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EU-Critics: The Scared or the Scary?

**Representations of EU-Critics And EU-Criticism in the Finnish
Daily *Helsingin Sanomat* 2000-2006**

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Research on “Euroscepticism” has gained currency after the French and Dutch ‘no’-votes on the *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe* in May-June 2005. Most analyses of “Euroscepticism” are quantitative, focusing either on public opinion or party-based “Euroscepticism”. Political scientists have sought to define the term “Euroscepticism” and sometimes offered competing terms to describe the phenomenon, but due to a lack of qualitative empirical studies of the issue, the resulting definitions have been normative, not taking into account the various ways, in which the terms are actually used.

In my doctoral dissertation I will seek to clarify the concept of “Euroscepticism”. I will not offer any normative definition myself, nor will I argue that one of the various terms used for the phenomenon is more appropriate than the others. Instead, I will discuss how the entire phenomenon is discursively constructed in mainstream media and juxtapose those representations to EU-critics’ own representations of themselves. I will examine the latter—“inside” perspective—by interviewing leaders of EU-critical organizations. I do not suggest that either of the two representations—mainstream media and self-representations—is more “true” than the other. In other words, I do not propose that Eurosceptics understand themselves better than do the mainstream media, nor do I believe that the media as an outsider can be more “objective”.

I will conduct case studies of “Euroscepticism” in three countries: Finland, Sweden, and Estonia. The three countries, Sweden, Finland and Estonia constitute a kind of a “Nordic scale” of EU member states. Adding Denmark would have gone a step further on the EU-critical scale. Indeed, adding Norway to the study would have broadened the scale as an example of a country that has not even joined the EU. While Scandinavian countries have traditionally been considered “Nordic”, Finland was constructed as “Nordic” only after WW II and Estonia began the construction of its “Nordic identity” after 1991.

In each country, I will analyze the representations of EU-criticism/EU-critics in the largest daily newspaper: *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Postimees*,

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respectively. The current paper is the first part of this analysis, using *Helsingin Sanomat* (hereafter *HS*) as the source for empirical material. The timeframe for my study is from the year 2000 to early 2006 (January and February). The sample of articles for this study was chosen by searching the *HS* electronic archive for keywords, such as EU-critic, Eurosceptic, EU-pessimist, EU-opponent etc.¹ This method easily leaves out writings by EU-critics themselves, since they are unlikely to use any of my search words in their texts. My focus on articles that directly discuss “Euroscepticism” limits the analysis somewhat, since the image of EU-critics is also constructed through the representations of the opposite side. For example, consider the following two hypothetical sentences:

- a. Those, who care about the Finnish economy, support the introduction of the euro.
- b. Supporters of the EU have fallen in the trap of believing everything Brussels says.

From the first sentence we can infer that those, who oppose the Euro, do not care about the Finnish economy. Thus, there would be a negative evaluation of EU-critics. From the second sentence we can infer that EU-critics are smarter than EU-proponents, since they are less gullible. Thus there would be a positive evaluation of EU-critics. In fact, *any* text at all that mentions the EU is an indirect evaluation of EU-critics. The current analysis, however, is limited to articles, which directly mention EU-critics (possibly using some synonym).

In the year 2004 there were twice as many articles mentioning EU-critics/EU-criticism as in the other years included in the study. This is due to the European Parliament elections that took place in that year. In the preceding year, when Euro-related discussions were dominant, EU-criticism received less attention. The second highest frequency of discussing EU-criticism in *HS* is in 2005, when France and Holland voted no in the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty.

¹ The keywords in Finnish were as follows: EU-kriittisyys, EU-kriitikko, EU-kriittinen, eurokriittisyys, euroskeptisyys, euroskeptikko, euroskeptinen, EU-kielteinen, EU-kielteisyys, EU-vastainen, EU-vastaisuus, EU-vastustaja, EU-epäilijä, EU-epäily, euroepäilijä, EU-pessimismi, EU-oppositio.

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2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 Jan/Feb
47	58	62	43	119	72	12

Table 1: Number of articles in Helsingin Sanomat mentioning EU-critics/EU-criticism per year

The most popular term for the phenomenon in *HS* is EU-criticism (used 185 times), followed by EU-opposition (148 instances), Euroscepticism (155 instances, out of which 51 instances the Finnish translation “*epäilijä*” was used instead of the loanword “*skeptikko*”) and EU-opposition (148 instances).

In the sample analyzed, there was no systematic use of terms related to the phenomenon. Indeed, frequently the different terms were used as synonyms and in no instance did the author attempt to define the term he/she was using. It thus seems that the media actually contribute to the widespread confusion surrounding the concept of “Euroscepticism”.

In looking at the representations of “Euroscepticism”, it appears that the emphasis is on public opinion. In other words, “Euroscepticism” is presented as something that can be measured through public opinion surveys and referendum results. This leaves out the role of active EU-critics, their individual and organizational activities. The focus in the discussions is on how much “Euroscepticism” there is, rather than deliberating on the content and different kinds of this phenomenon. In general, the assumption is that the less “Euroscepticism” there is, the better. Notably, there is one article, which argues that “EU-criticism is wisdom”², but this is a summary article of a text published in a regional newspaper. It has been argued that regional newspapers are more EU-critical than national ones, although my observation here by no means offers any sufficient quantitative support for the argument. Since EU-criticism is depicted through public opinion, it appears as a view people passively have, rather than an endeavor they actively pursue.

² **P78: EU-kriittisyys on viisautta**

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The so-called yellow press is portrayed as more “Eurosceptic”, particularly in Great Britain.³ If it is true that it is customary in Finland to admire the British press, as one article claims⁴, greater EU-criticism could be expected in *HS* as well, but since *HS* probably wants to identify itself with quality press, it does not follow the example of the “Eurosceptic” yellow press in the UK. If the media are portrayed as carrying EU-critical views in the UK (for example), is the implication that if *HS* does not display EU-criticism, then there is no EU-criticism in Finland?

EU-related debates are represented as rational and equal, in which the better, i.e. more rational argument wins. In other words, power relations are ignored. It is evident in the discourse on “Euroscepticism” in *HS* that the power relations between the yes- and no-sides are far from equal. EU-critics are portrayed as marginal and it remains unclear how there could be an equal debate under such an unequal power distribution.

In total, the articles mention EU-criticism in 24 countries, most of which are EU member states, but in addition to those, Iceland, Norway, Turkey, Croatia and Switzerland are also discussed. The quantitative impression from these articles is that the most EU-critical country is the UK (mentioned 698 times), followed by Sweden (410 times), France (399 times) and Denmark (292 times). All four indeed have a high degree of public EU-criticism and France receives extra attention⁵ due to the negative result of the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in May 2005.

³ **P20: Blair viilettää jo kolmannelle kaudelle; P23: Britannia katsoo kahtaalle; P47: Ei kansanäänestystä EU-perustuslaista**

⁴ **P111: EU-uutisoinnin syntipukki on tietysti...BBC**

⁵ **P43: Chirac hävisi uhkapelinsä, EU joutuu maksamaan laskun; P119: Euroopan on laitettava iso vaihde päälle; P120: Euroopan unioni jumiutunut Ranskan kansanäänestyksen vuoksi; P147: Hämmennyksen vuosi.; P239: Nyt tarvitaan Eurooppaa enemmän, ei vähemmän; P291: Ranskalainen cocktail; P292: Ranskalaiset päättävät EU:n tulevasta suunnasta; P293: Ranskalaisten EU-vastaisuus huolestutti huippukokousta; P408: Yhteistä EU-identiteettiä tulisi rakentaa tietoisesti.**

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In *HS*, the *United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)* and the Swedish *Junilistan (June List)* serve as the prime examples of EU-critical parties. Indeed, *UKIP* is mentioned 18 times and *Junilistan* 48 times, while others are hardly referred to at all. *UKIP* has 11 MEPs and *Junilistan* has three. *UKIP* is presented as single-issue party,⁶ a joke⁷, ravaged by internal conflict⁸, free-riding on the popularity of its front man Robert Kilroy-Silk, a former TV-star, and Joan Collins, an actress, who never bothered to vote in British elections.⁹

When reporting on EU-critics' successful campaigns and election and referendum results, the results are often said to be surprising.¹⁰ As for the discussion on *Junilistan*, the main emphasis is on its "surprising"¹¹ and "shocking"¹² success in the European Parliament elections of 2004, but there is also some discussion on the nature of the group. Namely,

The founders of *Junilistan* do not belong to typical EU-opponents but are old gentlemen from Stockholm with conspicuous bank backgrounds.¹³

The "typical" EU-opponent can, thus, be inferred to be a young poor woman from the countryside. Finland's own are hardly mentioned.

An important aspect of representing EU-criticism is the context, in which the topic is discussed. For the most part, EU-criticism is mentioned among various "problems". A

⁶ **P26: Britannian EU-vastainen Ukip etsii liittolaisia pääpuolueista**

⁷ **P61: EU-kielteinen pienpuolue pullistelee Britanniassa**

⁸ **P61: EU-kielteinen pienpuolue pullistelee Britanniassa**

⁹ **P61: EU-kielteinen pienpuolue pullistelee Britanniassa**

¹⁰ **P49: Emun vastustajat juhlivat voittoa Tanskassa; P74: EU-kriittisen Kesäkuun listan menestys järkytti Ruotsissa; P129: Eurovaalien tulos kasasi paineita perustuslakineuvotteluihin**

¹¹ **P72: EU-kriittinen Kesäkuun lista suurvoittoon Ruotsissa; P132: Feministipuolueen uhka vilkastutti ruotsalaispuolueiden naistoiminnan; P273: Porvareiden menestys ja uudet ryhmittymät kuumentavat Ruotsin poliittista kesää; P312: Ruotsissa vaatimuksia EU-n perustuslaki-äänestyksestä**

¹² **P74: EU-kriittisen Kesäkuun listan menestys järkytti Ruotsissa**

¹³ **P299: Ruotsi on omanlaisensa**

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good example of how EU-criticism is surrounded by negative issues in the articles of *HS* would be the report of Esko Aho's, Finnish presidential candidate, argumentation on television. He lists several bad things that he expects to result from the EU's sanctions against Austria. He uses the general disclaimer "fear" to describe EU-opponents, who appear in the same sentence with radical rightists and Soviet occupation.

Esko Aho of the Center Party denounced the EU's sanctions against Austria. According to him these weaken the authority of the Union, feed EU-opponents fears, add support to the radical right in Austria and are reminiscent of the bygone years under Moscow rule.¹⁴

Another example of using context is the short overview of the division of seats in the European Parliament. According to the article the largest groups in the European parliament are the 268 conservatives and to the 200 socialists. "The socialists are supported by other leftists and Euroskeptics."¹⁵ The implication here is that Eurosceptics are leftists.

With few exceptions, the usual structure of the articles reserves the "last word" to EU-proponents. In other words, after the EU-critics' position(s) are presented, they are countered with a statement from someone from the yes-side, usually a government or EU-official, who either indicates the critics' idea as false or unreasonable.¹⁶

While the general trend in the articles is to associate EU-criticism with the lack of knowledge about the European Union¹⁷, one article suggests the opposite, namely that the

¹⁴ **P 3: Aho ja Halonen jatkoivat kinaansa Itävallasta**

¹⁵ **P11: Barroso pakotti vastustajansa voimainkoitukseen**

¹⁶ **P57: EU-joukoista riita Britanniassa**

¹⁷ **P65: EU-kielteisyyteen etsitään lääkkeitä; P76: EU-kriittisyys kasvaa; P85: EU-n ehdottamat pienet maitokiintiöt huolestuttavat; P87: EU-n iskuryhmä torjuu valheita perustuslaista; P88: EU-n laajeneminen askarruttaa itävaltalaisia; P97: EU-n vastustaminen organisaationa itsekestä; P103: EU pysynyt etäisenä suomalaisille; P119: Euroopan on laitettava iso vaihde päälle; P136: Haloo, kuuleeko EU; P146: Huhujen tappajalla kova työ; P169: Kansan EU-epäilykset vaikeuttavat Ruotsin kautta; P187: Kolmen maan polut; P188: Komissio ei suunnittele EU-tiedon pakko-opetusta; P189: Komission uusi johtaja vaatii Venäjää; P207: Leluja sioille; P208: Leo Krone ei halua luopua kruunusta; P260: Perusturva tuulimyllynä;**

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lack of knowledge serves to *quell* criticism.¹⁸ For the most part, though, EU-critics are disparaged for spreading “myths”¹⁹ and “lies”²⁰ about the EU, thus making it hard for EU-proponents to educate the public. EU-critics are presented as purposefully frightening the public, although they know—or should know—that their claims are false. Tony Blair is cited as referring to EU-critics’ claim that *Rapid Reaction Forces* constitute a European army as “pure Eurofrightening”.²¹

EU-critics are frequently indicated to be wrong in their claims. One article, which suggests that the European Union directives regarding the protection of the Russian flying squirrel (*Pteromys volans*) are based on demands by Finnish state officials for extra protection of the species, rather than a stupid invention of the European Union, is entitled “Always In the Wrong Place.”²² However, no indication is made throughout the article of other cases when EU-critics have been wrong.

Whereas EU-critics are portrayed as being afraid of what EU-membership, joining the euro etc. will bring along, the yes-side is depicted as afraid of rising EU-criticism. While the EU-critics’ fears are presented in context where they appear to be irrational, the EU-proponents’ fears are presented as entirely rational, in other words, as though there objectively were cause for concern. Occasionally, the word “fear” is used very generally and abstractly, without any specification. For example, after the French and Dutch no-votes in the 2005 referendums on the Constitutional Treaty, Finnish EU-criticism on the level of public opinion was said to have risen because

P287: Puolan katoliset konservatiivit varoittavat EU-n arvorrappiosta; P337: Suomella ja Britannialla eri syyt euroskeptisyyteen

¹⁸ **P54: Esko Antola- Euroopan unionista ei keskustella tarpeeksi**

¹⁹ **P19: Blair ryhtyi heti myymään EU-sopimusta briteille; P37: Britit kinaavat EU-n tarusta ja todesta; P48: Ei, sanoo EU; P110: EU-tiedottamiseen pesiytyi omituinen kieli; P119: Euroopan on laitettava iso vaihde päälle; P337: Suomella ja Britannialla eri syyt euroskeptisyyteen**

²⁰ **P57: EU-joukoista riita Britanniassa; P87: EU-n iskuryhmä torjuu valheita perustuslaista; P275: Presidenttiainesta**

²¹ **P57: EU-joukoista riita Britanniassa**

²² **P 5: Aina väärässä paikassa**

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There may be fears related to the [EU] constitution.²³

One (i.e. EU-proponent) should be cautious not to mention the EU when discussing politics with “Eurosceptical” politicians, since they will otherwise oppose all of your ideas²⁴ and one (i.e. government official) should take extra care to minimize talk about EU-induced political reforms when talking to the public, since there is a danger of rising EU-criticism.²⁵

Notably, Finnish EU-criticism is not presented as something related to radical leftism or rightism. However, when talking about Denmark²⁶, France²⁷ and Austria²⁸, numerous references are made as to the relations between radicalism and EU-criticism. This aura of radicalism is reflected upon Finnish EU-criticism (and –critics) as well. Timo Soini, leader of the Finnish EU-critical party *Perussuomalaiset*, writes in an article *Citizens dare to vote differently*²⁹ that “it should be possible to criticize and even oppose the EU without being labeled “a radical rightist.””³⁰ He and his party clearly have experienced such labeling.

²³ **P63: EU-kielteisyys kasvaa Suomessa**

²⁴ **P50: Epäilijät niskan päällä**

²⁵ **P120: Euroopan unioni jumiutunut Ranskan kansanäänestyksen vuoksi**

²⁶ **P295: Rasmussenin kohtalonpäivä koittaa Tanskassa tänään; P355: Tanskalaiset euromyönteisiksi; P359: Tanskassa ehkä pian uusi kansanäänestys; P413: Äärioikeisto valtaa alaa EU:ssa.; P49: Emun vastustajat juhliivat voittoa Tanskassa; P208: Leo Krone ei halua luopua kruunusta**

²⁷ **P291: Ranskalainen cocktail.; P294: Ranskassa ennätysmäärä ehdokkaita; P413: Äärioikeisto valtaa alaa EU:ssa; P135: Hajaannus repii Ranskan sosialisteja; P204: Le Pen haluaa irrottaa Ranskan EU:n Maastrichtin sopimuksesta; P205: Le Pen ilmoitti haluavansa Ranskan irti EU:n rahaliitosta; P206: Le Pen painoi euroa**

²⁸ **P316: Saksankielisessä Euroopassa politiikkaa ei nyt pääse pakoon; P399: Viisaiden Itävalta-raportin käsittely alkaa EU-maissa; P 3: Aho ja Halonen jatkoivat kinaansa Itävallasta; P134: Haiderin puolue ehkä sittenkin valtaan Itävallassa; P161: Jörg Haider erosi vapauspuolueen johdosta**

²⁹ **P238: Nyt kansalaiset uskaltavat äänestää toisin**

³⁰ **P238: Nyt kansalaiset uskaltavat äänestää toisin**

While EU-criticism is generally represented on the passive level of public opinion, occasionally EU-critics' activities receive some attention as well. Generally, the only activities that get media attention are demonstrations and riots. The demonstrations related to the EU Summit Meeting in Copenhagen, 2002, were peaceful, surprising the local police, as well as the journalists who attended the event.³¹ In other words, the demonstrations of EU-critics are generally expected to be violent. The indirect reference here is, of course, to the respective meeting a year earlier in Göteborg, which was portrayed as extremely violent.³² The focus on articles concentrating on demonstrations and riots is on the violent acts, rather than on the content of the demands of the demonstrators (the words demonstration and riot are sometimes used interchangeably, which may easily give the impression that all demonstration involve a violent element). Also in other circumstances, rather than focusing on the *content* of the EU-critics' message(s), emphasis is on the *style*. Accordingly, words like "boisterous" and "rowdy" are pejoratively used to describe EU-critics.³³

By way of summary, the UK and Sweden are most often referred to as EU-critical and the only two EU-critical organizations that received tangible attention were the British *UKIP* and the Swedish *Junilistan*. EU-criticism is presented as a problem to be solved and cause for concern. The proposed solution is increasing public discussion of the EU and educating the citizens. The main issues for concern seem to be the radicalism of EU-critics and their populist appeal. As EU-criticism in the media is associated with the yellow press, indirectly the lack of a balanced EU-related discussion in *HS* is indirectly legitimized.

³¹ **P159: Jos odotitte verta, niin siitäs saitte**

³² **P200: Kymmeniä loukkaantui mellakoissa**

³³ **P 2: Aatteen palo sammui; P98: EU-parlamentin puhemies- Euroedustajille sama palkka; P183: Kohukomissaari joutumassa väistymään mielipiteidensä takia; P253: Paljon on kiinni Puolan vauhdista**