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Prologue

It is a pleasure and honour to preface this book by Cesareo Rodríguez-Aguilera which you are now reading. Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera, Professor of Political Science at Barcelona University, is a first class reference in the study of comparative politics in our country and this book does nothing but confirm this. This work makes an extremely significant contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon called “Euroscpticism” for at least three important reasons.

It does this, firstly, at a critical time for European integration, when the process of integration is going through one of its deepest crises, a crisis, no doubt, with such existential overtones that its survival is in question. It is well known, what was at first was a peripheral shadow in the system, British euroscpticism in the early 1990s, introduced and encouraged by Margaret Thatcher in the UK, ended up spreading to continental Europe. The Maastricht Treaty, with the victory of “no” in Denmark and the narrow victory of the “yes” in France marked a turning point in European integration. Although the EU believed in extricating itself from that first encounter between elites and electorates, the failed referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005 not only threw the draft European Constitution overboard but, as noted by Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera, European integration suffered a fracture (a cleavage) that since then has run transversely across European policy. The so-called “permissive consensus” by which the construction of Europe was governed during its first fifty years of history was swept from the stage, leaving the European Union to face a very dangerous spiral. It is increasingly difficult for the EU to legitimise itself through effectiveness, as “losers” or “victims” have appeared that call into question the official narrative presented by the EU as a process where everyone always wins. Nor can it completely legitimise itself with its procedures because ultimately, democracy continues to reside at the national level and neither the public nor the politicians have wanted or have known how to democratise the EU (hence the poor results of the elections to the European Parliament and the paradoxical emergence of euroscptical parties within the European Parliament itself). Nor, in the final instance, can it legitimise itself through identity, because precisely European integration has not only failed to create the support for identity it needs to survive, but, as this book shows, is perceived by some as a threat, not as a guarantee of these identities. So, Euroscpticism is here to stay – we

must live with it, it becomes essential to understand it better, it is what this book shows us and which, at the same time, constitutes its second substantial contribution.

This second contribution comes from the fact that both the term and the phenomenon of Eurocepticism are, despite their validity and current visibility, complex realities, hard to handle, difficult to capture and explain. What better claim for the task of social scientist and the utility of political science than the commitment Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera offers us here in observing reality, stopping the clock, reviewing, analysing problems, breaking down complexity, understanding the relevant variables that explain a problem, developing concepts that account for the observed and building explanations that account for that reality. This is a rigorous, well structured, intensive yet extensive piece of work, whose ambition is to cover the entire scope of Eurocepticism, from right to left, in all its rich and varied hues. Eurocepticism is a polysemous term, almost a cliché or catch-all concept under which are grouped, without much rhyme or rigour, in a superficial analysis phenomena that seem alike, but which reveal themselves to be different when examined in more depth. Here the work of Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera seems like that of an entomologist, who patiently dissects the 22 objects of study (in this case, eurosceptical parties) to offer a taxonomy that allows us to understand what we mean when we speak about Eurocepticism. It does this, moreover, despite the difficulty of obtaining the data underpinning his study because, as he surprisedly points out, parties pay so little attention to their manifestos, that are supposedly their contract with voters; that they do not even bother to save them, send them to the citizens who request them or deposit them in the library of the European Parliament.

The third reason why the contribution of this book strikes me as very relevant relates to the specifically Spanish context in which it is published. Spain is a country with a long tradition of European thought. For historical reasons that are well known to readers (Francoism and the transition to democracy), national and European interests have merged in such a way that it has generally been impossible to separate and distinguish between them. From Spain, the criticism of the alleged “democratic deficit” of the EU has always been misunderstood and mismatched, partly with good reason, because certainly our country was almost certainly more democratic, in some ways less democratic, merely because of being a member of the EU. This structural inability to understand the EU as a threat to identity, prosperity and democracy is what led to Spain, of all the countries of southern Europe, being the only one where the consensus on accession was total. While in Portugal or Greece communist parties were always critical of European integration,

which for them already felt like a product of commercial and financial capitalism, that is, an advance of what later would be called “globalisation”, in Spain there was not only unanimity, but unanimism, i.e. assent to Europe became the unquestioned ideology. Not surprisingly, and as proof, the Spanish United Left party (Izquierda Unida) broke apart in 1991-1992 over the decision on whether to vote in favour or abstain in the parliamentary vote on the Maastricht Treaty, leaving a leading group of leaders, the PCE and the coalition at that time, standing alone. From the sidelines, it was not without its logic that a Communist Party would vote against a monetary union such as that established in Maastricht – it would also happen with regard to the European Constitution, where again the radical Spanish left would take a critical stance, Spanish Eurosceptics never took such a position. As Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera rightly asserts, these facts fully justify the need to design categories that help us understand not only the phenomenon of Euroscepticism but its nuances and in many cases, the enormous differences between parties and attitudes that, out of laziness or a need for simplification, are usually grouped under the same conceptual umbrella.

Therein lies ultimately the last and most significant merit of this book. To the timely, analytical and contextual relevance of his research, the relevance of his results must be added. The exhaustive review of the existing literature that Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera carries out is helpful, though also extremely demoralising at first sight. Eurocritics, Europhobes, Eurorealists, Europragmatics, gradualists, rejectors, revisionists, minimalists, reformers, maximalist Euroenthusiasts, Eurooptimists, Euro pessimists, “hard stance”, “soft stance”. Having overcome the initial instinct to throw in the towel, Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera gets down to work and using the scalpel of the political scientist, gives us the keys to reconstruct and understand the material. For this he analyses the different dimensions and demands on which these parties pronounce their Euroscepticism: left-right, more or less integration, sovereignty, identity, immigration, globalisation.

His conclusions are clear and far reaching. Firstly in taxonomic terms, his findings are robust while elegant and leave us with a much more accurate route map than we had when we started reading. As he indicates, we can even see the horizon, at least in analytic or academic terms, where we could dispense with the term “Eurosceptic” having then found substantially higher analytical alternatives.

Second, in substantive terms or content, his conclusions allow us to separate right-wing Euroscepticism very precisely, clearly more directly anti-European and focused predominantly on immigration (i.e.,

identity), from that of the left, which maintains an integrative predisposition, but is openly critical of the economic design and orientation (of neoliberal persuasion) of the European project. They clearly share, with different nuances, democratic and sovereigntist concerns, but by finalising substantially different understandings of the meaning and purpose both of sovereignty and democracy, this rhetorical mechanism structured around the concepts of sovereignty and democratic deficit is not solid enough to force a common stance.

Beyond the differences and similarities between them, this distinction between “Europhobes” on the radical right and “positive Eurosceptics” on the radical left is very useful not only in itself but because it allows us to understand how this fracture is configured in Europe when we add the two remaining categories: on the one hand, the “Europhiles” parties represented by the parties of center-right and center-left, supporting European integration today which are generally in line with both the concept of integration and its main results and secondly, the “negative Eurosceptics” or conservative and agrarian parties, that reject the principle of integration but live with its results in a pragmatic way. So, with the author as a guide and with rigour and elegance, readers can immerse themselves in the forest of complexity that the phenomenon of Euroscepticism represents, coming out the other side with a much clearer picture than at the outset. It is for this reason, returning to the beginning of this prologue, that we must thank Professor Rodríguez-Aguilera and congratulate his work in giving us a much needed contribution to the study of Euroscepticism.

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