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**The danger of Euroscepticism for Party Cohesion within the European Parliament: A thesis on the relationship between Euroscepticism and Party Cohesion within European Political Groups in the European Parliament between 2009 and 2019.**

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# The danger of Euroscepticism for Party Cohesion within the European Parliament

A thesis on the relationship between Euroscepticism and Party Cohesion within European Political Groups in the European Parliament between 2009 and 2019.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Research Design:.....	5
1.2 Relevance of this Thesis:.....	5
1.3 Thesis Structure:.....	7
<b>Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework.....</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Party Cohesion:.....	10
2.1.1 Importance of Party Cohesion:.....	10
2.1.2 Factors Associated with the Level of Party Cohesion:.....	10
2.1.3 Perspectives on Party Cohesion:.....	11
2.1.4 Party Cohesion in the European Parliament:.....	12
2.2 Principal-Agent Relationship:.....	15
2.2.1 What is the Principal-Agent Relationship?.....	15
2.2.2 Special Situation Members of European Parliament:.....	16
2.2.2.1 Principal one: European Political Group:.....	16
2.2.2.2 Principal two: National Party:.....	17
2.2.3 Principal-Agent Relationship & EPG Party Cohesion:.....	18
2.3 Euroscepticism:.....	19
2.3.1 Intergovernmentalism:.....	19
2.3.2 The Origins of Euroscepticism between 2009 and 2019:.....	20
2.3.3 Contextual Factors Euroscepticism:.....	22
2.3.3.1 Historical and Cultural Context:.....	22
2.3.3.2 Nationalism:.....	23
2.3.3.3 Political ideology:.....	24
2.3.4 Euroscepticism & EPG Party Cohesion:.....	25
2.4 Hypothesis:.....	28
2.4.1 Hypothesis A:.....	29
2.4.2 Hypothesis B:.....	30
2.4.3 Hypothesis C:.....	30
2.4.4 Hypothesis D:.....	30
2.4.5 Possible other Causes for a Decline in EPG Party Cohesion:.....	31
2.4.5.1 Left-right ideology:.....	31
2.4.5.2 The deviation between the NP and EPG on the basis of left-right ideology:.....	31
2.4.5.3 The size of the EPG:.....	31
2.4.5.4 The number of national parties in an EPG relative to the size of the EPG:.....	32
2.4.5.5 Cultural and historical context of Member States:.....	32
<b>Chapter 3: Research design.....</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1 Methods:.....	33
3.1.1 The Dependent variable: ‘European Political Group Party Cohesion’.....	34
3.1.2 The Independent variable: ‘Euroscepticism’.....	36
3.1.3 The Relationship between Euroscepticism and EPG Party Cohesion:.....	37
3.1.4 Hypothesis National, Historical and Cultural Contexts:.....	39

3.2 Data collection:	40
3.2.1 Dependent variable: ‘European Political Group party cohesion’:	40
3.2.1.1 Hypothesis A:	40
3.2.1.2 Hypothesis B:	41
3.2.2 Independent variable: ‘Euroscepticism’:	41
3.2.2.1 Hypothesis C:	41
3.2.3 Relationship independent - and dependent variable:	41
3.2.3.1 Hypothesis D:	41
3.2.4 Hypothesis National, Historical and Cultural contexts:	42
3.3 Validity and Reliability of the Analysis:	42
<b>Chapter 4: Analysis</b>	<b>45</b>
4.1 Results:	45
4.1.1 Dependent variable: ‘European Political Group party cohesion’:	45
4.1.1.1 Hypothesis A:	45
4.1.1.2 Hypothesis B:	46
4.1.1.2.1 European Parliament:	46
4.1.1.2.2 European Political Groups:	47
4.1.1.2.3 National Parties:	48
4.1.2 Independent variable: Opposition (supranational) European integration:	50
4.1.2.1 Hypothesis C:	50
4.1.2.1.1 European Parliament:	50
4.1.2.1.2 European Political Groups:	51
4.1.2.1.3 National Parties:	52
4.1.3 Relationship between Euroscepticism and EPG Party Cohesion:	53
4.1.3.1 Hypothesis D:	53
4.1.3.1.1 Seventh European Parliament:	53
4.1.3.1.2 Eight European Parliament:	56
4.1.4 Hypothesis 1:	60
4.1.4.1 Hypothesis National, Historical and Cultural contexts:	60
4.2 Discussion:	64
4.2.1 Explanation of the Results found in the Analysis:	64
4.2.1.1 Other explanations for the decline of EPG party cohesion:	65
4.2.2 Implication of the Results found in the Analysis:	65
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>71</b>

# Chapter 1: Introduction

The rise of the political extreme has been widely reported in the news media across Europe (Adler, 2023; Henley, 2023; Koutsokosta, 2023). Over the past decade many governments in Europe, such as Hungary and Poland, have chosen a more Eurosceptic path (Lázár, 2015). The British public even chose to leave the European Union (EU) in the 2016 Brexit referendum (Asthana, et al., 2020). And within the last year politicians, known for their Eurosceptic rhetoric, came to power in Italy and the Netherlands (Amante & Fonte, 2023; Ross et al., 2023). The Dutch PVV even called for a Dutch exit from the EU in its winning election program (Ross, et al., 2023).

These trends show a rise in opposition to the European project, also known as Euroscepticism (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2008). This concept has been extensively studied, explained and evaluated in academic literature (Pirro, et al., 2018).

This has led to the following scholarly consensus on Euroscepticism: (1) Euroscepticism is associated with a preference for intergovernmental European policymaking (Wenz-Temming & Sonnicksen, 2020); (2) Euroscepticism is most prevalent on the fringes of the political spectrum, but has gained more ground in the political mainstream over the years (Brack, 2020; Meijers, 2017); (3) the growth of Euroscepticism was largely caused by the crises of the 2010s (Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020); (4) Euroscepticism is associated with an increased salience of national interests and domestic problems in European policymaking (Bickerton, et al., 2015; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2008); and (5) the level and expression of Euroscepticism depends on the historical and cultural context within countries (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018).

Although Euroscepticism has been extensively studied over the past decade, its relationship to the European Parliament, and more specifically to the party cohesion of European Political Groups (EPG) has been underexposed within the scholarly discourse. Although the nature of the relationships between the Members of European Parliament (MEP) and their respective EPGs and national parties (NPs) could make the rise of Euroscepticism to form a real threat to the party cohesion of EPGs.

An EPG is cohesive when its MEPs vote as a unit (Hix, 2002). MEPs follow instructions from both their EPG and their NP, and when these conflict, MEPs are most likely to follow the wishes of their NP (Hix, 2002). A rise in Euroscepticism, and the associated push for intergovernmental European policymaking, leads to an increase in the salience of

national interests and domestic issues in European legislation, increasing the likelihood of misalignment between national interests (NP) and European-wide interests (EPG) (Bickerton, et al., 2015; Hix, et al., 2007; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2008). Furthermore, the historical and cultural contextual nature of Euroscepticism causes divergence between Eurosceptic NPs (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2008). Thus, a rise in Euroscepticism could theoretically increase misalignment between the interests of EPGs and NPs, and therefore harm the party cohesion of EPGs.

Within this causal mechanism the dependent variable is the ‘EPG party cohesion’ and the independent variable is ‘Euroscepticism’. Therefore, the following research question will be investigated within this thesis:

*To what extent could European Party Group leaders ascertain cohesion in the face of rising Euroscepticism between 2009 and 2019?*

The timeframe was chosen because it coincides with the rise of Euroscepticism and the terms of the 7th and 8th European Parliaments (EP7 and EP8). Moreover, the first major crisis that influenced the rise of Euroscepticism studied in this thesis was the financial crisis in the early 2010s (Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020).

### 1.1 Research Design:

The research question will be answered through statistical analysis. The data used to construct the dependent and independent variables will be obtained from two datasets. The first dataset is provided by Hix, et al. (2022) and shows the voting behavior of MEPs between 2009 and 2019. This dataset will be used to construct the dependent variable. The second dataset is provided by Hix, et al. (2016) and shows the MEPs’ attitudes towards EU policies and political issues, including European integration. This dataset will be used to construct the independent variable. The trends shown by each variable will be tested using an independent samples t-test and the correlation between the X and Y variables will be tested using a multivariate regression model (Neuman, 2014).

### 1.2 Relevance of this Thesis:

EU legislation is the highest form of legislation within the Member States, which means that national - and local - legislation must comply with EU legislation (European Parliament, n.d.

c). In addition, the EP votes on agreements between the EU and third parties, and non-Member States that wish to interact with the EU bloc must comply with EU legislation (European Parliament, n.d. b).

The European Parliament is a co-legislator in the EU legislative process, meaning that it shares its legislative duties with the Council (European Parliament, n.d. a). Once the European Commission proposes legislation, the European Parliament can reject, approve, or amend the legislation. EU legislation can only be initiated by the European Commission, but the EP can ask the Commission to propose certain legislation (European Parliament, n.d. b). Moreover, the EP votes on agreements which were negotiated by the EU with third parties (European Parliament, n.d. b). In addition, the European Commission can only be appointed after each commissioner has been approved by the European Parliament. The EP also has the right to dismiss the European Commission (European Parliament, n.d. b). Although the power of the European Parliament is sometimes questioned, the institution still plays an integral role within European legislation (Hix, et al., 2007; Wenz-Temming & Sonnicksen, 2020).

A well-functioning European Parliament is therefore essential for public policy throughout the EU and beyond. Hix, et al. (2007) argue that high party cohesion is necessary for a well-functioning EP. High EPG party cohesion reduces uncertainty in public policy, maximizes the benefits of specialization, increases the advocacy for the general public good and reduces the dimensionality of European politics (Hix, et al., 2007). Therefore, a decline in EPG party cohesion would be unfavorable.

EPG party cohesion can only be achieved through good European Political Group leadership. In this thesis, good leadership is conceptualized as motivating MEPs to align their interests with the interests of the EPG (Bailer, et al., 2009). The concept is operationalized as the extent to which EPG leaders can motivate their MEPs to vote a certain way. This study explores the relationship between leaders and their team members, how people can be motivated in a public setting, and most importantly how third parties can impact the effectiveness of one's leadership efforts. Within the aforementioned Principal-Agent relationship, it is almost guaranteed that the interests of Principal and Agent differ (Eisenhardt, 1989). Whether this is due to personal differences, or the existence of another Principal, it will affect the effectiveness of leadership methods (Bailer, et al., 2009). This thesis focuses on the effect of national parties as a second Principal within the Principal-Agent relationship between MEPs and their EPGs.

The accumulation of the aforementioned emergence, growth and further rise of

Euroscepticism across Europe in the last decade, the possible relationship between Euroscepticism and a decline in European Political Group party cohesion, the negative effects of low EPG party cohesion on the functioning of the European Parliament and the influence of the European Parliament on public policy provide the social relevance of this paper.

Sixteen years ago, Hix, et al (2007) saw the relevance of studying party cohesion in EPGs, visualizing the trends in party cohesion within the European Parliament and providing possible explanations. With 708 citations, according to Researchgate (December 31, 2023), this work has become a leading source on EPG party cohesion since its publication in 2007 (Costello & Thomson 2016; Hix, et al., 2007). However, since 2007 the emergence and rise of Euroscepticism has dramatically changed the European political landscape (Brack, 2020). This change might cause a different outcome of the research by Hix, et al. (2007) if conducted with current data. The change within the European political context makes this thesis scientifically relevant and fills the current gap in the scientific literature pertaining to party cohesion within EPGs.

### 1.3 Thesis Structure:

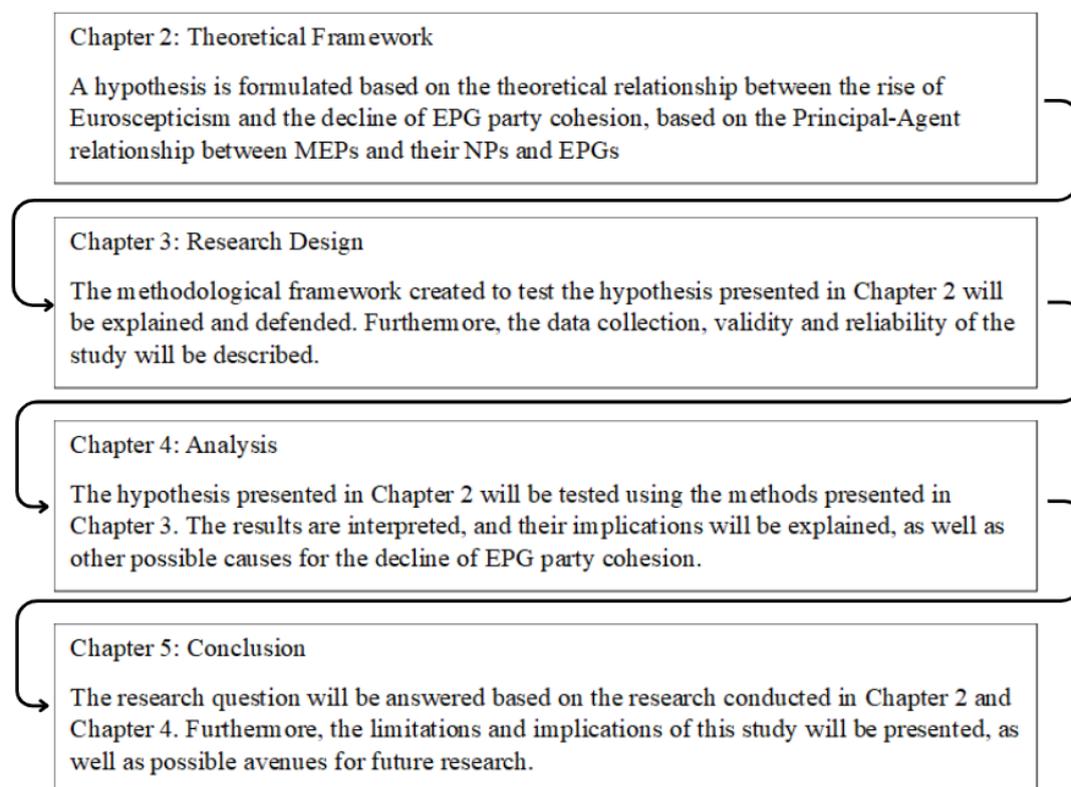


Figure 1. Structure of the thesis

The research question will be answered using the structure presented in Figure 1. A theoretical answer to the research question will be formulated in ‘Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework’ based on the existing literature concerning ‘Party Cohesion’, ‘Principal-Agent relationships’, and ‘Euroscepticism’. Each of these concepts will be explained and the scholarly consensus and discourse surrounding the concepts will be explored. At the end of ‘Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework’ the theoretical answer will be presented in the form of a hypothesis.

The methodological framework will be presented in ‘Chapter 3: Research Design’. This chapter explains and defends the methodological choices made to test the hypothesis and sub-hypotheses presented in ‘Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework’. Furthermore, the data collection, validity and reliability of the study will be described.

The results of the analysis will be presented in ‘Chapter 4: Analysis’. This chapter will be divided into two parts, first the ‘Results’ and second ‘Discussion’. Within the ‘Results’ section the hypothesis presented in ‘Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework’ will be tested. This analysis will be done per hypothesis and each hypothesis will be either accepted or rejected. Concluding in the acceptance or rejection of the main hypothesis. The ‘Discussion’ section interprets the results and explains the implications of these results. Moreover, other possible explanations for the empirical observations will be presented in this chapter.

This thesis will conclude by answering the research question. This will be explained in ‘Chapter 5: Conclusion’. This conclusion will be based on the available academic literature and the empirical analysis conducted in this study. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the limitations of the research and possible avenues for future research. Finally, the practical implications of the results found within this thesis will be presented.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

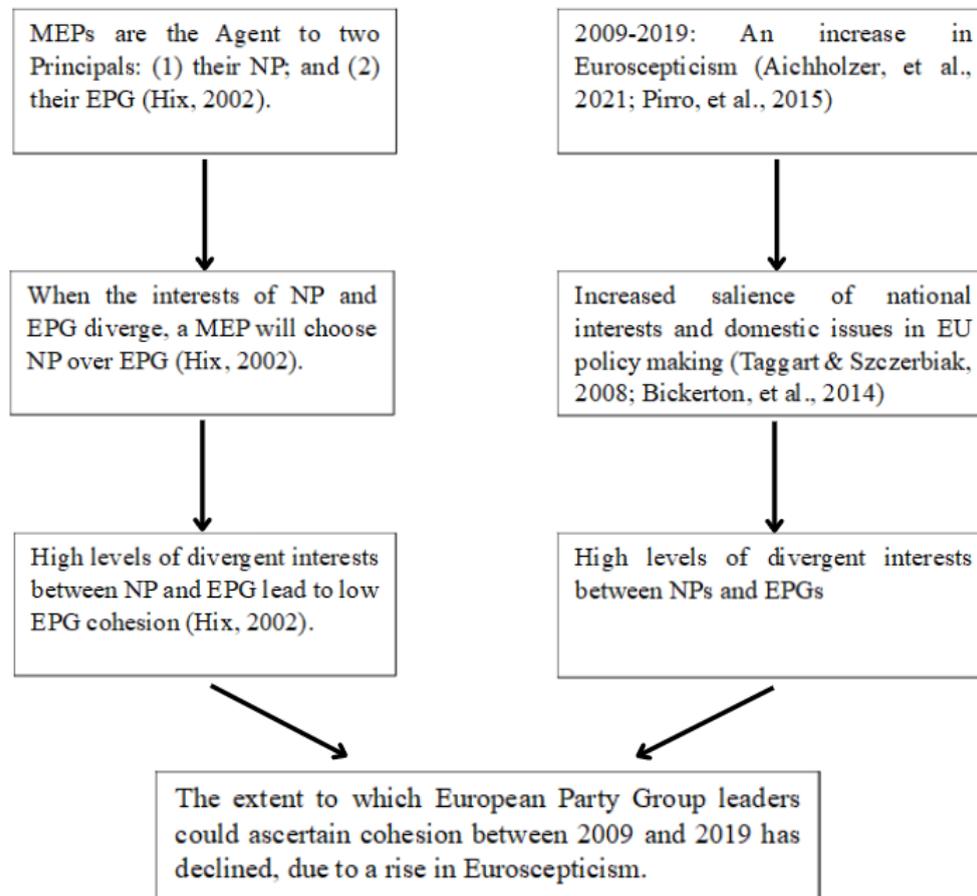


Figure 2. Theoretical foundation causal mechanism

The aim of this chapter is to formulate an answer to the research question based on the existing scientific literature. Figure 2. presents the theoretical foundation upon which the chapter is based. This argument structure will be explained and elaborated upon in the following text. First the three most important concepts will be explained and the existing scholarly literature on these concepts will be presented. These concepts are ‘Party Cohesion’, ‘Principal-Agent relationship’, and ‘Euroscepticism’. The relationship between the last two concepts and EPG party cohesion will be argued separately. Then the joint effect of these concepts on EPG party cohesion will be combined into one hypothesis, which is divided into four sub-hypotheses. In ‘Chapter 4: Analysis’ this hypothesis will be tested in order to answer the question: *To what extent could European Party Group leaders ascertain cohesion in the face of rising Euroscepticism between 2009 and 2019?*

## 2.1 Party Cohesion:

The dependent variable studied in this thesis is EPG party cohesion. In the early seventies Ozbudun (1970, p. 305) defined party cohesion as “*the extent to which in a given situation, group members can be observed to work together for the group’s goal in one and the same way*”. This definition has been the dominant conceptualization of the party cohesion since then, although most publications tend to focus on a more tangible expression of party cohesion. Bailer, et al. (2009), Hix (2002), Hix, et al. (2007), and Russell (2014) define the concept as the extent to which representatives of the same party vote as a unified bloc.

### 2.1.1 Importance of Party Cohesion:

The degree of cohesion within the voting behavior of political parties is important for both the democratic and legislative value of a parliament (Hix, et al., 2007). By voting as a cohesive bloc, political parties can ensure the trust of their voters by keeping their promises (Bailer, et al., 2009). This means that cohesive political parties provide citizens with the mechanisms to translate their preferences into public policy (Costello & Thomson, 2016). When party leadership can guarantee cohesive voting behavior, and political parties keep their promises, voters can trust that they will be represented in parliament. Thus, cohesive voting behavior ensures the democratic value of a parliament.

Other than improving the democratic value of a parliament, highly cohesive parties also improve the legislative value of a parliament. Cohesive political parties make the decision-making process within the legislature more structured and make endless voting cycles less likely (Costello & Thomson, 2016). Furthermore, high party cohesion reduces uncertainty in public policy, maximizes the benefits of specialization within political parties, increases the advocacy for the general public good and reduces the dimensionality of politics (Hix, et al., 2007). Thus, by structuring the legislative process, providing information to members of parliament and generalizing interests, high party cohesion ensures the legislative value of a parliament.

### 2.1.2 Factors Associated with the Level of Party Cohesion:

Party cohesion is generally very high within modern parliaments, but the levels do vary. In some countries, such as India or Australia, members can be expelled for voting against their party, while in other parliaments, like the EP, it is more common to vote against one’s party

(Russell, 2014). Russell (2014) identifies several factors associated with the level of party cohesion within parliaments. First, party cohesion is often higher in parliamentary systems than in presidential systems, since the government in the former is dependent on the confidence of the parliament for its survival (Russell, 2014). Furthermore, parties in a centralized government are often more cohesive than those functioning in a decentralized or federal system (Russell, 2014). Moreover, parties working within an electoral system which encourages intra-party competition, have lower levels of party cohesion (Russell, 2014). Other factors include ideology, opposition or government and the size of a party; once a party exceeds 150 members, party cohesion tends to decline (Russell, 2014). Party cohesion is an interesting variable that is very influential on the functioning of a parliament, but it is also highly contextual, and the forces that influence it are not universally agreed upon (Russell, 2014).

### 2.1.3 Perspectives on Party Cohesion:

Cohesive behavior can be explained by external factors as mentioned in the last paragraph, or by internal factors, meaning that members of parliament vote cohesively simply because they agree on public policy. The scientific consensus is that external factors are more influential than internal agreement (Costello & Thomson, 2016; Russell, 2014). There are multiple perspectives on how external factors influence party cohesion. The two most prominent perspectives on political party cohesion are the sociological and rational choice perspectives, but social psychology also provides an interesting perspective on the concept (Russell, 2014).

Although the sociological approach to party cohesion has become less popular in favor of the rational choice approach, it is still an interesting perspective to note. This approach assumes that the societal factors, such as social norms and predetermined social roles internalized by MPs cause them to behave (in)cohesively (Russell, 2014). This means that the sociological approach places most of the causes of party cohesion before the MP takes place in the parliament (Russell, 2014). The approach disregards the factors associated with party cohesion provided by Russell (2014) to a certain extent, but the idea that MPs are at least partially influenced by norms and predetermined social roles is important to keep in mind when studying party cohesion.

The psychological approach to party cohesion is less well known and used than the sociological and rational choice approaches, but it provides an interesting perspective nonetheless. The psychological perspective views party cohesion as group conformity. It

assumes that people want to be a part of a group, once they are part of a group, they tend to think in terms of in-groups and out-groups; us versus them (Russell, 2014). To be part of a group, one needs to conform to the standards of the group. Russell (2014) provides the *black sheep effect*, which states that those within the group who do not conform to the groups standards are rejected more harshly than those outside the group. The research by Russell (2014) found that MPs often gave ‘not wanting to upset colleagues’ or ‘not wanting to damage the group’ as reasons for their cohesive behavior even when certain votes went against their personal preferences.

The third, and most widely accepted, approach to party cohesion is the rational choice perspective. This perspective assumes that people act in their own self-interest. This means that MPs make rational choices in order to satisfy their own individual interests (Russell, 2014). The rational choice approach sees this goal-seeking behavior as the primary source of party cohesion (Russell, 2014). The goal of party leadership is to have the entire party vote as a cohesive bloc. Party leadership will use incentives to motivate MPs to align their interests with the interests of the party, thus creating a high level of party cohesion (Hix, 2002; Hix, et al., 2007). From the perspective of the rational choice approach party leaders have powerful tools to discipline or reward MPs to encourage them into certain behavior. After all, party leadership is highly influential on a MP’s re-selection, re-election, run for higher political office and other benefits (Costello & Thomson 2016; Hix, 2002; Russell, 2014).

The theoretical framework will be based on the rational choice approach to party cohesion, as this is the most widely accepted perspective on party cohesion in the current scientific literature (Russell, 2014). However, the possible effects of societal and psychological influences on MPs voting behavior must not be forgotten and taken into consideration.

#### 2.1.4 Party Cohesion in the European Parliament:

Extending the theory of party cohesion to the European Parliament, the cohesive voting behavior within the European Political Groups becomes the subject of study. Based on the factors associated with party cohesion provided by Russell (2014), one would assume that the voting cohesion within EPGs would be low. Considering that the EU is a cooperation between Member States, thus highly decentralized, which is reflected in the EPGs, which are collaborations between like-minded national parties. The largest EPGs consist of dozens of national parties (Bailer, et al., 2009). This means that EPGs face not only a high degree of

decentralization, but also large party sizes. According to Russell (2014), this should make them highly incohesive. In reality, the opposite is true; EPGs have been remarkably cohesive over the years (Bailer, et al., 2009).

Bailer, et al. (2009) provide structural determinants specifically aimed at EPG party cohesion. First, they find that ideology is a factor in EPG party cohesion. The effect of political preference is twofold. First, the homogeneity within the party; the more the political preferences of MEPs align, the higher the level of cohesion within a party (Bailer, 2009). Second, Bailer, et al. (2009) argue that left-wing and green parties show more discipline and cohesion than liberal and conservative parties.

Second, with respect to party size, similar to Russel (2014), Bailer, et al. (2009) see a large party size as a possible negative influence on EPG party cohesion. But they also argue that due to the EP's financial support system, which allocates money based on party size, the extra coordination and monitoring costs associated with bigger party sizes can be compensated within the EP (Bailer, et al., 2009). Furthermore, the larger the party the more (powerful) positions it can distribute among its members, such as the EP Presidency, committee positions or rapporteurships. This results in a situation where the larger parties have a wide range of incentives to motivate their MEPs to vote cohesively (Bailer, et al, 2009).

Third, the influence of national parties; the more national parties represented within an EPG, the more difficult the task of ensuring party cohesion (Bailer, et al., 2009). This comes back to the rational choice perspective on party cohesion. Both the EPG and the national parties aim to motivate their MEPs to align their individual interests with the interests of the party. If the interests of the EPG and national party align, there is no problem. But once the interests start to diverge, the MEPs will receive incentives for conflicting actions, causing the party cohesion to decline (Hix, 2002). The relationship between MEPs and their NPs and EPGs will be further explained and elaborated upon in the 'Principal-Agent relationship' section. Incidentally, Bailer, et al. (2009) argue that the existence of national parties with EPG is not necessarily harmful for the cohesiveness of EPGs. For instance, if a large number of NPs within an EPG are represented in a national government, the EPG is most likely to show high levels of cohesion. Governments can exert pressure on these NPs to ensure the adoption of policy already agreed upon in the Council of Ministers (Bailer, et al., 2009).

Thus, party cohesion is most often expressed as the extent to which representatives of the same party vote as an unified bloc. There are many theories as to why representatives choose to vote cohesively, but the rational choice perspective is the most widely accepted. There are also many external factors that influence the cohesiveness of political parties, and the factor at the heart of this thesis is the possible negative effect of Euroscepticism on EPG party cohesion.

## 2.2 Principal-Agent Relationship:

The causal mechanism underlying the possible relationship between Euroscepticism and EPG party cohesion is the effect of national parties as a second Principal within the Principal-Agent relationship between MEPs and their EPGs. These special Principal-Agent relationships are the basis of the theoretical framework and will be explained in this section.

### 2.2.1 What is the Principal-Agent Relationship?

Within the structure of an organization the relationship between those who delegate work and those who perform that work is critical (Eisenhardt, 1989). In management and leadership literature, this relationship is called the Principal-Agent relationship. The ‘Principal’ is the one who delegates tasks and the ‘Agent’ is the one who performs those tasks. This relationship is the basis of a hierarchical organizational structure, and in and of itself it is nothing more than a descriptive concept. However, it can become a problem when the possibility of conflict of interest arises within a Principal-Agent relationship (Eisenhardt, 1989). This is known as the Principal-Agent problem. A Principal-Agent problem arises “*when (a) the desires or goals of the Principal and Agent conflict and (b) it is difficult or expensive for the Principal to verify what the Agent is actually doing*” (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 58).

Within the Principal-Agent relationship, the Principal is the one who sets the goals, they are then dependent on their Agent in order to achieve those goals (Eisenhardt, 1989). An example of this can be seen in the European Parliament (Hix, 2002). By way of illustration, the leadership of a European Political Group (the Principal) sets the goal of passing a certain policy. In order to achieve this goal, they are dependent on the MEPs within their EPG (the Agent) to cast the actual votes. In the event that the goals align, there is no problem. But in the case that a MEP wants to vote no, where the EPG leadership wants them to vote yes, it complicates the achievement of the goal set by the Principal (Hix, 2002).

To ensure that the Agent follows the orders from the Principal, it is important to be able to verify the Agent’s actions. That way a Principal can sanction disobedience and praise obedience, thus motivating Agents to follow orders (Eisenhardt, 1989). This difficulty also exists within the Principal-Agent relationship between the leadership of the EPGs and their MEPs (Hix, 2002). There are three ways of voting in the European Parliament; (1) show off hands, (2) electronic voting, and (3) roll-call voting. In the first two cases there is no record of

how each individual MEP voted (Hix, 2002). Roll-call voting needs to be requested by an EP party or any group of 32 or more MEPs. According to Hix (2002) this is often done for one of three reasons. Either they want to show the group's position on an issue, or they want to embarrass another party, or, most importantly in this case, they want to keep a check on the behavior of their own MEPs (Hix, 2002).

### 2.2.2 Special Situation Members of European Parliament:

As mentioned above, a form of the Principal-Agent relationship also exists within the European Parliament, where the leadership of the European Political Group and the leadership of national parties are both Principals and the MEPs are Agents. These MEPs are forced in an interesting position. Hix (2002, p. 688) describe this position is as follows: *“The EP is a relatively new chamber, with a high number of political parties, a variety of decision rules, and multiple influences operating upon its members such as diverse policy preferences, national interests, national party policies, and European party affiliations. For example, when deciding how to vote, MEPs must respond to two different “Principals”: national parties, who control the selection of candidates in EP elections, and the political groups in the EP, who control a variety of private goods in the EP, such as leadership positions, committee assignments, speaking time, and the legislative agenda.”*

The existence of two Principals increases the likelihood of a Principal-Agent problem occurring in one of the two relationships. Both the European Political Group and the national party depend on the MEPs in order to achieve their goals. If the goals of the two Principals conflict, there is no possibility for the Agent to comply with both their Principals. In this case the MEP is forced to choose between their European Political Group and their national party.

#### 2.2.2.1 Principal one: European Political Group:

The first Principal that gives orders to the MEPs is the leadership of their European Political Group. Their goal is to pass legislation that aligns with their ideological ideals, aims and ambitions, and to block legislation that conflicts with those ideals, aims and ambitions. In order to achieve this goal, they are reliant on party cohesion, which means that the votes cast by their MEPs must be in line with the preferences of the leadership.

According to Hix (2002, p.689), *“A central claim in research on the EP is that the political groups have a significant impact on MEP voting behavior”*. The European Political Groups have certain tools they can use to exert influence on their MEPs. They decide which

MEPs get things such as leadership positions, committee assignments, and speaking time, furthermore they control the legislative agenda (Hix, 2002). Hix (2002, pp.690-691) provides an example of this with the following quote: “*With more than 65 percent of the MEPs between them, when working together these two parties control who wins the key offices in the EP, who gets what committee chair, and how the legislative agenda in committees and on the floor of the EP is organized*”. This means that in order to leave their literal as well as their figurative mark on Brussels, it is important for MEPs to stay on the good side of the European Party’s leadership.

#### 2.2.2.2 *Principal two: National Party:*

The second Principal that gives orders to the MEPs in the leadership of their national party. When entering the European Parliament national parties choose a European Political Group to join. EPGs are collaborations between several national parties whose ideological views are more or less aligned (Hix, et al., 2007). This means that MEPs represent their national party while being part of an EPG. Identical to the European Political Groups, national parties are reliant on their MEPs in order to achieve their goals in the European Parliament (Hix, 2002). In this case, their goal is to pass legislation that is in line with their ideological ideals, aims and ambitions, and to block legislation that is in conflict with said ideals, aims and ambitions. This means that for the NPs to achieve their goals it is crucial that MEPs follow the preferences of their national party leadership (Hix, 2002).

The national parties have, as Principals, a great advantage in controlling their Agents (the MEPs). They control, or have a strong influence on, whether a MEP will be up for re-election at the next European Parliament elections and on the political future of the MEPs back home. According to Hix (2002, p. 691) they do this “*either via the national party executive determining the list of candidates (as in France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, Finland or Austria), or via the national party executive approving candidates selected by regional organs (as in Britain, Germany, Italy, or Ireland)*”. Oftentimes, the leadership of the national parties assembles their ‘National Party Delegation’ and determines the party-wide position on legislation (Hix, 2002).

### 2.2.3 Principal-Agent Relationship & EPG Party Cohesion:

The Principal-Agent relationship is a relationship between those who give the orders and those who carry out those orders. This relationship exists in all hierarchical forms of management. The existence of this relationship is not inherently problematic, but when the interests of the Principal and Agent begin to diverge, and the Principal has difficulty verifying that the work is performed according to the orders given, it becomes a problem (Eisenhardt, 1989).

MEPs are forced into a particular position, where they have to adhere to orders from two different Principals whose interests do not always align: (1) the leadership of the EPG, and (2) the leadership of their national party. When the positions of the EPG and the national party align, there will not be a problem. But the moment that positions diverge, the existence of a Principal-Agent Problem becomes inevitable (Hix, 2002).

As Hix (2002, p. 691) states, *“the further the ideal policy position of a national party is from the ideal position of the EP party, the more likely the MEPs from that national party will find themselves facing a choice between their national party and their EP party. And, as discussed before, whether a national party is to the right or the left of the EP party should not have a systematic effect. Hence, the distance between a national party and the EP party should be a strong predictor of MEP defection from the EP parties”*. This would mean that when the positions of the national party leadership and the EPG leadership are misaligned, a MEP will more often than not align with their national party on legislation. Thus, the more the positions of the national parties and the EPGs diverge, the less cohesive the EPG voting bloc will be.

## 2.3 Euroscepticism:

The independent variable within this thesis is Euroscepticism. An increase in this sentiment could lead to a decline in EPG party cohesion, due to the increasing importance of national interests and domestic problems within European politics. As is illustrated Costello and Thomson (2016, p. 781), who argue that *“when salient national interests are at stake, national groups of MEPs are significantly more likely to deviate from their party group’s policy position and come out in support of their member state’s position”*. They also open up the possibility that the national divisions have become more prevalent since the 2009 Eurozone crisis (Costello & Thomson, 2016).

According to Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008), Euroscepticism can be described as opposition to the European project. Taggart and Szczerbiak (2008) divide the concept into two camps: (1) Hard Euroscepticism, and (2) Soft Euroscepticism.

They define Hard Euroscepticism as *“a principled objection to the EU and European integration and [which] therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived”* (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2008, cited by Kaniok & Komínková, 2022, p81).

Soft Euroscepticism is defined as *“There is NOT a Principal objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that ‘national interest’ is currently at odds with the EU trajectory”* (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2008, cited by Kaniok & Komínková, 2022, p.81).

This means that although Euroscepticism is a broad concept, the sentiment is a response to the loss of Member State sovereignty due to further European integration. Therefore, Eurosceptics often prefer intergovernmental over supranational solutions when it comes to European public policy (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2008; Wenz-Temming & Sonnicksen, 2020).

### 2.3.1 Intergovernmentalism:

An intergovernmental approach to international government is one in which integration is implemented via cooperation among countries, as opposed to the supranational form of international government in which integration is implemented by a governing institution

above the Member States (Bickerton, et al., 2015). Smeets & Zaun (2021, p. 853) define the intergovernmental approach as follows: *“In intergovernmentalist theorizing, institutional actors operating within supranational organizations play a minor, facilitative role at best. Instead, Member States shape and steer the course of European integration...”*

Since the Treaty of Maastricht, in 1993, there seems to have been an effort at all levels of the European Union to implement policy by the Member States rather than by Supranational bodies. Wenz-Temming and Sonnicksen (2020) argue that this widespread push for Intergovernmentalism is a response to the loss of sovereignty of Member States and goes hand in hand with growing Euroscepticism within the Union.

The push for further European integration through intergovernmental solutions creates an integration paradox (Bickerton, et al., 2015). This paradox is: Member States pursue more integration, but stubbornly resist further supranationalism. Bickerton, et al. (2015) provide a possible solution for this paradox with their sub-type of Intergovernmentalism, namely New Intergovernmentalism. This sub-type provides six plausible hypotheses that aim at resolving this paradox. In short, New Intergovernmentalism argues that an intergovernmental approach to European integration is not only desired by Member States, but also necessary for the continuation of the European project within the modern context (Bickerton, et al., 2015).

The fourth hypothesis within the theory of New Intergovernmentalism is the most important one regarding the relationship between Euroscepticism and EPG cohesion, namely: *“Problems in domestic preference formation have become stand-alone inputs into the European integration process”* (Bickerton, et al., 2015, p. 714). Furthermore, Bickerton, et al. (2015, p. 714) argue that the post-Maastricht era has been marked *“by a growing distrust in the political system as a whole”*. This means that according to New Intergovernmentalism ideologies pertaining to the make-up of the EU and Member States’ roles within the EU, such as Euroscepticism, have become stand-alone inputs into the European integration process. As have domestic problems, leading to a shift in focus from general public goods to local public goods.

### 2.3.2 The Origins of Euroscepticism between 2009 and 2019:

The 2010s; *‘a decade of crises’*. During the 2010s several crises have overshadowed the European legislative process (Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020). The most important crises are the financial crisis between 2010 and 2014, the refugee crisis between 2015 and 2019 and to some extent the Brexit since 2016 (Aichholzer, et al., 2021; Taggart &

Szczerbiak, 2018; Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh 2020). These crises have led to a decline in confidence in the European Union in all Member States and a growth of Euroscepticism among the population (Yoo-Duk Kang and Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020). In their article Yoo-Duk Kang and Chang-Rhyong Oh (2020) provide four conclusions on why these crises have led to a decline in confidence.

First, the global financial crisis of the early 2010s caused a dramatic decline in public trust in the EU. Not only because the crisis itself affected the daily lives of many EU citizens, but also because people felt that the EU was unable to help countries in need and get Europe out of the financial crisis (Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020).

Second, the dissatisfaction caused by the bailout programs implemented to counter the financial crisis was used by Eurosceptic political parties to gain popularity. These programs, which forced budget cuts and increases in taxes, were not imposed by domestic political bodies but were instead forced on Member States by the EU institutions (Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020).

Third, due to European economic integration, and the associated burden-sharing, many started to perceive bad fiscal policy in other countries as a direct endangerment of Member States' economies, causing a decline in public support for European integration (Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020).

The last conclusion focuses on the refugee crisis in the middle of the 2010s. Yoo-Duk Kang and Chang-Rhyong Oh (2020, p. 362) see this as *“a symbol of an external shock to the EU”*. Due to the EU being perceived as not being capable to respond appropriately to this challenge, support for the European Union declined. Yoo-Duk Kang and Chang-Rhyong Oh (2020, p. 362) summarize the effect of crises on Euroscepticism as follows: *“support for the EU is likely to depend on the ability of the EU to deal with challenges that are salient in national politics and public opinion”*.

According to Pirro, et al. (2018) Eurosceptic opinions have existed as long as the European integration project has existed. Meaning that these views were not created by the crises in the 2010s, but like Yoo-Duk Kang and Chang-Rhyong Oh (2020) argue the crises did make Eurosceptic ideas more salient and widespread. Both Pirro, et al. (2018) and Taggart & Szczerbiak (2018) argue that the different crises have affected the level of Euroscepticism in EU Member States to different amounts. These differences can be traced back to the different direct consequences of the crises in the countries.

### 2.3.3 Contextual Factors Euroscepticism:

The crises seen in Europe between 2009 and 2019 have led to a more pronounced and widespread opposition against European integration (Aichholzer, et al., 2021; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018; Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020). However, the extent to which this anti-integration sentiment increased was not the same throughout the EU. These differences might have been caused by other factors. This section explores the impact of historical and cultural context, nationalism and ideology on Euroscepticism.

#### 2.3.3.1 *Historical and Cultural Context:*

The importance of differentiating between the different Member States and their historical and cultural context is a recurring argument in the literature on Euroscepticism (Aichholzer, et al., 2021; Pirro, et al., 2015; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018; Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020).

Taggart & Szczerbiak (2018) provide tangible evidence of this importance. They have studied the effects of crises on EU Member States, how these effects differ across countries and how this affects the level/type of Euroscepticism prevalent in these countries. The authors mention the importance of the historical and cultural aspects when studying the effects of crises.

A country like Denmark comes to mind, a country that has not been too badly affected by either the Euro Crisis or the Migration Crisis (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018). Nevertheless, the country has a strong tradition of Eurosceptic opinion. For example, the country has never entered the Eurozone. This tradition can further be seen in a large presence of single-issue anti-European Union parties and the strong call for a Brexit-like referendum (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018). Thus, even though the aforementioned crises had at most a moderate impact on the lives of Danish citizens, the crises were seen as reasons to view the European Union in a skeptical light. Thus, in the case of Denmark, the cultural aspects within the country have led to an increased impact of the crises on Eurosceptic public opinion.

In contrast to Denmark, the historical and cultural aspects within Ireland have led to a reduced effect of a crisis on Eurosceptic public opinion. Although Eurosceptic public opinion was especially pushed due to the Euro crisis, which has impacted the country a great amount, Brexit had the opposite result. Historical tensions between Ireland and the United Kingdom caused a dramatic decrease in Eurosceptic calls in Ireland (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018).

### 2.3.3.2 *Nationalism:*

Similar to Taggart & Szczerbiak (2018), Aichholzer, et al. (2021) consider context to be of great importance in the study of Euroscepticism. They have studied the relation between National identity profiles and support for the European Union. The concept of nationalism has been treated as an umbrella term for all types of country loving, Aichholzer, et al. (2021) argue that further demarcation is needed to understand the concept and its effect on other variables like Euroscepticism. They measure nationalist attitudes in four types of national identity profiles.

(1) *Chauvinism*: the belief that one's country is the best, the feeling of being better than other countries (exclusive due to negative attitudes toward out-groups); (2) *Constructive patriotism*: pride in one's political institutions, culture, economic and social welfare system (inclusive because it does not imply being critical of other countries); (3) *Civic citizenship*: citizenship based on a social contract in which inclusion is based on willingness to uphold that contract; and (4) *Ethnic citizenship*: citizenship based on an ethnic community where inclusion is based on ancestry.

According to Aichholzer, et al. (2021) how one scores on these components indicate how they view the European Union. They divide opinions regarding the European Union in five types:

(1) *Anti-Nationalist Supporters* score low in all components related to nationalism show average support for the EU; (2) *Nationalists* score high in all components related to nationalism show below average support for the EU; (3) *Patriotic Supporters* score high in all components, except for chauvinism (average) and (Ethnic) low, these people show high levels of support for the EU; (4) *Moderate supporters* do not particularly emphasize national identity and exhibit average EU support; and (5) *Prideless opponents* show high emphasis on civic citizenship and score below average on other components and show low support for the EU.

EU Member States score differently on the types of identity profiles, so different nationalities fall into different EU support types. This means that nationalism means different things in different countries. This study shows that there are important differences in nationalist ideologies and how they affect the level and expression of Euroscepticism between Member States (Aichholzer, et al., 2021).

The form of nationalism that correlates with below-average support for the European Union is on the rise (Clark & Rohrschneider, 2021). This incline could be attributed to the

aging populations of many European Member States. Due to the importance of this demographic in the overall rise of nationalism, Clark & Rohrschneider (2021) argue that not only the extremes of the political spectrum, but also the moderate left, center and right see an increase in Nationalism and the related anti-European sentiment. Seeing that many older people do not necessarily tend to identify with those on the fringes of the political spectrum.

#### 2.3.3.3 *Political ideology:*

The rise of Euroscepticism is most pronounced on the fringes of the political spectrum (Brack, 2020). Both far-right and far-left parties voice concerns about the EU and its further integration. The right and left wings differ to such an extent that Brack (2020) argues that a unified Eurosceptic bloc within the European Parliament is nothing more than a pipe dream. This means that the Eurosceptic bloc can be divided in two movements.

Right-wing Euroscepticism is based on nativism and populism (Brasso Sørensen, 2020). Nativism is a form of in-out group thinking that concerns the horizontal antagonism between natives and non-natives (Rooduijn, et al., 2021). According to Brasso Sørensen (2020), right-wing Eurosceptics contest the idea of a collective European people. This assumption leads right-wing Eurosceptics to the conclusion that the European project has no prospects since “*Democracy needs a ‘people’ that is capable of collective will-formation*” (Brasso Sørensen, 2020, p.168). In the absence of one European people, European democracy is considered impossible (Brasso Sørensen, 2020). Furthermore, right-wing Eurosceptics tend to portray the EU as the European elite, which needs to be brought down for the good of the ordinary people (Brasso Sørensen, 2020). By doing so, providing a populist argument against European integration.

Where right-wing parties find the differences between the European peoples to be the main problem with the EU, as argued by Brasso Sørensen (2020). Do many left-wing Eurosceptics argue that the EU as a neoliberal project, is too focused on the betterment of the economic position of European companies, consistently forgetting the European people (Brack, 2020).

Thus, left-wing Euroscepticism is more aligned with Taggart and Szczerbiak’s (2008) soft Euroscepticism. Where right-wing Euroscepticism is more aligned with Taggart and Szczerbiak’s (2008) hard Euroscepticism. This divide is further confirmed in the article by Pirro, et al. (2018). However, right-wing and left-wing Euroscepticism are both a response to

a loss of sovereignty due to European integration, and meet in their belief that European integration conflicts with national interests.

Clark & Rohrschneider (2021), Meijers (2017), Toshkov and Krouwel (2022) and Treib (2021) challenge the idea that Euroscepticism is an ideology of the political fringes. They argue that this, previously too extreme, sentiment has slowly but surely seeped into the political mainstream.

Treib (2021) argues against ostracizing the Eurosceptic minority in the EP, pointing out that this could strengthen their agenda. Furthermore, as Euroscepticism seems to become a constant, mainstream parties need to find a more sustainable way of dealing with these extremes. Treib (2021) suggests finding common middle ground and de-escalating their talking points.

The use of the spatial theory and issue evolution theory by Meijers (2017) provides structure to the suggestions made by Treib (2021). Spatial theory argues that a party's strategy is always based on the positions of its competitors (Meijers, 2017). Issue evolution theory argues that political parties compete to bring their issues on the political agenda (Meijers, 2017).

Meijers (2017) argues that European integration is on the political agenda because Eurosceptic parties see it as a salient issue. This means that it also becomes a hot topic for voters, which forces mainstream parties to form an opinion on European integration. If the mainstream parties notice that they have lost votes after an election, due to their stance on the EU, they will move more to the fringes without alienating their own voters. If support for Eurosceptics increases, they will move further to those fringes (Meijers, 2017). This means that Euroscepticism becomes more mainstream as the popularity on the political fringes grows.

#### 2.3.4 Euroscepticism & EPG Party Cohesion:

Euroscepticism is the opposition to the European project. It is a response to the loss of sovereignty due to European integration, driven by the growing importance of national interests and domestic problems. This sentiment has seen a rise in support between 2009 and 2019. How this rise could have affected EPG party cohesion will be explained in this section.

Euroscepticism is associated with a preference for intergovernmental over supranational solutions in European policymaking (Wenz-Temming & Sonnicksen, 2020). The push for an

intergovernmental approach to EU integration means that ideologies pertaining to the composition of the EU and the role of Member States within the EU have become stand-alone inputs into the European integration process, as have domestic issues, causing a shift in focus from general public goods to local public goods (Bickerton, et al., 2015).

During the 2010s the European Member States have faced numerous challenges (Aichholzer, et al., 2021; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018; Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020). These crises had a significant negative impact on the support for the European Union. The crises were perceived as evidence that the EU was not a sufficient institution to solve large-scale crises, causing the trust to fall (Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020). Moreover, the crises highlighted the negative aspects of the EU in the eyes of Eurosceptics (Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020). Each crisis affected the various Member States differently, causing each crisis to affect the level of Euroscepticism in each Member State in different ways (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018).

When talking about this effect, it is important to consider the historical and cultural context of the different Member States (Aichholzer, 2021; Pirro, et al., 2018, Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018, Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020). The EU consists of dozens of different Member States, each with a different history and culture. This causes the Eurosceptic rhetoric to vary from country to country (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018; Toshkov & Krouwel 2022).

Aichholzer, Kritzinger & Plescia (2021) take the importance of context and apply this to the relationship between nationalism and Euroscepticism. They found that although nationalism is indeed on the rise throughout the EU, nationalism can be categorized in different national identity profiles, which can divide opinions regarding the European Union in different types.

Moreover, Euroscepticism is most prevalent on the fringes of the political spectrum, both far-right and far-left parties voice concerns pertaining to the EU and its further integration (Brack, 2020). But Clark and Rohrschneider (2021), Meijers (2017), Toshkov and Krouwel (2022) and Treib (2021) argue that the anti-European sentiment has seeped into mainstream European politics.

In short, Euroscepticism is the opposition against the European project, born as a response to the loss of sovereignty due to European integration, often associated with a push for an intergovernmental approach to European policy making. Eurosceptic rhetoric is highly dependent on domestic context, with national interests as main driving force, opening up the

possibility for national delegations within the same EPG to disagree. Even though Euroscepticism started, and is most prevalent, on the fringes of the political spectrum, it has also seeped into the political mainstream. Therefore, a rise of Euroscepticism could open up the possibility of a misalignment between the interests of the national parties and the EPGs within the European Parliament, leading to a decline in EPG party cohesion.

## 2.4 Hypothesis:

In the first parts of this theoretical framework, the dependent variable, ‘EPG party cohesion’ was explained, as well as the causal mechanisms on which the relationship between the dependent and independent variables is based. Furthermore, the independent variable ‘Euroscepticism’ was explained, as well as its relationship to the dependent variable. In this section each of these parts will be combined into a theoretical answer to the research question.

A European Political Group can be considered cohesive when its members vote as one block (Bailer, et al, 2008; Hix, 2002; Russell, 2014). The more the votes are misaligned, the less cohesive the European Political Group is. So, for leadership to ascertain cohesion it is important to get all the MEPs to vote as a unified bloc (Hix, 2002).

Each MEP is free to vote as they please, but a Member of the European Parliament is the Agent who receives orders from two Principals; (1) the leadership of their national party; and (2) the leadership of their European Political Group (Hix, 2002). Both Principals have tools which they can use to coerce MEPs to align their interests with the interests of either their national party or their European Political Group.

As long as the interests of both Principals are aligned, the MEPs within an EPG will most likely cohesively vote as one bloc. In case of misalignment between the two Principals, MEPs will most likely follow their national party leadership, over the leadership of the EPG, causing the EPG party cohesion to decline (Hix, 2002).

Euroscepticism is conceptualized as the opposition against the European project, born as a response to the loss of sovereignty due to European integration, often associated with a push for an intergovernmental approach to European policy making (Bickerton, et al., 2015; Wenz-Temming & Sonnicksen, 2020). Eurosceptic rhetoric is highly dependent on domestic context, with national interests as main driving force, opening up the possibility of national delegations within the same EPG to disagree (Aichholzer, 2021; Pirro, et al., 2018, Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018, Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020). Even though Euroscepticism started, and is most prevalent, on the fringes of the political spectrum, it has also seeped into the political mainstream (Brack, 2020; Meijers, 2017). Therefore, a rise of Euroscepticism could open up the possibility for misalignment between the interests of the national parties and the EPGs within the European Parliament.

The causal mechanism provided in this thesis states that EPG party cohesion will decline in the event that the interests of EPGs and NPs diverge, as MEPs are most likely to follow the interests of their national party leadership when this happens (Hix, 2002; Hix, et al., 2007). Based on this mechanism and the existing academic literature on Euroscepticism, an increase in anti-European sentiment could have led to a decrease in EPG party cohesion. This is because national parties with a high level of Euroscepticism are driven by national interests and domestic problems, whereas EPG positions are based on EU-wide concerns (Bickerton, et al., 2015; Hix, et al., 2007; Taggart & Szcerbiak, 2008). This misalignment could have caused an increased divergence between the interests pursued by NPs, and those pursued by EPGs between 2009 and 2019. Which in turn would have led to a decrease in EPG party cohesion, because MEPs are most likely to follow the interests of their national party when misalignment of interests between NPs and EPGs occurs. Thus, the rise of Euroscepticism between 2009 and 2019 might have caused a decline in EPG party cohesion. This provides the following theoretical answer to the research question: *To what extent could European Party Group leaders ascertain cohesion in the face of rising Euroscepticism between 2009 and 2019?*

Hypothesis 1: *The extent to which European Party Group leaders could ascertain cohesion between 2009 and 2019 has declined, due to a rise in Euroscepticism.*

This hypothesis consists of multiple parts. Meaning that it can only be accepted when multiple assumptions based on theory hold true in reality. For each of these assumptions a hypothesis was formulated. When each of these sub-hypotheses hold true the hypothesis can be accepted.

#### 2.4.1 Hypothesis A:

The first theoretical assumption concerns the decline of European Political Group cohesion between the 7th and 8th European Parliament. In the case that the cohesion within EPGs has significantly declined between 2009 and 2019, the following hypothesis can be accepted.

H1a: *Cohesion within European Political Groups has declined between the 7th and 8th EP.*

#### 2.4.2 Hypothesis B:

The second theoretical assumption concerns the comparison of the extent to which European Political Group leadership could ascertain cohesion within the EGPs between 7th and 8th European Parliament. In other words, to what extent could EPG leadership motivate MEPs to align their interests with those of the EPG? In the case that the proportion of votes cast against the European Political Group in favor of the national party has increased between the 7th and 8th European Parliament H1b can be accepted.

*H1b: The proportion of votes cast against the European Political Group but with the national party has increased during the 7th and 8th European Parliament.*

#### 2.4.3 Hypothesis C:

The third theoretical assumption concerns the rise of Euroscepticism within the European Parliament. Based on the existing literature on Euroscepticism, the anti-Europe sentiment has always been present but gained much prominence during the 2010s (Pirro, Taggart & van Kessel 2018). In the case that the level of Euroscepticism is higher in EP8 than in EP7, the hypothesis can be accepted.

*H1c: The level of Euroscepticism has increased in the seventh and eighth European Parliament.*

#### 2.4.4 Hypothesis D:

The fourth theoretical assumption concerns the existence of a negative relationship between Euroscepticism and the EPG party cohesion. The independent variable within this relationship is Euroscepticism, the dependent variable is the cohesion within the EPGs, which is expressed as the percentage of votes against the EPG and with the NP by a MEP. If the average percentage of votes cast by a MEP against the EPG and with the NP in a national party, as the level of Euroscepticism within a national party increases H1d can be accepted.

*H1d: The higher the level of Euroscepticism within a national party, the higher the percentage of votes cast against the EPG and with the NP by a MEP.*

#### 2.4.5 Possible other Causes for a Decline in EPG Party Cohesion:

EPG party cohesion, the Principal-Agent relationship within the EP, and Euroscepticism are complex concepts and the reality of social science is neither white nor black. Based on the academic literature the influence of variables other than Euroscepticism on EPG party cohesion cannot be ruled out. In the case that this study cannot provide significant evidence of a relationship between a rise in the level of Euroscepticism and a decline in EPG party cohesion within the European Parliament between 2009 and 2019, something else must have caused the possible decline of party cohesion within EPGs.

Five possible other variables that could have caused the decline in cohesion are: (1) left-right ideology; (2) the deviation between the NP and EPG on the basis of left-right ideology; (3) the size of the EPG; (4) the number of national parties in an EPG relative to the size of the EPG; and (5) the differences in cultural and historical context of Member States. The first four variables will be controlled for while testing Hypothesis D, and the last variable will be tested if the main hypothesis cannot be accepted.

##### *2.4.5.1 Left-right ideology:*

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, ideology might influence a party's cohesion substantially, with left-wing parties being more cohesive than those on the right-wing (Bailer, et al., 2009).

##### *2.4.5.2 The deviation between the NP and EPG on the basis of left-right ideology:*

Bailer, et al. (2009) also state that the ideological deviation between the national party and the European Political Group could also influence a party's cohesion substantially. The more the ideology of a national party deviates from the mean ideology of an EPG, the more likely MEPs within that NP are to vote against the EPG.

##### *2.4.5.3 The size of the EPG:*

Russell (2014) notes that the larger a party is, the less cohesive it tends to be. This is because the cost of motivating all representatives while maintaining the psychological feeling of an in-group, would be too high. Bailer, et al. (2009) argue that resource division within the EP solves this problem. Because the resources are distributed based on party size. Thus, the largest parties receive the most resources. Furthermore, the largest parties have access to the best incentives to motivate their MEPs, such as the EP presidency, committee positions or

rapporteurships. This would mean that the larger the EPG, the more cohesive its members will vote.

#### *2.4.5.4 The number of national parties in an EPG relative to the size of the EPG:*

Bailer, et al. (2009) state that the higher the number of national parties within an EPG, the less cohesive its members will vote. However, in specific cases the opposite might be true. For instance, if a large number of NPs within an EPG are represented in a national government, the EPG is most likely to show high levels of cohesion. Governments can exert pressure on these NPs to ensure the adoption of policy already agreed upon in the Council of Ministers (Bailer, et al., 2009).

#### *2.4.5.5 Cultural and historical context of Member States:*

Existing literature states that national, historical and cultural context is highly influential on nativism and anti-European rhetoric (Aichholzer, et al., 2021; Pirro, et al., 2018; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018; Yoo-Duk Kang & Chang-Rhyong Oh, 2020).

Taggart & Szczerbiak (2018) provide multiple causes for anti-European expression to differ between countries. They argue that a relation exists between anti-European rhetoric and the manner in which crises have affected Member States. Furthermore, the historical and cultural aspects of a Member State also impact nationalist and anti-European rhetoric. If a country has been historically hesitant to literally and figuratively open its borders to others, it might be more prone to nationalist and anti-European rhetoric. Taggart & Szczerbiak (2018) provide Denmark as an example.

Aichholzer, et al. (2021) provide examples of differences in nationalist attitudes and found different types of nationalism when related to Euroscepticism. These have all been explained within the literature overview, but the conclusion of their study is that nationalism means different things in different countries. Most notably they found that nationalist thinking is not necessarily related to a high or low level of Euroscepticism.

Based on these findings it could be possible that nationality, and its related historical and cultural context, could be a better explanatory variable of a strong increase in the proportions of votes cast with NPs against EPGs by MEPs of certain nationalities.

*Hypothesis National, Historical and Cultural contexts: Some Member States saw a larger increase in the proportions of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG by MEPs than others, due to differences in their respective historical and cultural contexts.*

## Chapter 3: Research design

This thesis is based on a quantitative form of deductive research. A statistical analysis will be conducted in order to test whether the hypothesis presented in the theoretical framework can be found in reality. Quantitative means that the hypothesis will be tested by analyzing numerical empirical data through statistical tests (Neuman, 2014). This form of research was chosen because it offers the possibility of generating the results found in this case to a wider population and can provide insights into the future (Neuman, 2014). The deductive nature of the research means that the aim of the study is to test whether the causal mechanism formulated in the theoretical framework can be applied to this case (Neuman, 2014).

This chapter will explain the methods that will be used to test the four sub-hypotheses, as well as the data collection used for the analysis and its reliability and validity. A 95% confidence level was chosen for each of the statistical tests performed in this study, meaning that a result is significant if the chance that it was found due to coincidence is lower than 5% (Neuman, 2014).

### 3.1 Methods:

The main hypothesis tested in this thesis is: *The extent to which European Party Group leaders could ascertain cohesion between 2009 and 2019 has declined, due to a rise in Euroscepticism.*

This hypothesis can only be accepted if the following theoretical assumptions, or hypotheses, about the independent and dependent variables and their relationship are true in reality.

H1a: *Cohesion within European Political Groups has declined between the 7th and 8th EP*

H1b: *The proportion of votes cast against the European Political Group but with the national party has increased during the 7th and 8th European Parliament.*

H1c: *The level of Euroscepticism has increased in the seventh and eighth European Parliament.*

H1d: *The higher the level of Euroscepticism within a national party, the higher the percentage of votes cast against the EPG and with the NP by a MEP.*

H1a and H1b concern the dependent variable, while H1c concerns the independent variable and H1d delves into the relationship between Euroscepticism and EPG party cohesion. The methods used to test these hypotheses are explained in this section.

### 3.1.1 The Dependent variable: ‘European Political Group Party Cohesion’

H1a: *Cohesion within European Political Groups has declined between the 7th and 8th EP.*

The research by Hix, et al. (2007) provides different tools to test H1a. They present the ‘index of voting likeness’ by Rice (1928), where the difference between yes and no votes is divided by the total number of votes. Hix, et al. (2007) discourage the use of this index because it can only be used in two-option voting systems, while MEPs have the choice between three options: Yes, No, or Abstain. The use of the index provided by Attina (1990) is also discouraged by Hix, et al. (2007) seeing that it can provide negative results, making it difficult to study the trends of party cohesion.

Hix, et al. (2007) provide the ‘Agreement Index’. This is a formula that measures the overall cohesion of European Political Groups by subtracting half of total amount of non-cohesive votes from the number of most cohesive votes within a party and dividing this number by the total votes cast by the party, as can be seen in the formula elaborated below. In this formula “ $Y_i$  denotes the number of Yes votes expressed by group  $i$  on a given vote,  $N_i$  the number of No votes and  $A_i$  the number of Abstain” Hix, et al. (2007, p. 91). The results vary from 0 to 1, where 0 means no cohesion within the party and 1 means complete cohesion within the party.

$$AI_i = \frac{\max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\} - \frac{1}{2}[(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\}]}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

This formula will be used to gain an understanding of EPG party cohesion in the 7th European Parliament compared to the level of party cohesion within the 8th Parliament. The average agreement index over all roll-call votes between 2009 and 2014 and between 2014 and 2019 will be calculated per EPG and these results will be compared between the two EPs.

Moreover, the average agreement index over all parties will be calculated and compared for both parliaments. In each case the comparison will be made using an independent samples t-test (Neuman, 2014).

If the agreement index and thus the cohesion within EPGs has declined between the seventh and eighth parliament and if this difference is statistically significant, H1a can be accepted.

*H1b: The proportion of votes cast against the European Political Group but with the national party has increased during the 7th and 8th European Parliament.*

This hypothesis is based on the theoretical assumption that an increase in conflict between the interests of EPGs and NPs is the cause of a decline in cohesion within EPGs. It is important to analyze whether, and how often, MEPs decide to vote against their EPG and while voting with their national party. This will be done following the methods provided by Hix, et al. (2007).

First the non-attached MEPs are excluded, as well as those whose national party has less than three members in the European Parliament, since in these cases the plurality of votes cannot be established for the EPG or NP. It is then determined whether a MEP voted with or against the majority of their national party and whether they voted with or against the majority of their European political group.

Thus, if the majority of the national party voted yes and a MEP chose to vote No or Abstain, that vote was counted as a vote against the national party. If a MEP chose to vote Yes, the vote was counted as a vote with the national party. In the rare cases that there were multiple modes within a single vote, meaning that there was no clear majority, all votes were counted as against the NP, as this shows a lack of cohesion within the party. The same method was used to determine whether a MEP voted with or against their EPG.

The average proportion of times MEPs voted against their EPG while voting with their national party is then compared between the seventh and eighth parliaments. This comparison is performed using an independent samples t-test on the parliamentary level, as well as on the EPG level and the level of national parties (Neuman, 2014).

If the proportion of the eighth EP is higher than the seventh EP, and this difference is statistically significant, H1b can be accepted.

### 3.1.2 The Independent variable: ‘Euroscepticism’:

H1c: *The level of Euroscepticism has increased in the seventh and eighth European Parliament.*

Hix, et al. (2016) have surveyed MEPs on their attitudes, opinions and beliefs in 2010 and 2015. In these surveys a number of questions delve into the extent to which MEPs support or oppose European integration. By combining the answers to these questions a variable on the level of Euroscepticism in the seventh and eighth EP can be constructed. Based on the conceptualization of Euroscepticism provided earlier in the thesis the responses to the following questions were selected to be combined into this variable.

1. Where would you place yourself on the question of European integration?
2. Where would you place your national political party on the question of European integration?
3. Do you think there should be more or less EU-wide regulation in the following areas?
  - a. Labour rights (e.g. Opinion on working time rules)
  - b. Discrimination based on gender, race, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation
  - c. Environmental protection standards
  - d. Financial services
4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about EMU and EU monetary policies?
  - a. Governments should be allowed to run deficits of more than 3% of GDP
5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about EU Justice and Home Affairs policies?
  - a. There should be a common EU policy on economic migrants from third countries
  - b. For serious crimes, the police in each Member State should be able to issue arrest warrants across EU

First the variables were recoded using SPSS 29 (IBM Corp, 2022) so that a high value would indicate a high level of Euroscepticism. Then each of these variables was tested for its comparability with the other variables using an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Williams, et al., 2010). The underlying factor tested for in the EFA, or latent variable is ‘Euroscepticism

' Only the variables which showed sufficient communality (communality value of 0,6 or above) were chosen, causing variables 4a, 5a and 5b to be eliminated. The remaining were combined into one 'Euro scepticism ' variable.

The lowest value of this variable is 4, which indicates a very low level of Euro scepticism. The highest value of this variable is 40, indicating a very high level of Euro scepticism.

In order to test H1c the average value of this variable is compared between 2010 (EP7) and 2015 (EP8) using an independent samples t-test (Neuman, 2014). Like H1b this comparison will be performed on the levels of the whole EP, the EPGs and the National Parties.

When the level of Euro scepticism is higher in EP8 than in EP7, and this difference is significant, H1c can be accepted.

### 3.1.3 The Relationship between Euro scepticism and EPG Party Cohesion:

*H1d: The higher the level of Euro scepticism within a national party, the higher the percentage of votes cast against the EPG and with the NP by a MEP.*

The theoretical assumption tested for H1d is that the interests of NPs are more likely to diverge from the interests of their EPGs when the NPs exhibit high levels of Euro scepticism, because domestic issues tend to be of more importance to those NPs.

In order to test this relationship the average level of Euro scepticism per NP (the independent variable) is plotted against the average proportion of votes that are cast against the EPG and with the NP per NP (the dependent variable). Since this research focuses on the divergence of interests between EPGs and NPs, and the survey by Hix, et al. (2016) is anonymous and the lowest level of identification is recorded at the national party level, this analysis is con on the level of national parties. Within the NPs the standard deviation for each of these variables has shown to be remarkably low. This means that the averages give a good indication of the whole NP.

The relationship between the independent and dependent variables is tested using the following methods. First the correlation between the two variables is tested using Pearson's R (Neuman, 2014). If there is a significant correlation between the two variables, a linear regression is performed to determine how much of the variance in the proportion of votes cast against the EPG and with the NP can be explained by Euro scepticism (Neuman, 2014). When

this regression shows a significant positive relationship between the independent and dependent variable H1d can be accepted.

### Control variables

Because EPG party cohesion is a complex concept which is influenced by a multitude of factors, a multivariate regression is used to control for several variables (Bailer, et al., 2009; Neuman, 2014). These variables are (1) left-right ideology; (2) the deviation between the NP and EPG on the basis of left-right ideology; (3) the size of the EPG and (4) the number of national parties in an EPG relative to the size of the EPG.

*Left-right ideology:* This variable will be created using the data from the survey by Hix, et al. (2016) pertaining 2010 and 2015. For each participating MEP the average of the score for 'self placement', 'NP placement' and 'EPG placement' on the left-right spectrum is calculated. Since the analysis is performed at the NP level, the average for each national party is then calculated using the scores per MEP.

*The deviation between the NP and EPG on the basis of left-right ideology:* For each participating MEP the average of the scores for 'self placement', and 'NP placement' is subtracted from 'EPG placement' on the left-right spectrum, using the data provided by Hix, et al. (2016). After all negative results will be turned positive, we are left with a score that indicates the following: The higher the score for the variable, the further the NP finds itself from its EPG on the left-right political spectrum. Since the analysis performed at the NP level, the average for each national party is then calculated using the above-mentioned scores per MEP.

*The size of the EPG:* This variable is the number of seats an EPG holds in the European Parliament.

*The number of national parties in an EPG relative to the size of the EPG:* The last variable is the number of national parties in an EPG. It is important to note that the largest EPGs consist of the largest number of national parties. To ensure that this variable does test for the effect of EPG size, instead of the number of NPs within an EPG, the number of NPs within an EPG is divided by the number of total seats an EPG has within the EP. So this variable shows the number of NPs an EPG has per seat the EPG holds in the EP.

Once each of these four Hypotheses is accepted H1 can be accepted. Which would mean that the extent to which European Party Group leaders can ascertain cohesion between 2009 and 2019 has declined due to a rise in Euroscepticism.

#### 3.1.4 Hypothesis National, Historical and Cultural Contexts:

*H1: Some Member States saw a larger increase in the proportions of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG by MEPs than others, due to differences in their respective historical and cultural contexts.*

Based on the available data it is impossible to decipher the specific differences in national, historical and cultural contexts between the Member States of the European Union between 2009 and 2019. However, the data concerning the proportions of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG by MEPs is suitable for a comparison between the different Member States.

This hypothesis is tested using the following methods. First, the mean proportion of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG by MEPs of the same nationality will be calculated for the 7th and 8th European Parliament. Then, the difference in averages between the 7th and 8th EP is calculated for each Member State using an independent samples t-test. Once this is done, the t-test values of the Member States are compared.

If there is high variance in t-test values, the Member States will be categorized based on their respective t-test scores. This may provide insight into the contextual differences of Member States which caused the decline in party cohesion within the EPGs. Even if this does not provide insight, it does provide an avenue for future research into the relationship between EPG party cohesion and national, historical and cultural context.

## 3.2 Data collection:

The descriptive data will be collected via Excel and the statistical analyses will be done using SPSS 29 (IBM Corp., 2022; Microsoft Corp., 2022)). The data used for this quantitative research testing the sub-hypotheses was collected from two datasets.

### 3.2.1 Dependent variable: ‘European Political Group party cohesion’:

The first is a dataset provided by Hix, et al. (2022). This dataset records all roll-call votes in the European Parliament up until 2022. roll-call votes are the only type of votes where the individual preferences of MEPs are recorded. For each roll-call vote this dataset provides following information per individual MEP as well as their nationality, national party and EPG:

- 0 - Did not hold office during this vote
- 1 - Voted in favor
- 2 - Voted against
- 3 - Abstained from voting
- 4 - Did not attend vote
- 5 - Chose not to vote

In order to test H1a and H1b, only the data provided by this dataset regarding EP7 and EP8 is used. This data is cleaned using Excel so only the votes in favor, against or those who abstained from voting will be taken into consideration (Microsoft Corp, 2022). Some MEPs left office early and were replaced by other MEPs and only MEPs associated with EPGs were taken into consideration. Furthermore, for H1b only the voting behavior of MEPs in NPs with three or more seats in parliament were taken into account. This explains the difference between the number of MEPs studied and the total number of seats in the European Parliament. This means that the following empirical data were used to test H1a and H1b:

#### 3.2.1.1 Hypothesis A:

EP 7: the voting behavior of 816 MEPs divided over seven European Political Groups. The voting behavior was recorded over 6961 different roll-call votes between 2009 and 2014.

EP 8: the voting behavior of 728 MEPs divided over eight European Political Groups. The voting behavior is recorded over 10252 different roll-call votes between 2014 and 2019.

### *3.2.1.2 Hypothesis B:*

EP 7: the voting behavior of 613 MEPs divided over seven European Political Groups and 74 national parties. The voting behavior was recorded over 6961 different roll-call votes between 2009 and 2014.

EP 8: the voting behavior of 508 MEPs divided over eight European Political Groups and 70 national parties. The voting behavior was recorded over 10252 different roll-call votes between 2009 and 2014.

### *3.2.2 Independent variable: 'Euroscepticism':*

The second dataset is provided by Hix, et al. (2016). In this dataset the answers MEPs gave to questions concerning their attitudes, opinions and beliefs were recorded. Only the data concerning the seventh and eighth EP were used in this research. From this data only the data concerning the level of Euroscepticism was taken. From this selection a variable was constructed through SPSS 29 to measure the level of Euroscepticism of a MEP. This means that the following empirical data was used to test H1c (IBM Corp, 2022).

#### *3.2.2.1 Hypothesis C:*

EP 7: the level of Euroscepticism was collected from 172 MEPs divided over seven EPG and 89 NPs in 2010.

EP 8: the level of Euroscepticism was collected from 164 MEPs divided over eight EPGs and 98 NPs in 2015.

### *3.2.3 Relationship independent - and dependent variable:*

H1d is tested using the data collected from both datasets as described in the methods section of this thesis. This means that the following empirical data was used to test H1d:

#### *3.2.3.1 Hypothesis D:*

EP 7: average level of Euroscepticism of 47 national parties and the average proportions of MEPs voting against their EPGs and with their NPs of those same 47 national parties.

EP 8: average level of Euroscepticism of 48 national parties and the average proportions of MEPs voting against their EPGs and with their NPs of those same 48 national parties.

### 3.2.4 Hypothesis National, Historical and Cultural contexts:

The same data used for H1b is used in this research. It is possible to compare the differences in the proportions of MEP votes that aligned with their NP and against their EPG of 25 Member States between the 7th and 8th EP.

Due to the data collection and exclusion methods explained for Hypothesis B, some countries are represented by a small number of national parties. This affects the validity of the study, but the results could nonetheless indicate possible variance between Member States.

### 3.3 Validity and Reliability of the Analysis:

The aim of this thesis is to answer the research question presented in the introduction. It does so by testing the hypothesis presented in the theoretical framework. In order to reject or accept the hypothesis four theoretical assumptions must be supported by empirical evidence. For each of these theoretical assumptions a hypothesis was created that can be empirically tested to ensure the research performed within this thesis actually provides a valid answer to the research question. In testing the Hypotheses, several important decisions were made.

First, the data used to calculate the cohesion within EPGs consisted of roll-call votes within the 7th and 8th European Parliament. Although all final legislative votes have been required to be roll-call votes since 2009, many other votes are still not held by roll-call (Costello & Thomson, 2016). This means that roll-call votes represent only a portion of the total number of votes cast in the European Parliament, and that there is often an agenda behind the calling for a roll-call vote. Hix (2002, p. 693) explains the following: *“Rule 134 of the EP's rules of procedure specifies that any EP party or thirtytwo MEPs can request a roll-call. In practice, roll-call votes tend to be called by EP parties or a large national delegation, either to show their position to the public on an issue, to embarrass another party, or to keep a check on their own members' behavior”*. However, roll-call votes are the only category of votes in the EP where each MEP's choice is recorded. It is therefore the only viable option for carrying out this research. But it is important to take note of this information.

Second, the data used to determine the levels of Euroscepticism are collected through a voluntary survey in which MEPs are not required to participate. The arguments for

participation or non-participation are not known, leaving open the possibility of different results if different MEPs had participated. However, given the fact that at least 23% of the total MEPs participated in both the 7th and the 8th EP and that the results do not show any eyebrow-raising differences between the 7th and 8th parliament, it can be assumed that this survey is representative to such an extent, that the use of it within this thesis results in valid conclusions.

Third, EPG party cohesion is a complex variable, which is influenced by a multitude of factors. This led to the need to control for left-right ideology, the deviation between the NP and EPG on the basis of left-right ideology, the size of the EPG, and the number of national parties in an EPG relative to the size of the EPG, within the regression model between the dependent and independent variables.

Fourth, certain choices had to be made concerning the data collection.

First, due to the nature of the research methods regarding the voting behavior of individual MEPs, national parties with less than three MEPs were excluded. This disproportionately excluded parties from smaller Member States from the study, as these Member States have less seats to divide. This caused Lithuania and Cyprus to be missing from the results concerning the 8th EP and Estonia to be excluded from both the 7th and 8th EP. But the remaining 613 (7th EP) and 504 (8th EP) still provide representative data concerning overall voting behavior.

Second, on the rare occasions when there was no plurality in the vote, i.e. multiple modes, the decision was made to count every MEP's vote as a vote against the NP and/or the EPG. Seeing that this testifies of a lack of party cohesion and leadership control. This happened to such a small extent that it did not significantly affect the validity of the study.

Furthermore, on some occasions a national party held such a large number of seats within an EPG, that its voting patterns significantly affected the EPG's voting plurality. Most notable and impactful was the case of the French Rassemblement National, which occupied almost half of all seats in the EPG 'Europe of Nations and Freedom'. The results of this party were not excluded from the data for Hypothesis A and B, seeing that it did not skew the overall results due to the size of the dataset. However, for Hypothesis D the results of the Rassemblement National were excluded. This was because it was clear that its size relative to its EPG was a more important explanatory variable for its cohesion score than its level of Euroscepticism, and due to the smaller dataset it had a large impact on the results. The exclusion improves the overall validity of the research.

Each of these decisions was made to improve the feasibility of study, while conserving the validity of the research. But the implications must be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

As for the reliability of the analysis, each of the datasets used is publicly available and each of the tests has been methodologically explained in the research design. None of the conclusions relies on a subjective interpretation of the results. Thus, if all steps are followed correctly, one must come to the same conclusions when replicating this analysis. Making the study reliable.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

The hypotheses presented in ‘Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework’ will be tested in this chapter using the methods described in ‘Chapter 3: Research Design’. This chapter consists of two parts: (1) Results; and (2) Discussion. In the first part, the results of the tests conducted in this study will be presented, and based on these results the sub-hypotheses and main hypothesis will be rejected or accepted. These results, and their implications, will be explained in the Discussion.

### 4.1 Results:

#### 4.1.1 Dependent variable: ‘European Political Group party cohesion’:

##### 4.1.1.1 Hypothesis A:

H1a: *Cohesion within European Political Groups has declined between the 7th and 8th EP.*

Hypothesis A concerns the overall cohesion within the European Political Groups in the European Parliament. This can be expressed by the agreement index, the higher a party’s score the higher that party’s cohesion. Accepting this hypothesis would mean that the EPG leadership was to a declining extent able to ascertain EPG party cohesion.

Table 1. Analysis of Agreement index EP7 and EP8

<i>Cohesion within the European Parliament (Agreement index)</i>								
EPG	EP7			EP8			Comparison	
	Mean	N	St. Deviation	Mean	N	St. Deviation	T-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left	0,898484	6961	0,13634	0,912303	10252	0,134251	-6,586	<0,001***
Europe of freedom and democracy Group	0,688702	6961	0,201497	0,660915	10252	0,197833	8,945	<0,001***
European Conservatives and Reformists Group	0,932346	6961	0,113663	0,874344	10252	0,153162	28,492	<0,001***
Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	0,949631	6961	0,08387	0,951096	10252	0,08164	-1,137	0,256
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	0,968218	6961	0,065698	0,964307	10252	0,077836	3,554	<0,001***
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	0,978622	6961	0,049534	0,978371	10252	0,062432	0,293	0,769
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	0,9627	6961	0,073309	0,962211	10252	0,074483	0,425	0,671
Europe of Nations and Freedom Group				0,813039	10252	0,16291		
<b>Total</b>	<b>0,911243</b>	<b>48727</b>	<b>0,147995</b>	<b>0,889573</b>	<b>82016</b>	<b>0,162304</b>	<b>24,684</b>	<b>&lt;0,001***</b>

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 1. shows that the two extreme right-wing EPGs, the Europe of Freedom and

Democracy Group (EFD) and the Europe of Nations and Freedom Group (ENF), are the least cohesive, with an Agreement Index of around 0,67 and 0,81 respectively. Meanwhile, the mainstream parties closer to the political center score high on the agreement index. Comparing the Agreement Index scores within the EP7 and EP8 shows that most EPGs have become less cohesive between 2009 and 2019. For four EPGs the Agreement index score has changed significantly, only the GUE/NGL showed a significant increase in cohesion. The other three have become less cohesive in the 8th EP. Furthermore, the ENF which was only present in EP8 scores low on the Agreement Index.

Thus, the average party cohesion of EPGs decreased significantly between 2009 and 2019. This means that H1a can be accepted.

#### 4.1.1.2 Hypothesis B:

H1b: *The proportion of votes cast against the European Political Group but with the national party has increased during the 7th and 8th European Parliament.*

Hypothesis B concerns the proportion of votes cast by MEPs with their NPs and against their. The higher this proportion, the more often MEPs vote against their EPG, and the lower the cohesion within the EPG. Accepting this hypothesis would indicate that the significant decrease in EPG party cohesion found for Hypothesis A is due to an increased misalignment between the interests of NPs and EPGs.

#### 4.1.1.2.1 European Parliament:

Table 2. Analysis Percentage with NP against EPG – EP 7 & EP 8

Descriptive						Comparison	
Ep 7			EP 8				
N	Valid	613	N	Valid	508	T-test	Sig (2-Tailed)
	Missing	0		Missing	0		
Mean		4,387665	Mean		8,319390	-8,125	<0,001***
Median		2,97763	Median		5,992715		
Std. Deviation		5,987444	Std. Deviation		9,447260		
Range		46,0954	Range		44,26512		
Minimum		0	Minimum		0		
Maximum		46,0954	Maximum		44,265117		

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 2. presents the descriptive statistics for the voting behavior of all studied MEPs at the parliamentary level. It shows that the average proportion of votes cast by MEPs with their NP and against their EPG has increased in EP8 compared to EP7. As did the median, meaning that the increase in the average was not caused by outliers but by an overall increase in the proportion. This is indicated by the fact that the range of proportions has become smaller. Indicating an overall increase in the proportion of votes cast against EPGs, with NPs. However, it is important to note that the standard deviation has also increased, indicating a greater variation in the proportions.

Overall these data show that on a parliamentary level the proportion of votes cast by MEPs against their EPGs and with their NPs has increased between 2009 and 2019.

#### 4.1.1.2.2 European Political Groups:

Table 3. Analysis Percentage with NP against EPG – EPGs 7 & EPGs 8 (Means)

Descriptive							Comparison	
	EP7			EP8			T-test	Sig (2-Tailed)
EPG	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation		
Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left	7,55894	21	5,228779	9,656003	33	6,120662	-1,297	0,200
Europe of freedom and democracy Group	30,83714	18	11,89574	31,80514	32	9,038828	-0,324	0,747
Europe of Nations and Freedom Group				19,66901	29	17,876481		
European Conservatives and Reformists Group	4,815223	42	4,290488	13,20294	39	5,555068	-7,743	<0,001***
Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe	5,413492	55	3,170018	6,426486	14	6,082399	-0,602	0,556
Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	2,989052	253	2,374898	2,945941	180	1,894264	0,210	0,834
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	0,442619	34	0,337243	1,627052	24	1,68054	-3,405	0,002***
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	3,708271	190	3,476402	7,267674	153	2,546939	-10,932	<0,001***
Total	4,387665	613	5,987444	8,319389	504	9,447261	-8,125	<0,001***

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

When analyzing the data taking into account the different EPGs, it becomes clear that the EPGs with the highest average proportion of votes cast by MEPs against the EPG and with the NP are those on the political fringes (Table 3.). The EPGs that occupy the political mainstream have the lowest average proportion of votes cast against the EPG and with the NP. This correlates with the results found for Hypothesis A.

Comparing the data from EP7 and EP8 it becomes clear that every EPG, except for the Group of the European People's Party (EPP), experienced an increase in the average proportions of votes cast by MEPs against their EPG and with their NP. It is noteworthy that

this increase was most significant for the EPGs occupying the political mainstream. The ‘European Conservatives and Reformists Group’ (ECR), the ‘Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance’ (Greens–EFA) and the ‘Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament’ (S&D) all saw a significant increase. Thus, although the parties on the political fringes were the least cohesive, those in the center saw the largest increase.

#### 4.1.1.2.3 National Parties:

Table 4. Analysis Percentage with NP against EPG – NPs 7 & EPGs 8 (Means)

EP7			EP8			T-test	Sig (2-teailed)
N	Valid	74	N	Valid	70		
	Missing	0		Missing	0		
Mean		5,221664	Mean		8,854823	-2,718	0,007***
Median		3,137996	Median		6,438809		
Std. Deviation		6,451979	Std. Deviation		9,391504		
Range		42,64571	Range		41,02346		
Minimum		0,165331	Minimum		0,513363		
Maximum		42,81105	Maximum		41,53682		

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 5. Descriptive statistics NPs (Std. Deviation)

EP7			EP8		
N	Valid	74	N	Valid	70
	Missing	0		Missing	0
Mean		0,71009	Mean		0,647503
Median		0,423551	Median		0,493525
Std. Deviation		0,785275	Std. Deviation		0,657093
Range		5,018377	Range		3,87278
Minimum		0,029731	Minimum		0,05497
Maximum		5,048107	Maximum		3,92775

Table 4. shows the descriptive statistics of the average proportions of votes cast by MEPs with their NP and against their EPG within each national party. In other words, these results show the mean, median and range of the average level of votes cast by MEPs with their NP and against their EPG of each national party.

This is interesting data because of the results shown in Table 5. Table 5. shows that the standard deviation within parties is remarkably small. The mean standard deviation is small in both parliaments. Furthermore, the median is smaller than the mean in both EPs, indicating that the mean standard deviation is influenced by outliers with disproportionately high

standard deviations. This indicates a strong cohesion within national parties, which means that the average proportions of votes cast by MEPs with their NP and against their EPG within the NPs give a good picture of the voting behavior of the national party.

Comparing the data between the NP and EP-wide level, the similarities are evident (Table 4., Table 2.). This means that results in Table 2. were relatively unbiased by the larger national parties. The mean average proportion of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG per national party has increased significantly (Table 4.). The median has also increased, while the range has become smaller, meaning that the increase in the mean between the 7th and 8th EP is not due to outliers. Thus, national parties as a whole have seen an increase of votes cast by MEPs against their EPG with their NP. However, the standard deviation has also risen, meaning that the variation within the shrunken range has increased.

Because the proportion of votes cast by MEPs with their NP against their EPG has grown significantly between 2009 and 2019 H1b can be accepted. Indicating that the significant decrease in EPG party cohesion found for Hypothesis A is due to an increased misalignment between the interests of NPs and EPGs.

#### 4.1.2 Independent variable: *Opposition (supranational) European integration*

##### 4.1.2.1 Hypothesis C:

H1c: *The level of Euroscepticism has increased in the seventh and eighth European Parliament.*

Hypothesis C concerns the level of Euroscepticism in the European Parliament. Accepting this hypothesis would mean that the level of Euroscepticism in the European Parliament has increased significantly between 2009 and 2019.

##### 4.1.2.1.1 European Parliament:

Table 6. Analysis Euroscepticism EP – EP 7 & EP 8

Descriptive						Comparison	
2010			2015			T-test	Sig (2-Tailed)
N	Valid	172	N	Valid	164	-1,874	0,062*
	Missing	0		Missing	0		
Mean		16,99	Mean		18,71		
Median		16	Median		16		
Std. Deviation		6,507	Std. Deviation		9,885		
Range		35	Range		36		
Minimum		5	Minimum		4		
Maximum		40	Maximum		40		

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Analyzing the variable 'Euroscepticism' at the parliamentary level, it is clear that the level of anti-European integration sentiment has increased to some extent (Table 6.). However, as the median has remained the same and the standard deviation has increased, the increase in the mean can also be caused by an increase in the number of outliers. Furthermore, this increase is only significant at the 90% confidence level of 90%. Meaning that the probability that this increase is due to chance is less than 10%. In this study, a confidence level of 95% was chosen, meaning that the increase is not significant enough for this study.

#### 4.1.2.1.2 European Political Groups:

Table 7. Analysis Euroscepticism EP – EPGs 7 & EPGs 8

Descriptive							Comparison	
	2010			2015			T-test	Sig (2-Tailed)
EPG	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation		
European People's Party-European Democrats (EPP - ED)	17,58	59	4,504	16,29	49	4,886	0,905	0,157
Group of the Party of European Socialists	13,63	48	3,311	11,93	43	5,293	0,938	0,74
Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)	15,27	26	4,396	14,06	17	6,447	0,678	0,504
European Greens - European Free Alliance (Greens- EFA)	13,14	14	5,803	13,13	8	4,612	0,004	0,997
European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)	26,57	7	7,091	30,21	19	8,032	-1,054	0,302
European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL)	23,67	3	6,658	24,55	11	7,789	-0,117	0,862
Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD)	28,9	10	10,867	30,64	11	11,156	-0,361	0,722
Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF)				40	3	0		
Total	16,99	172	6,507	18,71	164	9,885	-1,874	0,062*

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 7. provides an overview of the average level of Euroscepticism in each of the seven (EP7) or eight (EP8) European Political Groups. The data show that the EPGs on the fringes of the political spectrum tend to have higher levels of Euroscepticism, than those in the political mainstream.

It also shows that although the overall level of Euroscepticism in the EP may have increased slightly as seen in Table 6., there is no evidence of a significant change within any of the EPGs. Of the seven EPGs present in the 7th EP only three showed a slight increase, while the other four EPGs saw a slight decline. However, none of these changes can be deemed significant. Meaning that there is not enough certainty to say that these changes are real and not based on coincidence.

#### 4.1.2.1.3 National Parties:

Table 8. Analysis Euroscepticism EP – NPs 7 & NPs 8

Descriptive						Comparison	
2010			2015			T-test	Sig (2-tailed)
N	Valid	89	N	Valid	98	-1,266	0,207
	Missing	0		Missing	0		
Mean		17,2725	Mean		18,7836		
Median		16	Median		16,5		
Std. Deviation		6,747425	Std. Deviation		9,24647		
Mode		13	Mode		11.00a		
Range		34	Range		36		
Minimum		6	Minimum		4		
Maximum		40	Maximum		40		

a: Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 8. presents the descriptive statistics of the average level of Euroscepticism in the national parties from which a MEP responded to the survey. As with the EP and the EPGs, these data show a slight increase in the level of Euroscepticism within the national parties. The median has also increased, meaning that the slight increase could have been caused by a rise in outliers. The increase of the mean is not significant enough to say with certainty that the growth in Euroscepticism shown in Table 8. holds true in reality.

Based on the available data, an increase in Euroscepticism can be observed at all levels of the European Parliament. However, based on the fact that the average level of this has not increased significantly at the parliamentary level or within the national parties, and of the European Political Groups, it cannot be said that this increase applies in reality. Therefore, H1c cannot be accepted. Thus, the level of Euroscepticism in the European Parliament has not increased significantly between 2009 and 2019.

### 4.1.3 Relationship between Euroscepticism and EPG Party Cohesion:

#### 4.1.3.1 Hypothesis D:

H1d: *The higher the level of Euroscepticism within a national party, the higher the percentage of votes cast against the EPG and with the NP by a MEP.*

Hypothesis D concerns the relationship between the independent variable (Euroscepticism) and the dependent variable (the Percentage of votes cast by MEPs with their NP and against their EPG). These are calculated at the national party level since the hypothesis is based on the conflict of interest between the leadership of the national party and the leadership of the European Political Group. Accepting Hypothesis D would mean that there is a positive relationship between these variables.

#### 4.1.3.1.1 Seventh European Parliament:

##### Correlation:

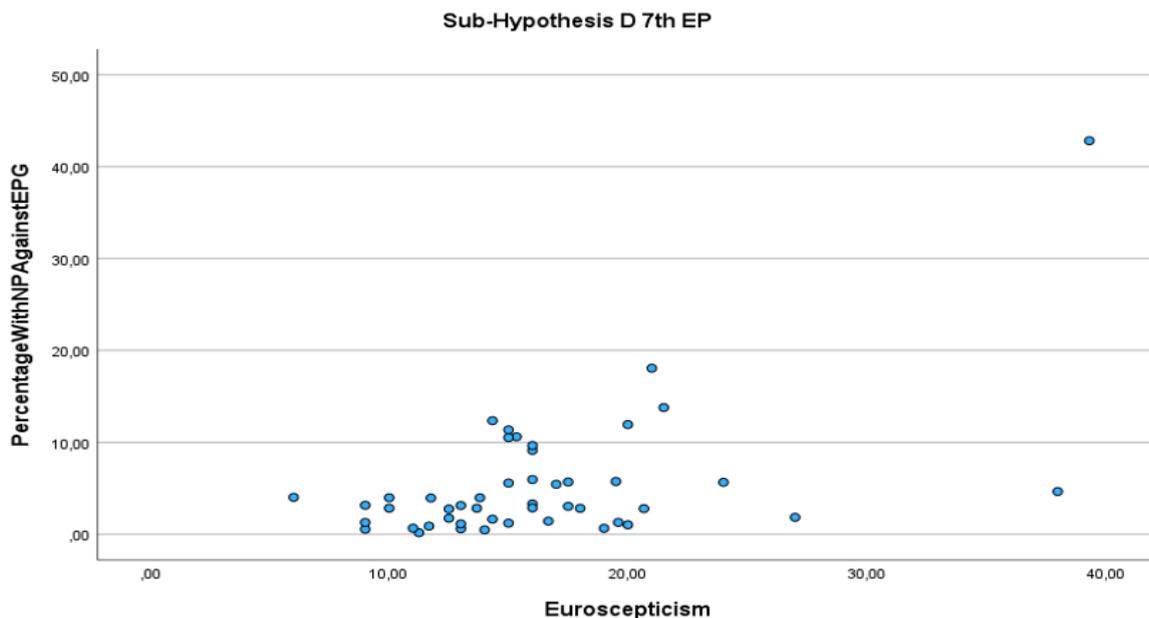


Figure 3. Correlation between Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 7th EP

The independent (X-axis) and dependent (Y-axis) variables are plotted against each other in Figure 3. This figure shows a possible positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables within the EP7. That is, the higher a national party scored on Euroscepticism, the higher the percentage of votes cast by its MEPs with the NP and against the EPG was. This correlation is further elaborated on in Table 8. Based on this, there is

indeed a significant positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient of 0,562 indicates that this correlation is quite strong (Neuman, 2014).

Table 8. Correlation Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 7<sup>th</sup> EP

Pearson Correlation		Euroscepticism	Percentage with NP against EPG
Euroscepticism	Pearson Correlation	1	,562
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<,001***
	N	47	47
Percentage with NP against EPG	Pearson Correlation	,562	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001***	
	N	47	47

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

### Regression:

In ‘Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework’ it becomes clear that EPG party cohesion is a complex variable that is influenced by multiple factors. A multivariate regression analysis can be used to examine the relationship between Euroscepticism and EPG party cohesion, controlling for the other factors provided by the existing literature on the subject. Within Tables 9, 10 and 11 Model 1 represents the results of a linear regression analysis with only Euroscepticism as explanatory variable, and Model 2 represents the results of the multivariate regression analysis controlling for other explanatory variables.

Table 9. Model summary Regression Analysis Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 7<sup>th</sup> EP

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,562a	0,316	0,301	5,809188824
2	,640b	0,409	0,337	5,655602661

a Predictors: (Constant), Euroscepticism

b Predictors: (Constant), Euroscepticism, Number of NPs in EPG relative to size, Deviation NP and EPG Ideology, Left Right, Size EPG

Table 9. presents the model summary of the regression analyses. The R-Square is the determination coefficient, this number expresses the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the model. The value of R-Square for the first model is 0,316, which means that Euroscepticism of a national party explains 31,6% of the variance of the proportions of votes cast by MEPs with their NP and against their EPG in national parties without controlling for other variables (Neuman, 2014). The R-square in the second

model is 0,409, meaning that all variables combined explain 40,9% of the variance within the dependent variable (Neuman, 2014).

Table 10. ANOVAa Regression Analysis Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 7th EP

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	701,551	1	701,551	20,789	<,001b***
	Residual	1518,6	45	33,747		
	Total	2220,151	46			
2	Regression	908,732	5	181,746	5,682	<,001c****
	Residual	1311,419	41	31,986		
	Total	2220,151	46			

a Dependent Variable: Percentage with NP against EPG

b Predictors: (Constant), Euroscepticism

c Predictors: (Constant), Euroscepticism, Number of NPs in EPG relative to size, Deviation NP and EPG Ideology, Left Right, Size EPG

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 10. provides the significance of the models. The value of Sig. is smaller than 0,001 for both models, meaning that in both cases the relationship is significant and therefore not based on chance.

Table 11. Coefficients a Regression Analysis Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 7th EP

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-4,701	2,359		-1,993	0,052*
	Euroscepticism	0,617	0,135	0,562	4,559	<,001***
2	(Constant)	-5,383	7,616		-0,707	0,484
	Euroscepticism	0,712	0,171	0,649	4,159	<,001***
	Left Right	-0,537	0,48	-0,154	-1,12	0,269
	Deviation NP and EPG Ideology	0,637	1,351	0,065	0,471	0,64
	Size EPG	-0,006	0,016	-0,08	-0,393	0,696
	Number of NPs in EPG relative to size	0,132	0,165	0,162	0,802	0,427

a: Dependent Variable: Percentage with NP against EPG

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 11. provides information on the effect of the independent variables on the proportion of MEP votes that aligned with their NP and opposed their EPG in a national party during EP7.

In the first model, the unstandardized coefficient for the effect from Euroscepticism on the dependent variable is 0,617. This means that, without controlling for other variables, it is estimated that the proportion of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG by MEPs of this

national party increases by 0,617 for every additional point on its Euroscepticism score (Neuman, 2014). Since the significance is less than 0,001, we can assume that this result is real and is not based on chance.

The second model controls for the four other explanatory variables. Within this model the unstandardized coefficient for the effect of Euroscepticism on the dependent variable is 0,712. This means that, controlling for political preference, ideological deviation, the size of the EPG and the number of NPs within an EPG, it is estimated that the proportion of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG by MEPs of this national party increases by 0,712 for each additional point on its Euroscepticism score (Neuman, 2014).

Comparing the standardized beta coefficients, Euroscepticism is the variable with the greatest effect on the dependent variable. Furthermore, the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable is the only significant one within this model. This means that the only relationship we presume to exist in reality is the one between Euroscepticism and the proportion of MEP votes that aligned with their NP and opposed their EPG in a national party in EP7 (Neuman, 2014).

#### 4.1.3.1.2 Eight European Parliament:

##### Correlation:

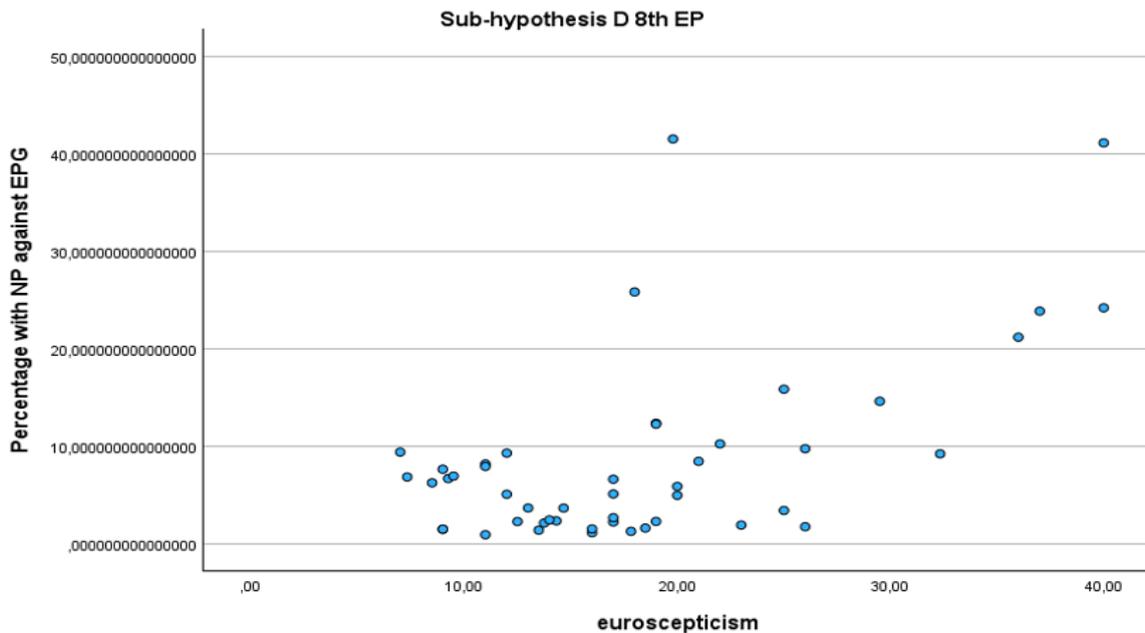


Figure 3. Correlation between Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 7th EP

Table 12. Correlation Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 8<sup>th</sup> EP

		euroscepticism	Percentage with NP against EPG
euroscepticism	Pearson Correlation	1	0,577
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<,001***
	N	48	48
Percentage with NP against EPG	Pearson Correlation	0,577	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001***	
	N	48	48

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

The independent (X-axis) and dependent (Y-axis) variables are plotted against each other in Figure 4. This figure shows a possible positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables within EP8. Meaning that the higher a national party scores on Euroscepticism the higher the percentage of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG by its MEPs will be. This correlation is further elaborated on in Table 12. Based on this, there is indeed a significant positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables. Furthermore, the correlation coefficient of 0,577 indicates that this correlation is quite strong (Neuman, 2014).

### Regression:

Figure 4. and Table 12. have shown a correlation between the independent and dependent variables in EP8. A multivariate analysis is used to further examine this relationship, while controlling for the other factors provided by the existing literature on the subject. For Tables 13, 14 and 15 Model 1 represents the results of a linear regression analysis with only Euroscepticism as explanatory variable, and Model 2 represents the results of the multivariate regression analysis controlling for other explanatory variables.

Table 13. Model summary Regression Analysis Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 8<sup>th</sup> EP

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	,577a	0,333	0,319	7,722361023
2	,893b	0,798	0,774	4,448776517

a Predictors: (Constant), Euroscepticism

b Predictors: (Constant), Euroscepticism, Number of NPs in EPG relative to size, Deviation NP and EPG Ideology, Left Right, Size EPG

Table 13. shows the model summary of the regression analyses. The R-Square is the determination coefficient, this number expresses the proportion of the dependent variable that is explained by the model. The value for R-Square is 0,333 for the first model, this means that Euroscepticism of a national party explains 33,3% of the variance of the proportions of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG by MEPs in national parties (Neuman, 2014). The R-square in the second model is 0,798, meaning that all variables combined explain 79,8% of the variance within the dependent variable (Neuman, 2014).

Table 14. ANOVA<sup>a</sup> Regression Analysis Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 8th EP

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1372,173	1	1372,173	23,01	<,001b***
	Residual	2743,204	46	59,635		
	Total	4115,376	47			
2	Regression	3284,129	5	656,826	33,187	<,001c***
	Residual	831,248	42	19,792		
	Total	4115,376	47			

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Percentage with NP against EPG

<sup>b</sup> Predictors: (Constant), Euroscepticism

<sup>c</sup> Predictors: (Constant), Euroscepticism, Number of NPs in EPG relative to size, Deviation NP and EPG Ideology, Left Right, Size EPG

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 14. provides the significance of the models. The value of Sig. is smaller than 0,001 for both models, meaning that in both cases the relationship is significant and therefore not based on chance.

Table 15. Coefficients a Regression Analysis Euroscepticism and Percentage with NP against EPG 8th EP

Model		Unstandardized	Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		Coefficients	Std. Error	Beta		
		B				
1	(Constant)	-3,089	2,673		-1,156	0,254
	Euroscepticism	0,639	0,133	0,577	4,797	<,001***
2	(Constant)	31,153	4,777		6,521	<,001***
	Euroscepticism	0,312	0,098	0,282	3,198	0,002***
	Left Right	-0,458	0,345	-0,109	-1,329	0,152
	Deviation NP and EPG Ideology	1,065	0,71	0,109	1,5	0,019
	Size EPG	-0,872	0,119	-0,902	-7,307	<,001***
	Number of NPs in EPG relative to size	-0,64	0,087	-0,746	-7,35	<,001***

<sup>a</sup> Dependent Variable: Percentage with NP against EPG

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 15. provides information on the effect of the independent variables on the proportion of MEP votes that aligned with their NP and opposed their EPG in a national party during EP8.

In the first model the unstandardized coefficient of the effect from Euroscepticism on the dependent variable is 0,639. This means that, without controlling for other variables, it is estimated that the proportion of votes cast by MEPs with their NP and against their EPG will increase by 0,639 for every added point on their NP's Euroscepticism score (Neuman, 2014). Since the significance is smaller than 0,001, we can presume that this result holds true in reality and is not based on chance.

The second model controls for the four other explanatory variables. Within this model the unstandardized coefficient for the effect from the independent variable on the dependent variable is 0,312. This means that, controlling for these variables, it is estimated that the proportion of votes cast by MEPs with their NP and against their EPG increases by 0,312 for each additional point on their NP's Euroscepticism score (Neuman, 2014).

Comparing the beta standardized coefficients, the size of the EPG and the number of NPs are the variables with the largest effect on the dependent variable. Interestingly, although the size of EPGs affected the dependent variable as predicted, the number of EPGs did not. First, the larger the EPG, the smaller the proportion of MEP votes that aligned with their NP and opposed their EPG within a national party, thus the higher the EPG party cohesion. Second, the larger the number of NPs within an EPG relative to the size of the EPG, the smaller the proportion of MEP votes that aligned with their NP and opposed their EPG of a national party, thus the higher the EPG party cohesion. Euroscepticism still has a significant effect on the variance of the dependent variable. This means that the relationship between Euroscepticism and the proportion of MEP votes that aligned with their NP and opposed their EPG in a national party presumably holds true in reality (Neuman, 2014).

Controlling for other explanatory variables provided by Bailer, et al. (2009), the effect of Euroscepticism was smaller in the 8th EP than during the 7th EP. However, there is a significant positive relationship between the dependent and independent variables in both EP7 and EP8. This means that H1d can be accepted, however the effect of the independent variable on EPG party cohesion is not consistent, making predicting the future effect of Euroscepticism on EPG party cohesion difficult.

#### 4.1.4 Hypothesis 1:

*H1: The extent to which European Party Group leaders could ascertain cohesion between 2009 and 2019 has declined, due to a rise in Euroscepticism.*

After testing each of the four hypotheses, the following conclusions can be drawn. Hypothesis A was accepted, meaning that the overall cohesion within the European Parliament and the EPGs declined between 2009 and 2019. Hypothesis B was also accepted, meaning that the proportion of votes cast by MEPs with their national parties and against European Political Groups has increased between 2009 and 2019. Furthermore, Hypothesis D was accepted, meaning that there is a positive relationship between the independent and dependent variables. However, Hypothesis C could not be accepted, meaning that there was no significant increase in the level of Euroscepticism within the European Parliament between 2009 and 2019.

This means that Hypothesis 1 can only be accepted to a limited extent. The extent to which European Party Group leadership could ascertain cohesion between 2009 and 2019 has indeed declined significantly. The proportion of votes cast with the NPs against the EPGs by MEPs has increased significantly, likely causing the aforementioned decline. Furthermore there is a relationship between the dependent and independent variables in EP7 and EP8. These results are consistent with the theories presented in the theoretical framework. However, there has not been enough evidence found for a significant rise of Euroscepticism in the European Parliament. Thus, on the basis of the studied data, the decline in EPG party cohesion observed between 2009 and 2019 cannot be explained by a rise in Euroscepticism within the European Parliament and must be explained by something else.

Seeing that H1 could not be accepted, the effect of the National, Historical and Cultural context of Member States on party cohesion was also tested.

##### *4.1.4.1 Hypothesis National, Historical and Cultural contexts:*

Table 16. shows the average proportion of votes cast with NPs and against EPGs by MEPs for 27 Member States. The higher this proportion, the less the votes of MEPs from a Member State aligned with their EPG. All Member States saw a significant increase, or no change, except for Sweden, which saw a significant decline in the proportion of votes cast with NPs and against EPGs by its representatives. The largest absolute changes were observed in the voting behavior of Dutch, Austrian and Italian MEPs. Each of these averages increased by ten

or more percentage points (Table 16.). However, it is important to note that the standard deviation for these countries is also extremely high, indicating the influence of outliers on the results. This is controlled for in the t-test results, which bring these results of these Member States within the norm. Looking at these relative changes, Slovenia shows the biggest increase. Slovenian MEPs voted more than 100% more with their NPs and Against their EPG in the 8th EP, compared to the 7th EP (Table 16.).

It is also clear that the changes in the proportions were not uniform across the 25 Member States that were analyzed. There was a significant decrease in Sweden, a significant increase in sixteen other Member States and no significant change in eight. Within the group of countries with a significant increase the variance is also rather large. The t-test scores range from -2,15 to -6,629.

In Table 17., the Member States have been categorized according to the magnitude of change observed in the mean proportions between the 7th EP and the 8th EP. Based on these results, and in particular the variance of these results, it can be concluded that some Member States experienced a greater increase in the proportions of votes cast with the NP and against the EPG by MEPs than others. This suggests that the national, historical and cultural contexts of the different Member States could be an explanatory variable for the decline of EPG party cohesion within the EP. However, there is no clear relation between the countries with similar scores. This means that these results are not conclusive regarding the specific contexts that could have caused the decline in EPG party cohesion.

Table 16. Analysis of the Percentage with NP against EPG - Per Member State

Percentage with NP against EPG - Per member state								
Descriptive							Comparison	
	EP7			EP8				
Country	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T-test	Sig
Slovenia	0,728261	3	0,196344	1,658141	3	0,143131	-6,629	0,003***
Slovakia	0,986035	7	0,320381	5,475836	7	1,962028	-5,975	<0,001***
Italy	3,818334	62	5,349683	16,65198	60	16,26801	-5,814	<0,001***
Spain	3,340595	46	0,663548	6,015227	38	3,302372	-4,911	<0,001***
Hungary	2,817953	19	1,332292	5,451449	11	1,690068	-4,728	<0,001***
Luxembourg	3,081288	3	0,525066	4,900107	3	0,43644	-4,614	0,01***
Romania	1,229418	20	0,252445	5,624973	18	4,299443	-4,331	<0,001***
Germany	2,242268	104	1,697717	3,680394	84	2,933191	-3,987	<0,001***
Belgium	2,636368	9	2,131595	14,67278	10	9,795369	-3,786	0,004***
Croatia	0,90675	10	0,219229	1,445711	4	0,342091	-3,565	0,004***
Malta	5,28699	9	1,499186	8,476054	6	2,04437	-3,499	0,004***
Netherlands	4,445365	17	1,967145	14,83977	19	14,6907	-3,054	0,007***
Denmark	10,16646	9	3,561264	16,76368	6	4,900282	-3,032	0,01***
Portugal	2,844215	18	1,707806	7,81415	17	7,972938	-2,516	0,022**
France	3,585445	70	2,893305	4,670836	50	2,261854	-2,304	0,023**
Austria	5,602088	11	1,812698	16,25438	14	16,27257	-2,15	0,030**
Bulgaria	1,893398	15	0,875134	3,354942	13	2,511312	-1,996	0,065*
Sweden	12,91389	13	4,570916	9,33595	12	3,42387	2,2	0,38**
Greece	4,780664	14	1,777776	5,578917	9	1,612488	-1,088	0,298
United Kingdom	9,232175	60	13,74832	11,20655	56	9,646811	-0,9	0,37
Czech Republic	5,661444	19	6,275355	7,596815	13	5,422615	-0,904	0,373
Finland	4,017406	4	0,656576	3,606655	3	0,671075	0,812	0,454
Ireland	8,144484	7	3,039328	9,668741	7	4,694119	-0,721	0,485
Poland	6,79902	50	6,801257	6,298937	38	5,57091	0,396	0,713
Latvia	2,405578	4	0,17532	2,336821	3	0,304624	0,382	0,718
Cyprus	1,677988	3	0,066137					
Lithuania	0,847714	7	0,260094					
Total	4,387665	613	5,987444	8,31939	504	9,447261		

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

Table 17. Analysis of the size difference in Percentage with NP against EPG between EP7 & EP8 - Per member state

Size of difference in Percentage with NP against EPG between EP7 & EP8 - Per member state					
Category	Country	T-test value	Significance	Total	%
> 0	Sweden	2,2	0,38**	1	4%
Non-Significant change	Bulgaria	-1,996	0,065*	8	32%
	Czech Republic	-0,904	0,373		
	Finland	0,812	0,454		
	Greece	-1,088	0,298		
	Ireland	-0,721	0,485		
	Latvia	0,382	0,718		
	Poland	0,396	0,713		
	United Kingdom	-0,9	0,37		
	2 - 2,9999...	Austria	-2,15		
Portugal		-2,516	0,022**		
France		-2,304	0,023**		
3 - 3,9999...	Germany	-3,987	<0,001***	6	24%
	Belgium	-3,786	0,004***		
	Croatia	-3,565	0,004***		
	Malta	-3,499	0,004***		
	Netherlands	-3,054	0,007***		
	Denmark	-3,032	0,01***		
4 - 4,9999...	Spain	-4,911	<0,001***	4	16%
	Hungary	-4,728	<0,001***		
	Luxembourg	-4,614	0,01***		
	Romania	-4,331	<0,001***		
5 - 5,9999...	Slovakia	-5,975	<0,001***	2	8%
	Italy	-5,814	<0,001***		
6 - 6,9999...	Slovenia	-6,629	0,003***	1	4%
No comparison possible	Cyprus				
	Lithuania				
Total		-8,125	<0,001***	25	100%

\*Significant when critical P value is 0,10

\*\*Significant when critical P value is 0,05

\*\*\* Significant when critical P value is 0,01

## 4.2 Discussion:

### 4.2.1 Explanation of the Results found in the Analysis:

The aim of this analysis was to test the theoretical answer to the following question: *To what extent could European Party Group leaders ascertain cohesion in the face of rising Euroscepticism between 2009 and 2019?* This meant that the possibility of a relationship between the decline in European Political Group party cohesion and the rise in Euroscepticism was analyzed. Hypotheses A, B, C, and D were created to examine each aspect of this relationship. Of these hypotheses, only Hypotheses A, B and D were accepted, as Hypothesis C could not be accepted.

This means that the analysis provided sufficient evidence of a significant decline in EPG party cohesion between 2009 and 2019. In other words, MEPs voted less in line with their European Party Group in EP8 than in the EP7.

Furthermore, there was a significant increase in the percentage of votes cast by MEPs with their national party and against their European Political Group between the 7th and 8th European Parliament. This suggests that the decline of EPG cohesion was due to an increase in conflict between the interests of national parties and European Political Groups.

Moreover, the examined data provided sufficient evidence for the existence of a significant positive relationship between the level of Euroscepticism within a national party and the proportion of votes cast with the national party and against the EPG by MEPs from that national party. This means that the higher the level of Euroscepticism within a national party, the higher the average percentage of the votes cast by its MEPs against the plurality of votes within the European Political Group. Thus, the higher the level of Euroscepticism, the lower the EPG party cohesion.

These three results indicate that the Hypothesis 1: *'The extent to which European Party Group leaders can ascertain cohesion between 2009 and 2019 has declined, due to a rise in Euroscepticism'* is true in reality. However, for this to be true, there must be evidence of a significant rise in the level of Euroscepticism within the European Parliament. And even though the data showed an increase in the level of Euroscepticism within the European Parliament, this increase was not significant enough to be certain that it was not caused by chance. This means that this study cannot provide enough evidence to conclude that the decline of party cohesion within the European Parliament was caused by a rise in the level of Euroscepticism.

#### *4.2.1.1 Other explanations for the decline of EPG party cohesion:*

A difference in the results of the multivariate regression models run on the data from EP7 and EP8 provides an interesting insight into what other variables might have caused the decline in party cohesion within the European Parliament between 2009 and 2019. For EP7, none of the control variables showed significant relationship with EPG party cohesion. This means that there was no evidence that any of these variables affected party cohesion between 2009 and 2014. This changes for EP8: although the relationship between Euroscepticism and EPG party cohesion remained significant, the effects of EPG size and NPs per EPG on EPG party cohesion became significant and more extensive. This is also reflected in the difference in the R-Square value of the models. In EP8, the model accounted for 80% of the variance in the proportion of votes cast by MEPs against their EPG and with their NP, whereas in EP7 the model accounted for only 40% (Table 9.; Table 13.). This suggests that the increased significance of the relationships between EPG party cohesion and EPG party size and NPs per EPG might explain the decline in EPG party cohesion between 2009 and 2019, rather than a supposed increase in Euroscepticism.

Another variable that could explain the significant decline in EPG party cohesion between 2009 and 2019 is the national, historical and cultural context of Member States. The decline or increase in EPG cohesive voting behavior varies extensively between Member States. Some barely saw any difference or even a decline, while others saw a 300% increase in the proportion of votes cast with the NPs, against the EPGs. Even when controlling for outliers, there were large differences between Member States. This could indicate that the differences in national, historical and cultural contexts of Member States could provide an explanation for the significant decline in party cohesion between 2009 and 2019.

#### 4.2.2 Implication of the Results found in the Analysis:

Based on the results for Hypothesis D suggest that the level of Euroscepticism within a national party can affect the variance in the proportion of MEP's votes that aligned with their NP and opposed their EPG of that national party. A high level of this type of vote could lead to a lower level of party cohesion within EPGs. This is because party cohesion is highest when all MEPs within an EPG vote the same, and with these types of votes MEPs choose to vote against their EPGs. This means that a future rise in the level of Euroscepticism within the European Parliament could lead to a decrease in party cohesion.

This decline could harm the legislative politics and public policy-making capabilities

of the European Parliament. This implication is based on the importance of EPGs for the legislative politics and public policy-making capabilities of the European Parliament and the importance of party cohesion for the effective EPGs, presented by Hix, et al. (2007).

The importance of EPGs for the legislative politics and public policy making capabilities of the European Parliament:

According to Hix, et al. (2007), strong political parties are generally desirable in both electoral politics and legislative politics. This means that strong political parties help to win elections and get legislation passed. Due to the nature of the European Parliament elections, EPGs only play an important role within legislative politics (Hix, et al., 2007). Hix, et al. (2007) present four reasons why strong EPGs would be desirable within legislative politics.

First, EPGs ensure stable public policy. Without strong EPGs there would be a large number of agenda-setters with a high variance of opinions within the European Parliament, who each have a small chance of setting the agenda. This would lead to high variations in policies and uncertainty in policy choices (Hix, et al., 2007). With EPGs there is a small number of agenda setters with a high likelihood of setting the agenda. Moreover, due to the cooperative nature of EPGs, a compromise would have been reached before the issue was put on the agenda. This means that EPGs reduce uncertainty and avoid extreme policies (Hix, et al., 2007).

Second, EPGs offer the advantage of specialization. EU policies affect all areas of life; it is difficult to understand and evaluate all policy options on one's own. Without EPGs, MEPs would struggle and end up voting against the interests of their voters (Hix, et al., 2007). EPGs allow for a division of labor that helps MEPs to make educated and informed policy decisions (Hix, et al., 2007).

Third, EPGs advocate for general public goods rather than local public goods. Policy based on local public goods "*would have a lower value to the electorate as a whole than one where more general public goods benefiting a large majority of constituencies were proposed*" (Hix, et al., 2007, p.44). Before an issue is placed on the agenda, the NPs within the EPG must reach a compromise. This compromise will not focus on a local public good, because it would only benefit one of the NPs in the EPG (Hix, et al., 2007).

Finally, EPGs reduce the dimensionality of European politics. Politics does not function on a single dimension; policy decisions affect many dimensions of the lives of

Europeans. EPGs provide MEPs and voters alike with clarity, by providing stances within each of the dimensions to which all its MEPs in theory adhere (Hix, et al., 2007).

Hix, et al. (2007) argue that if the transaction costs of democratic politics are taken seriously, party cohesion is essential for effective EPGs and, by extension the EP. This because only by *“behaving cohesively over time, groups of politicians who have broadly shared preferences and goals can be more decisive than groups of unorganized politicians or cliquish fractions”* and in doing so EPGs can actually provide the advantages of political parties in the EP (Hix, et al., 2007, p. 46). Therefore, a future rise of the level of Euroscepticism within the European Parliament, and the related decline of party cohesion within EPGs could endanger the functioning of the European Parliament.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study found a significant decline in party cohesion within European Political Groups between 2009 and 2019. This means that MEPs within EPGs voted less cohesively in EP8 than they did in EP7. The significant increase that was found in the proportion of votes cast by MEPs with their national party and against their EPGs suggests that this decline in party cohesion was caused by increased misalignment between the interests of NPs and EPGs. Indicating that national parties as the second Principal within the Principal-Agent relationship between MEPs and their EPGs, had a negative effect on EPG party cohesion between 2009 and 2019. This is consistent with the existing theory on the subject. Hix (2002) argues that EPG party cohesion can decline due to increased misalignment between the interests of NPs and EPGs, since MEPs are more likely to vote with their national party than with their EPG. This assumption is based on the rational choice perspective on party cohesion, which argues that MEPs will vote cohesively with their EPG or NP as long as it promotes the pursuit of their own interest (Russell, 2014). Voting with NPs is most likely to promote the pursuit of the MEPs' own interests when their NP and EPG disagree on a vote (Hix, 2002).

Furthermore, it is argued that the increased salience of national interests and domestic problems in policy making associated with Euroscepticism, could lead to a misalignment between the interests of NPs and EPGs (Bickerton, et al, 2015; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2008). This is consistent with the significant positive relationship which was found between the proportion of votes cast by MEPs with their national party and against their EPG and Euroscepticism.

The existence of this relationship could have provided an explanation for the increased misalignment between the interests of NPs and EPGs, and the associated decline of EPG party cohesion. As in the theoretical framework it was argued that Euroscepticism in the EP had increased between 2009 and 2019 based on the research Meijers (2017) and Treib (2021). However, no significant evidence was found for the alleged increase in Euroscepticism in the European Parliament between 2009 and 2019.

Thus, to answer the research question: *To what extent could European Party Group leaders ascertain cohesion in the face of rising Euroscepticism between 2009 and 2019?*

The ability of European Party Group leadership to ascertain party cohesion declined between 2009 and 2019. This decline was most likely due to the significant increase in the

proportion of MEP votes cast which aligned with their NPs and opposed their EPG, suggesting an increase in the misalignment between the interests of NPs and EPGs. However, this increased misalignment cannot be explained by a rise in Euroscepticism between 2009 and 2019, as this study could not find sufficient evidence for this increase. Thus, although party cohesion did decline between 2009 and 2019, there was not sufficient evidence found to say that this was caused by growing Euroscepticism in the European Parliament.

However, the results provided three other possible explanations for the decline in EPG party cohesion between 2009 and 2019.

First, the size of EPGs and second the number of national parties in an EPG, both of which Bailer, et al. (2009) identified as structural determinants that might affect EPG party cohesion. Within the regression models used for this study, there was a notable escalation in the significance of the relationship between these variables and EPG party cohesion EP7 and EP8. For the EP7 data, these variables did not show any significant relationship with the dependent variable of any sort. For the EP8 data, the relationships between these variables and the dependent variable were the most significant of the variables that were examined. This indicates that a change in these variables might be responsible for the significant decline in EPG party cohesion.

The other possible explanation is based on the work of Aichholzer, et al. (2021) and Pirro, et al. (2018), among others. They find that the historical, cultural and national contexts of Member States are important in terms of their Euroscepticism. The empirical data used in this study alludes to a relationship between this variable and EPG party cohesion, seeing that the decrease or increase of the proportions of MEP votes aligned with their NP and opposed to their EPG between EP7 and EP8 differed between Member States.

Further research is needed to explore the relationships between these three variables and EPG party cohesion between 2009 and 2019. Other possible avenues for future research concern the sociological and psychological perspectives on party cohesion. The research conducted for this thesis is based on the rational choice perspective on party cohesion, but the sociological and psychological approach as explained by Russell (2014) might provide a different perspective on why EPG party cohesion declined between 2009 and 2019. These would lead to a more qualitative understanding of the concept. This leads to the limitations of this research.

The research conducted was quantitative in nature, providing a general overview of the mechanical links between the variables based on trends and correlating relationships. Research of a more qualitative nature might provide a better understanding of the reasons behind the MEPs' voting behavior. Furthermore, the methods of data collection might have limited the research in providing results that are true to reality. For instance, the choice of roll-call votes excluded a significant portion of total votes cast in the European Parliament, and the exclusion of national parties with less than two MEPs disproportionately affected smaller Member States as they have a smaller total number of seats to divide. Moreover, the survey used to construct a variable on Euroscepticism was of voluntary nature. This meant that not all MEPs responded. Had the data on voting behavior and Euroscepticism been available for each individual MEP, the results would have been more representative.

Even considering these limitations, the results of this research have practical implications. As presented in the discussion, party cohesion is of critical importance for the functionality of the European Parliament (Hix, et al., 2007). As the existence of a negative relationship between Euroscepticism and EPG party cohesion was established within this study, a future rise of Euroscepticism could endanger functioning of the European Parliament and by and large European democracy.

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