

Karlis Bukovskis (ed.), *Euroscepticism in Small EU Member States*. Riga: LIAA, 2016. 160 pp.

Reviewed by Toms Rostoks, associate professor, University of Latvia

This edited volume seeks to track the roots of Euroscepticism in small European Union (EU) member states. At the very heart of the European integration project lies a question about the willingness of EU member states to pursue integration. If elites and publics in EU member states are optimistic about the European project, more integration is likely to follow in its twin forms of deepening and widening. If, however, elites and publics are sceptical about the European integration project, disintegration becomes a realistic possibility. The political relevance of this debate could not be greater, as evidenced by the results of the UK's Brexit referendum in June 2016. This event has indeed been a game changer in the ongoing debate on Euroscepticism. Instead of treating Euroscepticism as a phenomenon of minor importance which could be ignored, the Brexit vote has placed Euroscepticism in the spotlight. The British referendum result means that it is necessary to identify countries that are most Eurosceptic and identify the roots of their pessimism about European integration in order to prevent further damage to the European integration project. This book should certainly be on the reading list of anyone interested in which countries might follow the example set by the British.

This edited volume studies seven small EU member states. This sample offers considerable variation in terms of when they joined the European integration project. Luxembourg was part of the group of six founding members of the EU. Ireland joined the EU in 1973. Finland joined the European integration project in 1995 after the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union which rendered its former foreign policy obsolete. Latvia joined the EU as part of the big bang enlargement in 2004, and Bulgaria's accession to the EU took place in 2007. Croatia, in turn, is the most recent addition to the EU in 2013. This volume also provides geographical diversity, including case-studies from eastern, western, southern, and northern parts of the EU.

The book successfully explains the relative lack of Euroscepticism in the seven EU member states. Nadine Besch and Guido Lessing argue that 'Luxembourg has no interest groups in society, no business stakeholders nor any political party lobbying for leaving the EU' (p. 11). As a result, Euroscepticism is weak in Luxembourg, though 'it is not completely absent' (p. 25). In the chapter on Ireland, John FitzGibbon claims that 'while Euroscepticism has had a strong influence at specific junctures in the Irish-EU relationship, it remains firmly restrained by a series of wider historical, political and economic issues that both Eurosceptic actors and the effects of the Eurocrisis have yet to overcome' (p. 31). The unwavering support of the Irish for the EU is explained by the fact that the EU facilitated the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the financial backing provided by the EU in support of the economic expansion of the Irish state (p. 44). The title of the chapter on Portugal largely summarizes the main claim of this country-study written by Sandra Fernandez and Isabel Estrada Carvalhais, namely, that Euroscepticism is weak in Portugal. Admittedly, support for the EU dropped during the economic downturn (2009-2014), but Euroscepticism has lost momentum since then (pp. 48-49). Thus, the authors conclude that 'Portuguese pro-Europeanism is widespread in politics and society in

general, and seems to remain so far undisturbed by the recent events in Europe, namely Brexit' (p. 57).

Euroscepticism seems to have a stronger presence in Finland than in a number of other countries included in this study. Indeed, as the author of the Finnish chapter Tuomas Iso-Markku explains, Euroscepticism has become a permanent feature of the political landscape in Finland (p. 61). However, the author concludes that public support for the EU membership has not decreased considerably. Thus, 'the basic rationale behind Finnish EU membership and the overall attitude of the Finnish electorate toward the EU have remained unchanged' (p. 79). Aldis Austers begins by characterizing Latvian support for the EU as 'lukewarm' (p. 86). However, after explaining the key elements of Euroscepticism in Latvia, he concludes that 'the institutionalization of Euroscepticism has not advanced and will not have a chance to do so in the near future' (p. 104). Austers characterizes Euroscepticism in Latvia as having its roots in people's deeply entrenched perception that great powers (presumably, this category includes the EU as well) cannot be trusted (p. 103).

At the very beginning of the Bulgarian case, Antoinette Primatarova states that 'Euroscepticism continues to be a marginal phenomenon in Bulgaria, both as party-based and mass Euroscepticism' (p. 108). The long-term implications of Bulgaria being the poorest EU member state and not in the Eurozone and the Schengen area are uncertain. For now, however, the Bulgarian public is enthusiastic about EU membership. Visnja Samardzija, in turn, claims that Croatia is part of a larger group of EU member states that can be characterized as Eurorealist. However, she admits that 'EU membership was never seriously brought into question' (p. 125). To summarize, there is very little Euroscepticism in the seven country-studies included in this study. There is little doubt that Euroscepticism is present in some form in all of the countries discussed, but it has little potential to question the EU membership of these seven countries.

Euroscepticism is clearly not a major factor in all seven countries. Thus, this edited volume is not really a study of Euroscepticism in the EU. Rather, it is a study of why pragmatic small states are very unlikely to vote themselves out of the EU. Indeed, why would any of these states want to leave the EU? Luxembourg sits comfortably in the geographical heart of Western Europe, it hosts a number of European institutions, and the President of the European Commission is from Luxembourg. Ireland and Portugal have benefited immensely from their EU membership, and the EU has played a major role in helping them (and Latvia) to muddle through the economic recession. Newcomers – Latvia, Bulgaria, and Croatia – are still likely to benefit economically from their EU membership. There is little purpose for any of these countries to question their EU membership. Finland could be an exception because it is one of the wealthier EU member states, and it has repeatedly voiced criticism over the handling of the Eurozone crisis in the past years. It turns out, however, that Finns are too pragmatic to seriously consider leaving the EU because the benefits still far outweigh the costs and the public is supportive of the country's EU membership.

The implicit assumption built into the title of this edited volume is that small member states might be more inclined to develop Eurosceptical attitudes. At least, they might be inclined to be Eurosceptic (in equal measure to large EU member states). If anything, the country studies reject this implicit assumption because the analysis of

seven EU member states points toward the conclusion that it would be far more difficult for small states to leave the EU than for large member states to do so. To examine this proposition, however, we would need another study that includes the more interesting cases of Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, and Greece. After all, these countries may well have more substantial reasons for leaving the EU than the ones included in the present study.