

## Book Review

**Aleks Szczerbiak & Paul Taggart  
(2008)**

### *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism*

Oxford: Oxford University Press

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It may seem commonplace in many United Kingdom circles to regard Euroscepticism as part of a purely British debate, following the unwillingness of the UK to join the European Economic Community in 1957 and the semi-detached and often fraught relationship that has existed between the UK and its European partners since the UK finally joined the then European Communities in 1973. Mrs Thatcher's celebrated Bruges speech, together with the unwillingness of successive governments to pool or sacrifice sovereignty by joining the European Monetary Union and 'Schengenland' have symbolised the continuing importance of the Eurosceptic strand in British party politics. This phenomenon is today by no means confined to single issue, Eurosceptic parties, since the longstanding tradition of ambivalence towards Europe remains a major influence on the politics and politics of the Conservative, Labour and even the Liberal Democrat parties.

Modern party political diffidence or antipathy towards the European Union (EU) extends far beyond the UK, with the result that Euroscepticism has greatly influenced the political debate of all current Member States. The continuing enlargement of the EU, together with the dramatic growth in the scale and scope of the EU's policies since the 1980s and the shift in the policy-making focus from the national to the EU level (in areas including economic, social, environmental, justice, security and foreign policies) has made European integration an increasingly prominent target for criticism and outright hostility on the part of citizens in a growing range of EU Member States, together with many of the political parties that represent them. Party-based Euroscepticism has seized on growing popular concerns about the EU's perceived 'democratic deficit', and the growing distance between Europe's citizens and its political elites, to advance its own cause, thus presenting an increasingly powerful challenge to the European integration project and to the prospects of further broadening and deepening in the EU context.

Against this background, the recent proliferation of academic studies that focus on the Eurosceptic issue and cause has been timely, although the issue of party-based Euroscepticism has perhaps not received the full degree of attention that it merits. Szczerbiak and Taggart make a good contribution to overcoming this deficiency, however, in a recently published collection of essays, following on from their earlier case study-based contribution to scholarly understanding of Euroscepticism in party systems across Europe and the resultant exploration of the broad parameters of Euroscepticism in Europe's party systems. The second volume in their series seeks to build on this earlier

'mapping exercise' by developing a comparative and theoretical research agenda for the party politics of Euroscepticism on a pan-European scale. A collection of ten essays is offered as a means to this end, examining the nature and development of Euroscepticism at the party level in the EU as a whole, and in a range of existing EU member, candidate and non-member states.

Szczerbiak and Taggart provide a useful, scene-setting introduction to the overall volume, beginning with a conceptualisation of Euroscepticism in European party systems, based on the conventional distinction between principled or 'hard' opposition to European integration (leading parties to advocate withdrawal from EU membership), and to 'soft' Euroscepticism (leading to qualified opposition to the EU, based on the belief that its policies or development run counter to the perceived 'national interest'). There is now a need to develop a more nuanced conceptualisation of Euroscepticism as the authors acknowledge, however, and this theme is taken up by Katz in a later chapter of the volume, where a revised definition and classification scheme is developed and evaluated.

The other contributors to the volume go on to explore the measurement and the causes of Euroscepticism in the party system context, focusing on the effects of institutional structures, the roles of ideology and strategy and the impact of transnational party cooperation in the latter case. Party-based Euroscepticism is examined in comparative terms, focusing on the similarities and contrasts that exist at the national level between Western and Eastern Europe, together with Euroscepticism in the EU and national parliaments and amongst Europe's sub-national elites. The relationship between public opposition to the European integration project, voting (and non-voting) behaviour, and the development of support for Eurosceptic parties and their policy agenda is also explored. The editors conclude by suggesting a potentially valuable future research agenda for scholars of Euroscepticism in the party political context, highlighting the development of a broader and more comprehensive typology of Eurosceptic perspectives, the impact of government involvement on Eurosceptic parties, the comparison of different generations of new Member States, sub-national party systems and local and national activists, and the salience of Europe to party agendas and election outcomes as being issues worthy of further research attention.

Taken together, the essays included in this volume provide a range of comprehensive and valuable insights into the current impact of Euroscepticism on Europe's political parties, party systems and on the domestic politics of European integration. The essays also provide useful lessons regarding the interaction of domestic with pan-European politics in both the Western and Eastern European contexts, and into the impact of Euroscepticism at the party level for the future of the European integration project. Overall, therefore, this is a very useful and innovative volume, which goes a long way towards providing a definitive review of a vital and rapidly developing issue in European politics. This said, the book is clearly aimed at scholars with advanced knowledge of the subject. It is therefore most likely to find a place on the bookshelves of university libraries, academics and research students.

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