

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO PORTUGUESE EUROSCEPTICISM?  
THE DEPOLICITIZATION OF EUROPE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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## **What Ever Happened to Portuguese Euroscepticism? The Depoliticization of Europe and its Consequences**

In the last March 2002 general elections in Portugal, "Europe" was conspicuously absent as a campaign theme. A study about the media coverage of the two weeks during which the official campaign lasted, covering a total of 1423 news items as reported in the four main television channels and five major daily newspapers, revealed that European integration did not rank among the first nineteen issues more frequently addressed by any of the leaders of the five main parties (cited in Lobo and Freire, 2002). This does not mean that "Europe" totally failed to insinuate itself in relative disguise. In fact, if there was a single major issue in the campaign, it was the budget deficit, which the incumbent Socialist government was accused of letting slide way above the EMU convergence and stability pact criteria of three percent of the GDP. However, that particular debate seldom shifted from the extent to which the Socialist had actually mismanaged the economy to the actual reasonability (or even feasibility) of the EU's policies concerning short-term convergence towards balanced budgets, not to mention any discussion about European institutions, policies, or future constitutional architecture. For instance, when Durão Barroso, leader of the major center-right opposition party (PSD - *Partido Social Democrata*) and current Prime Minister, unexpectedly suggested the need to renegotiate the Growth and Stability Pact in order to allow for compliance with zero deficit goals later than 2005, he was immediately accused by the PS (*Partido Socialista*) of "irresponsibility," and the issue just died then and there.

The electoral platforms of the four major parties also gave little attention to issues directly related to European integration, and any observer would be hard pressed to find relevant differences between them that might be mapped in a unidimensional policy space. For example, while the center-left Socialists and the right-wing CDS-PP (*Centro Democrático Social - Partido Popular*) both expressed an interest in deepening integration and common European policies in matters related to justice and crime (PS, 2002: 9; CDS-PP, 2002: 137), the Socialists and the Communists (*Partido Comunista Português - PCP*) converged in their rejection of a purely "neo-liberal" Union where "only market liberalization would be relevant" (PS, 2002:8; PCP, 2002: 13). In the meantime, while the PCP and the CDS-PP gave particular emphasis to the protection of Portuguese sovereignty against "federalization" and an European Constitution (PCP, 2002: 113; CDS-PP, 2002: 135), all this was generally subsumed under a common concern with preventing that the (unquestionably supported) enlargement to the East would result in costs to the "Western front" in terms of structural funds and the Common Agricultural Policy (PSD, 2002: 175-176), or in the Communists' words, with preventing "the least developed countries from being the ones to pay the price of enlargement" (PCP, 2002: 114). The Socialists and the CDS also shared that basic message, arguing that that enlargement should not take place without "safeguarding equality between states and solidarity to the least developed regions" (PS, 2002: 9), and promising an "intransigent defense of Portuguese interests in the enlargement process, namely demanding more European aid [sic]" (CDS-PP, 2002: 136). In the end, the most "original" aspects presented in any of the platforms were CDS-PP's promise to submit any "European Constitution" to a referendum and the Communists' overt proposal of "suspension and revision of the Stability Pact" (PCP electoral platform, 2002: 114),

something that, as Barroso's timid advances and recent developments go to show, was a much less radical proposition than what it might have seemed at the time. In any case, as the previously mentioned study shows, the role played by any of these issues in the electoral campaign was completely irrelevant.

It was not always like this in the past. At least until the late 1980s, the Communist Party remained steadfastly opposed to European integration, and the early nineties even saw the emergence of a right-wing Euroscepticism, represented by the resistance to the "federalization of Europe" through Maastricht and the calls for referendums on the European Union supported by the new leadership of the CDS-PP. However, any signs of an important "European cleavage" at the level of party appeals seem to have almost disappeared today, having been slowly replaced by more complex and multidimensional convergences and, more frequently, simply by silence.

Whatever the reasons, they cannot be found at the level of mass attitudes. Since the late 1980s until today, and following a peak in approval in 1991 — when about 78 percent of the Portuguese described the country's membership in the EU as "a good thing"<sup>1</sup> — support for membership has remained at relatively stable levels. While the percentage of respondents making an overtly positive evaluation of membership has ranged between 52.2 (1995) and 63.5 (1999) percent, often (but not always) above the EU average, it is also a fact that roughly one-third of the population has consistently described membership as "neither good nor bad" or as downright "bad". In fact, since 1999, support for membership seems to be again on the decline, something that failed to be matched at the level of party-political discourse and appeal. This paper discusses some of the consequences of this peculiar combination of phenomena: the omnipresence of Europe as a major constraint upon domestic

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<sup>1</sup> Eurobarometers 35.0 and 36.

policy-making, the disappearance of an "European cleavage" at the level of domestic party politics, and the presence of a resilient minority in public opinion that remains less than "Euroenthusiastic." In the following sections, I will argue that although opinions about Portuguese membership in the EU have ceased to play a crucial role both in party appeals and electoral behavior, that is not the case in what concerns their impact on other forms of political behavior and attitudes. More specifically, I will suggest that the decline in electoral turnout currently experienced in Portugal, particularly since 1995, cannot be fully understood with exploring the combination between resilient Euroscepticism among a minority of the population and the depoliticization of Europe at the level of political élites. Furthermore, I will also suggest that, under the present conditions, anti-Europeanism may have developed into a more permanent and disturbing set of political attitudes of mistrust in, and disengagement from, domestic political institutions.

### **The demise of the European cleavage**

The history of Portuguese parties' positions vis-à-vis European integration has been admirably done elsewhere (Álvarez-Miranda, 1996), and requires little more than cursory attention here. During the mid-seventies' Portuguese transition to democracy, all major parties to the right of the Communists adopted a pro-integration stance. In the struggle against "popular democracy" and the socialization of the economy defended by the radical military and the extreme-left, one of the common grounds shared by PS, PSD, and CDS at the time was the option for "Europe", which in this context meant not only the promise of development and prosperity under the economic framework of a market (or at least mixed) economy, but also that such development would take place under the political (and geo-political) framework of

pluralist democracy and alignment with the Western democracies. As Álvarez-Miranda notes, the nature of the Portuguese transition played a major role in determining such configuration of party positions vis-à-vis Europe, causing that, in contrast with the Spanish case, "Europe" became a political weapon of exclusion of the Communists from the "democratic arch" of parties (Álvarez-Miranda, 1996; Lobo and Magalhães, 2001).

In spite of some early (and readily abandoned) "Tatcherite" instincts in relation to Portuguese EU-relations on the part of Cavaco Silva, PSD's leader and Prime Minister since the mid-1980s, it was only by the end of that decade that the first fundamental changes in Portuguese parties' positions vis-à-vis Europe took place. To a great extent, they consisted in strategic shifts related to domestic electoral concerns. On the one hand, the Communists moved away from their previous "hard" Euroscepticism in the direction of a "soft" one, based mostly on the criticism of specific paths taken by the integration process and the governments' stances vis-à-vis European issues, rather than on a "principled opposition to the EU and European integration" (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2002). As Bosco notes, this new stance on the part of the PCP can be best understood as a result of adaptation to changing domestic conditions. Although by the mid-1980s they still expected to be able to "force themselves" upon a weakened Socialist Party as a future coalition partner, the Communists' own electoral stagnation and internal crisis, as well as the Socialists' relative recovery following the catastrophic 1985 elections, forced a shift on the part of the PCP in favor of both pluralist democracy and European integration, in the (yet unfulfilled) hope of rendering themselves legitimate and acceptable partners of a leftist coalition (Bosco, 2001: 337-338; 349-350).

On the other hand, by the early 1990s, it was the CDS-PP's time to make a move in the opposite direction, shifting from pro-Europeanism to a "soft" Eurosceptic position. In eleven years, from 1976 to 1987, CDS's share of the vote in general elections had dwindled from about 16 percent to 4.3 percent, in a continuous loss of voters to a PSD from which it had become ideologically indistinguishable, and suffering additionally with strategic vote in the two largest parties by an electorate that had become eager for previously elusive governmental stability (see, for example, Bacalhau, 1989; and Magone, 1999). In a desperate bid for survival, following acute leadership instability, the CDS-PP seized the opposition to Maastricht's "European federalism" as one of its major campaign issues, as part of an overall ideological reconfiguration as a "populist" and overtly "rightist" party under the leadership of Manuel Monteiro (Robinson, 1996; Lobo, 2002). Although this ultimately resulted in CDS-PP's expulsion from the European People's Party, the new strategy seemed to pay off in the domestic front. In the 1995 elections, the CDS-PP rose to nine percent of the vote, becoming the third largest party. And curiously, although Monteiro's campaign included extensive catering to the supposed "losers" of PSD's government's pro-integration policies — such as farmers and fishermen — the 1995 elections represented a "remarkable renovation" of the party's electorate, which became less dependent on the religious and rural Northern petty bourgeoisie and increasingly secularized, urban, and younger (Freire, 2001: 78-84).

However, the CDS-PP would again abandon its "soft" Eurosceptic stance in the second half of the 1990s. Following the ultimately frustrated negotiations for many city-specific coalitions with the PSD for the 1997 local elections, CDS-PP's results in those elections came out as very disappointing, reducing its share of the overall vote to six percent and to mayoral control of only eight cities in the country

(Magalhães & Doncel Luengo, 1999). More importantly, those results put into question the party's ability to independently undermine support for the and, thus, the viability of any strategy that discarded a center-right coalition, which the party's critical stance on Europe and the single currency continued to make impossible. Thus, in 1997, Monteiro was replaced by his former mentor — Paulo Portas —, who has since then systematically played down the party's anti-European discourse and unquestionably accepted the country's commitment with the single European currency and its implications. All this leading to the last 2002 elections where, at the level of elite discourse, parties either converged in most European issues or, more frequently, were simply silent about anything closely related to "Europe".

This decline of Euroscepticism as a relevant element of party appeal in Portugal is mirrored by the decline of an European cleavage in voting behavior. One of the major themes of the growing literature on europeanization has been the extent to which an "European dimension" has begun to penetrate domestic politics and policy-making (see, for example, Ladrech, 2002) and, more specifically, the extent to which electoral behavior is affected by voters' positions on European issues, independently of other issue dimensions (Evans, 1999; Gabel, 2000). Using Eurobarometer data on voting intention in national elections, support for EU membership, and individual self-placement in a left-right ideological continuum, Table 1. allows us to examine long-term trends in the extent to which support for EU membership among the Portuguese citizenry has affected vote choices from the late eighties to the late nineties.

Table.1 The impact of ideology and support for EU membership in Portuguese voting intentions

	1988-91	1992-95	1996-99
Association between EU membership evaluation and left-right self-placement (Gamma coefficients)	.20***	.10***	.02
<b>Dependent variables</b>			
PCP vote (PCP: 1; PS: 0; Others: missing)	LR Self = -1.2*** EU Memb= -.38*** Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> =.45	LR Self = -1.1*** EU Memb= -.36*** Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> =.39	LR Self = -.83* EU Memb= -.33** Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> =.28
PS vote (PS: 1; PSD:0; Others: missing)	LR Self = -1.22*** EU Memb= -.15*** Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> =.53	LR Self = -1.3*** EU Memb= -.20*** Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> =.44	LR Self = -.90*** EU Memb= n.s. Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> =.46
CDS vote (CDS: 1; PSD: 0; Others: missing)	LR Self =.24*** EU Memb= n.s. Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> =.05	LR Self = n.s. EU Memb= -.18* Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> =.03	LR Self =n.s. EU Memb= n.s. Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup> =.01

- 1) LR Self: Left-right self placement, from 1 (left) to 10 (right).
- 2) Memb: Support for membership. 1: Membership is a "bad thing"; 2: "neither good nor bad"; 3: "a good thing".
- 3) \* p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001
- 4) NA, DK, Refused, and responders younger than 18 years old were treated as missing data.
- 5) Regression equations used years as dummy independent variables.
- 6) Source: Schmitt (2001).

The first row reveals the extent to which support for EU membership in Portugal has been related to individuals' left-right self-placements. In general, respondents further to the right in terms of their self-identified ideological position have tended to make a better evaluation of Portuguese membership in the EU. However, the relationship between the two variables is not only weak, but has also increasingly faded and completely disappeared by second half of the 1990s. At face value, this is congruent with CDS-PP's adoption of a Eurosceptical position in the early 1990s, picking up and/or reinforcing increasing dissatisfaction with European integration among the electoral right and, thus, leading to the emergence of an European cleavage *independent* from what has traditionally been the single most powerful explanation of voting behavior in Portugal: left-right self-placement (Freire 2001; Gunther and Montero, 2001).

However, an analysis of the determinants of voting intention tell us a more complete and nuanced story about the importance and resilience of such purported "European cleavage". I used logistic regression analysis to determine the extent to

which, regardless of left-right self-placement, was the vote for the CDS-PP, the PCP, and the PS determined by voters' support for the EU. The results suggest three major conclusions. First, the major divide caused by the EU membership issue has predictably taken place in the left, distinguishing Communist from Socialist voters. In all three periods, and regardless of ideological self-placement, lack of support to Portugal's membership in the EU had had a statistically significant impact in determining the option for the Communists in the left of the party system.

Second, until 1995, support for membership also created a division between Socialists and Social Democrats, as more pro-European respondents were also less likely to vote for the PS. However, in the later period, that division disappeared, and only ideology remained relevant. The fact that attitudes towards the EU ceased to make any difference in the option between Socialist and Social Democratic vote fits with two relevant facts. First, the use by the PS leadership in the first half of the nineties of the "excessive" concern of the PSD government with nominal convergence criteria as a political weapon, in an effort to capitalize electorally on the stringent economic conditions experienced by the country in the first half of the decade, a discourse that was immediately replaced by a full and overarching commitment to entry in EMU as soon as the PS got into government in late 1995 (Lobo and Magalhães, 2001). Second, the data also fit the notion that supporters of incumbent parties in general tend to lend greater support to EU membership, given the centrality of executives in European politics, the powerlessness of parliaments and opposition actors in what concerns European issues, and the inherent interest of unsuccessful parties (in terms of obtaining office) in disturbing the traditional dimensions of contestation in the party system (Hix 1999; Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002). In fact, as soon as the PS returned to government — note, for the first time since Portuguese

accession to the EU—, attitudes towards EU membership cease to play any major role in structuring voting choice between the two major centrist parties. Third, and finally, while levels of support for EU membership played no role in determining vote choice for the CDS-PP instead of the PSD before 1991, in the following period, corresponding more or less to Monteiro's leadership of the party, anti-Europeanism becomes *the* single attitudinal variable explaining vote for the CDS-PP. In other words, by the mid-nineties, Euroscepticism as a determinant of voting behavior in the right of the party system became totally independent from left-right alignments, as voters for the leftist PCP or the rightist CDS-PP became more anti-European than voters for the centrist parties (for tests of this hypothesis at both the mass opinion and party position levels in Europe in general, see Hix 1998; and Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002).

However, all this disappears in the second half of the decade. Corresponding to the demise of Monteiro's leadership and the abandoning of "soft Euroscepticism", CDS-PP voters ceased again to be distinguishable from PSD voters not only in terms of their opinions about Europe, but now also in terms of traditional ideological positions. Therefore, by the end of the 1990s, the only "European cleavage" that remained was the one that structured voting for the Communists. However, it seems that even that cleavage has disappeared altogether by the time of the 2002 elections. Table 2. displays an analysis of data collected in a post-electoral survey conducted in March 2002 in Portugal (Barreto et al., 2002). The survey did not contain any questions concerning evaluation of Portuguese membership in the EU, but it did include a question concerning the level of trust placed in the European Union, an item that, in Eurobarometer surveys in Portugal, has been significantly correlated with

support for membership in Portugal.<sup>2</sup> We perform the same tests used in Table 2., replacing support for membership with trust in the European Union as an independent variable, and using reported voting behavior in the 2002 elections in order to build the three dependent variables: PCP vote, PS vote, and CDS vote.

*Table.2* The impact of ideology and support for EU membership in voting behavior in the 2002 elections

	Dependent variables		
	PCP vote (PCP:1; PS:0)	PS vote (PS:1; PSD:0)	CDS vote (CDS:1; PSD:0)
Left-Right Self Placement	-.53***	-.77***	.18*
Trust in the EU	.06	.17	.22
Constant	.12	4.01	-.37
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.21	.44	.03
Valid N	329	540	313

- 1) LR Self: Left-right self placement, from 1 (left) to 10 (right).
- 2) Trust in the EU, from 1 (no trust) to 4 (absolute trust).
- 3) \* p<.10; \*\*p<.05 \*\*\*p<.01
- 4) NA, DK, and Refused were treated as missing data.
- 5) Source: Barreto et al. (2002).

The criteria for statistical significance used here can somewhat less demanding than in Table 1., considering much smaller sample sizes. However, even in such cases, trust in the EU seems to have played no role whatsoever in determining vote choices in either of the major parties. In fact, the sign of the coefficients for trust in the EU are all *positive*, meaning, opposite to what could be expected if Euroscepticism still played any role in shaping voting choices for the PCP, the PS or the CDS-PP. In other words, "Europe" seems to no longer constitute a relevant cleavage neither in Portuguese party politics nor in voting behavior.

<sup>2</sup> In Eurobarometer 51.0, the gamma coefficient for the association between "Trust in the EU" and "Support for membership" in Portugal was .57\*\*\*.

## **The depoliticization of Europe and electoral demobilization**

This, however, raises new questions. On the one hand, it seems that by the end of the nineties, the preferences of the Portuguese in what concerns EU membership have become largely unrelated to a left-right dimension of politics, suggesting that pro- or anti-Europeanism now cross-cuts traditional determinants of voting preferences. However, on the other hand, this cross-cutting issue dimension has played a declining autonomous role in shaping voting choices, to the point where, today, it seems to play no role whatsoever. So, does this autonomous pro- and anti-Europeanism dimension still play any kind of role in shaping political behaviors and other political attitudes in Portugal?

One of the possible answers is that, instead of shaping voting choices, Portuguese citizens' pro- or anti-Europeanism has begun to shape the decision *whether* to vote. Considering that Eurosceptics have remained a resilient minority among the Portuguese mass public, it is likely that PCP's move to "soft" Euroscepticism in the late 1980s and, later, CDS-PP's strategic withdrawal from a Eurosceptic stance in the second half of the nineties, may have left that minoritarian constituency without any party-political articulation of its preferences, thus contributing to its electoral passivity and demobilization. At the most superficial level, the evolution of turnout in Portugal is indeed congruent with such interpretation. The decline of electoral turnout in Portugal has been shown to be one of the strongest in intensity among all industrialized democracies in the last two decades, raising substantial concerns about the quality and health of Portuguese democracy (Freire & Magalhães, 2002). But curiously, although turnout did decline slowly but systematically from the 1985 to the 1991 elections (from 79.7 to 77.7 of the voting age population), it experienced again a recovery in the 1995 elections (79.1

percent), only to drop abruptly again in 1999 to 69.3 percent the voting age population (Freire & Magalhães, 2002: 49). In other words, the politicization of European issues in the first half of the nineties may have fostered increased electoral mobilization in the 1995 elections, while its strategic abandonment since then might have contributed to the new increase in abstention in 1999.

However, this is clearly not enough to establish any relation of causality between attitudes vis-à-vis integration and a multidimensional phenomenon such as turnout, nor between the decreasing politicization of Europe in Portuguese politics and increasing abstention. Table 3. goes somewhat further in that effort. It displays results of tests of the impact of several social and attitudinal variables on the "declared intention to abstain" in three different periods: 1988-91, 1992-95, and 1996-99. Some of the factors that have been shown to influence electoral turnout in Portugal are similar to those found in other contexts. Age is the single most important socio-demographic cause of turnout, with older people voting much more than the younger (see, among many, Franklin, 1996; and Perea, 1999; for Portugal, see Magalhães, 2001; and Freire & Magalhães, 2002). On the other hand, while other socio-economic features (such as education, habitat, and income) have apparently lost weight in terms of their effect on voting (Freire, 2000), political attitudes such as identification with parties, interest in politics, and trust in national political institutions seem to play a decisive role in determining turnout in Portugal and elsewhere (see, for example Campbell et. al, 1960; Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; for Portugal, see Magalhães, 2001; and Freire & Magalhães, 2002).

Table 3. Explanations of declared abstention in Portuguese general elections (logistic regression coefficients)

	1988-1991	1992-1995	1996-1999
Age	-.22***	-.24***	-.24***
Gender ('Female')	.20	.25*	.18
Education	-.13	.07	.19
Income	.01	-.08***	-.18***
Size of locality	.04*	.04*	.08**
Political discussion	-.64***	-.44***	-.57***
Election year	-.17	-.63***	-.30
Support for EU membership	-.34***	-.21**	-.31***
Constant	-.21	-.42	-.08
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.05	.08
Valid N	4639	3889	1891

- 1) Dependent variable: 1: "Would not vote"; Others: 0
- 2) Support for membership. 1: Membership is a "bad thing"; 2: "neither good nor bad"; 3: "a good thing".
- 3) Political discussion: 0: "Never"; 1: "Occasionally"; 2: "Frequently".
- 4) \* p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001
- 5) NA, DK, Refused, and responders younger than 18 years old were treated as missing data.
- 6) Source for data: Schmitt (2001)

The results in Table 3. cannot be directly compared with those of other post-electoral surveys. On the one hand, because the available Eurobarometer data for the entire period concerns voting intention rather than voting recall. In other words, the data deal with openly expressed negative answers concerning the likelihood to vote, which inevitably underestimate the actual abstention levels experienced in actual elections. However, the analysis of its determinants may provide important clues about the causes of overall abstention, or at the very least of a kind of "politically motivated abstention" (Memmi, 1985) that some respondents are likely to openly acknowledge in surveys. On the other hand, some of the potentially relevant variables — such as party identification and interest in politics — are not available for the entire period. However, the results do seem to confirm not only some of the extant hypotheses about abstention in Portugal, but also the one we have presented here. "Declared abstention" is patently lower among the older cohorts and those who

discuss politics more frequently, and this holds for the entire 1988-1999 period. However, at least since 1988, abstention is also lower among those who are more supportive of Portugal's membership in the EU.

In fact, the explanatory weight of the variable "Support for membership" changes according to what could be predicted if the extent to which political élites politicize European issues affected the extent to which attitudes towards membership influence turnout. Between 1988 and 1991, and with an original probability of the dependent variable of 11.4 percent (meaning, 11.4 percent of respondents answered that they "would not vote" in general elections in the entire valid sample), an increase of two points in the "support for membership" variable (from "a bad thing" to "a good thing") decreased the chance of not voting by 4.8 percent, controlling for other variables. Then, in the following (1992-1995) period, corresponding to the renewed politicization of the European issues on the part of the CDS-PP, the effect of support for membership *diminishes*: 10 percent of respondents in the sample stated they "would not vote", and an increase of two points in support for membership diminished the probability of not voting by only 2 percent. Finally, in the third (1996-99) period, the individuals' evaluation of Portuguese membership in the EU regained weight in their intention to vote: starting from a base probability of 11.6 percent of abstaining, an increase in two points in the independent variable decreased the probability of abstaining by 4.2 percent.

Thus, by the end of the nineties, although the "European cleavage" had begun to play an ever smaller role either on party politics or on voting behavior, that does mean it had become politically irrelevant. Citizens' support for Portuguese membership in the EU does not structure voting intention, but it does structure the very intention to vote. Regardless of the many factors that may be behind the present

decline of electoral participation in Portugal — and, for that matter, in most Western democracies —, the extent to which European issues have been withdrawn from the domestic agenda should probably be seen as part of the explanation.

### **Temporary withdrawal or resilient disengagement?**

There is, nonetheless, an additional question about whose answer we still remain clueless. The fact that Eurosceptics are less likely to vote in national elections may simply mean that, given the current stances of Portuguese political parties about an issue on which they have intense preferences, they have only temporarily withdrawn from an electoral arena where such issue has retained little salience. However, a different problem altogether would be if the depoliticization of Europe had created among those citizens less supportive of membership not only a perception of the low utility of the vote, but also a set of more resilient and permanent attitudes of political disenfranchisement and mistrust.

In the extant literature, the relationship between attitudes vis-à-vis national political institutions and support for membership in the EU has been mainly addressed by treating the latter as the dependent variable. Anderson (1998), for example, suggests that low levels of political knowledge about European Union have led citizens to use their evaluation of national politics as a proxy with which to form judgements about European institutions and integration in general. This positive relationship between attitudes such as "satisfaction with national democracy" and support for EU membership becomes all the more likely if we take into account the extent to which the former measures specific support to incumbents and positive evaluations of their performance. From that point of view, considering the centrality of executives in European construction, it is likely that approval of the government

readily translates into support for membership (Ehin, 2001). Others, however, have suggested that citizens are indeed able to distinguish between the performance, democratic quality, and trustworthiness of the domestic and European levels of governance (Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2001). In fact, it has been found that, once we control for the level of trust placed by individuals in European institutions, a better opinion of the national government actually *decreases* support for integration, since those citizens will fail to perceive political benefits from transferring power and sovereignty from a domestic level of governance in which they actually trust (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000).

However, regardless of how the previous question stands, it is also likely that the causal link between evaluation of domestic institutions and support for membership can be reversed. Some of the reasons have been presented by Mair in a 2000 essay about the impact of europeanization in domestic politics. According to Mair, either because "popular traditions and expectations" prevent political actors from acknowledging that "their hands are tied" in many policy issues, or because they have an intrinsic interest in preserving "Europe" out of the domestic political arena in order to remain insulated from electoral constraints, party élites have often opted for taking Europe out of national political debates (Mair, 2000). This, in turn, may contribute not only to offer voters "a voice that is likely to have little or no effect on the practice of decision-making — thus diminishing the value of the vote —, but also to foster deeper feelings of "disengagement from, and indifference to, the wider political process" (2000: 47-48; see also Ladrech, 1999).

The hypothesis that will be tested here stems from this general idea. I suggest that, to the extent this disengagement in relation to domestic politics and institutions is taking place at all as a result of the increasing depoliticization of Europe, it should

also be more prevalent among those on the "wrong" of the European "silent consensus" in Portugal. In other words, individuals that, for whatever reason, are less supportive of membership, are not only more likely to choose not to vote (given the current supply of party appeals and the low salience of the European issue in Portugal), but are also more likely to have developed negative feelings towards the entire domestic political system and institutions.

One way to test this hypothesis would be to use "satisfaction with national democracy" as a dependent variable. However, although interesting in itself, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the way democracy works may be rather problematic as a measure of support for, and attachment to, democratic institutions and procedures. Instead, while some have treated it as a measure of *performance* (Klingemman, 1999), inextricably linked to short-term economic indicators and partisan support for incumbents, other have even questioned the very usefulness of the indicator, since it taps multiple dimensions of support that vary across individuals and nations, and therefore lacks validity and render comparisons impossible (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001). Therefore, we used a composite measure of "political trust" as a dependent variable, more specifically, the mean score of trust in the national parliament, the government, and the political parties.

Theories of political trust have typically focused on three types of explanatory factors: culture and ideology, performance, and institutions. Since the latter's impact can only be tested in a comparative framework, we focus only on the former two types of explanation. First, the decline of political trust that has reportedly been experienced in many Western democracies in the last decade has been linked to the role of the mass media (especially television) in leisure activities and political socialization, by exposing citizens to predominantly negative portrayals of the

political realm and replacing civic-minded activities by "privatised" and 'individualistic' forms of leisure (Putnam, 1995; Brehm & Rahn, 1998). A different strand of the cultural argument links confidence in institutions to a post-modern cultural shift — particularly visible among the younger cohorts and the more educated — de-emphasizing "all kinds of authority, whether religious or secular, allowing much wider range for individual autonomy in the pursuit of individual subjective well-being." (Inglehart 1999: 238; see also Inglehart 1997). Others have stressed the role of political discussion — to the extent that it is related to interest in politics and feelings of political efficacy — to stronger diffuse support to the political system (Weatherford, 1992). Finally, we should expect more ideologically radical individuals — furthest away from the center and closer to the extremes, to place less trust in democratic political institutions (King, 1997). We test these hypotheses by using exposure to TV news, age, education, frequency of political discussion, and distance from the center in terms of ideological self-placement as independent variables.

A second set of hypotheses concerns specific support to extant political authorities. We should expect political trust not to be impervious to short-term positive evaluations of the performance of political institutions, the way the government responds to social demands, and the benefits and costs it distributes. The accumulation of short-term frustrations with the performance of the political system is a socialization experience in itself, likely to shape more long-term attitudes towards politics and institutions (Mishler and Rose, 1997), and economic outcomes and subjective evaluations of the economy have been shown to have at least a modest — but always significant — impact on attitudes of confidence in government and political institutions (see Citrin, 1974; Citrin & Green, 1986; Clarke, Dutt, & Kornberg, 1993; McAllister, 1999). And "because the government is largely

composed of institutions operated by incumbents, feelings about both should explain trust" (Hetherington, 1998: 312). Unfortunately, the latest fully available Eurobarometer survey which includes measures of institutional trust, Eurobarometer 51.0, (Melich, 1999), did not measure sociotropic or egotropic evaluations of the economy. However, we use three independent variables aimed at determining the impact of specific support in attitudes of institutional trust (and, thus, to test the impact of evaluations of Portuguese membership in the EU regardless of that specific support): support for incumbent party (whether respondents intended to vote for the party controlling government at the time), unemployment (assuming that joblessness, as first-hand experience of negative government performance, might undermine political trust) and, in one of the models — and in spite of its limitations - satisfaction with the way democracy works. Table 4. presents the results of tests of all these hypotheses.

*Table 4. Explanations of political trust in Portugal, 1999 (OLS beta coefficients)*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender ('Female')	-.05	-.04	-.03
Income quartile	-.01	-.01	.01
Education	-.04	-.02	-.01
Age	.11	.14*	.14**
Exposure TV news	-.01	.01	-.01
Political discussion	-.02	-.02	-.01
Distance from center	-.08	-.05	-.03
Unemployed	n.s.	-.01	.02
Support for incumbent party	.13**	.14**	.13**
Support for EU membership	-	.18***	.10*
Satisfaction with democracy	-	-	-.26***
Constant	.48	.13	.49
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.07	.13
Valid N	548	483	483

- 1) Dependent variable: mean score of trust in political parties, parliament, and the government (0: Tend not to trust; 1: Tend to trust);
- 2) Support for membership. 1: Membership is a "bad thing"; 2: "neither good nor bad"; 3: "a good thing".
- 3) Political discussion: 0: "Never"; 1: "Occasionally"; 2: "Frequently".
- 4) Unemployed: 1: unemployed; 0 others
- 5) Support for incumbent party: 1: Would vote for PS; 0: Others
- 6) Distance from center: absolute value of difference between left -right self placement and mean for sample.
- 7) Exposure TV news: 1: Never; 2: Occasionally; 3: Frequently
- 8) \* p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001
- 9) NA, DK, Refused, and responders younger than 18 years old were treated as missing data.
- 10) Source for data: Melich (1999).

The results validate several conclusions. First, as a growing literature on Portuguese political culture has demonstrated, political attitudes vis-à-vis the democratic regime and its institutions seem to be influenced more by other attitudes and opinions than by objective social positions and economic or educational resources (Heimer, Vala and Viegas, 1990; Magalhães, 2001; Freire, Magalhães, & Santo, 2002). The exception here is age, which, as predicted under the "post-materialism" hypothesis, had a positive and statistically significant effect on political trust.

Second, political trust in Portugal depends largely on support for the incumbent. In other words, the intention to vote for the governing party — and, thus, the positive evaluation of, or identification with, the political élites that control the government of

the day — makes citizens predictably more likely to place confidence in governmental and political institutions. Finally, and *regardless* of social, cultural or specific support determinants of institutional trust, citizens that make a better evaluation of Portugal's membership in the EU are also more likely to trust national political institutions. In model 2, the variable's effect is even stronger than that of incumbent support, and although the introduction of satisfaction with democracy reduces the beta coefficient - suggesting that it is related both to support for EU membership and political trust —, opinions about membership remain most definitely a cause of political trust. In other words, by the end of the nineties in Portugal, as opinions about EU membership had become increasingly less relevant in terms of shaping voting behavior, they had become attached to feelings of political mistrust and disengagement.

## **Conclusion**

In many respects, the analyses made here should be seen more as hypothesis-generating than hypothesis-testing. Scarcity or inadequacy of data still prevents us from making any definitive longitudinal assessments about the political and attitudinal effects of the depoliticization of Europe we have detected in Portuguese domestic politics in the last decade. However, some basic — though tentative — conclusions can be made. The story we told here is one in which, since 1988, Portuguese political parties have begun making strategic changes in their campaign appeals, particularly in what concerned their positions vis-à-vis European construction. For the Communist Party, qualified acceptance of Portuguese membership in the EU resulted from an overall readjustment in the face of electoral stagnation, through which the party finally conceded to lend support to an entire package of political and economic rights

around which the main cleavage in Portuguese party politics had been constituted back in the 1970s. Then, in the early nineties, (moderate) Euroscepticism acquired a new center of gravity in the right of the party system, as the a new leadership in the CDS-PP chose to ride on a wave of economic recession and European discontent, with relatively positive electoral benefits. However, such benefits were not as great as to provide a long-term solution to the party's strategic dilemmas as a small rightist force, and Euroscepticism was readily abandoned by the second half of the decade. Finally, the center-left Socialist party, whose strong support of EU membership as a political project since the democratic transition had never prevented the (mostly rhetorical) qualified criticism of unification as an economic project, finally gave in unconditionally as it reached the government for the first time since 1985, turning "Europe", i.e, EMU, into the centerpiece of its political platform and into the overarching guiding principle of governmental action until 1999 (Lobo and Magalhães, 2001).

Thus, as we reached 2002, although the constraints on national policy-making posed by deepened integration had perhaps become greater than ever, "European issues", such as the institutional architecture of Europe and the political consequences of enlargement, had virtually disappeared from the current political agenda. The effects of public evaluations of Portuguese EU membership on voting behavior closely mirror these developments, to the point of having presumably become totally irrelevant in the last general elections, in contrast with what had occurred in the past. In the meantime, although negative assessments of European membership on the part of the mass public have not returned to the low levels of 1993-95, positive assessments have not returned either to the high levels found in the late eighties and very early nineties.

While Eurosceptics thus remained a resilient minority, and strategic adjustments have led to the depoliticization of Europe on the part of political parties, a few consequences have followed. First, although Euroscepticism has ceased to be a relevant electoral cleavage, it has become an important determinant of the decision whether to vote at all. Second, the electoral demobilization of this segment of the population cannot be easily dismissed as a temporary consequence of the state of European construction or of the current supply of political alternatives, readily reversible as soon as European issues regain relevance in the electoral arena and party supply changes. Instead, lack of support for membership has now become one of the factors structuring citizens' distrust in relation to the very national structure of party competition and political decision-making, regardless of which is the incumbent party and the evaluation of political and economic performance. In other words, electoral demobilization also bears the signs of a political "exit", of political disenchantment and disenfranchisement in relation not only to the EU and European issues, but also to the national arena.

To be sure, one can readily imagine that this present situation might remain substantively irrelevant or even be reversed. If the levels of Euroscepticism among the mass public remain as relatively low as they are today, this syndrome of attitudes and behaviors I identified here as being related to a negative evaluation of EU membership may also remain themselves minoritarian or, at least, contained under reasonable levels. However, as we know from the extant literature, evaluations of membership are themselves strongly affected by instrumental and short-term evaluations of economic conditions and individual benefits and losses (see, among many, Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993; Gabel 1998). If the depoliticization of European issues remains a basic condition of political socialization in Portugal, even those who

temporarily move to Eurosceptic camp on account of short-term factors may acquire more permanent feelings of distrust vis-à-vis national political institutions. On the other hand, it is also true that any such rise of dissatisfaction with Portuguese membership in the EU would, inevitably, create incentives for political entrepreneurs in existing or new parties to reactivate Euroscepticism as a relevant foundation for an electoral cleavage. However, considering what we know now about what happened to Portuguese Euroscepticism in the last decade, this legacy of this depoliticization of Europe forces one to consider less than optimistic prospects about on what grounds — in terms of democratic discourse and loyalty to extant political institutions — are such potential entrepreneurs likely to achieve electoral success.

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