Explaining variation in mainstream centre-right party support for European integration

A case-study research of France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

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S1535420

Thesis MA International Relations: European Union Studies

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Word amount (declaration of originality excluded): 14919

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the last years the European Union has gained in relevance in politics as well as in public discourse. The last decade especially has shown a series of crises putting the issue of European integration high on the political agenda, not least the 2011 Eurozone crisis, the 2015 migration crisis, and the first ever decision by a Member State to exit the Union (Brexit). Moreover, the current global pandemic caused by COVID-19 has reminded EU Member States that cooperation is important in difficult times. As the history of European integration has shown so often, however, conflicts over the role of the European Union has gained prominence between Member States as well as within Member States. An illustration of this disagreement is the rage of Italian and Spanish politicians to the Dutch 'frugal' position of opposing Eurobonds and a more common financial reaction to the economic losses suffered by the former states due to COVID-19.[1] National political parties as well have disputed the role of the European Union and European integration in general. Interestingly, national parties have shown variation in their support for European integration, as Chapter 2 will explain. The main interest of this thesis is to attempt to explain why this variation has occurred diachronically as well as geographically. The guiding research question for this thesis is therefore: 'What explains the variation in mainstream centre-right party support for European integration?'.

Chapter 2-4 will show that especially mainstream centre-right (MCR) parties are interesting case studies for this research given their ostensibly similar position on the political spectrum on the one hand, and the variation in their support for European integration on the other hand. Chapter 2 of this thesis will explain that MCR parties take positions ranging from pro-integration to Soft, and sometimes even Hard, Euroscepticism. Not only will the thesis look at case studies from different EU Member States (see Chapter 3), which already implies some explanation for the variation, but it will also examine to what extent independent variables indicated by the literature on party politics can explain the variation in MCR parties' position on European integration. The variables have been selected on the basis of the political field approach described by González-Ocantos (see Chapter 2). While some of these variables focus on the parties themselves, others integrate the role that other parties play in shaping MCR parties' positions. Chapter 4 will analyse the MCR positions by a discourse analysis of their

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[1] Schmidt, Christoph, "Nederland is boksbal voor zuidelijke woede in corona-debat dat de EU splijt", *Trouw*, 31 March 2020. https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/nederland-is-boksbal-voor-zuidelijke-woede-in-corona-debat-dat-de-eu-splijt~b7cdbfcd/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F accessed 7 September 2020.

election manifestos. Chapter 5 will then look at the extent to which the selected variables (*politicisation; party type*; *government-opposition dynamics & party competition*) account for the observed variation in the three case studies.[2] The thesis will end with a conclusion (Chapter 6) on the extent to which the variables explain the observed variation. It will also provide the reader with ideas for future research.

This research not only involves the reader into a concise description of what parties say about European integration but it also attempts to provide for a synthesised evaluation of four explanatory variables on why parties take certain positions on the issue of European integration. The thesis wants to go beyond the explanations of ideology and integrate the realms of strategy.

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[2] This thesis' structure has been largely inspired by the structure of the following article: Isabelle Hertner and Daniel Keith, "Europhiles or Eurosceptics? Comparing the European Policies of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats,*" British Politics* 12, no. 1 (2017): 63-89.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theory

2.1: Variation in party support for European integration

Turning to the relevant academic literature, Hooghe, Marks & Wilson described that the more a party is located to the fringes of the party system, the less supportive the party is on European integration.[3] They introduced the so-called 'inverted U-curve', which would explain parties' support for European integration based on the left/right continuum that political systems often display.[4] Szczerbiak & Taggart agree in their article that, traditionally speaking, analyses of party support for European integration are "finding the greatest concentrations of Eurosceptics among radical left and the far right, with most Europhiles locating themselves in the middle of the left-right spectrum".[5] In addition, – mainstream parties who "regularly participate in governing coalitions" – have been regarded by Meijers as more pro-integration than challenger parties ("parties that have not governed before").[6] However, Rohrschneider & Whitefield argued that mainstream parties have become more Eurosceptic as well in order to "ward off competition from Euro-skeptical challenger parties".[7] Szczerbiak & Taggart support this as they have also reviewed this conception of pro-European mainstream centre parties on the one hand and Eurosceptic challenger fringe parties on the other hand. Firstly, they explain that mainstream centre parties take Eurosceptic positions as well.[8] Secondly, in order to show the potential varieties of these positions, they seek to redefine Euroscepticism. Therefore, an analysis of MCR parties' positions on European integration contributes to discussing this contradiction in the literature.

As Euroscepticism is an important concept for the current research, the thesis will briefly explain the definition of Euroscepticism that will be used in the rest of this thesis. Initially,

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[3] Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks and Carole Wilson, "Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?" *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 8 (2002): 966.

[4] Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, "Does Left/Right Structure, " 966.

[5] Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart "Introduction: Researching Euroscepticism in Party Systems: A Comparative and Theoretical Research Agenda," in: *Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism, Volume 2: Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives*, eds. Paul Taggart, Paul and Aleks Szczerbiak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 9.

[6] Maurits Meijers, "Contagious Euroscepticism: the Impact of Eurosceptic Support on Mainstream Party Positions on European Integration," *Party Politics* 23, no.4 (2017): 413-414.

[7] Robert Rohrschneider and Stephen Whitefield, "Responding to Growing European Union-skepticism? The Stances of Political Parties toward European Integration in Western and Eastern Europe following the Financial Crisis," *European Union Politics* 17, no. 1 (2015): 140.

[8] Szczerbiak and Taggart, "Introduction: Researching Euroscepticism," 9-10.

Taggart distinguished between "outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" on the one hand, and "contingent or qualified opposition" on the other hand.[9] Later, this distinction transitioned to Hard Euroscepticism, which is "principled (…) opposition to European integration", and Soft Euroscepticism, which is "contingent (…) opposition".[10] The threshold between the two variants would be the party's "attitudes towards a country's membership of the EU".[11]

Szczerbiak & Taggart constructed a more detailed definition of the two forms of Euroscepticism which this thesis will use. Hard Euroscepticism, usually found at the edges of the political spectrum, is "*principled* opposition (…) based on the ceding or transfer of power to supranational institutions such as the EU".[12] Soft Euroscepticism, then, is "opposition to the EU's current or future planned trajectory based on the *further* extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make."[13] Note that the focus of the opposition is on the supranational EU. Furthermore, in the new definition Soft Eurosceptics oppose any 'further' competences to the EU. Importantly, parties that only "*problematize* aspects of European integration" should not be considered as Soft Eurosceptic. For example, "those who criticise the EU for failing to properly reflect their countries' national interests" should not be labelled as Soft Eurosceptic nor parties who "only criticise one or two EU policy areas; oppose EU enlargement; or criticise the EU for being insufficiently integrationist and/or undemocratic".[14] The thesis will therefore make a clear distinction between Hard Euroscepticism, Soft Euroscepticism and mere problematisation when discussing party positions on European integration.

2.2 Theory

However, Taggart & Szczerbiak have not only identified ideology as a reason for the varying degree of support for European integration, but they also underscored "strategic-tactical party competition factors".[15] Indeed, other research has also explained that there is a need for studies

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[9] Paul Taggart, "A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems," *European Journal of Political Research* 33, no. 3 (1998): 366.
[10] Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak, "Theorising Party-based Euroscepticism: Problems of Definition, Measurement and Causality," in *Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives. Opposing Europe? The Comparative Party Politics of Euroscepticism,* eds. Aleks Szczerbiak and Paul Taggart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 239.
[11] Taggart and Szczerbiak, "Theorising Party-based Euroscepticism," 239.
[12] Szczerbiak and Taggart, "Introduction: Researching Euroscepticism," 3.
[13] Ibidem.
[14] Ibid., 4.
[15] Taggart and Szczerbiak, "Theorising party-based Euroscepticism," 250.

that relate "contextual factors" to party positions.[16] This is where this thesis' theory to answer the research question comes into the picture. The variation in MCR party support for European integration should be explained by looking at the different contexts in which MCR parties operate. More specifically, it is by analysing the different aspects of the so-called "political field" that this thesis will attempt to explain the variation.[17] Moreover, these different aspects of the political field have to be analysed as there is no single explanatory variable that can account for the whole variation (as chapter 5 will demonstrate).

According to González-Ocantos, these political fields "structure [human] behaviour".[18] Therefore, the thesis wants to comprise explanations in its analysis that contribute to mapping the case studies' political fields to a large extent. Political fields consist of three aspects: the fields' actors, space of action and interaction between actors.[19] In order to analyse these aspects, the thesis will examine four explanatory variables in total (one for the actor, two for the space of action and one for the interaction between actors). Although multiple variables exist, this thesis only chooses four in order to keep the analysis as in-depth as possible.

A (non-exhaustive) list of contextual variables that contribute to a party's political field are: party type;[20] issue salience[21]; government-opposition status[22]; party competition[23]; party

[16] Matthijs Rooduijn, Sarah L. De Lange and Wouter Van Der Brug, "A Populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic Contagion by Populist Parties in Western Europe," *Party Politics* 20, no. 4 (2014): 571;
Joost Van Spanje, "Contagious Parties: Anti-Immigration Parties and Their Impact on Other Parties' Immigration Stances in Contemporary Western Europe*," Party Politics* 16, no. 5 (2010): 580.

[17] Ezequiel González-Ocantos, "Designing Qualitative Research Projects: Notes on Theory Building, Case Selection and Field Research," in eds. Luigi Curini and Robert Franzese Jr , *SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE publications, 2020), 107.

[18] Ibidem, 108.

[19] Ibid., 109.

[20] Wolfgang Müller, Kaare Strøm, eds., *Policy, Office, or Votes?: How Political Parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[21] Meijers, "Contagious Euroscepticism," 414; Alexandru Filip, *Contesting Europe: A Time-Series Cross-Sectional Analysis of Eurosceptic Influence over Mainstream Political Parties* (Bremen: University of Bremen Press, 2017), 88-89; Sara Hobolt and Catherine De Vries, "Issue Entrepreneurship and Multiparty Competition," *Comparative Political Studies* 48, no. 9 (2015): 1177-1178; Marc Van De Wardt, Catherine De Vries and Sara Hobolt, "Exploiting the Cracks: Wedge Issues in Multiparty Competition," *The Journal of Politics* 76, no. 4 (2015): 115.

[22] Filip, *Contesting Europe,* 52; Van De Wardt, De Vries and Hobolt, "Exploiting the Cracks," 115; Tarik Abou-Chadi, "Niche Party Success and Mainstream Party Policy Shifts: How Green and Far-right Parties Differ in their Impact," *British Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 2 (2016): 427; Van Spanje, "Contagious Parties," 578.

[23] Filip, *Contesting Europe,* 49; Abou-Chadi, "Niche Party Success," 432; Rooduijn, De Lange and Van Der Brug, "A Populist Zeitgeist?" 571.

unity[24]; rival mainstream party policy shifts[25] and European election performance[26]. The thesis has selected the following four variables: *politicisation* (space of action)*, party type* (actors), *government-opposition dynamics* (space of action), and *party competition* (interaction). Although more variables are worth looking at, the selection of these four variables guarantee an analysis of the fundamental aspects of a party's political field. Moreover, this selection contributes to an in-depth analysis and avoids the research chapter to become superficial. Furthermore, this selection allows the analysis to look at the internal context shaping MCR parties' positions (*party type / government-opposition dynamic*) as well as the external context shaping MCR parties' positions (*politicisation / party competition*).

This chapter will now continue by reviewing the relevant literature on these explanatory variables, which is required in order to get a deeper understanding of how they affect party positions on European integration. Also, sections 2.3-2.6 will end with hypotheses that will be examined in chapter 5.

2.3 Politicisation of European integration

In a broad sense, politicisation could be described as "rendering something contested or controversial".[27] Zooming in into the field of politics, the academic literature has described politicisation as "making previously apolitical matters political".[28] When politicising an issue, one is "transporting an issue into the field of politics".[29] This act is fulfilled by political parties as they have a so-called "arena choice", which comes down to the choice of "whether an issue enters the arena of mass politics".[30]

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[24] Van De Wardt, De Vries and Hobolt, "Exploiting the Cracks," 991; Van Spanje, "Contagious Parties," 580; Tim Bale, Christoffer Green-Pedersen and André Krouwel et al., "If You Can't Beat Them, Join Them? Explaining Social Democratic Responses to the Challenge from the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe," *Political Studies* 58, no. 3 (2010): 421.

[25] Andreas Fagerholm, "Why Do Political Parties Change Their Policy Positions? A Review," *Political Studies Review* 14, no. 4 (2016): 508; James Adams, "Causes and Electoral Consequences of Party Policy Shifts in Multiparty Elections: Theoretical Results and Empirical Evidence," *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012): 404.

[26] Filip, *Contesting Europe*, 57.

[27] Niilo Kauppi, Kari Palonen and Claudia Wiesner, "The Politification and Politicisation of the EU," *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 19, no. 1 (2016): 74.

[28] Pieter De Wilde and Michael Zürn, "Can the Politicization of European Integration Be Reversed?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 50, no. 1 (2012): 139.

[29] De Wilde and Zürn, "Can the Politicization," 139; Michael Zürn, "Opening Up Europe: Next Steps in Politicisation Research," *West European Politics* 39, no.1 (2016): 167.

[30] Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "A Postfunctional Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus," *British Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 1 (2009): 8.

Although these definitions give a meaning of politicisation in politics, they do not explain the effects that politicisation has on the political debate. Therefore, this thesis chooses the working definition of De Wilde who, after reviewing a large part of the literature on politicisation, conceived politicisation as "an increase in polarisation of opinions, interests or values".[31] The mechanism between politicisation and polarisation works as follows. First, an issue becomes politicised "when there are at least two different opinions on the subject".[32] A debate starts between the two opinions. As more actors enter the debate, so-called "advocacy coalitions" emerge due to the need of common positions when drafting policies.[33] The more actors joining the advocacy coalitions, the more pronounced the conflict between them and "the stronger polarization of opinion contributing to increasing politicisation".[34] Politicisation leads to more polarisation, which leads again to more politicisation; this process can be labelled as a "centrifugal mechanism".[35]

Politicisation of European integration did not occur for a long time in history, as European integration was regarded as a *fait accompli* by political elites since the construction of the supranational institutions in the 50s.[36] Maintaining this idea was beneficial for political elites as they did not have to legitimise themselves to the public for ceding national powers to supranational institutions. In the 50s already Jean Monnet and Walter Hallstein conceived the European community as a "fragile construction, without strong institutions".[37] Although European integration was not completely un-politicised over the decades that followed (as the research chapter will show), the largest surge in politicisation of European integration occurred at the beginning of the 90s with the Maastricht Treaty. This treaty had much more effect on the European peoples and, therefore, politicians had to politicise the issue increasingly.[38] It is true that politicisation can work as an opportunity for new ideas about further European integration,[39] but for the European integration issue politicisation worked out mostly negatively. As Hooghe & Marks have argued in their 'from permissive consensus to constraining dissensus'- thesis, the political elites had to take into account public opinion increasingly after

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[31] Pieter De Wilde, "No Polity for Old Politics? A Framework for Analyzing the Politicization of European Integration," *Journal of European Integration* 33, no. 5 (2011): 560.
[32] De Wilde, "No Polity" 567.
[33] Ibidem.
[34] Ibidem.
[35] Ibid, 565.
[36] Kauppi, Palonen and Wiesner, "The Politification," 8.
[37] Ibidem.
[38] Hooghe and Marks, "A Postfunctional Theory," 21.
[39] Kauppi, Palonen and Wiesner, "The Politification," 3.

Maastricht. More importantly, the political elite "had to make room for a more Eurosceptical public".[40] It is not true that the public became more Eurosceptic, but politicians were forced to represent the public (that had already been more Eurosceptic) after Maastricht which resulted in more politicisation.[41] This, in turn, resulted in more polarisation on European integration, thereby hindering further integration.[42] Politicisation would then actually lead to more "renationalisation" instead of further integration.[43] Therefore, it lies within the line of expectation for this thesis that the more the issue of European integration becomes politicised, the more the MCR positions on European integration take extreme ends, resulting in more Euroscepticism:

H$_1$: The more the European integration issue becomes politicised, the more polarisation on the issue occurs within the political arena, and the more it is likely that MCR party positions become Eurosceptic.

2.4 Party type

A second explanation of why MCR party positions on European integration vary could be the difference in *party type*. Strøm & Müller distinguish two party types, an office-seeking party and a policy-seeking party.[44]

Office-seeking parties strive to "maximize their opportunities to gain office".[45] A reason for this is that holding office entails certain benefits, such as a higher "policy effectiveness" or a "preferential treatment".[46] These parties, therefore, use votes as "instrumental goals" to attain office.[47] One of the consequences of this desire to hold office is that parties will take vote-maximising positions, "whether or not the positions (…) correspond to the policy preferences of their members".[48] Office-seeking parties are thus rather pragmatic and are willing to give up

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[40] Hooghe and Marks, "A Postfunctional Theory," 8.

[41] Ibidem, 8-9.

[42] De Wilde, "No Polity" 566.

[43] Ibidem.

[44] Kaare Strøm and Wolfgang Müller, "Political Parties and Hard Choices", in *Policy, Office, or Votes?: How Political Parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions,* Wolfgang Müller and Kaare Strøm, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.

[45] Ibidem.

[46] Ibid., 6.

[47] Ibid., 9.

[48] Ibid*.,* 4.

their original position in exchange for another, vote-attracting, position that might not be supported by their members.

In contrast, policy-seeking parties "faithfully represent the policy preferences of their members".[49] For these parties, success is not measured by whether or not they hold office, but rather by "the ability to change public policy toward its most preferred positions".[50] These parties will therefore keep their policy and aim at steering the public debate towards their original position.

The relationship between party type and party positioning on European integration has been explained by Taggart & Szczerbiak. They argue that office-seeking parties have far less difficulties with changing their (fundamental) position on European integration than policy-seeking parties.[51] Moreover, for office-seeking parties "ideology is a secondary factor in determining their party position" on European integration.[52]

This balancing act between office and policy-adherence is an issue that parties have to face when drafting electoral manifestos as well, making this explanation fitting for this thesis.[53] The thesis' second hypothesis is therefore:

H₂: The more the MCR party is office-seeking, the higher the chance that it will shift its policy positions on European integration towards Euroscepticism.

2.5 Government-Opposition Dynamics

A third explanation for variation in MCR party support for European integration could be the dynamic between government and opposition. Being in government or being in opposition has different effects on MCR parties' positions. It affects the degree of policy continuity or change.

On the one hand, parties in government have won votes to the extent that they could enter office. It is therefore expected that these parties continue with the same positions that have brought them into office.[54] This aligns with Budge's past election model, showing that parties

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid, 7.

[51] Taggart and Szczerbiak, "Theorising Party-based Euroscepticism," 14-15.

[52] Ibidem, 15.

[53] Strøm and Müller, "Political Parties," 10.

[54] Nick Sitter, "Opposing Europe: Euro-scepticism, Opposition and Party Competition," *Sussex: Sussex European Institute* 56 (2002): 24.

keep their positions when votes have been gained.[55] Moreover, changing positions on European integration is even less likely when there is a need to work with other parties in coalition governments. A change in policy would create an insecure prospect for the coalition.[56] These aspects of government (electoral prospects and possible coalition building) constituting the "logic of government" would disincentive MCR parties to change their positions towards more Euroscepticism.[57] In contrast, Fagerholm specified that precisely government parties will shift policies more easily because of the risk of losing votes to opposition parties.[58] This debate in the literature makes it all the more fascinating to examine government-opposition status as a moderating factor for variation in MCR support for European integration.

On the other hand, opposition parties (including mainstream opposition parties) have the privilege to criticise parties in government. Mainstream parties in opposition are, therefore, more able to change their position on European integration (in this thesis' case: towards more Euroscepticism) than parties in government.[59] Being in opposition is regarded by mainstream parties as a loss, to which the party responds by reshaping its strategy in which Euroscepticism does not have to be ignored ("logic of opposition").[60] Budge's past election model, again, adds that parties alternate their positions when votes have been lost during previous elections.[61] The earlier mentioned coalition-building, however, also pressures opposition parties to downplay Euroscepticism, given that those parties will also have to build a coalition if they want to govern at a later stage.[62] It is, therefore, expected that the logic of opposition is flattened for parties in multi-party systems since coalition-building is eventually required in these systems.

The forthcoming hypotheses are the following:

H$_{3a}$: MCR parties in government will refrain from changing their position on European integration towards more Euroscepticism (logic of government).

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[55] Ian Budge, "A New Spatial Theory of Party Competition: Uncertainty, Ideology and Policy Equilibria Viewed Comparatively and Temporally," *British Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 4 (1994): 453; Adams, "Causes and Electoral Consequences," 407.

[56] Sitter, "Opposing Europe," 24.

[57] Ibidem.

[58] Fagerholm, "Why Do Political Parties Change," 505.

[59] Sitter, "Opposing Europe," 12.

[60] Ibidem, 15.

[61] Budge, "A New Spatial Theory," 453; Adams, "Causes and Electoral Consequences," 407.

[62] Sitter, "Opposing Europe," 23.

H₃ᵦ: MCR parties in opposition will change their position on European integration towards more Euroscepticism (logic of opposition).

H₃ᵪ: The logic of opposition for MCR parties will be more moderate when their respective electoral system requires them to eventually build coalitions when in government.

2.6 Party competition

The fourth explanation examines the role that other parties play in shaping MCR parties' positions. It touches upon the literature on interparty competition. An influential theory on party competition is Downs' spatial theory which states that "the major force shaping a party's policies is competition with other parties for votes".[63] According to Downs, parties seek to maximise their votes by presenting policy positions that are as closely related to voters' preferences as possible.[64] Parties compete on presenting the policy *position* that attracts the highest amount of votes. Relating this to interparty competition, a rich body of literature has focused on how past election results of successful challenger parties shape positional shifts of mainstream parties during subsequent elections. Norris argued how mainstream parties adjust their positions towards their competitor's position when their challenger competitor sharply gained in votes during preceding elections, which is also called "contagion".[65] Although contagion effects can happen on all sides of the political spectrum – from radical right and radical left parties to their mainstream right and mainstream left colleagues (Odmalm & Hepburn, Filip, Meijers, Abou-Chadi & Orlowski, Akkerman, Abou-Chadi, Rooduijn et al., Bale et al.,, Van Spanje) – contagion effects have occurred very often at the right side of the political spectrum. Norris named this the "contagion of the right".[66] Bale has underscored that there is indeed a "symbiotic" relationship between MCR and CRR parties on the right side of the political spectrum.[67]

Although a fair amount of the studies above focused on contagion effects regarding immigration policies and populist policies, Filip and Meijers were the only ones (to my knowledge) that analysed Eurosceptic contagion. This makes it relevant to look at the extent to which the CRR

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[63] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 102.

[64] Filip, *Contesting Europe,* 24.

[65] Pippa Norris, *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 266.

[66] Ibidem.

[67] Tim Bale, "Who Leads and Who Follows? The Symbiotic Relationship Between UKIP and the Conservatives – and Populism and Euroscepticism," *Politics* 38, no. 3 (2018): 263.

parties' electoral success triggered a shift in MCR parties' policy positions towards the CRR parties' position, which would have meant an increase in Euroscepticism. Although Filip has argued that this is the case,[68] other studies regarding contagion effects in other policy areas find modest to no contagion effects (Abou-Chadi & Orlowski; Akkerman; Rooduijn et al.), making it even more interesting to see to what extent party competition shaped the positions of this thesis' case studies.

The fourth hypothesis of this thesis is therefore:

H_4: The more successful the CRR party is during preceding elections, the more Eurosceptic the respective MCR party position becomes during the subsequent elections.

With this more in-depth understanding of the four explanatory variables that this research will examine to support its theory, the thesis will test hypotheses 1-4 in chapter 5. However, the following chapter will first explain this thesis' design (chapter 3), which includes the case selection and methods used to analyse the party positions in chapter 4.

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[68] Filip, *Contesting Europe,* 2.

Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1: Case Selection

To operationalise this thesis' aims, it chooses to analyse mainstream centre-right (MCR) parties' positions. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the fact that they are mainstream parties makes them an interesting focus of study, because it allows the thesis to look at the role that government-participation can have in party positions. Secondly, mainstream centre-right parties have been known to have a "symbiotic" relationship with their challenger radical right (CRR) colleagues, which is an excellent condition to integrate theories on party competition.[69]

Suitable case studies to answer the research question need to meet the following criteria[70]:

- A MCR party (*dependent variable*).
- Within the same political spectrum a Eurosceptic CRR party that has been present over a longer period of time is required in order to test the theory of *party competition* (one of the *independent variables*).[71]

Examples of non-cases[72] are MCR parties in Spain and Germany since the CRR parties Vox and Alternative für Deutschland respectively came to exist in 2013 with a success only during the last three years.

Instead, the thesis' case-studies are *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP) in France, *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD) in the Netherlands, and the Conservative Party (Conservatives) in the United Kingdom. These three parties show varying degrees of support for European integration (see Chapter 4), providing the thesis with "different perspectives on the (…) process (…) I want to portray".[73] Moreover, their CRR competitors – *Front National* (FN), *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) respectively, have existed for a longer period in time.

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[69] Bale, "Who Leads and Who Follows?" 263.

[70] Audie Klotz, "Case Selection" in Audie Klotz and Deepra Prakash eds., *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 44.

[71] Maurits Meijers and Christian Rauh, "Has Eurosceptic Mobilization Become More Contagious? Comparing the 2009 and 2014 EP Election Campaigns in the Netherlands and France*," Politics and Governance* 4, no. 1 (2016): 87.

[72] Klotz, "Case Selection," 46.

[73] John Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE publishing, 2007), 75.

The selected MCR parties will be analysed during the specific timeframe of 2005 – 2015. 2005 is the year in which both France and the Netherlands rejected the Constitutional Treaty by referendum, which emphasised the running debate on whether more integration is actually desired by these Member States. 2015 is the last year taken into the analysis because of the 2016 referendum on EU membership held in the UK. In 2016 the official exit-procedure of this now ex-Member State commenced, making 2015 a logical end date for this thesis' research on MCR parties and their support for European integration.

3.2: Methods

3.2.1 Discourse analysis

One way to outline MCR parties' positions on European integration is to make use of the 2006-2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey data on parties' positions on European integration. A synthesis of the data for UMP, VVD and the Conservatives would generate Figure 1.

Figure 1: MCR parties' position on European integration.
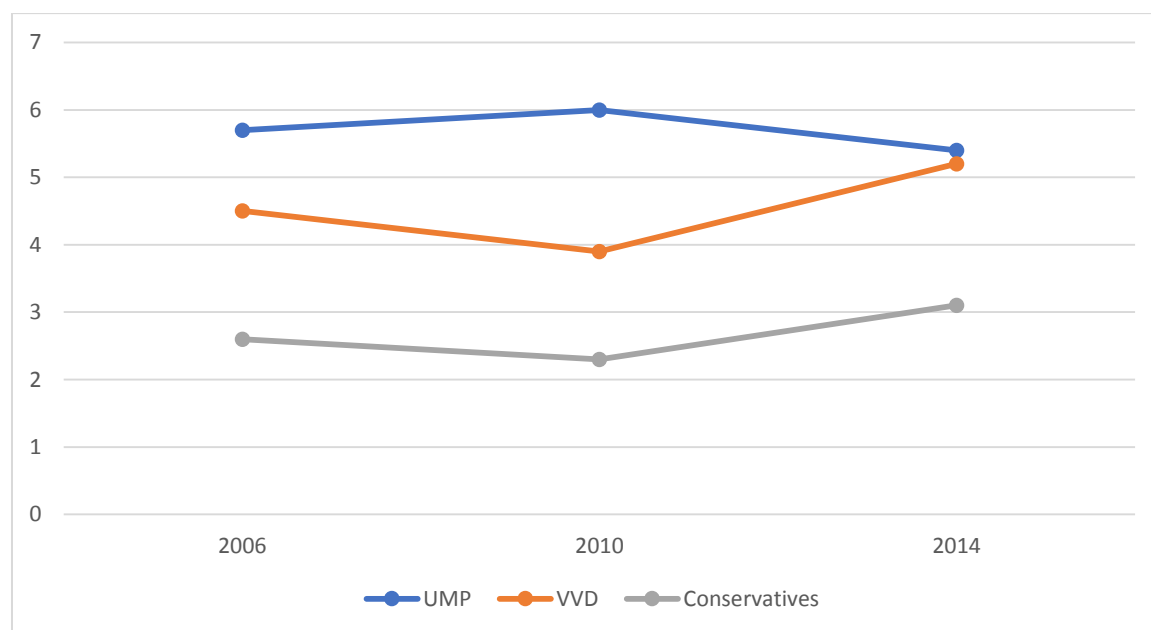
Note: Overall orientation of party leadership towards European integration (1-7 scale; 1= strongly opposed, 7 = strongly in favour). Based on the 1999-2014 CHES trend file.[74]

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[74] Ryan Bakker, Catherine De Vries and Erica Edwards, et al., "Measuring Party Positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2010," *Party Politics* 21, no. 1 (2015): 143-152; Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny and Ryan Bakker, et al., "Explaining the Salience of Anti-elitism and Reducing Political Corruption for Political Parties in Europe with the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Data," *Research & Politics* 4, no.1 (2017): 1-9.

Although this gives the thesis a hint of what the MCR parties' positions were in the specific timeframe, it does not show *how* and *on what dimensions* of the European integration issue the positions have changed/remained stable. Therefore, the thesis uses discourse analysis as a method to analyse the variation in MCR support for European integration. It thereby contributes to the literature that has expressed a wish for more research on parties' "way of discussing and framing EU issues".[75] Moreover, it is a fitting method to determine how "things were not always the way they appear now", *i.e.* how MCR parties' positions on European integration have shown variation.[76] Studying discourse is relevant because it shows "how people (…) think about the world" – in this thesis' case, about European integration.[77] Rhetoric and language are not just words external to society, but are *discourse* which means they are a "social practice determined by social structures".[78] More specifically, "language is a part of society", meaning that "linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena".[79] When politicians speak or write about European integration, their language is conditioned by the social processes they take part in, which touches upon the explanatory variables that will be examined in chapter 5.[80]

Although discourse analyses can be executed through analysing public speeches or public statements[81], this thesis looks at the discourse found in party manifestos. Manifestos adhere to the electoral cycle and are therefore considered to be an "authoritative source of information about the stated electoral policy positions of political parties".[82] Taggart & Szczerbiak have also underscored that "for measurement (…) key sources might be (…) [amongst others] published party programmes and manifestos".[83] One of the limitations of studying manifestos is that they cannot predict politicians' actions after elections.[84] However, manifestos provide so-called "possible outcomes" that parties provide for policy-making on European integration on a specific moment in history, making them reliable primary sources of parties' ideology on European integration during elections.[85]

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[75] Maurits Meijers, "Contagious Euroscepticism," 421.

[76] Iver Neumann, "Discourse Analysis" Audie Klotz and Deepra Prakash eds., *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 76.

[77] Neumann, "Discourse Analysis," 62.

[78] Norman, Fairclough, *Language and Power* (Longman Group UK Limited, 1989), 17.

[79] Ibidem, p.23.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Kenneth Benoît and Michael Laver, *Party Policy in Modern Democracies* (Routledge Research in Comparative Politics, 2006) 57.

[82] Ibidem, 64.

[83] Szczerbiak and Taggart, "Introduction: Researching Euroscepticism," 5.

[84] Neumann, "Discourse Analysis," 62.

[85] Ibidem.

Furthermore, the manifestos correspond to national elections as these constitute "the main arena for interparty competition" which is significant for the theories this thesis will explore.[86] Also, even during national elections the European integration issue is important for voters.[87] Moreover, De Vries has explained that parties exhibit aspects of Euroscepticism during national elections as well, making national elections fitting for this thesis' research.[88]

3.2.2 Dimensions of European integration

The framing of the MCR parties' discourse on European integration has been executed for this thesis following three guiding dimensions that stand out in the literature on political and public support for European integration:

1. Economics: costs and benefits of EU membership[89]
2. Immigration: immigration facilitated by EU membership[90]
3. Transfer of powers to supranational Brussels, indicating a decline in national sovereignty.[91]

3.2.3 Coding

The coding, used to analyse the manifestos, has consisted of two rounds and was focused on "the most salient portions of the corpus related to the research question".[92] The first round has been conducted following In Vivo-coding; the second round is a round of Concept/Pattern-Coding.

In Vivo coding makes use of "a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record".[93] Given the fact that the manifestos of the case studies are written in three different languages, it is most fitting to use In-Vivo coding in the first round to stick as

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[86] Filip, "Contesting Europe," 199.

[87] Meijers, "Contagious Euroscepticism," 415.

[88] Catherine de Vries, *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 14.

[89] Sara, Hobolt and Catherine de Vries, "Public Support for European Integration", *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016), 420. Matthew Goodwin and Caitlin Milazzo, "Britain, the European Union and the Referendum: What Drives Euroscepticism?" *Chatham House*, (2015) 5-6; Hooghe, Wilson, and Marks, "Does Left/Right Structure," 467.

[90] Tibor Iván, Berend, "The Political Representation of Discontent: Disappearing Traditional Political Parties and Rising Populism." In: *Against European Integration: The European Union and Its Discontents* (Routledge, 2019), 49; Hobolt and De Vries, "Public Support," 420-421. Goodwin and Milazzo, "Britain, the European Union," 5-6; Hooghe, Wilson, Marks, "Does Left/Right Structure," 476.

[91] Berend, "Political Representation," 49; Goodwin and Milazzo "Britain, the European Union," 5-6.

[92] Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE publishing, 2016), 16.

[93] Saldaña, *The Coding Manual*, 105.

closely as possible to the parties' ideas and "unique vocabulary".[94] The analysis was not limited to single words but to "impacting nouns, action-oriented verbs, evocative vocabulary, clever or ironic phrases, similes or metaphors".[95]

The Concept/Pattern coding round aimed at extracting the essential concepts and themes from the In Vivo codes; this way of coding has been labelled as "pattern coding". [96] The thesis not only sorted the In Vivo codes into the three dimensions of European integration, but also analysed the ideas that the In Vivo codes adhere to. The second round was aimed at synthesising the large amount of In Vivo codes into ideas (or patterns). An example of such an idea would then be 'the Netherlands should take back control of the EU regarding immigration policy'.

Chapter 4 will compare the results in order to establish the variation in MCR party support for European integration.

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[94] Ibidem,106.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid., 236.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the variation

4.1: UMP

      The 2007 and 2012 presidential election manifestos of UMP have shown the following discourse regarding the three dimensions of European integration. In terms of economics, UMP proposed more fiscal as well as social harmonisation in 2007 and 2012.[97] In 2007, UMP even promoted the idea of a European economic government.[98] Moreover, the 2012 manifesto proposed plans for a Eurozone government as well as a Eurozone parliamentary assembly.[99] These ideas all proposed *further* integration. Regarding immigration policies, UMP aimed at more restrictive policies in 2007 since France had to "stop thinking that France can adopt as many foreigners as her welcoming tradition would want to".[100] This adheres to what Bale has argued about centre-right parties: that they want to "defend the socio-economic and cultural status quo".[101] However, no open critique to any new EU immigration policies was observed in those manifestos, ruling out Euroscepticism on this dimension within the timeframe. Lastly, relating to the supranational dimension of the EU, UMP stated in 2007 that France "needs Europe in order to advance common policies".[102] This was a pro-European idea and showed no criticism whatsoever to the EU; UMP even stimulated more common policies. In 2012, UMP's policies showed some problematisation when it stated in its manifesto that Europe should have been more efficient, easier to understand and more democratic at the time.[103] However, as Szczerbiak & Taggart have stated, these forms of problematisation should not be regarded as Soft Euroscepticism.[104]

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[97] UMP, *Contrat de Législature 2007-2012*, (Party Election Manifesto, 2007), 12 in : Andrea, Volkens, Werner, Krause, Pola Lehmann, et al., *The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR)* (Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB)), Version 2019b ; UMP, *Projet 2012 : Protéger et Préparer l'avenir des enfants de France*, (Party Election Manifesto, 2012), 20 in : Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[98] UMP, *Contrat de Législature*, 12 in : Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[99] UMP, *Projet de 2012*, 20 in : Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[100] This quote has been translated from French to English by the author ; the original French quote: "*Cessons de faire croire que la France peut accueillir autant d'étrangers que sa tradition d'accueil le voudrait*", UMP, *Contrat de Législature*, 4 in : Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[101] Tim Bale, "Turning round the telescope: centre-right parties and immigration and integration policy in Europe," *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15, no. 3 (2008): 319.

[102] "*Nous avons besoin de l'Europe pour avancer sur des politiques communes*", UMP, *Contrat de Législature*, 13 in : Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[103] UMP, *Projet 2012*, 4 in : Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[104] See Chapter 2.

In sum, the UMP manifesto analysis has shown that UMP's positions regarding European integration were neither Hard nor Soft Eurosceptic. Instead, they adhered to the pro-EU position that centre-right parties traditionally hold on to according to some of the literature.[105]

4.2: VVD

Within the timeframe national elections were held in the Netherlands in 2006, 2010 and 2012. The discourse analysis has provided the following characteristics for VVD's support for European integration. Concerning EU economics, the VVD stated in 2006 that the EU and its internal market were of "huge importance" for the Netherlands.[106] Monetarily speaking, the VVD was also supportive of the Euro as a "stable currency" in 2010.[107] Even though this remained the case in 2012, VVD expressed that in order to keep the common currency stable "no power should be transferred to Brussels".[108] Moreover, the 2012 manifesto also stated that "the Dutch contribution to the EU's budget should be reduced" and that "at all times, it has to be avoided that the Dutch contribution per capita to the EU increases again".[109] These are two economic policies (Single Currency and EU budget) in which the VVD did not want any further extension of competencies to the EU. Regarding immigration, the VVD advocated policies that were "strict, just and consistent" in both 2010 and 2012.[110] The interesting part of this dimension is in the 2010 and 2012 manifestos in which VVD suggested opt-outs for European regulations when VVD's strict policies were hindered by them.[111] This promoted the idea of no further extension of EU regulations regarding immigration, and possibly even a reduction in EU immigration policies where wished by the VVD in the future. Finally, the VVD was at first sight not too much troubled by the EU's supranational institutions as VVD wrote that it

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[105] See Chapter 2.

[106] "*Enorm belang*" VVD, *Voor een Samenleving met Ambitie* (Party Election Manifesto, 2006), 4 in : Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data.*. All quotes in this section have been translated from Dutch to English by the author, the original Dutch quote can be found in the specific footnote.

[107] "*Stabiele munt*", VVD, *Orde op Zaken*, (Party Election Manifesto, 2010), 38 in : Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data.*.

[108] "*Daarvoor hoeft geen macht te worden overgedragen aan Brussel*", VVD, *Niet Doorschuiven maar Aanpakken*, (Party Election Manifesto, 2012), 11 in : Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[109] "*De VVD vindt dat de Nederlandse bijdrage aan de EU flink omlaag moet*"
"*We moeten in ieder geval voorkomen dat de Nederlandse bijdrage per inwoner aan de EU opnieuw stijgt.*", VVD, *Niet Doorschuiven maar Aanpakken*, 54 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[110] "*Streng, rechtvaardig en consequent*" VVD, *Orde op Zaken*, 36; VVD, *Niet Doorschuiven maar Aanpakken*, 48. in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[111] VVD, *Orde op Zaken*, 37; VVD, *Niet doorschuiven maar Aanpakken*, 7. in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

regarded "Brussels as the seat for Europe".[112] However, in 2012, VVD stated the following: "not more Europe but a functioning Europe".[113] Although the exact policies were not specified, this piece of discourse aligns with the opposition to any *further* extension of EU competences on economics (Euro and budget) as well as on immigration (opt-outs where needed).

All in all, in 2010 and 2012, VVD expressed that no *further* EU policies nor any *further* transfer of power should occur in more than one policy area (namely, Euro stability, EU budget and immigration policies where it hindered VVD's policies). Since 2010 VVD's position on European integration was, therefore, Soft Eurosceptic, in the sense of Szczerbiak & Taggart's definition (see Chapter 2). This also aligns with the CHES data that showed a decrease in VVD's support around 2010.

4.3: Conservative Party

An analysis of the Conservative Party's manifestos revealed that one specific part of discourse seemed to resonate throughout the timeframe, namely the Conservatives' desire for the UK to "keep control".[114] On all three dimensions of European integration this message seemed to stand out in all national elections (2005, 2010, 2015). Economically, the Conservatives promoted to "never join the Euro"[115] in 2010 and to "stay out of the Eurozone" in 2015.[116] Of course, monetary integration has always been an opt-out for the UK since its entry in 1973, but to promote the idea that it would never happen in the future was still a Soft Eurosceptic discourse that this thesis wanted to emphasise. Regarding the internal market, the Conservatives, however, recognised the benefits for British businesses and consumers in 2010 and 2015.[117] The Conservatives problematised the fact that the European markets are too "slow-growing" in 2015,[118] but this should not be labelled as Euroscepticism, but problematisation. In terms of immigration policies, the Conservatives stated in 2005 that "we've lost control".[119] In

[112] "*De VVD ziet Brussel als zetel voor Europa*", VVD, *Orde op Zaken*, 38 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[113] "*Niet méér Europa, maar een werkend Europa*" VVD, *Niet Doorschuiven maar Aanpakken*, 53 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[114] Conservative Party, *Are You Thinking What We Are Thinking?* (Party Election Manifesto, 2005), 19 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[115] Conservative Party, *Invitation to Join the Government of Britain,* (Party Election Manifesto, 2010), 103 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[116] Conservative Party, *Strong Leadership, A Clear Economic Plan, A Brighter, More Secure Future,* (Party Election Manifesto, 2015), 72 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[117] Conservative Party, *Invitation to,* 113. Conservative Party, *Strong Leadership*, 72-73 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[118] Conservative Party, *Strong Leadership,* 7 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

[119] Conservative Party, *Are You,* 33 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.

the same election year, the Conservatives wanted to "take back power from Brussels" on this dimension.[120] Relating this to Taggart & Szczerbiak's definitions, this discourse should be labelled as Hard Eurosceptic, because it is opposition to European integration based on the "ceding or transfer of power".[121] This Hard Eurosceptic idea travelled along in the 2015 manifesto in which the Conservatives promoted to "cut EU migration" which meant a decrease in the EU's free movement of people.[122] When it comes to the EU's supranational dimension, the Conservatives' ideas were equally Hard Eurosceptic as their immigration policies. The 2005 manifesto stated that they wanted to "bring back powers from Brussels to Britain".[123] In 2010 they specified that they wanted to "bring back powers over legal rights, criminal justice and social employment legislation".[124] The 2015 manifestos in the same way promoted to "reclaim power from Brussels".[125] This went hand in hand with the Conservatives' proposal to hold an "in-out referendum on EU membership".[126]

Therefore, the Conservatives' discourse on European integration within the timeframe of this research showed a continuity of aspects of Soft Euroscepticism (*e.g.* no joining of the Euro in the future) as well as Hard Euroscepticism (*e.g.* transferring powers back from Brussels to Britain).

4.4: Comparison of the mainstream centre-right parties' positions

Within the selected timeframe, the case studies showed variation in their support for European integration. The UMP's manifestos showed pro-integrationist ideas on all three dimensions and merely small forms of problematisation. VVD's policies, however, showed a transition from a pro-EU position in 2006 to a Soft Eurosceptic position in 2010 and 2012. Although VVD supported Brussels and its policies as they were at the time, VVD did not want any further extension of EU policies and competences, which is a key characteristic of Soft Euroscepticism in Szczerbiak & Taggart's definition. The Conservative party, on the contrary, was Soft Eurosceptic at the least, with positions that were Hard Eurosceptic as well. Although the Conservatives did not promote leaving the European Union (not even when they proposed a referendum for EU membership), their aim of reclaiming powers from EU institutions to the

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[120] Ibidem, 19.
[121] Szczerbiak and Taggart, "Introduction: Researching Euroscepticism", 3.
[122] Conservative Party, *Strong Leadership*, 29 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.
[123] Conservative Party, *Are You*, 1 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.
[124] Conservative Party, *Invitation to*, 113 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.
[125] Conservative Party, *Strong Leadership*, 72 in: Volkens, Krause, Pola et al., *Manifesto Data*.
[126] Ibidem, 30.

British government was a telling example of the Hard Eurosceptic features that the Conservatives' position contained during the whole timeframe of 2005-2015.

These findings of the discourse analysis align with the Chapel Hill Expert Survey data from figure 1. UMP's position has been very pro-integrationist in the CHES data (it does not go under a score of 5,4 during the timeframe) as well as in the discourse analysis which showed pro-integrationist ideas on all dimensions. VVD's position was also relatively positive in the beginning but the 2010 CHES data as well as the discourse analysis showed a decrease in support. VVD promoted Soft Eurosceptic ideas during the 2010 and 2012 elections. The most unsupportive MCR party in the selected timeframe clearly was the Conservative party with a score not going above 3,1. The discourse analysis has shown that the Conservatives' position on European integration was indeed a mix of Soft and Hard Eurosceptic ideas.

Now that the thesis has more details on the case studies' position on European integration at the time, it will turn to explaining why this variation in MCR party support occurred as it did. The crucial 'why' question will be explored in chapter 5. Moreover, the CHES data indicate some puzzles as well, such as why UMP's support for European integration slightly dropped between 2010 and 2014 as well as why VVD's position was more positive in 2014 than in 2010. These and other findings of this chapter's analysis will be explored hereafter.

Chapter 5: Political Field Analysis

5.1 Politicisation of European Integration

Hooghe & Marks constructed an aggregate graph (see Figure 2) that depicted the overall salience that political parties gave to European integration over time as well as the degree of internal dissent within parties regarding the European integration issue.

Figure 2: Salience and dissent on European integration within national political parties, 1984-2002.[127]
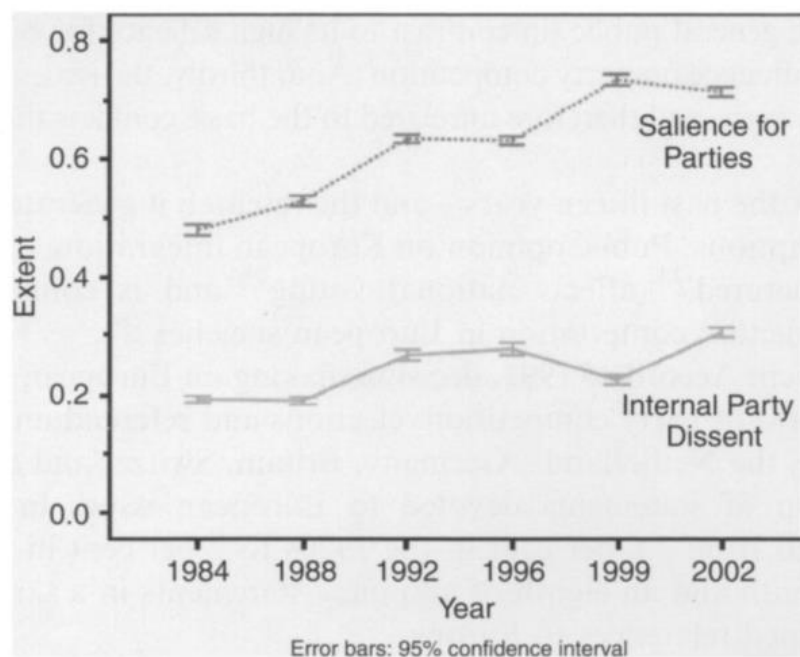
Although these data confirm an overall rise in the salience that political parties have attributed to the European integration issue and an increase in internal party dissent, it does not explain the overall history of politicisation within each member state of the selected case studies. The thesis will, therefore, proceed by analysing the specific history of the politicisation of European integration within the respective political arena per case study.

Within the French political system European integration became politicised only after the Maastricht treaty, just as Hooghe & Marks argued in a general way. Hutter & Grande, in their article, analysed the degree of politicisation of European integration as well as the degree

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[127] Hooghe and Marks, "A Postfunctional Theory," 8.

of polarisation on European integration in France (as well as in Britain) from 1970 to 2010. Table 1 shows the results relevant for this thesis.

Table 1: Results of the Politicisation and Polarisation Index by Hutter & Grande, 1970-2010. [128]

	Politicization index Range (0–200)			Polarization Range (0–1)		
	Pre-1992	Post-1992	All years	Pre-1992	Post-1992	All years
United Kingdom	**7.8**	**8.6**	**8.1**	**0.14**	**0.23**	**0.18**
Switzerland	3.0	**9.1**	5.4	0.05	**0.23**	0.12
France	2.0	**6.6**	4.3	0.09	**0.17**	0.12
Austria	0.6	**6.2**	3.2	0.00	0.12	0.06
Germany	1.0	5.2	2.9	0.02	0.12	0.06
Benchmark		**6.2**			**0.13**	

Note: the results in bold are results that crossed the benchmark set by Hutter & Grande at which one can speak of politicisation or polarisation.[129] Also note the strong correlation between politicisation and polarisation in these indexes. As soon as the benchmark for politicisation was crossed, the benchmark for polarisation was crossed as well (except for the Austrian case). This supports De Wilde's definition of politicisation (see section 2.3).

Hutter & Grande's analysis showed that for the French case the European integration issue had not been politicised nor had any polarisation on the issue occurred before the Maastricht Treaty. The average of all years that were examined for the French case showed that the European integration issue was hardly politicised between 1970 and 2010 as the average did not cross the benchmark. Only around 2005 the European integration issue became politicised according to Hutter & Grande.[130] Statham & Trenz explained this relatively small surge in politicisation by pointing at the event of the Constitutional Treaty referendum held in France in 2005.[131] When looking at the exact years in which European integration became politicised (in the French case: around 2005), hypothesis 1 is be supported. The reason for this is that there is a discrepancy between the politicisation/polarisation becoming exacerbated around 2005, on the one hand,

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[128] Swen Hutter and Edgar Grande, "Politicizing European Integration in the National Arena: A Comparative Analysis of Five West European Countries, 1970-2010," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 52, no.5 (2014): 1011. Used data from their table 1 on p.1011.

[129] Ibidem.

[130] Ibid, 1010.

[131] Paul Statham and Hans- Jörg Trenz, "How European Union Politicization can Emerge through Contestation: The Constitution Case," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51, no. 5 (2013): 965-966.

and the pro-integration position of UMP during the 2007 and 2012 elections on the other hand. However, when looking at the historical trend that politicisation and polarisation have showed from 1970 to 2010 in France, following Hutter & Grande, hypothesis 1 could become plausible. The degree to which European integration had been politicised in France over the years was limited as the average did not cross the benchmark, making it credible that UMP's position on European integration over the years has been relatively unaffected by politicisation or polarisation. Nevertheless, within this thesis' timeframe European integration had become politicised enough to generate polarisation and this should have generated at least some Euroscepticism in UMP's position, according to hypothesis 1. Therefore, the politicisation variable does not fully explain UMP's position, justifying the need for multiple variables of the political field to explain MCR parties' variation in support for European integration (see section 2.2).

For the Dutch case, the thesis turns to data from Hoeglinger's analysis. Amongst twelve political issues (such as welfare, immigration, and culture), European integration was ranked as the least politicised issue of all in the Dutch political arena.[132] In comparison, European integration in France was ranked as sixth and in Britain it was ranked first.[133] Furthermore, from all six West European countries that Hoeglinger took into account, "the Netherlands is the country where Europe is the least politicised".[134] Also, the overall history of the European integration issue in the Dutch political arena from the 1970s to 2010 showed a stable low politicisation in Hoeglinger's work.[135] When laying these data next to VVD's position on European integration as observed in chapter 4, a few interesting remarks stand out. First, the low politicisation in the Netherlands explains VVD's positive position in 2006, supporting hypothesis 1. However, the turn to Soft Euroscepticism in 2010 should have been accompanied by a higher degree of politicisation and polarization. This was, on the contrary, not observed in Hoeglinger's data. Therefore, politicisation theory explains VVD's position at the beginning of the timeframe but not during the 2010 and 2012 elections. Thus, the findings of politicisation theory in the Dutch case are mixed.

For the British case, the thesis first turns to table 1, earlier treated in this section. The data for the UK clearly show that politicisation of the European integration issue was prominent

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[132] Dominic, Hoeglinger, "Politicising European Integration: Struggling with the awakening Giant" in: *Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016),132.
[133] Ibidem.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.,133.

during the four decades under study (1970s-2010). Before as well as after the Maastricht treaty, politicisation and polarisation regarding European integration were present to a large extent. According to politicisation theory, the Conservative party's position on European integration would, therefore, contain Euroscepticism. Indeed, chapter 4 showed the continual Soft and Hard Eurosceptic policies of the Conservatives. The long history of politicisation and polarisation regarding European integration in the British political arena, thus, explains the British MCR party's position. It is relevant to take a closer look at why the British political arena deviates from the standard low politicisation of European integration found in most national political arenas at least until 1992, as for example Hooghe & Marks argued.[136] De Wilde & Zürn argue that politicisation is a process that largely depends on the kind of narrative on European integration within political arenas.[137] If there is a "consistent national narrative", then there is no need for politicisation, whereas "ambivalent narratives" would leave "more room for controversy".[138] Diez Medrano illustrated this by Spain's consistent narrative that European integration would "reinforce democracy in Spain", whereas the UK's narrative was more focused on "the population's reluctance to lose sovereignty".[139] Indeed, research explained how British politics has always known a strong emphasis on discourse on the so-called "sacredness of national sovereignty", whereas, in fact, British politicians are at the same time "gradually embracing interdependence since 1973".[140] In this way, the British ambivalent narrative continually regenerates debate on Britain's membership to the EU. This long history of politicisation and polarisation on the European integration issue, therefore, convincingly explains the higher degree of Soft and Hard Euroscepticism in the Conservative party's position.

All in all, politicisation theory explains the variation in MCR party support for European integration to a large extent. The British case can be explained by politicisation theory as the long tradition of politicising European integration has influenced party positions in a way that generates more extreme positions. The French case cannot be explained by politicisation theory (given the discrepancy found at the beginning of the timeframe). The Dutch case, however, can only partially be explained by politicisation. Other theories would have to explain the surge in VVD's Soft Euroscepticism in 2010 (despite the continual low politicisation of European

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[136] Hooghe and Marks, "A Postfunctional Theory," 6.

[137] De Wilde and Zürn, "Can the Politicization," 143-144.

[138] Ibidem, 144.

[139] Juan Diez Medrano *Framing Europe: Attitudes to European Integration in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 12.

[140] Jim, Buller, "Britain as an Awkward Partner: Reassessing Britain's Relations with the EU," *Politics* 15, no.1 (1995), 41.

integration in the Netherlands). Hypothesis 1 is, therefore, fully supported by the British case and to some extent by the Dutch case.

5.2 Party Type

An analysis of hypothesis 2 requires the thesis to establish what party type the selected MCR parties are. Theis can be examined by looking at the degree to which the party is dominated by its leadership or by its activists. Schumacher et al. have underscored this distinction between on the one hand "activist-dominated parties" and on the other hand "leadership-dominated parties".[141] Activists contribute to the party because of the "party's policy platform", whereas leaders seek to participate in governments, *i.e.* leaders have an "office-seeking goal".[142] This results in the fact that parties who are dominated by their leaders are more likely to shift their position in order to enter office, whereas activist-dominated parties are less likely to do so because activists want to keep the policy they advocate.[143] Strøm & Müller agree to this because leaders desire "office benefits, which they can convert into private goods".[144] However, leaders are constrained by the "organisational properties of their parties" which means that they cannot be entirely "dictatorial".[145] Nevertheless, it is within the line of expectation that the more the party is dominated by its leadership, the more likely the party is to be office-seeking and, therefore, to shift its policies in its attempt to seek office.

The Laver & Hunt Expert Survey analysed the degree to which the MCR parties are dominated by their leadership or by their activists. Although the Laver & Hunt Expert Survey might be rather old, recent studies still use it, because "while party organisations may change, they do so rather rarely and slowly".[146] This thesis, therefore, considers the Laver & Hunt Expert Survey as a valid source. This survey has ranked parties on a scale from 1 to 20 (where 1 equals an extremely activist-dominated party and 20 an extremely leadership-dominated party). The case studies of this thesis have been attributed the following scores:[147]

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[141] Gijs, Schumacher, Catherine De Vries, and Barbara Vis, "Why do Parties change Position? Party Organization and Environmental Incentives," *The Journal of Politics* 75, no.2 (2013), 465.
[142] Ibidem.
[143] Ibid., 466.
[144] Strøm and Müller, "Political Parties", 14.
[145] Ibidem.
[146] Markus, Wagner and Thomas, Meyer, "Which Issues Do Parties Emphasise? Salience Strategies and Party Organization in Multiparty Systems," *West European Politics* 37, no. 5 (2014), 1026.
[147] Michael, Laver and W. Ben Hunt, *Policy and Party competition*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), 72-73.

- RPR (former UMP): 11,20
- VVD: 15,92
- Conservative Party: 13,45

Laver & Hunt have indicated that the threshold at which a party becomes mostly leadership-dominated is at a score of 11,99.[148] Although no party is fully dominated by its leadership nor by its activists, UMP seems to be the most balanced party, whereas VVD is the most leadership-dominated party. Based on these scores it is expected that VVD is the most office-seeking of all. The Conservatives are also office-seeking but to a lesser extent, and UMP is a party that knows a balance between policy and office. Relating this to hypothesis 2, it is expected that VVD will have changed its positions on European integration most drastically when seeking office. Furthermore, the Conservative Party is expected to do so as well but to a lesser extent, whereas UMP is expected to keep its policies to a larger extent than its Dutch and British colleagues. When applying these party types to the MCR parties' policy continuities and changes between 2005 and 2015, the following interesting observations can be made.

The stability in UMP's pro-integration position can be explained because the French MCR party gives relatively more weight to the opinions of its activists and, therefore, their traditional policies on European integration, which are pro-EU (see chapter 2 and 4). This party would not drastically change its policies on European integration to Euroscepticism because it attributes relatively more value to its existing policies.

The VVD's positional move to Soft Euroscepticism in 2010 (see chapter 4) can be explained by the fact that the party is office-seeking and had not held office for a long time before 2010, triggering a desire to policy shifts at the party's leadership. VVD won the 2010 elections which explains why it kept the same position in 2012. Party type theory does, therefore, explain the VVD's trajectory.

The Conservative party is an interesting case in relation to party type theory. Chapter 4 has demonstrated that the Conservatives' position on European integration has remained a combination of Soft and Hard Euroscepticism within the timeframe. The Laver & Hunt Expert survey has labelled this party as rather office-seeking which would indicate that the party would change its position whenever it is seeking to enter office. It is true that the conservative party was in opposition from 1997 till 2010 which could mean that the party shifted its policies before

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[148] Laver and Hunt, *Party and*, 72-73.

the selected timeframe, but this falls outside the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, party type theory assumes that office-seeking parties are willing to change their policies to get into office whenever possible. Within the selected timeframe, however, this has not occurred. One would have expected a change in policy between the 2005 and 2010 manifestos (as the Conservatives won the national elections only in 2010) but this has not taken place according to chapter 4. Therefore, party type theory does not fully explain the continuity in the Conservatives' policies regarding European integration. One reason for not changing its policies could be that the Conservatives already promoted a combination of Soft and Hard Eurosceptic positions. A next step in policy change would then result in opposition to EU membership at all. This is, however, not what the Conservatives wanted to promote, as their 2016 referendum campaign showed that in the end the Conservatives' leader David Cameron wanted the UK to remain within the EU despite the party's Soft and Hard Eurosceptic policies.[149]

Party type theory has explained the variation in MCR party support for European integration to a large extent. UMP's and VVD's positional stability and change respectively can largely be explained by this theory, supporting hypothesis 2. However, it has not explained the continuity of the Conservative party's position.

5.3 Government-opposition dynamics

Within the selected timeframe, UMP was in government until 2012 after which it lost the presidential elections to its centre-left colleague *Parti Socialiste*. With the French case study, the thesis can analyse hypothesis 3a and 3b. According to hypothesis 3a, parties in government are disincentivized to adopt more Eurosceptic positions. In the French case this would mean adopting Eurosceptic positions at all. Chapter 4 has shown that UMP's position on European integration has remained pro-integrationist until 2012 and that no Eurosceptic policies were integrated in its position. After losing the elections, UMP became part of the opposition in the French political system. Although the discourse analysis only reaches until 2012 (since new elections were only held in 2017), the Chapel Hill Expert Survey indicated a slight decrease in UMP's support for European integration. This evidence supports hypothesis 3b. However, more research (such as a discourse analysis of the 2017 manifesto) is necessary

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[149] Heather Stewart, Rajeev Syal, and Rowena Mason, "David Cameron makes final plea for Britain to vote to remain in the EU" *the Guardian*, 22 June 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/22/david-cameron-makes-final-plea-for-britain-to-vote-to-remain-in-the-eu (accessed on 14 September 2020).

to support hypothesis 3b. The French case study does, nevertheless, confirm the logic of government as Sitter theorised it (see chapter 2).

VVD's case allows the thesis to analyse hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c. The Dutch MCR party was in opposition until it won the elections in 2010. During the remainder of the timeframe, this party was in government. Furthermore, the Dutch political system requires the winning party to form a coalition as this system consists of multiple smaller parties that need to work together to form a majority. This allows the thesis to analyse Hypothesis 3c as well. The logic of opposition stipulates that parties in opposition are more incentivised to adopt Eurosceptic positions (H3b). The Dutch case study confirms this hypothesis as VVD adopted more Soft Eurosceptic policies in 2010 when it was still in opposition just before winning the elections. Although VVD was part of several coalitions until 2006, the fact that this party had never won the Dutch elections in history until 2010 makes it even more plausible that VVD felt incentivised to change its position between 2006 and 2010. Indeed, the discourse analysis as well as the Chapel Hill Expert Survey have shown that VVD's position on European integration dropped during these years, thereby confirming the logic of opposition. When VVD was in government after 2010, its position remained stable. Although the 2012 manifesto still consisted of Soft Eurosceptic policies, this is not a change in policy compared to its 2010 manifesto. On the spectrum of pro-integration to Hard Euroscepticism, VVD's policies did not shift to more opposition, but remained the same during its time in government. Hypothesis 3a is, therefore, supported by the Dutch case because VVD did not change its position on European integration to Hard Euroscepticism in 2012. Furthermore, the Chapel Hill Expert Survey indicated that VVD's position on European integration became more integrationist in 2014, making it even more interesting for future research to analyse how VVD's positions developed after 2015. This increase in support for European integration also supports the logic of government. Regarding hypothesis 3c, the need to build coalitions does not seem to have caused the VVD to be more moderate as VVD turned to Eurosceptic policies when the party was in opposition. As the party adopted Soft Eurosceptic policies in 2010 and as the CHES data indicated that the party's position on European integration became more opposed in 2010, the party seemingly was not reluctant to promote Soft Eurosceptic policies. The Dutch case study, therefore, does not support hypothesis 3c.

Within the selected timeframe, the Conservatives were in opposition until 2010 after which they became the largest party until the day of writing. The logic of opposition (H2b) stipulates, then, that the Conservatives would have promoted Eurosceptic policies until 2010.

Chapter 4 shows that the Conservatives, indeed, promoted Soft and Hard Eurosceptic policies. It is true that the logic of opposition, therefore, applies to the Conservative party's case. However, the fact that The Conservatives advocated a Eurosceptic position as an opposition party should not be regarded as so surprising when looking at how the British party system works. Buller has underscored the effects of the British two-party system. One effect that is important to take into account in this analysis is the fact that the British political system is very adversarial.[150] The two main parties within the system (Conservatives and Labour) will always oppose each other, resulting in a very polarised debate whatever the subject. Buller stated that "whatever the government of the day proposes, the opposition will usually oppose, even if there is some measure of agreement behind the scenes".[151] The logic of opposition is, therefore, accentuated within the British political system. Finding Euroscepticism in the Conservative party's discourse in 2010 might, therefore, not be as surprising as finding Euroscepticism in the discourse of, for example, VVD that was still largely pro-EU in 2006. The logic of government theorised that, once in government, parties would not shift towards more Euroscepticism. For the Conservative party's case, this theory holds. The CHES data confirm that in 2014 the party's position on European integration stabilised compared to earlier years and even slightly became more positive. The conducted discourse analysis of the 2015 manifesto also showed that the party's position, though still Soft and Hard Eurosceptic, remained similar to their policies in 2005 and 2010. Furthermore, the 2016 referendum campaign also emphasised that the Conservative party, or at least its leaders, wanted to remain within the EU (see section 5.2), which underscores that the party did not want to shift is policies towards more opposition to European integration (which in the British case would probably mean ending up with opposing EU membership given the already fair amount of Hard Eurosceptic policies).

In sum, the logic of government (H3a) is supported by all three case studies as no MCR party shifted its policies on European integration to more opposition when in government. The logic of opposition (H3b) finds some support in the Dutch and British case as well. Hypothesis 3c, however, does not find support in this analysis. As a preliminary conclusion, the logic of government has explained parts of the trajectory of all case studies. This thesis, therefore, finds this theory very convincing in explaining variation in MCR party support for European integration.

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[150] Buller, "Britain as", 38.
[151] Ibidem.

5.4 Party Competition

As Section 2.6 explained, party competition theory predicts a shift in MCR positions to Euroscepticism whenever their CRR colleagues were successful in preceding national elections. Figure 3 (on the next page) shows the CRR's national election results.

Figure 3 shows that FN won 17% of the votes in 2002. This was a historical victory for The French CRR party as this score allowed the party to get through to the second round of the presidential elections. This large gain would, according to party competition theory, instigate a shift to Euroscepticism by UMP. However, chapter 4 showed that UMP's position remained pro-integrationist. Hypothesis 4 can therefore not be supported by the 2007 elections in France. Examining the results of the 2007 presidential elections, one observes a decrease in support for FN. This should have instigated UMP's position to shift to more pro-integrationist ideas. Although it is true that's UMP's position was still pro-integrationist in 2012, it does not seem likely that this was the result of FN's loss. Over time, UMP's position remained pro-EU regardless of what the electoral results for FN were. An acceptable reason for this is the argument that the two-rounds-system in France always provides for a moderate centre party to win the elections. Cordell explains that when French citizens have to vote in the second round on a party that was not their first choice in the first round, they would vote on a party that is "ideologically consistent with their first choice".[152] It follows that in the end the more centrist position in the second round will win as this is ideologically speaking closest to (radical) left or (radical) right. Godin adds that there has indeed been a "anti-FN *cordon sanitaire*" at place.[153] This mechanism to keep French politics 'healthy' is a plausible reason for the UMP to ignore any electoral gain or loss for FN during presidential elections as UMP would always be at an advantage when faced by FN in the second round. Party competition theory, therefore, does not hold in the French case. UMP's position cannot be explained by FN's electoral results, probably because of the characteristics of the French electoral system during presidential elections. Hypothesis 4 is not supported.

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[152] Jim Cordell, "Unity and Plurality in the French Right," *South European Society & Politics* 10, no. 2 (2005), 192.

[153] Emmanuel Godin, "The Porosity between the Mainstream Right and Extreme Right in France: Les Droites Décomplexées under Nicolas Sarkozy and Marine Le Pen's Leadership," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 21, no. 1 (2013), 54.

Figure 3: Vote shares of the challenger radical right parties during national elections, in percentages.[154]
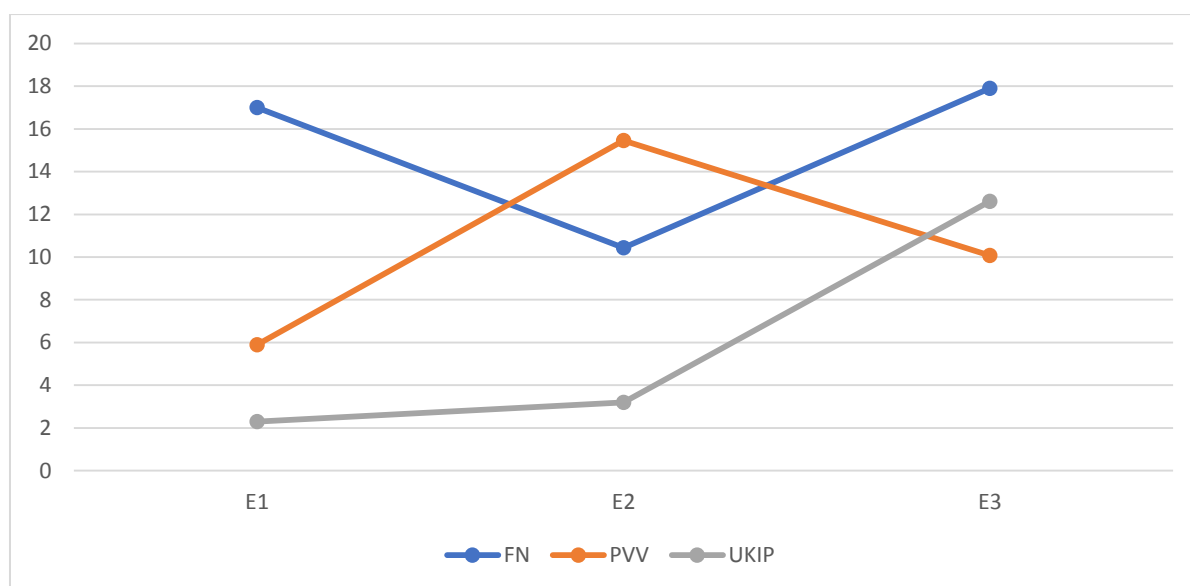
Note: The four sequential election years differ per country (FR: 2002-2007-2012; NL: 2006-2010-2012; UK: 2005-2010-2015). The data for the FN are those belonging to the first round of the presidential elections since the French electorate votes for its preferred candidate during this round (as opposed to the second round). In general, all CCR parties' vote shares increased between E1-E3, though their itinerary differs.

In 2006, PVV came into existence as a break-out party of the VVD. The 6% vote share that PVV gained at its first national elections could have been a shock for VVD. This relative success for PVV in 2006 could explain VVD's turn to Soft Euroscepticism in 2010, according to party competition theory. However, the huge success for PVV in 2010 should have instigated an increase in Soft or Hard Euroscepticism in VVD's policies during the 2012 elections. Chapter 4 has shown that, in fact, VVD's position regarding European integration remained similar to its position in 2010. Although some small evidence for party competition theory could be found in the Dutch case, hypothesis 4 does not find convincing support in VVD's case. Another explanation for VVD's turn to Soft Euroscepticism in 2010 related to party competition

[154] The data in Figure 2 have various sources:

European Elections Database, "European Elections Base (NSD)", accessed 28 September 2020, https://nsd.no/european_election_database.

French ministry of Home Affairs. "Résultats Elections Présidentielles." Accessed 28 September 2020. https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult__PR2012/(path)/PR2012/FE.html.

House of Commons Library, "UK election statistics." Accessed 28 September 2020. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7529/.

Alex Hunt, "UKIP: The story of the UK Independence Party's rise.", *BBC News*, 2014. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-21614073.

theory could be that VVD took into account the polls for the 2010 elections and decided to turn to Soft Euroscepticism because of the expected electoral success for PVV. Nevertheless, party competition theory as it is explained in Section 2.6 does not explain the Dutch case in a way that makes it seem likely that VVD's position changes according to PVV's electoral success.

Party competition theory predicts that the Soft and Hard Eurosceptic policies of the British conservative party are the result of a large electoral success for UKIP. Figure 3, on the contrary, clearly shows the extremely limited vote share of UKIP in 2005 and 2010. The Conservative party's Soft and Hard Eurosceptic position in 2010 and 2015 respectively can, therefore, not be explained by UKIP's electoral results. Only in 2015 UKIP succeeded in gaining a relatively large proportion of the votes. It is possible that the Conservative party analysed the predicting polls for the 2015 elections and decided to incorporate some content on European integration that aligns with UKIP's position. An example could be the Conservatives' discourse that promoted a referendum on EU membership,[155] something that UKIP would have promoted as well, given that UKIP's main goal is to get the UK out of the EU. However, this piece of discourse cannot be labelled as Hard Eurosceptic in the sense of Szczerbiak & Taggart.[156] Moreover, The Conservatives' position on European integration did not change in 2015 in relation to its position in 2010. Therefore, no contagion effect can be observed in the British case. Hypothesis 4 is not supported in the British case.

All in all, party competition theory does not explain the variation in MCR party support for European integration within the timeframe of 2005-2015 in France, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Only in the Dutch case a very limited extent of evidence could hint at a contagion effect (the break-out of PVV in 2006), but this does not hold as sufficient evidence for explaining the overall variation.

The main findings per case study as well as a conclusion on the explanatory variables will be discussed in the final chapter.

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[155] See section 4.3.
[156] See chapter 2.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Following the definitions of Soft and Hard Euroscepticism by Szczerbiak & Taggart (see chapter 2), the thesis established variation in MCR party support for European integration aided by CHES data as well as a qualitative discourse analysis of UMP's, VVD's and the Conservatives' national election manifestos between 2005 and 2015 (chapter 4). Following the findings in Chapter 5, this thesis argues that variation in MCR party support for European integration for the used case studies can be explained to a large extent by the degree of politicisation within the national political arena; the kind of MCR party at hand; and the logic of government. This thesis finds no support for party competition as an explanation for the variation found for the three selected case studies.

A case-by-case analysis results in the following findings: UMP's stable pro-integration position has been explained by the fact that this party attributes relatively more importance to its traditional policies, advocated by its party activists, than its MCR colleagues in Britain and the Netherlands (party type). Moreover, until 2012 this MCR party was in government. This disincentivised UMP to change its pro-integration position to any form of Euroscepticism (logic of government). The pro-EU position of VVD in 2006 has been explained by the low degree of politicisation of the European integration issue within the Dutch political arena (politicisation). VVD's shift to Euroscepticism in 2010 can be explained by the fact that VVD is an office-seeking party and that the party had never won any national elections before (party type). Furthermore, the party was in opposition, which incentivised the party to adopt Soft Euroscepticism (logic of opposition). After winning the elections in 2010, VVD's Soft Eurosceptic position remained stable according to the conducted discourse analysis. According to the CHES data, VVD's position even became more positive in 2014. These two facts support the logic of government as an explanation for VVD's position after 2010. The Soft and Hard Eurosceptic position of the British Conservative party during the selected timeframe has been explained mostly by the high degree of politicisation and polarisation regarding European integration within the British political arena (politicisation). Moreover, the continuity in this party's position after 2010 can be explained again by the logic of government.

The fact that there is no single omniscient variable that can fully explain the whole trajectory of every single case confirms this thesis' theory that multiple aspects of the political field have to be taken into account when analysing reasons for varying trajectories in MCR parties' position on European integration. These different aspects complement each other. Some

variables, however, explain the observed variation in chapter 4 better than others. The high degree of (Soft and Hard) Euroscepticism found in the Conservative party's manifestos should be explained by the high degree of politicisation (and polarisation) of European integration within the British political arena. Politicisation sets the British case study apart from the French and Dutch case study (see section 5.1). The variation observed in chapter 4 is therefore largely explained by the degree of politicisation within a political arena. Party type and the logic of government/opposition account for the change or stability of support in the French and Dutch case (see sections 5.2 and 5.3), but the variation between the Conservative party on the one hand and the VVD and UMP on the other hand is still better explained by the difference in degree of politicisation. Although one cannot neglect the influence that other variables within the case studies' political fields have on MCR party positions, it is politicisation that answers the thesis' research question to the largest extent.

Further research could benefit from analysing party positions through multiple kinds of data. Not only expert surveys or quantitative data contribute to our knowledge, but also qualitative data, such as discourse analyses, provide for a deeper understanding of party positions. Qualitative data explain *how* an *on what dimensions* European integration is viewed by politicians, but also by the broader public. Furthermore, an analysis of strategy explains why parties take positions as they do. It is important to comprise multiple contextual factors when analysing reasons behind these positions, as political fields consist of a complex set of factors that cannot be understood with only one variable. The research executed by this thesis should be extended to other case studies (such as European centre-left parties) as well as to other explanatory variables. This will provide for articles that widen and deepen our knowledge of the social context that structures and drives political parties' positions on European integration.

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