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Euroscepticism Re-galvanized: The Consequences of the 2005 French and Dutch Rejections of the EU Constitution

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Abstract

In the spring of 2005, the European Union was plunged into a state of crisis when two of the Union's founding members (France and the Netherlands) rejected the proposed EU Constitution in two separate referendums. In this article, it is argued that the 'no' votes in both countries, despite the support of mainstream political elites and the bulk of the media, should not be viewed with surprise. The article begins by examining the background debate to the referendums in both countries before considering the major issues that dominated the 'no' campaigns as well as the issues that motivated the two countries' electorates in their decisions to reject the EU Constitution. From here, the article examines the significance of the 2005 'no' votes in the current context within France and the Netherlands and argues that the clear polarization of the 'no' vote among those from socio-economically less well-off backgrounds is not only the sign of a further widening of the gap between mainstream political elites and their supporters with regard to European integration, but that in turn it is also having a significant impact at a party level in terms of the galvanization of Eurosceptic political parties – particularly the radical right. The article concludes with the argument that 2005 has contributed to the growing salience of Euroscepticism within both countries, which in the context of the crisis in the eurozone is likely to lead to further re-evaluation of the European project among political elites.

Introduction

In the spring of 2005, the European Union (EU) was plunged into a state of crisis when two of the Union's founding members rejected the EU Constitution in two separate referendums. On 29 May, 54.7 per cent of the French electorate voted 'no', followed three days later, on 1 June, by the Dutch vote, where 61.6 per cent of the participating public opposed the adoption of the Constitution. The two results sent shockwaves not just through EU institutions, but also through the French and the Dutch domestic political arenas. The shock was felt all the more deeply as France and the Netherlands were two of the six founding members of the EU and had always taken their European credentials seriously. In this article, however, we argue that the rejection of the Constitution by the French and Dutch electorates, despite the support of mainstream political elites and the bulk of the media, should not be viewed with surprise, and argue that the events of 2005 have acted as something of a watershed, a turning point in terms of the evolution of Euroscepticism at the mass level, similar to the two referendums on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 in Denmark and France¹ (see Vasilopoulou in this issue). The results of the 2005 referendums in two of the founding Member States (both with a reputation as 'good

¹ For an extensive discussion of different indicators and measures of Euroscepticism, anti-EU attitudes and political cynicism, see Krouwel and Abts (2007) and Boomgaarden *et al.* (2011).

partners’) has served to harden Eurosceptic public opinion in France, the Netherlands and beyond, to galvanize populist political parties such as the French Front National (FN) and the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV). These developments in the context of a global economic crisis (with the eurozone in a perilous state) (see Serricchio *et al.* in this issue) are increasingly putting tremendous strain on the European project as a whole (see Lubbers and Jaspers, 2011, p. 36).

We begin by examining the background debate to the referendums in both countries (illustrating that the public in these two apparently pro-EU countries did not entirely share the pro-EU enthusiasm of their political leaders) before considering the major issues that dominated the ‘no’ campaigns in both countries as well as the issues that motivated the two countries’ electorates in their decisions to reject the EU Constitution. Here, we draw primarily on the two Flash Eurobarometer post-referendum surveys conducted straight after the two plebiscites as data.² From here, the article examines the significance of the 2005 ‘no’ votes both within France and the Netherlands and beyond, and identifies three broad sociodemographic categories of ‘no’ voter and the emergence of a highly significant sociodemographic cleavage – namely the class cleavage – which clearly point to a significant polarization of the ‘no’ vote among those from socio-economically less well-off backgrounds. The article then discusses the significance of these findings with regard to the implications for party support and argues that one of the major consequences of 2005 is that it has not only widened the gap between mainstream political elites and their supporters with regard to European integration, but it has led to the galvanization of Eurosceptic political parties – particularly radical right parties – who increasingly pitch their opposition to the EU within an anti-globalization framework. The article concludes with the argument that the events of 2005 have contributed to the growing salience of Euroscepticism within both countries, which in the context of the crisis in the eurozone has had a significant impact at party and governmental levels – dominating the 2012 French presidential election campaign and leading to the resignation of the Dutch government – and leading to the re-evaluation of the European project among some previously Euro-enthusiast elites (see Taggart and Szczerbiak in this issue).

I. France, the Netherlands and the EU: The Background

It seemed unthinkable to many commentators that France would be the first of the EU-25 to say ‘no’ to the proposed EU Constitution. Despite historical opposition from the French Communist Party and Charles De Gaulle’s ‘France First’ approach towards the development of the European project (famously typified by the ‘Empty Chair’ crisis of 1966), French political elites have always been at the forefront of closer European co-operation spawning Europhile statesmen such as Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, François Mitterrand and Jacques Delors; indeed, former French President Valéry Giscard D’Estaing was the architect of the Constitution. Similarly, in what was the first national referendum in modern Dutch history, it seemed unlikely at the outset that the Netherlands would effectively be responsible for burying the EU Constitution as Dutch political elites have persistently supported developments towards closer European co-operation and the Dutch

² Eurobarometer, The European Constitution: Post Referendum Surveys in France and the Netherlands: Flash EB 171 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/flash/fl171_en.pdf), May 2005; and EB 172 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/flash/fl172_en.pdf), June 2005.

public have consistently been one of the most pro-EU in the biannual Eurobarometer opinion polls. In reality, however, the two referendum results were not a great surprise as in recent years there has been clear evidence that a 'gap' between pro-European political leaders and a more sceptical citizenry has emerged in both countries.

In France, as far back as 1992 at the Maastricht referendum, the narrow margin of the 'yes' victory (just over 51 per cent in favour) indicated that France's citizens did not entirely share the pro-European enthusiasm of the country's political elites.³ The year 1992 acted as a watershed in France in terms of raising the profile of Europe as an issue, and more specifically Euroscepticism, in the domestic political arena. This salience appeared to reach its zenith, albeit temporarily, on the right of the political spectrum in the 1999 European elections when Charles Pasqua's breakaway pro-sovereignty *Rassemblement Pour la France* (RPF) outscored the Gaullist *Rassemblement Pour la République* (RPR). The RPF list polled over 13.05 per cent of the vote and obtained 13 seats compared to the RPR's 12.82 per cent of the vote and subsequent 12 seats. With this in mind, it is no surprise that neither the introduction of the euro nor the 2004 EU enlargement were put to a referendum of the French people by President Chirac; it is debatable whether a referendum on the euro would have produced a 'yes' vote and extremely unlikely that a referendum on EU enlargement would have produced a similar outcome. Added to this, the shock result of the 2002 presidential election when Jean-Marie Le Pen progressed into the second round did nothing to bolster the confidence of France's pro-EU political elites. The victory of the 'no' vote in France was no bolt out of the blue; large swathes of voters rejected the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and there were clear warning signs in the post-Maastricht period that the French public might well say 'no' at their next referendum opportunity.

Signs of declining Euro-enthusiasm within the Dutch political elite became first visible within the conservative right-wing Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD). The leader of the party throughout the 1990s, Frits Bolkestein (who later became a European Commissioner), voiced strong criticism against (German and French) plans for further deepening of the European integration process, as typified by the economic and monetary union (EMU) and the single currency (*NRC Handelsblad*, 1997). In addition, the VVD experienced a split, in part over the issue of European integration: in September 2004, VVD member of parliament and spokesman for foreign affairs Geert Wilders left the party rejecting further European integration and the EU accession of Turkey. Declining popular support for the pro-integration elite became apparent when the two major pro-European parties – the Christian democratic CDA and the social democratic PvdA – suffered heavy electoral losses during the early 1990s. While these two parties have together polled, on average, 60–65 per cent of the popular vote in general elections since the 1970s, their support declined to only 43 per cent in the 2002 election. Despite a partial recovery at the 2003 election where the two parties polled 56 per cent, support for the pro-EU centrist parties further declined in 2006 (48 per cent) and 2010 (33 per cent). Clearly, the pro-European majority at elite level in the Netherlands has increasingly come under pressure from the Eurosceptic margins on both the left and right.

³ This, in spite of the fact that three past and future presidents from the three main parties (Giscard d'Estaing, François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac) had endorsed Maastricht, and, as was the case in 2005, the campaign took place in a context where the vast majority of the French media was strongly in favour of a 'yes' vote.

While the Dutch pro-European centre is weakening in electoral terms, anti-integration parties emerged on both fringes of the political spectrum. On the radical left, the Socialist Party (SP) has consistently campaigned against the ‘capitalist project’ of European integration, polling 16.6 per cent of the vote in 2006 and 9.8 per cent in 2010. In opinion polls, the SP is now ahead of the social democrats (PvdA). On the radical right, first the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) campaigned for replacing the European Parliament with a Senate, against Turkish accession and for the ‘reinstatement of Dutch national sovereignty’ by withdrawing power from ‘Brussels’ (see Mudde, 2007) and since 2005 Geert Wilders’ PVV has substantially increased its vote share obtaining 15.5 per cent of the vote in 2010. Both right-wing Eurosceptic parties have played a role in government, with LPF having a short spell at the government table in 2002, while the minority government of the VVD and CDA has been dependent on Wilders’ PVV between 2010 and 2012. The PVV and SP have most consistently campaigned against European integration, while, in the 2004 European elections another anti-EU party, Transparent Europe, won two of the 27 Dutch seats and over 7 per cent of the vote. Its leader, an ex-EUocrat Paul van Buitenen, had previously been a ‘whistleblower’, providing evidence for several cases of corruption within the EU’s bureaucracy. As in France, in the Netherlands, there is clearly a noticeable gap between voter and elite opinions with regard to the EU. In this respect, the emergence of a Eurosceptic elite is merely a reflection of a trend that was already developing at the mass level (see also Holsteyn and Ridder, 2005).

II. The 2005 Referendum Campaigns in France and the Netherlands

Jacques Chirac informed the French public of his decision to hold a referendum on the EU Constitution during his annual Bastille Day speech on 14 July 2004. With the referendum taking place on 29 May 2005, this ensured that the debate stayed salient within the French media for nigh on a year. Part of Chirac’s motivation in opting for a referendum in 2005 – when he had previously chosen not to over the euro and EU enlargement – was his belief that the campaign would divide the Socialist Party.

In party political terms supporters of the ‘no’ campaign were diverse and mainly on the fringes of the political spectrum. On the left, the Communist Party, the radical left Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), a significant faction of the Socialist Party fronted by Laurent Fabius and a significant number of Greens were in the ‘no’ camp.⁴ On the right, a faction in favour of the ‘no’ vote emerged from within the ranks of the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), organized by the *souverainiste* ‘Debout la République’ think tank and fronted by the National Assembly member for Essonne, Nicolas Dupont-Aignan.⁵ The pro-sovereignty position was also represented by the former presidential candidate Philippe de Villiers and his Mouvement Pour la France (MPF) party and by the remnants of Charles Pasqua’s neo-Gaullist RPF.

⁴ The PS chose to conduct a referendum of party members in December 2004 to ascertain the party line on the Constitution: 59 per cent of members voted in favour, indicating a significant split within the party. The Greens had also opted to conduct a referendum of its membership back in February 2004, which resulted in 53 per cent voting in favour, also demonstrating deep division within the movement.

⁵ The Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle (UMP) was initially formed as an electoral alliance by the RPR, Démocratie Libérale (DL) and a small fringe of the UDF prior to the 2002 presidential and legislative elections. The two parties merged in the autumn of 2002 and adopted the title ‘Union pour un Mouvement Populaire’ allowing the same acronym to be preserved.

Also, the rurally dominated Chasse, Pêche, Nature et Traditions (CPNT) called for a 'no' vote, and on the radical right, Jean-Marie Le Pen's FN was vehemently opposed to the Constitution. Once the campaign proper started, the polls which had initially predicted a victory for the 'yes' vote quickly began to tell a different story, with the 'no' campaign soon in the ascendancy.

Unlike in France, the Dutch referendum was not tactically initiated by the incumbent parties, but the result of a parliamentary motion by three backbenchers from (centre-) left parties: the incumbent D66 and opposition parties PvdA and GreenLeft.⁶ The referendum was a unique event as it was the first national referendum in the Netherlands since 1797 (when also a French-designed constitution was rejected).⁷ The government (CDA–VVD–D66) was divided over the referendum itself, with the Christian Democrats most staunchly against it and the libertarian D66 in favour. This division among the incumbents, as well as their clear lack of experience with referendum campaigns, resulted in a very low profile in terms of the supporters of the Constitutional Treaty. In fact up until two weeks before the referendum, all major politicians were on recess – the general assumption being that the referendum campaign would be similar to parliamentary elections with many voters deciding which way to vote in the final stages. Instead of substance, much of the media attention focused on the lack of debate, on the fact that so many voters were unaware of the referendum and on the conflict over the distribution of campaign subsidies between the 'yes' and 'no' camps. Entering too late into the debate, mainstream politicians were unable to create public interest in their arguments and the 'no camp' was able to dominate (Aarts and Kolk, 2005a).

Most mainstream Dutch politicians, used to complex multiparty and multidimensional political competition in parliamentary elections, felt uneasy with the stark polarization resulting from a simple binary choice between 'yes' and 'no' (Harmsen, 2005). They were unable to counteract the fierce anti-EU campaign that came from three fringes of the political system: the radical left (SP), the radical right (LPF and Wilders) and the fundamentalist Protestant parties (CU and SGP).

III. The Issues in the French and Dutch Campaigns

What were the major issues and developments that led to the victory of the 'no' vote in the two countries? Much debate in France, particularly on the left of the political spectrum, centred on the perceived threat posed by the contents of the Constitution to France's social model. It was vehemently portrayed as a neo-liberal Anglo-Saxon constitution that threatened the very fabric of the French welfare state. As part of this threat the Bolkestein Directive, permitting free movement of services within the EU (although not actually mentioned in the Constitution) was effectively deployed as a campaign tactic by supporters of the 'no' vote across the political spectrum (see Cautres, 2005, p. 33). This drew on voters' fears (in the context of rising unemployment and controversy surrounding reform of the 35-hour week) of the perceived risk of an influx of workers from the new EU Member

⁶ The backbenchers were Farah Karimi (GroenLinks), Niesco Dubbelboer (PvdA) and Boris van der Ham (D66).

⁷ The subject of the 1797 referendum was the constitution of the newly established Batavian Republic. As the unitarians and federalists could not agree on the formation of a unitary state, the French army occupied the Dutch parliament and expelled the federalists. A referendum was called over a draft constitution, but in August 1797 this constitution was rejected with 108,761 against and only 27,955 votes (25.7 per cent) in favour.

States, as symbolized by the fictional ‘Polish Plumber’ who would undercut the prices of the French plumber. Related to this, the issues of social dumping and *délocalisations* were constantly cited as a threat to the French model and a core reason to reject the Constitution. In essence, much of the debate seemed to centre on France’s changing role in a globalized world, and for supporters of the ‘no’ vote the negative socio-economic impact of globalization on the EU countries and more pressingly France (see Startin, 2008a).

Another major issue which constantly cropped up in the campaign was the question of EU enlargement, both retrospectively and in terms of potential future developments. A feeling among voters seemed to prevail that the 2004 EU enlargement had taken place without proper consultation of the French public. France was the only one of the EU-15 countries where more than half of its voters were opposed to enlargement, according to the Eurobarometer 59 (2003) poll. Enlargement also remained an emotive issue in the campaign (particularly on the right of the political spectrum) as a result of the Turkish question. Opposition to Turkey’s entry was persistently espoused by the Christian Democrat centre-right UDF, who were concerned about a non-Christian country joining the EU, and by the leadership of the radical right FN, who were concerned about the cultural consequences of Turkish membership.

Related to the debate on enlargement, traditional pro-sovereignty arguments were also put forward as a justification for rejecting the Constitution, as were arguments relating to its consequences in terms of immigration. The length and inaccessibility of the text itself was also regularly highlighted. Marthaler (2005, p. 10) points out that ‘it was an over-long, highly complex and ambiguous text, associated in the minds of many left-wing voters with former Right wing president Giscard D’Estaing’ – a factor which certainly contributed to its rejection on the left of the political spectrum. Finally, as discussed, the domestic context of the referendum also played a significant part: the anti-Chirac factor, a general anti-government and anti-political corruption feeling, as well as the Le Pen factor associated with the 2002 presidential election, all contributed to the electorate’s hostility towards the Constitution (see Startin, 2008a).

In the Netherlands most media outlets were moderately positive towards the Treaty (Schuck and De Vreese, 2008), yet from day one mainstream politicians were on the defensive, being confronted with harsh criticisms of the speed of integration and eastward enlargement. The euro also became a salient issue after the director of the Dutch Central Bank stated that the Dutch guilder had been undervalued by 10 per cent compared to the German mark at the introduction of the new currency. This resonated with an overwhelming majority of Dutch voters (93 per cent), who felt that the introduction of the euro had damaged their purchasing power due to inflation (Aarts and Kolk, 2005b, pp. 4–5). Eastward enlargement and its consequences for the labour market became a salient issue when Frits Bolkestein (VVD and former Dutch European Commissioner) intervened in the French campaign (in fluent French) by stating that ‘he was glad he could now finally get a good (Polish) plumber’ for his house in Ramousies (France). When subsequently French electricians cut the power supply to his house, this was widely publicized in the Dutch media. Since Bolkestein had been the first Dutch politician from a major party to adopt a ‘soft’ Eurosceptic attitude (which had not prevented him from becoming European Commissioner) and had previously called for stricter laws to curb labour immigration during the 1990s, the ‘no camp’ had a field day and were able to portray Bolkestein – and other members of the elites – as hypocrites.

This campaign dynamic allowed the SP and PVV to link (labour) immigration, Turkey's EU accession and economic issues (unemployment and inflation) to the Treaty. As in France, the major objection to European integration from the radical left was that it undermined Dutch welfare state provisions. The SP cleverly linked socio-economic anxieties of voters to a – typical Dutch – ‘nationalist’ discourse, arguing that social policies on gay marriage, abortion, soft drugs and euthanasia would be threatened (Harmsen, 2005, p. 5). The PVV, as well as the LPF remnant, adopted a more nationalist discourse and emphasized the loss of sovereignty due to EU integration, and both anti-immigration parties campaigned fiercely against the possible accession of Turkey (Vossen, 2008). The idea of a ‘Judaico-Christian’ Europe in which a Muslim Turkey is a ‘*fremdkörper*’ was also voiced by the fundamentalist Protestant parties (CU and SGP).

Overall, while similar issues emerged in both countries – particularly welfare state retrenchment, labour immigration and further enlargement and, not least, Turkey's potential accession to the EU – economic reasons were the drivers of the ‘no’ vote in France. In the Netherlands, the speed of integration and the perception of the loss of sovereignty played a much larger role in the minds of ‘no’ voters. In both countries, the incumbent governments were on the defensive against far left, religious and radical right parties employing a wide range of arguments against the Treaty, as opposed to pro-integration arguments which were less numerous and seemed to lack conviction.

IV. The Motivations of the 2005 ‘No’ Voters in France and the Netherlands

In France, the findings of the Eurobarometer Flash surveys reveal this predominance of socio-economic concerns with the three most popular responses falling into this category: 31 per cent cited that the Constitution would have negative effects on the unemployment situation, 26 per cent that the economic situation in France was too weak and 19 per cent that economically speaking the draft was too liberal. The predominance of socio-economic issues is what also emerges most clearly from the IPSOS exit poll.⁸ Faced with eight different answers and given the liberty to choose as many responses as possible, the two answers that elicited the most responses are again socio-economically driven concerns. Over half of the ‘no’ voters cited discontent with France's socio-economic situation and 40 per cent agreed that the Constitution was too liberal economically.⁹ This is in direct contrast to the Netherlands, where socio-economic concerns were much less predominant according to the Eurobarometer Flash data. Only 7 per cent of Dutch voters stated that it would have negative effects on unemployment, 5 per cent mentioned that the economic situation in the Netherlands was too weak and another 5 per cent cited that the draft was too liberal economically.

The Eurobarometer Flash data show that the primary motivation for the ‘no’ votes in the Netherlands was a lack of information on the Constitution for one-third of the respondents (Table 1). Also, the complexity of the Treaty, the speed of integration and the loss of sovereignty played a much larger role in the Netherlands than in France. Clearly,

⁸ IPSOS, Referendum 29 mai 2005: les sondages sortis des urnes comparatif 29 mai 2005/20 septembre 1992 («<http://www.ipsos.fr/referendum/soiree/referendum.htm#01>»).

⁹ Unsurprisingly ‘no’ voters on the left focus on socio-economic issues to a greater degree than parties of the right, and the Greens were the only party where more than half of its supporters (55 per cent), perhaps somewhat optimistically, cited that voting ‘no’ would allow a new constitution to be negotiated.

Table 1: What are the Reasons Why You Voted 'No' at the Referendum on the European Constitution? Responses of 5% or more

	%
<i>Netherlands</i>	
Lack of information	32
Loss of national sovereignty	19
I oppose the national government/certain political parties	14
Europe is too expensive	13
I am against Europe/European construction/European integration	8
It will have negative effects on the employment situation in the Netherlands/relocation of Dutch enterprises/loss of jobs	7
I do not see what is positive in this text	6
The draft goes too far/advances too quickly	6
Too technocratic/juridical/too much regulation	6
I am opposed to further enlargement	6
Not democratic enough	5
Too complex	5
Economically speaking, the draft is too liberal	5
The economic situation in the Netherlands is too weak/there is too much unemployment in the Netherlands	5
I do not want a European political union/a European federal state/ the 'United States' of Europe	5
Europe is evolving too fast	5
The 'yes' campaign was not convincing enough	5
This Constitution is imposed on us	5
<i>France</i>	
It will have negative effects on the employment situation in France/relocation of French enterprises/loss of jobs	31
The economic situation in France is too weak/there is too much unemployment in France	26
Economically speaking, the draft is too liberal	19
I oppose the president of the Republic/the national government/certain political parties	18
Not enough social Europe	16
Too complex	12
I do not want Turkey in the European Union	6
Loss of national sovereignty	5
Lack of information	5

Source: Eurobarometer, The European Constitution: Post Referendum Surveys in France and the Netherlands: Flash EB 171 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/flash/fl171_en.pdf), May 2005; and EB 172 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/flash/fl172_en.pdf), June 2005.

the anxiety in the Netherlands was broadened by the multitude of anti-Treaty parties from left (SP), right (LPF, PVV, SGP) and centre (CU). In addition, two-thirds of Dutch voters believed the campaign started too late and that they lacked the necessary information. This contrasts with the French case (where a much longer and more drawn out campaign took place), where only 5 per cent of voters cited lack of information as a reason to vote against the Treaty. Survey data from a variety of sources, such as the Eurobarometer, national surveys and panel data (see Schuck and De Vreese, 2008) show that those voters with more Eurosceptic attitudes and concerns over national identity and sovereignty were most likely to oppose the Treaty. Lubbers (2008) finds that anti-EU motivations in particular accounted for the 'no' votes, while domestic political evaluations and 'party identification' positions also drove voters to reject the Treaty. Evidently, EU-related concerns were more

Table 2: The Motivations of the French ‘No’ Voter at the 2005 Referendum on the EU Constitution by Party (%)

<i>‘What were the main reasons, from the following list, for why you decided to vote “no” to the EU Constitution?’</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>PCF</i>	<i>PS</i>	<i>Verts</i>	<i>UDF</i>	<i>UMP</i>	<i>FN-MN</i>	<i>No party preference</i>
You are discontented with the current socio-economic situation in France (<i>socio-economic</i>)	52	57	54	59	63	40	54	40
The Constitution is too liberal in economic terms (<i>socio-economic</i>)	40	57	49	50	30	35	18	45
It will allow a better Constitution to be renegotiated (<i>EU-related</i>)	39	44	47	55	38	48	17	36
It’s the right moment to oppose Turkish entry of the EU (<i>EU-related</i>)	35	23	26	16	44	56	56	37
The Constitution represents a threat to France’s national identity (<i>EU-related</i>)	32	20	22	22	40	38	44	36
You wanted to manifest your discontent towards the whole political class (<i>domestic grievance</i>)	31	29	31	31	31	26	26	40
The process of closer European co-operation has been negative for France (<i>EU-related</i>)	27	26	25	27	32	27	29	24
It is the right moment to show opposition to the government and to Jacques Chirac (<i>domestic grievance</i>)	24	22	26	15	23	11	38	19
No response	2	2	2	2	–	2	3	3

Source: IPSOS, Referendum 29 mai 2005: les sondages sortis des urnes comparatif 29 mai 2005/20 septembre 1992 («<http://www.ipsos.fr/referendum/soiree/referendum.htm#01>»).

important for the Dutch voters than economic concerns;¹⁰ this contrasts sharply with the French case where socio-economic issues were the main driver of the no vote.

One economic factor that did play a role in the Netherlands to an extent was the Dutch financial contribution. The Netherlands is the highest net per capita contributor to the EU budget, and that fact was frequently emphasized by the ‘no camp’. Precisely because many voters believed they had too little information and that the speed of European integration was too fast, they consciously rejected the Treaty. The referendum was not merely a verdict on the national political situation in a ‘second-order’ election, even though disapproval of the incumbents did matter for the ‘no’ vote (Schuck and De Vreese, 2008, p. 117). Dutch voters – many of them feeling uninformed and uneasy about the speed and direction of European integration – were given the opportunity to slow down the integration process and they decided to apply the brakes.

In the case of France, the IPSOS poll does reveal a greater emphasis on issues related to French sovereignty than the Eurobarometer Flash surveys (Table 2). Opposing Turkish entry was cited by 39 per cent and 35 per cent of ‘no’ voters, respectively, while 32 per cent of French voters thought that the Treaty poses a threat to French identity, with 27 per cent believing that European co-operation has been negative for France. If we break down

¹⁰ 2005 Interview/NSS results, available at: «<http://www.nos.nl>» and «<http://www.politiekebarometer.nl/>».

these data by party affiliation, it is evident that Eurosceptic-based motivations do predominate among 'no' voters on the right of the political spectrum.

For example, the most important issue for both UMP and FN voters was opposition to Turkish entry to the EU with 56 per cent in both parties citing this as a motivation for their decision to vote 'no'. The Treaty being a risk to French identity was also mentioned more frequently by supporters of right-wing parties, with 40 per cent of UDF, 38 per cent of UMP and 44 per cent of FN voters stating it was a factor in their decision to vote 'no'. A similar ideological pattern can also be discerned in the Netherlands, where right-wing voters more frequently emphasize issues of sovereignty and identity (Eurobarometer 172, 2005, p. 16). Dutch right-wing voters are more Eurosceptic and more likely to vote against the Constitution (see also Schuck and De Vreese, 2008, p. 110).

Domestic grievances, on the other hand, featured fairly equally in both countries. In France, 18 per cent of respondents cited opposition to the president of the Republic, the national government and/or certain political parties, which was the fourth most common response. In the French IPSOS poll, the two explicitly domestically driven questions ('You wanted to express your discontent with the political class in general' and 'It was the moment to oppose the government and Jacques Chirac') were cited by 31 per cent and 24 per cent of 'no' voters, respectively.¹¹ In the Netherlands, 14 per cent highlighted their opposition to their national government and/or certain political parties, which was the third highest ranked response. Thus there is evidence in both countries that at least part of the 'no' vote is fuelled by anti-incumbent and anti-establishment sentiments.

V. The Significance of 2005

The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty was no real surprise to scholars of EU mass opinion. In both France and the Netherlands a long-term trend of growing anti-European integration sentiment is discernible among the general population, in contrast to the majority of political elites who have consistently been more pro-EU than their voters (Ray, 1999, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). The year 2005 can be viewed as a continuation of this trend – with hindsight, however, it is significantly more than just a minor event in this evolution. In reality, 2005 marks something of a watershed – a turning point – potentially of equal significance to Maastricht; the two 'no' votes in France and the Netherlands have had a very significant impact on the Eurosceptic debate in both these countries and across the EU as a whole, providing a theatre for anti-integration parties to make their case fully to the public.

In the Netherlands, attitudes towards the EU have become more negative since the early 1990s and notably at a faster pace than in the other Member States (Huijts and De Graaf, 2007; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2007, 2010). The referendum of 2005 elevated the levels of party conflict over EU integration and increased the issue salience of Europe for voters (see De Vries, 2009, p. 163; Lubbers and Jaspers, 2011, p. 36). The referendum also impacted on the 2006 elections, in which the anti-Treaty parties gained significantly. The SP went from 6.3 to 16.6 per cent, the CU from 2.1 to 4.0 per cent and the PVV gained 5.9 per cent in its first ever election, which meant that 18 per cent of the electorate moved into the anti-EU bracket. Also the fact that the Rutte government was defeated over the 3 per cent norm and pressure from Brussels for austerity measures propelled the EU to the

¹¹ Of the domestically driven grievances, 38 per cent of FN 'no' voters cited opposition to the government and Jacques Chirac as a motivation, which is 14 per cent higher than the overall average.

centre stage in the run-up to the 2012 elections (Schout and Wiersma, 2012, p. 1). In France, opposing Europe, and in particular unease with the eurozone crisis, was a major issue in the 2012 presidential election campaign for the major candidates of both the radical left (Jean-Luc Mélenchon) and radical right (Marine Le Pen).

A New Category of EU Rejectionist Voters

Analysis of the 2005 'no' voter in both countries is of particular significance because it reveals the emergence of a third broad category of EU rejectionist. Back in 1992 two types of 'no' voters were predominant at the Maastricht referendum in France: a traditional pro-sovereignty, anti-EU voter mainly found on the right of the political spectrum, religious and a believer in traditional values; and an essentially non-ideologically driven protest voter primarily motivated by the domestic context and politically associated today with the radical right or left (in France they are found predominantly among FN voters; in the Netherlands they are aligned with the SP and Wilders). These voters share disillusionment with the political system, be they anti-Chirac or anti-Balkenende, anti-government, anti-system, anti-establishment or anti-political. Our analysis of the various data reveals that these voters have been joined in 2005 by a discernible, third category of voter who is normally from the left, not necessarily anti-Europe per se but who is against what he or she believes to be the neo-liberal direction of the EU as epitomized by the Constitution. This third type of ideological voter, who is also likely to be anti-globalization, primarily supporting the political left (communists, socialists or greens) appears to have become the dominant category of 'no' voter in the 2005 referendums in both countries. So 2005 is significant because the emergence of three types of Euro-sceptic voters has broadened the face of EU rejectionism and transformed the political realities in both national political systems as well as at the supranational level.

2005 and the Polarization of Opposition in Socio-economic Terms

Allied to this, 2005 marks a key turning point as analysis of the two referendum results highlights the extent to which a socio-economic cleavage continues to emerge in the two countries – one which clearly correlates the 'no' vote (and by implication, opposition to the EU) with socio-economic status. At the 1992 French Maastricht referendum Duhamel and Grunberg (1993, p. 79) observed the existence of *deux frances sociologiques* and concluded that the 'no' vote predominated among those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds often with low levels of educational qualifications. Analysis of the 2005 Eurobarometer Flash surveys in both countries indicates that the correlation between the 'no' vote and class status has deepened. In France, 78 per cent of manual workers voted 'no' – 23 per cent more than the overall 55 per cent rejection of the Treaty. This figure is backed up by evidence from the two national French exit polls: the SOFRES data indicate that 81 per cent of *ouvriers* (manual workers) rejected the Treaty and the IPSOS poll shows that 79 per cent of French workers voted 'no'.¹² Similar socio-economic Treaty-rejection patterns can be found in the Netherlands. The Eurobarometer Flash data

¹² TNS/SOFRES, Le référendum du 29 mai 2005: Enquête réalisée par téléphone le 29 mai 2005 pour TF1, RTL et *Le Monde*; IPSOS, Referendum 29 mai 2005: les sondages sortis des urnes comparatif 29 mai 2005/20 septembre 1992 («<http://www.ipsos.fr/referendum/soiree/referendum.htm#01>»).

show that an overwhelming majority of 78 per cent of manual workers voted 'no', while among employers and the self-employed the rejection rates were substantially lower at 60 and 57 per cent, respectively.

Clear evidence of the link between educational status and the 'no' vote is also revealed in France in the IPSOS poll, with 72 per cent of those without any formal educational qualifications voting 'no' to the Constitution. Dutch citizens with low levels of education also had a higher propensity to reject the Constitution. Around 80 per cent of those with low levels of education voted 'no' in the Dutch referendum, while for the higher educated the Treaty-rejection rate was between 47 and 51 per cent.¹³ Although voting 'no' in the two referendums on the Constitutional Treaty does not automatically imply lack of support for the EU per se, to explore this more deeply we have tracked EU support over time differentiating respondents by their number of years of formal education in order to observe whether there are similar demographic findings. Figures 1a for France and 1b for the Netherlands both reveal the same cross-time pattern.

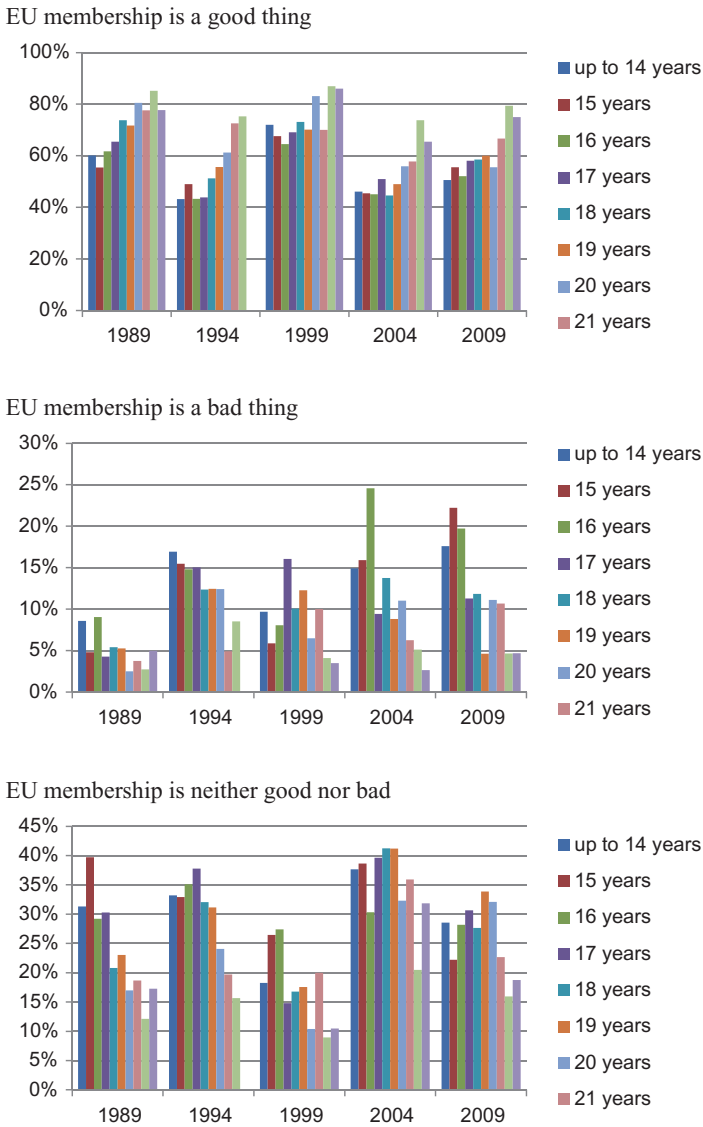
Citizens with lower levels of education are far less supportive of EU integration than those with higher levels. In both countries it is noticeable that during the time frame the least educated in particular show the steepest drop in EU support. In France EU support was lowest among those with lower levels of education in 1994, with a substantial increase in 1999; yet in 2004 and 2009 support for the EU among this demographic is below 50 per cent, while the proportion among those with higher levels of education is close to 80 per cent. In the Netherlands we see the same structural pattern. What is particularly striking in both cases according to the data is that up until 2004 many citizens with lower levels of education were indifferent towards the EU, stating in larger percentages that the EU is neither good nor bad. In 2004, however, there is a sudden increase among this demographic stating that 'the EU is a bad thing'. The data indicate that since the period either side of the two referendums the lowest educated have become less inclined to support EU integration and despite a limited restoration of trust in 2009, the gap in support between the two ends of the educational spectrum is between 20 and 30 per cent in both France and the Netherlands.

Further evidence of the link between the 'no' vote and socio-economic status is evident from an analysis of the way the unemployed voted in the referendum. With unemployment consistently hovering around the 10 per cent mark over the last decade in France, those without work make up a significant percentage of the adult population; evidence from the two national polls indicates that a very significant percentage of unemployed voters rejected the Constitution, with 71 per cent and 79 per cent of *chômeurs* saying 'no' according to the respective IPSOS and SOFRES polls. Evidence for the Netherlands suggests that the unemployed voted by a large majority against the Treaty. Both Eurobarometer data and national polls demonstrate that those who classify themselves as lower class and those that have a low income are clearly opposed to the Constitution (Kolk and Aarts, 2005, p. 186; Harmsen, 2005, p. 9).

This link between the 'no' vote and socio-economic status in France is further underlined by an analysis of contrasting socio-economic urban areas within the same regions. The results published by the French Ministry for the Interior illustrate that the 'no' vote was more pronounced in France's socio-economically deprived suburbs (the *bainlieues*

¹³ See M. De Hond's website, available at: <<http://www.peil.nl>>. See also Kolk and Aarts (2005, p. 186).

Figure 1a: Approval of EU Membership in France by Years of Education

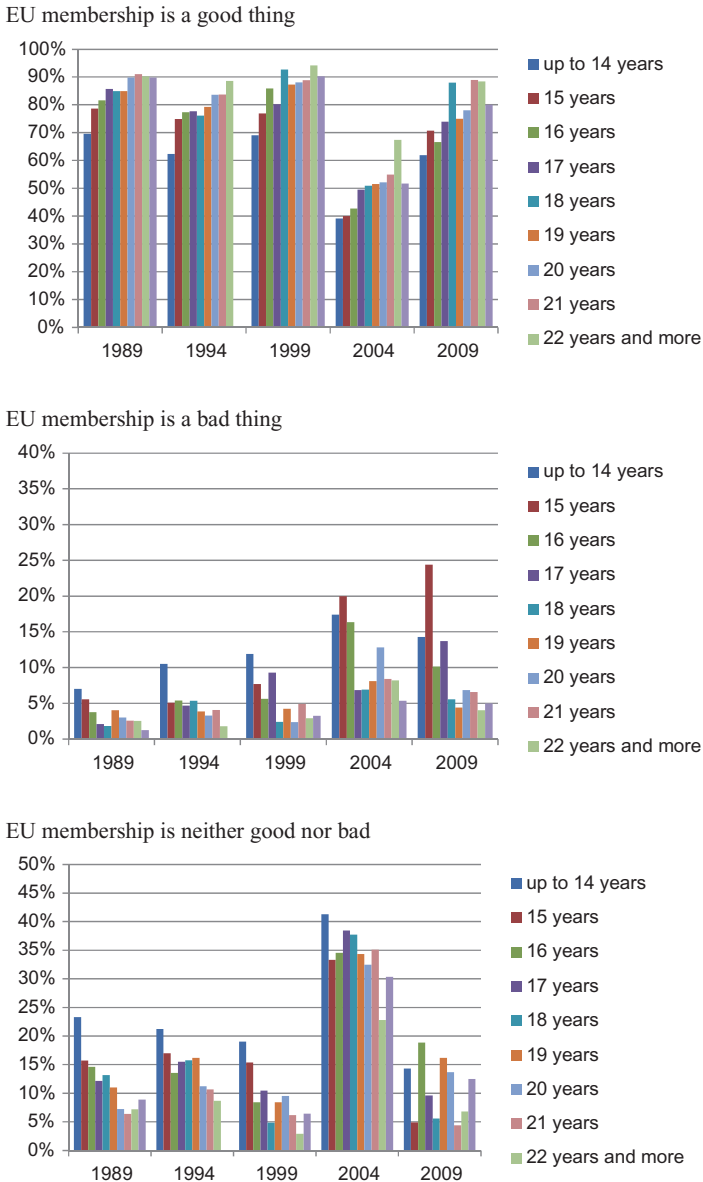


Source: EES trend file 1989–2004 and EES 2009 voter study.

déshéritées), while the ‘yes’ vote was more prominent in France’s more affluent urban areas (the *communes bourgeoises*).¹⁴ This socio-economic cleavage was further inflamed

¹⁴ <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/avotreservice/elections/rf2005/>. A brief analysis of contrasting socio-economic urban areas in the south, the north and in Paris illustrates this point. In the Provence-Cote d’Azur region, the percentage of ‘no’ votes in Marseille’s socially economically deprived 15th arrondissement was 78 per cent, compared to 45.1 per cent in the more affluent Aix-en-Provence. In the Nord-Pas-de-Calais, the contrast in the working-class port of Calais and the affluent holiday resort of Le Touquet is even more striking; whereas nearly three-quarters (74.4 per cent) of Calais’ voters rejected the Treaty, in Le Touquet just under a third (32.5 per cent) did so. Further proof of this socio-economic divide is evident in Paris, where overall the electorate voted by 66.5 per cent to 33.6 per cent in favour of the Constitution. The difference

Figure 1b: Approval of EU Membership in the Netherlands by Years of Education



Source: EES trend file 1989–2004 and EES 2009 voter study.

in France by the riots that took place in the Parisian suburbs and the suburbs of other major French cities in the autumn of 2005 as it cross-cut with a generational divide that is becoming increasingly apparent (see Frégnac-Clave, 2008). Also in the Netherlands, the

between the affluent 7th arrondissement, where less than a fifth (19.5 per cent) of voters rejected the Constitution and the easterly working-class 20th arrondissement where nearly a half (47.2 per cent) did so is very clear-cut.

highest proportion of Treaty rejection can be found in the more deprived areas of the larger cities, while in affluent suburban areas the percentage of the population voting against the Treaty was much lower (Kolk and Aarts, 2005, p. 185).¹⁵ It is abundantly clear from analysis of the above data that a socio-economic structuration of the 'no' vote emerges with those on lower incomes, with lower levels of education and the unemployed being far less supportive of EU integration than the higher-educated and the financially better off. This is a significant development with regard to the demographic of mass opinion with regard to EU attitudinal data, which in turn has had significant repercussions at a party level in both France and the Netherlands where radical right and radical left parties – and also the Dutch fundamentalist religious parties – have all built upon their anti-Treaty campaigns from the 2005 referendum to be ever more visibly anti-EU with noticeable electoral success.

2005 and the Galvanization of the Radical Right

Without doubt, the most significant repercussion at a party level with regard to the consequences of the 2005 referendums in both countries has been the galvanization of support for the radical right – the French FN and the Dutch PVV. Evidence from the EUProfiler data indicates that respondents with higher vote propensities for the radical right (the FN in France and PVV in the Netherlands) are the most anti-EU.¹⁶ Of particular significance is the rejuvenation of the radical right vote in both countries with regard to the support of blue-collar voters – often with lower levels of education and on lower incomes. In effect, post-2005 we have witnessed in both countries (and elsewhere) that the radical right in both countries are increasingly adopting an anti-EU, anti-globalization rhetorical discourse which has become inextricably entwined in what Lecoeur (2007) describes as a '*Euromondialist*' critique of mainstream politics, parties and elites. There has been conscious, strategic decision among such leaders to deploy anti-EU and anti-globalization rhetoric to garner electoral support (see Startin, 2011) which is both a reflection of the evolving state of public opinion on the issue (particularly among blue-collar workers) and recognition that there are more votes to be won in opposing Europe and globalization than in traditional anti-immigrant discourse. For example Marine Le Pen famously stated on the night of Sarkozy's 2007 presidential victory that the main line of demarcation between the Front National and the Centre Right was not the issue of immigration, but the question of 'Europe' and 'globalization' (see Startin, 2008b). Five years on, as party leader, she used opposition to the EU within the context of the global economic crisis as the main policy plank in her manifesto for the 2012 presidential elections, gaining an impressive 18

¹⁵ In the affluent suburban areas in north and south Holland and the south-east (Brabant and Gelderland) a majority of voters wanted the Treaty to be ratified. The most pro-Treaty cities were among the wealthiest in the Netherlands: Bloemendaal (60.6 per cent in favour), Heemstede (57 per cent in favour), Naarden (55 per cent in favour), Laren (53.6 per cent in favour) and Wassenaar (52.6 per cent in favour). With the exception of Utrecht, all larger cities voted in majority against the Treaty (<http://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/verkiezingsuitslagen.aspx>). However, when we look at the vote distribution within the larger cities, again we see a pattern whereby the most affluent neighbourhoods display higher levels of support for the Treaty, while the poorer neighbourhoods tended to vote against. For example, in the wealthy southern suburbs of Amsterdam (Apollobuurt, Vondelbuurt and Museumkwartier) and the affluent parts of the centre of the capital (Grachtengordel, Duivelseiland and Nieuwmarkt), more than 60 per cent of the population voted 'yes'. In the poorest parts of the city, such as Zuidoost and Noord, more than 70 per cent of the citizens rejected the Treaty (<http://www.parool.nl/home/EU-referendum/buurt.html>). In Rotterdam, a similar pattern is visible with the more deprived parts of the city (Spangen, Feijenoord, Crooswijk, Lombardijen and Oude Westen) voting overwhelmingly against the Treaty and the more affluent parts (Kralingen, Hilligersberg and Dijkzicht) voting in favour of ratification (<http://www.rotterdam.nl>).

¹⁶ See the EUProfiler data: <http://www.EUprofiler.eu>.

per cent of the vote in the first round; subsequently the FN won three seats in the French National Assembly in the legislative elections – a major breakthrough given the discriminatory nature of the two-round majority system in terms of smaller parties gaining representation.¹⁷

With regard to the Dutch case, on the back of the 2005 referendum campaign, Geert Wilders PVV emerged in the 2006 election (5.9 per cent) and almost tripled its support in the 2010 election, becoming the third largest party. Subsequently, the first-ever Dutch minority government of the centre-right VVD and CDA became dependent on the support of the PVV, forcing the traditional pro-EU elites of these mainstream parties to adopt Eurocritical or even obstructionist stances in Brussels (Schout and Wiersma, 2012, p. 1). In April 2012 the PVV flexed its *Euromondialist* muscles by refusing to accept EU demands for austerity to bring the Dutch budget deficit in line with EU rules, which resulted in the fall of the government. The PVV has made a Dutch exit from both the EU and the euro the core issue of the 2012 elections. The economic and financial crisis has allowed the PVV to link their anti-EU stance (within a global context) to previously typical ‘domestic’ issues such as income, pensions, taxation and housing. Thus, in the context of the crisis in the eurozone, this *Euromondialist* tactic is becoming a staple diet for radical right parties as they trawl in particular for blue-collar votes – witness the Austrian Freedom Party and the True Finns who have both recently enjoyed electoral success under the stewardship of charismatic leaders adopting high-profile, anti-EU/anti-globalization rhetoric.¹⁸

Conclusions

We argue that the two ‘no’ votes in France and the Netherlands in 2005 have had a very significant impact on the Eurosceptic debate in both these countries and across the EU as a whole. The results illustrate a widening gap (and one which continues to grow) between party elites and mass public opinion over the issue of European integration and demonstrate that mainstream political elites no longer seem able to persuade the French and Dutch publics that the EU provides a positive response to the negative economic and cultural consequences of globalization. In the same way that the 1992 Maastricht Referendums in Denmark and France (and the subsequent Treaty) contributed to a hardening of opposition to the EU at the mass level, in 2005 we have witnessed a similar development. Five years on from the referendum, only 46 per cent of French citizens believed that France had benefited from EU membership, compared to 54 per cent according to Eurobarometer 62 conducted in the autumn of 2004, six months prior to the referendum.¹⁹ Opponents of the EU are now also able to connect these anti-EU sentiments to the demand

¹⁷ Although Marine Le Pen narrowly missed out on being elected in the northern French town of Hénin Beaumont, polling 49.89 per cent, her niece Marion Maréchal-Le Pen was elected in the Vaucluse region of southern France in the seat of Carpentras Sud. Gilbert Collard was also elected in the Gard region and former FN member and mayor of Orange, Jacques Bompard, was elected as an assembly member in that town – with Marine Le Pen’s backing.

¹⁸ In the Vienna (where leader Heinz-Christian Strache has his base) elections for mayor, city council and district council, the FPÖ gained 26 per cent of the vote and 27 seats on the city council. In Finland, in the 2011 parliamentary elections the True Finns under Timo Soini’s leadership polled 19.1 per cent of the vote (an increase of 15 per cent compared to 2007), winning 39 seats in the Finnish parliament – making it the third biggest party.

¹⁹ Eurobarometer 74, Standard Eurobarometer, conducted autumn 2010, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb74/eb74_en.htm>; Eurobarometer 62, Standard Eurobarometer, conducted Autumn 2004, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb62/eb_62_en.pdf>.

for austerity measures emanating from Brussels, allowing them to combine pro-sovereignty arguments against the EU with 'welfare state chauvinism'. This broad anti-EU agenda, increasingly couched in a global context, has become increasingly popular, particularly among voters at the lower end of the education and income scales.

Related to this, another significant consequence of the 2005 referendums is that they appear to have contributed to a widening of the socio-economic cleavage with regard to attitudes towards the EU. The 2008 Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty is a pertinent example where the 'no' vote was 74 per cent among manual workers and the 'yes' vote was as low as 35 per cent among 18–24-year-olds (rising to almost 60 per cent among over-55s) (see Holmes, 2008). Perhaps the biggest challenge facing EU and domestic political elites over the next decade is how to convince younger voters and those from modest socio-economic backgrounds (often with low levels of education) that the EU can combine with domestic governments and act as a counterbalance to some of the negative socio-economic consequences of globalization, rather than merely acting as an agent which reinforces the process. With the cost of living noticeably on the rise across the EU and with youth unemployment hovering around 50 per cent in Spain and Greece and growing in France, the United Kingdom and Italy, it would appear that the argument is being lost, particularly as many citizens see tackling unemployment as one of the EU's major objectives.

The situation is even more unsettling for Europe's mainstream political elites due to the fact that the two referendums in 2005 in France and the Netherlands (and the two subsequent ones in Ireland in 2008 and 2009) have reignited the debate with regard to the role of referendums in the EU (see Schneider and Weitsman, 1996). Europe's citizens are becoming increasingly aware that referendums give them the power to slow down, derail and even call into question the whole process of European integration. Europe's political elites may now well be less keen on the idea of direct democracy in an EU context, but the same cannot be said for her citizens – witness the clamour for a referendum on EU membership in the United Kingdom in recent years.

The situation at mass level in 2005 has also contributed to the galvanization of Euro-sceptic political parties. Here we have focused primarily on radical right parties, who are increasingly deploying anti-EU and anti-globalization rhetoric to gain electoral mileage but there are similar developments on the radical left. In France the Front de Gauche candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon rejuvenated the French left's fortunes, polling 11 per cent by advocating a 'citizen's revolution' in a campaign full of anti-EU/anti-globalization sentiment and calling for economic protectionism and cultural nationalism. His electorate are largely drawn from the third category of 'no' voter identified in our discussion. In the Netherlands, the SP has been growing rapidly as a membership organization and is now also overtaking the PvdA in opinion polls as the major party on the left. Just like Pim Fortuyn (and now Wilders) have torn apart the centre-right and decimated the former dominant Christian Democrats, so the SP has dominated the discourse on the left against the 'austerity dictates from Brussels'. The sequence of elections in the Netherlands after 2005 for the national parliament in 2006 and 2010, as well as the European elections in 2009 have demonstrated a weakening of the pro-EU parties in electoral terms and an increasingly anti-EU rhetoric which is clearly helping parties previously on the margins to move into the mainstream. The outcome of the 2014 European elections is likely to put more pressure on pro-EU parties and their elites, with the radical right in particular likely to make gains.

The EU, and the role of the nation-state within it in an increasingly globalized world, has reached a critical stage. Faced with the socio-economic cleavage identified, a general increase in Euroscepticism, a steep rise in unemployment (particularly among the young), a growth in radical right parties and now a crisis in the eurozone, time is running out for pro-EU mainstream political elites. There is no doubt that the repercussions of the 2005 referendums are still being felt in France, the Netherlands and beyond. In France, the role of the EU in a wider global context was a crucial issue for all main candidates (and for millions of voters) in the 2012 French presidential election campaign. In the Netherlands in April 2012, Prime Minister Mark Rutte's government was forced to resign in a dispute over the Dutch EU budget contribution (an issue that was pushed initially to the forefront of the Eurosceptic debate at the time of the 2005 referendum), which will mean fresh elections and new opportunities for Eurosceptic political parties such as Wilders' PVV and the SP. The EU is at a crossroads and the next few years will be crucial to its overall direction and future. Failure to close the socio-economic cleavage identified, and to convince Europe's citizens of the merits of the EU's role in an increasingly globalized world, could cause irreparable damage to the future of the European project.

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