

NAVIGATING CHANGE: THE NEW EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, EUROSCEPTICISM, AND THE GLOBAL POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Asst. Prof. Martina Marinova, PhD

*Institute for Historical Studies,
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*

Abstract:

This paper examines the interplay between the newly constituted European Parliament (EP), the rise of Euroscepticism, and the evolving global political landscape. An analysis is presented herein of how Eurosceptic sentiment, originating in socioeconomic discrepancies, cultural concerns, and perceived democratic deficit, influences EP's debates. The initial phase of the research involves constructing a conceptual framework encompassing the ideologies of the EP's political groups. The principal hypothesis is substantiated by a content analysis of EP debates. By adopting an integrated analytical lens, the paper offers a comprehensive understanding of how internal political dynamics and global pressures converge to shape the EU's trajectory in an era of uncertainty. By analysing stenographic records of parliamentary speeches, the study identifies three dominant rhetorical patterns: (1) agenda shifting through thematic reframing, (2) strategic avoidance of participation in politically sensitive debates, and (3) the deployment of emotionally charged, populist rhetoric alongside pragmatic critiques. Drawing on discourse theory and typologies of Euroscepticism, the analysis reveals how parties from across the Eurosceptic spectrum engage with EU policy in ways that both challenge and adapt to the institutional context of the EP.

Keywords: European Parliament, Euroscepticism, Global political dynamics, 2024 European elections

Introduction

The growing presence of Eurosceptic parties within the institutional framework of the European Union (EU), particularly in the European Parliament (EP), has significantly altered the nature of intra-European political discourse. Once considered marginal actors, Eurosceptic parties now exert influence from within

the very institutions they seek to criticize or transform. This paradox – opposition from within – has drawn scholarly attention how these actors use institutional platforms not only to legislate but to communicate ideological dissent¹. While typologies of Euroscepticism have been well-established², less is known about the discursive strategies these parties deploy in parliamentary debates. This article seeks to address that gap by examining how three relatively or more targeted Eurosceptic groups – the Europe of Sovereign Nations Group (ESN), Patriots for Europe (Pfe), and The Left Group – engage in rhetorical practices across six plenary debates in the EP between 2024 and 2025. Within a Laclau and Mouffe³ inspired discourse analytical framework, this research discerns three primary strategies: (1) redirection of criticism toward the EU through strategic reframing of debate topics (2) strategic non-participation in debates; and (3) the use of emotional, populist rhetoric alongside pragmatic critiques of policy. These strategies suggest that Euroscepticism within the EP is not a monolithic expression of rejection, but a strategically heterogeneous discourse shaped by topic, audience, and party ideology. Through an examination of communicative patterns, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the articulation, modulation, and amplification of opposition to European integration within established institutional contexts. The hypothesis is: Eurosceptic parties in the EP adopt strategically differentiated rhetorical approaches – such as agenda-shifting, selective participation, and emotional appeals – depending on the political sensitivity of the debate topic.

Literature Overview

Academic discussions on Euroscepticism have evolved significantly over the past two decades. Scholars such as Taggart and Szczerbiak⁴ categorize Euroscepticism into „hard“ and „soft“ varieties. This is one of the most influential concepts in their work is the distinction between hard and soft Euroscepticism, first elaborated in the early 2000s. „Hard Euroscepticism refers to a principled opposition to the EU and European integration“⁵. Parties or individuals that adopt this stance believe that their country should withdraw from the EU or that the EU project is flawed. Soft Euroscepticism indicates a conditional or qualified opposition⁶. These actors do not reject the EU outright but are critical of specific policies or aspects of its functioning – such as opposition to further integration or dissatisfaction with specific treaties. Taggart and Szczerbiak emphasize that Euroscepticism is not binary but exists on a spectrum. Different political actors may oppose European integration for various reasons – economic, political, sovereignty-based, cultural, or ideolo-

¹ Brack, N., 2018; Usherwood, S., Startin, N., 2013.

² Taggart, P., Szczerbiak, A., 2002; Kopecká, P., Mudde, C., 2002.

³ Laclau, E., Mouffe, C., 1985.

⁴ Taggart, P., Szczerbiak, A., 2002; Taggart, P., Szczerbiak, A., 2004.

⁵ Taggart, P., Szczerbiak, A., 2008.

⁶ Ibid.

gical⁷. Another key point in their theory is that Euroscepticism is often strategic⁸. Parties may adopt Eurosceptic rhetoric not out of deep ideological conviction but to differentiate themselves in the political landscape or to appeal to voter segments critical of the EU. This paper builds on this dual foundation, connecting internal political developments in the EU to broader global transformations, and asking how one domain influences the other.

Research design and debates in the EP

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of all stenographic records pertaining to the specified topics. The research is based on 4 indicators: Keyword; MEP position – affirmative, negative, posing a problem; MEP attitude – positive, neutral, negative; Building the argumentation – rational-logical, emotional-figurative. The rational arguments are characterized by statistical evidence, policy analysis, or logical reasoning, whereas emotional appeals might utilize metaphors, vivid imagery, or charged language. This study draws on the Discourse-Historical Approach within Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how Euroscepticism is constructed in parliamentary debates. Combining this with principles from Argumentation Theory, it analyses the rhetorical strategies and argumentation structures used by MEPs to affirm, critique, or problematize the European project. Through systematic analysis of keywords, speaker positions, attitudes, and modes of argumentation, the study aims to uncover the underlying ideological and discursive patterns that characterize the contemporary political contestation of European integration.

The first debate is based on the topic „EU support for a just, sustainable and comprehensive peace in Ukraine“ (2025/2685(RSP))⁹. The principal keywords and phrases derived from the statements of the PfE group include: „the failure of the European strategy“¹⁰, „If you really want peace, you have to sit at that table“¹¹, „accelerated Ukrainian accession to the EU with catastrophic economic consequences“¹², „the EU has become a prisoner of its own strategy“¹³, and „stronger diplomatic efforts“¹⁴. Across the seven statements made by PfE members during the debate, the prevailing sentiment was critical of the EU’s current approach. Five of the seven statements expressed a clearly negative position, while two MEPs articulated more neutral perspectives. In terms of argumentative strategy, PfE members employed emotional appeals in four instances and relied on rational-logical reasoning in three, revealing a

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-05-07-ITM-003_EN.html

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

discourse that blends affective rhetoric with policy-focused critique. Lexical choices signal discursive strategies of delegitimization. The contrast between emotional appeals and rational argumentation reflects strategic framing aimed at both mobilizing public sentiment and criticizing institutional inefficacy. Emotional appeals like the criticism of von der Leyen's actions reflect pathos-driven rhetoric, designed to foster identification and emotional disapproval. Logical arguments, on the other hand, such as warnings about economic consequences, fall under logos, reflecting an attempt to maintain credibility and rational persuasion.

The primary keywords and phrases identified within the ESN statements are: „foreign policy driven by illusions“¹⁵, „the EU has not come up with a single peace initiative“¹⁶, „toxic anti-Russian hysteria“¹⁷. The four statements made by ESN during the debate reflected a wholly negative stance toward the EU policy. Their argument comprised two statements supported by rational argumentation and two by emotional. This dual approach often serves to reinforce the underlying negative narrative by ensuring that both cognitively rigorous and instinctive responses are engaged. The specific choice of language and metaphors can be analysed as part of a broader pattern of delegitimizing the EU's actions. These keywords and phrases not only signify the negative stance but also highlight the rhetoric used to delegitimize EU policy. The specificity of phrases provides clear evidence of the discourse's emotive and ideologically charged nature.

The discourse of The Left during the debate is characterized by keywords and phrases such as: „But you have done absolutely nothing for peace, and your aid is also poisonous. It's just loans“¹⁸, „Europe's great hypocrisy“¹⁹, and „we need a diplomatic strategy“²⁰. Of the six statements made by MEPs from The Left, three expressed a negative stance toward the EU's actions, two were neutral, and one conveyed a positive view. In terms of argumentation, four statements relied on emotional appeals, while two were grounded in rational reasoning. This distribution reveals a predominantly critical tone, though more balanced than that of other groups, combining moral condemnation with some calls for diplomatic engagement. Some of the used keywords signal moral-emotive criticism, employing delegitimizing metaphors and accusatory tone.

The second analysed debate is „A united EU response to unjustified US trade measures and global trade opportunities for the EU (2025/2657(RSP))“²¹. The PfiE group made seven contributions to the debate on US trade taxes, all of which expressed a negative stance on the EU's policies. Key expressions

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-05-06-ITM-003_EN.html

included: „strategic autonomy of nations“²², „Green Deal – Green Disaster“²³. Other statements framed the EU as a self-inflicted obstacle, accusing it of „industrial and geopolitical suicide“²⁴ and „climate-fanatic hypocrisy“²⁵. Several statements rejected core elements of EU policy frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda, climate policy, and regulatory standards, characterizing them as ideologically driven and economically harmful. Of the seven statements, five relied on emotional-figurative rhetoric, while two employed rational-logical arguments. Although all statements maintained a negative orientation, some framed their critique by posing problems rather than solely assigning blame, suggesting a discourse not only of opposition but of systemic alarm. Some of the used phrases undermine the credibility and rationality of EU actors and institutions. Ideological polarization is evident in the contrast drawn between strategic autonomy of nations and the suicidal bureaucratic burden imposed by the EU. The EU is framed not just as ineffective, but as self-destructive, having „handed our automotive future to China“²⁶, blending geopolitical critique with nationalist protectionism. The rhetoric evokes fear, frustration, and outrage through figurative metaphors. Rational elements (logos) are present but limited, e.g. quantifying bureaucratic costs or highlighting market reform needs.

The ESN group contributed two statements to the debate on US trade taxes. The principal keywords and phrases included: „no trade alternatives and no negotiating power“²⁷, „EU establishment isolated economies because of arrogance“²⁸, „The EU must stop interfering in the internal affairs of nations“²⁹, and „We must end the Green Deal and smash the bureaucratic monster that is Brussels“³⁰. Both statements reflected a distinctly negative stance toward the EU and relied exclusively on emotional and figurative argumentation. The rhetoric emphasized blame, delegitimization, and national sovereignty, positioning the EU as a central obstacle rather than a solution in trade-related matters. Lexical choices like reflect delegitimizing strategies, painting the EU as both ineffective and harmful. The call for sovereignty and the rejection of EU interference aligns with nationalist discourse strands commonly seen in Eurosceptic rhetoric. The exclusive use of emotional-figurative argumentation shows a highly rhetorical and populist mode of expression, centred on evoking anger, fear, or resentment. No rational-logical arguments are offered-instead, metaphors serve to simplify and vilify.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

In the debate on US trade taxes, The Left made seven statements, exhibiting a more balanced tone than either the ESN or PfE. Notable keywords and phrases include: „the Commission is in political denial“³¹, „no strategy“³². The group also advocated for more autonomous and progressive economic approaches, such as: „broaden trade ties“³³, „strengthen the internal market“³⁴. Of the seven statements, three were negative toward the EU’s current trade policy, while four were more neutral in tone. Argumentation styles were predominantly rational, with the remaining three drawing on emotional appeals. The Left also focused more on posing structural problems and suggesting alternative strategies, rather than merely expressing opposition. This makes their discourse stand out as critical yet constructive, engaging with the substance of policy while incorporating ideological and economic concerns. The Left accuses the EU of „political denial“ and „lack of strategy“, while also prescribing reindustrialization, fair trade, and digital taxation. Rational-logical appeals dominate. Emotional appeals appear in phrases is used to stress urgency and injustice.

The third debate is based on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – „Dramatic situation in Gaza and the need for an immediate return to full implementation of the ceasefire and hostage release agreement (2025/2644(RSP))“³⁵. During the debate on the situation in Gaza, the PfE group made three statements. Departing from its stance in prior debates, PfE adopted a neutral approach to the EU, instead directing criticism toward ideologically opposed groups. Key phrases included: „The far-left refuses to see the truth“³⁶, „refuses to label Hamas as terrorists, spreads its hateful propaganda, and justifies the unjustifiable“³⁷. All three statements posed problems, focusing on the broader geopolitical complexity of the conflict and the perceived bias of certain political factions. Only one statement employed emotional-figurative language, while the remaining two were framed in more analytical or observational terms. This suggests a rhetorical shift from systemic EU critique to ideological contestation and conflict framing. Only one emotional appeal is clearly present. The other two statements reflect problem-posing, aiming to shift the conversation from unilateral blame to wider contextual understanding. The absence of direct EU critique marks a rhetorical departure from the PfE’s usual discourse pattern.

The ESN group’s failure to issue statements during the Gaza debate represents a significant data point, a strategically employed silence admitting several

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-04-01-ITM-016_EN.html

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

interpretations. The multifaceted nature of the Gaza conflict involves deeply polarizing geopolitical, religious, and humanitarian elements. Gaza's multifaceted moral and political dimensions exceed the capacity of conventional binary frameworks (such as „EU = undesirable“, „Nation = favourable“). Unlike trade, green policy, or the Ukraine war – topics they can easily link to EU failure or national decline – the Gaza conflict doesn't easily serve Eurosceptic narratives: the EU has limited direct control over the conflict, making it hard to portray it as an „EU failure“.

In this debate, The Left made six statements, all of which expressed a strongly negative stance toward the EU's role in the conflict. The group employed highly charged and accusatory language, with key phrases such as: „this genocide is being carried out with European weapons“³⁸, „The EU has blood on its hands“³⁹. Other notable calls to action included „suspend all agreements with Israel“⁴⁰ and „enforce the arrest warrants“⁴¹, urging the EU to detain Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. These statements reflect an unambiguous moral indictment of the EU's foreign policy, emphasizing complicity, passivity, and hypocrisy. Only one of the six statements employed rational-logical argumentation; the remainder relied on emotional and figurative rhetoric. The EU is not simply failing but is cast as a complicit actor in genocide, marking one of the harshest critiques of the entire dataset. Some of the used phrases evoke collective moral failure and align with accusatory, justice-centred discourse. Calls to action function as prescriptive arguments driven by ethical imperatives rather than technocratic reasoning.

The fourth debate is based on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy – „Crackdown on democracy in Turkey and arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu (2025/2642(RSP))“⁴². In the debate, the P/E group made two statements, both of which conveyed a negative stance toward the EU rather than Türkiye itself. Key phrases such as „Europe look as much like Turkey as possible“⁴³ and „Democracy is not only in danger in Turkey, but also in danger right here“⁴⁴ reflect a rhetorical redirection: P/E leveraged the foreign policy issue to accuse EU institutions of eroding democracy internally. The group also criticized EU leaders' continued partnership with Erdoğan, with emotionally charged lines like „You are not democrats, but aristocrats“⁴⁵. Both statements relied on emotional-figurative rhetoric, emphasizing perceived elitism, hypocrisy, and the collapse of democratic legitimacy within the EU itself. P/E uses the external

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-04-01-ITM-015_EN.html

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

crisis in Türkiye not to critique Erdoğan per se, but to project criticism back onto EU institutions, particularly the Commission leadership. The phrase „make Europe look like Turkey“ uses analogical reasoning to equate EU governance with authoritarian drift – a potent delegitimization strategy. The EU is framed not as a promoter of democracy abroad, but as a hypocritical actor eroding it at home. Use of „you are not democrats, but aristocrats“ taps into classic populist binaries: people vs. elites, democracy vs. technocracy.

ESN’s non-participation in two foreign policy debates – Gaza and Türkiye – contrasts with their active and emotionally charged contributions in debates on the topics about Ukraine/Peace and US Trade Taxes. This shows a discursive selectivity. The explanations might be: 1) Openly criticizing Erdoğan might risk alienating segments of their nationalist base, especially given how some right-wing populist parties in Europe have adopted a pragmatic admiration for authoritarian „strongmen“; 2) Engaging in this debate might require the ESN to align with liberal democratic values they usually contest – e.g., defending judicial independence, human rights, minority rights.

In the debate on the democratic crackdown in Türkiye and the arrest of Ekrem İmamoğlu, The Left group delivered three statements, all of which conveyed a strongly negative stance toward both the Erdoğan regime and the EU’s response. The rhetoric employed was entirely emotional-figurative, reflecting moral urgency and frustration. Key phrases included „Erdoğan has you in his hands“⁴⁶, „Stop the dirty deals with the Erdoğan regime!“⁴⁷, and „Concerned words are no longer enough“⁴⁸. These statements criticized the EU’s perceived complicity with authoritarianism in Türkiye, denouncing what The Left sees as hypocritical or passive behaviour by the Commission and EU member states. There was a strong normative appeal to human rights and press freedom, particularly in the demand for the release of Swedish journalist Joakim Medin. In sum, The Left framed the EU-Turkey relationship as a moral failure rooted in strategic cynicism and a betrayal of democratic values. They employ negative evaluation of both Erdoğan’s regime and EU leaders, positioning themselves as guardians of moral coherence. The Left’s version of populism targets elites for failing to uphold transnational values.

The last debate is based on the Council and Commission Declarations on the political crisis in Serbia (2025/2554(RSP))⁴⁹. In the EP debate on the political crisis in Serbia, the P/E group made three statements, all of which conveyed a negative attitude toward the EU’s role. However, the tone and strategy showed some variation from other debates. While the group continued to criticize the EP as hypocritical and overreaching, two of the three statements employed rational-logical argumentation, indicating a more moderated rhetorical approach.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2025-02-11-ITM-015_EN.html

Key phrases included: „The EP is once again demonstrating its hypocrisy“⁵⁰, „EU must also respect the sovereignty of the candidate countries“⁵¹. The statements emphasized the principle of non-interference, portraying the EU as meddling, biased, and selectively concerned, depending on its political interests. This framing aligns with the PfE’s broader sovereigntist narrative, but with a more formal and measured tone than in other debates. The rhetoric frames the EU’s involvement as a breach of sovereignty – a sovereigntist defence consistent with populist narratives. Unlike in debates, here, the critique focuses on process and legitimacy. The accusation of EU double standards (silence on Kosovo⁵² vs. loudness on Serbia) reaffirms a core populist claim that the EU acts opportunistically and ideologically, rather than objectively or consistently.

In this debate, the ESN group made only one statement, but its content reveals a sharp, emotionally charged Eurosceptic and conspiratorial worldview. The keywords „globalist network“⁵³, „obedient vassals“⁵⁴, and „independent nations“⁵⁵, reflect a strong anti-EU stance, framing the EU as part of a transnational elite system seeking to subjugate sovereign states like Serbia. While Serbia is portrayed as committed to EU accession, the ESN emphasizes its relations with Russia and China as a positive marker of independence. The argument is emotional-figurative, relying heavily on populist tropes of „the people vs. the globalist elite“ and fears of supranational control. The framing of Serbia as independent, non-compliant, and attractive to „foreign investment“ positions it as a model of national sovereignty – in direct contrast to the „vassal“ EU states.

The Left made only one statement in the debate on the political crisis in Serbia. This statement was negative toward the EU, specifically targeting the EU’s lack of concrete engagement and leadership in the Western Balkans. The criticism was grounded in rational argumentation, with no emotional or figurative rhetoric. Key phrases such as „indecisive“⁵⁶ and „content with barren statements“⁵⁷ frame the EU as ineffective and passive, failing to uphold its responsibilities in guiding Serbia toward meaningful reforms. Unlike far-right groups that accuse the EU of overreach, The Left criticizes the EU for doing too little: abandoning Serbia, not engaging sufficiently on democratic and economic reforms, and not supporting integration effectively. The absence of emotional rhetoric and the presence of concrete policy references (rule of

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ECJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

law, economy, reforms) underscore The Left's preference for policy-based critiques over ideological confrontation.

All three groups construct „Us vs. Them“ frontiers – PfE: people vs. bureaucrats, ESN: nations vs. globalist elites, The Left: citizens vs. corporate-EU complex. This shows how Euroscepticism is not a monolith, but a field of competing hegemonic projects challenging liberal-centrist EU discourse from both right and left. This study contributes to the understanding of how Euroscepticism is discursively constructed and diversified within the EP. Rather than a binary opposition between „pro-EU“ and „anti-EU“ actors, the analysis reveals a pluralistic field of critique, shaped by distinct ideologies and argumentative strategies.

Conclusion

This study examined the rhetorical strategies and argumentative patterns of three Eurosceptic groups in the EP – the ESN, PfE, and The Left – across six topical debates: Ukraine/Peace, US Trade Policy, the situations in Gaza, Türkiye and Serbia. The analysis of plenary debates reveals three distinct rhetorical and strategic approaches employed by Eurosceptic political groups within the EP. These strategies reflect both ideological positioning and calculated political communication tactics aimed at shaping public perception, avoiding reputational risk, and maximizing rhetorical impact. One prominent strategy observed is the intentional reframing or diversion of debate topics. Instead of directly engaging with the debate's central issue, these groups shift the focus to overarching ideological frameworks that serve their political goals. This aligns with Laclau and Mouffe's theory of antagonism⁵⁸, where discourse seeks to construct a political frontier – transforming external topics into opportunities to oppose the EU elite and consolidate in-group identity through „us vs. them“ dichotomies. A second observable strategy is little or no participation at all in delicate debates. This tactic appears to be intentional silence, likely to avoid internal fragmentation, reputational damage, or electoral risk. Avoidance reflects a form of calculated discursive minimalism, consistent with theories of strategic ambiguity, where silence is used to preserve ideological coherence or dodge accountability. This behaviour suggests that Euroscepticism, particularly in its hard-line forms, is not merely oppositional but also tactically cautious – selectively engaging only when discursive conditions are favourable. The third and most consistent strategy across all groups is the blend of pragmatic grievances with emotionally charged language. While PfE and ESN rely more heavily on emotional-figurative rhetoric, The Left alternates between rational argumentation and moral appeals, depending on the topic. This emotional-pragmatic duality aims to mobilize public discontent while also presenting policy-based objections. The strategies of topic reframing, selective participation, and populist-emotional rhetoric reflect the multifaceted nature of Euroscepticism in the EP.

⁵⁸ Laclau, E., Mouffe, C., 1985.

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