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Euroscepticism in France: An Analysis of Actors and Causes

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the development of Euroscepticism in France and the underlying actors and causes. First, the literature review presents a selection of distinct classifications, actors and sources for the analysis. Thus, the distinction between hard and soft Euroscepticism as well as diffuse and specific support for European integration guides the interpretation of Eurobarometer data, which show that there has been an actual increase of French discontent towards the European project since the early 1990s. The Front National represents the main actor within the Eurosceptic landscape. A socio-demographic analysis of the electorate describes the average *frontiste* likely to be a male, belonging to a household with lower levels of income and education, and besides immigration and security, ranking identity and national sovereignty very highly on their list of concerns. Eventually, the sources for rising Euroscepticism in France are examined in light of socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors. Once more, Eurobarometer data reveal that while economic concerns tend to fuel EU-critical positions rather than fundamental opposition, cultural aspects like national identity, immigration and national security should also be deemed as a crucial source of Euroscepticism. Institutional dissatisfaction at the national and European level – particularly related to the mismanagement of the financial and sovereign debt crisis as well as the migration crisis – has also contributed to the amplification of EU-critical attitudes.

Keywords: Euroscepticism, France, Front National, Rassemblement National, Euro Crisis, Migration Crisis

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1. Introduction

Euroscepticism is one of the major challenges the European Union faces today. When the European Economic Community (EEC) was founded in 1957, there was very little opposition to the beginning process of European integration as people focused on economic growth perspectives and the promise of peace in Europe. However, in the 1970s, doubts on the European project emerged, starting with Norway's decision not to join the EEC in 1972, Margaret Thatcher criticising the progression of European political and economic integration in 1988 and some small opposition to the ratification of the Single European Act in 1992. This occasional discontent with European integration turned into a more permanent and established opposition as a reaction to the discussions on the Maastricht Treaty, which politicised European integration and ended the strict division between European and national policy responsibilities. Denmark, rejecting the Maastricht Treaty, and France, only narrowly agreeing to it, showed that Euroscepticism was no longer neglectable (Usherwood/Startin 2013). Since then, growing Euroscepticism cannot only be observed in Northern countries but also among the Union's founding members. France, for example, rejected the European Constitution Treaty (ECT) in a referendum in 2005, and the rise of the right-wing party Front National in the National Assembly (2007: 4,29%; 2012: 13,60%; 2017: 13,20%) and in European elections (2009: 6,34%; 2014: 24,86%) concerns politicians all over Europe. This might stem from the EU's incapability to deliver on its promises of stability and a continuous increase of economic as well as social well-being, and the dissent in how to deal with the migration crisis may affect public opinion.

This paper aims to examine the actors of and causes for Euroscepticism in France. First, it provides an overview of the academic literature on Euroscepticism, before a conceptual framework for analysing French attitudes towards the EU is derived. The fourth chapter seeks to answer the questions how Euroscepticism has developed and which actors fuel anti-European and EU-critical attitudes. It presents data on public opinion and discusses voting behaviour. After providing a broad overview of French EU-critical actors, the role of the Front National as the leading Eurosceptic party is outlined. In the next step, possible causes for Euroscepticism are discussed. To what extent socio-economic, cultural and institutional aspects can be considered as sources for anti-European and EU-critical attitudes is examined by reflecting on Eurobarometer data and reviewing empirical literature in terms of crucial elections. Finally, the findings are summarised in the conclusion.

2. Literature review

The following section aims to provide a brief overview of the academic debate on Euroscepticism focusing on its classifications, actors that express Euroscepticism and sources for Euroscepticism.

2.1. Classifications of Euroscepticism

The term Euroscepticism “expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (Taggart 1998:366) and is often used as a catch-all phrase to describe opposition to the EU (Serricchio et al. 2013). An early attempt to classify Euroscepticism was made by Szczerbiak and Taggart (2000, 2003) who distinguished principled, or hard, Euroscepticism from contingent, or soft, Euroscepticism. Hard Euroscepticism describes a “principled opposition to the EU and European integration” (Szczerbiak/Taggart 2003:6) and is generally taken up by parties who promote leaving the EU and abandoning European integration. In contrast, soft Euroscepticism refers to cases “where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas leads 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 trajectory” (ibid.). This simplistic distinction was criticised by Kopecky and Mudde (2002) for the ambiguous distinction between the two forms as well as the sweeping definition of soft Euroscepticism. They propose adding an additional dimension: the distinction between ‘diffuse’ support for the broad ideals of European integration and ‘specific’ support for the current execution of European integration (ibid.:300). Similarly, Boomgaarden et al. (2011) speak of utilitarian support parallel to specific support and affective parallel to diffuse support. Some researchers (Weßels 2007; Krouwel/Abts 2007; Boomgaarden et al. 2011) drew on Easton’s (1965) conception for political support, adding that opposition is expressed towards targets of discontent: authorities, the regime and the community. The public may disapprove of certain public actors and institutions taking an executive role in the EU, reject the EU’s overall “political values, norms and structures” (Serricchio et al. 2013:52) or voice negative attitudes towards fellow European citizens (ibid.). Further, two hypotheses are introduced: the buffer hypothesis, which states that scepticism will be low if citizens identify with their political community, and the cumulation hypothesis whereby “specific discontent over a longer period should translate into generalized discontent” (Weßels 2007:290). Consequently, discontent should be lower among citizens with a sound European identity and specific opposition towards the current workings of the EU may develop into more serious opposition to the project of European integration as a whole.

2.2. Actors of Euroscepticism

Much of the research on the actors that express Euroscepticism has focused on party-based Euroscepticism. However, the role of the public, the media, the government, the European Parliament and critical groups needs to be addressed as well (Usherwood/ Startin 2013). Increasing integration has fuelled opposition and Euroscepticism has become embedded in the European political system as many political parties specifically address anti-European sentiments. Single issue parties “exist only to express Euroscepticism and to mobilise electors on the European issue” (Taggart 1998:368), while protest-based parties oppose the political establishment as a whole and therefore the EU. Usherwood and Startin (2013) differentiate between radical right parties who use Euroscepticism to broaden their appeal to their voter base beyond anti-immigration positions and far left-wing parties that position themselves against the neo-liberal direction of European integration. Established parties have also expressed Eurosceptical positions with regard to issues such as the EU budget, the future of the Euro and further enlargement. Finally, we have seen the emergence of Eurosceptical factions within traditionally pro-European parties (Taggart 1998, Usherwood/Startin 2013). Conti and Memoli (2011) confirm that Euroscepticism is most commonly found in radical fringe parties that do not participate in the government with the opposition to the EU playing a larger role for the extreme right as it has become “an essential part of its programmatic supply and electoral appeal” (ibid.:105). The left has shown a more pro-European stance since the 1990s. Vasilopoulou (2011) analyses right-wing party positions in particular and distinguished “rejecting, conditional and compromising patterns of Euroscepticism” (ibid.:224). This differentiation is based on the party attitudes towards a common European culture and identity based on shared history and religion, towards further integration at a multilateral level, as well as towards the current execution of EU policies and future integration on the European level, turning towards a European polity. All three types agree that Europe shares a common culture and that this constitutes a European identity; however, they differ with regard to the other factors. Rejecting Euroscepticism opposes the core principle of European cooperation, as well as the current execution and future plans for the EU. It thus follows an “anti-supranationalism and national self-determination discourse” (ibid.:232) and proposes to leave the EU. Conditional Euroscepticism generally supports the cooperation of nation states at the European level, yet it opposes current policies and a future European polity as they “compromise nation-state sovereignty” (ibid.:232). While intergovernmental cooperation through an institutional framework is supported, the supranational decision-making processes are rejected. As “a majority of decisions have been taken by supranational institutions and not by the member states” (ibid.:233), there are doubts about the legitimacy of the EU project. Compromising Euroscepticism accepts the

“principle and the practice of integration” (ibid.:233), but still rejects the possibility of a federal European polity. Integration is seen as necessary for economic success. Moreover, remaining within the EU structures and institutions offers opportunities to push for reform and to promote national interests. Transferring much of the national decision-making power to supranational institutions, however, is not desired. Compromising Euroscepticism can alternatively be seen as a criticism of the EU instead of an outright opposition to European integration as it “implies a willingness to play by the rules of the game” (ibid.:233). Public opinion on the EU has changed significantly not only in countries that generally oppose integration, but also in some original member states, pro-European countries and new member states. Further, we have seen the building of an anti-EU bloc in the European Parliament (EP) as the number of Eurosceptic Members of Parliament (MEPs) has steadily increased. In the 1990s, several transnational soft and hard Eurosceptic coalitions have formed in the EP, such as the Confederal Group of the European United Left in 1994. This continued as the 2009 election led to the formation of the hard-Eurosceptical Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group consisting of 27 MEPs and the soft Eurosceptical European Conservatives and Reform Group consisting of 56 MEPs. Further, 29 MEPs from the radical right were voted into parliament. More than one tenth of MEPs can now be classified as Eurosceptics and they have formed coalitions “for leveraging their profile and influence” (Usherwood/Startin 2013:7). On national level, the formation of non-party groups opposing the EU can be observed in most member countries. This could be described as an anti-EU movement as the groups connect transnationally in order to exchange information. Euroscepticism has also been fuelled by a plethora of EU Referendums held in various countries, where many decisions made by EU member states with regard to increasing integration have been rejected such as Sweden and Denmark refusing to join the Euro. It seems that forces opposing European integration have been much more active and successful in promoting their positions than their pro-European counterparts. The media has also served as a tool to promote Euroscepticism in several countries, most prominently the UK, by portraying the “EU as a corrupt and untrustworthy predator” (Usherwood/Startin 2013:10).

2.3.Sources of Euroscepticism

Research finds that there are a multitude of reasons for the existence of Euroscepticism. However, a number of scholars (McLaren 2002; Hooghe/Marks 2007; Abts et al. 2009) have come to similar conclusions. There are three main drivers of Euroscepticism: economic, cultural and institutional factors. Firstly, major sources of Euroscepticism are economic concerns. Abts et al. (2009) also describe this as a utilitarian approach. Socio-economic concerns shape people’s opinions on and

attitudes towards the EU, and Hix (2005) states that “a centre-periphery conflict between groups whose interests are threatened by economic and political integration and those whose interests are promoted by integration” (ibid.:151) emerges. The poor of a society, mainly low and unskilled workers, benefit recipients, and people with low incomes and less education will objectively be disadvantaged as a consequence of integration. However, it is the subjective perception of one’s economic situation and future prospects that influence the degree of Euroscepticism. Thus, support for European integration partly depends on the evaluation of costs and benefits associated with it, whereby we can differentiate between “sociotropic evaluations” (Abts et al. 2009:3) focusing on national interests and “egocentric perceptions” (ibid.) focusing on personal interests. Baute et al. (2018) summarise further aspects of economic concerns such as the perceived burden of financial contributions to the EU, especially by net payers, concerns about the future of national labour markets due to the relocation of jobs, a fear of social dumping and regime competition as well as the perception that European integration may pose a threat to national social security systems. Condruz-Bacescu (2014) highlights the economic concerns regarding EU enlargement. There is a fear that social security might not be viable in the future due to migration, that social protection will be downgraded to the lowest common denominator due to the internal market, and that austerity policies restrict domestic distribution. A more ideological left/right dimension is also important with regard to threats to social security as the left is traditionally more concerned with social redistribution. As Europeanization is seen as an “amplifier of globalization” (Baute et al. 2018:213) by the left leading to inequality and a loss of workers’ rights, its constituency is particularly sensitive to these issues and they play a key role in explaining Euroscepticism. Further, among citizens in countries with high levels of welfare provision, the fear of a decline in social security tends to be stronger.

However, economic factors are not sufficient in explaining Euroscepticism: Cultural factors are also highly important. According to the cultural approach a “strong identification with the nation state and social distrust in European and non-European citizens are significant determinants of popular opposition to the European project” (Abts et al. 2009:3). National identity plays a key role here: Citizens who strongly identify exclusively with their nation rather than identify themselves as Europeans will have a more negative attitude towards the EU and see European integration as a “threat to their community and their national identity” (ibid.). People who feel an attachment to multiple identities or feel exclusively European will have a much more positive attitude towards the EU (De Vries/Edwards 2009). Further, political trust, which depends on social capital, is also an important variable: a feeling of “general reciprocity and social trust in fellow citizens” (Abts et al. 2009:4) is important. When European citizens trust not only the citizens from their home

country, but also other Europeans and non-Europeans, the support for European integration should be stronger.

Thirdly, we should consider institutional and political factors. According to the second-order thesis citizens tie their support for the EU to their experiences with their domestic government as the mass public has little actual knowledge on the EU. According to McLaren (2007:234) “those who are more cognitively mobilized – that is, those who are capable of digesting complex political events and who actually take the time to do so – are more likely to be less fearful of the EU simply as a result of more exposure to it”. Left- and right-orientated political factors should also be examined as a political factor: both show signs of opposition to European integration. While left-orientated voters fear a loss of social security, as previously explained, the right-orientated sphere is strongly influenced by a fear of immigration. Further, three sub-factors related to political efficiency and institutional distrust explain the emergence of Euroscepticism: firstly, the perception that oneself is powerless in the political decision-making process; secondly, the degree of dissatisfaction with the EU’s democratic system and the democratic deficit; and thirdly, the degree to which citizens trust political actors to be honest and competent, therefore evaluating them on a “normative and performance-related” (Abts et al. 2009:6) basis.

The previous years have provided many challenges for the EU that exemplify the three factors, namely the effects of the global financial crisis and following recession as an economic factor, increasing immigration as a cultural factor, as well as the potential effects of Brexit as a political factor (Taggart/Szczerbiak 2018). Hobolt and De Vries (2016) showed that “citizens who were personally negatively affected by the crisis and who disapproved of EU actions during the crisis were more likely to cast a ballot for a Eurosceptic party” (ibid.:510). Left-wing Eurosceptic parties profit more from economic drivers as their voters often support redistribution and more liberal immigration policies, whereas right-wing parties profit from political discontent with the EU as their supporters want strict immigration rules and do not support financial aid and bailouts to member states in crisis. They further show that the voters’ personal economic situation shapes their voting behaviour. Gomez (2015) further specifies that it is especially unemployment and high interest rates, as an indicator for market pressures on national economies, that negatively affect support for the EU. However, Serricchio et al. (2013) who analysed the effects of the global financial crisis on Euroscepticism find that the economic factors at play do not sufficiently explain the rise in Euroscepticism. Rather, it is the more pronounced role of national identity and the “role of public confidence in national political institutions” (ibid.:52) that explains the trend of public Euroscepticism. This is in line with a trend that has been visible since 1992. Meijers (2017) suggests that as the different parties’ opinions on economic policies converge, cultural issues have

moved into focus and the radical right especially have adopted “cultural politics” (416). Their success with this strategy of an anti-immigration rhetoric has led centrist parties to adapt their policies accordingly (Van Spanje 2010). Further, Boomgaarden et al. (2011) find that anti-immigration sentiments and Eurosceptic attitudes often coexist on an individual level. Thus, “individuals who disapprove of, fear and feel threatened by immigration are much more likely to oppose further European integration” (Toshkov/Kortenska 2015:913). Information on the impact of the Brexit vote is still inconclusive. Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) also show that there is a certain interrelatedness of the different factors: In France especially all three crises strengthened the Front National as the financial and economic crisis provided the preconditions for Euroscepticism. Later, the migration crisis led to an “increased focus on security to mesh with the party’s policy on border control” (ibid.:1209) and Brexit proved to the party that leaving the EU was actually a possibility. Thus, the progression of crises steadily increased the success of Eurosceptic parties.

3. Conceptual framework

For the analysis of the development of Euroscepticism in France, we select certain classifications, actors and sources mentioned in the literature presented above. With regard to classification, this paper will work with the basic, more simplistic differentiation proposed by Taggart (1998) and Kopecký and Mudde (2002), and it will distinguish between hard and soft Euroscepticism as well as ‘diffuse’ and ‘specific’ support for the European project. Secondly, we will use Usherwood and Startin’s as well as Vasilopoulou’s description of party positions to evaluate French voting behaviour, especially in examining the position of the Front National. Thirdly, we will rely on the distinction of socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors as drivers of Euroscepticism.

In order to answer the research questions (1) how French Euroscepticism has developed during the past four decades, (2) which parties benefited from growing anti-European and EU-critical attitudes, and (3) to what extent socio-economic, cultural and institutional aspects can be considered as sources for anti-European and EU-critical attitudes in France, we suggest the following hypotheses:

- (1) Since the late 1980s Euroscepticism has been increasing in France.
- (2) The right-wing Front National benefitted from rising Euroscepticism.
- (3) Anti-European attitudes have been fuelled by different causes:
 - (3.1) There is a substantial proportion of the French population who considers the EU membership as adverse in terms of economic and social aspects.

(3.2) Cultural factors increasingly play an important role in explaining French Euroscepticism as many French voters associate the EU membership with a loss of national identity and sovereignty.

(3.3) Institutional distrust and dissatisfaction with the management of the European crisis is widely spread among the French electorate.

The following table shows the different aspects that will be analysed in detail to test the proposed hypotheses:

Table 1: Analytical guideline

General description
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of public support for France's EU membership
Actors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Right- and left-wing parties in France and their positions towards immigration and neoliberalism • Analysis of the Front National as an example of a Eurosceptic party <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Analysis of the success in national and European elections ○ Analysis of the party programme ○ Analysis of the socio-demographic profile of voters and their reasons to vote for the Front National
Drivers of Euroscepticism
<p>Economic factors: Evaluating costs and benefits of EU membership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of EU membership in France • Perception of the economic and employment situation • Concerns about the French social model <p>Cultural factors: Identification with the EU and the EU's impact on French identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification with France and the EU • Perceptions of EU as cultural threat, the recognition of French interests in the EU and concerns about the loss of national sovereignty • Immigration and national security in the context of EU integration <p>Institutional and political factors: Attitudes towards the domestic government, political efficiency and institutional distrust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of representation in French politics and at the EU level • Dissatisfaction with EU democracy • Trust in the European Commission and the European Parliament • The impact of the economic crisis as an institutional factor

Source: Own depiction.

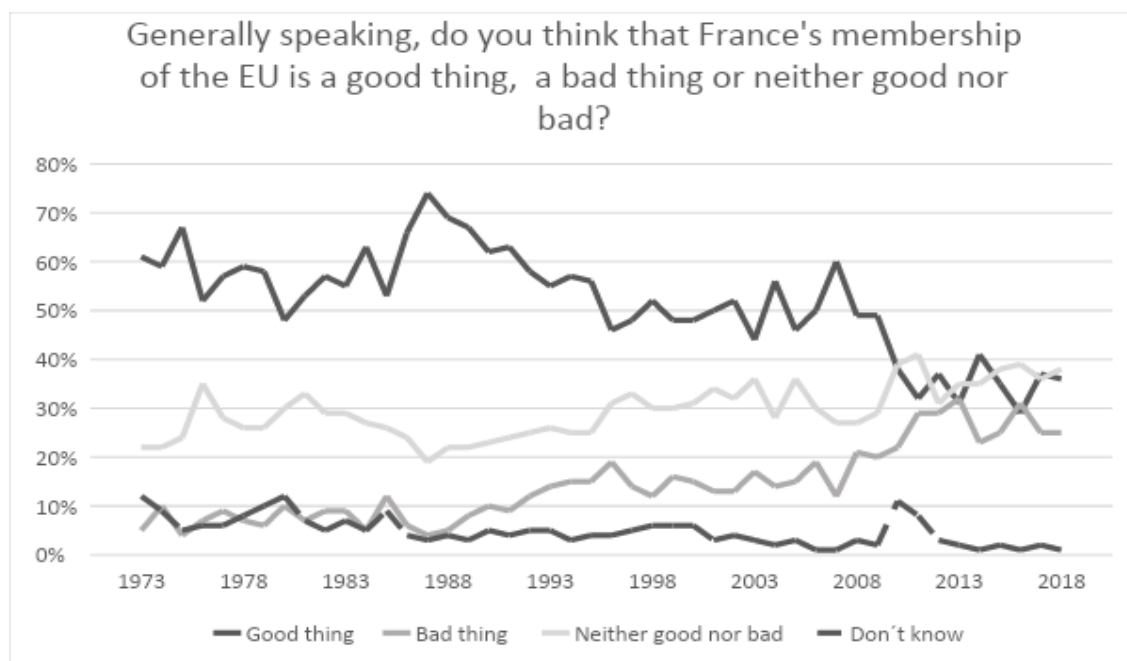
4. Development of Euroscepticism in France

As the home country of EU pioneer Jean Monnet, France counts among the pro-European forces in Europe, yet its relationship with its own project has always been ambiguous. Asserting that Eurosceptic feelings have been rising, in this particular case, implies a risk of ignoring the large variety of actors and reasons shaping this trend. Historically, leaders of both the right and left wings have supported and contributed to the building of the EU, confident that it would bring France back to its old prestige, allowing therefore a certain amount of market-friendly policies (Culpepper et al. 2006). Nevertheless, concerns regarding EU's impact on France's socio-economic model as well as a loss of sovereignty and cultural identity have always been present and soundly expressed themselves in key moments of the European integration (Drake 2010). Opposition to the EU does not constitute a unified front; a variety of forms deriving from different ideologies can be identified. Yet taken together, they proved to have a remarkable influence.

4.1. Public opinion – Eurobarometer

Established in 1973, the Eurobarometer has since conducted surveys twice a year investigating public opinion of EU issues. The French population, just like all other European citizens, have been asked whether their country's membership of the EU was perceived as a *good thing*, a *bad thing* or *neither* of the two. The general trend of French public opinion on the European project during a time-span of more than forty years is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Assessment of EU membership in France, 1973-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer.

The data clearly shows a dominance of pro-EU sentiment over time. After reaching their peak in the late 80s, however, the positive attitudes towards the EU seem to have slowly followed a downward trend. The 1992 referendum on the Maastricht treaty saw the French voters equally split, with a mere 51% in favour of the treaty, signalling an important drop in support. Correspondingly, the portion of respondents perceiving France's membership in the EU as a *bad thing*, which until then, had rarely rose above 10 percent, started to increase. In the first decade of the new millennium, the percentage of people with negative feelings went, in fact, over 20% and has continued to range between 20-30% since the financial and economic crisis. The 2005 referendum for the Constitutional treaty depicts another key moment. On this occasion, French voters opted for a loud expression of their concerns. Rather than supporting the European integration process 55% of voters rejected the Constitutional Draft. Whether these results are to be interpreted as a tide of Euroscepticism or whether the answer is to be found in domestic issues or specific campaign context is worth analysing. What is clear is that in key moments of the integration process, the French electorate can constitute a real challenge. Equally true and evident, if we look at the numbers, is that people who have neither a positive nor negative opinion of the EU, or that simply do not know, form a large share of the respondents. Another question rising from this survey is whether the long era of *permissive consensus*, during which Euro-indifferent public opinion would allow the national elites to proceed undisturbed with the building of the European project, is slowly giving way to a *constraining dissensus* (Down/Wilson 2008).

4.2. Euroscepticism expressed in party programs and voting behaviour

As bearers of high visibility, the role of political parties, their viewpoints on key issues, how they position themselves towards European integration and their relative success in both national and European elections provide worthy material to analyse the extent of Euroscepticism within a specific country. The party system in France encompasses both right- and left-wing Eurosceptic attitudes; their motivations, however, do not share common ground. As Meijers (2017) simplifies, radical left parties base their rejection of the European project on socio-economic concerns, while sovereignty and cultural arguments form the rationale of radical right parties. Amid the left fringes, Euroscepticism appeared to have its peak at the end of the 1990s. The ratification of the Maastricht treaty, in fact, fuelled opposition in pre-existing parties and served as a basis for the foundation of new Euro-critical parties. It is mainly for ideological and geopolitical reasons that establishment left parties, including the Communists, the Socialists and the Greens, have expressed their scepticism towards the EU to different extents. To the eyes of the radical left, social policies driven

by feelings of justice and equality hardly find space in an institutional framework, like the current in EU, where market-liberal policies have the priority (Meijers 2017).

The 2005 referendum campaign saw the Socialist leaders actively pushing for the rejection of the Constitutional treaty denouncing the lack of social protections and, more generally, of a *Social Europe* (Rozenberg 2011). The Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste*), however, does not position itself among the Eurosceptic parties; its lean is more of a revisionist type. Their idea of Europe, as Jacques Delors described it, is of a “federation of nation-states”, therefore they call for a revision of the European Constitution, Commission and Parliament in a more cooperative and representative direction (Milner 2004:63).

The Citizen and Republican Movement (*Mouvement républicain et citoyen*) is positioned on the same side of the political spectrum. Born from dissident voices within the Socialist party, this political formation opposes federalism and advocates for a multipolar world with no nation placing itself in a leading position (Milner 2004:65).

The right fringes of Eurosceptic parties, on the other side, consider the European supranational unification as being completely at odds with their conception of popular sovereignty. The latter being based on the ‘nativist ideology’ according to which “[o]nly the ethnically or culturally defined nation can form the basis of popular sovereignty and endow a polity with legitimacy” (Meijers 2017:4). This idea resulted in the sovereignist movement emerging during the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht treaty and remaining active in the fight for national independence for nearly a decade. Some political leaders even galloped the sovereignist wave to establish their own party. Philippe de Villiers, for instance, created the Movement for France (*Mouvement pour la France*) in 1994: a durable soft Eurosceptic party, member of Nicolas Sarkozy’s presidential majority and heir of the Gaullist tradition (Rozenberg 2011). Villiers’s political formation successfully campaigned for the *no* during the 2005 referendum and resists further enlargements of the European community remaining in line with their belief that unregulated immigration poses a threat to the authority of the State and leads to social fragmentation. The party, nevertheless, distances itself from secessionist instances (Charte du MPF). The National Front is positioned much further to the right with an anti-EU stance which is much more strident. The party, configured as rejectionist, holds a leading position among Eurosceptic voices in France. For this reason and for its recent unexpected electoral successes, the following chapter will be entirely dedicated to the study of their historical formation, major electoral achievements, the party program and an analysis describing the socio-demographic structure of its electorate and the motivations behind its voting choice.

5. Front National

The Front National (FN), recently renamed *Rassemblement National*, is a Eurosceptic, extreme right-wing party favouring a possible 'Frexit'. It stands within the historical sovereignist tradition and advocates for the protection of "popular classes from neoliberal deregulation and unrestrained immigration" (Cabanès 2017:6). As such, a summary of its electoral success throughout the years appears necessary to our aim. Founded in 1972, the FN has experienced a widening of its electorate year by year until achieving its most successful performance forty years later.

Its first electoral success dates back in 1983-4 when Le Pen's party managed to "break out of its political ghetto" (Hainsworth 2004:107) and won 11% of the votes and ten seats in the European Parliament. The following two decades saw the FN slowly consolidating with scores ranging between 10% and 18% in major elections in France (Hainsworth 2004). The 2002 elections ended up being surprisingly advantageous for the party. Still led by Jean-Marie Le Pen at that time, the FN gathered 16.9% of votes in the first round knocking out the third-placed Socialist Party candidate Lionel Jospin and placing itself at the second place separated by only three percentage points from the right-wing candidate Jacques Chirac. Nevertheless, the second round saw the unprecedented victory of the latter as the unexpected success of the FN in the first round prompted large anti-Le Pen protests across France. After a few years of relative decline in support, the party now led by Le Pen's daughter, embraced the post-Euro crisis phenomenon and began to gather important successes year by year. The 2014 European elections gave the party an unexpected 25% of the vote and a leading position among the French parties represented in Brussels. Building on these results, Marine Le Pen decided to run for the presidential elections in 2017. Capable of accessing the second-round run-off, the FN leader failed to defeat the independent candidate Emmanuel Macron (French Minister of the Economy 2017). The result was nevertheless seen as a major success placing the party among the most influential political forces in the country.

5.1. Front National – Party program

For the 2017 presidential race, party leader Marine Le Pen presented a detailed program consisting of 144 points (144 Engagements Présidentiels – Marine Le Pen 2017) to which, once elected, she would commit to. The very first point of her program contemplates a 'Frexit' referendum on the country's membership to the EU in line with her promise to restore monetary, legislative, territorial and economic sovereignty in France (ibid.:3). The program continues with the project of putting an end to "uncontrolled immigration" by putting a cap of 10,000 (instead of 140,000) on the arrival

of new migrants every year and by introducing measures making the naturalisation process and family reunification harder. Securing the borders is complementary to this end. Le Pen aims to do so by recruiting an additional 6,000 police forces displaced along the line and exiting the Schengen area. The tough fight against terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism occupies an important piece of the program and forecasts the creation of an ad-hoc agency under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister (ibid.:6).

The economic policy will be based on what the party leader calls “intelligent protectionism”. A plan favouring a state-led re-industrialization and protection of French companies from unfair international competition by establishing a “true economic patriotism” that puts a break on globalisation while getting rid of European constraints. To ensure priority of employment for French citizens, an additional tax will be put on the hiring of foreign employees. At the same time, tariffs will be applied in order to force French manufacturers to re-localise in the national territory and boost employment (ibid.:7). Further in the document, the issue of sustainability is addressed through a national agricultural policy replacing the EU’s common agricultural one and policies encouraging the supply and consumption of *made in France* products will be implemented (ibid.:21).

The chapter dedicated to social protection involves a revision of pension law aimed at fixing the retirement age at 60 and the removing the highly contested “Loi El Khomri” of 2016 regulating employment. Furthermore, a policy promoting an increase in birth rates among French families as well as special allowances for low-income families would be pursued (ibid.:9).

The sixth chapter refers back to the French pride and the defence of national, cultural and historical identity. In order to restore its *old prestige*, France would need to leave NATO and devolve significant percentages of its national budget to the military (ibid.:19).

The 144-points program concludes by addressing issues like power generation deficit, access to housing and equality.

5.2.Front National - A socio-demographic profile of its electorate and the reasons behind its electoral success

Despite a significant widening of its electorate during the recent years, the classic profile of FN voters tends to preserve some strong specificities. The party appears to gather more support among men than women (54% vs. 46%) with a major concentration among those aged 35 to 49. Striking is the support granted by the working class and employees (39%) and by the retired / inactive part of the population constituting 35% of their voters. Farmers and traders only form 7% of FN classic

electorate; a minor 6% is covered by intellectual / managerial professions and the remaining 13% by intermediate professions (Jaffré 2016:3). Income and education level also have a big impact on the formation of voter's preferences. While 36% of French people living in a household where monthly income is less than 1,250 euros per month favour Front National, only 19% of those living in a household with more than 6,000 euros monthly income do the same. Data also reveal that only 15% of those with a *grand école* diploma (University degree or higher) opt for Le Pen's party, while 39% of people with a professional diploma and 37% of those holding no degree give their votes to the party. From a religious perspective, the traditional *frontiste* is more likely to be a non-practicing Catholic (35%), Protestant (26%) or without religion (25%). Furthermore, the FN electorate appears to be the most loyal: 93% of Le Pen voters declare their intention to choose, at the regional elections, an FN list while Sarkozy and Hollande voters are more reluctant (73% and 70% respectively) to opt for a list supported by the presidential candidates (Perrineau 2015: 2). During the last few years, the FN has witnessed a widening of its usual base towards a more feminine (+2%), educated (+7%) and slightly older electorate (+5%). Among the conquered electorate, 60% come from the centre and right lines (almost 50% from Sarkozy's voters only) and 25% from the left (Hollande voter's weighting of 20%).

A survey belonging to the same wave of French electoral inquiry (Enquête électorale française 2015) investigated the ideological attitude of FN voters and found out that a striking 80% believes the number of foreigners allowed to reside in France should be reduced. Those who consider Islam a threat for Western countries form a wide 69% and 55% of voters declare having developed feelings of hatred in the aftermath of the attacks of 13th November 2015. In very close proximity to these numbers, the new electorate of FN is also positioned. Furthermore, 76% of *Sarkozyste* and 64% of *Hollandais* voters (against 64% of traditional *frontiste*) declared to use their vote at the regional elections as a *punishment* towards the dissatisfactory political operations of the President and government. This corresponds to a radicalisation of their attitudes on issues, such as immigration, security and rejection of the political class, adopting the so-called practice of issue voting. A large part of the classical base of FN (59%) believes that, concerning employment, French citizens should be granted priority over immigrants. Finally, 46% maintain France should limit its participation in the European Union, showing that besides immigration and security, identity and sovereignty issues, still rank very highly among traditional *frontistes*. (Jaffré 2016:5).

6. Causes for Euroscepticism in France

The following chapter examines the causes for Eurosceptic attitudes amounting to 20 to 30% since the rejection of the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005. The Front National could establish

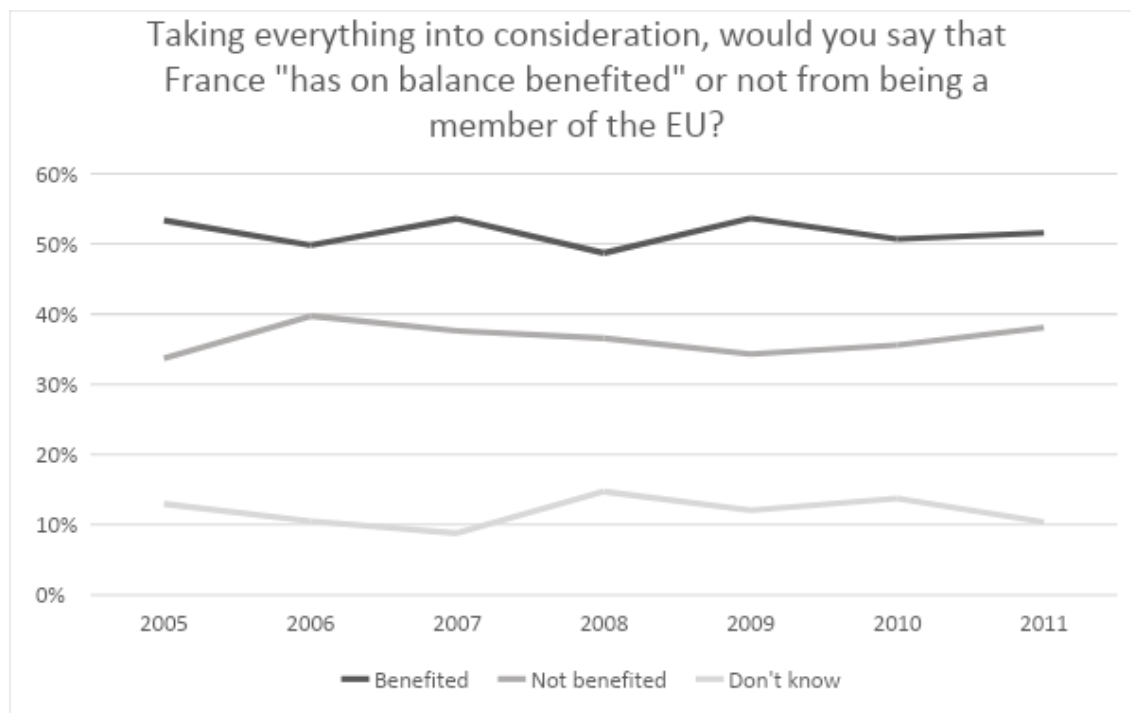
itself as leading Eurosceptic party throughout the recent financial and migration crisis. Hence, the relevance of socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors as sources for Euroscepticism in the last 13 years are discussed by reflecting mainly on Eurobarometer data and reviewing empirical literature in terms of crucial elections.

6.1.Socio-economic factors

This section explores how far French Euroscepticism is driven by socio-economic factors, namely the perception of benefits from EU membership, financial contributions, the impact on the labour market as well as on social security.

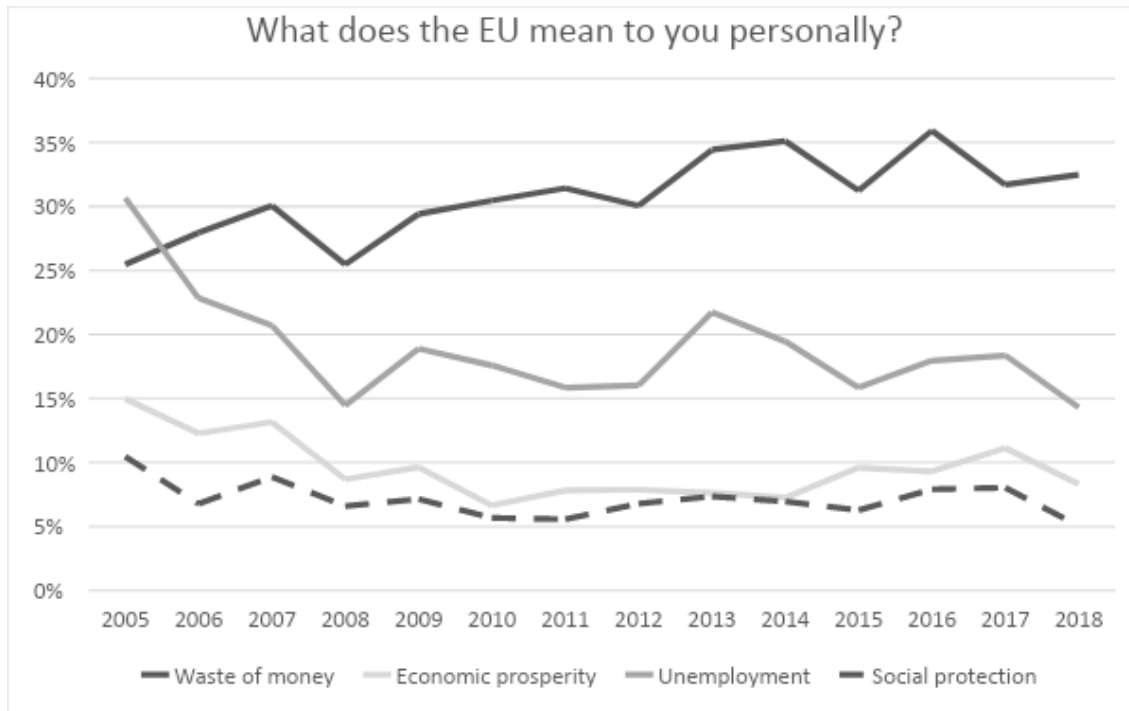
First, most people regard EU membership as beneficial for France, but more than one in three people do not agree as Figure 2 shows. Moreover, the number of respondents believing that EU membership is a ‘waste of money’ increased from 25.5% in 2005 to 35.1% in 2014 when European elections took place, and it has remained high since then (see Figure 3).

Figure 2: Perception of EU membership in France, 2005-2011



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

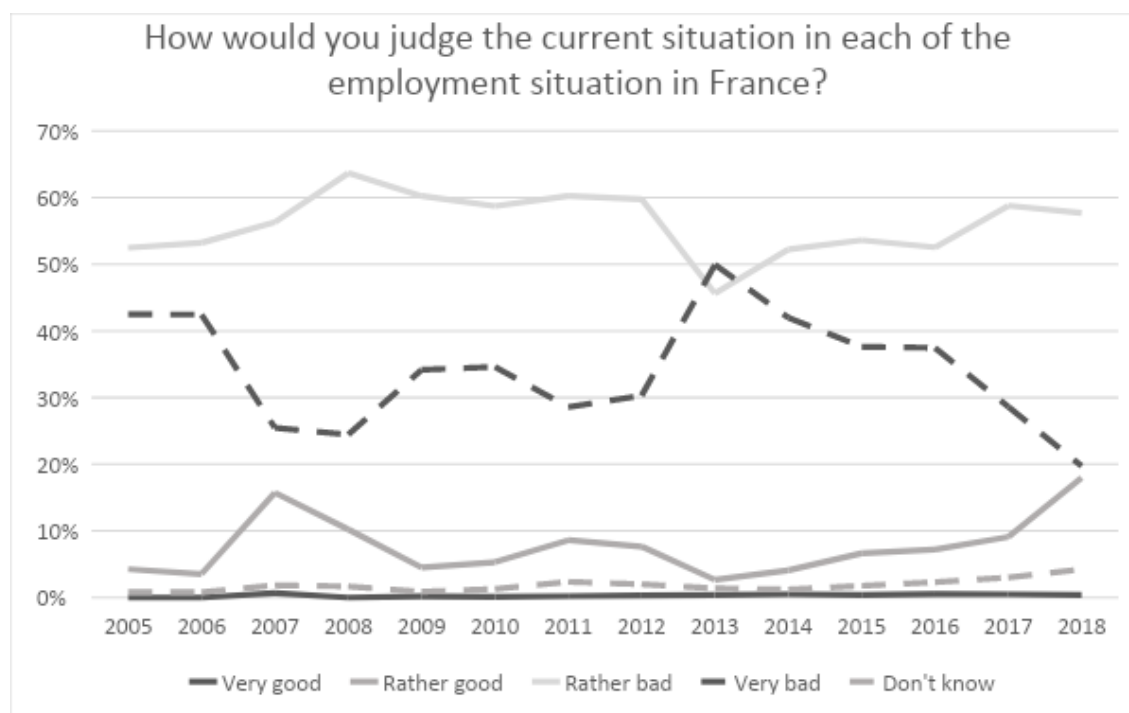
Figure 3: Perception of economic aspects in the context of the EU in France, 2005-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

The second aspect concerns the labour market. In general, the French population judges the employment situation in France as rather bad or even very bad as it is illustrated in Figure 4, while a significant share associates EU membership with unemployment. Although there had been a significant fall until 2008, the latter opinion is shared by roughly 15 to 20% of the French population (see Figure 3).

Figure 4: Perception of the employment situation in France, 2005-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

In past elections, unemployment has always been an important issue. During the ECT referendum, ‘no voters’ were first and foremost concerned about the negative impact on the labour market (31%) and France’s weak economic performance (26%) (European Commission 2005:15). In the presidential elections of 2012, all candidates focussed their campaign on the state of the economy and especially François Hollande discussed the employment situation in the context of EU membership (Dehousse/Tacea 2013:5f.). Post-election surveys reveal that this met citizen’s concerns as unemployment was the most influential election subject, followed by other economic issues (ibid.:13f.). In the 2014 elections for the European Parliament, unemployment was the second most important aspect (40%) after the assessment of EU actions in addressing the economic crisis (42%). Two thirds of the French electorate – compared to half of the European population – rejected the idea that the EU had facilitated job creation throughout the Euro crisis. Besides immigration, cost of living and security, Front National voters mentioned unemployment as motivation for their choice (Goodliffe 2014:331-333). In the presidential elections of 2017, unemployment remained the most influential issue (41%). Although FN voters were motivated by cultural matters (Steppat 2017), it is striking that Le Pen was especially strong in regions that were marked by particularly high unemployment rates (Aisch et al. 2017). Furthermore, the EU Posted

Workers Directive became a symbol for social dumping during the election campaign (Schild 2017:507).

With regard to social security, only a minority of 5-10% associates the EU with social security as Figure 3 indicates and the trend is even falling. A look at the empirical literature reveals that social security in the context of European integration has been a major issue in France. The country provides a high level of welfare and already in the early 1990s, the political left warned of an erosion of the French social model (Milner 2000:38-41). The economic and social crisis in the 1990s as well as concerns about economically and socially adverse effects of the Economic and Monetary Union provided the ground for social Euroscepticism in France characterised by anti-liberal and social-protectionist attitudes (Goodliffe 2014:329f.). Concerns about the erosion of the French welfare state were also main drivers of France's rejection of the ECT. The result did not reflect people's fundamental refusal of the European project but should be considered as an expression of specific discontent with the nature of European integration (Binzer Hobolt/Brouard 2011:318f.). These worries were also relevant in the 2012 elections, when two out of three made the EU responsible for cutbacks in social security and every fourth French voter mentioned social welfare as essential for his/her vote. Among those who voted for Hollande 73% considered EU membership as threat to the welfare state (Dehousse/Tacea 2013:13f.).

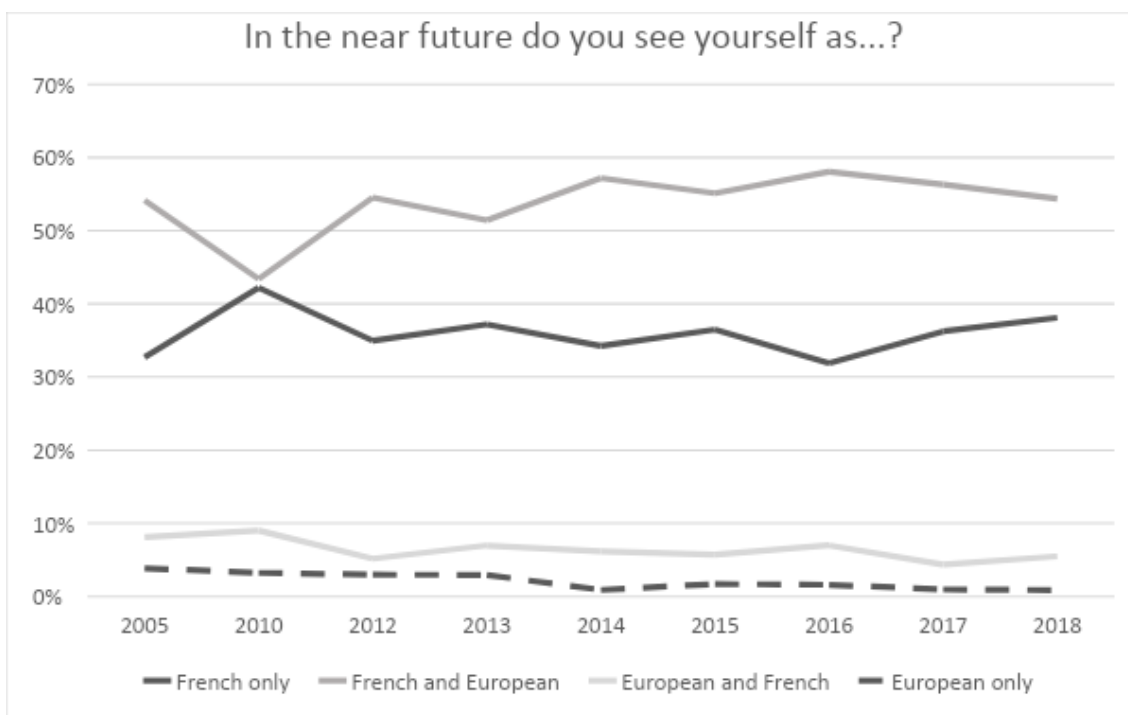
The effects of the financial and economic crisis on Euroscepticism are not clear. As Figure 3 illustrates only a small proportion of French people associate EU membership with economic prosperity and between 2005 and 2010 it even halved so that only around 6% regarded the EU membership economically beneficial throughout the crisis. Since 2014, the share is slowly growing again. However, the effect of the financial and economic crisis on French Euroscepticism can only be identified among left voters. Particularly, the presidency of François Hollande was influenced by conflicts regarding distributional, fiscal and economic policies and caused fragmentation on the political left (Ivaldi 2018:10), while parties on the right were not affected (ibid.:13). Serricchio et al. (2013), who investigated the interrelation between the financial crisis and Euroscepticism, found out that the explanatory power of economic factors is limited, while cultural and institutional factors have become increasingly important (ibid.:61).

6.2.Cultural factors

Cultural factors also play an important role in explaining rising Euroscepticism in France. This section examines the identification of French people with the European Union as well as their perception of the EU in terms of its impact on national identity and sovereignty. In addition, people's attitudes regarding immigration and national security are explored.

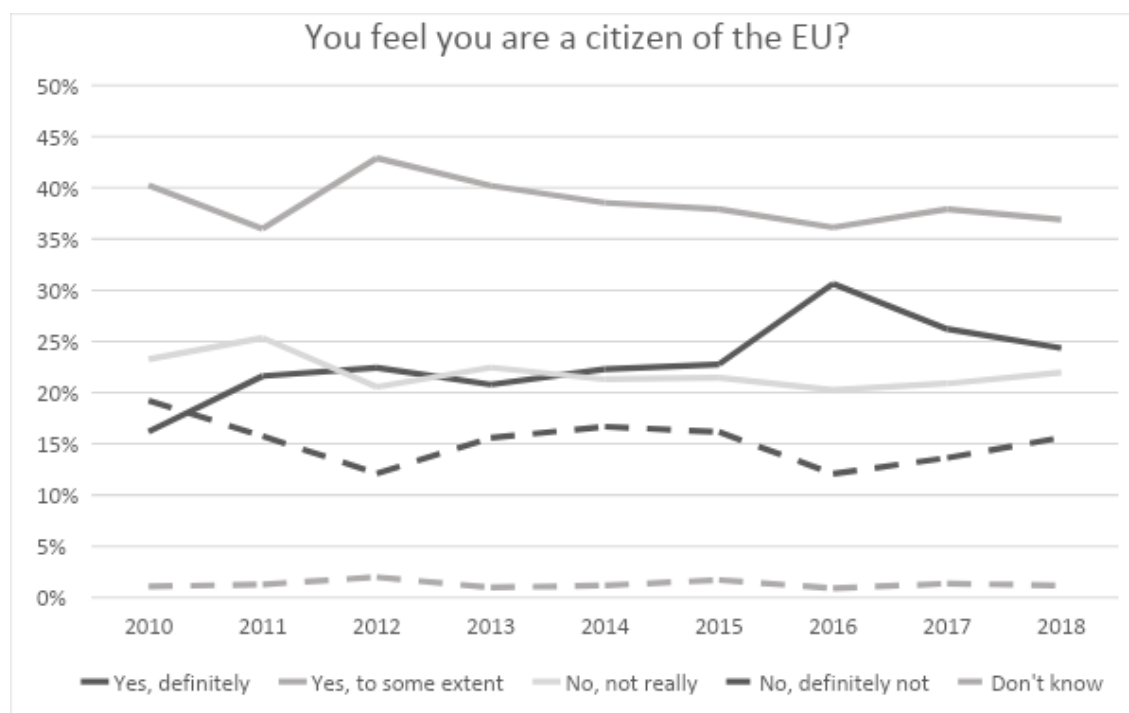
The feelings about future identification of French people with their own country and the EU are replicated in Figure 5. The majority regards itself to be both French and European. However, there is a large group of people who consider themselves to be French only, ranging between 32% and 43%. Furthermore, Eurobarometer has asked the question whether people regard themselves as citizens of the EU since 2010 (see Figure 6). This supports the presented findings that most French people also identify with the EU, with rising numbers of people claiming ‘yes, definitely’ culminating in 2016 and slightly declining number of people stating ‘yes, to some extent’. But the amount of people who do not really feel European or explicitly reject European citizenship remains between 30-40%.

Figure 5: Future identification with France and the EU, 2005-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

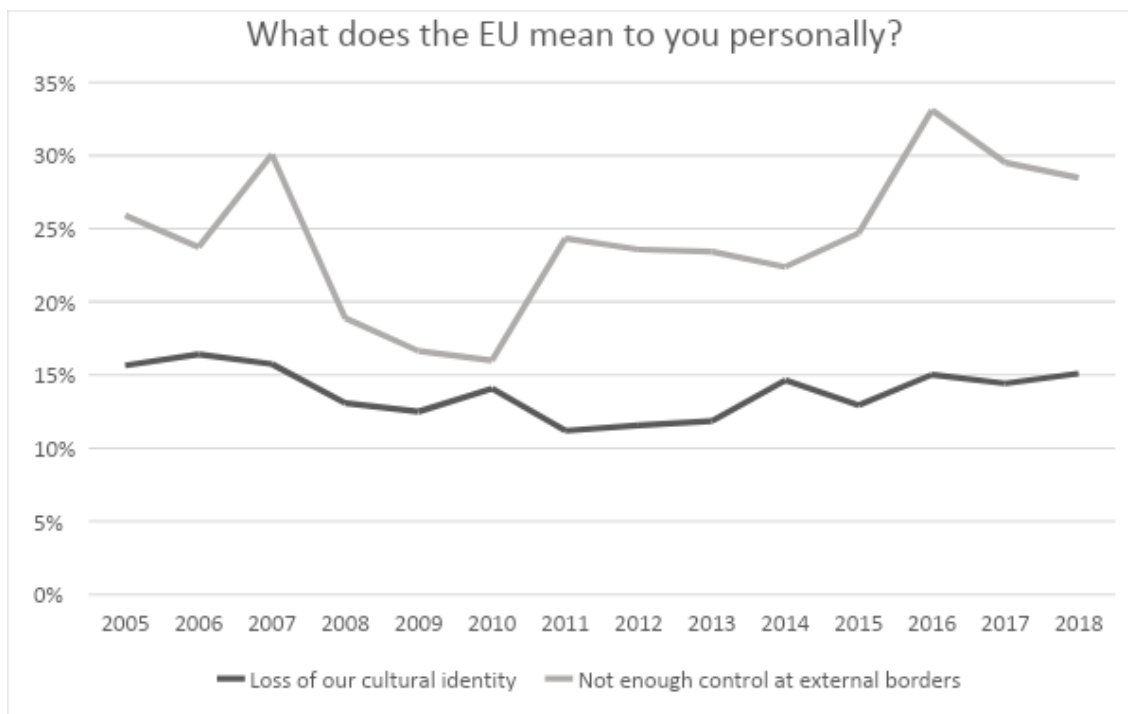
Figure 6: Identification as EU citizen in France, 2010-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

A lack of identification with the EU raises the probability that people consider EU membership as a threat to their national identity and community. Binzer Hobolt and Brouard (2011) show that cultural threat was the second important explanation for 'no votes' in the referendum on the ECT after the previously discussed social threat (ibid.:313). Ivaldi (2005) also points out that the right-wing campaign, which was based on Eurosceptic and Xenophobic ideas, might have attracted 45% of those 'no votes' (ibid.:10). For the presidential elections in 2012, Dehousse and Tacea (2013) assume that more than half of the French population associated the EU with an adverse effect on national identity and culture (ibid.:14). However, according to Eurobarometer, only every sixth respondent identifies EU membership with a loss of cultural identity as Figure 7 illustrates. Between 2005 and 2011, the figures even declined although they have been slightly rising to 15% since then.

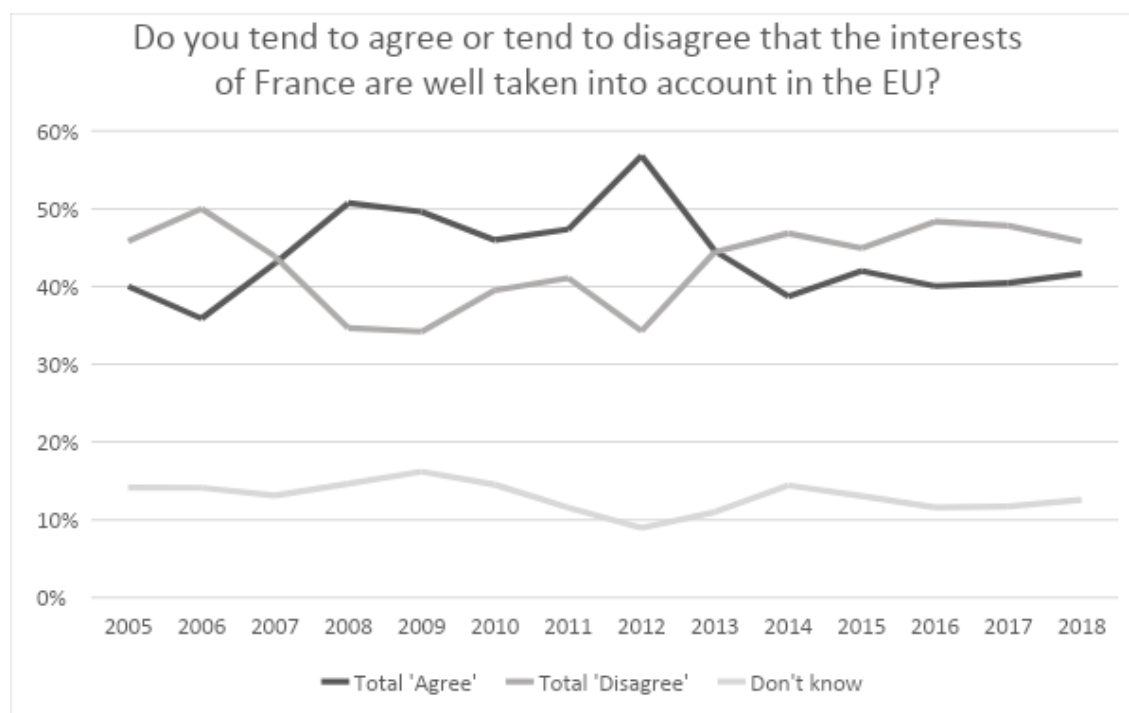
Figure 7: Perception of cultural identity and control over borders in the context of the EU in France, 2005-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

Figure 8 demonstrates how French people perceive the recognition of French interests by the European Union. The proportion of people thinking that the EU adheres to French interests has been rising to 56.8% until 2012 before the trend turned. Since the European elections in 2014, the support for this statement has been relatively low at around 40% and again more people share the opinion that French interests are not well taken into account at EU level.

Figure 8: Perception of the recognition of French interests in the EU, 2005-2018



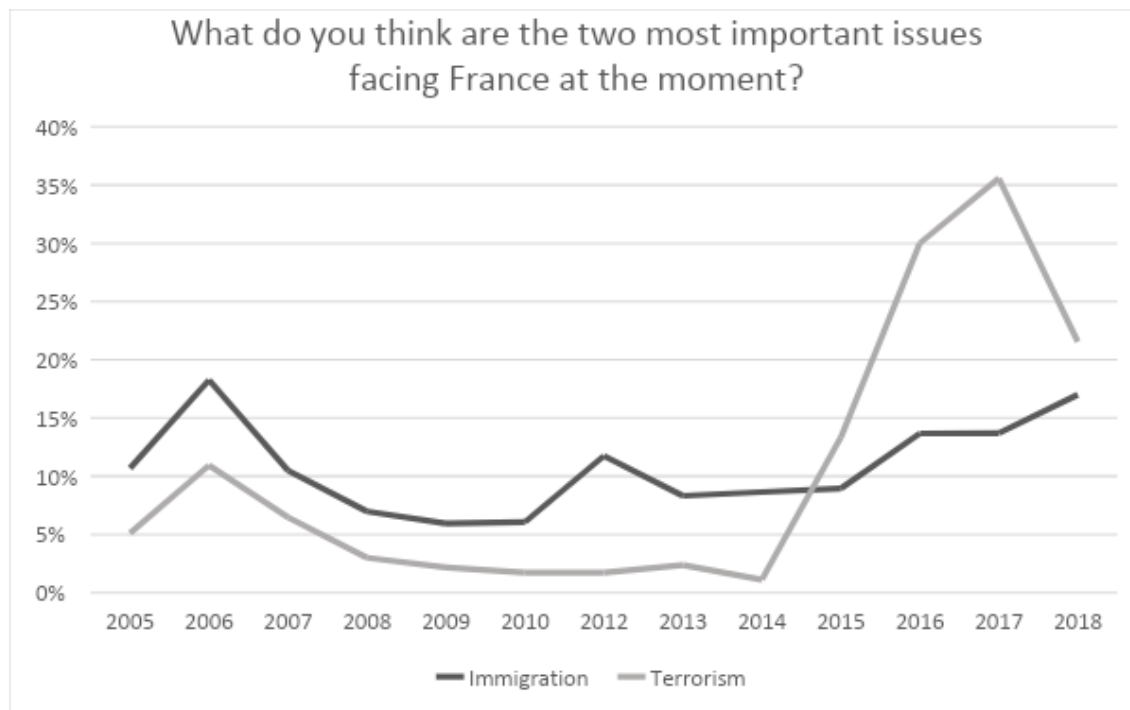
Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

Accordingly, concerns about national sovereignty are considerable. These objections fuelled the occurrence of right-wing Euroscepticism in the early 1990s, when the Single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (1992) implied a sizable shift of competences to the EU level (Goodliffe 2014:327). Later, the rejection of the ECT can to some extent be traced to fears about a loss of national sovereignty as both left-wing and particularly right-wing parties referred to a national threat besides social issues during the election campaign (Brouard/Tiberj 2006:266f.). However, the effective influence on voting behaviour remained limited as only 5% of the voters declared that the fear of a loss of national sovereignty motivated them to reject the ECT and only 4% of the 'no voters' indicated clear anti-Europe attitudes (European Commission 2005:17). However, in recent years, there has been rising public support for renationalisation (Schild 2016:505f.). National sovereignty became more relevant in the presidential elections in 2012, when Marine Le Pen successfully condemned the loss of national sovereignty due to European integration. Even more highlighted than matters of immigration and insecurity, the topic was central to her election campaign (Dehousse/Tacea 2013:5f.), and she demanded that France leave the EMU and the European Union (ibid.:8). Thus, the Front National attracted most Eurosceptic votes (Goodliffe 2014:331). The same can be said for the European elections two years later, when the strengthening of France's decision-making capacity at the expense of EU competences was supported by 72% of respondents according to an IPSOS survey (Schild 2014:434). Two thirds of voters rejecting

EU membership and opposing the Euro as well as three quarters of people endorsing a ‘Frexit’ voted for Front National (Goodliffe 2014:332f.). During the 2017 presidential election, the support for enforcing domestic decision-making authority remained high (70%). Yet, a large majority of French citizens still supported the EU membership and the Euro (Schild 2017:506).

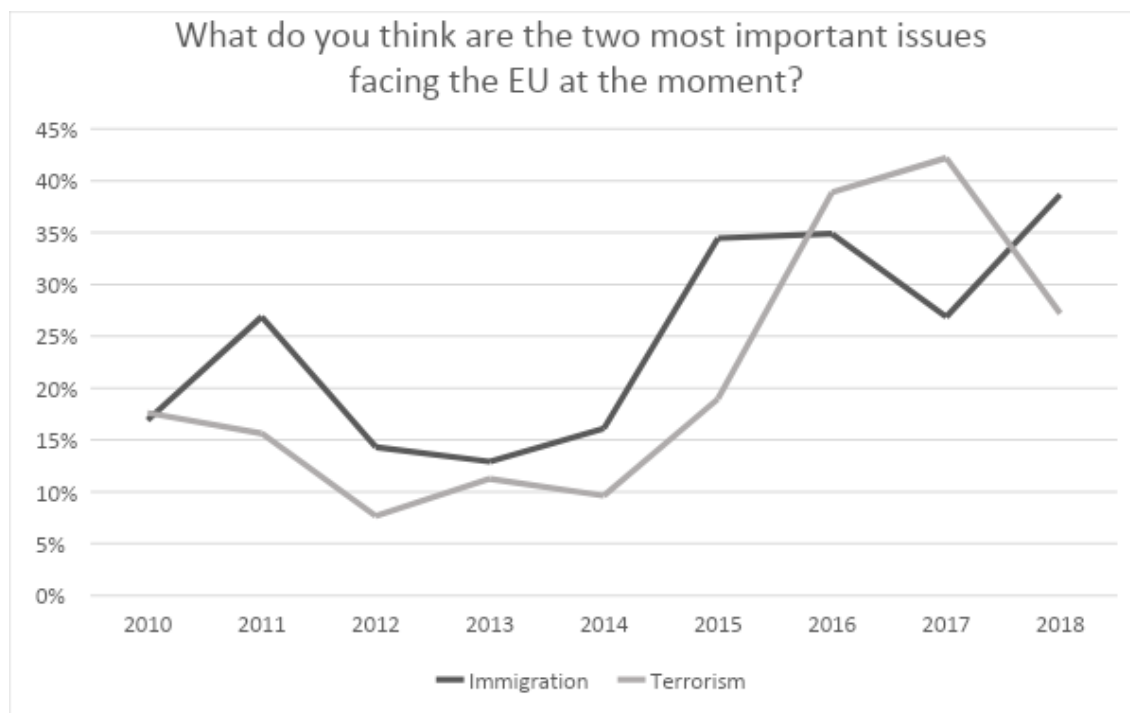
Migration and national security represent crucial policy fields that are linked to national sovereignty and identity. Concerns about a lack of control over external borders have been rising significantly after a temporary easing in 2009/2010 as Figure 8 reveals. Especially since the terrorist attacks in Paris and emergence of the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015, every third French person associates the EU with a loss of control over borders. As Figure 9 illustrates, the importance of migration declined between 2006 and 2010 before it has been increasing again. Since 2015, the proportion of French people considering immigration as a crucial issue has doubled to 17%. More drastic is the development of the figures regarding the salience of terrorism. In the two years after the attacks in Paris, the share of citizens considering terrorism as an essential domestic problem tripled to 35,6%. The numbers for perceived importance of both issues at the EU level have developed similarly since 2010 as Figure 10 demonstrates.

Figure 9: Perception of the importance of immigration and terrorism for France, 2005-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer.

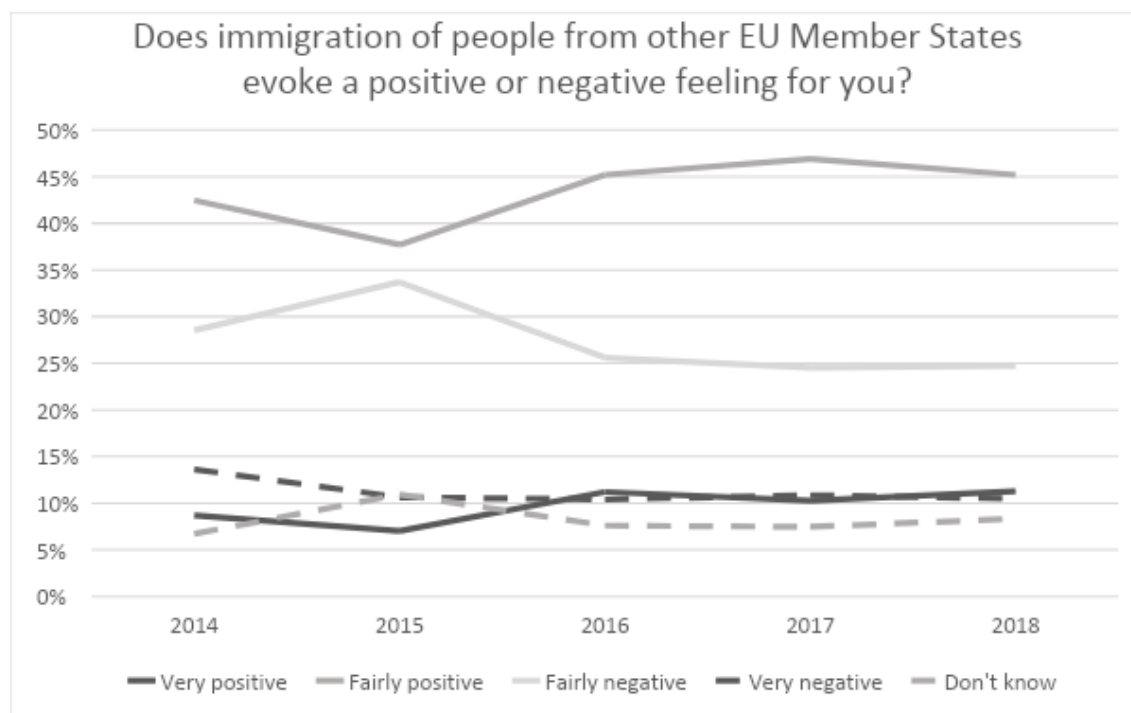
Figure 10: Perception of the importance of immigration and terrorism at EU level, 2010-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

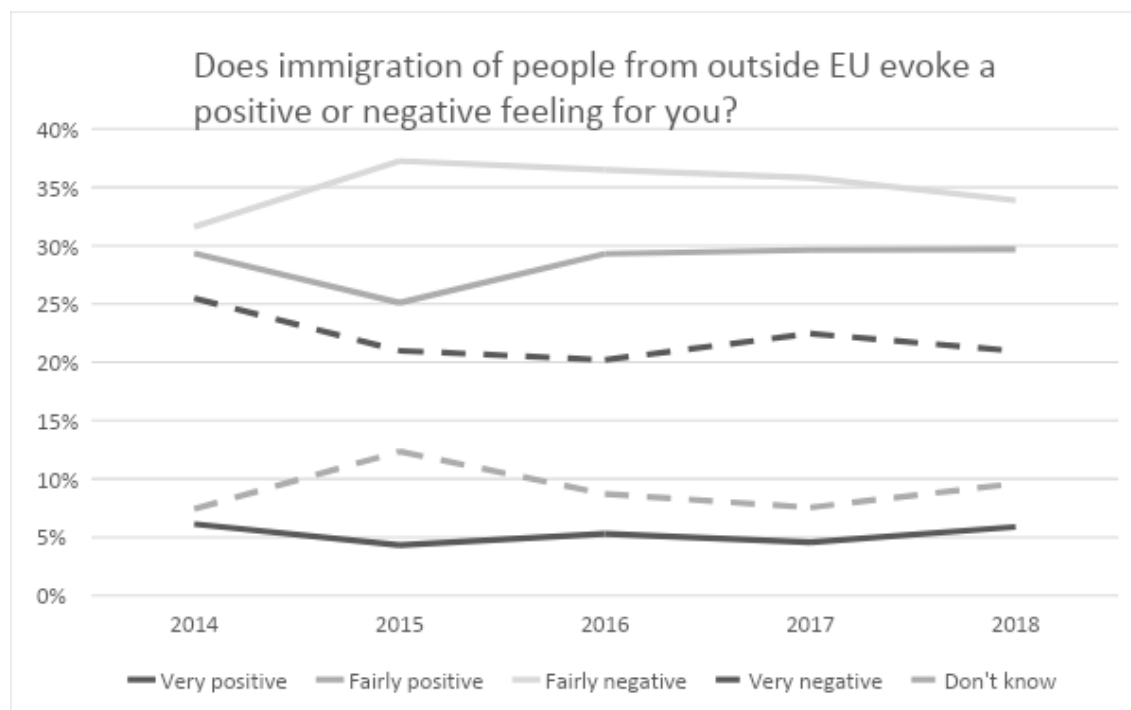
Since 2014, Eurobarometer has also collected data on sentiments about migration, which reveal that a slight majority of French people has positive feelings about migrants from other EU member states, but a large minority has a negative view. Regarding migration from outside the EU, the share of French citizens having a negative opinion is on average 20% higher than for those perceiving that migration rather or very positive.

Figure 11: Feelings about migration of people from other EU countries, 2014-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer.

Figure 12: Feelings about migration of people from outside the EU, 2014-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer.

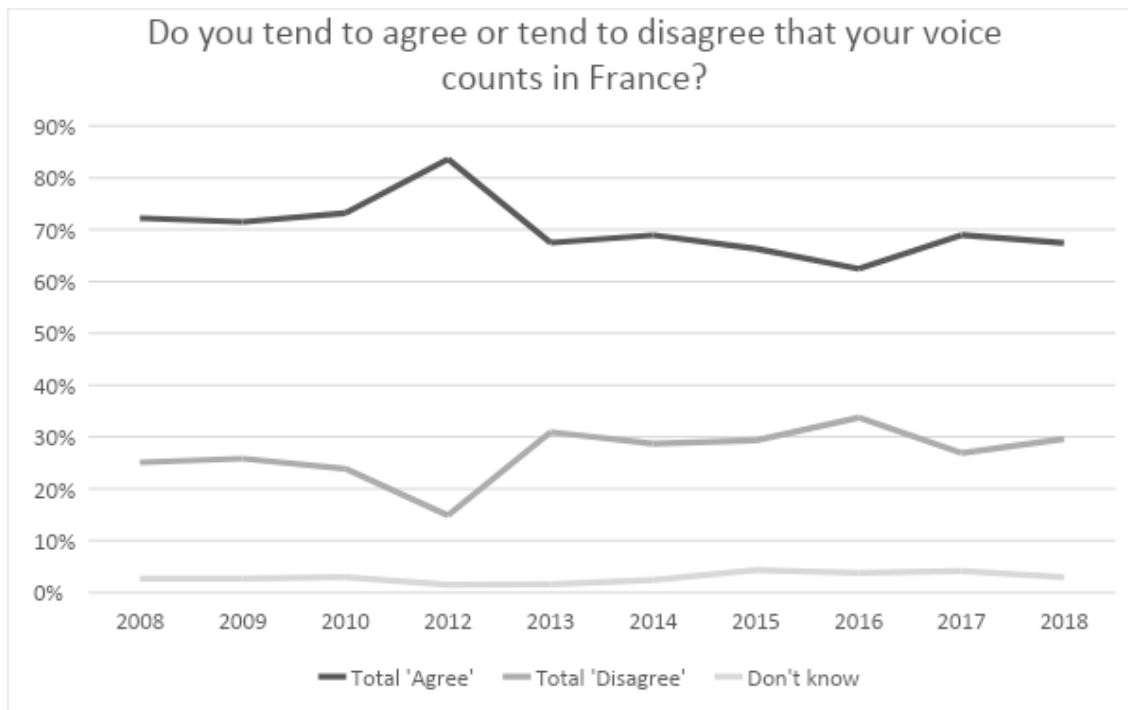
In the 2012 presidential elections, Sarkozy and especially Le Pen thematised immigration and security in their campaigns. While the radical right-wing candidate raised fundamental critique about the EU, the incumbent president promised to enforce the Schengen agreement (Dehousse/Tacea 2013:9f.). However, regarding the importance, the topics rank ninth and tenth behind a wide range of economic and social aspects. Nevertheless, two thirds of French people regarded migration as threat to national identity as post-electoral surveys revealed (ibid.:12-14). In the European elections two years later, immigration was much more salient (40%) and ranked third after the economic crisis and unemployment (Goodliffe 2014:331). Furthermore, 65% of the respondents to an IPSOS survey supported the reintroduction of border controls within the EU to facilitate national security (Schild 2014:434). The decisions for the presidential elections in 2017 were also highly coined by concerns about security as more than one out of three voters indicated the combat against terrorism and immigration as motivation for his/her choice. Among Le Pen's voters, two thirds were worried about national security and even three out of four FN electors mentioned immigration as crucial issue (Steppat 2017).

6.3. Institutional factors

The institutional factors fuelling Euroscepticism encompass attitudes towards the domestic government as well as political efficiency and institutional distrust. The management of the recent financial and economic crisis in Europe is also discussed as a driver of institutional Euroscepticism.

According to the second-order hypothesis, attitudes towards the own government influence Euroscepticism. Figure 13 shows an overall feeling of good representation in French policies although the numbers have been significantly declining since their peak at the time of the presidential elections in 2012 (83,6%). Accordingly, the share of French people disagreeing that their voice is heard doubled since the penultimate presidential election. This development may be explained by drastically falling approval values for President Hollande. In 2014, less than 20% of French citizens trusted Hollande to address France's economic problems in the context of the EMU effectively so that the Parti Socialiste (PS) obtained only 14% of the votes in the European elections. It lost many votes to the Front National that won the EP elections in France (Schild 2014:433f.).

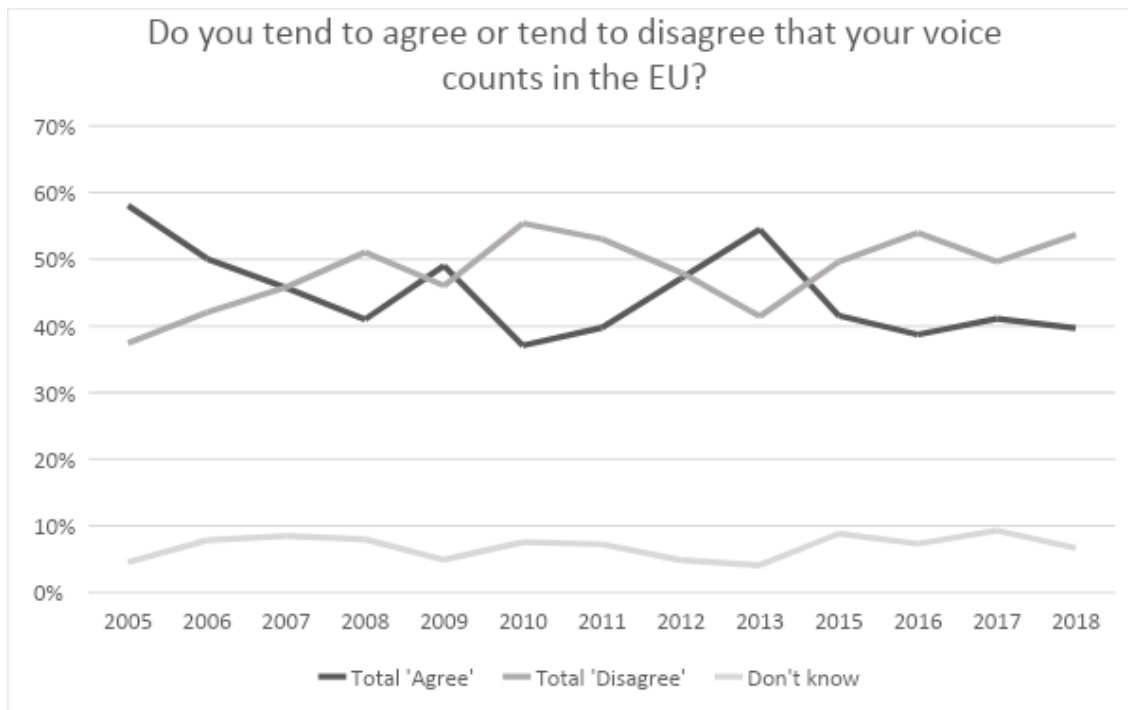
Figure 13: Perception of representation in French politics, 2008-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

Political efficiency and institutional distrust can be divided into feelings of powerlessness in political decision-making, dissatisfaction with European democracy and distrust in political actors. In general, French people consider themselves less represented at the European level than in domestic politics (see Figure 14). But the declining trend in the perception of representation is similar. While 58% of French people agreed with the statement that their voice counts in the EU in 2005, this fell by 20% until 2010, followed by a just as large increase up to 2013. However, since 2015 the figures remain at a relatively low level of about 40%. The amount of people disagreeing with the statement developed accordingly.

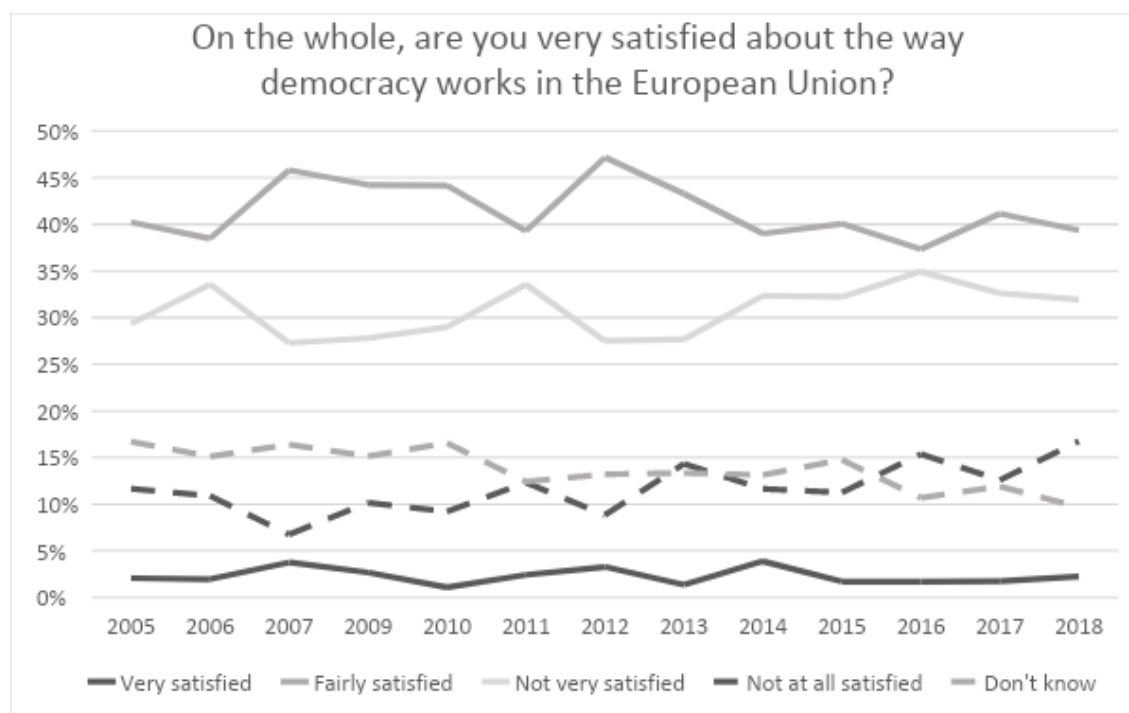
Figure 14: Perception of representation at EU level, 2008-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

The satisfaction with European democracy is also an important determinant of the attitude towards the European Union. Overall, most French people are satisfied with European democracy, but the number of discontented citizens has been growing since the beginning of the century by about 12% up to 31.9% in 2018 (see Figure 15). This proportion was significantly higher at the time of European elections in 2014 (32.3%) compared with 27.3% during the previous EU elections.

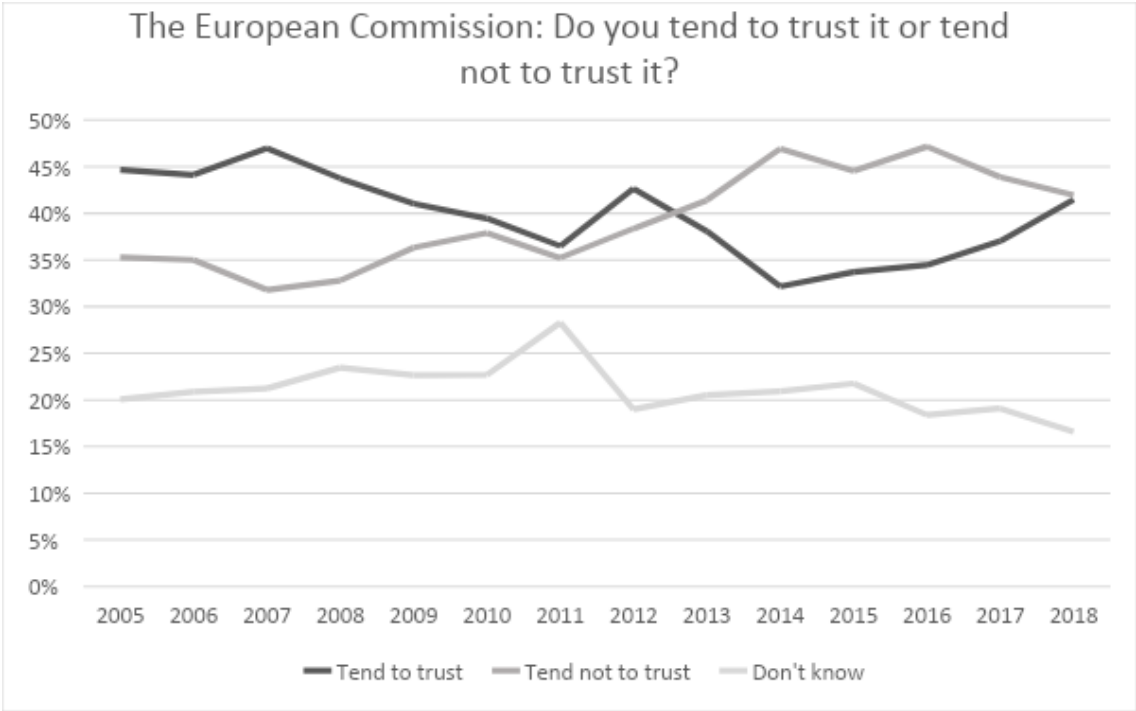
Figure 15: Satisfaction with EU democracy, 2005-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

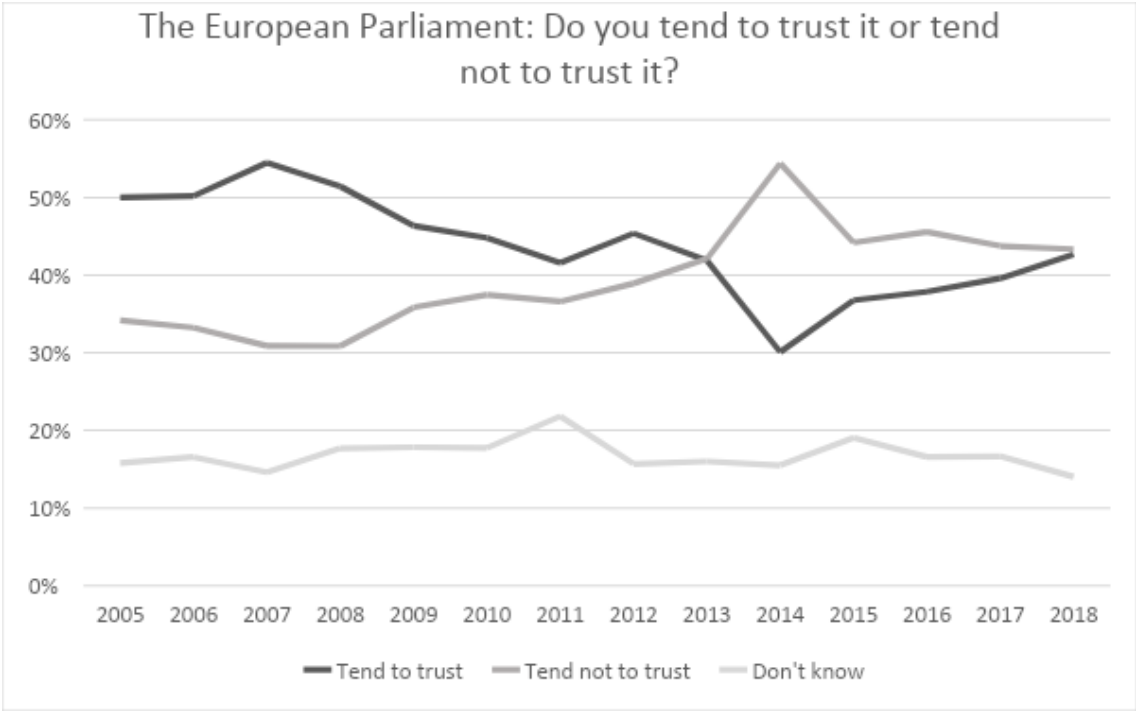
With regard to trust in European political actors, there has been a clearly negative development. For example, confidence in the European Commission (see Figure 16) has been falling from 44.7% in 2005 to 32.2% in the 2014 election year although the approval value was especially high in the previous European election (47%). However, the proportion has been rising again since 2014. A similar development can be observed for trust in the European Parliament, which is replicated in Figure 17. At the beginning of the observation period, half of the respondents trusted the EP, while one third expressed distrust. In the 2014 election year, however, almost 55% had no confidence, whereas the proportion trusting the Parliament had fallen to 30%. But like the approval values for the Commission, trust in the EP has recovered and the share of both trusting and distrusting people amounts to 43.3%.

Figure 16: Trust in the European Commission, 2005-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

Figure 17: Trust in the European Parliament, 2005-2018



Source: Own illustration based on Eurobarometer

As mentioned above, the impact of the financial and economic crisis can be rather explained via the institutional channel than economic Euroscepticism since the satisfaction of the management of the Euro crisis by domestic and supranational institutions matters. While European citizens mainly expected national approaches to address the financial crisis, EU institutions got more important in the context of the subsequent Euro crisis so that the sovereign debt crisis occurred as additional source of Euroscepticism (Serricchio et al. 2013:61f.). Indeed, (radical) left candidates in the 2012 presidential elections taking place at the climax of the Euro crisis criticised management of the crisis, and subsequently the winner, Hollande promised to renegotiate the Stability and Growth Pact with the aim of relaxing fiscal rules and facilitating progressive fiscal policy (Dehousse/Tacea 2013:8-10). Finally, every third voter was influenced by issues concerning sovereign debt and one out of six electors was concerned with fiscal policy (ibid.:13f.). In the 2014 EP elections, most of the voters were motivated by European issues casted their vote according to their confidence with EU approaches to address the economic crisis, with a great majority disagreeing with the effectiveness of the measures taken (Goodliffe 2014:331). Approximately two thirds of Front National voters did not aim to express specific criticism with their choice, but rather sent the signal of fundamental rejection of the Economic and Monetary Union (ibid.:332f.). The financial crisis was also a theme of the 2017 presidential elections as both Marine Le Pen and the far-left-wing candidate Mélenchon criticised the European Union for not protecting European citizens against the financial industry. Macron reacted to such accusations by re-emphasising progressive proposals for a far-reaching reform of the Euro zone governance structures, namely a common budget and a European new deal, meaning a deepening of the economic cooperation within the European Union (Schild 2017:507-509).

7. Conclusion

Euroscepticism is one of the major challenges the European Union faces today since it is not only an incidental but rather persistent phenomena, which also prevails among founding member states. France has experienced a drastic increase in Euroscepticism since the early 1990s. A multitude of *souverainiste* movements came into existence as a reaction to the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty which, although being approved by a mere 51%, determined a deeper integration of France in the EU. The slow but constant rise of the Front National in both national and European elections turned out to be particularly important during the last years. Besides, the enlargement of its traditional electorate to ex-voters of left and right parties is a clear signal of a growing discontent among the French population towards the work done by the domestic political class, and it simultaneously reveals dissatisfaction with the current activities at the EU level. Hence, the first

two hypotheses of rising Euroscepticism in France, which fuelled the success of the Front National, could be proved. This paper analysed the causes for rising Euroscepticism and focussed on the developments throughout the recent European crises. More precisely, it discussed the role of socio-economic, cultural and institutional aspects. First, economic factors play an important role since one out of three French people regards EU membership as being not beneficial and a waste of money. Furthermore, concerns about the impact on the labour market and France's social model are spread widely. While unemployment always belongs to the most important issues influencing people's voting behaviour across all political groups, the perception of the EU as a threat to social security particularly prevails among (radical) left voters. Thus, hypothesis (3.1) could be proved. However, these views fuelled EU-critical positions rather than fundamental opposition to European integration, and they do not sufficiently explain Euroscepticism.

Thus, cultural factors have to be considered as a crucial source of Euroscepticism. Although most of French people identify both with their nation and the EU, there is a large share of citizens regarding themselves as French only and rejecting EU citizenship. Hence, 10-20% of the population perceive EU membership as a threat to their national identity. A majority of French people believes that French interests are not acknowledged at EU level, and many citizens endorse a strengthening of French national sovereignty. Although the latter has already been discussed during the 1990s and before the 2005 referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty, the issue only became genuinely relevant in the course of the European crises. The Front National emphasised the loss of national sovereignty in the campaign for the presidential elections in 2012 and has been successful in mobilising a large share of people voting for a 'Frexit' and a withdrawal from the Euro. The other two key issues of the radical right, namely immigration and national security, became relevant after the occurrence of the 'refugee crisis' and the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015. Since then, both topics have outperformed economic factors in their importance for people's voting behaviour. Overall, hypothesis (3.2) could be confirmed and cultural aspects clearly explain anti-European stances and the continued success of the Front National. While socio-economic factors drive soft Euroscepticism on the left and cultural factors fuel fundamental opposition to the EU by right-wing actors, institutional and political factors also contribute to EU-critical attitudes. First, more than half of the French population does not feel well represented at the European level and there is growing dissatisfaction with EU democracy. Furthermore, the trust in supranational institutions, such as the Commission and the Parliament, has been significantly declining. Here, the perception of EU's actions to address the Euro crisis is crucial as most French people were not satisfied with the management of the financial and the sovereign debt crisis. The migration crisis remains unsolved and the influence of Brexit on Euroscepticism is still unclear.

These findings support hypothesis (3.3). Overall, Eurosceptic parties like the Front National have become established and public opinion of the EU is highly polarised. Thus, the prospect that these phenomena will soon cease are slim. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that a large majority of French people and Europeans generally still support European integration.

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