# The Shifting Focus of Opposition to the European Union

**Simon Usherwood**  *University of Surrey*

## Abstract

Using France and the UK as case studies, this paper discusses how the focus of groups opposed to European integration has changed over time. Such groups often claim to have a generalised or ideological opposition to the European Union, but in practice it is apparent that particular issues arouse most attention. The article covers the period since the mid-1980s, to show how the relative importance of different elements has changed over time, both for anti-EU group formation and changes in groups' activities. Most notably, this change has been informed by two key factors. Firstly, an incomplete (or biased) view of the EU system repeatedly draws groups' attention to otherwise minor topics, often taking them to be symbolic of wider developments (e.g. harmonisation of standards). Secondly, groups' interest is highest in projects when they are not fully decided (e.g. membership of the Euro or the constitutionalisation process since Laeken). The overall picture that emerges is one of groups rationally concentrating their efforts on targets that offer the most unambiguous case for an alternative policy at the point of greatest leverage in the policy-making cycle. This underlines the dynamic nature of opposition to the EU and the fundamental link between that opposition and the EU itself.

## Keywords

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It is tempting to think of those opposed to the European integration process as an uninformed and undifferentiated group of people, a thought best summed up in the pejorative connotations in the overly reductive term 'eurosceptic'. However, such an approach is clearly an over-generalisation, something noted by most academics working in the field (see Taggart & Szczerbiak 2001; Kopecky & Mudde 2002; Flood 2002; Skinner 2010; Vasilopoulou 2011). Just as there is recognition that not all opponents of the European Union (EU) are the same, so too there needs to be a more careful appreciation of the evolutionary development and adaptation of those involved. At its most basic, this requires some sense of change over time, as individuals and groups move in and out of various taxonomical categories. But it also requires some understanding of how the objectives, strategies and tactics of anti-EU groups have changed in of themselves: this article is directed at making just such a contribution.

The article focuses its attention on those organised groups within civil society that express positions of active opposition to the EU. This definition has two parts. Firstly, it encompasses both political parties and non-party groups, considering both to be important parts of the mobilisation and conduct of public debate: the latter have been largely ignored by researchers to date (Koopmans 2007 and FitzGibbon 2013 are exceptions). Secondly, it sets a threshold for inclusion of active opposition, and so is tight enough to exclude more overtly opportunistic elements, those for whom scepticism is little more than a sideshow to their primary goals. In both these elements, the resultant sets of groups can justifiably be described as the effective anti-EU movement within their respective countries.

While such movements extend beyond party politics, it is important to draw a distinction from research on social movements (e.g. McCarthy and Zald 1977; Della Porta and Diani 2006; Tarrow 2011). While this does offer some insights – as are noted throughout the article – the anti-EU 'movement' is defined by a negative, rather than a common interest and so social movement literature needs to be handled with care. Tarrow (1998) does identify a europeanization of popular contention, but this is grounded in a sub-set of actors, namely trade unions, that raise a question of general applicability. Moreover, the inclusion in this paper for political parties sets it apart from other studies, which tend to consider these as operating in a different political space, a view which seems particularly

inappropriate in this context, given the deep interaction between party and non-party groups and the limited structure for opposition in the EU (Neunreither 1998; Usherwood 2002).

In order to produce a robust catalogue of all groups that fall under the scope of this work, a multi-stage process was followed. Working from an initial survey of existing directories of groups – more common in the UK (e.g. European Movement 2000) than France – a new catalogue was built up, since such catalogues are incomplete or out-of-date. Firstly, all links on groups' websites to other groups were followed and double-checked with general internet searches. Secondly, a systematic survey of academic literature on the two countries was examined for further group activity. Thirdly, there was a systematic survey of press media coverage, using the Lexis-Nexis database, for any and all references. This last element forms the basis for evaluating the active nature of a group's opposition, as opposed to a simple declaration.

In the first section of the paper, some theoretical approaches to the subject will be laid out. The starting point is the observation that most groups actively opposed to the EU do not have uniform interests across the range of Union activities. Instead, they almost all tend to focus on particular elements (be it institutions, policies or policy areas). This is most apparent in groups focused exclusively on one element (such as the anti-euro groups in the UK), but it also holds for those whose primary concern is withdrawal. This observation serves as a foundation for the construction of a framework that enables us to look at how the anti-EU movement has changed its focus, both in terms of the creation of new groups and shifts in the interests of existing ones.

This is followed by an analysis and discussion of groups' activities since the mid-1980s. France and the UK are used as illustrative case studies, reflecting as they do very different patterns of group formation and development. In France, most anti-EU activity has been found within political parties, while in the UK the focus has been much more on non-party groups; a difference that essentially reflects the differing institutional opportunity structures present in each national political system (c.f. Della Porta and Diani 2006). It is important to note the national specificities of the debate on the EU in the two countries do differ. This is most evident when looking at policy areas where national policy is divergent (e.g. the Euro), but for both the broad pattern of development and the more low-profile policy areas, there is much in common, and this is reflected in the formation and activity of groups: while they reflect national preoccupations, they are also fundamentally tied into the development of the Union itself, which cuts across national boundaries. The article therefore will draw attention to both similarities and divergences between the two cases. Indeed, in this analysis it will become apparent that anti-EU groups have been particularly interested in certain types of project, revealing themselves to be actors with clear awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and with a clear idea of the EU policy cycle.

## THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

'Opposition to the European Union' clearly covers a multitude of attitudes, interests and programmes of action. In order to access this variety, it is helpful to identify key elements that might shape the objects of opposition. This differs from the question of the strength of opposition, to which the article will return later and is discussed more fully elsewhere (e.g. Taggart & Szczerbiak 2001; Kopecky & Mudde 2002; Flood 2002; Skinner 2010; Vasilopoulou 2011).

The 'North Carolina School' (Hooghe 2007; Hooghe & Marks 2007, 2009 Mudde 2011) focus on ideology as the determinant of groups' positions on European integration, in order to differentiate potential underlying motivations. All groups have particular, localised concerns: every group dislikes the EU as it stands for some reason and that

reason will be reflected in particular points of friction. The reason can come from any number of quarters, but the effect is still the same. In practice, the main clusters of stated reasons tend to be located around individuals' political economy, or to the psychological impact on their lives, or to the inadequacies of existing opposition groups (see Hooghe & Marks 2005). This is evident in the focus around specific clusters of policy-based opposition. Firstly, there are policies that have a clear economic impact on individuals, such as the Common Fisheries Policy. Secondly, there are policies that have symbolic importance, such as the use of metric measures in the UK. EMU falls somewhere in-between these two, given both its obvious economic impact and its psychological dimension (e.g. Risse *et al.* 1999). This division between economic and symbolic matches the variety of explanations put forward for public opinion: as Gabel (1998) has shown, utilitarian models offer a robust explanation of the latter.

The left's critique of integration clearly centres on a fear of a threat to its constituency and the basis for its national organisation (Halikiopoulou *et al.* 2012). Indeed, this might explain the somewhat ambiguous stance of the PCF in the mid-1990s, when it was opposed to EMU, but was in favour of European monetary stability (Greffet 2001). In the UK, the Labour Euro-Safeguard Campaign's (n/d) opposition to EMU is founded on resultant cuts to public investment in the welfare state and the potential for increased unemployment in certain regions of the eurozone. But perhaps the most forceful example of the left's critique of the integration comes from the *Comité pour l'Abrogation du Traité de Maastricht* (1999):

> 'For seven years, the people of Europe have had the painful experience of the application of the Maastricht treaty. No area has been untouched: privatised public services; land put in fallow to prevent the farmers from producing; fishermen stopped from fishing; young people, to whom one gives skilled work, unemployed; workers laid off; a dismantled system of social protection; wage moderation imposed by the European Central Bank on both the active and the retired; pension plans threatened; the educational system called into question.'

If the left is preoccupied with the effects of the EU on workers and welfare systems, then the right is concerned primarily with the question of sovereignty. On the far right, this manifests itself as opposition to the development of European policies on immigration and security and, in the French case, voting rights for EU nationals in elections.[1] For the mainstream right, issues of national self-determination are prominent. For example, the *Union Populaire Républicaine* (2007) announces that 'Frenchmen & women of all ages and backgrounds have decided to found a Popular Republican Union (UPR) in order to re-establish France's independence, to give the French people back their liberty, and to restore our country's historic role as the spokesman for the liberty of people and of nations around the world'. Similarly, the Thatcherite Conservative Way Forward (n/d) holds as a principle that '[e]ach nation must be free to determine its policies to the benefit of its citizens', an echo of Margaret Thatcher's Bruges speech, where she held as her first guiding principle the idea that 'willing and active co-operation between independent sovereign states is the best way to build a successful European Community' (Thatcher 1998). Indeed, the four other principles that Thatcher outlined in her speech – practical Community policies, encouraging enterprise, avoiding protectionism and having a NATO-led defence – represent a checklist to which most right-wing groups in the UK – and, to a more limited extent, in France – could subscribe.

While left and right have developed distinctive critiques of the European integration process, the endpoint is very similar for both sides, as noted by Liesbet Hooghe & Gary Marks (2009) and Daphne Halikiopoulou *et al.* (2012). One of the key problems of building opposition groups has been the lack of common ground between actors, firstly in agreeing what the problems are and secondly on the solutions to those problems. However, this should not overshadow the fact that, in practical terms, both left and right are able to find common ground in disliking particular elements of the European Union. The best examples of these common elements are also, almost by definition, the largest:

the Maastricht treaty, the Euro and the Constitutional Treaty. Certainly, the very size of these elements requires at least some response from either side, given the potential impact on Europe's (and national) political economies.

The overlap of left and right also helps to understand a third category, that of ideologically "neutral/indeterminate" in both countries. These can be divided into two main types. Firstly, there are those groups that fall under the "neutral" heading. This is to say that they have never elaborated a position beyond that of opposing the European Union for reasons unspecified. This includes umbrella groups, those groups that are trying to distance themselves from political parties (e.g. *Alliance pour la Souveraineté de la France and Democracy Movement*) and sectoral opposition groups (e.g. the Bruges Group).

Secondly, there are those groups that are indeterminate in their position on a left-right spectrum, despite a more extensive elaboration of their position towards the European Union. These groups can be described as having a populist agenda, in the sense that they do not frame their programmes in anything more than a language of 'common sense', nor construct those programmes from first principles, as illustrated by the case of the UK Independence Party (UKIP 2010).

This section can be summarised in the form of Table 1 below. This table highlights the main points on the matter of groups' critiques, the objects of that critique and their form, on the basis of their position on a left-right spectrum. This emphasises that the main cleavage is not necessarily between left and right, but between those groups with clear ideological positions and those without. While left- and right-wing groups have different initial critiques, they share many of the same objects of those critiques and have very similar group form characteristics. By contrast, groups with a neutral or indeterminate position often lack fundamental critiques, have a more diverse set of EU elements that they oppose and almost entirely shun party forms.

*Table 1: Characteristics of groups classified by ideological standpoint*

|  | **Left** | **Neutral/Indeterminate** | **Right** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Critique** | EU as threat to workers and to democratic system | Often unclear or imprecise | EU as threat to national sovereignty and independence |
| **Objects of Critique** | EMU, Maastricht, Constitutional Treaty, Internal Market | EMU, Maastricht, Constitutional Treaty, sectoral policies | EMU, Maastricht, Constitutional Treaty, immigration & asylum policy, defence policy |
| **Group Form** | Mainly party and intra-party | Mainly non-party | Mainly party and intra-party |

The taxonomy highlights the particular interests and focuses that individual groups possess (see the Appendix for a full listing of relevant groups in the UK and France). Regardless of ideological position or of suggested remedy, all anti-EU groups point out specific elements for their consideration. As has already been mentioned, the EU as a whole is too complex and too far-reaching for a generalised (in the sense of being non-specific) opposition to be sustainable. This is true even in the case of the radical right, whose concerns usually centre on the primacy of EU law, human rights, immigration and Article 18 TFEU (non-discrimination on the basis of nationality) rights (e.g. British National Party n/d, *Mouvement National Républicain* n/d).

Moreover, there is also a separation of ideology and specific objects of opposition, as seen in Table 1. Groups have ideas about why they oppose the EU in its current form, often relating to wider ideologies or to specific economic concerns. This is important because if a specific object of opposition did not exist, then others would potentially take its place. This is not to suggest that groups will oppose the EU whatever it does, but rather that as the EU evolves, so different elements will change in importance for those groups. It must be questioned whether this holds true for all groups, especially those that have only narrow, sectoral concerns, since it may well be that prior to the development of that sectoral policy (and after its "successful" reform) that such groups are not mobilised at all.

Consequently, we would expect the focus of opposition to the European Union to change over time. This is due to two, interrelated factors. Firstly, the EU is a system in a state of expansionary flux. This has been true since the start of the integration process in the 1950s, but has become particularly marked in the period since the Single European Act, as exemplified by the succession of system-revising and –enlarging treaties. This is important because it has provided repeated new opportunities for anti-EU elements to become mobilised and work against those developments. This leads to the second factor, namely the separation between groups' wider interests (ideological or economic) and the specific objects of their opposition. In the case of those groups that espouse ideological positions (in the broadest sense), it would be expected that the changing EU system will provide new specific policies and events that will draw such groups' attention and activity. For those groups without such ideological positions, interest, mobilisation and activity will be driven by threats to economic well-being (for sectoral groups) or perceived resonance with wider constituencies (for populists).

Consequently, when we look at the development of anti-EU opposition in France and the UK in the following section, we would expect to see shifts in focus on the part of groups with ideologies, as well as populist groups, alongside which there should be the development of new sectoral groups, reflecting the changing EU system. This will be operationalised in the first instance by considering the timeline for the foundation of anti-EU groups, since this almost always reflects the point of maximum mobilisation of individuals and resources: the only notable example of a group that formed during the period which developing significantly beyond its original base is UKIP. It is then further enriched with other data on groups' activities.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF OPPOSITION TO THE EU

There is a clear evolution over time in the focus and practice of anti-EU activity. The concerns of the late 1980s differed from those of the early 1990s and both again from those of the present day. This is not to say that there is no continuity (witness the continuing struggle of *Chasse-Pêche-Nature-Traditions* (CPNT) over hunting directives, which span the entire time-frame), but rather that a significant proportion of anti-EU activity has moved in its focus over time. This is true for all of the different types of group outlined in the first section. As Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate, there has been a steady progression since the late 1980s, in terms of primary motivation for anti-EU group formation or commencement of anti-EU policy by pre-existing groups.

*Figure 1: UK anti-EU groups by primary motivation for formation or commencement of anti-EU policy, 1989-2012*
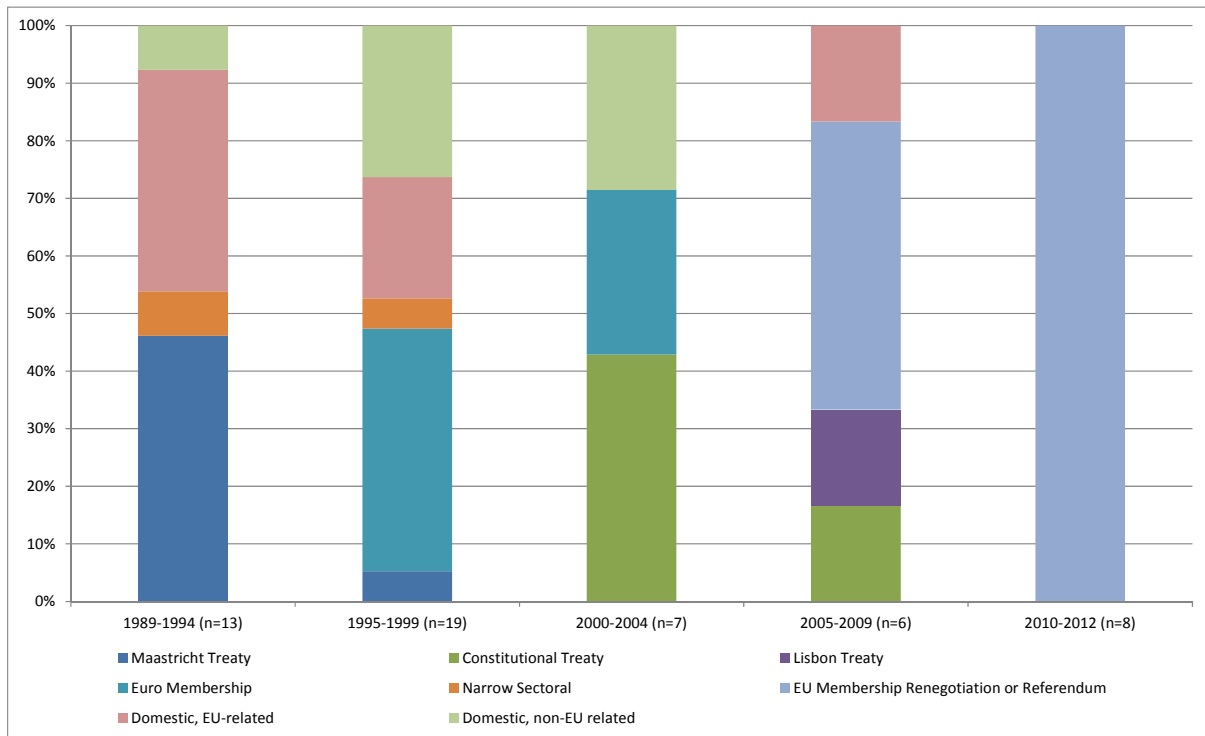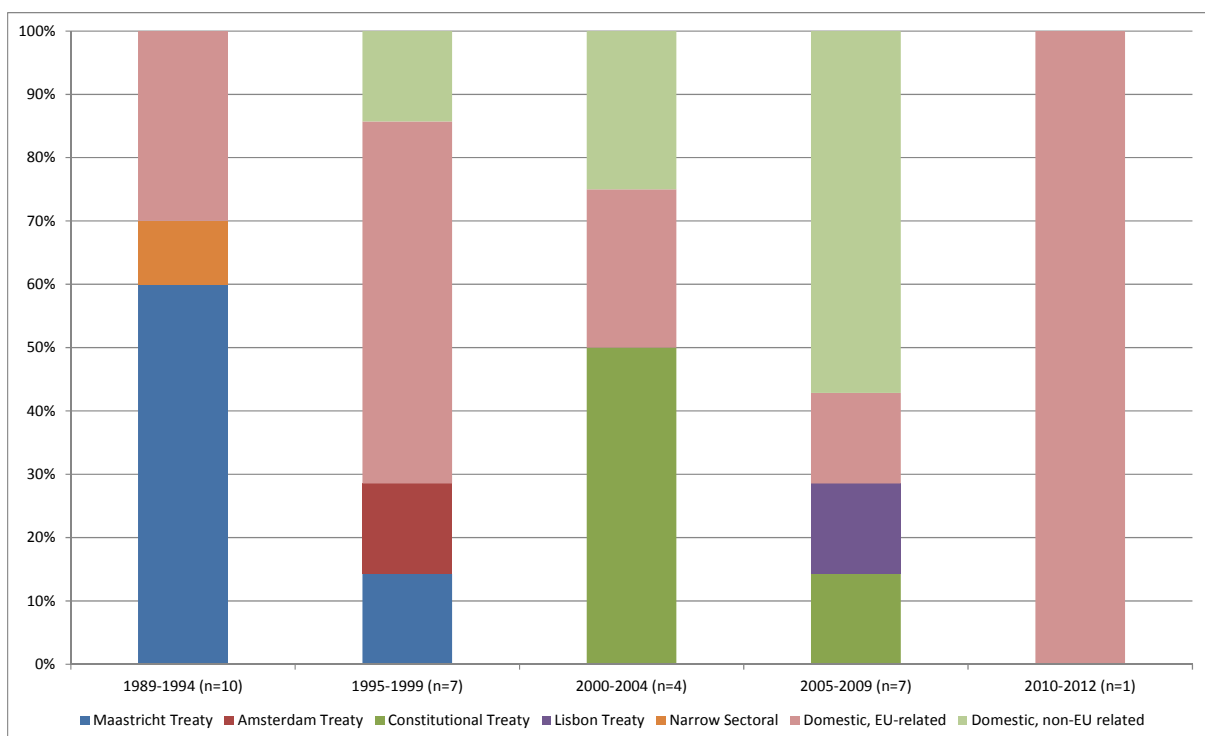


*Figure 2: French anti-EU groups by primary motivation for formation or commencement of anti-EU policy, 1989-2012*

The data in these Figures is based on the lists in the Appendix, excluding only those groups that formed anti-EU platforms prior to 1989.[2] It categorises groups on the basis of the primary motivation for their creation (for new groups) or commencement of an anti-EU platform (for pre-existing groups). Groups are only listed once, for simplicity: although this is somewhat reductionist, in practice it creates very few problems. The most obvious is the British Conservative Party, which is dated here at 1997 for commencing an anti-EU policy, since prior to this date there was no such official policy, notwithstanding Thatcher and Major's assorted pronouncements: it was only once in opposition that year that the party would integrate that policy more fully.

The overall pattern displayed in the data is one of a cyclical development of groups and their focus. The 1990s saw a large number of groups being mobilised in both countries, in response to the Maastricht Treaty and the ensuing project of EMU, followed by a slower pace of group activation. It is possible to link this changing volume to the parallel rise and fall in public interest in the EU as an issue that emerged through the 1990s (see Ipsos-Mori n/d for UK data), but just as evidently it can been seen that national debates on European integration have been the primary frame of reference. Thus, political ambivalence in the UK about first euro membership and then membership of the EU itself have provided fertile conditions for groups to develop as agents in the ensuing public debates, while in France the effective political space has focused much more around treaties and their ratification. As will be argued below, within this general understanding we can discern much specific patterns of activity within the policy-cycle, but it is important to note here that the topics (in the general sense) emerge from national contexts.

The Figures also hide the consistent increase in the number of individuals mobilised in both cases. Since the mid-1990s there has always been at least one group in each country with a significant membership of active participants: The Referendum Party, Democracy Movement and then UKIP in the UK; the RPF and FN in France (Usherwood 2004 provides data on this). Even as the organisational arrangements change, anti-EU groups appear to have been able to maintain the engagement of tens of thousands of people, thereby securing an important source of funding, labour and policy advocates.

Beyond these general considerations, more specific comments can be made of a first set of groups – those with sectoral concerns - which are broken down into membership of the Euro and narrower policies in Figures 1 and 2. Here the shift in focus does not occur primarily within groups, but between them. Given that in no case has there been a reform of policy that satisfies any given sectoral group, over time there is an increasing number of relic organisations. Such groups still maintain a certain level of activities - especially if they represent an economically affected body of people - but in general terms such activities will not match the initial wave that follows a group's foundation (see also Snow & Benford 1992). This is due in part to increasing costs (both financial and temporal), but also to the general lack of success that confronts those first attempts. This tends to result either in a hunkering-down, i.e. waiting for a more propitious window of opportunity, or in a deflection into more systemic opposition (see Neunreither 1998). Consequently, interest lies primarily with the creation of new sectoral groups. In this, it is the blossoming of numerous anti-EMU groups that is most visible. Despite EMU having being publicly discussed for several decades, not to mention officially negotiated since 1988, it was only in 1997 that the first explicitly anti-EMU groups began to appear in the UK. The reason for this is clear enough: the election of the Labour government in that year suddenly brought the prospect of British membership much closer. However, in France it was to be 2001 before any group mobilised solely against the issue, despite French membership having been a political given from the outset. Nonetheless, the development of such groups in both countries does mark a clear change from the more parochial concerns of hunters, fishermen and supporters of imperial weights and measures, a development only underlined by the widespread mobilisation during the Constitutional Treaty process in the mid-2000s. In that case, there was a notable change

in approach, with anti-EU campaigners working alongside pro-EU groups to push for popular ratification of the Treaty, albeit with opposite outcomes in mind (e.g. Ivaldi 2006).

The second set of groups is that expressing identifiable positions on the ideological spectrum. As anticipated, these groups have shifted their focus of opposition during the study period, without noticeably shifting their ideological position. This is particularly apparent in France, where party-based groups have been most developed. The continuity of ideological position is evident in those groups created by, and centred on Philippe de Villiers. The aims of L'Autre Europe in the 1994 European elections (Gaullism and neo-nationalist positions) closely match those of today's MPF. However, the objects of opposition have shifted. In 1994, the focus lay rather narrowly on opposing the single currency, Community preference in trade and retaining exclusive national citizenship, while today's more comprehensive programme focuses on flexible cooperation, subsidiarity, migration and other home affairs matters (Benoit 1997: 59). Similarly, while Rassemblement Pour le Non was focused on foreigner's voting rights and reduced border controls during the 1992 referendum, its ultimate successor, the Rassemblement pour la France et pour l'indépendance de l'Europe (RPFIE), now campaigns on economic growth, employment and federalism, while still retaining the Gaullist ideology of national sovereignty (Grunberg 2008).

In the UK, the Labour Euro-Safeguards Campaign (LESC) dates back to the time of the first British application to join the European Economic Community in 1962. While no archival material exists back to this stage in the group's existence, it is still possible to mark shifts in its interests since the late 1990s, through its regular bulletins (LESC n/d). During this period, the group has maintained a consistent interest in issues of transparency, corruption and the impact of integration on workers, but there has been a shift from discussion of British membership of the euro to debate on the functioning of the Eurozone and its impact on the UK. Moreover, the repeated cycles of treaty reform have also been marked by LESC, typically with an approach that each new stage of integration is either problematic for the UK or unworkable. The persistence of challenging British membership therefore finds expression and motive through a succession of specific policy and conjunctural occasions, allowing for a continual refreshing of an underlying conceptualisation.

*Figure 3: LESC Bulletin Topics, 1997-2012 (%)*
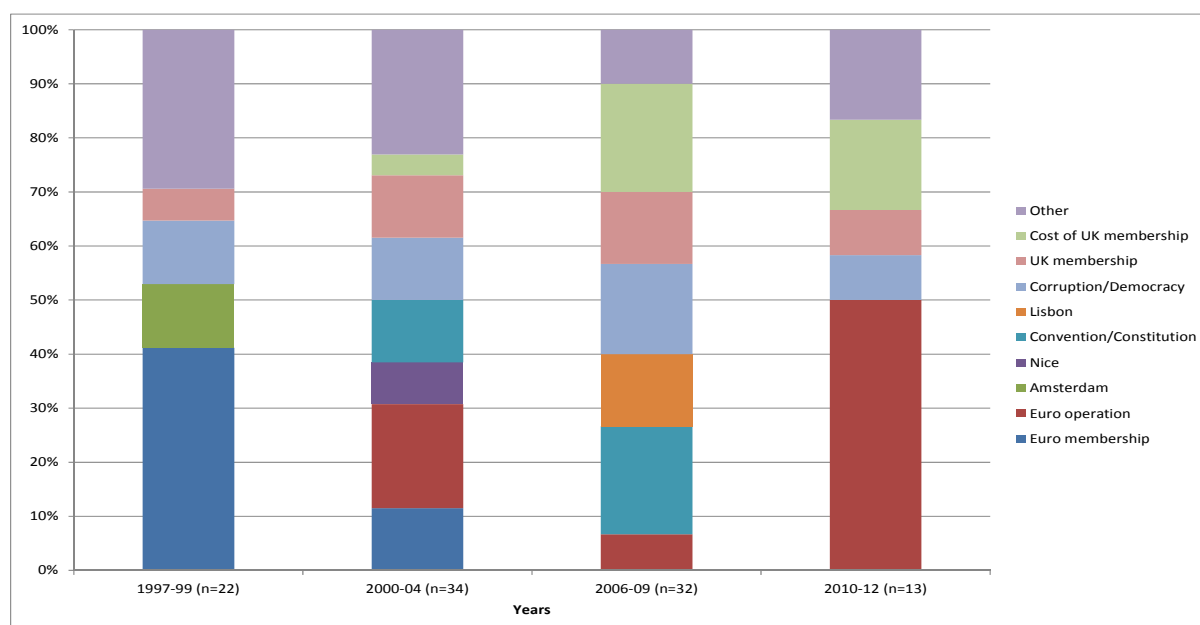
The third and final set of groups that merits inspection here – groups with indeterminate ideological positions – presents similar characteristics to the previous set. Despite the lack of ideological cohesiveness, these groups still display a changing set of interests over time: indeed, these groups represent the only clear set of long-run data that is available, in terms of concrete outputs. This is illustrated by the examples of the Bruges Group and the European Foundation. In the case of the former, we can see a shift in the focus of the group's activities by looking at its publications. The group has been one of the more prolific and consistent producers of anti-EU material during the 1990s and covers a wide range of issues (Bruges Group n/d). In the early years of its existence (roughly 1988-1991), the main focus was on the domestic politics that had helped to shape the group's foundation, the Single Market, the Exchange Rate Mechanism and the Common Agricultural Policy. That focus has since shifted to economic governance, democratic legitimacy and trade policy. Indeed, as Figure 4 shows, it is possible to discern several waves over the past quarter-century, moving in time with the evolution of the Union itself.

*Figure 4: Publications of Bruges Group, 1989-2012, by main topic (%)*
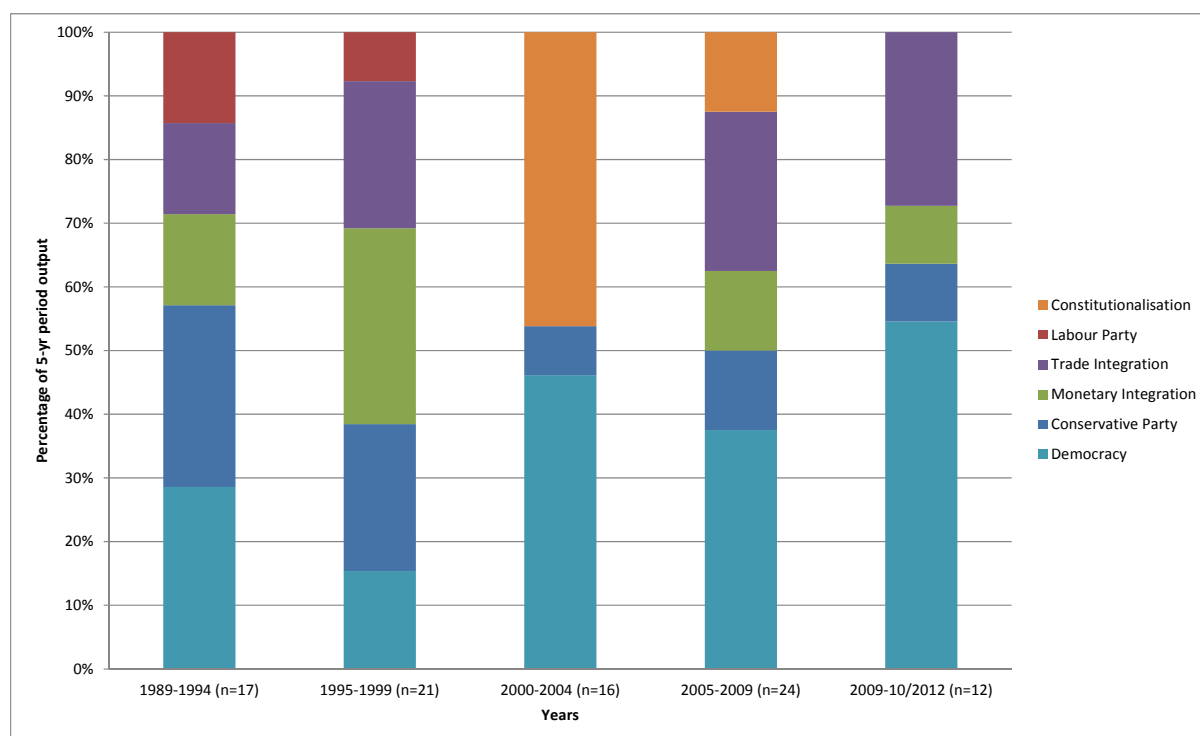


Likewise, the European Foundation has published an in-house journal on a regular basis since the early 1990s (European Foundation, n/d). Early editions dealt with concerns about EU financing and avoiding British re-entry into the Exchange Rate Mechanism. At the turn of the millennium, there was a range of interests, from asylum policy to the role of the British parliament in EU decision-making and through to privacy legislation. By contrast, the most recent issues have included pieces covering the Eurozone crisis and fiscal union, energy taxation and border controls.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE SHIFT IN FOCUS

The evidence that is available clearly points towards changes over time. The nature and scope of this shift bears some further discussion, since it reveals some important aspects of the opposition movement. The first observation is that groups frequently appear to highlight issues that receive very little interest elsewhere at that time. From imperial weights and measures to Corpus Juris to regionalisation, anti-EU groups have been very active in picking up, and raising the public profile of, many seemingly technical points: the European Foundation (n/d) is the most recent proponent of this approach. This warrants several comments itself. Perhaps most importantly, it reveals a characteristic of many such groups, namely a tendency to catastrophise. What ties together these diverse points is their position as gateways into whole new fields of EU activity. Metrification is seen as the end of distinctive national cultures and practices, Corpus Juris opened the way to a single legal system and regionalisation the end of national governments. This highly teleological approach results from the strong sub-current in anti-EU thought – the creation of 'a country called Europe' – which is particularly prevalent in the UK (see Gowland *et al.* 2010). European integration is seen as a process with a clear end-point that will be achieved by hook or by crook. Hence, it is the duty of anti-EU groups to highlight when such developments occur, otherwise the door will have been opened and it will be too late.

This leads to a second comment, concerning levels of knowledge. In order for such a watchtower role to be effective, groups need to possess a clear sight of what is actually happening in the EU. One of the major developments within the movement since the 1990s has been precisely such an autonomous capacity to accumulate, evaluate and disseminate information. This is seen in the creation of umbrella groups, which create webs of contacts between individuals and groups, on both national and European levels and of specialised research driven groups, such as the European Foundation or Global Britain. In so doing, the anti-EU movement has been highly successful in optimising its resources, to its lasting benefit.

The second overall observation concerns the point of concentration of groups' activities during the policy cycle. This is most apparent with major policy developments, such as the Maastricht treaty, EMU or the Constitutional Treaty, which had long cycles of discussion, negotiation and implementation (see Figures 1 and 2). As was noted in the first section of this paper, such large projects tend to draw the attention of anti-EU groups, albeit for a wide variety of ideological and practical reasons, not least of which is a desire to remain relevant actors in the evolving (if generally weak) public debate. However, given the restraints on resources that most opposition groups face, it is necessary for them to focus their efforts where they are likely to have the greatest impact, rather than employing a scattergun approach.[3] In practical terms, this means that groups are most active in the policy-making cycle before decisions are completed (an observation that reinforces Rochon & Mazmanian's (1993) findings on the relative ease of inclusion into new policies, as compared to policy change; see also Meyer 2004).

More particularly, groups appear to be interested in pushing their preferences at two clear points in the cycle. The first has already been discussed above, namely when policy ideas are first floated: here it might be expected that policy preferences are relatively open and unfixed, giving opposition groups the opportunity to create a credible alternative pole to any incipient policy development. If this occurs right at the beginning of the policy-cycle, then the second main area comes significantly later. While the anti-EU movement is more convinced than most of the reality of a European superstate, as discussed before, then there is also a very realist approach to the role of national governments and parliaments. In both countries, groups focus much of their attention and efforts on influencing national politicians, as most vividly demonstrated in 1992-3 by the wave of opposition to Maastricht. Then, opposition was not directed at the IGCs that had preceded the final text, but rather at national ratification processes: This was also clearly the case with other member states (Denmark, Germany, etc.) and with other

treaty ratifications (e.g. Amsterdam in France, Nice and Lisbon in Ireland, etc.). The need for unanimous ratification opens up the EU system to political actors who are less likely to be socialised into that system or less concerned about the need for its development, especially if it comes at the perceived price of a reduced role for those national actors (see Hobolt 2007 and Glencross and Trechsel 2011).

This strategy reached its apotheosis with the defeat of the Constitutional Treaty in the 2005 referenda in France and the Netherlands. The Convention on the Future of Europe failed to generate much interest on the part of anti-EU groups, at least those not directly involved (see Usherwood 2007). It might appear strange that opposition groups push most where there was the best access to the decision-making process, especially given the Convention's approach, but it reflected the inevitable ratification that would have to follow the Convention, particularly given the pressure that resulted in a proliferation of national referenda (including France and the UK). By using arguments demanding more democracy, pro-referenda campaigners (both pro- and anti-EU) were able to side-step traditional barriers to their involvement (see Laursen 2008). Even if French voters were motivated as much as by concerns over domestic politics as the Treaty itself (Krouwel & Startin 2013), it still represented a major achievement for anti-EU elements, albeit one tempered by the re-emergence of the Treaty's substance in the Lisbon Treaty.

Similar issues and factors were also apparent when looking at anti-EMU opposition in the UK. During the Maastricht ratification, EMU played a relatively minor role in groups' critiques, largely because of the opt-out that had already been secured and instead broader issues of national sovereignty and the loss of parliamentary rights predominated (Baker *et al.* 1994). However, as the 1997 general election loomed – with its anticipated switch to an ostensibly pro-EMU Labour government – so anti-EMU groups began to crystallise. First there was the effort of the Referendum Party to monopolise the issue from the start. Its failure to secure a parliamentary majority (or indeed any seats) was balanced by its success in gaining assurances from all sides of a referendum on membership, which resulted in a slew of groups being formed from 1997 onwards to organise any 'no' campaign.

In France, the strong political commitment to EMU membership on both right and left (as seen in the 1997 *Assemblée* elections) essentially stifled anti-EU groups playing on the issue after Maastricht ratification had been secured (Stone 1993). Certainly, the anti-EMU groups that sprang up in 2001 were very small and had only a marginal public profile, lacking as they did the broader support of the anti-EU movement as a whole.[4] This reflects a more general perception across opponents of the Union that it is much easier to change policy that has yet to be implemented than it is policy that already exists as part of the status quo: certainly, in the UK it is not uncommon for the failure to win the 1975 referendum on continued British membership of the EEC to be attributed to this point. This relates back to the point made previously about limited resources, but also to how anti-EU groups perceive their opportunity structures.


**CONCLUSIONS**

This paper has tried to demonstrate that opposition to the European Union is a dynamic phenomenon, which requires a full understanding of the various interests and motivations of those involved. It has shown that there have been both macro- and micro-level shifts in focus by anti-EU groups, resulting from the interplay of the evolving EU system and the overarching ideologies that many groups hold. Together, these factors drive opposition groups to continually modify their activities, in order to maximise their influence.

As was noted in the previous section, opposition groups present certain features in common in this respect. They are much more alert to any potential structural expansion

of the European Union than either the general public or even elites (who have traditionally been seen as drivers of integration): the anti-EU information dissemination infrastructure across Europe is one of the most developed outside of government and academic circles. Moreover, anti-EU groups appear to have adopted a rational strategy of maximising their limited resources to focus on policies and points in the policy cycle when they have the best opportunity to exercise some leverage. In this, they resemble other instances of social movements engaged in 'contentious politics' (Tarrow 2011).

This is not only true for groups' focuses, but also from their strategies. One example will suffice to illustrate this point. UKIP has adapted itself since its foundation in 1992 to its changing circumstances, most notably in its electoral strategy. Initially, the party had a clear policy of not accepting any seats that it might win in the European Parliament, as a mark of its lack of constitutionality: Money normally paid to MEPs would be returned to the taxpayer. However, from 1997 onwards, following a change in leadership, party policy changed so as to accept seats in the Parliament, in order to gain a platform, expose fraud and mismanagement and report on the EU's activities: MEPs would only take minimum expenses and give the rest to help fund anti-EU activities. Since the party's successes from 1999 onwards, even this cautious policy has been pushed further aside, as new opportunities have presented themselves. This shift reflects a shift in the nature of what the party was trying to do: essentially, the failure of a fundamentalist approach helped to generate the shift to a more realistic strategy (see Usherwood 2006 and 2008 for an elaboration of this 'fundi/realo' dilemma).

In brief, our understanding of anti-EU groups needs to move away from pejorative models of opposition as a necessary residual part of the population that is impossible to accommodate within the Union system and to start recognising that such groups are not only a necessary consequence of integration, but that they can also shed light upon the process. By studying their actions and interests, it is possible to discern where the active boundaries of the integration process lie: groups tend to focus on those areas where the EU presents a credible and consequential policy. For instance, there are no groups opposed to a Union foreign policy, and are unlikely to be until such a policy develops further. By recognising this fundamental link between the Union and its opponents, we might improve our understanding of both.

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1 Nicholas Startin (1997: 103) noted these three areas as the main focuses of the Front National during the 1990s. The British National Party discusses membership primarily as a block to political and economic freedom, but also implies a repatriation of immigration policies as a priority. The BNP's opposition to the EU is best seen as a strategic choice, designed to bolster public support, but which also allows the party to achieve other goals (Ford & Goodwin 2010).

2 These groups are: Anti Common Market League, British National Party, Conservative European Reform Group, Green Party and National Front, in the UK; *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* and *Lutte Ouvrier* in France.

3 Resources in both France and the UK, in both financial and leadership terms, have tended to be concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of people (e.g. Paul Sykes, James Goldsmith, Philippe de Villiers, Jean-Paul Bled, etc.). Other sources of funding (from the state for French parties, and from small private contributions in the UK) have proved irregular and unreliable for the most part, hence partly explaining the high level of coordination of anti-EU work in both countries.

4 Interviews with RPF and MPF officials in 2002 indicated that they saw the issue as come-and-gone and so did not merit their particular interest.

**APPENDIX**

Anti-EU groups in France and the UK classified by ideological position and group form.

**Party**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Left | UK | Communist Party of Britain (1988/(1991)-)<br>Green Party (1974-)<br>Respect (2004-) |
| | France | Front de gauche (2008-)<br>Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (1974-)<br>Lutte Ouvrier (1939-)<br>Mouvement des Citoyens (1991-2002)<br>Mouvement républicain et citoyen (2003-)<br>Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste (2009-)<br>Parti Communiste Française (1943/(1991)-)<br>Parti de gauche (2008-)<br>Parti ouvrier indépendant (2008-) |
| Neutral /<br>Indeterminate | UK | Anti-Federalist League (1991-1992)<br>Democratic Party (1998-2005)<br>Freedom Democrats (2011-)<br>Have Your Say (2012-)<br>Referendum Party (1994-1997)<br>UK Independence Party (1992-)<br>Veritas (2002-) |
| | France | Libertas (2009-) |
| Right | UK | British National Party (1982-)<br>Conservative Party (1834/(1997)-)<br>National Democrats (1995-2011)<br>National Front (1967-) |
| | France | Chasse-Pêche-Nature-Traditions (1989-)<br>Demain la France (1996-1999)<br>Front National (1974/(1988)-)<br>L'Autre Europe (1994-1994)<br>Mouvement National Républicain (1999-)<br>Mouvement pour la France (1994-)<br>Parti de la France (2009-)<br>Rassemblement pour la France et l'Independence de l'Europe (1999-)<br>Rassemblement pour l'indépendance de la France (2003-)<br>Souveraineté, indépendance et libertés (2011-) |

Note: Dates of operation for each group are as follows: year of establishment/(year of start of active EU policy, if later than establishment) – year of end of operations (if applicable). Source: groups' websites and literature.

### *Intra-party*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Left | UK | Labour Against the Euro (2003-2004)<br>Labour Euro Safeguards Campaign (1995-)<br>People's Europe Campaign (1996-1997)<br>Trade Unions Against the Single Currency (1997-2002) |
| | France | Comité national pour le Non à la Constitution européenne (2005-2005) |
| Neutral | UK & France | -- |
| Right | UK | Anti Common Market League (1961-2009)<br>Conservative European Reform Group (1980-1993)<br>Conservative Way Forward (1991-)<br>Conservatives Against a Federal Europe (1996-)<br>Fresh Start Group (2012-)<br>Get Britain Out (2009-) |
| | France | Combat pour les Valeurs (1991-1994)<br>Debout la République (1999)<br>Rassemblement pour le Non (1991) |

### *Non-party*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Left | UK | Campaign Against Euro-Federalism (1992-)<br>No2EU – Yes to Democracy (2009-) |
| | France | Comité pour l'Abrogation du Traité de Maastricht (1997-1999) |
| Neutral / Indeterminate | UK | Anti Maastricht Alliance (1993-2003)<br>Alliance against the European Constitution (2004-2005)<br>British Weights and Measures Association (1995-)<br>Bruges Group (1989-)<br>Business for Sterling (1998-2000)<br>Campaign for an Independent Britain (1989-)<br>Congress for Democracy (1998-2008)<br>Democracy Movement (1998-)<br>EU Referendum Campaign (2009-2010)<br>European Foundation (1993-)<br>Federation of Small Businesses (1974/(1990)-)<br>Global Britain (1998-)<br>New Alliance (1997-2008)<br>New Europe (1997-2000)<br>No (1999-2001)<br>Open Europe (2005-)<br>People's No Campaign (2005-2005)<br>People's Pledge (2011-)<br>Save Britain's Fish (1990-2003)<br>Vote No (2004-2005)<br>Vote UK Out of EU (2010-)<br>Youth Against the European Union (1995-1998)<br>Youth For a Free Europe (1999-2005) |
| | France | Alliance pour la Souveraineté de la France (1998-2002)<br>Etats Généraux de la Souveraineté Nationale (1998-1998) |
| Right | UK | Britain Out of Europe Campaign (2002-2002)<br>European Research Group (1993-2001)<br>The Freedom Association (1975/(1991)-) |
| | France | Action Française (1898/(1991)-)<br>Combats souverainistes (2001-2002)<br>Demain la France (1991-1996)<br>Gardons le Franc (2001-2001) |

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