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## Political Opposition and the European Union<sup>1</sup>

ONE OF THE PRINCIPAL REASONS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF POLITICAL opposition in the context of the European Union is that there seems to be a lot of it about. Indeed, when France and the Netherlands voted in early summer 2005 to reject the proposed new European constitution, they seemed to epitomize a growing mood of scepticism about Europe that could be sensed more or less throughout the enlarged Union. In the past, when approval of the European project has been explicitly demanded – in referendums in France, Ireland, Denmark and the UK, for example, as well as in the accession referendums in many of the newer member states – it has almost always been given. Where it has been denied, as in Denmark in 1992 and Ireland in 2001, the question has been asked again in a somewhat different form, and then eventually consent has been given. More often, of course, consent was never explicitly demanded, and hence it was always assumed to exist. In the absence of any serious outbreak of opposition, agreement was taken as given. This was the essence of the so-called permissive consensus: 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.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is a slightly revised version of the *Government and Opposition*/Leonard Schapiro Annual Lecture, delivered at the Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association, Reading University, 5 April 2006. I am grateful to Michael Moran and Paul Heywood for their initial invitation and their support, and to various members of Deirdre Curtin's Research Group 2 of the Connex network for comments on these and other arguments.

<sup>2</sup> Note Ken Tynan's observation in his 1975 diary: '6 June: Roy Jenkins, interviewed on TV after the result [of the Common Market referendum] was announced, made an unguarded remark that summed up the tacit elitism of the pro-Marketeters. Asked to

Today, there is neither consensus nor much that is permissive. When France and the Netherlands voted opposition to the proposed constitution, they did so with relatively large majorities on the basis of relatively large turnouts. Of the 62 per cent who voted in the Netherlands, fewer than 40 per cent voted Yes; of the 69 per cent who voted in France a few days earlier, only 45 per cent voted Yes. Less frequently recalled is the July 2005 referendum in Luxembourg – one of the two major centres of the European Union – when 90 per cent of the electorate voted, and when the majority in favour proved to be a surprisingly muted 57 per cent.<sup>3</sup> If so many Luxembourgish had doubts about the project that was effectively located in their midst, then support for Europe was certainly ebbing.

Survey evidence tells much the same story. In a recent paper presented to a conference on Euroscepticism, Catherine Netjes and Kees van Kersbergen show that between 1991, when the Maastricht Treaty was being finalized, and 2003, popular support for the EU fell by some 17 per cent across the EU-15 as a whole. The fall was most pronounced in the Netherlands and France, but was also substantial in the UK, Germany, Belgium and Italy. Only in Luxembourg, where the doubts were evident in 2005, as well as in Ireland, Sweden and Austria, did the more recent Eurobarometer polls point to a slight growth in support,<sup>4</sup> and even in Ireland the question regarding approval of the Nice Treaty had to be posed twice before an endorsement was forthcoming.

Of course, there are a lot of extenuating circumstances at work here. Voters in both France and the Netherlands were clearly concerned about the enlargement of the EU, as well as the proposed further expansion to Turkey, and even though this was not formally an issue in the constitutional referendum, it clearly played a role in helping to determine voter attitudes. Scepticism about the euro and its effect on hidden price inflation may also have been important, even though this too was not part of the issues that were formally put

explain why the public had voted as it had, . . . [he] smugly replied: "They took the advice of people they were used to following." See John Lahr (ed.), *The Diaries of Kenneth Tynan*, London, Bloomsbury, 2001, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> These figures are all reported on the valuable website maintained by the Research Centre on Direct Democracy in Geneva, <http://c2d.unige.ch>.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine E. Netjes and Kees van Kersbergen, 'Interests, Identity and Political Allegiance in the European Union', paper presented at Euroscepticism Conference, Amsterdam, July 2005, Table 1.

to the vote in summer 2005. Indeed, in the Netherlands in particular, which has no history of national referendums, and in which the question of Europe had long been excised from the political debate, this first ever opportunity to express an opinion on an EU issue seemed to encourage the emergence of a portmanteau of old grievances.

Even allowing for these extenuating circumstances, however, as well as for all the other contingencies that may be listed, it is evident that the EU is not particularly popular with voters and is not widely trusted, and that it is becoming even less popular and less trustworthy with the years. There is, in this sense, a growing *opposition* to Europe, as well as a growing sense that this opposition can be tapped by political actors and organizations. Van der Eijk and Franklin refer to this situation as being equivalent to ‘the sleeping giant’, arguing that the European issue is now ‘ripe for politicization’ and suggesting that ‘it is only a matter of time before policy entrepreneurs . . . seize the opportunity . . . to differentiate themselves from other parties in EU terms’.<sup>5</sup>

But even though there may be a wide range of disparate evidence pointing to the growing opposition to Europe, it remains unclear what this opposition involves, and from where it comes. For example, opposition to the EU could be a reflection of an opposition to the *policies* being promoted at the European level, although even here it is not clear which policies are being opposed, or by whom. On the other hand, opposition to the EU could involve opposition to the EU project as a whole – opposition to the EU *polity* – and hence it could reflect a desire to return to the familiar confines of the nation-state. Nor is it clear what ‘contesting’ Europe entails, to adopt the terms used by Marks and Steenbergen.<sup>6</sup> Is this equivalent to contesting, say, France, or Italy? Can we be against an individual country’s political system in the same way that we can be ‘against’ Europe, and, if not, what does that tell us about the nature and character of Euroscepticism?

If one is against the EU as a polity, then we can assume that this entails an anti-system opposition – much in the same way that Gerry

<sup>5</sup> Cees van der Eijk and Mark N. Franklin, ‘Potential for Contestation on European Matters at National Elections in Europe’, in Gary Marks and Marco N. Steenbergen (eds), *European Integration and Political Conflict*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 32–50, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> Marks and Steenbergen, *European Integration*.

Adams and Sinn Féin are against the UK, or that Umberto Bossi and the Lega Nord are against Italy. But if one is against an extension of the EU's policies into new areas, or even against tighter EU control, then we can assume that one is expressing a fundamentally conservative position – a position that states ‘thus far, no further’. This is not so much an anti-system opposition, therefore, as a pro-system opposition – an opposition that argues in favour of the status quo or even the status quo ante. In sum, while there seems to be a lot of opposition to the EU about, it is often difficult to pin down what it entails, and this clearly makes it worth addressing.

There is also another obvious reason why we might want to look at the question of political opposition and the EU, and that is that it allows us to return to the core concern of *Government and Opposition* and of its founding editor, Leonard Schapiro, whom this lecture commemorates. As Schapiro stated in his first editorial in 1965,<sup>7</sup> *Government and Opposition* was established in order to revive the study of opposition and to bring it back to the centre of comparative political science research. That first issue of the journal also carried an article by Robert Dahl on the nature of opposition in Western democracies, a paper that later served as the concluding chapter in Dahl's classic *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, first published 40 years ago, a volume that still stands as one of the foremost contributions to the study of modern comparative politics.<sup>8</sup> In other words, thanks to *Government and Opposition* and thanks to Robert Dahl, the notion of opposition was figuring prominently in the scholarly debates of the 1960s, and hence it is now worth returning to.

## MODES OF OPPOSITION

That said, although this lecture might well offer a good occasion to link the traditional notions of political opposition to the current situation of the EU, the link itself seems to reveal relatively little – a factor that is interesting in itself. That is, while there is clearly growing opposition to Europe, and while this opposition might well appropxi-

<sup>7</sup> Leonard Schapiro, ‘Foreword’, *Government and Opposition*, 1: 1 (1965), pp. 1–6.

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Dahl, ‘Reflections on Opposition in Western Democracies’, *Government and Opposition*, 1: 1 (1965), pp. 7–24; and Robert A. Dahl (ed.), *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1966.

mate to a sleeping giant, there is relatively little opposition in the sense of the *government–opposition* dynamic that was emphasized by both Shapiro and Dahl in the 1960s. There are governments in the EU, of course, and there is opposition to the EU, but there is little in the way of a linkage between these two that would make the government–opposition relationship relevant to EU practice.

When Schapiro launched *Government and Opposition* in 1965, and when Dahl published his volume on political oppositions a year later, they were not breaking completely new ground. Almost 10 years earlier another major figure in European political science, Otto Kirchheimer, had published a now famous and widely quoted essay on what he referred to as ‘the waning’ of opposition in Western democracies, in which he identified three different modes in which opposition could be understood.<sup>9</sup> The first of these was defined as ‘classical opposition’, and was drawn from the experience of the United Kingdom polity from the eighteenth century onwards, and reflected a system in which those not in government opposed and offered alternatives to the policies pursued by the government, while at the same time recognizing the right of that government to govern. Second, there was what he called the ‘opposition of principle’, in which those opposed to the government of the day objected not only to the government and its policies, but also to the whole system of governance. In other words, they opposed the government and also denied it legitimacy. Finally, there was what he called ‘the elimination’ of opposition, something that occurred when the polity experienced government by cartel, and when no substantive or meaningful differences divided the actors that were ostensibly competing against one another.

If we relate this distinction to the categories that were later developed by Dahl in his *Political Oppositions* volume, then we can think of classical opposition as being that which is directed at the *policies* of the government; opposition of principle is that which is directed at the *polity*; and the elimination of opposition is that which occurs when opposition is directed only against the *personnel* of government.

<sup>9</sup> Otto Kirchheimer, ‘The Waning of Opposition in Parliamentary Regimes’, *Social Research*, 24: 1 (1957), pp. 127–56. For a valuable recent overview of Kirchheimer’s analyses of the post-war democracies, see André Krouwel, ‘Otto Kirchheimer and the Catch-All Party’, *West European Politics*, 26: 2 (2003), pp. 23–40.

The key point to understand here, however, is that these are not just discrete modes of opposition, but are actually related to one another. For Kirchheimer, for example, there had been a more or less unstoppable trend among the post-war democracies away from classical opposition, and away from an opposition of principle, towards a situation in which opposition was effectively eliminated – hence ‘the waning of opposition’. This trend was also noted by Dahl, who pointed to the growing extent of agreement among political actors and to the decline in opposition, and who referred quite elegantly to the emergence of a ‘surplus of consensus’.<sup>10</sup>

Over and above any general trends that might be noted with regard to these different modes of opposition, though, there was also another relationship between them that was emphasized by both Dahl and Kirchheimer, as well as by Schapiro, and which is very relevant in this context. It is perhaps an obvious point, but it is still worth recalling and underlining: anti-system opposition, or opposition of principle, is undermined when more scope is afforded to classical opposition. Conversely, when classical opposition is limited or constrained, it then becomes more likely that critics will mobilize around an opposition of principle. In other words, if political actors lack the opportunity to develop classical opposition, then they either submit entirely, leading to the elimination of opposition, or they revolt. We need look no further than the sad history of Northern Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s and beyond to see the truth of this statement.<sup>11</sup> Or, as Schapiro put it in his editorial in the first issue of *Government and Opposition*, ‘revolutions become necessary because the polity has failed to integrate opposition within government, and to provide it with an outlet’.<sup>12</sup>

According to Dahl, back in 1966, the long-term path of development of democratic institutions has been marked by three major milestones. The first of these established the right of citizens to participate in governmental institutions by casting a vote. The

<sup>10</sup> Dahl, ‘Reflections on Opposition’, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Richard Rose, *Governing without Consensus: An Irish Perspective*, London, Faber and Faber, 1971; and Ian McAllister, *The Northern Ireland Social Democratic and Labour Party*, London, Macmillan, 1977.

<sup>12</sup> Shapiro, ‘Foreword’, p. 3.

second established the right of citizens to be represented within the polity. The third established the right of an organized opposition to appeal for votes against the government and in elections.<sup>13</sup> But while the first two of these milestones have also been established in the case of the EU institutions, the third has not. That is, while we now enjoy the right to participate in EU decisions by casting a vote, whether for our putative national representatives who go to the various Councils, or for our European representatives who go to the European Parliament in Strasbourg; and while we also enjoy the right to be represented in Europe – by all accounts, and despite its manifest shortcomings, the European Parliament is a representative body;<sup>14</sup> we emphatically lack the right to organize opposition within the system. We lack the capacity to do so, and, above all, we lack an arena in which to do it.

Once we cannot organize opposition *in* the EU, we are then almost forced to organize opposition *to* the EU. To be critical of the policies promulgated by Brussels is therefore to be critical of the polity; to object to the process is therefore to object to the product. Following Kirchheimer, in other words, we either submit, and hence we accept the elimination of opposition, or we mobilize an opposition of principle and become intrinsically Eurosceptic.

#### DEPOLITICIZATION<sup>15</sup>

Why should this be the case? The obvious answer is that we cannot organize opposition in the EU – we cannot appeal for votes against a government in elections or in parliament – because the EU itself has been depoliticized. Opposition demands *political* debate, and, as

<sup>13</sup> Robert A. Dahl, 'Preface', in Dahl, *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, p. xiii.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Herman Schmitt and Jacques Thomassen (eds), *Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> The following section draws closely on part of my online paper 'Popular Democracy and the European Union Polity', *European Governance Papers (EUROGOV)*, C-05-03 (2005), at <http://www.connex-network.org/eurogov/pdf/egp-connex-C-05-03.pdf>; for related arguments, see Peter Mair, 'The Europeanization Dimension', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 11: 2 (2004), pp. 337–48; and Peter Mair, 'The Limited Impact of Europe on National Party Systems', *West European Politics*, 23: 4 (2000), pp. 27–51.

Vivien Schmidt puts it, the EU is a polity without politics.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, by becoming depoliticized itself, the EU also helps to depoliticize decision-making at the national level, tending therefore to bring even the member states to the status of polities without politics.

This is not a new argument, at least not on my part, but it is one that can be underlined in this particular context, and for which the *Government and Opposition* lecture, commemorating a scholar who emphasized the importance to democracy of both government and opposition, offers a very appropriate occasion. In fact, it is a double argument. In the first place, I argue that the EU is largely depoliticized; and in the second, I argue that this is part of a more or less deliberate policy by mainstream political elites who are reluctant to have their hands tied by the constraints of popular democracy. Let us look at both these elements more closely.

In general, those citizens who seek to exercise control in and over the EU polity have access to two overlapping channels of political influence, with two sets of delegates who may be mandated, and with two arenas in which politics might be played out. On the one hand, they can seek to exert control through their national parliaments and governments, and then, in a further step, through the Council of Ministers and the European Council. On the other hand, and with more immediate effect, citizens can also seek representation through the European Parliament, and can use this channel to control government in the EU. It was through this channel, for example, that the parties in the European Parliament forced the withdrawal of Rocco Buttiglione from the proposed new Commission headed by José Manuel Barroso in 2004. This is how our right to vote is constituted, and our right to be represented.

Although constitutionally quite separate from one another, these two channels nevertheless experience considerable overlap, and this occurs in two important ways. First, and increasingly so, overlap occurs as a result of processes of co-decision in the EU, whereby issues and/or appointments are decided on the basis of input from both channels at the same time, that is, on the basis of input from both the European Parliament and the national governments. Second, overlap also occurs because, in the main, it is usually the same actors or delegates that take on the role of intermediary in both channels.

<sup>16</sup> Vivien A. Schmidt, *The EU and National Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.



In other words, the same political parties, subject to control by the same political leadership and by the same organized membership, compete in both channels.

As well as two channels of representation, there are also two dimensions of possible conflict and competition that have to do with the establishment and functioning of the EU polity. The first of these is what I have elsewhere defined as the ‘Europeanization dimension’,<sup>17</sup> a dimension that is bounded at one end by conflicts over the institutionalization of a distinctive European political system and at the other end by conflicts over the penetration of European rules, directives and norms into the domestic sphere. That is, at one end of the Europeanization dimension there exists the potential for conflicts regarding the creation, consolidation and territorial reach of authoritative political institutions at the supranational European level, whereas at the other end of the same dimension the potential conflicts concern the extent to which local policies and practices become subject to standardizing European influences and constraints. Both ends of this dimension are related, of course, in that each requires and is dependent upon the other. Were it not for the institutionalization of a European political system, there would be little to exert an ‘external’ impact on the domestic sphere, and hence little that could penetrate. At the same time, in the absence of any penetration into the domestic sphere, the institutionalization of a European political system, however advanced, would be of little practical concern. It is in this sense that these two faces of Europeanization – institutionalization and penetration – can be seen to constitute part of a single dimension.

This single dimension of Europeanization offers a close parallel to the territorial dimension that was specified by Lipset and Rokkan in their now classic analysis of the development of national cleavage structures.<sup>18</sup> At one end of the territorial dimension in that earlier framework can be found those conflicts that involve local opposition ‘to encroachments of the aspiring or the dominant national elites and their bureaucracies’; in the European equivalent this can be seen to constitute local opposition to the interference of Brussels. At the

<sup>17</sup> See Mair, ‘The Europeanization Dimension’, pp. 340–3.

<sup>18</sup> S. M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, ‘Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction’, in S. M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, New York, Free Press, 1967, pp. 6–26.

other end of the dimension are located conflicts that concern ‘the control, the organization, the goals, and the policy options of the system *as a whole* . . . [often reflecting] differences in conceptions of nationhood, over domestic priorities and over external strategies’, and these, when translated to the European level, would be equivalent to the current divisions about the desired shape, depth and territorial extension of the European integration process.<sup>19</sup>

In their original schema, Lipset and Rokkan also specified a second or functional axis that cut across the territorial dimension. At one end of this dimension were grouped various interest-specific conflicts over the allocation of resources, conflicts that were seen as pragmatic in nature and as capable of being solved ‘through rational bargaining and the establishment of universalistic rules of allocation’. At the other end were grouped the more ideological oppositions, in which the conflict was not about particular gains or losses but instead concerned ‘conceptions of moral right and . . . the interpretation of history and human destiny’.<sup>20</sup> This second dimension is also perfectly compatible with the translation of this scheme onto the European level. In this case, as in the case of the Lipset–Rokkan nation-building model, the second axis is not about Europe or Europeanization as such, whether specified in terms of institutionalization or penetration, but rather takes Europe as a given and divides instead along strictly functional conflicts, sometimes interest-specific and sometimes ideological. Conflicts that occur along this dimension take no position on the question of Europe as a polity, but are more concerned with the allocation of resources within whatever version of Europe happens to exist at the time.

In sum, there are two dimensions of competition involved here, the Europeanization dimension and the functional dimension. The one concerns the shape and reach of the increasingly institutionalized European Union political system, while the other concerns policy areas in which there is already an established EU competence, but in which there are disagreements about approach and about priorities. In addition, and as outlined above, there are also two channels of representation within the EU system; that is, there are

<sup>19</sup> Lipset and Rokkan, ‘Cleavage’, p. 10. For a recent wide-ranging application of Rokkan’s framework to the process of European integration, see Stefano Bartolini, *Restructuring Europe*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Lipset and Rokkan, ‘Cleavage’, p. 11.

two channels through which citizens can hope to exert influence on, or control over the outputs of the system. The one channel works through European elections and the European Parliament, an institution that has an increasingly important voice and authority in the policy-making process, and hence on the outputs of the EU, but which has no real say over the constitutional structures or even over the appointment of the political executive. The other works through national elections and national parliaments and governments, that is, within the arena that has the exclusive authority over constitutional questions.

In principle, then, it should be possible to match these dimensions and channels to one another, and, at least at first sight, it should also be obvious how they fit together. As far as opposition on the Europeanization dimension is concerned, for example, and most especially as far as opposition to the institutionalization of Europe is concerned, the competences of the various institutions are such that one would expect this to be channelled through the national route. It is here, and *only* here, that the relevant authority lies. As far as opposition on the functional dimension is concerned, on the other hand, while this might also be channelled through the national route, since some of the relevant authority is also located here, the expectation is that this should mainly be focused on the European channel, and through the European Parliament, since it is along this dimension that the main competences of the Parliament seem to lie. To be effective, therefore, it would seem that representation via the national channel is best invoked for opposition along the Europeanization dimension, whereas representation via the European channel is best invoked for opposition along the functional dimension.

In practice, however, the real-world patterns of contestation tell quite a different story. That is, when we look at the debates and programmes that are found in each of the channels, we tend to find opposition regarding the institutionalization of Europe being voiced within the European channel, where no relevant competence lies; whereas opposition along the functional dimension is usually invoked in the national channel, even though on this dimension authority is shared with the European channel.

The result is then simple to see. The choices in both channels become increasingly irrelevant to the outputs of the system, and the behaviour and preferences of citizens constitute virtually no formal constraint on, or mandate for, the relevant policy makers. Decisions

can be taken by political elites with a more or less free hand. Opposition, even when it exists, is almost by definition ineffective, and hence it becomes either muted and submissive – in Kirchheimer’s sense, it is eliminated – or it is transformed into an opposition of principle. Because we cannot mobilize opposition in Europe, and because we are denied an appropriate political arena in which to hold European governance accountable, we are almost pushed into organizing opposition to Europe.

### THE SEDATED GIANT

How can we account for this evident evasion of opposition in Europe? How do we explain the failure to mark Dahl’s third major milestone in the development of democratic institutions at the EU level?

In the short run, the answer, at least in principle, is very simple, and especially so when viewed from a supply-side theory of political competition: the system is driven by the choices made by party and political leaders when they contest elections and by the strategies that they adopt in both channels of representation. That is, and again with few exceptions, political leaders dealing with Europe choose to contest elections on issues in which those elections cannot prove decisive, and to exclude those issues on which the elections can prove decisive. They prefer to talk about the institutionalization of Europe when competing in elections to the European Parliament, where it is largely irrelevant, and they prefer not to raise these questions when competing in national elections, where it matters.<sup>21</sup>

The result is the remarkable depoliticization of the Europeanization dimension. There may well be a potential for conflict over Europe – over its reach, its form, and its sheer size – but, at least as yet, the parties that contest elections, particularly at national level, seem to want to push this to the shadows. The preference appears to be that Europe not be contested – at least within the mainstream. To

<sup>21</sup> Although this is generally true for the mainstream parties in particular, the most extreme example of such displacement comes from the fringe, the Danish June Movement and People’s Movement. Again the EU chooses to fight its anti-European battle in the electoral arena of the European Parliament rather than in that of the Folketing. The two parties win a lot of support – almost 25 per cent in the 1999 round of European Parliament elections – but they are also clearly choosing, deliberately so, to fight in the wrong arena.

recall, van der Eijk and Franklin have referred to this situation as being equivalent to ‘the sleeping giant’, and have argued that the European issue is now ‘ripe for politicization’. Perhaps this is true. In my reading, however, the giant is not only sleeping, but has been deliberately sedated, so that Jack – in the shape of the mainstream parties – can run up and down the European beanstalk at will. But the problem does not just stop here – or at least the effects of this depoliticization do not just stop here. The problems also feed into national politics, and it is here too that the interplay between classical opposition and its alternatives comes again into focus.

To begin with, the development of a European level of decision-making has clearly played a major role in the hollowing out of policy competition between political parties at the national level. This has happened in two ways. First, and most obviously, one major effect of Europe is to limit the policy space that is available to the competing parties. This happens when policies are deliberately harmonized, and when we are confronted with more or less forced convergence within the Union. That is, it comes from adopting the *acquis* and from accepting, at least in certain key policy areas, the rule that one size fits all. National governments may still vary from one another in how they interpret these demands for convergence, of course, and in this sense there may still remain a degree of variation from one system to the next. But even when such interpretations differ across countries, they rarely appear to differ – at least across the mainstream – within countries. Thus even when one of the member states does seek to opt out of a particular policy, this usually happens by cross-party agreement, and hence the domestic policy space remains foreshortened and the issue in question rarely becomes politicized. Classical opposition is in this sense limited by Europe.

Second, Europe limits the capacities of national governments, and hence also the capacities of the parties in those governments, by reducing the range of policy instruments at their disposal and by limiting their policy repertoire. This occurs through the delegation of decision-making from the national level to the European level – whether to the European Central Bank, or to Europol, or to any of the many new regulatory agencies that now proliferate at all levels within the European polity.<sup>22</sup> These are the so-called

<sup>22</sup> Daniel R. Kelemen, ‘The Politics of “Eurocratic” Structure and the New European Agencies’, *West European Politics*, 25: 4 (2002), pp. 93–118.

non-majoritarian institutions, from which parties and politics are deliberately excluded. In this instance, policy is decided according to a variety of different expert or legal merits, and in principle, at least, is not subject to partisanship or open to opposition politics. It is difficult to appeal for votes against an agency or an expert. In addition, Europe also has the effect of disallowing what had once been standard policy practices on the grounds that they interfere with the free market, and in this way also the overall stock of policies available to national governments is steadily curtailed.

These different limits serve to reduce substantially the stakes of competition between political parties, to dampen down the potential differences wrought by successive governments, and to reduce the scope for classical opposition. Policy competition becomes more attenuated, and elections inevitably become less decisive in policy terms. To be sure, elections do continue to determine the composition of government in most polities – they determine the personnel – and as more and more party systems tend towards a bipolar pattern of competition, and towards a contest between two teams of leaders, this aspect of the electoral process is likely to become even more important. This is opposition within the cartel. But in so far as competing policies or programmes are concerned, the value of elections is steadily diminishing. Through Europe, although crucially not only through Europe, political competition, and hence political opposition, becomes increasingly eviscerated.

This reduction in the stakes of political competition, and the wider process of depoliticization to which Europe contributes, clearly downgrades the value of traditional democratic processes at the national level, including the role of opposition. More to the point, if politics becomes less important, then so too does democracy – at least in the sense of popular participation and electoral accountability. The result is not only the familiar democratic deficit that we see at the European level, but also a series of domestic democratic deficits within the member states themselves. To put it another way, because democratic decision-making proves marginal to the working of the European polity at the supranational level, it also tends to lose its value in the working of the various component polities at the national level. It is in this sense that, through Europe, European citizens learn to live with an absence of effective participatory or input-oriented democracy.

They also learn to live with a growing absence of politics. For while European integration serves to depoliticize much of the policy-

making process at the domestic level, it fails to compensate for this reduction by any commensurate *re*politicization at the European level. What is being lost on the swings is not being gained on the roundabouts. Political conflict in this sense becomes undermined in Europe, and by Europe.

#### EUROSCEPTICISM AND POLITY-SCEPTICISM

Let me come to a conclusion and see where this might have taken us. In the first place, and following Dahl's categories, it is clear that the EU misses the third great milestone that has marked the path to democratic institutions in the nation-states. That is, we are afforded a right to participate at the European level, even if we may now choose to avail ourselves of that right less frequently; and we are afforded the right to be represented in Europe, even if it is sometimes difficult to work out when and how this representative link functions; but we are not afforded the right to organize opposition within the European polity. There is no government–opposition nexus at this level. Second, and again following Dahl, as well as Kirchheimer and Schapiro, we know that a failure to allow for opposition within the polity is likely to lead either (a) to the elimination of opposition, and to more or less total submission; or (b) to the mobilization of an opposition of principle against the polity – to anti-European opposition and to Euroscepticism. Third, this development is also beginning to reach down into the domestic sphere, in that the growing weight of the EU, and its indirect impact on national politics, also helps to foster domestic democratic deficits, and hence also limits the scope for classical opposition at the national level. Here too, then, we might expect to see either the elimination of opposition or the mobilization of a new – perhaps populist – opposition of principle.

Part of the problem here is that it is increasingly difficult to separate out what is European and what is national. In other words, as European integration proceeds, it becomes more and more difficult to conceive of the member states as being on one side of some putative divide, with a distinct supranational Union sitting on the other. Instead, we usually see both together and at the same time. Thus, for example, we have one approach in the literature on the EU that emphasizes how Europe 'hits home', while we have another and more recent approach that emphasizes how home – or the

nation-state – ‘hits Europe’.<sup>23</sup> In reality, each ‘hits’ and hence intermingles with the other, so that we might well conceive of what the great Irish writer Flann O’Brien might have called ‘a molecular theory of Europe’.<sup>24</sup> The EU is also the member states.

If, though, in practice, it becomes difficult to separate out what is European and what is domestic; and if, in practice, the two become ever more closely bound up with one another, it then follows that dissatisfaction with Europe must also entail a more generalized ‘polity-scepticism’. In other words, 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, and it is, in my view, a scepticism that is at least partially fostered by the increasingly limited scope for opposition *within* the system – whether that system be European or national, or both at the same time.

This is also one of the reasons why our polities have now become such strong breeding grounds for populism. To a degree, this was foreseen by Dahl in his contribution to the first issue of *Government and Opposition*, when he talked about the decline of opposition and the ‘surplus of consensus’, and when he talked about the type of opposition that might develop in the Western democracies of the future. Speculating about that future, he pointed towards the possibility of the emergence an opposition of principle, and of an opposition that would be directed at the mode of governing itself. Not just

<sup>23</sup> Tanja Börzel and Thomas Risse, ‘When Europe Hits Home: Europeanization and Domestic Change’, *European Integration Online Papers*, 4: 15 (2000), <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2000-015a.htm>; Jan Beyers and Jarle Trondal, ‘How Nation-States “Hit” Europe: Ambiguity and Representation in the European Union’, *West European Politics*, 27: 5 (2004), pp. 919–42. I also deal with this issue in *Polity-Scepticism, Party Failings and the Challenge to European Democracy: Uhlenbeck Lecture 24*, Wassenaar, NIAS, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> See Flann O’Brien, *The Third Policeman*, London, McGibbon and Kee, 1967, where the molecular theory of bicycles is outlined in some detail. In brief, cyclists who ride their bikes often enough, especially on bumpy Irish roads, will transfer some of their molecules into the bike, while the bike will transfer some of its molecules into the cyclist. Eventually, the mix becomes so advanced that it becomes impossible to know which is the bike and which is the rider. On market days you might see old farmers who cycle a lot balancing themselves with one foot on the curb, or leaning with their shoulders against a gable wall, while late on cold evenings you might see their bikes edging closer to the fire.



the policies, and not only the personnel, but also the polity itself might be called into question, he suggested:

Among the possible sources of alienation in western democracies that may generate new forms of structural opposition is the new democratic Leviathan itself. By the democratic Leviathan I mean the kind of political system which is a product of long evolution and hard struggle, welfare-oriented, centralized, bureaucratic, tamed and controlled by competition among highly organized elites, and, in the perspective of the ordinary citizen, somewhat remote, distant and impersonal . . . . The politics of this new democratic Leviathan are above all the politics of compromise, adjustment, negotiation, bargaining; a politics carried on among professional and quasi-professional leaders who constitute only a small part of the total citizen body; a politics that reflects a commitment to the virtues of pragmatism, moderation and incremental change; a politics that is un-ideological and even anti-ideological. . . . This new Leviathan [is seen by many citizens] as too remote and bureaucratized, too addicted to bargaining and compromise, [and] too much an instrument of political elites and technicians . . . .<sup>25</sup>

Political opposition gives voice. By losing opposition, we lose voice, and by losing voice we lose control of our own political systems. It is not at all clear how that control might be regained, either in Europe or at home, or how we might eventually restore meaning to Dahl's third great milestone on the road to building democratic institutions.

<sup>25</sup> Dahl, 'Reflections on Opposition', pp. 21–2.