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ARTICLE

Going Soft or Staying Soft: Have Identity Factors Become More Important Than Economic Rationale when Explaining Euroscepticism?

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ABSTRACT The scholarly debate on explanatory factors of public opinion towards the EU has shifted from economic and utilitarian (hard) factors to also encompass identity/ affective (soft) factors. This study investigates the explanatory strengths of these two factors. It does so in the context of 12 long-standing EU member states at two time points (1994 and 2005), drawing on Eurobarometer data. Results from the multi-level analyses show that identity-based as well as utilitarian factors play a significant role in explaining Euroscepticism in both years. Furthermore, the explanatory power of hard factors is very stable across time. We conclude that, against expectations, soft factors did not explain more variance in 2005 than in 1994, but already played an important albeit neglected role in explaining Euroscepticism.

KEY WORDS: Euroscepticism, economic, identity, soft and hard factors

Public opinion about the European Union is much discussed among scholars (see Anderson 1995; Gabel 1995, 1996; McLaren 2002; Boomgaarden *et.al*, 2011). Over time, the academic debate on EU attitudes (often labeled Euroscepticism) has moved beyond a mere utilitarian perspective to encompass other facets of political and social life. The empirical focal point on the factors that explain Euroscepticism shifted from so-called 'hard factors', which are utilitarian and economic predictors, to 'soft factors', relating to affective, identity and culturally driven aspects (McLaren 2002; de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; de Vreese *et al.* 2008; Hooghe and Marks 2005).

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Scholars in the 1990s (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Gabel and Palmer 1995; Gabel and Whitten 1997) emphasized the importance of, for instance, individuals' work status, income and economic evaluations, the 'hard factors'. At that time this approach was hardly questioned, since the initial purpose of European integration was predominantly economic (Anderson and Reichert 1995; Gabel and Whitten 1997). However, with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty intergovernmental policies were created concerning foreigners and security (CFSP), and justice and home affairs (JHA), causing the EU to incorporate 'softer' policy dimensions (Dinan 1999). These policies arguably had an impact from the late 1990s onwards (de Vreese *et al.* 2008).

Extant research suggests that today soft factors have a bigger impact on public Euroscepticism than hard factors (Hooghe and Marks 2005; de Vreese *et al.* 2008), implying a shift in explanatory power from economic to identity-based accounts. To our knowledge no empirical evidence shows that determinants of EU attitudes in the 2000s in fact differ in explanatory power from the ones investigated in the 1990s.¹ Therefore, we pose the following question: Has the strength of soft and hard factors in explaining Euroscepticism changed over time?

The terms hard and soft relate to the *predictors* of public opinion regarding the EU. Building on Marks and Hooghe (2005) and de Vreese *et al.* (2008, 59-82) this study takes the approach of grouping independent variables into categories of hard and soft. De Vreese *et al.* (2008) used this same terminology in order to group predictors of attitudes towards Turkish accession to the EU. The terms relate to how processes of European integration would affect citizens in a financial way, a practical sense (hard factors) as well as culturally and identity-wise (soft factors). It is a useful distinction to make here, since we build our hypotheses on the basis of developments in European policies and integration.

Our approach differs from literature on party positions vis-à-vis European integration, where the terms hard and soft are used to distinguish different types of Euroscepticism among *political parties* (see for example Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2003), and focus on the dependent variable. Szczerbiak and Taggart (2008, 7-8) distinguish principal opposition against the EU (hard Euroscepticism) and parties' criticism on certain aspects of European integration (soft Euroscepticism). Hence, this conceptualization should not be equated with the way the terms hard and soft are applied in this study that focuses on factors explaining Euroscepticism in public opinion.²

Throughout the 1990s a growing number of European citizens expressed reluctance towards further European integration, which marked the end of an era of 'permissive consensus' (Hooghe and Marks 2008), and the undisputed authority of EU elites (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Gabel 1998b). In response the EU took greater strides for a more open and accountable progress of decision-making, creating a greater role for the European parliament (Luedtke 2005). Positive public attitudes are crucial to the success of the EU (Cichowski 2000); negativism can induce stagnation, standstill or ultimately, implosion of European integration. Hence, it is vital to understand the factors that cause changes in public attitudes towards the EU, and

to see if those factors have changed after a period wherein much has changed for the EU.

Euroscepticism and a Change in Emphasis

From extant literature (see Hooghe and Marks 2005; de Vreese *et al.* 2008) the expectation arises of an increasing explanatory strength of soft factors vis-a-vis hard factors with regard to Euroscepticism between the 1990s and the 2000s. There are two main underlying assumptions: First, the focus of the EU has shifted. By implementing new (social) policies during the Maastricht treaty (in 1992) the EU took a more social (soft) turn in European integration without leaving its utilitarian (hard) qualities behind (Hooghe and Marks 2005; de Vreese *et al.* 2008). The newly implemented policies gradually altered the European context. European citizenry competed with national citizenship (Kriesi *et al.* 2008); the fear of losing one's national identity as a consequence of progressing European integration was found to directly affect ethnic threat and Euroscepticism (Hooghe and Marks 2005, 2006; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2007). Consequently, ethnic threat became a main predictor of Euroscepticism. This showed for example in the Netherlands in 2008, where it was of no influence in 1990 (Lubbers and Jaspers 2010). Second, a number of international key events took place in between the two periods, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York (in 2001), and the terrorist attacks in Madrid (in 2004) and London (in 2005). These events altered the discourse within politics (Perrin 2005; Korteweg 2005), the media (Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2003; Vliegenthart and Boomgaarden 2007), and the public sphere (Davis 2007). As a consequence of the 9/11 terrorist attacks national identities were re-established and feelings of (cultural/national) threat were heightened (Huddy *et al.* 2002).

Huntington (1993, 22) stated that world politics entered a new phase in the 1990s, when economy and ideology made way for culture as the most fundamental political source of conflict. Taking recent key events, literature, and the new European social policy impact (de Vreese *et al.* 2008) into consideration, we assume that people in the 2000s were primed to take soft issues into consideration more so than hard issues when judging an overarching political power such like the EU:

H1: The explanatory strength of soft (identity) factors vis-à-vis hard (economic) factors has increased between 1990s (specifically 1994) and the 2000s (specifically 2005)³.

This first and main hypothesis stems from years of Euroscepticism research; therefore, we aim to put this hypothesis in its proper context. In the next section we elaborate on the assumptions, hypotheses, and measurements within EU opinion research in order to embed our main hypothesis within the field.

Hard Factors and Euroscepticism

Rational choice theory explains human action by calculative rationale. People tend to think in terms of costs and benefits when making decisions

them when a penalty follows (Coleman 1973; Heath 1976). With its roots in economics this theory functions especially well when attitudes and behavior relate to financial incentives. This theory has found its way in Euroscepticism research through the use of economic variables. The operationalization of these variables has developed throughout time. For example, in the early 1990s national economic conditions were used (i.e. GDP, inflation and unemployment rates) (see Eichenberg and Dalton 1993). Later individual level indicators were added (i.e. occupation, education and wealth) (see Gabel and Palmer 1995), and in 1997 a *subjective* financial measure was introduced (see Gabel and Palmer 1997). People's perceptions of their financial situation were found to play a bigger role than objective financial indicators, used thus far in the field (Gabel and Palmer 1997).

To get a thorough overview of the influences of the several economic indicators we include most of the above-mentioned economic predictors in the analysis. We expect the following: First, economic threat from the EU is felt least by those who foresee a positive financial future. Economic prosperity is likely to catalyze a sense of financial security as open borders may lead to economic benefit (Anderson and Reichert 1995), while people who feel financially insecure are more vulnerable. Hence, the latter are most likely to see European integration as a threat, as open borders and trade may shake up their unstable financial situation even more (Marx and Engels 1961; Wood 1994; Rodrik 1997). Hence, it is only *rational* for the former to support the EU, therefore our first 'economic' hypothesis reads:

- H2: The more positive someone is about their own financial or their country's economic situation the less Eurosceptic they are.

In a similar line of reasoning Gabel (1998a, 938) stated that people's EU support is consistent to their objective economic situation. Open trade of goods between EU countries creates significant gains or losses for workers, depending on their occupational status. Elimination of country barriers increases labor competition throughout the EU. A higher level of competition on your step of the occupational ladder increases Euroscepticism. Rodrik (1997, 26–27) stated that the 'weakest' in society (i.e. lower occupational workers) are easiest to replace by cheaper immigrants, more competition comes with the addition of new EU countries. By showing discontent towards further integration, lower skilled employees try to stagnate the process of European integration and thereby limit the risk of being replaced. Therefore, we expect:

- H3: The lower one's occupational status the more Eurosceptic one is.

As said before, early scholars mostly stressed Europe's economic performance on public evaluations (Shepherd 1975). Eichenberg and Dalton stated 'the EC has a major impact on economic welfare and this fact should be recognized by the European public' (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993, 512). Which leads us to expect that:

- H4: The greater the rise of a country's GDP the less Eurosceptic its citizens are.

Soft Factors and Euroscepticism

McLaren (2002, 551) was one of the first in the field to notice the biased focus in EU opinion research. She argued that previous research forgot to include fear and hostility towards foreign cultures, and the power of nationalism. Especially national attachment generates feelings of mistrust and threat towards the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2005). Hooghe and Marks (2004), 2005 compared the explanatory strength of economic- and the newly introduced identity-based factors on public opinion concerning the EU. These studies concluded that identity factors had a stronger influence than economic factors.

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) states that attitudes and behavior stem from the desire to belong to social groups or institutions; from this one subtracts an individual identity. Group connections have a strong impact on one's perceptions and attitudes (Ellemers *et al.* 2002). At times, people go through great lengths for their group, and group identity (Gaertner *et al.* 1999), thereby placing the collective 'self' above the individual 'self'. Everyone wants to create and/or maintain a positive and significant sense of the social 'self'. This can be obtained by applying positive characteristics to one's in-group via mental labeling processes, while applying negative characteristics to the out-group in the same way (Scheepers *et al.* 2002). These seemingly harmless labeling strategies can lead to real between-group conflicts.

Realistic group conflict theory (LeVine and Campbell 1972; Austin and Worchel 1979) emphasizes the possible consequences of in- and out-group attitudes, especially when they compete for the same (scarce) resources. These can be tangible (e.g. possessions, housing, land, jobs and food) or symbolic (e.g. cultural values, identity or political power). Every group wants these resources, but they may have to compete for it with other groups. Group competition can exist in various ways. For example, European citizenry can be seen as a competing level of citizenship (the out-group) that challenges nationalism (the in-group), as it creates new social layers that crosscut existing class divisions on the national level (Kriesi *et al.* 2008). Therefore, people who feel a strong attachment to their own nation can feel threatened by the European identity. Hence, the next hypotheses read:

- H5(a): The stronger one's national pride, the more Eurosceptic one is.
- H5(b): If one identifies *exclusively* with the country, one is more likely to be Eurosceptic.

The two hypotheses are similar, but there is a subtle difference. Hooghe and Marks (2005, 423) argued that *exclusive* national identity is of greater importance than national pride when explaining EU opinion, because nationality can be multi-dimensional. 'Individuals who identify themselves

multi-level governance than those who identify themselves as both Belgian and Flemish' (Hooghe and Marks 2005, 424). The level of national pride (in Hypothesis 5(a)) does not eliminate feelings of pride associated with other social groups that one may identify with.

By opening up the borders between EU countries and enabling easier migration within the EU, the absolute influx of migrants to European countries grows each year (OECD 2010). With additional member states a greater number and variety of immigrants travel freely throughout Europe (Queisser and Whitehouse 2007). This can create competing groups within the natural environment of societies, which provokes feelings of threat among the natives, and augments the possibility of intergroup competition over scarce socio-cultural and identity resources. Due to EU's responsibility with regard to migration, it is likely that some of the aggravation regarding immigrants reflects upon them. We hypothesize the following:

- H6: With increasing migration levels within EU member states, people will become more Eurosceptic.

Data and Methods

Data

The analyses were carried out with the use of survey data from the Eurobarometer eb42 (1994; $n = 7816$) and eb64.2 (2005; $n = 8793$). The first period lies in the midst of the 1990s and represents the period right after the implementation of new EU policies. Only two years had passed since the Maastricht treaty. Consequently, the social policies were not fully employed and therefore could not yet have a notable effect in the public sphere. Additionally, most of the important external events (e.g. 9/11, Madrid bombing) had not yet taken place. Since 2005 is right in the middle of the 2000s it represents the zeros. By this time European policies had the opportunity to develop much more; hence their effects were much more notable. Some of the external events had taken place by this time, allowing these to influence public opinion too. The two time points enable us to compare the two periods and detect any systematic differences between them. Note that we do not claim to say anything about fluctuations or developments about the time in between the two points of observation.

On a pragmatic level, the decision to employ these waves was made because of the compatibility of the questions, a necessity to estimate the exact same models over time. These are the two surveys within the time frames of interest that comply with this compatibility demand of the key variables.

The 12 countries in the sample are Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK. All have been EU members since at least 1993. Membership duration will therefore not be a factor of influence (Cichowski 2000). All countries had to be member states, as our dependent variable concerns membership attitudes.

Dependent Variable

The Euroscepticism indicator was created out of two questions. The first reads: Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership in the European community (Common market) is a good thing (0), neither good nor bad (1), or a bad thing (2)? The second reads: taking everything into consideration, would you say that (our country) has on balance benefited (0) or not (2) from being a member of the European Union? The dependent variable was created out of the mean of the two answers, only if respondent answered both adequately. 'Don't know' answers were recoded as missing, which meant that 18.2 per cent of our respondents were dropped in 1994 and 10.9 per cent in 2005,⁴ and left an 'n' of 7816 in 1994 and 9603 in 2005. The scale of the dependent variable runs from 0 to 2 in *five* steps (1994: M = 1.46; SD = 0.73; 2005: M = 1.37; SD = 0.77): (0) not at all Eurosceptic, and (2) very Eurosceptic. Factor analysis showed a clear single dimension for both variables, with a Cronbach's alpha of .77 in 1994 and .76 in 2005.⁵

Independent Variables

Hard factors. The first individual hard variable is occupational class. As the original survey categories were too detailed they were combined in concordance to the EGP class schema (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992). This categorization was tested and found valid in various occasions (Evans 1992; Evans and Mills 1998, 2000). It also creates a distinction between higher-level occupations and lower level occupations, an important feature for testing the third hypothesis.⁶

There are three subjective financial variables of the perceived personal and country's financial situation: 'And over the next 12 months', (1) 'how do you expect the financial situation of your household will be?'; (2) 'how do you think the general economic situation in (our country) will be?'; and (3) 'how do you think the employment situation in (our country) will be?' Respondents could choose one of the following answers: worsened (0), stable (1) or improved (2). We decided to include these questions separately because the questions concern financial situations on different conceptual levels (country or household) or on different subjects (economics and unemployment). The questions correlate but not very strongly ($R < .64$), and show no collinearity; hence, the coefficients of each question can yield different results. We use the percentile of increase or decrease of the country's GDP (1994: M = 1.07; SD = 0.02; 2005 M: = 1.05; SD = 0.02) compared to the same period one year prior to the year of interest as the objective country level hard factor.⁷

Soft factors. The first soft variable measures national pride: 'Would you say you are very proud (3), quite proud (2), not very proud (1), not at all proud (0) to be (nationality)'. The second measures exclusive nationality: 'In the near future do you see yourself as: country nationality only, country nationality and European, European and country nationality, or European only?' This was recoded into a dichotomous variable: (1) exclu-

variable is the percentile of immigration increase relative to the previous year⁸ (1994: $M = 1.14$; $SD = 0.98$; 2005: $M = 1.01$; $SD = 0.36$).

Control variables. We control for left–right⁹ placement, and expect to find an effect of extremism rather than ideological position (Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Hence, we recoded the 10-point scale into a variable representing the distance from the country’s average value. This ranges from 0 to around 7 (most extreme). Arguably, post-materialists are more likely to approve of a supranational entity (e.g. the EU) (Inglehart 1970, 1990). In the analysis ‘post-materialist’ (1) are compared with ‘mixed’ and ‘materialists’ (0).

Last, we control for age¹⁰, gender and education. The elderly often have significantly different political views to youngsters (Rhodebeck 1993; Goerres 2008; Wilkoszewski 2009), men and women tend to think differently about European integration (Nelsen and Guth 2000), and higher levels of education¹¹ create more EU support (Gabel 1998a).

Analysis

The data are structured on the country and individual level. In order to control for this structure we performed OLS multi-level analysis. The intra-class correlation of the empty model is .10 in 1994 and .09 in 2005, which indicates that 10 per cent of the total variance is on the country level. Hence, the method needs to control for variance on two levels.¹² In order to observe the isolated impact of soft and hard factors the variables are added separately into the first models.¹³

Results

In the result section we aim to address the hypotheses step-by-step but in the logic of the models, which is not in sequential order. Eventually, this leads us to the model variances; whereby we discuss our first and main hypothesis. Both Tables (1(a) and (b), respectively 1994 and 2005) present a baseline model with only control variables (Model 1), in order to allow for a comparison of variances of these models with those of the subsequent models.

Our discussion starts with Model 2 of Table 1(a). The first conclusion we can draw is that hard factors have little significant impact on Euroscepticism. The coefficients are often small and insignificant. Occupational class has hardly any significant impact, which goes in against Hypothesis 3 (people with a lower occupational status are more likely to be against the EU). However, financial expectations do significantly affect Euroscepticism, which supports the second hypothesis. People with more positive views of their financial situation are less Eurosceptic. The strongest effect of the three economic expectation effects is that of perceived economic position of the country ($B = -0.1$). Higher GDP rates lead to less Euroscepticism, which supports the fourth hypothesis.

Continuing to the soft factor in Model 3: greater levels of national pride lead to less Euroscepticism. The results are fairly small, but significant.

Table 1(a). Multilevel analysis the influences of hard and soft factors on Euroscepticism, 1994

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
<i>Controls:</i>								
Constant	0.65	0.07	6.15	2.58	0.68	0.09	5.69	2.00
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gender (male = ref)	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02
Education level	-0.02	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.00
Extremism	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.01
Post-materialism	-0.05	0.02	-0.03	0.02	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.02
<i>Soft:</i>								
National pride					-0.04	0.01	-0.02	0.01
Exclusive national ID					0.45	0.02	0.43	0.02
<i>2nd level:</i>								
Immigration					-0.14	0.05	-0.11	0.05
<i>Hard:</i>								
Occupation: (upper-service = ref)								
Lower service			-0.07	0.04			-0.07	0.04
Routine non-manual worker			0.02	0.03			0.00	0.03
Manual worker			0.04	0.03			0.00	0.03
Non (paid) working			0.02	0.03			-0.02	0.03
Petty bourgeoisie			0.05	0.04			0.02	0.04
Household, financial situation			-0.04	0.01			-0.04	0.01
Country, economic position			-0.10	0.01			-0.08	0.01
Country, unemployment			-0.09	0.01			-0.08	0.01
<i>2nd level:</i>								
GDP			-4.96	2.41			-4.57	1.88
<i>Variances:</i>								
2nd level variance	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
1st level variance	0.05	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.01
-2*loglikelihood	0.42	1.22	0.40	1.35	0.38	1.53	0.36	1.03
	16436.6		16055.5		15677.5		15362.9	

Note: N 2nd level = 12; N 1st level = 7816; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Source: Eurobarometer (eb42).

Table 1(b). Multilevel analysis the influences of hard and soft factors on Euroscepticism, 2005

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
<i>Controls:</i>								
Constant	0.99	0.08	7.83	2.13	0.81	0.19	7.70	1.81
Age	0.001	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.001	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gender (male = ref)	0.07	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.04	0.02
Education level	-0.03	0.00	-0.02	0.00	-0.02	0.00	-0.02	0.00
Extremism	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Post-materialism	-0.07	0.02	-0.07	0.01	-0.03	0.02	-0.03	0.02
<i>Soft:</i>								
National pride					-0.04	0.01	-0.03	0.01
Exclusive national ID					0.49	0.02	0.46	0.02
<i>2nd level:</i>								
Immigration					-0.05	0.17	-0.15	0.12
<i>Hard:</i>								
Occupation (upper-service = ref)								
Lower service			0.04	0.04			0.02	0.04
Routine non-manual worker			0.05	0.03			0.03	0.03
Manual worker			0.14	0.04			0.07	0.03
Non (paid) working			0.08	0.03			0.02	0.03
Petty bourgeoisie			0.08	0.05			0.04	0.05
Household, financial situation			-0.08	0.01			-0.07	0.01
Country, economic position			-0.09	0.01			-0.08	0.01
Country, unemployment			-0.09	0.01			-0.08	0.01
<i>2nd level:</i>								
GDP			-6.42	2.01			-6.35	1.70
<i>Variances:</i>								
2nd level variance	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
1st level variance	0.06	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.01
-2* loglikelihood	0.46	2.78	0.44	2.13	0.42	1.97	0.40	2.21
	19380.8		18997.1		18475.5		18176.6	

Note: N 2nd level = 12; N 1st level = 8793; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Source: Eurobarometer (eb64.2).

Having an exclusive national identity has a positive effect on Euroscepticism ($B = .45$). In summary, in 1994 Hypothesis 5(a) (greater levels of national pride yield more negative opinions of the EU) is not supported, but Hypothesis 5(b) (exclusive national identity creates more Euroscepticism) is supported. Increasing levels of immigration have a significant negative effect on Euroscepticism, which is the opposite of what we expected, and therefore refutes Hypothesis 6. Both soft and hard factors are included in the final model. This barely alters the coefficients.

When continuing to 2005 (Table 1(b)) the results show similar to 1994; therefore, we will mainly emphasize the differences. In the second model, occupation class shows more significant results in 2005 than in 1994. Manual workers are the most Eurosceptic, quickly followed by non-worker/non-paid workers. Members of the upper-service class are the least Eurosceptic. Most effects disappear with the inclusion of soft factors, and therefore Hypothesis 3 is again not confirmed.

Model 3 shows an unexpected result, as GDP is significantly stronger in 2005 than in 1994. A significant difference also shows in the impact of the expected financial situation of the household, which is larger in 2005 than in 1994. Similar between-time significance tests were performed on other soft and hard variables, but did not show any significant differences over time. The results of GDP and financial expectations are in line with Hypothesis 2 and 4, as they were in 1994.

The results of the soft indicators (in Model 3) are roughly the same as in 1994. National pride has a significant negative effect, while exclusive national identity has a positive effect. Hypothesis 5(a) is thereby not supported while hypothesis 5(b) is. The effect of immigration increase shows insignificant; hence Hypothesis 6 is not confirmed. The coefficients in the final model of soft factors do not change much with the inclusion of hard factors or vice versa. This means hard and soft factors do not have a mediating effect on one another.

We now continue to our first and main hypothesis. At the bottom of each model in both Tables the unexplained variances show. The 1994 baseline model reveals a small estimated unexplained variance on the country level (.049), and a relatively large one on the individual level (.418). GDP explains 22 per cent (.038) of the country level variance and all other hard factors explain 4.7 per cent (.40) on the individual level. Substantially less than soft factors explain. This is 43.7 per cent of the variance on the country level and 8.83 per cent on the individual level. Most variance is explained when both factors are combined. Compared to the first model, the fourth 1994 model shows a decrease of 53.2 per cent (to .023) on the country level and a 13.3 per cent (to .36) decrease on the individual level.

In 2005 (Table 1(b)) the variances show a pattern alike that of 1994; however, with one important difference: the 2005 explanatory strength of the country level variables. The variance of GDP in comparison to that of immigration is much bigger; the opposite of what the 1994 models show. With our main hypothesis we expressed the expectation that the explanatory strength of soft factors vis-à-vis hard factors had increased from 1994 to 2005. Our results do not support this hypothesis, since on the individ-

ual level both hard and soft factors show a similar influence in relation to one another in both years with rather similar explained variances. Overall, soft factors already played a substantial explanatory role in 1994, even bigger than hard factors.

Last, we briefly discuss the control variables in both years. Age showed positive and significant only in 2005 ($B = .001$). Women appear to be significantly more Eurosceptic than men. Education has a strong negative impact in both years. A more extreme ideological position creates more skepticism and post-materialists are less Eurosceptic than materialists. The gender and post-materialist effects disappear in the later models in both Tables, which means that they are mediated by soft and/or hard factors.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate whether the claims within the scholarly debate about the shift in explanatory strengths of soft and hard factors for public skepticism towards European integration could be empirically supported. We observed the effects and explanatory strength of soft and hard factors at one time point before and one after relevant developments in EU policies and important events had taken place. Our results showed remarkable similarities in the effects of both types of variables at the two time points. Our overall findings showed that in both years hard factors had a somewhat limited influence on Euroscepticism in comparison to soft factors.

In line with Hooghe and Marks (2004, 2005, we found that soft factors generally had a greater effect on EU attitudes in both 1994 and 2005. Nevertheless, soft factors have only recently gained prominence in this field of academic research (see Hooghe and, 2005; McLaren 2002). As there is no difference in explanatory strength between the two time points, the results are not in line with what we expected from extant literature (see Hooghe and Marks 2005; de Vreese *et al.* 2008). EU social policy developments did not seem to affect the leverage of socially and culturally driven factors on which people base their attitudes. These soft factors may have existed alongside hard factors already, or gotten leverage from earlier EU developments.

Furthermore, our findings regarding hard factors showed a more significant influence of perceived than of objective financial measures. Positive perceptions about different types of financial situations gauged significantly less Eurosceptic attitudes. Meanwhile, the influence of occupational status was small. While the increase in GDP led to less scepticism. These results offer no indisputable confirmation or a definite rejection of the rational choice theory (Coleman 1973; Heath 1976; Scott 2000), as people do not act rationally in relation to their objective financial situation, but to their perceived personal and country's financial situation.

Exclusive national identity positively influences Euroscepticism, while national pride shows the opposite effect. In line with Hooghe and Marks (2005), it is the exclusive element that creates the opposing attitudes towards 'others' (the EU).

The results of the soft factors showed no full support for the two theories (social identity and realistic group theory). National pride and a possible increase of cultural threat (by immigrants) do not always lead to more Euroscepticism. The effect of immigration increase was rather ambivalent in both years. This unexpected (negative or none) effect might be explained by the intergroup contact theory. Which states that contact with immigrants, under certain conditions, can create mutual understanding and acceptance (Allport 1954). Something we cannot deduct from our data, as we have no information about individual contact with immigrants. Another explanation could be that there is a longer time lag between the appearance of a change and the effect on EU citizens than we accounted for. It is difficult to make a correct judgment of how long it will take for people to detect a contextual change, if they do so at all. As an alternative one could take the perceived number of immigrants into account.

The dissolved immigration effect mirrored in the limited explanatory strength of the variable. Though scarce resources may relate to identity and cultural resources, they may also relate to economic factors (jobs as a scarce resource). Hence, we expected that the absent effect could be due to the fact that economic predictors already explained this variance. However, this was not the case, since the effect was already absent in the third model without GDP. We tentatively interpret this finding as a function of the fact that we are looking at actual immigrant numbers and cannot, for data limitation reasons, rely on attitudes towards immigrants (see de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005)

One of the limitations of this study was the use of two survey waves, which did not allow us to observe possible fluctuations over time and between the two observations. This could have given us more insight into possible period effects. In follow-up research it would be useful to include more time points. However, due to insufficient data, this is likely to create problems with a sufficient number of counties in the analysis or variable usage. Also, in this study we discussed threat and identity, however, we were not able to control for attitudes towards possible out-groups. We therefore plead for including this in follow-up research.

The last point of discussion is on the dimensionality of Euroscepticism. There are several spectra of the EU (Boomgaarden *et al.* 2011). In this paper we used two variables, which are both part of the so-called utilitarian dimension. A problem with this could be that utilitarian Euroscepticism corresponds too well with the hard factors, and could lead to an overestimation of their explanatory power. Even so, the soft factors proved more important. Since the interest in this study was to observe differences between the two time points, and because we applied the same variables in both years, the dimensionality of the dependent variable had no implications for the interpretation of our results.

Our findings speak to Easton's (1965) commonly used distinction between *specific* (concrete political outcomes and rewards) and *diffuse* (general) support. One might expect that these two types of support would call for different types of predictors. In this study we found that soft

factors explain a more diffuse type of support, whereas previous research found they also explain more specific types of support, like the Turkish accession to the European Union (de Vreese *et al.* 2008).

With this study we were able to contribute to the field of Euroscepticism research by looking at the effects and the change in explanatory strength of today's most commonly used indicators (hard and soft factors). Surprisingly we found, despite the implicit assumption in this line of research, that the explanatory strength of these two issues in relation to Euroscepticism has not changed much between 1994 and 2005. We believe that soft factors already played an important explanatory role well before they were included in many Euroscepticism models. It has become clear from this study that soft factors have rightfully earned their position in current EU public opinion research and should not be discarded in future research on the basis of their assumed temporary nature.

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Notes

1. Our results are based on data from the 1994 and 2005 Eurobarometer. More information on the data selection can be found in the method section.
2. Whereas Euroscepticism is multidimensional (Boomgaarden *et al.* 2011), here we focus on a standard measure of EU support, namely perceived benefits of a country's membership to the EU.
3. Data limitations led to a more diachronic approach than initially anticipated. Leaving out some of the EU countries or excluding some of the less important variables would not solve this problem. Hence, we base our conclusions on two time points (1994 and 2005). We argue that these time points are representative of a larger period, but we acknowledge that we cannot make claims about longitudinal developments on the basis of these data.
4. This decision substantially decreased our sample size; however, the variable we created gives a more exhaustive idea of real EU attitudes.
5. Scalar invariance tests were performed, and the measurements appeared equivalent over time. Greece and Ireland were outliers, but were kept in the analyses. Since we are interested in over time comparisons, this should not jeopardize the interpretation of these results.
6. Descriptive statistics are available from the author upon request.
7. For more information on GDP: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home/>
8. For more information on immigration figures: <http://www.oecd.org/home/>
9. Due to many missing values on this variable (14 per cent in 1994, 16 per cent in 2005 we used multiple regression imputation (with education level, age and gender as predictors), reducing the amount of 'missings' to 2 per cent in both years while maintaining the same effects in the analyses.
10. Age is included as age in years minus 16.
11. Education is measured in number of years of schooling.
12. The method we use does not control for the categorical nature of the dependent variable (five categories, not normally distributed). We chose the method because it provides variances on both levels, which is important to answer the main hypothesis. For reasons of construct validity, we performed a two-level *multinomial* logistic regression analysis. The interpretations of both methods yield the same conclusions (consult authors for exact results).
13. There were no problems of heteroskedasticity in the model.

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