Resisting Europe: Protest and Opposition in the EU

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WORKING PAPER: Resisting Europe: Protest and opposition in the EU

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Abstract

Protest, demonstrations and social unrest have been increasingly prevalent across the European Union. European citizens appear ever more discontent with their national governments and with ‘Europe’. Reforms and policies aimed at countering the challenges of the economic crises and increased global competition are met by strong public opposition. Recent student movements protesting against educational reforms, strikes and massive anti-austerity demonstrations in many European capitals, protest votes for extreme right or left political parties are just some of these manifestations. What translates dissatisfaction to protest and drives these collective actions? How is protest expressed in European politics and in the public sphere today? Who is protesting and against what? Is this growing opposition the result of socio-economic insecurity felt by European citizens due to Europe’s increasingly strained economic security and prosperity? Or, has Europe hit the limits of how much integration and diversity it can digest? As the current model of European economic liberalism is attacked by protest groups and populists from both left and right, how does this affect European democracy and the future of the European project?

Introduction

Protest and opposition to the European Union are stronger than ever before. Opposition has been growing steadily in intensity, it is expressed across wider sections of society, it is occupying a more central space in the public sphere and, most importantly, it is affecting politics and policies in Brussels and in all the national capitals.

Student movements violently protesting against educational reforms, strikes that immobilize countries for days in a row, massive anti-austerity demonstrations in many European capitals are some of the ways in which protest is being expressed. Protest votes for populist radical right wing parties or extreme-left wing parties are others. European citizens appear more discontent than ever with their national governments and with ‘Europe’.

In 2010, the Eurobarometer, which records European public opinion trends, recorded for the first time in its history, a situation where distrust in the EU outweighed trust. Distrust scored high across all member states. The countries that topped the ranks are predictable to an extent, but disconcerting just the same: the UK, a traditionally Eurosceptic country; Greece and Ireland, countries that have significantly benefited from EU membership but that have been undergoing one of their deepest crises post-World War II; and Germany and France, the two founding member states that have...
long been considered the driving engine of EU integration (See Table 1). Another alarming indicator is the high percentage who feel that the EU, as well as their country, are headed in the ‘wrong direction’ (Table 2).

Table 1

Source: Eurobarometer 74 (Feb 2011)

Table 2.

Source: Eurobarometer 74 (Feb 2011)

Liberal democracy in Europe is going through a rough patch, with trust low and pessimism high. Against this background, in this paper, I attempt to shed some light into what is driving the current popular unease in European politics.

1 Eurobarometer 74, (February 2011), p. 43.
http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb74/eb74_en.htm
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How is protest expressed in European politics and in the public sphere today? Who is protesting and against what? What is driving this opposition? Is it the result of socio-economic insecurity felt by European citizens as Europe's economic security and prosperity is being increasingly strained? Or, has Europe hit the limits of how much integration and diversity it can take in? As the current model of European economic liberalism is attacked by protest groups and populists from both left and right, how does this affect European democracy and the future of the European project?

Before turning to the various forms of opposition expressed in the EU, let us first take a look back at how we reached the current situation.

The EU: a success story in perpetual crisis

Most accounts and descriptions of the European Union’s course follow a narrative along these lines:

The history of European integration is an outstanding achievement. The European Union (EU) has contributed to building a community of democracy, peace, prosperity, human rights and solidarity; it has reunited the Old Continent destroyed twice by World Wars and harshly divided by the Cold War for almost half a century. Throughout the course of European integration, EU institutions’ role and influence, both direct and indirect, have expanded and spilled-over into practically every area of policy. For the first time in the continent’s history, sovereignty has been pooled, countries have voluntarily tied their economies and politics, a common currency has been created and the peoples of Europe have come closer together than ever before. Moreover, the EU has been an anchor of stability. It has served as a hope and a magnet for its neighbouring countries, transitioning from communism or conflict, aspiring to eventually join the club, and, it has been a pioneer of regional integration.

The road has been a bumpy one. In effect, the course of European integration has been driven, framed and shaped by a perpetual bras de fer between those considering that ‘more Europe’ would be beneficial, and those more reluctant of the transfer of sovereignty and less appreciative of Brussels’ increasing and widening decision-making power. This bras de fer has sometimes brought integration to a halt. At times it has led to creative ad hoc measures in order to by-pass opposition, and at other times, it has catapulted integration and enlargement forward in brave strides. It has led to an alternation between Euro-euphoria (more often than not doing more damage than good as it has left the capabilities – expectations gap gapping) and deep Euros-cises, periods of euro-scleroses and pessimism.

For Europhiles, European integration is perceived as a public good that strengthens democracy, social and political rights (Balme & Chabanet 2008: 1) and enhances the competitiveness of the European economy, domestic growth, and Europe’s international strength and presence. For Eurosceptics, the EU is an oligarchic, elitist process that serves the interests of specific influential minorities and more specifically big business, financial capitalism and a tedious ‘bureaucratic hegemony of a supranational technocracy’ (Balme & Chabanet 2008: 1).
In spite of its difficulties, the successes are numerous and impressive by any account. If we were to identify two or three flagship events, it would be the launch of the euro, the Schengen agreement, and the successive rounds of enlargement that reunified the divided continent. Building on these, European political elites decided to pursue the long declared goal of an ever closer union further, and transform the founding European treaties into a Constitutional one.

Then came the crises. Crisis from within and crises from outside that affected the Union deeply, making Europe less attractive, and risked making it more fragile and less relevant on the world scene. The failure to ratify the Constitutional Treaty, the effects of the global financial crisis, and the crises within the eurozone have had far reaching effects, shaking the foundations of the monetary union and provoking political deep rifts within the Union.

Crises have been part of European integration, indeed part of Europe’s history. It would be no exaggeration to say that Europe has been considered as being in a condition of perpetual crisis caused by perceived threats from within and from without. From within, the fragmentation of modern life, or the challenges to identity resulting from migration-related diversity, have caused deep anxieties. From without, the threat came from the Soviet Union during the Cold War, whereas today it is from the rising economic powers that are challenging Europe’s position in international politics.

The present crises, however, seem more far reaching than the previous ones. In the course of the past decade we have noted a particularly strong declinism and deep rooted anxiety coupling the threats from outside to the dangers of internal degeneration. Moreover, during these crises, we discovered that European citizens were no longer supportive of their leaders’ decisions on the future of European integration. European political leaders proved incapable of inspiring trust, support and enthusiasm for further integration and an ever closer Union (Tsoukalis and Emmanouilidis 2011).

From discreet support to vocal resistance

Throughout its course, European integration has progressed, evolved and muddled along thanks to the bargaining between those wanting more or less Europe, and between those wanting a more intergovernmental or a more federal Europe. In addition, European integration has been possible thanks to the infamous ‘permissive consensus.’ As Taggart and Szczerbiak have argued, “the development of European integration has relied on a more or less compliant European population. (...) European elites have been largely supportive of European integration and they have been able to assume at least mass acquiescence, if not support, on this issue for many years. But this assumption in a larger and more integrated European Union (EU) has become harder to sustain” (Szczerbiak & Taggart 2008: 1).

In effect, with the exception of the reluctant Europeans, namely the UK, Denmark and Sweden, there was a general acceptance, albeit an acceptance without particular enthusiasm, among European citizens of moving along the path towards a more
integrated, interdependent, political European Union. Initially, Europeans’ interest in the EU was scant, their understanding of it poor, and their connection with a European identity rather negligible. Gradually however, Euroscepticism, and Euro-reluctance grew. It is now a visible minority in all member states.

The turning point came with the process of ratification of the Maastricht Treaty. The difficulties in ratifying the Maastricht Treaty posed by the 1992 referenda were a fair indication of the growing public unease with the shape and direction of the European project. Over a decade later, the failure of the Constitutional Treaty after the ‘no-votes’ of the French and Dutch electorates, however, was a strong declaration that there was a deep rift between public opinion and Europe’s political elites, and a definite opposition to the kind of Europe that was being presented by the latter to the former. The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by two of the founding member states epitomized a growing mood of Euroscepticism that could be sensed more or less throughout the enlarged Union. Until that point, when approval of the European project had been explicitly demanded from European citizens through referenda (in France, Ireland and Denmark for example, or in the case of the accession referenda in many of the newer member states), it was almost always given.

In the two cases it was denied, namely in Denmark in 1992 and Ireland in 2001, after some negotiation a second round of voting brought the desired positive results. “More often, of course, consent was never explicitly demanded, and hence it was always assumed to exist. (…) There was a consensus in the sense that there was agreement across the political mainstream that European integration should be furthered, and it was permissive in the sense that the high levels of trust in the political elites during these years ensured that there was almost always popular deference to their commitments” (Mair, 2007: 1). In short, the summer of 2005 is taken by most as marking the end of the “permissive consensus;” indeed today, we are lacking both. There is little consensus, even among mainstream political elites, and not much of it is permissive. So what does this actually mean?

Balme and Chabanet have argued that this means that a significant part of the European public is not obtaining what it expects from European integration and disagrees with the orientations and outcomes of EU public policies. “As European integration does not fulfill citizens’ expectation and conflicts with their policy preferences, European democracy is clearly at stake in this process” (2008: 2). In effect, a number of indicators have been suggesting that the European polity has been ‘underperforming’ in democratic terms and that the European political system is in crisis.

3 ‘The EU institutions may increasingly impose policy choices in contradiction with those expressed through the channels of national political representation. If this is indeed the case, a European bureaucratic process restrains, distorts and conflicts with representative government in the member states. Alternatively, if EU policymaking is indeed driven by national governments and effectively controlled by supranational channels of democratic participation and political accountability, then the whole process of representative government in Europe fails to meet citizens’ expectations.’ In both cases, the democratic deficit is rather generalized to the whole of democratic institutions in Europe, and particularly at the level of the member states. (Balme & Chabanet 2008: 2).
First, political participation has been decreasing and changing. Turnout in national elections has been falling, while abstention, electoral volatility (i.e. the change in partisan preference expressed by voters from one ballot to the next) and partisan de-alignment of voters have been increasing. Second, electorates have been shifting their support from mainstream governing parties towards smaller parties that are either single-issue parties (i.e green parties) or that are reviving the extremes of the ideological spectrum on both the far left and far right. Third, since the 1990s we have noted across Europe a significant decrease in party membership and an increase in civic activism, particularly among young Europeans. The parliamentarization of the EC/EU (through the application of universal suffrage to the EP elections since 1979) was unable to compensate for the crisis of party democracy in the member states (Balme & Chabanet 2008: 6-7). Fourth, there has been a strong development of collective action\(^4\) over the past two decades aspiring towards more direct and participatory forms of democracy. Fifth, and following from the above, there has been an increase in protest behaviour since the 1970s.\(^5\)

Surveys on political participation have underlined the increase in protest behaviour manifested in activities such as petitions and boycotts (more common in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries) and demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, occupations and the stopping of traffic (in the southern European countries). This has been noted across Europe in parallel to claims of political apathy among European electorates, particularly among the younger generations (Balme & Chabanet 2008: 10-11). These collective actions have become more widespread and more frequent. They have come to occupy a strong position in the public sphere because of the role of the mass media and the Internet, and also because of the radicalization of many of these actions and the growing number of citizens from all socio-economic strata that have been joining in.

In June 1997, 50,000 people turned out to demonstrate at the Amsterdam European Summit, mobilized by the movement known as European Marches Against Unemployment, Job Insecurity and Social Exclusion (Balme & Chabanet 2008: 133). The march had been prepared by a group of activists, majority French from the far-left, who had travelled across the EU15 to mobilize unemployed and trade unions in this European march. Similar protests were held in the late 1990s at subsequent European Summits calling attention to the European character of the unemployment challenge and aiming to get issues relating to unemployment and job insecurity onto the European agenda. The unemployed taking part in these marches essentially made up a transnational coalition of actors who targeted the EU as a means through which to oppose government policies and put pressure on their national executives (Balme & Chabanet 2008: 135).

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\(^4\) Defined as the organization, promotion and defence of social interests, among which lobbying and social movement (protest) activities are the main manifestations (Balme & Chabanet 2008: 17, 21). 
\(^5\) Balme and Chabanet have argued that this may be interpreted as a consequence of the over-institutionalization of party representation and of interest groups. In addition, the saturation of the public sphere on the one hand and the crowding of the policy space on the other, have undermined linkages between social interests and organized groups, and are conducive to alternative processes in the definition of political issues (2008: 11).
It is however the European Social Forum first held in Florence in 2002, that took protest to a different level in Europe. The protesters are no longer the deprived or the excluded as in the case of the aforementioned marches of the unemployed. Rather, the majority are students, individuals with higher education qualifications and in many cases with stable public sector jobs, and intellectuals. The ESF expresses the discontentment of “rooted cosmopolitans” with a rich social and cultural capital and environmental activists (Balme & Chabanet 2008: 136). It has sprung out from the World Social Forum, bringing together social movements, trade unions, NGOs, refugees, peace and anti-imperial groups, anti-racist movements, environmental movements, networks of the excluded and community campaigns to discuss themes linked to major European and global issues.

This growing opposition and disconnect with further integration have normative implications for the democratic foundations of the European integration project. As mentioned above, the effects on EU policies and politics are increasingly noticeable, increasingly vocal and increasingly determined. For one, public opposition has effectively rejected and blocked the Constitutionalisation of Europe through the 2005 referenda. Second, Eurosceptic politicians have been directly elected into the European Parliament thereby granting them a formal and visible podium for their participation in the political debate at both the EU and national levels. Third, Euroscepticism has started to seep into the positions of member states’ governments, even in traditionally Europhilic states, as politicians have had to respond to Eurosceptic concerns of their public opinion (Sczczerbiak & Taggart 2008). Fourth, this distrust and dissatisfaction has been nurturing impressively transnational social protest movements as mentioned above.

The cat is out of the bag. Europe is resisted from its basis and opposition is evident at its core. Resistance to Europe is being expressed in the streets by demonstrations and strikes, and through the ballots.

**Opposing Europe**

So what are the forces that are driving the opposition we are observing in Europe today?

There are a number of ways through which we can tackle the question of what is driving resistance. We can examine the nature of the opposition that we are witnessing. Is it opposition in its classical form, where those not in government oppose and offer alternatives to the policies pursued by the government while recognizing the right of that government to govern? Or, is it an opposition of principle whereby objection is not directed only against the government and its policies but against the entire system of governance (thereby denying its legitimacy)? In short, is it an opposition to the policies promoted at the EU level or to the EU polity itself? Is it

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7 Where classical opposition is constrained, political actors/critics either submit (thereby leading to an elimination of opposition), or they mobilize around an opposition in principle (generally leading to revolt). See Otto Kirchheimer and Robert Dahl’s work *inter alia*. 
an opposition to a particular kind of Europe that is being constructed, and more specifically to a neo-liberal EU? Is it an opposition to the EU project as a whole and thereby a reluctance to pool and give up more sovereignty and a desire to return to the familiar boundaries of the nation-state? Would we consider this as an anti-system opposition, or a pro-system opposition if it expresses support for the status quo, or for the status quo ante? (Mair 2007: 4). Or, finally, is the EU packed together with globalization and in this case is it nothing more than opposition to yet another facet of neo-liberal globalization?

To tackle these questions it is necessary to understand how opposition has been expressed and which ideological backgrounds have framed the various forms of resistance that we are witnessing.

Protest and opposition have drawn from the following ideological backgrounds that feed into each other:

- Euroscepticism;
- Populism;
- Anti-globalisation; and
- Anarchism.

Euroscepticism is an elusive term that involves negative attitudes towards European integration (Vasilopoulou 2011: 224). Its roots lie in British political discourse and “its origins as a significant political force in French and Danish referendums on Maastricht, which opened up both elite political and academic discourses to the importance of public opinion in the process of integration” (reference to Susan Milner’s 2000 article in Sczczerbiak & Taggart 2008: 4). The term itself is problematic as it has become a blanket description referring to all sorts of oppositions. It may denote opposition to the entire project of European integration, or it may include those who have reservations about a specific course, including those who “merely want to make haste more slowly or who express uncertainty about the wisdom of some or all of the ‘advances’” (see chapter by Katz in Sczczerbiak & Taggart 2008).

Kopecky and Muddle (2002) have identified principled opponents of European integration as ‘Europhobes’ or ‘Eurorejects’ when this is combined with criticism of the EU’s further deepening. And Flood (2002) has distinguished between rejectionists, revisionists, minimalists, gradualists, reformists and maximalists of EU integration. Taggart and Sczczerbiak, in turn, have distinguished between hard and soft euroscepticism. Hard Euroscepticism consists of a principled opposition to the EU and the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived (Sczczerbiak & Taggart 2008: 7). Essentially single issue anti-EU parties fall within this category as do political actors who frame their opposition to the EU with language that stress that the Union is “too capitalist/socialist/neo-liberal/bureaucratic” depending on their ideological positioning (communist/conservative/socialist/populist respectively) and therefore call for a fundamental recasting of the terms on which their country is an EU member (Sczczerbiak & Taggart 2008: 7-8). Soft Euroscepticism is expressed in situations where concerns on one (or a number) of

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policy areas lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where “there is a sense that ‘national interest’ is currently at odds with the EU’s trajectory” (Sczczerbiak & Taggart 2008: 8).

Euroscepticism is found across the political spectrum and it also cuts across and within mainstream political parties. However, the harder and more rejecting expressions of Euroscepticism are found in the radical right and the radical left. Due to the nationalistic elements of their ideology, populist radical right parties consider supra-nationalism as a threat to the nation-state (Vasilopoulou 2011: 226). Eurosceptics may seek their country’s withdrawal from the EU, while others are content to criticize the system from within. Radical right parties are clearly on the rise across Europe. The French Front National’s impressive bounce back to the centre of French politics since Marine Le Pen took over, the True Finns’ electoral success in April 2011, the steady consolidation of the British National Party, the League of Polish Families, the Greek Popular Orthodox Rally, the Italian Northern League, the Danish People’s Party, the Flemish Interest Attack, the Bulgarian Attack, the Austrian Freedom Party and the Latvian For Fatherland and Freedom are illustrative of this phenomenon.

There are two important dimensions to point out in this rise of the radical right. The first is that while they are opposed to the EU they are certainly not anti-European in the wider sense of the term given that they willingly accept the common cultural, historic and religious heritage shared among the European peoples (Vasilopoulou 2011: 244) and actually argue that they seek to protect it from the degeneration that comes from Europeanization, globalization and migration. The second, is that the closer that hard Eurosceptical peripheral parties come to involvement in government and the more exposed they are to coalition politics, the softer their Euroscepticism tends to become (Sczczerbiak & Taggart 2008 volume 2: 10).

A challenging situation has resulted from the expansion of Europeanisation into ever more policy areas, as distinctions between national and European policies become blurred. In this context, problems at the European level of governance feed into the national and vice versa. If it becomes difficult to separate what is European and what is domestic, it follows that dissatisfaction with Europe also entails a more generalized ‘polity-scepticism.’ “When ‘we talk about Euroscepticism, and about opposition to Europe, we are also sometimes talking about scepticism and opposition towards our own national institutions and modes of governance. This is a scepticism about how we are governed” (Mair 2007: 16). Thus, Euroscepticism is not an EU problem only, on the contrary it cuts to the very heart of democracy at the national level.

This leads us on to the second pillar of opposition. Closely linked to Eurosceptic political discourse that comes from both the radical right and the radical left, is populism. Over the past decade, European politics have become strong breeding grounds for populism (Mair 2007: 16). Populist discourse is anti-elitist and anti-establishment. It rejects the national political class in the name of the ‘people’ who are presented as being systematically ignored by a self-interested and insulated elite. Populist discourses are thus generally cast as an appeal to the interests and the wisdom ‘of the common man’, usually further amplified by a call to protect the national ‘heartland’ when it comes from the right (Harmsen 2010: 334) and to protect
social justice and jobs when it comes from the left. Populist politicians respond to public insecurities by attacking established elites and thereby presenting society as falling into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: 'the people as such' and 'the corrupt elite'. This is compounded by a conception of the people in national terms, framing a political community with closed borders and a common past and with reference to nationalistic, xenophobic or racist notions.

So why has Europe become a fertile ground for populist discourse and populist politicians? Corruption, economic hardship, post-communist transition legacies have all been advanced as explanatory factors. Most importantly, however, the rise of populist radical right parties in Europe is linked to the expansion of the European Union (Szczepaniak and Taggart 2008: 13; Meny and Surel 2002: 7–11). This has occurred in four ways: the elitist character of the EU project; the democratic gap; the depoliticisation of the EU; and the liberalization of the European economy.

Let us briefly turn to each. First, European integration has proceeded at the cost of the popular will. It has been designed and carried out from above and, populist actors have been able to exploit anti-elitist sentiments, claiming that the necessary public support for the realization and expansion of the European project is missing (Hayward 1996: 28). Second, one of the democratic gaps that the EU suffers from is that until recently, it has lacked the right of an organized opposition to appeal for votes against the government and in elections. Robert Dahl has argued that democratic development entails three core milestones: (a) the right of citizens to participate in governmental institutions by casting a vote; (b) the right of citizens to be represented within the polity; and (c) the right of an organized opposition to appeal for votes against the government and in elections. This third milestone has not yet been established in the case of the EU polity. European citizens can participate in EU decisions by casting a vote (whether for national representatives who then participate in the various Councils or by electing MEPs); they can be represented by standing for elections with the EP; but, there is no arena, no institution or process within which opposition can be organized. As Mair has put it: “Once we cannot organize opposition in the EU, we are then almost forced to organize opposition to the EU. To be critical to the policies promulgated by Brussels is therefore to be critical of the polity; (...) we either submit, and hence we accept the elimination of opposition, or we mobilize an opposition of principle and become intrinsically Eurosceptic” (Mair 2007: 7).

Third, the EU’s depoliticisation has in fact encouraged the mobilization of a populist, opposition of principle. How? In two ways. The development of a European level of decision-making has limited the space and scope for policy competition between political parties at the national level. The adoption of the acquis communautaire and the requirements for harmonization and convergence mean that unless a Member State seeks to opt out of a particular policy its leeway is rather constrained in terms of the range of policy instruments and options at its disposal. And, given that both opting in and opting out essentially require cross-party agreement and consensus, classical opposition is seriously limited at the national level. Furthermore, by delegating decision-making in certain sectors to EU institutions such as the ECB, (institutions that are essentially non-majoritarian and which exclude party politics), where policies are decided in principle on technical merit and without being open to opposition policies, EU politics are further depoliticized. This empties elections of their
importance and renders them less decisive in policy terms as it downgrades the value of traditional democratic processes at the national level including the role of the opposition. In short, “if politics becomes less important, then so too does democracy – at least in the sense of popular participation and electoral accountability” (Mair 2007: 14). This situation allows space for populist forms of opposition to flourish.

Finally, the growing liberalization of the European economy and the cutback of the welfare state have resulted in the formation of an important number of modernization losers, real or perceived, who, anxious of the potential affects of the inflow of migrants, are particularly tempted by the appeals of populist radical right parties (e.g. Betz 1994; Decker 2000; Kriesi 1999).

To conclude, the success of populist actors is the result of the weakness of politics at the European level. Seen in this light, Euroscepticism and the re-emergence of populism in Europe go hand in hand, as they react against the formation of new forms of governance that go beyond the nation-state.

This leads us to the third and fourth ideological pillars that have defined and framed opposition in Europe: anti-globalisation and anarchism. The two have become inter-woven in many ways. In the early 21st century, anarchism found resonance among the disillusioned left disappointed by the authoritarianism of Soviet communism and then its collapse in 1989. It also inspired many resistance movements against capitalism’s latest stage: neo-liberal globalization (Curran 2006: 3).

Globalization is a highly contentious and contested term encapsulating important changes to global economic structures and their impact on national and global economies, cultures and politics. David Held and Anthony McGrew have argued that “the globalization debate projects into a new context, the cardinal questions of political life concerning power and rule: who rules, in whose interests, by what means, and for what ends?” (2002: 58). Globalization’s opponents have been impressively vocal, articulating their opposition and granting high visibility to the anti-globalization movement, the ‘movement of movements’, or ‘more aptly the global justice movement’ (Curran 2006: 2-3). Opponents of globalization protest against deregulation and the associated dismantling of social rights, the privatization of public enterprises and the retrenchment of social welfare assistance (Brand and Wissen 2005: 10). Moreover, opponents to globalization express their resistance through protest and contestation in the public space as there is a broad consensus that nonviolent direct actions and civil disobedience are legitimate.

For the protesters at Genoa, Barcelona, Seattle, Gleneagles, Prague and Davos, globalization is viewed as a project governed by the world’s political and economic elites – the cosmocracy – for the benefit of a minority. This cosmocracy, organizes globalization principally through formal institutions and informal elite networks (among the most important being the IMF, World Bank, WTO, G7 and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS)) in order to promote the project of a liberal world order in which global markets, the international rule of law, liberal democracy and human rights are taken as universal standards of civilization. These are resisted as the expansion of global markets is advanced as a priority (often to the exclusion of other values) and growing emphasis on good governance, democracy and where necessary
humanitarian intervention, essentially represent attempts to stabilize world order around the liberal capitalist model (Held and McGrew 2002: 62-63).

Anarchism, for its part, has not enjoyed the authority of other major ideologies, “usually dismissed as either bomb throwing fanatics, eccentric utopians or idle scoundrels” (Curran 2006: 1). Though it has been a relatively marginal political philosophy, it has nonetheless exerted considerable influence in shaping the modern political landscape across Europe and within the anti-globalisation movement (Curran 2006: 1). Anarchism’s core include liberty, anti-statism, anti-authoritariansm and resistance to the centralization of decision-making power, both within the state and globally. A green dimension has recently been added to these characteristics. New anarchism embraced the claims of radical ecology that environmental degradation signifies the enhanced destructive power of industrialism and/ or capitalism (Curran 2006: 7) with much enthusiasm and has emerged as a noticeable force in European oppositional politics. Finally, a fundamental trait in the current post-ideological environment is the extremely high number of young people it has mobilized.

In Europe, anti-globalization and new anarchism have entered the political scene from three directions: (a) through the radical left and the green parties in national parliaments and in the European Parliament; (b) from the streets through demonstrations and the organization of massive public protest; and (c) through violent actions.

The radical left rejects the underlying socioeconomic structure of contemporary capitalism and its values. It advocates for alternative economic and power structures as well as a major redistribution of resources from the existing political elites in order to achieve social justice and protect collective economic and social rights. Based on this, the Marxist/Leninst, reformist, revolutionary and anarchist political parties across the EU Member states range between being Eurosceptic to rejecting the EU as a capitalist project aimed at repressing workers’ rights, dismantling the welfare state and promoting neo-liberal globalization. Radical left parties that do participate in elections and are represented in the European Parliament form one of the seven main European political party groupings: the Confederal European United Left – Nordic Green Left. This includes the Greek, Cypriot, Czech, French, Portuguese Communist Parties, the Spanish and Greek United Left Coalitions, the Dutch, Swedish and Irish Socialists and Sinn Fein, and have close ties with the Italian Communist and Left parties.

The radical left has been instrumental to ‘normalizing’ protest in contemporary Europe. Europe is a ‘demonstration democracy’, a ‘protest society’ with strikes, demonstrations, sit-ins and occupations a common feature across all member states. Job insecurity, unemployment, privatizations of public goods and services, involvement in wars have been the main issues around which the radical left has mobilized European citizens. This has been the case since the 1960s at the member state level, and since the 1990s it has started to take on European dimensions.

The last strand of opposition is the most radical and violent. Loosely linked movements of European anarchists have been coordinating actions in response to tensions spawned by the continent’s financial crisis and domestic political crises.
Targeted bomb explosions, the use of black block strategies to infiltrate legal demonstrations and incite violence, property destruction and clashes with police have been increasing. Between 2008 — which saw the height of the global financial crisis — and 2009, Europol recorded a 43% increase in attacks by militant groups in the EU. The majority have been in Italy, Spain and Greece. In December 2010, bombs exploded in three embassies in Rome by Italian anarchists (Informal Anarchist Federation) in solidarity with jailed Greek anarchists, who had asked their comrades to organize and coordinate a global “revolutionary war.” Europe is packed together with globalization and imperialism for groups like the Italian Informal Anarchist Federation or the Greek Revolutionary Struggle. These are extremely isolated and marginal instances but they do receive significant media attention and affect public attitudes.

And while such acts may be extremely isolated and rare, the overall turn towards violent protest behaviour is not. Since December 2009, Athens has been shaken with riots and some have claimed human lives. Demonstrations are regularly turning violent in Rome, Paris, Madrid, London and Berlin. Urban riots seem to be becoming an almost daily occurrence in Europe. The immediate causes may be slightly different in each case, but the background is common throughout. In Athens, Paris and Madrid it has been protests against austerity packages and growing unemployment. In London, sharp rises in student fees have mobilized angry citizens in their thousands. Austerity is affecting most of Europe and citizens are feeling that they are not receiving the recognition or response they expect from their national government and the EU institutions. The underlying anger, fear and despair caused by spending cuts, slow growth, rising unemployment and fear of the future, are spilling out onto the streets and are voting populist extremists into Europe’s parliaments.

**Concluding remarks**

In spite of its successes and achievements, Europe is going through a very deep and painful crisis. Its accomplishments are unparalleled in terms of consolidating democratic governance and human rights across the continent, lowering borders, dismantling barriers (both tangible and ideational), and pooling sovereignty. Solidarity, coherence, redistribution, and unity in diversity are principles that have driven EU integration and that have changed relations between the member states. And yet, in spite of these achievements that are often taken for granted, European integration has been largely unable to generate much public enthusiasm.

At best, the EU looks like a mundane and cumbersome bureaucracy; at worse it is seen as another facet of neoliberal globalization, or an elitist affair that threatens national sovereignty and identity. Generally perceived as a vehicle of change and liberalisation, Europe has become a threat for those who consider themselves at risk by the major economic restructuring that has been and is taking place. Larger sections of its population have been turning against it, and with increasingly vocal discourses that are bringing populist extremism back into the political arena, mainstream political actors who have been consistently pro-further integration are now finding themselves between a rock and a hard place.

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9 [http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2040403,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2040403,00.html)
The side effects of modernization and globalization have hit parts of Europe quite hard leading to a widespread pessimism throughout the Union. There is a feeling that conditions in Europe will deteriorate further as globalization pressures and economic hardship will lead to the further dismantling of employment rights and benefits that had been consolidated in previous decades; of public goods such as public education that had allowed a democratization of European societies through providing opportunities for upward social mobility; and of economic security. This is particularly harsh for a community where levels of aspiration, expectations and sensitivity have risen due to the prosperity, stability, peace and security that Europe has enjoyed for over 50 years.

What translates this feeling of unease into protest?

According to Rucht, Koopmans and Neidhardt (1998: 7) two conditions are necessary. First, people must attribute a deplorable situation to the action of another person or a group of people who are thus seen as culpable. Second, people must perceive that protest may improve their situation; in other words, that some sort of change or positive transformation may result from their protest.

In effect, both conditions exist. European citizens are concerned with the situation across the continent. They are disillusioned with their politicians, they feel insecure about their future, their jobs, their economic security that had been taken as a given, and in many cases they feel threatened by the fast paced change that is transforming both local realities and the balance of power at the global level. And, they feel that their active protest and opposition may lead to change. They are thus seeking alternative avenues through which to express this resistance, outside the mainstream institutionalized mechanisms, parties and practices as these seem to be too committed to pursuing neoliberal reforms and not attentive enough to their concerns and threatened interests.

The process of European integration has depoliticized policy making and in this sense, it has neutralized and watered down the power and role of institutionalized forms of opposition in the member states. Mainstream parties that are in the opposition rarely differentiate themselves from the governing ones on the main political and economic issues as cross-party consensus is the rule of the game in the European polity. In fact, European politics have institutionalized cross party and cross national consensus through the standard practice of package deals. So, mainstream political parties are delegitimized in the eyes of European citizens. Similarly, elections have often been seen as void of meaning as neo-liberal policies promoting market deregulation, privatization and ‘flexible’ employment are pursued in rather similar ways regardless of whether the governing party is centre-right or centre-left. Thus, between abstention and protest voting for radical, fringe parties, the European electorate is showing its discontent and its unease with this post-ideological style of governance. Finally, with decreasing levels of trust in the main political institutions that are considered as corrupt, inefficient, ineffective or irrelevant, protest spills out in the streets.
Although alarming, these developments have to be seen as opportunities to re-invigorate European democracy both in its content and in its form. Democracy involves the capacity of public policy to match citizens’ preferences. At present there is a disconnect but, the institutions and processes are there. Liberal democracy in Europe can, and must be improved if it is to maintain, or in many cases regain, the legitimate respect of its citizens. It has done so in the past in response to deep challenges and emerging opportunities. It must do so again by according priority to reforms that target declining citizen trust in political institutions and participation in democratic processes.

Politics has to come back into the policies in Europe.

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