptoms must still be diagnosed. Populism, in other words, appears as a mirror, albeit perhaps a cracked mirror, in which the dysfunctions of representative regimes may be seen.

This approach merits transposition to the more specific European arena. Too much of the literature on Euroscepticism has thus far, perhaps inevitably, preoccupied itself with essentially 'taxonomic' questions – seeking to define and categorize variations on the theme. It is time that this research focus was broadened out to a wider concern with the diverse contestations of the European project which have emerged, and the manner in which these may be seen to point to the failings or the shortcomings of that project itself (see Crespy & Petithomme, 2010). The study of Euroscepticism would, in this way, be better linked to the study of elite or mainstream discourses on Europe – inter alia highlighting the signal failures of national elites to invest themselves in the development of strong legitimating discourses (Schmidt, 2006). Equally, more attention would correspondingly be focused on questions such as the absence of 'normal' political oppositions at the

European level, and the manner in which this may ultimately force opposition to assume more systemic forms (Mair, 2007). The juxtaposition of Euroscepticism and populism thus, finally, forces us to return to questions about the nature and limits of European democracy itself, serving as a salutary reminder that not only the forms, but also the objects of political protest merit our attention.

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