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The Euro-indifference of ordinary citizens, another type of resistance to European integration? Empirical and Theoretical Contributions to the study of legitimacy in a multilevel polity¹

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Draft – Comments welcome!

Work in progress.

Introduction

The double "no" expressed against the Constitutional Treaty draft by the French and Dutch electorates followed by the Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty have given rise to renewed pressing questions about the legitimacy of the EU. It became impossible to be unaware of the more or less radical oppositions to the EU among political actors but also among European citizens. Part of the recent European Studies' literature, for example on European political parties (Kopecky & Mudde, 2002; Szczebiak & Taggart, 2004; Lacroix & Coman, 2007), has focused on these resistances towards the European integration process distinguishing between *soft* and *hard* Euroscepticism or differentiating *Euro-reject* and *Euro-sceptic* resistances. But few empirical studies focusing on European ordinary citizens and seeking to bring a "bottom-up" perspective on this matter have been published³. Therefore, this paper aims to contribute to the study of the resistances to the European integration by focusing more specifically on the Euro-indifference of

¹ A first version of this text has been presented at the European Studies Center in Oxford (St Anthony College). The author is grateful to Justine Lacroix and Kalypto Nicolaïdis for their precious comments and wants to thank Sophie Duchesne for her precious supervision.

³ To different degrees, the following works deal also in part with the issue of European legitimacy from a socio-political perspective: Belot, 2000 & 2002; Medrano, 2003; Scheuer, 2005. They are therefore of primary interest to my study even if they do not address directly the question of legitimacy defined as the acceptance and/or the appropriation of a changing political order. Note that other innovating sociological studies have been conducted on other "European objects". See among others the following authors: Favell, 2007; Imig & Tarrow, 2001; Le Gales, 2002; Merand, 2006; Smith, 2004.

ordinary citizens, which can be in some circumstances understood as a passive opposition to the EU, as a complementary type of resistance along the well known Euroscepticism (Delmotte, 2007). Thus, this paper underlines the necessity to both considering passive and active resistances in order to understand the “legitimacy deficit” of the EU. Indeed, the high levels of Euroscepticism and Euro-indifference are currently the major forms of resistance to further European integration and Euroscepticism alone does not cover the entire reality of the so-called “legitimacy’s deficit” of the EU.

Beginning with a brief overview of the literature on legitimacy, support and Euroscepticism (Section I) as point of departure and pointing to some of its shortcomings, this paper aims to reconsider the issue of legitimacy in the specific context of European integration by using as a microscope focus groups realized in Great-Britain, France and Belgium in the framework of the CITAE project⁴ to address empirically the issue of the deficit of EU legitimacy (Section II). The two major contributions taken out of our focus groups is the need to consider both the multilevel aspect of what is called ‘European legitimacy’ (Section III) and to focus analysis also on the Euro-indifferent citizens who are more and more present in the post-Maastricht period (Section IV). The two last sections (V and VI) will propose to shed a new light on Eurobarometer data in order to get a better understanding of the ways in which the interplay of different political levels in the EU’s multilevel system impacts on Europeans’ legitimacy assessments and of their evolution in the three countries studied.

1. Legitimacy, Support and Euroscepticism: a brief conceptual and empirical clarification

Theoretical and empirical research on the political legitimacy of the EU has been one of the hallmarks of European studies since it burgeoned as an academic discipline after the difficulties surrounding the ratification of the Maastricht treaty in the early nineties. It seems a sensible simplification⁶ to divide the literature on European legitimacy into two traditions: on the one hand the macro perspective that emphasizes formal system properties, on the other hand the micro view

⁴ The data were collected as part of an international project led by Sophie Duchesne: “Citizens talking about Europe. French, British and Belgian Citizens in Political Discussion”, in which Sciences Po Paris (CEVIPOF), the University of Oxford (Department of Politics and International Relations and New College) and the University of Louvain (CPC) took part. The teams member are: S. Duchesne, F. Haegel and G. Garcia (Sciences Po Paris); E. Frazer (University of Oxford); and A.-P. Frogner and V. Van Ingelgom (University of Louvain). For further details on the project please refer to the following website: http://erg.politics.ox.ac.uk/projects/discussion_political/index.asp or read DUCHESNE, S. & VAN INGELGOM, V. (2008), Recherche en cours : « Comment les discussions deviennent politiques, lorsque des Français, des Anglais ou des Belges francophones parlent de l’Europe », *Politique européenne*, 24, Automne 2008.

⁶ For a more detailed overview of the literature on European legitimacy please refer to: Obradovic, 1996.

analyses citizens' attitudes and actions (Weatherford, 1992: 149). To this regard, Hermann Schmitt and Jacques Thomassen underline that “*basically there are two different ways to assess the legitimacy of a political system. The first is to refer to normative theory: to what extent does a political system conform to certain normative criteria? The second is to determine to what extent the political system is right in the eyes of the relevant beholders, the members of a particular political system?*” (Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999).

Regarding empirical legitimacy of the EU on which this paper will focus, the two last decades have witnessed a proliferation of research on European public opinion focusing on citizens' attitudes towards European Union and using almost only Eurobarometer data. To this regard, there is extensive recognition that the decline in support has become a more significant phenomenon in the post Maastricht period than in earlier decades of the European integration process⁷ (See Figure 1.1.). Thereafter, the concept of Euroscepticism has become a very fashionable and perhaps overused one in European studies since its first apparition in the *Economist* on 26 December 1992 (Hooghe & Marks, 2007: 120). It seems to cover a large range of realities and facts. Indeed, Euroscepticism is generally conceived as encircling a range of critical positions on European integration going to complete opposition (Taggart, 1998; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004; Hooghe & Marks, 2007). According to a recent special issue of *Acta politica*, the term Euroscepticism describes “*one side of a continuum that ranges from very positive to very negative dispositions towards European integration, its policies, its institutions or its principles*” (Hooghe & Marks, 2007 : 120). Therefore, Euroscepticism and support towards European integration can be seen as the two sides of the same coin or the two sides of a continuum. In the framework of survey analysis (Eurobarometer) Euroscepticism generally refers to and is measured by the proportion of the EU population that is opposed to further integration and more precisely by the EU population perceiving their country's membership to be a ‘bad thing’. More specifically, a great deal of the literature on attitudes towards European integration has tended to focus on support or absence of support for integration, from an Eastonian view which distinguishes between specific or instrumental support and diffuse or affective support in order to explain why people support or not the EU (Easton, 1965 & 1975)⁸.

To examine these alternative models of support towards the EU that have been proposed so far, and to see what is problematic or limiting about them, is undeniably a useful way of entering into the question. As the terms suggest, the different existing perspectives differ in the definition of the basis on which support for European integration or scepticism emerges and about the factors that shape them. Among these factors, one can find political, economic, historical and/or cultural

⁷ For a recent state of art on the Euroscepticism subject see the recent issues of *European Union politics* (Vol. 8 no.1, March 2007) and *Acta Politica* (Vol. 42, no. 3, September 2007).

⁸ The instrumental and the affective theories of European integration are by far the most influential and mainstream theories but of course various other theories exist which are also significant, and sometimes conflicting, contributions to the discourse on the issue of support for European integration. For an overview see: GABEL, M. (1998), “Public support of European Integration : An Empirical Test of Five theories”, *The Journal of politics*, 60 (2).

factors, both at macro and individual levels. On the one hand, rational choice theory argues that citizens are expected to be in favour of integration if they believe that they (their country and themselves) benefit from it (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Gabel and Palmer, 1995; Gabel, 1998). This utilitarian or instrumental view stresses the importance of the performance criteria of the new political system for the development of support. This neofunctionalist perspective has of course been challenged by other European integration theories that underline other factors, such as identity and political construction, which are at least as influential as economic factors in shaping public preferences on European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2005; McLaren, 2002; Medrano, 2003). From the mid-90's, the so-called "EU democratic deficit" issue became of primary interest and, correspondingly, the notion of "European identity" was also introduced in the literature, firstly by social psychologists. The primacy of an affective kind of support has from that moment been put forward.

The concern with support has undoubtedly produced many valuable insights and the debates surrounding the attitudes towards Europe have pointed to various factors that prevent the development of legitimization's attitudes towards the EU: the remoteness of the European level of government from citizens' every day lives, the democratic deficit of the European political system, the lack of a single political arena and/or of a self-conscious European public and so on. Moreover, national and social differences have been proved to be very strong and, more important, not to decrease over the years (Anderson, 1998; Belot, 2002; Cautrès & Grunberg, 2007; Gabel, 1998; Hooghe & Marks, 2005; Niedermayer and Sinnott, 1995). Indeed, a repeated finding, from both instrumental and affective supports views, was that nationality remains the strongest factor in explaining the level of support. However, in view of this concern, unpacking the "black-box" of nationality remains however one of the most pressing tasks for those doing research on attitudes toward European integration (see Berezin and Díez Medrano for a recent review of these issues, 2008). Socio-demographic variables constitute also an important factor for the level of support and the existence of an "elitist bias" have been demonstrated by many European scholars.

Despite our understanding of empirical European legitimacy has suffered, to my point of view, three major shortcomings. Firstly, as just mentioned, unpacking the "black-box" of nationality is still to be done. Secondly, these surveys analysis are of little help for anyone who wants to understand the deep meanings and the significance which the EU has and to assess the saliency of Europe in people's everyday lives. Finally, the empirically developed notion of support is too limiting to be of much use in elucidating the nature and the dynamics of European legitimacy beliefs and is becoming overused and under-theorized. Indeed, the legitimacy of a still emerging polity cannot be assessed by any statist concept and measure. As highlighted by Scheuer (2005 : 10), *"as a consequence, we have no solid empirical evidence about how European legitimacy emerges, what the current state of European legitimacy is and to which factors it reacts – in short : we are ignorant about the evolution of European*

legitimacy”. Therefore, the survey-oriented methods commonly used to study support or scepticism toward the European integration should be complemented by a sociopolitical approach of empirical European legitimacy using qualitative analysis to shed a new light on the so called ‘legitimacy deficit’ of the EU. In the next section, I will present the research design based on focus groups and address some general considerations and hypothesis.

2. The Empirical Legitimacy of the EU: On the Benefits of the Use of Focus Groups

I begin this section with a citation borrowed from Virginie Guiraudon, who emphasizes that “*the lesson to be drawn ... is the need for more systematic data-rich comparative projects that combine qualitative and quantitative methods and do not hesitate to answer macro questions with a microscope*” (Guiraudon, 2006:5). Thus, I envisage addressing macro questions about legitimacy of the EU with an individual-level methodology, the use of “focus groups”. In this I hope to gain a better understanding of legitimacy, reconsidered in the specific context of an emerging and therefore changing multilevel political order. The qualitative analysis of focus groups based on interpretative analysis and on CAQDAS and ALCESTE methodologies will serve for the formulation of theory which could then be further tested on quantitative data. Thus, the analysis of the focus group will be used to develop a kind of *Grounded theory* of legitimacy that aims to review the concept at the micro level and from a socio-political perspective which will be then applied to the Eurobarometers data. Indeed, in spite of all the critics that could be levelled at them, I still believe that these quantitative data represent a very useful tool for European studies if correctly understood and enriched by the use of qualitative data. My research takes part in the debate on ‘European legitimacy deficit’ outwardly methodological but with important theoretical consequences regarding the very understanding of the empirical legitimacy of the EU.

Turning to the design of the research, the focus groups¹⁰ were realised in three countries: Belgium, France and Great-Britain. The participants met for an extended period of three hours including

⁹ Using the particular methodology that was developed by Sophie Duchesne et Florence Haegel : DUCHESNE, S. & HAEGEL, F. (2004), *L'enquête et ses méthodes. L'entretien collectif*. Paris, Nathan Université, Collection 128. For another application of focus group methodology to the study of European identity see : BRUTER, M. (2004), ‘On What Citizens Means by Feeling ‘European’: Perceptions of News, Symbols and Borderless-ness’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, January 2004, pp. 21-39; BRUTER, M. (2005), *Citizens of Europe ? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁰ The data were collected as part of an international project led by Sophie Duchesne : “Citizens talking about Europe. French, British and Belgian Citizens in Political Discussion”, in which Sciences Po Paris (CEVIPOF), the University of Oxford (Department of Politics and International Relations and New College) and the University of Louvain (CPC) took part. The teams member are: S. Duchesne, F. Haegel and G. Garcia (Sciences Po Paris); E. Frazer (University of Oxford); and A.-P. Frogner and V. Van Ingelgom (University of Louvain). For further details on the project please refer to the following website:

refreshment and socialising, and they discussed a range of questions regarding Europe: the experience of 'being European', the power structure of Europe, the question of Turkey's possible entry into the EU and the attitudes of their country's major political parties to Turkish entry.

The groups were deliberately constructed to include participants who were socially homogeneous but politically heterogeneous¹¹. As national and social differences have been proved to be very strong and, more important, not to decrease over the years, the design has to enable the comparison on these two aspects. Indeed, as already mentioned, a repeated finding, from both instrumental and affective supports views, was that nationality remains the strongest factor in explaining the level of support. Socio-demographic variables constitute also an important factor for the level of support and the existence of an "elitist bias" have been demonstrated by many European scholars (Anderson, 1998; Belot, 2002; Cautrès & Grunberg, 2007 ; Gabel, 1998 ; Hooghe & Marks, 2005 ; Niedermayer and Sinnott, 1995).

So in each country we convened: two groups of participants with occupations such as cleaners, drivers, shop assistants and kitchen workers (identified for the purposes of the project as working class), two with occupations such as office workers, salespersons, health support workers (white collar), and two groups with university or higher education and jobs such as consultants, engineers, office managers, or journalists (professional-manager). In addition, in each country, we convened two groups of 'activists', the idea being that we expected our activists to be familiar with the facts and understand the controversies surrounding the European Union and European politics. In addition we expected them to have relatively well formed and stable attitudes about these controversies and to be used to engaging in political debate and argument. The research was thus designed to enable three kinds of comparison: between countries, both within and across countries between social groups and between politically involved people and ordinary citizens.

Moreover, our specific way of using focus group technique was based on the research of conflict. To record conflict, we introduce some mechanisms. First, the five questions (re)introduce the question of Europe in the discussion several times. Apart from that, the dynamic was free – we did not try to refocus the discussion on Europe and let them talk about what they felt comfortable with and interested in. Second, we actually had no concern for "naturalness", quite on the contrary and in this sense, the design may be considered some kind of experimentation. Indeed, choosing to put

http://erg.politics.ox.ac.uk/projects/discussion_political/index.asp or read DUCHESNE, S. & VAN INGELGOM, V. (2008), Recherche en cours : « Comment les discussions deviennent politiques, lorsque des Français, des Anglais ou des Belges francophones parlent de l'Europe », *Politique européenne*, 24, Automne 2008.

¹¹ An article written with Guillaume Garcia which will be published in the *Revue internationale de Science Politique* underlines the specific difficulties and challenges regarding the construction of focus groups and the qualitative comparative analysis. This article deals with both question of social homogeneity and political heterogeneity.

together people who don't know each other was also intended to make conflict possible: people could have been more reluctant to publicly expose disagreement with their relatives and have it recorded. Moreover, we choose to confront people with opposing views on Europe (according to the questionnaires) and opposing political opinions. But we knew people would resist taking the risk of conflict in public discussion. That would require special conditions and explicit incitation. Therefore the moderation technique also includes elements in order to facilitate the conflictualisation of the discussion. The moderator displays main elements of the discussion as it goes along making disagreement and misunderstandings apparent. Moreover, the "flash" is the most important rule introduced by the moderator: when any participant disagrees, does not fully understand or even wants to comment on something that has been written on the board, the moderator draws a flash next to it that indicates that this would be discussed again. The flash is clearly valued by the moderator and therefore this is a clear incitation to voice disagreement. Finally, the questions were organised according to a scenario which aimed at producing conflict. The first session was considered some kind of warming-up. But the second session, after the break, contains two questions that were supposed to generate disagreement: Who profits from Europe? For/against Turkey's entry in the EU. Moreover, thanks to the first session, participants had the opportunity to learn about others' opinions and hence should have been able to identify participants with whom they would agree and participants with whom they would disagree on European questions. As conflictualisation proceeds of the making of alliances (Duchesne & Haegel, 2007), we thus gave participants the time to identify each other's positions in order to make alliances when the questions at stake would become more controversial.

We thus consider conflict as an indicator of saliency: participants did express disagreement when the issue at stake really matters to them. And this is not any issue. Our research question thus is: how much is European integration a conflictive issue in these discussions, compared with many other topics spontaneously discussed (such as: economy, politics, education, immigration, globalisation, and so on). The dynamic of conflictualisation, which is at the core of the research design, consists fundamentally in participants taking the risk of acknowledging publicly disagreement with unacquainted people – a risk that participants would not take for any reason (Duchesne & Haegel, 2007; Duchesne & alii., 2008). In other words, they take this risk only when an opinion at stake matters to them, when they feel committed to support it even at some price. We are far here from the opinion expressed in surveys.

At the time of the redaction of this paper, the systematic qualitative analysis of the groups is still under work. So the first outcomes presented here result from a first interpretative analysis of the groups and should be confirmed by further systematic analysis¹². So what can we learn out of

¹² This paper does not engage the other members of the team in any way.

these 24 focus groups for the study of empirical legitimacy in the specific context of the European integration process? It seems that there two main points that need to be made: the multilevel essence of what is called 'European legitimacy' and the rephrasing of the social gap by taking into account indifference¹³.

3. The 'European Legitimacy': a multilevel Phenomenon

Considering first the national comparison and confirming the results of prior studies by Juan Diez Medrano among others, our first analysis of participants' attitudes to and evaluation of European integration suggest ostensible country differences (Diez Medrano, 2003). Indeed, what makes power legitimate in one society differ from what makes it legitimate in others as people's attitudes and behaviour towards political objects depend on how they represent or frame them (Diez Medrano, 2003). Using Diez Medrano's terms, 'frames' vary across sociodemographic, political and national groups and so do the grounds for compliance and therefore the legitimacy of this changing political order. The rise of 'contentious politics' as a field of study has also concluded that European citizens are Europeanized to differing degrees depending upon national contexts (Imig and Tarrow, 2001). To summarize, the structures of perception and evaluation of the EU are of primary interest in studying the acceptance of a political order and are framed; these 'frames' differ across sociodemographic and national groups. The nation-state remains the prime reference point for the formation of political attitudes (Anderson 1998) and the locus of political socialisation.

To this regard and very briefly said, the Belgian groups speak from a taken for granted position within the EU and focus on familiar dilemmas of a multi-level institutional system in which political authority is complex and shared. The French groups also take the EU for granted but do not make any clear distinction between it and the national level; in the favour of European integration, there seems to be an amalgam between the national and the European sphere. The British groups on the other hand speak very clearly from outside the EU, focusing above all on the questions of sovereignty and national identity. Of course, this interpretative analysis needs to be refined by a more systematic analysis such as the one developed by Achim Hurrelmann, by studying the legitimating and delegitimizing assessments of European integration, the criteria used in them, as well as the ways in which evaluations of the EU are related to evaluations of the member states (Hurrelmann, 2008). Indeed, the concept of legitimacy is multidimensional as well as multilevel as brilliantly theorized by David Beetham and Christopher Lord (Beetham & Lord, 2001). Therefore, further systematic analysis should concentrate on these two important aspects for empirical legitimacy as well.

¹³ For a more extensive discussion of this aspect see: Duchesne & Van Ingelgom, 2009 (paper presented at this conference as well).

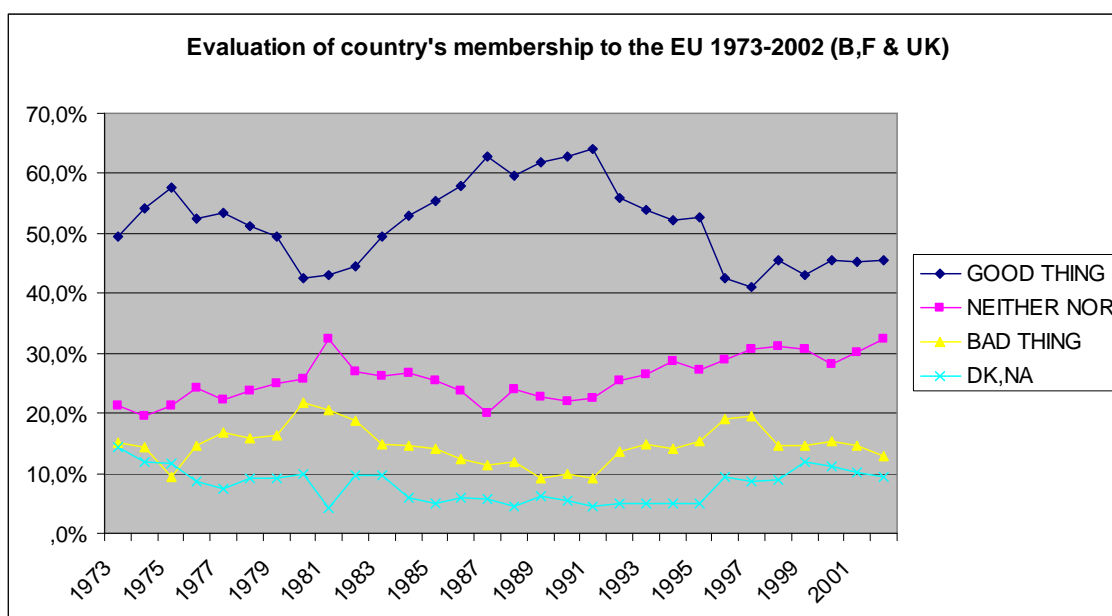
Thus, different national publics may have different structures of perception and evaluation towards the EU, and that these are framed by national legitimacies which are not necessarily similar (Belot, 2000; Scheuer 2005; Medrano, 2003). Even not with the same perspective, the crucial importance of national discourses for legitimacy at both national and European levels is also strongly underlined by Vivien Schmidt (Schmidt, 2006). Thus, regarding this multilevel aspect, one should note that we have *“insufficient understanding of the ways in which the interplay of various political levels in the EU’s multilevel system impacts on Europeans’ legitimacy assessments”* (Hurrelmann, 2008). The “legitimacy of the EU” cannot be assessed alone. It should be understood both as direct and indirect in a two-level process and moreover has to be perceived as the extension and/or transformation of the acceptance of the national political order. Therefore, my own conceptualization is not far away of the one developed by Kees Van Kersbergen when writing on ‘double allegiance’ consisting of a primary allegiance to the nation-state and a secondary allegiance to the European Union that exist only to the extent that European integration benefits to the nation-states (Van Kersbergen, 2000: 1). An illustration of this can be found in the French ratification procedure of the so-called ‘European Constitution’; a situation in which this two-level process was clearly visible. National and European political elites now recognize the necessity of a direct legitimation process, as revealed by the use of the referendum. However once this direct legitimacy runs into trouble, as was the case after the French ‘no’, the emerging political order can still rely on indirect legitimacy. Indeed, the process has continued on through the legislative procedure, relying on national acceptance of political domination without much contention from French citizens. To sum up, as underlined recently by Fritz Scharf, most of the literature on EU legitimacy, being normative or empirical, was focused *« on the European level, rather than on the implications of the multilevel characteristics of the European polity »* (Scharpf, 2007: 5). Many scholars however are increasingly dissatisfied with this arguing that the frontiers between the national and the European sphere have to be crossed when studying the EU (Risse-Kappen, 1996: 54). So am I.

4. Rephrasing the social gap: the need to consider indifference

Turning now to the social comparison, the most striking fact in our group is not that working class and white collars’ groups are more Eurosceptics than managers and the activists; the difference lies more particularly in the way European integration is an issue for the latter and not for the former. Thus, if our hypothesis was correct – the fact that conflictualisation in these groups would allow us to record salience of opinions – regarding European integration, what distinguishes working class groups – and to a lesser extent white collars – is a dramatic absence of attention, of interest but in the sense of being not interested in : 2). Being in favour or not in favour of the EU, in other words being Europhile or Eurosceptic, is not actually a question for them, while it is a matter of debate

and openly expressed disagreement for managers and activists (Duchesne & alii, 2008). Therefore understanding Euro-indifference is of primary interest for the study of the ‘European legitimacy deficit’ as we recorded it in our groups. Indeed, regarding the interest citizens have for European affairs and their feelings, one can argue that a European “cens caché” exists, to use Gaxie’s term (Gaxie,1993).

In the post-Maastricht period, substantial numbers of people have appeared to be either hostile to or ambivalent concerning further integration. Indeed, the proportion of the EU population perceiving their country’s membership to be a ‘bad thing’ increased from 9% in 1990 to 11% in 2002, while the proportion that perceived membership as ‘neither good nor bad’ or that simply did not know increased from 21% in 1990 to 36% in 2002 (Down & Wilson, 2008 ; Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File, 1970-2002).



Data source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File (1970-2002)

The high levels of Euroscepticism and Euro-indifference are nowadays the major forms of opposition to further European integration. But where as the former, Euroscepticism, has been largely studied, the latter, Euroapathy or Euro-indifference, remains mainly understudied. But if Euroscepticism alone does not cover the entire reality of the “legitimacy’s deficit” of the EU, studying Euro-indifference raises other problems as it is difficult to observe and analyse indifference, particularly by the mean of surveys. Indeed, as underlined by other scholars, surveys don’t always measure real opinions, they record answers to questions without indications of their saliency. Concerning Europe and European integration, we know that these answers do not necessarily refer to strong opinions; we have no ideas of what Europe or the EU means for respondents. Moreover, the EU is not fixed but is constantly evolving making it a “floating

referent” (Inglehart 1970). As it is still an emerging and therefore a changing political order; ordinary citizens could be perceived as complex, distant and uncertain. To this regard, the use of focus groups, generally speaking, present a precious advantage: the dynamics of discussion makes it easier for participants to think and say something about a remote topic and Europe is without any doubt a remote topic to ordinary citizens. Here also, further systematic analysis should be made.

Before continuing, it is worth saying that my conception of empirical legitimacy follows Weber’s work and other European scholars (Belot, 2000; Scheuer, 2005; Hurrelmann, 2008) and defines legitimacy in empirical terms as “belief in legitimacy”. It is still an open empirical question to examine people’s beliefs and judgements and the criteria employed by them (Barker, 2007; Hurrelmann & al., 2007). Indeed, to “consent” can indicate multiples relations between the citizen and power, all marked by different significations. Indeed, the individual can “consent” in the sense that he is resigned to the existence of the political apparatus, he agrees to it by *habitus* or because he believes in the social necessity of it. He can either perceive the utility of power or its beneficial character as he expects to receive advantages from it¹⁶, as outlined in the *utilitarian approach*. He can also support it because he subscribes personally to the beliefs and values delivered by the regime and the leaders, as emphasizes by the Eastonian concept of *diffuse support*. In this tradition, the legitimacy of political power is here defined as “*the product of attitudes and beliefs of unequal intensities, having diverse significations depending on the social group; it ensures the political regime and its leaders different kinds of support, ranging from the habit of consensual obedience to the mobilisation of particular groups for the defence of a threatened power. It ensures an acceptance of the political domination by the social agents upon which this domination is exercised*” (Lagroye, François and Sawicki, 2006: 440-441)¹⁷. According to this definition, the approval of a political order corresponds to dispositions that are different in essence but also in intensity (Lagroye, François & Sawicki, 2006: 439). All these dispositions contribute to the legitimacy of the political order. As a result, both passive and active forms of acceptance are relevant to the legitimacy of a political order. Indifference, defined as the lack of interest for “political life”, is not a phenomenon neither necessarily nor profoundly negative towards the legitimacy of a political order, as long as it states passive acceptance of political domination and not

¹⁶ S.M. Lipset (1962) distinguishes strongly between supports resulting from the “efficiency” of the regime and legitimacy. Without making a so rigid distinction, it is however important not to confuse efficacy and legitimacy.

¹⁷ My own translation of : « La légitimité du pouvoir politique apparaît alors comme le produit d’attitudes et de croyances d’intensité inégale, dotées de significations variées selon les groupes sociaux ; elle assure à un régime politique et aux dirigeants *des* soutiens variés, allant d’une docilité consentie habituelle à la mobilisation de groupes particuliers pour la défense d’un pouvoir menacé. Elle garantit une acceptation de la domination politique par les agents sociaux sur lesquels cette domination s’exerce ».

resistance to it. In this sense, Braud (1991) refers to an “optimum of indifference towards politics” and argues that dangers to the serenity of pluralist democracies come from the excessive influence of dissidents or from the presence of too many apathetic citizens, i.e. assenters¹⁸. The consolidation of the democratic political order relies on a relative equilibrium between the consenters and dissidents on one hand, groups that play an active role in the dynamic of the political system, and the assenters on the other hand, a group that favours the forces of inertia (Braud, 1991). Of course in pluralist democracies, citizens are not politicised all the time with the same intensity, as there is a rotation between highly politicised times, for example elections or referendum and dead times. They will be a function of the degree of politicization, which varies according to the context and to the issue addressed - bearing in mind that an individual’s direct experience of an issue is also a factor of politicization. Regarding passive acceptance or rejection of the political order manifesting by indifference towards it, it is important not to underestimate the importance of beliefs, however diffuse or unconscious they may be. Here the primacy of national sphere is essential as it will serve as a proxy for measuring citizens’ attitudes. The link is made between the multilevel aspect of empirical European legitimacy and Euro-indifference.

5. A typology of legitimacy relationships between EU and nation state

To gain a first impression of the complex interactions that can exist between the assessments of EU and Member States by citizens, it makes sense to work out a typology. To this regard, I will start from the model proposed by Achim Hurrelmann, constructed on previous work of Guido Martinotti and Sonia Stefanizzi, that distinguishes on the basis of simple positive vs negative dichotomies between four types of citizen orientations in the European multilevel system: ‘integrated’ (positive orientations towards both the EU and the Member State), ‘nation-statist’ (negative orientation towards the EU, positive orientation towards one’s Member State), ‘innovative/escapist’ (positive orientation towards the EU, negative orientation towards one’s Member State) and ‘alienated’ (negative orientations towards both the EU and one’s Member State) (Hurrelmann, 2007: 19; Martinotti & Stefanizzi, 1995). However, following what was found out of our focus groups, two more categories will be added, reflecting the importance accorded to the indifference aspect underlined above: ‘positive Euro-indifferent’ (indifference towards the EU, positive orientation towards one’s Member State) and ‘negative Euro-indifferent’ (indifference towards the EU, negative orientation towards one’s Member State).

¹⁸ A similar « debate » took place in the United States following the work of R. Dahl in the sixties.

²³ For an illustration see Duchesne & Frogner, 1995, 2002 & 2008.

Figure 1.2.: Types of legitimacy relationships between EU and nation State

		Assessment of the European integration as ...		
		Good	Neither nor	Bad
Assessment of the nation state as ...	Positive	'Integrative' citizen orientation	'Indifferent positive' citizen orientation	'Nation-statist' citizen orientation
	Negative	'Escapist' citizen orientation	Indifferent negative' citizen orientation	'Alienated' citizen orientation

This typology is of primary use in terms of simplification of a complex reality as one factor that contributes to this complexity is that relational legitimacy assessments do not follow one and the same logic in all countries and in all parts of the population. Studies on the relationship between European and national identities²³ illustrate this quite well on a topic that has attracted greater research interest than legitimacy assessment *stricto sensus* (Hurrelmann, 2007: 22).

Regarding the Euro-indifferent citizens, the hypothesis is made that the national assessments can serve as a proxy in order to evaluate the positive or negative orientations of the particular assessments of the European multilevel system as a whole (Anderson, 1998; Van Keersbergen, 2000). Starting with the assumption that the issue of integration may be too difficult, too abstract or not interesting enough for an important part of citizens referred here as Euro-indifferent, I expected they compensate for a gap in knowledge and/or interest in the EU “*by construing a reality about it that fits their understanding of the political world. For most people, this means that they rely on what they know and think about domestic politics*” (Anderson, 1998: 576).

Based on the same national primacy hypothesis, I will differentiate the results between the ‘national positive’ citizens and the ‘national negative’ citizens in order to control the effects of variation in the national evaluation, which can fluctuate along time and therefore would have introduced a bias in the observed results. The table reproduced here show that a statistical relation does exist in each country, the positive national citizens being more inclined to evaluate positively the European integration process than their negative homologues²⁴. This relationship is of course the first condition in order to speak of multilevel legitimacy!

Table 1.3.: Legitimacy relationships between EU and nation State (Belgium, France and United Kingdom)

Satisfaction with national	Evaluation of country membership to the EU								
	Belgium			France			United-Kingdom		
	Good	Indiff.	Bad	Good	Indiff.	Bad	Good	Indiff.	Bad
Positive	67,8	25,9	6,3	62,0	28,4	9,6	42,2	36,9	20,8

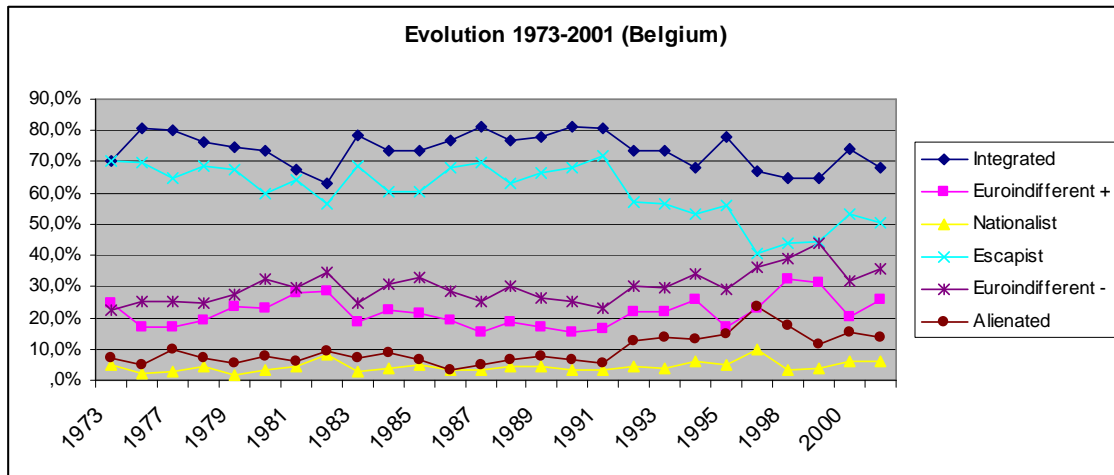
²⁴ Testing the relationship was confirmed for every year and for each country, however with substantial differences in the time. Therefore, further studies are needed to examine the findings reported here more carefully at different points in time.

democracy	Negative	50,5	35,6	13,9	37,2	43,4	19,4	27,8	35,2	37,0
	Total	62,0	29,2	8,9	52,3	34,3	13,4	38,2	36,5	25,4

Source: EB 2004, % in row – Chi-squared significant at 0.001.

In figures 1.3., 1.4. and 1.5., I show the development of the 6 types between 1973 and 2001 in Belgium, France and the United-Kingdom. The common salient trends in the three countries are, first, a substantial decreased in the proportion of integrated citizens among the positive citizens, a decline which largely took place after the Maastricht period confirming previous research results. But what is even more striking is the fall in the proportion of escapist citizens among negative citizens, this being true in the three countries. A important part of negative citizens who saws in European integration a exit from their national dissatisfied situation, are now becoming negative Euro-indifferent and/or alienated citizens depending of the country.

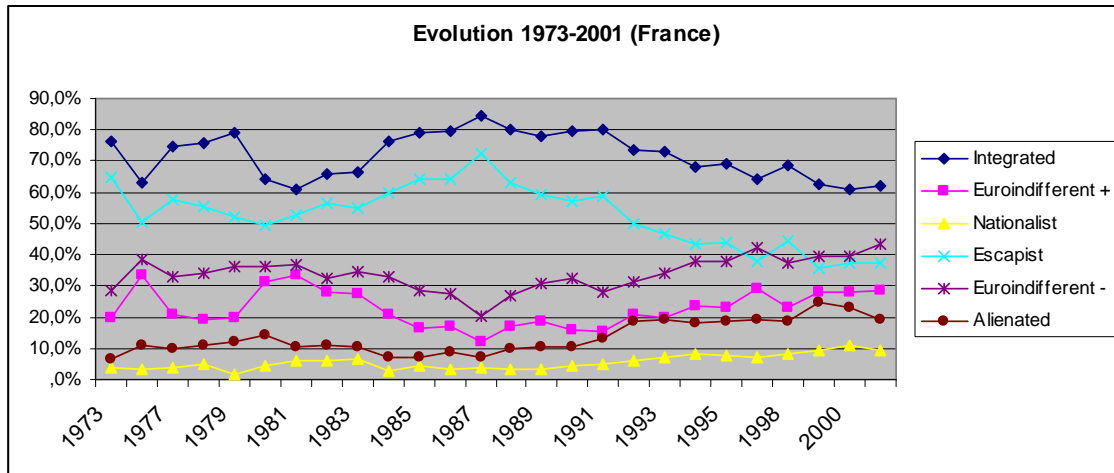
Figure 1.4.: The evolution of citizens' types in Belgium between 1973 and 2001



Data source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File (1970-2002)

In Belgium, the Escapists declined somewhat in numbers between 1991 and nowadays but they remain the second largest group, clearly outnumbering the negative Euro-indifferent (exception made of the year 1999, following the Dutroux case) and alienated among negative citizens. The positive categories, integrated and escapist, remain the first categories followed by the Euro-indifferent categories.

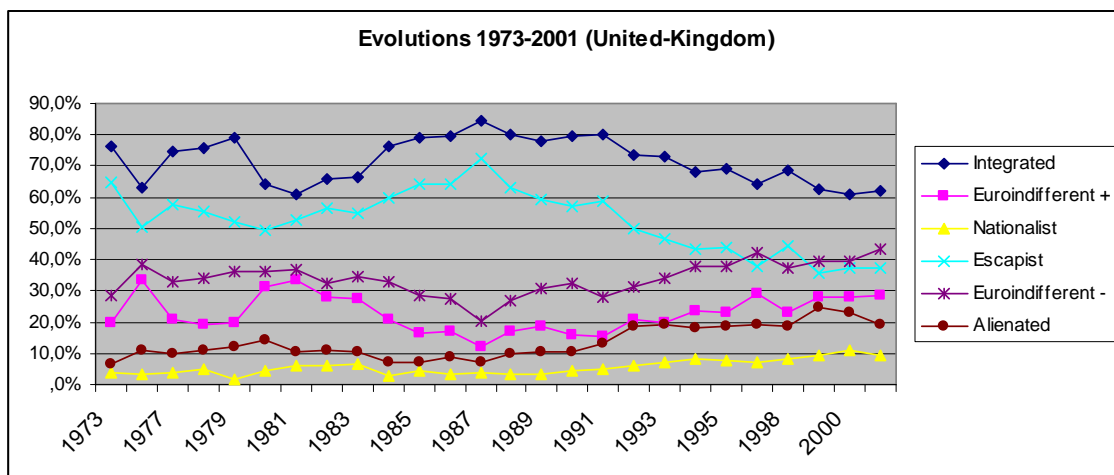
Figure 1.5.: The evolution of citizens' types in France between 1973 and 2001



Data source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File (1970-2002)

In both France and the United-Kingdom, the escapist are not anymore the first group among negative citizens as since the beginning of the years 2000, the negative Euro-indifferent citizens are more important! In France, the last two decades have seen substantial augmentation in alienation. Since 1990, the alienated substantially outnumbered the nation statist. One explanation for this can be found in the fact that, out of our groups, in France the relation between the national and European evaluations is characterized by an amalgam. Thus, in favour of the integration process, the national negative citizens have become more and more negative about European integration and less escapist.

Figure 1.6.: The evolution of citizens' types in the United Kingdom between 1973 and 2001



Data source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File (1970-2002)

The United-Kingdom is also characterized by an augmentation of alienated citizens but also by slightly higher proportion of nationalist citizens since the Maastricht events, these two categories referring to what is generally called Euroscepticism.

To sum up, out of these very first quantitative analysis, it is obvious that what characterized the post-Maastricht period is indeed a decline of integrated citizens among positive national oriented citizens but also and even more important, a very striking decline of escapist citizens among negative national oriented citizens in favour of a higher level of Euro-indifferent citizens.

Conclusions: On the Need to consider Euro-indifference as another type of resistance towards European integration

This conclusion will be twofold as it will underline the need for a micro socio-political approach of European Legitimacy, which will lead to consider Euro-indifference as another type of resistance towards European integration, this being not without theoretical and methodological consequences.

First, the focus of the “sociologist” is quite different from that of the legal expert, the philosopher or even the integration theorist. Thus, the concern is not about solving legal disputes or normative dilemmas about power, but it is rather to understand how citizens accept or not a new political order or, as underlined by Medrano in his paper’s introduction: *“what we still need, however is an exploration of the ways in which the emerging institutional order in Europe has impacted on this society”* (Medrano, 2008: 4). In this text, I fundamentally argued that the question of how citizens accept (or not) major changes in their political order is of most relevance to the issue of legitimacy, and has not yet been addressed as such in European literature. This absence can be understood by the conjunction of two factors: the lack of debate between sociologically-inclined scholars and other theorists of European integration and the abusive utilisation of the Eastonian framework of analysis that has characterized major socio-political works on empirical legitimacy. These shortcomings warrant the micro socio-political approach presented above. Crossing the paths between sociology and European Studies may be both reciprocally useful and potentially enriching in our move towards a new understanding of the concept of legitimacy itself, as it is reconsidered in the context of the European integration. The so-called ‘European legitimacy’ studies stand in need for systematically collected qualitative data on people’s understanding and acceptance (or not) of their changing political order and therefore, methodologies and concepts borrowed from the field of sociology will be of much use. In short, here also the lesson to be drawn is the need for more systematic comparative projects that combine qualitative and quantitative methods and do not hesitate to answer macro questions with a microscope. To this regard, this study finds its place in the field of sociological approaches of the EU which are more and more considered in European Studies even if they are still emerging approaches (Saurugger: 2008).

But taking this sociological point of view on the so-called “legitimacy’s deficit” is not without theoretical and methodological consequences. It leads to emphasize the necessity to both considering active and passive resistances to European integration in order to understand fully the so-called “legitimacy deficit”, Euroscepticism and Euro-indifference being currently the two major forms of resistance to further European integration. Therefore Euroscepticism alone does not cover the entire reality of the so-called “legitimacy’s deficit” of the EU. The indifference to European integration needs also to be taken into account and understood. To this regard, our focus group are of much help as our preliminary results demonstrate that what is most striking is that European integration is not an issue for working class and white collars’ groups while it is a matter of debate and openly expressed disagreement for managers and activists (Duchesne & alii, 2008 : 10). The quantitative results presented here have permitted to confirm and to complement what we found in our groups, proving the complementarities of both qualitative and quantitative approach. Studying growing Euro-indifference is necessary and promising research agenda for anyone who wants to understand the issue of empirical legitimacy in this still emerging multilevel polity.

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