

New article studies the evolution of Euroscepticism in political parties and public opinion in Portugal before and after the economic crisis

The article "[All Quiet on the European Front? Assessing the Impact of the Great Recession on Euroscepticism in Portugal](#)", published in the journal *South European Society and Politics* by Marco Lisi of New University of Lisbon, seeks to understand to what extent the Portuguese political system has been affected by the growing Euroscepticism in Europe in the last decade.

During the economic crisis, criticism of the European integration project gained ground not only in Portugal, but in all European Union countries. On the one hand, both moderate players and new parties have taken Eurosceptical positions on European issues. On the other hand, there have been increasing levels of negative attitudes towards the European institutions. In Portugal, criticism emerged mainly through the radical left parties during the "Troika" period. However, the economic recovery that took place from 2015 onwards and the governmental solution associated with the "Geringonça" led to a weakening of Euroscepticism, both in terms of public opinion and in the positions taken by political parties with parliamentary representation. As such, in the Portuguese case, there was no politicisation of European issues, contrary to what happened in other countries affected by the economic crisis – which in some cases led to the emergence of a new cleavage based on the opposition between pro and anti-Europe forces.

The investigation

The author argues that Euroscepticism in Portugal is mainly associated with the parties of the Radical Left (*Left Bloc* and *Communist Party*), in spite of the fact that both critics have different arguments and connotations. Although there has been a greater radicalisation of these positions during the period of economic crisis (2011-2014), European issues have assumed a marginal and secondary role in the political agenda and party competition within the "Geringonça" negotiations. The article also looks at the evolution of Euroscepticism at the level of citizens and public opinion, showing an increase in negative opinions towards Europe between 2008 and 2014 - with a clear recovery from 2015 onwards.

The article thus seeks to understand the factors that have determined this evolution of Euroscepticism in Portugal, analysing data from public opinion (to examine the opinions of citizens) and various party documents (party programmes, declarations, etc.). The analysis revealed that:

1. The relevance of European issues increased between 2009 and 2014, but decreased in the following period;
2. The most significant increase in Euroscepticism is found in the *Left Bloc* and *Communist Party*, while the other parties have continued to express pro-European positions;
3. The positions of the parties on the European integration process are mainly determined by ideology (the Radical Left parties are more sceptical than the moderate or right-wing parties) and by strategic issues, i.e. a party's switch from government to opposition (when in government, political parties tend to be less Eurosceptic, and vice versa).

4. At the level of public opinion, the highest level of Euroscepticism was recorded in 2013, when 76% of citizens said they were dissatisfied with the European Union (according to the Eurobarometer data). However, from 2014 onwards, dissatisfaction started to decline and reached 21% in 2019, the lowest in all southern European countries (and lower than the European average).
5. Voters' Euroscepticism is primarily explained by the performance of the economy and the assessment of government's performance. Ideology and party identification are also important factors which influence voters' orientations on Europe. Finally, younger and better educated individuals tend to be more enthusiastic about the European Union.

Conclusions

The article concludes that the 2008 economic crisis significantly affected Euroscepticism in Portugal, increased the proportion of voters with negative orientations towards the European integration process, and strengthened the polarisation of parties on European issues. In particular, this research shows that:

1. The orientations of the Portuguese parties have remained relatively stable on European issues, especially when compared to other European countries;
2. Public opinion has undergone significant changes during the crisis, but these oscillations have not endure. The public opinion on European issues moved in a cyclical way, influenced by the evolution of the economic situation and the performance of the government.

The fact that voter and party alignments on European issues, together with the lack of relevance attributed to this issue by the parties, have remained stable over the last decade, helps to explain the stability of the Portuguese party system, especially when compared to other Southern European countries, where European issues have assumed a central role in the reconfiguration of their political systems.



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