

The tilted horseshoe: Euroscepticism in the Nordic

A study of the changing course of politics in far left and far right parties.

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to study the changes that occurred within the far left and far right parties of the Nordic member states of the European Union, regarding their euroscepticism. The study aims towards both mapping out the changes of the parties political course as well as comparing the political standpoints between the countries. By comparing characteristics between existing literature regarding euroscepticism with the political changes in the Nordic, the study maps out a pattern that applies to a majority of the countries. Utilizing the terms “hard” and “soft” to categorize euroscepticism, before and after Brexit. The thesis also addresses the famous horseshoe theory, and debates whether or not it is deemed appropriate when discussing euroscepticism in the Nordic countries.

The study shows that the hard euroscepticism of the far left and right parties has softened in the aftermath of Brexit, as well as mapping out key differences in the values of the different parties. The findings of this thesis works as a valuable illustration of the patterns of far left and far right parties, as well as a possible explanation for what has driven the parties to become eurosceptically softer.

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1. Introduction

Since its earliest days, the European Union (EU) has had to endure quite a copious amount of critique. However, what else is there to expect of one of the largest international economical and political unions in modern European history? Throughout the decades, some groups on the political arena have been more prone to expressing critique and withhold their support for the union. As the political parties of today move further towards the centre of the spectrum, some of the more eurosceptic opinions are found among the radical right- and left-wing parties. At least this has been the idea (Hobolt & De Vries 2016). In the aftermath of Brexit, and of course, Covid-19, the Europe we find ourselves in today has a political climate that is far from what it was a decade ago. Not surprisingly, we see change occurring in politics as well (Hobolt & De Vries 2016; De Vries 2017). This thesis aims to study whether or not there has been any changes in the Nordic left- and right-wing parties after the event of Brexit, and in that case, towards which direction are they heading?

First of all, it is good to start off with a brief explanation of the European Union. In short, it is best, and easiest, described as a political and economical union of 27 European countries. Initially it was intended to solemnly act as a way to maintain peace on the continent after the second world war, by tying together the economies of six countries in 1958. However, a lot has changed since then. In our current day, the EU has evolved into much more than the simple trade union it initially was intended to be. The modern EU spans its areas of policies far further than just economics and trade. The environment, migration, health and security all fall under the category of aspects of our daily life that is, although to various extent, orchestrated by the European Union (European Commission, 2020).

As the world changed in the aftermath of the European Debt Crisis (also known as the Eurozone crisis) of 2010, we saw change happening amongst the political parties as well, with the corner parties being no exception. As voices of euroscepticism rose, some authors would even argue that quite a few of these parties went as far as making it one of their most prominent characteristics (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016; Topaloff, 2012, p. 3-4). However, a lot has changed since then, and there are new aspects to account for when debating the critique surrounding the European Union.

So, what was Brexit? In June 2016, the British people voted on whether or not they should remain a member state of the European Union, or if they should exit the union

altogether. Hence the terms “Brexit” and “Remain”. The referendum resulted in the latter, shocking both Europe and the world. This resulted in the resignation of Prime Minister Cameron, and the discourse for the effects it would have on the rest of the EU began to circulate all over the continent (De Vries, 2017, p. 38).

Regarding the expectations of this thesis, i.e. *ex ante*, it is clear that the turmoil associated with the United Kingdom's “divorce” from the European Union, has forced the political parties to reevaluate their stand on withdrawing their countries status as member states of the EU. The question is what *sort* of effect the event has had on the European political landscape. According to both scholars and political scientists, the support for the union faced a crossroad after Brexit. The first possible outcome is the possibility that the support of the EU could increase, as well as in a way, unify the union. This could be something much needed for the union, especially after the divide caused by both the financial as well as the refugee crisis. However, a second outcome could be that of a further divergence within public opinion, causing a rise in criticism towards the European Union. If the latter one is *de facto* true, it has been argued that it could potentially be the beginning of the end (De Vries, 2017).

Furthermore, the development of euroscepticism in the Nordic countries is of utmost non-scientific interest, since the political agenda affects all people of the European Union. Especially taking in consideration how much Brexit has affected both the United Kingdom, as well as the rest of the union. We all live in an era where we have to constantly adapt and take into consideration both the politics and the international relations that are changing faster, day by day. When a major event, such as Brexit occurs, it will inevitably cause a ripple effect. And it is that specific ripple effect that this thesis aims to study.

1.1 The Research question

This thesis studies changes in the politics of the far left and far right parties of the European Union member states in the Nordic. Have there been any changes? Have the parties become more eurosceptical or europhilial? Are there significant differences amongst the parties? How can these trends be explained?

1.2 Disposition

The thesis will initially start off with a thorough explanation and walkthrough of previous works and literature regarding euroscepticism, how it is defined and how it shows in different political parties of Europe. After that I will go over each of the three countries that are being studied, and a brief introduction of their history and relationship with the union. This will be followed by a subsection for the countries far left and far right parties, where I will examine the politics driven by the parties and the changes that has occurred over the last years. This will be followed by an analysis, where the countries and their parties' politics will be categorized further, as well as compared to one another (both country and party-wise). Finally a conclusion will be made, as well as the inclusion of suggestions for possible further research on the subject.

2. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this thesis is to study whether or not the Nordic EU member state countries have experienced a change in euroscepticism in the far left and far right parties in the last years, following the event of Brexit.

2.1 Delimitations

The Nordic countries consist of the following five: Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark and Finland. However, I have decided to only study the three that are member states of the European Union. I have chosen to do this, with the motivation that countries that are not members of the EU tend to have parties that are more sceptical towards the union, than the countries that are already member states (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016). Since all of the Nordic countries are similar to a certain extent, it makes the selection logical. A risk one usually encounters while studying countries of the Nordic region can be that they are far too similar to one another, causing the results of the study to risk being too general, or even worse, not reliable. However, since each of the three countries have a somewhat different history and relationship with the EU, I still deem the selection being both relevant and reliable.

Timewise, as previously stated, I will be using Brexit as an aspect regarding the timeframe, since it was one of the largest changes to occur in the EU. Hence, I will be looking at party programs and other sources (e.g. debate articles), published *before* 2016 and comparing them to ones from *after* 2016. The political climate was affected tremendously both by the UK's exit of the EU itself, but also by the political turmoil that followed.

As a limitation for the earliest sources that will be studied, I am using Denmark's membership in the EU, 1973, as my limit. However, since none of the Danish parties in this thesis existed that year I have come to the conclusion that the more realistic limitation will be the year of 1989, the year that their left-wing party was founded. There is only one party in this study founded prior, which is the Swedish left-wing party, being founded as early as 1917. That being said, it should not be of significance since it is multiple decades before the EU, then known as the European Economic Community (EEC), was founded (Udenrigsministeriet, 2021; European Commission, 2020). As a limitation for the years after Brexit I have decided that all material and data that is available, simultaneously as I write this thesis, is of interest for this study. However, since the last EU election was held in May 2019, most of the party programs that I have found are manifestos in preparations for that election,

resulting in that a significant amount of the recent sources are from 2019 (Sveriges Riksdag, 2021).

Regarding the delimitations concerning the Danish far right and far left parties, a decision had to be made whether or not to study the largest right-wing party, or all three. However, since one of the parties holds a longer history, a decision was made to limit this thesis study to The Danish People's Party. I encountered a similar issue studying the Finnish right-wing spectrum, where the largest right-wing party had split into two different parties not far too long ago. However, the new party that was derived from the far right party was rather short-lived, and in 2019 they had lost a significant amount of their support. (Gröhn, 2019). Hence, for the simplicity of the study, and to eliminate the risk of manipulating the outcome of the study with parties that no longer exist, I have decided to only study the largest, and oldest, right-wing parties in each of the three countries. A similar decision was also made regarding the countries left-wing parties, where I've decided not to account for the communist parties in each country, hence limiting the study to the countries largest left-wing parties.

Furthermore I'm also basing my delimitations on the political party families of the Nordic, as an additional way of validating my selections. All three of the left-wing parties selected belong to the "Left-socialist Green Group" in the Nordic Council, and all three of the right-wing parties belong to the group "Nordic Freedom" (Nordiska Rådet, 2021).

3. Theories and Literature

In this part of the thesis I will thoroughly explain the theories and terminology that I have chosen, such as euroscepticism, both hard and soft, as well as the horseshoe theory. The selection of literature is based on significance for the study. The subject of euroscepticism is one that has quite an extensive collection of literature to its name, as one notices when they begin to study the subject. Due to the limitations of this thesis, such as time and the limit of words, one could not account for all of the written works on euroscepticism. With that said there is a significant amount of great work written about the subject by astounding authors and political scientists, and without any doubt; more great work to come.

3.1 Euroscepticism: What It Is and How We Define It

Before we dive deeper into the literature, it is vital to understand what we're discussing when using the term "euroscepticism". In her book "Understanding Euroscepticism" the author Cécile Leconte thoroughly explains what falls under the category of euroscepticism, as well as what the characteristics are.

Initially we have to acknowledge that euroscepticism itself falls under the category of a fairly new terminology. As a matter of fact, the word was first mentioned in an article in the British newspaper *The Times* in 1985. According to Leconte, at that time, the word was intended to refer to a person that one would have called an "anti-marketer". And when there was vocabulary to describe certain political views, one could also categorise them. During the time of the publishing of the article, most of the people that shared the eurosceptical opinions were to be found in the Labour Party, as well as a smaller part of the Conservatives (Leconte, 2010, p. 3-4).

One of the key elements when discussing euroscepticism and aspects of the terminology is greatly summarized when Leconte describes it as "a generic and encompassing term, which applies to a large variety of actors and discourses" (ibid.). The term itself has varied over time. Furthermore, the term has a different meaning, geographically. Euroscepticism incorporates different aspects in different countries (ibid). However, a common denominator tends to always be the *criticism* and *hostility* towards the European Union.

As argued by Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak in their article “Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe”, published in European Journal of Political Research, euroscepticism can be divided into different forms, and classifies the different terms as “hard euroscepticism” and “soft euroscepticism”:

- *Hard euroscepticism*: principled opposition towards the European Union as well as European integration. Often associated with opposing membership in the European Union, or if the country is a non-member, being opposed towards accession to the EU. This rejection concerns both economical and political aspects. It is implied that the core of what the union stands for, drastically collides with other vital values of someone who shares these opinions.
- *Soft euroscepticism*: characterizes itself by being associated with dissatisfaction of the EU, alternatively an expression of qualified opposition towards the union. These dissatisfactions and oppositions can apply to both policies as well as the political course of the union. Soft euroscepticism might also merely apply to certain areas of the EU, such as the monetary union EMU. Thus, a party or a country can be europhiliac (EU-friendly) while simultaneously expressing euroscepticism on specific topics.

This differentiates the elements that we associate with euroscepticism, creating a divide in opinions. It is also healthy to acknowledge that all supranational organisations, the European Union included, should always, and or occasionally, be subject to some form of critique. Afterall, it would not be realistic for an organisation with the vast span over both politics and finances as the European Union, would be viewed as perfect by all of its citizens. And since the EU affects our day to day life on many different levels, it is reasonable that it faces (at least) some sort of soft euroscepticism (Leconte, 2010, p. 5-6 ; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004, p. 1-27).

Regarding the term soft euroscepticism, which often incorporates critique of the single currency, it is worth noting that of the three countries being studied in this thesis, only one of them uses the euro. However, since the Eurozone crisis of 2010, a divergence

regarding opinions can be noted between the countries that use the euro, and the ones that do not. Amongst the countries that use the euro, hence being included in the eurozone, support for the single currency has remained stable and/or high. On the contrary, amongst the countries that do not use the euro, a decline regarding support for the single currency, has been found (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016, p. 9-10).

This creates an obvious difference between the countries that are being studied, since one of them is a member of the Eurozone, while two of them are not. Hence, the relationship between the Finnish far right and left parties are somewhat different from the Swedish and Danish (Lahtinen, 2010).

Parallels can certainly be drawn between the authors, however I find that Leconte quite neatly describes the term euroscepticism, whereas we through the literature by Taggart and Szczerbiak can grasp the differences between the nuances of euroscepticism.

To summarize the term euroscepticism, one could say that although the mere existence of the term has been brief, it has had time to change in that short period of time. Euroscepticism can in a way be seen as a reflection of the union, where the critique expressed often corresponds with issues surrounding the political and economic decisions occurring in the union (Leconte, 2010).

3.2 Party Based Euroscepticism

Although we previously discussed the broadness of the term euroscepticism, one element that is often associated with the term is political parties. As earlier mentioned, in the UK, euroscepticism was associated with the Labour party and somewhat with the Conservatives as well. Associations with political parties is not something exclusively found on the British islands, but rather something that we encounter in almost all countries on the continent.

In the book *Political Parties and Euroscepticism*, the author Liubomir K. Topaloff discusses what kind of different motives behind euroscepticism that we find in the political parties of today. He argues that in just a few decades, euroscepticism has become one of the defining characteristics for a lot of European political parties. According to Topaloff, the subject of euroscepticism in relation to political parties is not as easy to study as one would think. He argues that one of the key elements to what makes it difficult to study is the relationship between structural and ideological arguments. The subject of euroscepticism does, as a matter of fact, challenge our traditional view of left- and right-wing politics

(Topaloff, 2012, s. 69-75). However, that does not exclude some aspects of euroscepticism to be associated with one of the two sides of the political spectrum. One example of such, is the rise in disbelief of the economic benefits that the union brings to a country. Amongst the far right, euroscepticism seems to often be associated with concern whether or not the cost of the membership is equal to its value. This concern is something that has become even more of a vital question for the parties, since the event of the European Debt Crisis (Vasilopoulou, 2018, p. 125-126).

One paradoxical aspect of party based euroscepticism is mentioned in the work of Taggart and Szczerbiak; the critique of the European Union is that the project itself is both too socialistic and too capitalistic. The EU faces accusations of simultaneously being on different sides of the “traditional” political linear spectrum, which results in the fact that different political parties can both be eurosceptic, however necessarily not for the same reasons (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004, p. 3).

Hence, both the far right and far left have their own perspective of what is wrong with the European Union, which, somewhat ironically, has resulted in both extremes rooting in favour for their countries withdrawal from the union. As stated by Hobolt and De Vries, studying the support and opposition towards the EU has become as vital to political science as the study of the union itself (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016).

3.3 The Horseshoe Theory

Also known as the convergence of the extremes, the Horseshoe theory discusses common ground between the far right and far left. The theory has had both support, as well as had to endure quite a significant amount of critique. Most famously coined by Jean-Pierre Faye, a french philosopher, in the 20th century. The theorem challenges the linear view of politics, where we usually find the far left and right on opposite sides of the spectrum. According to Faye’s theory, the political spectrum should be visualized as more similar to the shape of a horseshoe, where extremes almost meet. However, the theory has had to endure quite a significant amount of critique. This is due to many scholars viewing the horseshoe theory as far too simplistic (Patrikarakos, 2017).

Amidst these critiques however, the theory often resurfaces regarding certain subjects, such as euroscepticism. In an article from 2017, senior lecturer at Kingston University, Simon

Choat uses the horseshoe theory to illustrate the current political landscape. However, the history of the theory is rooted in something darker than euroscepticism; facism and communism. The theory suggests that due to similarities between the communism of the Soviet Union and fascism of Nazi Germany, opposites can share similarities (Choat, 2017).

If we look further into recent usage of the horseshoe theory, it can, in a way, be found in the French presidential election of 2017. During that election, we saw the current president of France, centrist Emmanuel Macron, rise to victory. However, leading up to the election, both the French far right and left, had candidates that fell under the category of being eurosceptical; Marine Le Pen and Jean-Lúc Mélenchon. Both the parties of Le Pen and Mélenchon expressed opinions against the European Union, creating a contrast to Macron. This is one illustration of how the horseshoe theory, although being dated, can still be found in current politics. The far right and far left both shared the distaste for the supranational institute, while the centre could be categorized as more europhiliac (Patrikarakos, 2017).

Even though the horseshoe can be criticized as being far too simplistic, as well as dated, it is still an interesting thought to bear in mind while studying the political extremes of euroscepticism. Most often, we see parties sharing eurosceptic views, hence both being in favour of a referendum regarding a country's membership of the European Union. However, what is interesting for us political scientists, is to study *why* these parties share these opinions, and what their similarities, and differences are.

4. Methods and Data

This chapter is dedicated to explain and present the three countries' left- and right-wing parties. Each country has been assigned its own chapter, with one subcategory per party. First of all, I will start off with a presentation of the party and its background, followed by a comparison regarding whether or not the party has changed its views of the European Union. The information collected on the parties will mostly be based on their political party programmes and available literature regarding their beliefs, as well as new articles from relevant and reliable sources from the time periods in question. I will be using qualitative content analysis.

4.1 Qualitative content analysis

I have chosen qualitative content analysis as my main form of conducting the study, since it is the one I deem most fit for the nature of the subject. I will be using the work from Esaiasson *et al.*, and through the usage of qualitative content analysis map answer the research question: has there been any change in euroscepticism amongst the far right and left political parties of the Nordic? Through the use of the method, one can classify and systematically analyze the content that is being studied, in this case political party programs and media sources such as newspaper articles (Esaiasson *et al.*, 2012, p. 211-212). I will be using the classification by Taggart; soft euroscepticism and hard euroscepticism, as my classifications for the qualitative content analysis (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004, p. 1-27).

Furthermore, regarding operationalisation of the terms “hard” and “soft” euroscepticism, I am in need of indicators of the terminology. As previously discussed, one of the key elements of hard euroscepticism is the opposition towards one's country's membership in the European Union, alternatively the demand for a withdrawal from the EU. Hence, I deem that demand for a referendum, as well as the demand for a withdrawal from the EU all together, are fitting indicators of hard euroscepticism. The indicators of hard euroscepticism also works as a distinguisher towards soft euroscepticism, as a change of political course towards no longer demanding withdrawal from the EU is an indicator of softening euroscepticism (Esaiasson *et al.* 2012, p. 51-52).

Regarding self reflections, one of the challenges that all writers of a thesis faces is that of preconceived ideas. Considering my subject being euroscepticism, and myself, being

multilingual, pursuing a higher education in another European country than the one I call home, I most certainly fall under the category of a person having more europhilic opinions. Adding on to that, coming from a linguistic minority background that over the last decades has had to endure our own fair share of strong opinions aimed towards us from the right-wing parties of Finland. I acknowledged the fact that it would be a challenge to maintain a certain level of neutrality when it came to analysing the right-wing parties of the Nordic countries, simultaneously as I also had to study the material from a critical point of view, to be able to conduct the study. However, I am well aware that I, first of all, am not the first, nor am I the last person to have had to deal with these sorts of obstacles while writing a bachelors' thesis.

4.2 Sweden

In the case of Sweden, we quite clearly see two parties at the ends of the spectrum (if we choose to call it that). Although there are parties far more extreme, I've chosen to study these two, since they both each year qualify for a substantial amount of votes, both in regional and national elections. Sweden has been a part of the European Union since 1995, after the country voted in favor of it in a referendum held in 1994 (Gilljam & Holmberg, 1996 s. 5-8).

4.2.1 The Left Party

In their political party program from 2016, the party flaunts a quite hostile view of the EU. The party states that they share their views with like minded people throughout Europe, stating that the EU does not meet the minimum criterias for democratic government nor cooperation. The Swedish Left Party lists a few reasons behind their EU critique, and one of the main reasons being migration politics. Other contributing factors are e.g. agriculture where they believe that the subsidizing within the EU leads to a disadvantage for the poorer countries outside of the union. Under the headline "The European Union and European cooperation" the party states that they are working *against* a Swedish membership in the union. The Left Alliance also wants to work toward changing the course of the politics of the European Union, by shifting it further to the left. And further to the left, the party means that they want to create a distance to the current course of the union, which the party claims to be far too federalistic (Vänsterpartiet 2018).

However, this took a turn during The Left Party's EU election conference in Norrköping, held in early 2019. During the conference, the party voted in favour of no longer working towards a Swedish withdrawal from the European Union. Worth noted is that this proposal of change came from the board of the party. The party states that they are currently working on a socialistic Europe, both inside and outside of the European Union (SVT, 2019). In an interview with *Dagens Industri*, the (now) former party leader Jonas Sjöstedt states that the party has not actively driven the withdrawal-question since 1995, and that the party does not plan on making it active again during the years to come. Therefore, Sjöstedt claims that it is of utmost interest for the party to provide clarity for its voters, to dodge the risk of losing pro-EU voters that are doubting whether or not they should lay their vote on the Left Party (Dagens Industri, 2019).

This is quite a significant change that the party has gone through, at least from a historical point of view. During the time of the EU referendum taking place in Sweden, the Left Party was one of the ones most opposed to EU membership, alongside with the Swedish Green Party (swedish: Miljöpartiet) (Gilljam & Holmberg, 1996 s. 225). The party still states both in their EU party program as well as on their website that they are critical towards the union. However now they are aiming towards working for a better EU from within. They are still very critical towards the migration politics of the union, as well as towards some financial aspects (Vänsterpartiet, 2021).

Hence, The Left Party of Sweden has gone from being a party strongly opposed to the Swedish EU membership, to being a party that through a vote has changed its political course. The party has, in other words, softened its euroscepticism.

4.2.2 The Sweden Democrats

The Sweden Democrats has in previous years party programs been very critical towards the European Union, like many of the similar parties across Europe. The party has somewhat of a different background than its Nordic counterparts, being created through a merge of a (far right) political party and a campaign group dedicated to anti-immigration, in 1986 (Widfeldt, 2018, p. 549).

However, it was before the EU election of 2019 that the party changed its agenda. In a debate article published in January for the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*, the leader of the Sweden Democrats; Jimmie Åkesson, explains why the party has decided to change their EU

politics. He explained that even though the party has always been EU critical, times have changed and so has the politics. In the article he explains that the party still views the union critically, however at the same time they have come to the conclusion that there are pros and cons regarding cooperating with the European Union (Åkesson, 2019). He proceeds by explaining that the party has sided with the ECR (European Conservatives and Reformists) amongst other right-wing parties such as their Nordic sisterparties. He explains that the reason behind the change of politics has to do with the Sweden Democrats long term vision, and that if they want to succeed with their agendas they need to do so step by step (Åkesson, 2019, par. 4-6). Åkesson argues, on behalf of the party, that there are concerns regarding the effects that the union has had on the migration politics as well as the economy.

The same year, the Sweden Democrats issues a new edition of their party program, called their *Principprogram* (english: Program of Principles), in which where we can find segment nr. 21 dedicated to their international politics; “The Sweden Democrats and the Surrounding World” (Sverigedemokraterna, 2019). The European Union is not once mentioned by name in the program, however one can easily read between the lines, since the program discusses “the powers of a supranational organ”, and addresses this organ with striking similarities to the way Åkesson describes the EU in the debate articles. On their website however, under the chapter of Foreign Policies (swedish: utrikespolitik), the party states further opinions regarding the European Union. The Sweden Democrats want to restructure the budget of the union, as well as decrease the amount it costs for Sweden to be a member of the EU. The party also wants to secure the Swedish currency (SEK), and permanently stay outside of the Eurozone. The reason behind this is that they want to eliminate the risk of having to “bail out” failing banks of the eurozone (Sverigedemokraterna, 2021).

The Sweden democrats have gone from being one of the most vocal parties when it comes to sharing the euro sceptical and eu-critical views, to changing their nuances regarding the membership by addressing cooperation with the union as something that needs to occur (Sverigedemokraterna 2019; Åkesson 2019).

4.3 Finland

Similar to its neighbor Sweden, Finland also have two prominent left- and rightwing parties, while there are parties more extreme. However, as previously explained in the chapter of delimitations, I will also in this chapter focus on the Finnish parties with largest political support. Finland also shares a similar journey to membership as Sweden, with a referendum held in October 1994, where 56,9 percent voted in favour of a membership in the European Union. Finland became a member of the European Union in 1995 (Eurooppatiedotus, 2021). Finland also differentiates from the other Nordic countries, by being the only one that is a member of the Eurozone. Finland has been using the euro as its currency since the implementation of it in 2002, making the country one of the twelve original Eurozone countries (Lahtinen, 2010).

4.3.1 The Left Alliance

The Left Alliance in Finland is one of the younger parties, since it was founded in 1990 as a result of the merger of three other left winged parties (Vasemmistoliitto, 2021). Traditionally it has been one of the parties with a more critical view of EU membership. However, according to the 2007 party program *Periaateohjelma* (english; Our Vision or Program of Principles), the party does not hold a practically hostile view of the EU. In the program, the party does state concerns regarding the way that the union has been heading during the last decades, with, according to the Left Alliance, a far too neoliberal direction. They also wish for an EU that values peace and a fair world economy (Periaateohjelma, 2007). The Left Alliance wants the European Union to aim towards acquiring a welfare model more similar to the Nordic model, and abandon the politics that has made the union unequal, such as the lowering of taxes and reduced regulation. In addition to this the party also suggested that Finland should hold an *advisory referendum* in conjunction with the next treaty taking form (ibid).

Since the party was founded fairly recently, all while their party program not being revised in over a decade, mapping out changes in the Left Alliances standpoints regarding the European Union becomes a bit more challenging. The party was in fact only formed four years prior to the referendum in 1994 (Eurooppatiedotus, 2021; Vasemmisto, 2021). The Left Alliance has stated that they want to further push our nordic values, such as how social

democracy is implemented here, towards Bruxelles and the EU (Periaateohjelma, 2007; Vasemmistoliitto 2021).

In conclusion, one could say that the party has previously expressed some hard euroscepticism to a certain extent, e.g. regarding their proposition of an advisory referendum. However, an advisory referendum does not equal a withdrawal of the union. The party has since gone in for a more EU friendly approach, and wishes to be a change from within, together with the like minded members of parliament in the European Parliament.

4.3.1 The Finns Party

The Finns Party (formerly known as The True Finns Party), has since its founding in 1995 been the most eurosceptic party in Finland. Although it was founded after Finland became a member state of the EU, it was not created in reaction to the referendum. The party was in fact created in the aftermath of another right-wing party filing for bankruptcy (Fellman, 2011; Widfeldt 2018, p. 546).

The party already stated in 2009 that they want to be a party that changes the EU from within, through being critical of the European Union, and hesitant towards the euro as a single currency. The party has also been very vocal about their hesitancy towards financial aid provided by the richer countries of the EU, and their usage amongst the countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Perussuomalaisten EU-vaaliohjelma, 2009).

In another old party program from 2011 (at the time they were called “The True Finns Party”), under chapter seven “*Missä EU, siellä ongelma - Perussuomalaisten EU politiikka*” (english; where there is EU, there are problems) the party goes into deep detail about what they consider being issues derived from the supranational cooperation. The party starts off the chapter by stating that they are a EU critical party, and that less of the EU is a better EU. The party program uses a fair share of idioms, as well as figurative speech, e.g. describing the union as a *pakkopaita* (english; straitjacket). The chapter contains numerous subcategories, of which all are distinguishably eurosceptical. However, they also emphasize the importance of trading, as one of the good outcomes from being a member state of the union. On the other hand, the (True) Finns Party believes that it would be more profitable for the country to not be a part of the European Union. The party also raises concerns regarding the migration

situation as well as the financial crisis as reasons why the country would benefit more from not being a part of the EU (Perussuomalaisten maaseutuohjelma, 2011).

Ahead of the 2014 European Parliament election in Finland, the party released their party program, specifically focused on the upcoming election. Regarding the use of the single currency, the party stated that they do not want to separate Finland from the euro, however, they are prepared for a collapse of the currency. The party strongly emphasizes the fact that they want to work as a power within the EU, to change the course of the union towards what they deem fitting for the supranational organisation. The party also strongly emphasizes the fact that they are critical towards the financial aid that was provided to Greece after the euro crisis of 2010 (Perussuomalaiset, 2014).

Following the events of Brexit, there were voices of high profile politicians being raised regarding wishes for a similar referendum to take place in Finland, preferably immediately after the British split from the European Union (Säävälä, 2016). However, this referendum never gained any popularity, and as previously stated in this thesis, the party experienced some inner turmoil, following the divide of 2017 that resulted in the split into Sininen Tulevaisuus (Gröhn, 2019).

Then, before the parliamentary election of 2019, the Finns Party released a new program, where they continue to claim that they are a solemnly EU-critical party, in line with their previous party programs (Perussuomalaisten eduskuntavaaliohjelma, 2019).

To summarize The Finns Party, they have, since long before the events of Brexit, viewed themselves as a EU critical party, rather than an anti-EU one. They continue to work towards changing the union from within, and have done so since the late 00's.

4.4 Denmark

In comparison to the other Nordic EU members, Denmark has a bit of a different history. The country joined the EU significantly earlier than both Sweden and Finland, in 1973 when it became an active member. Denmark does also have a unique agreement regarding its currency, and does not use the euro (Udenrigsministeriet, 2021; Lahtinen 2010).

4.4.1 The Red-Green Alliance

The Red-Green Alliance, also known as the Unity List, has traditionally been one of the most eurosceptic parties in the Nordic. Founded through a coalition between multiple Danish

left-wing parties, the party has since then undergone alterations regarding their opinions towards the European Union.

In their political party program, accepted by the yearly meeting in 2016, the party has a segment entirely dedicated towards what they call their “EU resistance” (danish: Enhedslistens EU-motstand). There, the Red-Green Alliance states that they are against the neoliberal politics that they associate with the European Union, and that they consider the union to be of non-democratic character.

The Red-Green Alliance emphasizes the fact that they *are not* against cooperations between countries in Europe. The issue with the EU is not that it creates an inner market aiding its own countries, but more of how it affects the world outside of the union. Under chapter eight: “Basic Changes Impossible in the EU ” (danish: Grundlæggende forandringer umulige i EU), the party states that the party is in favor of a Danish *withdrawal from the EU*. The party claims that the euronationalism, often disguised as internationalism, is simply contributing to the structure of a state-like EU. The party finished this program off by stating that the world is larger than the EU, and that international issues (e.g. climate crisis, refugees, finance crisis etc.) demand international answers (Enhedslistens Delprogram, 2016).

However, this is something that has changed since 2016. In an article in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten, it is stated that while the party leader Pernille Skipper argued in favour of a Danish referendum after the Brexit vote, the party has since then changed course. As of March 2019, the party no longer demands a Danish EU-vote (also known as Daxit). In the article, Skipper states that the aftermath of Brexit has been an “eye opener” for the Danish party, which contributed to their ideological change (Hvass & Rytgaard, 2019).

Hence, The Red-Green Alliance has gone from being in favour of a Danish withdrawal, to no longer supporting Daxit, in other words softening their euroscepticism (Enhedslistens Delprogram 2016; Hvass & Rytgaard, 2019).

4.4.2 Danish People’s Party

The Danish People’s Party was founded in 1995, and the earliest program that could be found was from 2002. The program discusses similar aspects as most far right parties, with a strong emphasis on Danish values, the Danish Lutheran Church, and nature. The program has a critical opinion towards migrants and refugees, and states that they believe that Denmark is

not a country for immigrants and has never been. The party also refuses the transition to a multiethnic society (Dansk Folkeparti, 2002).

In an early party program from 1997, it is stated that the Danish People's Party are strongly against the European Union. Then, they wished for an EU, which would simply just be a trade union, and nothing else. However, it is not written *specifically* that the party wishes to withdraw the Danish membership in the EU, although they strongly oppose any legal changes that would affect the Danish constitutional law. The party was also strict about keeping their own currency, the Danish crown (Dansk Folkepartis Principprogram, 1997).

However, it is somewhat difficult to map out the party's current EU course. On their party website, under "EU Politics", the Danish People's Party states that they are against the EU. It also states that they wish to see Denmark leave the union. It is stated that the party wishes for Denmark to have close relationships with the rest of Europe, however not through the European Union. The idea is that the will to influence politics is found amongst settings where people can sense a fellowship i.e. solidarity to one another (Dansk Folkeparti, 2021).

To summarize the euroscepticism of the Danish People's Party, it is clear that the party has never been, and still is not, EU-friendly. Also worth mentioning is the downfall of the party. In the last EU election, the party lost three of their four mandates. Following that, it was time for the election of the Danish parliament, Folketinget, in 2019. The numbers plummeted, and the party went from 21,1 percent of the votes to 8,7 percent - cutting the support in half (Eriksson, 2019). This could be a possible explanation to why the party has come across as somewhat silent over the last couple of years. The party, however, remains eurosceptical, while leaning towards the hard side of euroscepticism.

5. Analysis and Comparison

In this chapter I will conduct my analysis, by basing it off both the literature and theories regarding euroscepticism and how it takes form in political parties. After studying the party programs, debate articles and other reliable sources regarding the right- and left-wing parties' views on the European Union, one can with certainty say that changes have occurred. During the last years, especially following Brexit, the parties in the Nordic countries have seen a quite vast change in the political course.

When the parties are compared with their sister parties in the other Nordic countries, they show clear similarities. This is something that was expected of the study, since most of them belong to the same party group in the Nordic Council as well as in the European Union. Adding on to that, they share similar ideologies as well.

As previously discussed in chapter three, it is not uncommon for political scientists to categorize the term euroscepticism into “hard” and “soft” euroscepticism. However, I believe that it is not too bold to state that just as the political idea maps are linear and multidimensional, euroscepticism is as well.

We often find ourselves debating whether or not the horseshoe theory withholds some scientific value, with some going as far as saying that it should be debunked. Although the theory itself presents itself as a far too simplistic answer to such a complex question as euroscepticism, maybe the truth that is to be found in the theory lies in its spectrum. To divide and to categorize is something that we do in political science, in an attempt to create structure similar to that of other sciences bound by the laws of nature. Is it possible that while thoughts and ideas can be divided into “hard” and “soft” euroscepticism, the political parties of today have become somewhat multi-faceted regarding their opinions of the European Union, that we no longer are able to place them in one of the boxes?

If the horseshoe exists, which is something that is still debated, does it still exist within euroscepticism? If all the parties are moving further away from the extremes, and thus heading for the centre, has the horseshoe vanished or simply grown smaller?

5.1 Comparison: The Far Left

Comparing the far left parties with each other, we can easily come to the conclusion that they share similar concerns regarding the European Union. Emphasis lies on how the EU affects its neighbouring regions and countries, both economically and politically. Another aspect is the migration situation, where they consider the EU being something that inhibits the countries possibilities of taking in more refugees.

Firstly, regarding the concern over how the EU affects its neighbouring countries. This is as a result of the internal trading union, that makes EU goods far more affordable for EU countries to trade with one another, than to buy from a country outside of the EU. With this said, we still have to bear in mind that all of the three parties clearly stated that they are not against cooperation between European countries. They want to see a global world, and emphasize that the world is bigger than just Europe.

The far left parties also state that the structure of the EU inhibits its citizens from taking part in politics, resulting in the European Union failing to meet certain basic democratic criterias. They all shared the same concern about Bruxelles gaining far too much power, and are worried about the centralisation of politics. The Danish far left party, The Red-Green Alliance, went as far as stating that the European Union, through euronationalism and internationalisation, is starting to become more and more like a coalition of states, rather than just political and economical cooperation between neighbouring countries. Specifically regarding the state-likeness of the union, a parallel can be drawn to the Swedish Left Party, since their party program also accuses the union of being too federalistic.

However, something that they all share is the will to change the European Union from within. None of the far left parties are currently pushing for a Brexit to happen in their country. The only exception here being Finland, however only to a certain extent, since the Left Alliance still have their old party program that suggests an advisory referendum. That being said, the focus is now on cooperation in their own political group inside of the European Union. All of the parties want to change the neoliberal course of the union, and implement the characteristics of the Nordic model, with an emphasis on social security.

Finally, if we dive deeper into the reasons behind the changed course within the left, a contributing factor indeed seems to be that of Brexit. As previously discussed regarding the danish Red-Green Alliance withdrawal of their wish for a “Daxit”, the events of Brexit was described as an “eyeopener” for the party.

5.2 Comparison: The Far Right

When comparing the rightwing parties, similarities were also encountered. Although they differentiate from their left-wing counterparts, like-mindedness also occurs within the right-wing of the Nordic countries. Similar to the left, all of the rightwing parties listed migration as one of their greatest concerns, however, on the contrary to the left, they were of the opinion that the Nordic countries experiences excessive migration.

The concern over excessive migration has become one of the characteristics of the far right, and it comes to no surprise that so is the case in the Nordic countries as well. The Danish People's Party especially put huge emphasis on the migration question. This concern seems to have taken up even more space in all of the party's political programs in the aftermath of the refugee crisis.

Financially, the parties see the economical aspects of the union as something that is not necessarily inherently bad. They value the good that has come from the trade union, and view it as one of the few things that benefits their countries. However, this does not necessarily apply to the Eurozone. The Sweden Democrats state that they want to keep Sweden out of the Eurozone, to protect their own citizens from having to "bail out" banks of countries that use the single currency, the euro. This statement is also similar to the one the Finnish far right party wrote in their party program, regarding the financial aid that was provided to Greece in the aftermath of the European Debt Crisis. The Danish far right does not stray far from these opinions, as they have also stated early in their party days that they wish to protect their own currency. All of the three far right parties are hesitant towards financial aid, as well as there being provider and receiver states within the union.

Similar to the parties of the far left, the far right also wants to change the EU from within, with the exemption of the Danish People's Party, which still upholds quite a hostile view of the European Union. However, all three of the parties are still candidates when it is time for the elections of the EU, meaning that they are changing the union, regardless of whether they are fond of the EU or not. As neatly put together by the party leader of the Sweden Democrats, one of the contributing factors are the benefits that the European Union brings with it. The reason behind them no longer wishing to withdraw the Swedish membership of the European Union, is that they have come to the conclusion that it is in the country's best interest to seize the opportunities that the union creates. It seems to be financial reasons that are the main reasons behind both the Swedish and Finnish far right parties' decisions to soften their euroscepticism.

5.3 Tables

This chapter is dedicated towards illustrating the changes of the far left and far right parties of the Nordic member states. By dividing the parties by “hard” and “soft” euroscepticism, we can visualize the pattern of change. Bear in mind that a party can have opinions that are both “hard” and “soft”, and that politics sometimes are more of a spectrum, rather than simply a linear yes or no. The first table illustrates the opinions of the parties before the event of/immediately after Brexit. The second one illustrates where the parties' opinions are today, in the aftermath of Brexit.

Table 1: The Nordic countries, Pre-Brexit:

	SWE: L	SWE: R	FIN: L	FIN: R	DK: L	DK: R
Hard	X	X	X		X	X
Soft				X		

Table 2: The Nordic countries, Post-Brexit:

	SWE: L	SWE: R	FIN: L	FIN: R	DK: L	DK: R
Hard						X
Soft	X ¹	X	X ²	X	X	

¹ The Left Party of Sweden has not released a new program, thus making the Post Brexit “soft x” exclusively based on media statements, as well as information on their website.

² The Left Alliance of Finland still uses their program from 2007 where they suggest an advisory referendum.

6. Conclusion

The outset of this bachelor's thesis was initially a fascination with the possible similarities between the far right and the far left, as well as curiosity surrounding the heavily debated horseshoe theory. The goal was to map out the changes of euroscepticism in the Nordic countries, something that turned out to be more complex than at first glance. However, simultaneously as the complexities of euroscepticism unfolded, so did, in a way its simplicity. Sharing ideologies turns out to have an impact on the political course of like-minded parties, something that led to a pattern being discovered. The softening of euroscepticism in the Nordic countries. This thesis was able to come to this conclusion, based on both the literature regarding euroscepticism, as well as political party programs. Since the aftermath of Brexit has started to show pretty recently, a lot of vital material and information for this thesis has had to be extracted from newspapers, interviews with party leaders and press releases from the parties in question. All important for the process of answering the research question. The two tables of chapter 5.3 offer an illustration that further supports the conclusion that euroscepticism in the Nordic has indeed softened.

However, there are still aspects to where the countries and parties differ, e.g. regarding the monetary union and the euro as a currency. Finland is the only country out of the three that uses it. Thus, it is logical that it is the only country where the far right and far left are hesitant towards the euro, and not entirely against it. This goes along the lines of what was previously discussed, about the Eurozone countries generally being less opposed towards the single currency. However, if we can let this thesis endure somewhat of a generalization, we can see a pattern between different reasons behind why the countries euroscepticism has softened:

The concerns of the far left, regarding the European Union, often tended to correlate with the worries of whether or not the union is fair, or in other words, equal. The critique that the union is somewhat democratically deficit is most certainly an aspect that will continue to be discussed. The parties also took into consideration the effect that the union has on

countries outside of the union, with emphasis on the world being larger than the European continent. Other forms of injustice in the EU had to do with the political nature of the EU.

On the contrary, the far right are more concerned with what the European Union is taking from their countries (or what they believe is being taken away from them). One of the main concerns encountered was whether or not they would be better off financially without the EU, since they would not have to pay financial aid to other countries, as well as other fees associated with the EU.

Furthermore, another interesting aspect of this subject is that of what was expected of Brexit in 2016 versus what actually happened. Following the result of the British referendum, a lot of people expected that similar referendums would take place throughout the European Union. These expectations were especially common amongst the far left and right parties. However, Brexit is, in a way, still ongoing, and it will be exciting to see how the final outcome of the political situation unfolds, and if the softening is permanent.

7. Discussion

One could state that although the parties share euroscepticism as one of their most prominent characteristics, the reason behind their euroscepticism differs to a great extent. Personally, for me, one of the most surprising elements of studying euroscepticism was that a party being eurosceptic necessarily does not equal them wishing to withdraw the country's membership in the European Union. It is not uncommon for people to associate EU-criticism with the desire to pull another Brexit. Hence the common misconception that parties that are eurosceptic all want a referendum. However, as a matter of fact, it is not that long ago since quite a few parties around Europe were rooting for a similar outcome, as the referendum in the UK in 2016.

I believe that one key element to why the softening of euroscepticism has occurred in the Nordic, is due to how the "divorce" between the United Kingdom and the EU played out. The far right and far left has traditionally been more critical towards the EU, and over the past decades it has been somewhat of a flagship question, as previously argued by Topaloff. However, when the price of Brexit unfolded, a lot of the previously eurosceptic parties changed course. Not too much surprise. The financial impact that Brexit has had, and will continue to have on the United Kingdom, is something that we will see more of in the future, since everything is still fairly recent history.

Regarding further research on the subject of euroscepticism amongst the Nordic countries, a suggestion could be to study the political parties of Norway and Iceland. Since they are not part of the EU, it would be interesting to see if there are any correlations between the left- and rightwing parties in the two countries outside of the union and the ones of the memberstate countries.

Further research could also be aimed towards the birth of new far right (and possibly also far left) parties of the Nordic. As a matter of fact, this has already occurred in Denmark. In the aftermath of Dansk Folkeparti changing their political course from hard euroscepticism to soft, we saw a new party gaining popularity amongst the Danish far right voters: Nye Borgerlige (english: The New Right). Could it be that we in the future see more extreme parties surface in the Nordic, as a reaction towards the softening of euroscepticism in the once so opposed parties discussed in this thesis? Parallels can be drawn to the Median Voter Theorem, which theorized that the political parties of today are moving closer and closer to the middle, in an attempt to secure as many votes as possible, creating a political landscape

where the parties necessarily do not differ from each other significantly. As a result, we see new parties surfacing on the extremes that attract the voters that don't share political views with the parties of the median. This could possibly be of interest both for the Nordic countries in general as well as for the community of political scientists.

In conclusion, one could say that the events and ripple effect that Brexit has had on our politics is something that is yet to be studied, as it evolves day by day. When the probability of a referendum in the UK first was being discussed, many of us were hesitant to whether or not it would actually occur. Fast forward to half a decade later, and the event of the British withdrawal from the European Union is something that we all have witnessed, rather than something that is merely a probability. Whether or not we chose to label this as a "Brexit effect", or simply as something happening due to the centralisation of our politics, it is of utmost importance that the political science community keep up their curiosity, and proceeds with creating new exciting studies regarding euroscepticism in an attempt to explain a little bit more of the world. One ripple effect at a time.

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