

The politicization trap and how to escape it: intergovernmentalism, politicization and competences mismatch in perspective

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EUROPEAN STUDIES

THE POLITICIZATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

From Processes
to Consequences

Anne-Marie Houde

Thomas Laloux


Morgan Le Corre Juratic

Heidi Mercenier

Damien Pennetreau

Alban Versailles

(eds.)

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INTRODUCTION

The consequences of EU politicization: a research agenda

Heidi Mercenier, Anne-Marie Houde, Thomas Laloux,
Morgan Le Corre Juratic, Damien Pennetreau,
Alban Versailles¹

Landmark events such as the 2008 financial crash (Statham and Trenz, 2015), the Schengen crisis (Börzel and Risse, 2018), Brexit (Atikcan et al., 2020), and the Covid-19 pandemic (Haapala et al., 2022) have shaped the contemporary landscape of the European Union (EU) and accelerated its politicization (de Wilde, 2011; Schmitter, 2009). These defining moments served to increase the salience of European issues, and the relevance of the EU for European and national institutions, political parties, the media, and citizens, which in some cases have become sharply polarized. Put differently, the European integration project, EU institutions' policy-making processes, and specific EU policies have become politicized to the extent that they have 'generat[ed] a visible cleavage in the political community, bringing actors and citizens to clarify – or even polarize around – their positions' (Beaudonnet and Mérand, 2019, p. 9, our translation).

The politicization of the EU is no longer an assumption or a prediction – it is a documented reality. EU politicization has thus become a central focus of scholarship in at least three distinct strands. The first has identified a plethora of factors explaining the extent of EU politicization, ranging from the role of authority transfers from member states to the EU (de Wilde and Zürn, 2012), the role of political entrepreneurs (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, 2018, 2019; Kriesi, 2016), and the weight of increasing Euroscepticism (Grande and Hutter, 2016). A second strand of research has been attentive to the differentiated nature of EU politicization, namely, the way that it varies across time and context. Politicization may depend on significant integration events and levels of domestic polarization over EU issues (de Wilde et al., 2016; Grande and Hutter, 2016; Kauppi et al., 2016). It also varies across political loci – such as formal and informal institutions, intermediate (the media or political parties), or citizens

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– although the salience of the EU is often lower in the citizens’ arena (Hurrelmann et al., 2015). In other words, the growth in politicization has not been continuous or linear, and must therefore be examined over a specific period – or moment – and within a specific context (Goldberg et al., 2020). Finally, a third strand has focused on the normative implications of such politicization, assessing its ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ impacts on the EU understood as a democratic polity and political entity (Hix and Bartolini, 2006).

This volume builds on and complements this flourishing body of literature by switching the locus of analysis from the EU politicization processes to its consequences, and opening more nuanced perspectives on the question: *what are the consequences of EU politicization for the EU and European societies?* Existing studies have already argued that EU politicization has affected the shape of supranational policies (e.g., Rauh, 2019), the responsiveness of EU institutions (e.g., De Bruycker, 2020), as well as citizens’ relationships with the EU (e.g., Dupuy and Van Ingelgom, 2019; Mercenier, 2019). Through in-depth empirical research and further normative reflections, we enhance the early assessments of the impact of EU politicization on European integration, by looking beyond the current emphasis on its causal factors, and by adopting a more explicit focus on its consequential variation across spatial, temporal, and social contexts.

Such a widening of the EU politicization research agenda is crucial for two main reasons. First, it allows for the retracing of how EU politicization influences both the EU’s functioning and the existing dynamics within and between European societies. While studying politicization *per se* increases the understanding of how EU integration is contested and shaped, its relevance is contingent upon its concrete impacts on the EU political system, decision-making, and policies (Anders, 2021; Gheyle, 2019; Zürn, 2016). Secondly, broadening the EU politicization research agenda contributes to fostering our understanding of this phenomenon by including new dimensions, especially its concrete outcomes. This is consistent with Zürn (2016) who posited that, if defining and explaining the phenomenon of politicization were the first two steps of a research agenda, the third phase refers to the study of its effects on the EU and its political implications. This book echoes this demand for a third phase and focuses on the consequences of politicization on the EU polity, politics, and policies, as well as domestic politics, by offering primarily empirical – and to a lesser extent normative – insights into these dynamics.

This volume adopts a pluralist approach both conceptually and methodologically. While most contributions converge on definitions of politicization, the authors approach the concept from different epistemic perspectives and with diverse methodologies. In that spirit, the contributions range from sociological to intergovernmentalism or post-functionalist approaches and adopt qualitative or quantitative methodologies to study politicization in different ways. We take the adoption of a pluralistic mindset as a strength; one which is essential in unpicking the diverse nature of politicization in terms of scope, internal dynamics and actors involved cannot solely rely upon a singular approach without facing significant shortcomings. A variety of approaches allows for the exploration of diverse topics, such as citizens’ attitudes towards the EU and public opinion (part 1), the shape of public discourses on several EU issues

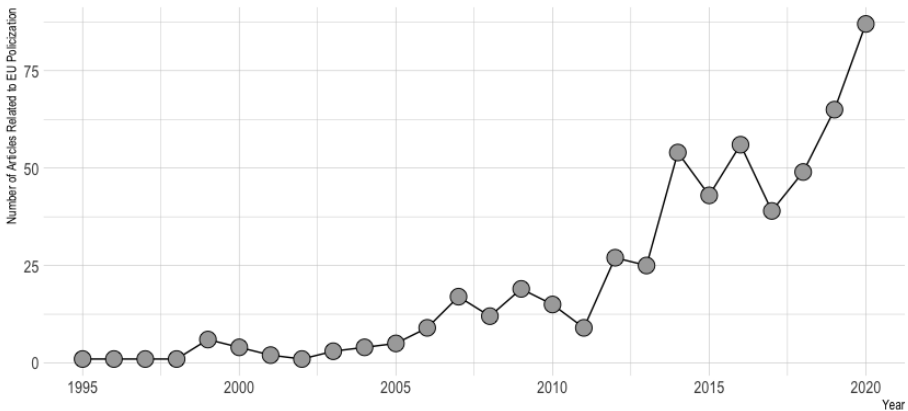
(part 2), the functioning of EU policy making (part 3), as well as EU legitimacy and European integration (part 4).

This introduction proceeds as follows. First, we sketch out and unpack the conceptual map of politicization and its uses in EU studies as the foundation for studying its potential consequences. We then present the different ways in which politicization and its consequences have been studied to introduce, in the third section, the core findings of this book. Finally, we conclude by highlighting two key pathways to enhance future research on the impact of EU politicization.

Mapping EU politicization

The study of the politicization of the EU is in full scholarly swing. As Figure 1 below shows, the number of articles whose abstracts mentioned ‘politicization’ and the ‘EU’ (and were listed in the SCOPUS database) reached no fewer than 80 articles in 2020. Obviously, encountering EU politicization in an abstract may not necessarily be concomitant with attempts to operationalize it in each study, as this term can equally refer to general contexts. Nonetheless, the increasing enthusiasm for the concept indicates its rising profile within the vernacular of EU studies.

Figure 1. Number of articles related to the politicization of the EU referred to in the Scopus database²



Following the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by French and Dutch citizens in 2005, research on EU politicization began to escalate, expanding quickly at the height of the Eurozone and sovereign debt crises in 2012. In sharp contrast to the first decades of European integration, which were elite-driven and remote from public

² The search was done on 01/01/2021 on the online SCOPUS database; we searched for all articles published that include the words ‘EU/European Union/European Integration’ AND ‘Politicization/Politicisation’ in the title/abstract/keywords.

politics (Haller, 2008; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Kuhn, 2019), these events coincided with the emergence of popular contestation over the EU. These developments played a somewhat important role in explaining the increased visibility of EU politicization as a recognised and relevant field of study within EU studies. Of course, this is not to suggest that such research is homogeneous or consensual, as the myriad causes (de Wilde and Zürn, 2012; Hooghe and Marks, 2009, 2018; Kriesi, 2016; Grande and Hutter, 2016), and extent of EU politicization, remains largely contested (Grande and Hutter, 2016; Goldberg et al., 2020).

The study of EU politicization is characterized by a pervasive 'definitional consensus' (Zürn, 2019, p. 977), shaped around three criteria: (1) an intensification and increase in the visibility and salience of a specific European issue or the EU; (2) a polarization of opinions and (3) an expansion in both political actors and public resonance (de Wilde, 2011; de Wilde et al., 2016; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019; Statham and Trezn, 2013). This book does not deviate from this 'definitional consensus'. Indeed, most of our contributions use this specific conceptualization as a premise to examine the consequences of the politicization process. Some chapters, however, focus more strongly on a specific criterion (e.g., salience for Laloux et al., chapter 9, or polarization for Le Corre Juratic et al., chapter 1). In addition, other chapters approach politicization through contingency and political agency, namely the possibility to act on a defined issue and the necessity of political action (Kauppi et al., 2016). In this respect, Nicoli et al. (chapter 12) define politicization 'as discretion, or empowerment, of supranational institutions' (Nicoli et al., chapter 12). Similarly, Bonnamy and Dupont (chapter 7) examine EU politicization and its consequences through the making of contingency in EU actors' discourses.

Besides mapping the existing literature, unpacking the concept of EU politicization is an essential step towards a better grasp of its potential consequences. In order to bring forward this research agenda, it is important to specify which object is politicized (what is politicized); at what moment politicization is occurring (when it is politicized) and in which arena(s) (where it is politicized). In other words, conceptual clarification is essential in order to study the consequences of EU politicization.

First, this requires the clarification of *what* is under scrutiny and what its potential consequences are. When theorizing politicization, de Wilde (2011) distinguished between different objects that can be politicized, such as the EU, EU decision-making and EU issues. Even if distinguishing between these objects remains challenging in practice, it is essential to do so, as each is likely to lead to different consequences or implications. To give but one example, Bartolini argues (see Hix and Bartolini, 2006) that the politicization of issues specific to the EU carries a risk for European integration, which is not necessarily the case for 'isomorphic' issues, e.g., those that closely mirror national matters. This is illustrative of the diverse impacts EU politicization can have, depending on whether the object of politicization is the EU itself or specific EU issues. Most contributors to this volume are concerned with the consequences of EU politicization itself on various phenomena. This ranges from citizens' attitudes to the functioning of EU policy making (Camatarri and Gallina, chapter 2; Gellwitzki and Houde, chapter 4; Laloux et al., chapter 9; Le Corre Juratic et al., chapter 1; Schäfer, chapter 5; Silva et al., chapter 3). Others have approached such consequences through

normative lenses by focusing on EU legitimacy (see Gheyle, chapter 11; Nicoli et al., chapter 12). The remaining chapters study the politicization of specific policies (Bonnamy and Dupont, chapter 7; Hoppe, chapter 8; Schmeer, chapter 10) or issues (Bolzonar, chapter 6) and their related consequences.

Second, politicization may also occur at times variously described as politically ‘dramatic’, ‘exceptional’ or ‘everyday’ (Kauppi and Trenz, 2019, p. 263). Assessing when politicization is occurring when studying its outcomes is essential. As such, politicization occurring during crises may lead to the observation of heated controversies, such as in the case of the Schengen crisis (Börzel and Risse, 2018), the Eurozone crisis (Statham and Trenz, 2015), the constitutional crisis (Statham and Trenz, 2013) or even recurrent EU crises (Hutter and Grande, 2014). Monitoring politicization in relation to everyday politics rather means unravelling when an issue, actor, or institution enters the political (Dupuy and Van Ingelgom, 2019; Zürn, 2016) or, more specifically, the ‘realm of choice’ and contingency (Hay, 2007). The moment examined is likely to matter for the study of consequences, as the effects identified during a crisis may or may not affect the daily functioning of the EU once the crisis is over. Empirical chapters investigate the consequences of politicization either as an everyday phenomenon (e.g. Laloux et al., chapter 9) or during crises (e.g. Silva et al., chapter 3).

Third, EU or EU-issue politicization can be scrutinized in different arenas, namely the institutional (EU or national institutions), intermediary (media – and political parties), or citizen arenas (Baglioni and Hurrelmann, 2016). Distinguishing between such arenas is crucial, as the dimensions of politicization (such as salience and polarization) cannot be observed in the same way in each arena (Beaudonnet and Mérand, 2019). This makes studying the entire process of politicization across several arenas challenging, even when mobilizing only one dimension of politicization (Beyers et al., 2018). *Where* politicization happens is thus a pivotal factor in defining how to grasp its consequences. In that sense, the consequences of politicization may be assessed by investigating how politicization in one arena is influencing a specific phenomenon in another, or even inside the same arena. For instance, some contributions study how politicization observed in the intermediate arena (either a political party or a media outlet) influences citizens’ attitudes towards the EU or electoral behaviours (see Camatarri and Gallina in chapter 2, and Le Corre Juratic et al. in chapter 1). Other chapters pay attention to actors’ responses when facing the politicization of an EU issue (see Bolzonar in chapter 6, on the national responses regarding LGBT rights in Poland; Gellwitzki and Houde in chapter 4, on the migration crisis in Germany). Finally, others study the effects of EU politicization within the European institutional arena by focusing on European policy making (see Bonnamy and Dupont, chapter 7, on the strategies developed by EP negotiators on two politicized legislative files, or Hoppe, chapter 8, on the strategies developed by policy makers during legislative negotiations).

In sum, the study of the consequences of politicization varies significantly according to which object is politicized, at what political moment, and in which arena(s). This collective volume posits that it is essential to consider such diversity when examining the consequences of politicization. Consequently, each chapter studies specific objects, moments, and arenas of politicization. This variety is not only required

to provide better insights into the outcomes of politicization but also to enhance our understanding of EU politicization as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon.

The analytical shift to ‘consequences’

Before elaborating on the contributions to this volume, this section delves into how the consequences of politicization have been studied thus far, both normatively and empirically. The growing interest in the study of EU politicization consequences can be traced back to a key normative debate between classical theories of EU integration (see, for instance, Hix and Bartolini, 2006; de Wilde and Lord, 2015). As such, neo-functionalists and post-functionalists developed opposing expectations regarding the effects of politicization on the integration process.

Neo-functionalists perceived politicization as a desirable and logical product of European integration. They argued that the constant increase in supranational authority over larger policy areas would lead to more political actors becoming involved in European matters (Schmitter, 1969). This politicization was hypothesized to lead to ‘a shift in actor expectations and loyalty’ (Schmitter, 1969, p. 166) towards European integration, pushing towards further integration. In other words, neo-functionalism was optimistic about the consequences of politicization on the future of European integration. Furthermore, it claimed that politicization was needed for the legitimacy of the EU, as a democratic system requires political contestation over leadership and policy (Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Hix and Bartolini, 2006). In contrast, the post-functional view saw politicization as a threat to the future of integration. This more recent view is rooted in the manifestations of public scepticism about Europe that has emerged in recent decades. Scholars have argued that public contestation shaped by identity politics politicizes European integration and ultimately leads to a ‘constraining dissensus,’ hindering further integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Put differently, post-functionalism’s forecast for the future of European integration has a more pessimistic tone.

In light of this debate, recent scholarship has begun to address the consequences of EU politicization not only in normative but also in empirical terms (Anders, 2021). Over the last few years, the study of politicization’s consequences has fallen under greater scrutiny, reflecting the implications they have had for the functioning of EU political system and the structure of domestic contestation and public opinion. In response to these insights, a first strand of scholarship suggests that EU institutions respond to ‘bottom-up’ pressures from domestic politicization. De Bruycker (2017, 2020), for example, shows how the politicization of specific policies strengthens the responsiveness of the European institutions, while Rauh (2019) similarly observes that the politicization of EU policy-making pushes EU institutions to be more responsive to public interests – rather than industry interests – and thus also affects the content of EU policies. However, Laloux and Pennetreau (2019) noted that the politicization of debates in the European Parliament (EP) was more dependent on internal conflicts than external pressures. EU institutions not only respond to but also strategically

adapt their actions to variations in the domestic politicization of the EU, either by taking measures to reinforce this politicization process or by trying to depoliticize it (Bressanelli et al., 2020).

Another stream of this literature takes a more ‘top-down’ approach, highlighting that EU politicization may impact public opinion. Some studies emphasized the leading role of extreme parties in politicizing the EU with its impact on the rise of Euroscepticism among citizens (see de Vries, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Hutter et al., 2016). Further research has rather focused on the effect of highly politicized events, such as the adoption of European treaties and the recent ‘euro crises’, and their nuanced impact on citizens’ attitudes. In their comparative analysis, Hutter et al. (2016) describe how the politicization of the EU during these debates did not spill over to citizens but remained limited to political elites. Similarly, citizens may remain ambivalent or indifferent towards the EU despite increasing EU politicization in the media and the political arena (Down and Wilson, 2008; Van Ingelgom, 2014). In addition, the polarization of national parties on European issues has not necessarily corresponded to greater polarization among citizens (Goldberg et al., 2020; Versailles, 2021). Most importantly, understanding such consequences on EU legitimacy also demands a consideration that citizens may perceive the EU, as with other political levels, as unable to act on crucial political issues (Mercenier, 2019).

This overview of the extant scholarship illustrates of the diverse array of findings that can stem from an empirical investigation of the consequences of EU politicization. It is also reflective of prior normative debates about how politicization may impact the future of European integration. Recent findings portrayed a more nuanced picture than the ‘constraining dissensus’ theorists and post-functionalists suggested. For example, Bressanelli et al. (2020) showed that under some conditions, namely when actors use national pressure to pursue their own goals at the European level, EU institutions might benefit from the expansion of politicization by increasing their room for manoeuvre leading to an ‘enabling dissensus’.

Contributions

This book develops these normative and empirical debates on the consequences of EU politicization in at least three ways. First, it enhances the debate between neo- and post-functionalism about public opinion, EU institutions and policy making through rich empirical findings. The various contributions to this volume highlight how differentiated the processes of politicization and their consequences are, as they vary across time, setting and context. Concomitantly, politicization does not produce uniform consequences, and the empirical variations we witnessed demand more nuanced discussions in broader theoretical and normative debates.

Hence, this volume brings finer grained insights regarding the pessimistic view of post-functionalism by exploring how politicization affects citizens’ attitudes and voters’ behaviour. Some chapters show how political parties’ politicization of the EU issue is related to a more significant share of citizens holding negative opinions of the

EU (Le Corre Juratic et al., chapter 1) and matters for voters' individual vote choice (Camatarri and Gallina, chapter 2). At the same time, Le Corre Juratic et al. (chapter 1) also show how politicization among parties is not related to a clear cut polarization of attitudes among citizens. Camatarri and Gallina (chapter 2) find that Eurosceptic parties' aggregate electoral results are not significantly affected by EU politicization. While these findings seem to confirm the post-functionalist view of an emerging Euroscepticism, they draw a more nuanced picture of the concrete constraining consequences of politicization in terms of attitudes or vote choice. In discussing the financial crisis Silva et al. (chapter 3) similarly argue that the politicization of the EU has blurred the responsibility of the incumbent and mainstream parties, thereby making it more difficult for voters to identify who to hold accountable.

Speaking more directly to the expectations of neo-functionalism, other contributions emphasize the institutions and policy making consequences linked to EU politicization. Bonnamy and Dupont (chapter 7) show that politicization provides an opportunity for MEPs to push their views through framing activism. Their findings align with the neo-functionalist expectation that politicization led political actors to get more involved in European affairs. Similarly, Nicoli et al. (chapter 12) argue that one way to escape the trilemma posed by EU politicization, notably its constraining effect, would be to create instruments of collective political participation, thereby enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the EU by empowering citizens. This contrasts with Laloux et al. (chapter 9) who find that, in most cases, MEPs tend to shy away from episodes when European matters are salient. These findings point to a less optimistic outcome: politicization leads elected representatives to be less active, while as Schmeer (chapter 10) suggests, decision makers may also transfer authority to less visible agencies.

The second area of development in the book is the exploration of a plurality of epistemological approaches to EU politicization and its consequences which by definition expands the locus of analysis of such consequences. This epistemological plurality cuts across qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and evinces the importance of paying attention to the consequences of politicization from complementary angles to expand the observable phenomena and consider the implications of the process. Quantitative approaches for the investigation of politicization are already well established in the literature. They are primarily used for larger-scale cross-time and cross-country analyses of the salience, polarization and expansion of actors. Several contributions in this book belong, in some respects, to this approach and study politicization and its consequences in mass media (Schäfer, chapter 5; Silva et al., chapter 3; Laloux et al., chapter 9), parties and public opinion (Le Corre Juratic et al., chapter 1), voters' behaviours (Camatarri and Gallina, chapter 2) or legislative actors' behaviours (Laloux et al., chapter 9).

Although the term consequences could imply a direct causality that would be outlandish to post-positivists, this volume also includes contributions that treat consequences as broader implications of politicization, and allow for the adoption of qualitative methods and non-positivist approaches. Gellwitzki and Houde's qualitative discourse analysis of German public discourse during the migration crisis (chapter 4) sheds light on the role of emotions in the EU politicization process (for a detailed account of the theoretical argument, see Gellwitzki and Houde, 2022). In this case, it

is suggested that EU politicization within the government led to the use of emotions in public discourse, and eventually to a form of depolarization. The qualitative exploration of the nature of EU politicization in national media also brings to light new mechanisms that explain divergent Eurosceptic parties' fortunes in Greece and Portugal (Silva et al., chapter 3). Additionally, Bonnamy and Dupont's chapter, as well as Hoppe's, show that an in-depth qualitative analysis can better grasp all the implications that politicization can have on informal and elite processes that are more difficult to access, such as legislative negotiations in the EU. Continuing this theme, Bolzonar (chapter 6) explores the debates around LGBT-free zones, and argues that politicization had limited influence on policies despite having a significant impact on policy positions. Taken together, these chapters show how exploring complex expressions of EU politicization is essential to grasp its multifaceted consequences.

The third contribution the book makes is to show the relevance of studying politicization and its consequences as a dynamic process in which episodes or strategies of politicization and depoliticization may alternate. In this sense, Schäfer (chapter 5) notes how EU politicization can be transmitted from one country to another but with significant differences across national contexts. Hoppe (chapter 8) focuses on actors' strategic behaviours to illustrate how negotiators in trilogues use both politicization and depoliticization strategies to strengthen their position and bargaining power. Such alternate strategies were also apparent within elite decision-making. Nicoli et al. (chapter 12) argues that political elites might employ such strategies to circumvent the paralysing effect of EU politicization for decision-making, by delaying the decision-making process (such as in the case of the EMU), or by taking advantage of crises where the distribution costs of the lack of integration are even across countries (such as the beginning of the European economic and financial crisis or the Covid-19 crisis).

Several contributions also highlight that depoliticization strategies are potential consequences of EU politicization. This type of strategy is apparent when decision makers attempt to mitigate politicization by externalizing authority towards agencies, with strategies of 'depoliticization through agencification' (Schmeer, chapter 10). As Gheyle (chapter 11) argues with reference to the case of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations, where less straightforward strategies included actively responding to highly politicized demands at the EU level, but constraining the answer to minimal adjustments. This strengthened the Commissions' claim that all views on the policy were considered, but opponents of the treaty found their room for manoeuvre was reduced, leading to a subsequent depoliticization of the new Trade Agreement.

It is prudent to note, however, that these strategies to evacuate politicization are not always successful. Schmeer (chapter 10) for example, argues that the attempt to depoliticize policies in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice through agencification created a 'repoliticization backlash', leading to potentially greater politicization of this domain. Similarly, Hoppe (chapter 8) shows that not all actors succeed in using or countering politicization, especially when conflict exists with other actors. Actors do not easily affect politicization, and its impacts also depend on the structure of the conflict in which it is embedded. Overall, these findings show that (de)politicization processes – and thus their consequences – are more dynamic than initially supposed in

the debates between neo- and post-functionalists. The politicization of the EU does not automatically increase as the EU's competences expand or constrain its development.

Studying the consequences of EU politicization: the next steps

A decade ago, de Wilde (2011) proposed a framework to analyse the politicization of European integration that engendered a flourishing field of research. This collective volume follows from, and contributes to, this burgeoning scholarship. While scholars have so far focused on the first two steps of the research agenda (Zürn, 2016) – that is, the identification and explanatory factors of politicization – the chapters collected here are interested in the third step: the study of the consequences and implications of politicization for the EU and European societies. While it is commonly assumed that the politicization of the EU plays a role in policy-making, polity and politics, and that these consequences would have critical political implications, the nature and the extent of this influence has remained largely underexplored. Yet, with the crises the EU has faced in recent years and the acute politicization they have engendered, deepening the study of its consequences is needed to have a complete understanding of the phenomenon. The evolution of EU responses over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic and their politicization have, for instance, demonstrated how the 'EU continues to be a supranational entity that creates controversies and conflicts among different players' (Haapala et al., 2022, p. 302).

This volume shows that studying the consequences of politicization empirically through a pluralist approach is a meaningful intellectual endeavour. Indeed, the results of the different chapters reveal that the politicization of European integration has not only affected EU policy making and political actors' behaviours, but also citizens' political behaviours and attitudes towards the EU in various ways. More specifically, some contributions show that while in certain cases, politicization leads to more negative public opinion on the EU and influences vote choice, it does not necessarily constrain elites. Hence, the post-functionalist's argument that politicization leads to ever-increasing constraining dissensus is only partially confirmed. Other contributions rather give a more nuanced account of the neo-functionalist's argument that politicization will become a driving force in the process of spill over to further integration. Actors from the institutional arena may, for instance, adopt depoliticization strategies to remove the decision-making and policy implementation from public contestation. EU politicization does not produce uniform consequences for the EU and European societies. Studying such consequences requires taking into account both the dynamic and differentiated nature of such processes.

These conclusions lead to propose two pathways to enhance future research on the consequences of EU politicization. The first suggests going beyond the focus on politicization only, and to follow a research trajectory that develops and utilises tools to facilitate access to explore both sides of the (de)politicization process. While de Wilde's (2011) definition has reached some kind of 'definitional consensus' in EU studies (Zürn, 2019, p. 977), it limits access to only one side of the (de)politicization processes: politicization. It thus overlooks the dynamic nature of the process that

opens an analytical window to depoliticization, and restricts the types of consequences that can be observed. Hence, depoliticization must be more systematically included in the study of EU politicization (Bressanelli et al., 2020; Hay, 2007; Flinders and Woods, 2014; Dupuy and Van Ingelgom, 2019). In this context, politicization is often used as a generic term to refer to both the whole process, and one side of the politicization-depoliticization dynamic. An alternative generic term, e.g., to focus on what is ‘*politicizable*’ (Boltanski and Esquerre, 2022), allows for a clearer exposition that politicization and depoliticization are two equally political dimensions of what is ‘*politicizable*’. However, these clarifications would only be useful if the way in which researchers measure politicization – as well as where they observe it – also evolves.

A second suggestion is to widen the locus of analysis when studying the consequences of EU politicization for the EU and European societies. As suggested by Gheyle (chapter 11), future research should systematically integrate all types of responses to EU politicization and cover a broader range of actors. Merely examining whether actors are affected by, or responsive to, politicization, without unpacking the content of their responses, may conceal the absence of actual political or institutional changes induced by politicization – and even make them more complicated in the future – as was the case with the TTIP negotiations. Therefore, the politicization of the EU may have only what we can call a ‘surface effect’, identifiable by research but not leading to profound political changes. In that spirit, future research should track the depth of these responses, a broader range of actors and their longer-term effects. This could, for instance, mean confronting the most visible EU narratives against how citizens perceive them to put into perspective the making of EU legitimacy (see Damay and Mercenier, 2016, on the example of free movement). A systematic scrutiny of the consequences of politicization in the more ‘remote’ arenas, or over the longer term, would enhance the understanding of EU politicization beyond the current functioning of the EU.

In sum, future research should aim to empirically grasp the impacts of EU politicization, but without neglecting to continue the crucial conceptual work needed to better comprehend this complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Haapala et al., 2022; Palonen et al., 2019; Wiesner, 2021). Only through multi-disciplinary research can we continue to understand what EU politicization and its consequences imply for Europe and European societies. This edited volume constitutes a step in that direction.

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PART I

Consequences on citizens

CHAPTER 1

Eurosceptic, polarized or undecided? How party politicization may shape the structure of public attitudes towards European integration

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Introduction

The future of the European Union (EU) heavily relies on popular support. The pro-EU political elites no longer can make decisions regarding the integration of the Union without considering public opinion on the topic (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016). Since the debates surrounding the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the EU started to be politicized in national arenas, and individuals' attitudes towards Europe shifted from a 'permissive consensus' (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970) to a 'reluctant acceptance' (Mittag and Wessels, 2003) or even a 'constraining dissensus' (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). However, public opinion is often ill-informed about the EU and, consequently, vulnerable to construction and political persuasion (Marks and Wilson, 2000; de Vries, 2013; Pannico, 2017, 2020). Furthermore, increasing political conflict on this issue can motivate citizens to follow party messages (Druckman et al., 2013; Bolsen et al., 2014; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014). In this regard, partisan cues are a vital micro-mechanism through which citizens form their opinions about the EU (Ray, 2003).

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Party cues are usually understood as messages provided by a political party that citizens may use to form their opinion and take decisions regarding specific issues (Pannico, 2020). These cues are particularly efficient in the context of party politicization, where political alternatives become more readily accessible and clearer (Hetherington, 2001; Levendusky, 2010). Over the last decades, the EU has become a new source of party conflict. A few parties, mainly located on the extremes of the left–right spectrum, have been contesting and politicizing the EU (Down and Wilson, 2008; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Kriesi et al., 2012). On the one hand, right-wing Eurosceptic parties blame it for eroding national sovereignty and values. On the other hand, left-wing Eurosceptic parties argue that it promotes neoliberal values that undermine labour rights (de Vries and Edwards, 2009). As demonstrated by the electoral success of Eurosceptic parties in diverse European countries or by the important consequences of the Brexit referendum campaign, anti-EU stances have become increasingly voiced and rewarded. This indicates that European integration matters for national politics and citizens' voting decisions. Thus, the way different political parties emphasize and take different positions about the EU is far from trivial to public opinion.

This chapter aims to address the consequences of party politicization on the EU for public opinion through partisan cue-taking processes. We rely on the definition of politicization developed by de While, stating that politicization corresponds to 'an increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU' (de Wilde, 2011, p. 560). In other words, party politicization of European integration in national arenas occurs when parties take more different positions on the issue, and when these positions on the EU are made more visible. While this increased contestation is particularly clear among political elites and parties in some countries, it is still ambiguous how this conflict is received by the public, and to what extent it has translated into citizens' attitudes towards Europe. So far, some scholars have shown that public opinion towards European integration is far from being clearly polarized (Down and Wilson, 2008; de Vries, 2013; Stoeckel, 2013; Van Ingelgom, 2014) while others have emphasized the polarization between Eurosceptic and Europhile citizens (Hooghe, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2007, 2009; de Vries, 2018). Therefore, this chapter explores how party politicization may shape the structure of public attitudes towards European integration. In other words, it aims to unveil how politicization influences the main patterns and dynamics of public opinion polarization on the EU issue.

Reversing the stance taken by Hooghe and Marks (2009), and the *constraining dissensus* hypothesis stating that citizens' growing Euroscepticism played a central role in parties' shifting positions, we argue that political parties could have a major influence on shaping public opinion. Although we do not deny that citizens' change of attitude towards Europe might have impacted parties' move towards the extremes, we investigate the reversed hypothesis claiming that parties play a central role in politicizing the terms of the debate, in turn enhancing citizens' polarization through partisan cue-taking processes. As such, party cue-taking has been shown to be particularly relevant and efficient for the least accessible and more complex issues, such as European integration (Pannico, 2017, 2020), and is particularly strong in the context of party politicization (Druckman et al. 2013).

The contribution of this work to research on the consequences of the politicization of European integration is threefold. First, and similarly to Gellwitzki and Houde (this volume), we explore how political elites may shape public opinion. Nevertheless, instead of focusing on emotional contagion, we argue that national parties influence citizens' attitudes towards the EU through cue-taking processes. Second, while Camatarri and Gallina (this volume) and Silva et al. (this volume) consider consequences in terms of voting behaviour or electoral outcomes, we focus on citizens' attitudes. We assess the impact of party politicization on the structure of public opinion through time using a panel data analysis approach. This makes it possible to estimate the effect of party politicization on public opinion across the same observations (countries) over a period of more than thirty years (1984–2018), which provides a broad and longitudinal picture of the consequences of party politicization on citizens' attitudes towards European integration. Third, compared to previous studies mostly relying on case studies and cross comparisons in Western European countries, we combine data from Western and Eastern EU member states. This enables us to account for potential different dynamics of party cue-taking about European integration in different national contexts across Western and Eastern Europe.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on the politicization of European integration and citizens' partisan cue-taking. Drawing on the existing research, we present the argument and main theoretical expectation. Second, we outline the methodological choices and measurements to assess both party politicization and citizens' polarization on European integration. Lastly, we describe and discuss the main findings of our panel data analysis, considering its relevance for the literature on the consequences of the politicization of European integration.

Party politicization and public opinion on European integration

Since the intensification of the debate around the Maastricht Treaty and its initial rejection by Danish citizens, scholars of European Integration and public opinion have shifted to study growing 'Euroscepticism' among the citizens and its consequences for European integration. Scholars have highlighted how many citizens oppose European integration (Hooghe, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2007, 2009; de Vries, 2018). The postfunctionalist theory developed by Hooghe and Marks (2009) notably hypothesized that this growing scepticism towards the European project would constrain political elites from pursuing further integration. Such a theory seems to be confirmed in light of the outcomes of referendums on the European Constitution in 2005, and even more strikingly with the result and consequences of the Brexit referendum. However, other studies assessing citizens' attitudes towards Europe have drawn a more nuanced picture, emphasizing the important share of indifferent or ambivalent attitudes rather than a clear-cut polarization driven by rising Euroscepticism (Down and Wilson, 2008; de Vries 2013; Stoeckel, 2013; Van Ingelgom, 2014). While all these studies convincingly highlight how shifts in citizens' attitudes towards Europe have potential consequences for European integration, they mostly disregard the possible role of political elites in shaping these attitudes by emphasizing conflicting views about Europe. Yet, the

politicizing role of political elites, particularly political parties, is arguably a key factor shaping attitudes towards the EU.

There is evidence that parties politicize European Integration (Hutter and Grande, 2014; Hoeglinger, 2016). Through the analysis of national campaigns in five Western European countries, Hutter and Grande (2014) show that the so-called 'elite consensus' on the pace of European integration had started to disappear as early as the mid-1980s. The politicization of this issue in national arenas was not continuous or symmetrical across countries, and has been mainly driven by the emergence of anti-EU parties at the extremes of the political spectrum. Thus, opposition to the EU is particularly associated with radical and extremist parties. Indeed, these parties play a predominant role in the politicization of European integration, as far-right and far-left parties try to gain votes by raising the EU issue and opposing integration (de Vries, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Hutter et al., 2016). Moreover, we also know that mainstream parties are usually in favour of European integration and try to avoid debate on these topics, particularly in times of crisis (Schimmelfennig, 2014; Zürn, 2016). However, these attempts to decrease the politicization of Europe are most often unsuccessful, as challenger parties can continue to pick up the issue to their advantage (de Wilde and Zürn, 2012).

Even though different political actors can politicize European integration, political parties play a key role in this process. By acting on salience and polarization, national parties can inform, persuade and mobilize popular attitudes on the issue (Aldrich, 1995). Parties can strategically emphasize or de-emphasize specific issues such as European integration, to attract potential voters (Steenbergen and Scott, 2004). While the overall salience of an issue is not solely dependent on each party's strategy, national parties can also strategically shift their position by moving further away from their opponents. By providing clear policy alternatives, parties increase polarization and contestation over an issue (Downs, 1957). When parties attempt to differentiate themselves from competitors, and to attract the attention of voters by raising the issue or by adopting less consensual positions, this may influence the views of the citizens themselves. Nevertheless, this literature lacks evidence on whether and how the extent of politicization of the EU issue among national political elites influences citizens or whether it remains a 'tempest in a teapot'.

Party politicization of the EU and public opinion: a cue-taking model

The seminal works of party competition and public opinion indicate that party polarization should lead to citizens' subsequent polarization through the process of cue-taking (Bafumi and Shapiro, 2009; Abramowitz, 2010; Aldrich and Freeze, 2011). In a complex political world, citizens rely on informational shortcuts to formulate political preferences, and partisan cues simplify this task (Downs, 1957; Zaller, 1992). This literature has been highly influential for studies on the drivers of EU support. Considering that citizens are often ill-informed and do not have a stable opinion on EU

issues, a vast literature on heuristics has proven that public opinion takes its cues from political parties. Scholars argue that citizens take the cues on European issues that are provided by the political parties they support or feel closer to (Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Down and Wilson, 2010; Druckman et al., 2013; Pannico, 2017).

One of the flaws of previous analyses has been ignoring the general structure of public opinion and the relevance of less firm and unstructured attitudes when analysing the effect of party cues on individuals' position towards the EU. While attitudes towards the EU are often dichotomized as support or opposition, both qualitative focus groups' analyses and quantitative evidence suggest that a large share of public opinion might be indifferent or ambivalent towards the EU regardless the broadening of political alternatives offered by parties (Duchesne et al., 2010, 2013; de Vries, 2013; Stoeckel, 2013; Van Ingelgom, 2014). A second shortcoming in most studies investigating changes in the structure of political opinion is that they focus solely on the effect of party politicization on party supporters. This is particularly important, as it is expected that party cues act asymmetrically stronger for party supporters than for non-partisan citizens (Zaller, 1992; Fiorina and Abrams, 2008; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014).

Therefore, we investigate the effect of party cues on the overall structure of public opinion by focusing on the main patterns and dynamics of public opinion polarization on the EU issue. Different factors help us to understand the extent of cue-taking and why citizens do (not) follow party messages, which may depend on capacity or motivation. We expect that party politicization strengthens the cue-taking mechanism, and leads to more polarized public opinion, because party politicization makes diverse cues more accessible, increasing the capacity of individuals to form their opinion (H1). Moreover, party politicization makes opposing party views clearer, increasing the motivation of individuals to follow their preferred party's line (H2). Finally, we expect that party politicization makes negative cues more visible, increasing the possibility that individuals follow these cues (H3).

Party cues and messages provide informational shortcuts that increase citizens' capacity to position themselves on complex issues. This informational role of parties should be particularly relevant in the case of European Integration. Political information on European integration is costly for citizens due to its technical features, the different levels of governance, and the lack of clarity about its implications at the national and individual level (Steenbergen et al., 2007; Mair, 2013; Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). Indeed, citizens hold most often ambiguous and unstructured attitudes towards the process of European integration (Marks and Wilson, 2000; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; de Vries, 2013), and their knowledge on EU issues is lower than on national issues (Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Hobolt, 2007). Considering that citizens are often ill-informed on EU issues, they are, thus, more vulnerable to construction and political persuasion (Pannico, 2017). In this context, party politicization increases the visibility and accessibility of diverse cues, giving citizens access to more diverse informational shortcuts about the EU. Therefore, we hypothesize that increased cue diversity leads to more diverse opinions.

H1 (Cue diversity hypothesis): Party politicization of European integration should lead to more diverse citizens' opinions.

In addition, party politicization should make party positions clearer and thus increase the motivation to follow the party line. An increasing distance between parties' positions triggers partisan-motivated reasoning (Bolsen et al., 2014; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014). Through an experimental design, Druckman and colleagues (2013) confirm this theory by showing that party cues overcome any other source of political information and the strength of arguments in polarized settings. In the context of intense polarization among parties, individuals will adopt opinions most in line with their preferred party. Therefore, the emergence and deepening of elite dissensus on European integration should enhance citizens' polarization on the same issue. In this regard, numerous works have shown that party politicization (or increasing 'elite dissensus') on European integration had a negative impact on support for Europe by shifting citizens' attitudes (Ray, 2003; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Gabel and Scheve, 2007; Steenbergen et al., 2007). Therefore, we expect the context of party politicization makes the party position clearer, motivating citizens to adopt clearcut (polarized) opinions.

H2 (Cue clarity hypothesis): Party politicization of European integration should lead to more firm citizens' opinions.

Finally, we expect citizens to follow party cues and to be influenced by the tone of the messages they receive from political parties. In this regard, scholars indicate that the politicization of the EU in national arenas is mainly promoted by the emergence of extremist parties that frame the EU negatively. In contrast, mainstream parties that share pro-EU stances are likely to be less vocal about European integration (Kriesi, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Kriesi et al., 2012; Zürn, 2016). Considering this pattern of politicization among political parties, some emergent literature highlights a negative relationship between this political process and popular support for the EU (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014; Ares et al., 2017). Similarly, we expect public opinion to be influenced by cue directionality, and thus to become more negative towards the EU.

H3 (Cue directionality hypothesis): Party politicization of European integration should lead to more negative citizens' opinions.

Data and operationalization

Measuring party politicization of European integration

To measure our independent variable, party politicization of European integration, we use the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017) and its predecessor survey conducted by Leonard Ray (Ray, 1999; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007). These surveys were conducted approximately every four years between 1984 and 2017. In each of these surveys, experts were asked to evaluate 'the overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration on a scale ranging from 1 ("strongly oppose") to 7 ("strongly in favour")'. Thus, we rely on data stemming from those ten consecutive waves to measure the evolution of parties' politicization

over more than thirty years. As the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship of citizens' attitudes in reaction to shifts in party politicization, we select this expert survey over alternative sources of information on parties' positions, such as manifesto data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP), since experts' judgements were shown to be closer to citizens' perception of parties' positions (Adams et al., 2014).

To evaluate the degree of politicization in country C in year Y, we apply Dalton's formula, which was designed to measure the party polarization or 'the overall ideological spreading of parties in a given political system' (Dalton, 2008, p. 900). As we are interested in the politicization of European integration, we adapt the original formula by including a salience component. We measure the polarization of European integration and include a weight for party salience on this issue. We rely on the experts' evaluations of party salience in the CHES.

Dalton index, applied to the European integration:

$$I_{cy} = \sqrt{\sum S_{pcy} \left(V_{pcy} * \left(\frac{E_{pcy} - WE_{cy}}{5} \right)^2 \right)}$$

Where I_{cy} is the index of party politicization of European integration in country C in year Y. Then, S_{pcy} is the salience of European integration for party P. V_{pcy} is the vote share of party P in the last national election before year Y. E_{pcy} is the position² on European integration of the same party P, and WE_{cy} is the weighted (by vote share) average position on European integration of all parties in country C in year Y. This index is comparable to a measure of standard deviation of positions weighted by vote share and salience. This index of politicization may increase in different scenarios. For example, when one or more parties adopt a less consensual position on European integration, when one or more parties with non-consensual position gains votes, or when one or more of these parties increases its emphasis on the EU. In these scenarios, the alternative positions of parties on European integration are more diverse, clearer and make the Eurosceptic stance more visible.

Measuring the structure of citizens' attitudes towards European integration

Our dependent variable is the structure of citizens' attitudes regarding European integration (Down and Wilson, 2008; Van Ingelgom, 2012). We rely on data from the standard Eurobarometer surveys. Among the recurring 'trends' in questions asked to respondents, there is one related to citizens' attitudes towards their country's membership of the EU: 'Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership in the EU is a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad?'. We use the answers of respondents to this question to evaluate the structure of citizens'

² Rescaled to 0-10.

attitudes towards the EU. We have selected Eurobarometer waves whose fieldwork was conducted one year after the CHES waves. Thus, there is a one-year lag between our measures of party politicization and citizens' attitudes, allowing us to test our hypothesis that the structure of party competition may impact the structure of public opinion. This strategy allows controlling for the potential problem of reverse causality, and goes in line with the literature that suggests that citizens take cues from parties for complex issues such as European integration (for instance, Pannico, 2017, 2020).

We use three different measures of the structure of public attitudes towards European integration. First, to assess the diversity of citizens' attitudes and test our first hypothesis, we use the variance of respondents' answers to the EU membership question. The higher the variance, the higher the probability of randomly picking two individuals with different attitudes. Second, the relative frequency of people responding 'good thing' or 'bad thing' indicates the share of citizens with a firm opinion, enabling us to test our second hypothesis. The higher the share of citizens with a firm opinion, the higher the probability of randomly picking citizens who do have clearcut positions. Finally, for our third hypothesis, we use the relative frequency of negative attitudes towards EU membership. The higher the share of citizens with a negative opinion, the higher the probability of randomly picking citizens who oppose the EU.

A panel modelling of party politicization and citizens' attitudes

To estimate the impact of party politicization on the structure of citizens' attitudes on European integration we use a panel data analysis. Our expectation is that party politicization should enhance citizens' polarization on European integration. Still, we must consider the fact that variation can be observed between and within countries. A panel data design makes it possible to assess these two sources of variation. We estimate the effect of party politicization on public opinion with a random effects model.³ Then, in addition to the variance of opinions and the share of firm opinions, we include the share of negative opinions as the dependent variable. This allows us to consider the potential evolution towards Euroscepticism in our discussion about the structure of public opinion.

Moreover, we control for other sources of variation of increasing conflict and salience over the EU issue that may influence both the independent and the dependent variables of this analysis. We integrate a dummy variable for the cases in which a referendum about European integration had been held in the time period (three or four years) since the last year present in the dataset. This controls for the potential politicizing effect of referendum campaigns. We also include a dummy variable for the points in time corresponding to important integration steps: the Single European Act, the Maastricht Treaty, the Lisbon Treaty and also the Constitutional Treaty. This

³ The random effect model has been preferred over a fixed effect model because the results of Hausman tests did not allow rejecting the null hypothesis, meaning the unique errors do not correlate with the regressors, and there is no unobserved heterogeneity biasing the estimates. Moreover, the descriptive evidence presented in the following section shows that countries follow different patterns of politicization of European Integration, which reinforces the option for a random effect model.

controls for the potential politicizing effect of debates about the deepening of European integration. A dummy variable for the years of the ‘eurocrisis’ (2010 and 2014 in our dataset) is added to control for the effect of the crisis on public opinion. To control for the learning or socialization effect that longer membership could have on public opinion, we include the length of country membership of the EU (in years). Finally, we introduce a dummy variable for Western European countries⁴ to control for systematic differences between Western and Eastern party competition (parties and party system stability) and effectiveness of party cues on public opinion.

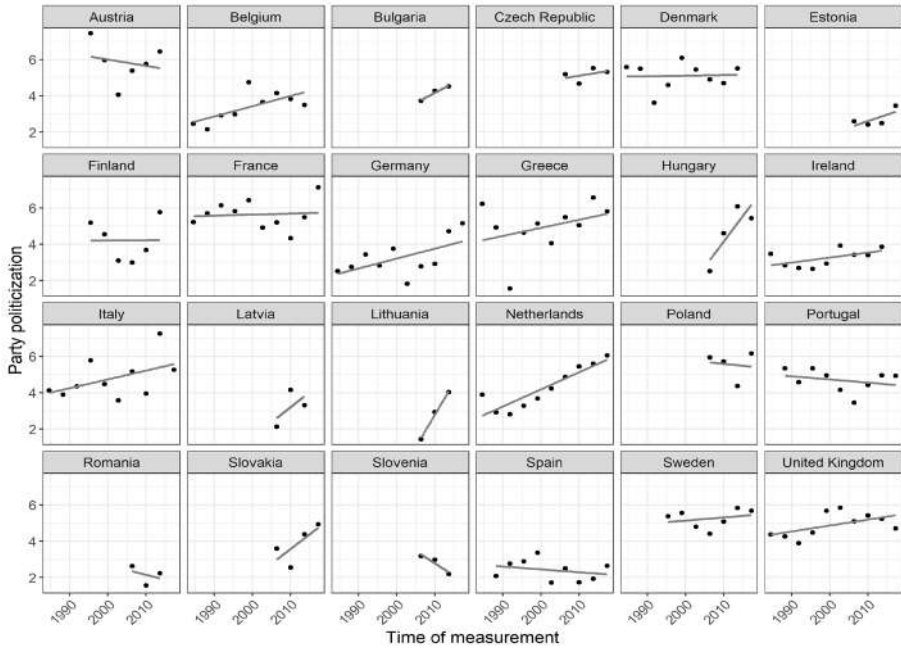
Rising party politicization and citizens’ polarization since 1984?

Politicization of parties’ positions on the EU Issue

Figure 1 displays the evolution of party politicization in twenty-four EU member states from 1984 to 2017. The degree of party politicization of the EU and its evolution is far from uniform. The structure of party competition on European integration varies significantly both between countries and over time. First, we can distinguish, on the one hand, some countries with a high degree of party politicization, and, on the other hand, other cases where parties have more consensual views on European integration. Second, the level of politicization still varies over time in most countries, with episodes of growing dissensus and periods of consensus on European integration. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify clearer patterns of evolution of the degree of party politicization in some countries. Among the older member states, the Netherlands is the only case where we clearly find a steady increase in party politicization. This trend of growing politicization seems somewhat less steep in other older member states, such as Italy, the UK, Belgium and Germany. On the other hand, most of the recent member states from Central and Eastern Europe shared a relative lack of politicization among parties at the time of their accession, probably linked with the existence of a pro-EU consensus, with the notable exceptions of the Czech Republic and Poland. Today, this consensus seems to be evaporating in countries such as Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia.

⁴ Coded ‘1’ for Western countries and ‘0’ for Central and Eastern countries.

Figure 1. Evolution of party politicization of the EU, 1984–2017



Structure of citizens' attitudes about the EU

Figures 2, 3 and 4 display the evolution of negative, share of firm, and variance of attitudes towards the EU from 1985 to 2018 in each country. Similarly to the data presented for political parties, these figures show a lot of variation in terms of the evolution of the structure of citizens' attitudes. Together, these figures suggest that it would be abusive to describe current trends of EU attitudes as a 'Eurosceptic turn', or as an intensely polarized public opinion across countries. For instance, figure 2 shows that we can observe a steady rise of Euroscepticism only in the case of Italy. Furthermore, the share of firm opinions, or in other words the polarization of public opinion towards the EU, increases somewhat in older member states such as in Austria, Belgium, or Germany, but decreases in other countries such as Denmark and Sweden (figure 3). Finally, we can distinguish different types of trends depending on variance in attitudes (figure 4). Austria, Denmark, the United Kingdom and Finland stand out as the countries where people always had more diverse opinions about the EU. Conversely, in cases like Estonia, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland and Romania, citizens hold more similar opinions. In terms of trends, Italy, and to a lesser extent, Greece and the Netherlands, stand out again as countries that experience greater variance in EU opinions over time. Interestingly, two Scandinavian countries, namely Sweden and Denmark, experience the reverse pattern of increased public opinion consensus on the EU issue.

Figure 2. Evolution of the frequency of citizens with a negative opinion about the EU, 1985–2018

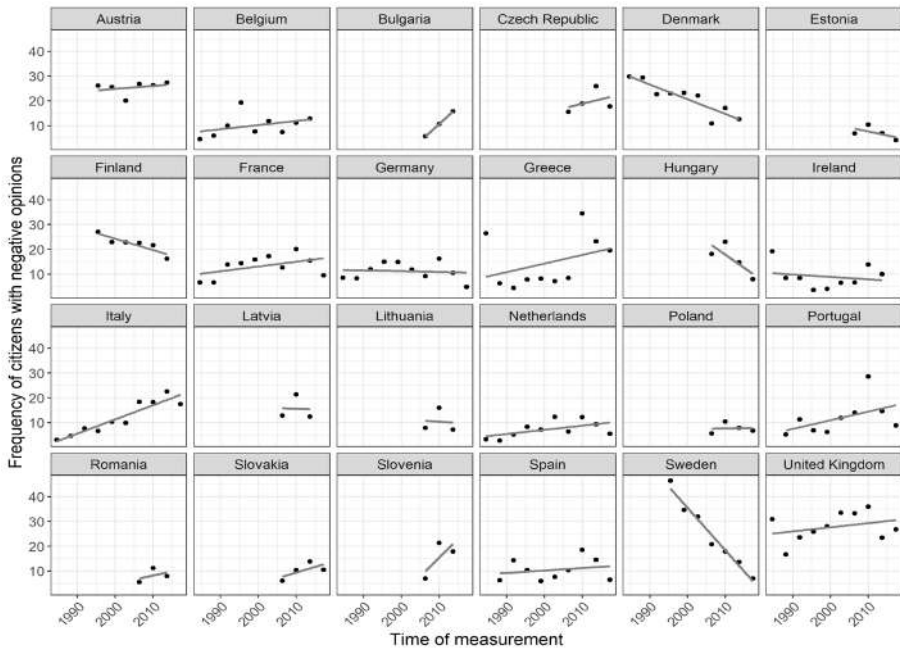


Figure 3. Evolution of the frequency of citizens with a firm opinion about the EU, 1985–2018

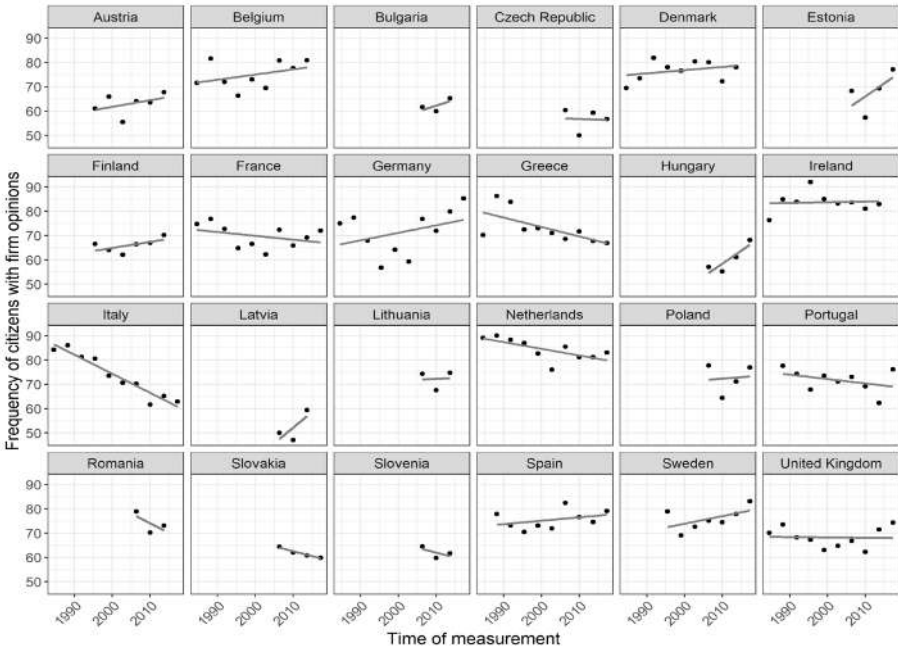
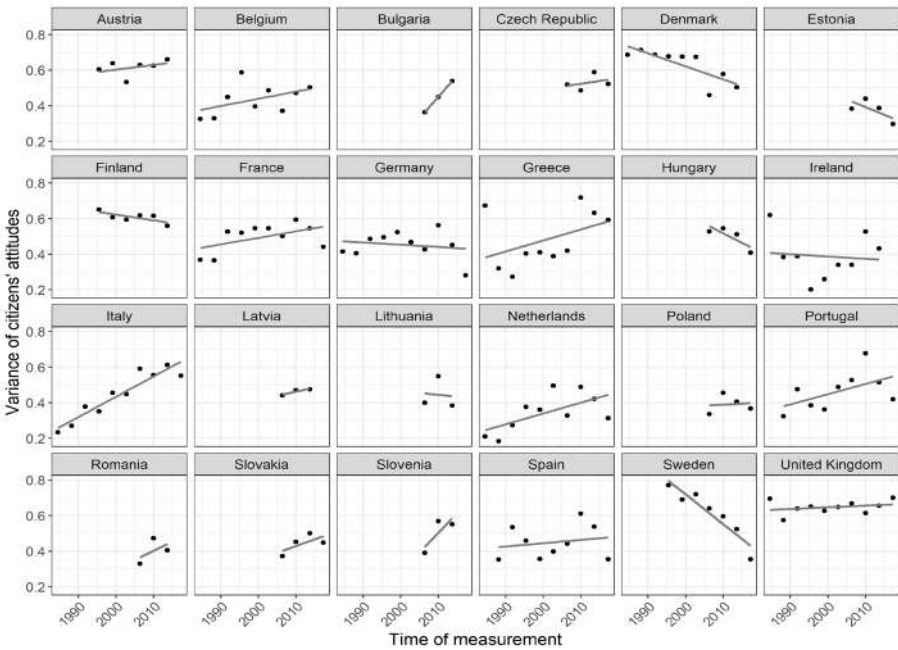


Figure 4. Evolution of the variance in citizens' attitudes about the EU, 1985–2018



This brief descriptive analysis allows us to draw a much more nuanced picture of the state of party politicization and citizens' attitudes on the issue of European integration. First, while party politicization has increased in some countries over the last decades, this trend is far from being linear or common to all member states. Second, public opinion across EU countries does not follow a linear trend towards more variation or more firm opinions towards EU membership. Thus, the following section aims to account for the relationship between party politicization and the structure of public opinion towards the EU, taking into account these heterogeneous patterns across EU member states.

Party politicization of European integration: enhancing citizens' polarization?

Table 1 sets out the results of our panel data analysis. We find that a higher level of party politicization is associated with more diverse opinions and more negative opinions in the following year. However, we do not find any effect on the share of firm opinions. These findings hold in all our models, including our controls and regardless of the time span at $t+1$.⁵ A one-point increase in the standard deviation of party politicization increases about 0.2 standard deviations in the variance of opinions about EU membership, holding constant other sources of variation of contestation over the EU issue. Additionally, a one-point increase in the standard deviation of party politicization leads to an increase of 0.23 standard deviations in negative opinions towards the EU. In other words, in a country where the index of party politicization of the EU issue goes from the mean level of 4.3 to 5.6,⁶ citizens holding a negative opinion about the EU will increase by about two percentage points in the subsequent year.

Therefore, party politicization on European integration increases the variance of attitudes on the same issue, which is in line with cue-taking theoretical expectations and our first hypothesis. The more politicized the positions of parties, the more diverse the opinions of citizens. The greater diversity of cues seems to inform citizens and foster them to adopt more different attitudes. This finding seems to confirm previous research on the topic, indicating that the issue of European integration is no longer consensual for political parties and citizens (for instance, de Vries, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; de Wilde, 2011; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Hoeglinger, 2016).

The fact that parties take more distinct and clear positions on European integration does not mean, however, that more citizens hold firm opinions on the issues. Contrary to our second hypothesis, the clarity of cues does not seem to

⁵ The robustness check reproducing the analysis with a +6 months' and +24 months time lag (instead of a 12-month time lag) between party politicization and citizens' EU attitudes can be found in the appendix. The results hold for the 6-month time lag, while the 24-month time lag indicates the same direction of coefficients but loses statistical significance.

⁶ As a matter of illustration, such 1.3 points increased of party politicization occurred in Italy between 2002 and 2006, or in the Netherlands between 2002 and 2010 (c.f. figure 1).

be enhanced by politicization. In line with previous research claiming that citizens maintain ambiguous or unstructured attitudes towards the process of European integration (Down and Wilson, 2008; de Vries 2013; Stoeckel, 2013; Van Ingelgom, 2014), this finding shows that the share of citizens belonging to the 'middle' categories does not decrease with party politicization. In other words, a more politicized party system does not decrease the share of citizens answering that being a member of the EU is 'neither good nor bad,' and does not shift the European public towards two poles characterized as Europhiles and Eurosceptics. However, considering that party politicization of the EU issue is mainly driven by the emergence of anti-EU political parties, the results presented reflect that citizens' attitudes on the same topic seem to become more negative accordingly. This finding confirms our third hypothesis and provides evidence that citizens are influenced by the tone of the messages and cues provided by political parties.

Finally, a glance at the control coefficients enables us to draw some conclusions regarding alternative contextual variables explaining the structure of citizens' attitudes towards European integration. In terms of institutional contextual factors, Western Europeans' attitudes seem to be more polarized than those of Central and Eastern European citizens. In fact, the variance, share of firm attitudes and negative attitudes are higher in Western European countries. In terms of contextual events acting on the salience and polarization of the European issue, the Economic crisis seems to have led to changes in the structure of European attitudes. During the years of the crisis, European attitudes became more heterogeneous, more negative, and more undecided. Experiencing the euro crisis led to an increase in negative attitudes towards Europe of about five percentage points. However, this shift did not lead to the polarization between Eurosceptics and Europhiles, as the economic crisis seems to have also led to a decrease in firm opinions of about two percentage points. Interestingly, we do not find similar effects for other events such as referendums and the ratification of European integration treaties that could have affected the structure of European attitudes by increasing salience and conflict on the European issue. One interpretation of this finding could be that as parties are the actors who politicize the European issue during these events and the variation is captured by our main independent variable. During the economic crisis on the other hand, citizens might have had more direct experiences of the eurocrisis effects on which to base their judgement on the EU's performance, and to update their attitudes accordingly.

Table 1. Random Effects Models – The Effect of Party Politicization on the Structure of Public Attitudes towards the EU

	Dependant variable					
	(st.) Variance		(st.) Firm attitudes		(st.) Negative attitudes	
	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)	(3a)	(3b)
Party politicization index (st.)	0.223**	0.179*	-0.038	-0.045	0.228**	0.227**
	(0.080)	(0.082)	(0.072)	(0.076)	(0.081)	(0.084)
West		0.798**		0.893**		0.918**
		(0.291)		(0.308)		(0.306)
Membership (years)		-0.013*		0.003		-0.020**
		(0.007)		(0.006)		(0.007)
Referendum		0.439*		0.178		0.256
		(0.205)		(0.184)		(0.209)
Integration		-0.080		0.093		-0.030
		(0.126)		(0.111)		(0.128)
Eurocrisis		0.762***		-0.243+		0.680***
		(0.150)		(0.135)		(0.152)
Constant	0.090	-0.427+	-0.268	-0.838***	0.081	-0.356
	(0.128)	(0.221)	(0.167)	(0.232)	(0.139)	(0.232)
Observations	159	159	159	159	159	159
R²	0.046	0.198	0.034	0.139	0.047	0.174
Adjusted R²	0.040	0.166	0.028	0.105	0.041	0.142
F Statistic	7.678**	37.511***	0.271	22.247**	7.893**	32.137***
Note:	+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p< 0.001					

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter explored the consequences of party politicization of the EU on public opinion. Specifically, it assessed whether party politicization increases polarization among citizens on European integration. This study found evidence that party politicization is related to changes in the public opinion structure both in Eastern and Western European countries. Party politicization is associated with more diverse citizens' attitudes on European integration. This result falls in line with our first hypothesis stating that cue-taking is stronger when the diversity of party cues is greater. However, we also find that party politicization is not related to a larger share of citizens holding firm opinions. This finding is contrary to the expectation of our second hypothesis, as it seems that party politicization does not enhance the clarity of cues. In line with previous studies emphasizing the progress of Eurosceptic attitudes among citizens (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), we find that higher levels of EU party politicization do not lead to firmer popular opinions (positive and negative combined) but more sceptical opinions. As stated in our third theoretical expectation, citizens are

influenced by the direction and tone of party cues and party politicization in national arenas.

Why would party politicization lead to more diverse and negative opinions without increasing the share of citizens on both the Eurosceptic and Europhile sides? We propose two possible explanations for this phenomenon. One possible explanation for this mixed evidence could be that Eurosceptic party cues are clearer or more efficient than Europhile ones. The messages on European issues from Eurosceptic parties might gain more visibility because they own the issue. Furthermore, these political parties may present and frame their messages on the EU in a clearer and simpler way. In contrast, pro-EU political parties are more likely to attempt to depoliticize the EU by avoiding the issue or sending complex messages, as suggested by previous studies (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hooghe and Marks, 2018). In this case, their cues on the EU may be almost nonexistent or not clear for ordinary citizens.

Another possible explanation is that party politicization does not enhance the clarity and efficacy of cues, especially given the complexity of EU issues. When increasingly confronted with diverging views from political elites, it is possible that some citizens struggle to form their own opinion on the issue of European integration. This hypothesis goes in line with an argument made by Catherine de Vries and Marco Steenbergen (2013), who suggest that too few but also too many diverging party cues on the EU might make attitude formation more difficult. In addition, individual characteristics might moderate the efficacy of party cues. If individuals are not strong supporters of a specific party, the motivation to follow cues in a debate is weaker. Besides, if these people have less knowledge or hold less strong opinions on political issues, it is possible that the conflict and the debate will add complexity rather than clarity and, consequently, blur the process of cue-taking. Therefore, it may also suggest that some micro-mechanisms are underlying the effect of party politicization on the firmness of public attitudes towards the EU. In this respect, individual-level factors such as education level, political interest, knowledge or party attachment may be important moderators of this relationship.

Only further studies finely tracking the structure of EU attitudes, the evolution of these different groups, and their respective political attitudes and behaviour will enable us to conclude or not about the development of a 'constraining dissensus' as argued by Hooghe and Marks (2009). Depending on the structure of public opinion on European integration, the outcomes of the politicization of Europe might look quite different in the future. On the one hand, if citizens become polarized, further integration might face more resistance or more political shifts according to the majority will. On the other hand, if citizens' attitudes remain highly variable rather than structured into two competing groups, support for or defiance against further European integration might be subject to more uncertainty and volatility.

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Appendixes

Table A1. Random Effects Models – The Effect of Party Politicization on the Structure of Public Attitudes towards the EU (6 months lag)

	Dependent variable					
	(st.) Variance		(st.) Firm attitudes		(st.) Negative attitudes	
	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)	(3a)	(3b)
Party politicization index (st)	0.229**	0.168*	-0.042	-0.059	0.224**	0.218**
	(0.078)	(0.080)	(0.070)	(0.073)	(0.079)	(0.083)
West		0.607*		0.885**		0.803*
		(0.304)		(0.298)		(0.318)
Membership (years)		-0.006		0.003		-0.015*
		(0.006)		(0.006)		(0.007)
Referendum		0.466*		0.302 ⁺		0.238
		(0.195)		(0.176)		(0.202)
Integration		-0.081		0.056		-0.022
		(0.118)		(0.107)		(0.123)
Eurocrisis		0.670***		-0.243 ⁺		0.601***
		(0.142)		(0.129)		(0.148)
Constant	0.097	-0.416 ⁺	-0.262	-0.825***	0.084	-0.341
	(0.137)	(0.230)	(0.166)	(0.224)	(0.146)	(0.240)
Observations	159	159	159	159	159	159
R²	0.052	0.198	0.031	0.163	0.049	0.155
Adjusted R²	0.046	0.166	0.025	0.130	0.043	0.121
F Statistic	8.738**	37.576***	0.355	27.074***	8.148**	27.890***
Note:	+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p< 0.001					

Table A2. Random Effects Models – The Effect of Party Politicization on the Structure of Public Attitudes towards the EU (24 months lag)

	Dependent variable:					
	(st.) Variance		(st.) Firm attitudes		(st.) Negative attitudes	
	(1a)	(1b)	(2a)	(2b)	(3a)	(3b)
Party politicization index (st)	0.091	0.053	-0.078	-0.118	0.110	0.094
	(0.078)	(0.081)	(0.073)	(0.074)	(0.081)	(0.084)
West		0.322		1.056***		0.417
		(0.319)		(0.279)		(0.333)
Membership (years)		0.004		-0.002		0.001
		(0.007)		(0.006)		(0.007)
Referendum		0.401*		0.280		0.309
		(0.204)		(0.188)		(0.213)
Integration		0.079		-0.073		0.159
		(0.121)		(0.112)		(0.126)
Eurocrisis		0.426**		-0.282*		0.462**
		(0.147)		(0.135)		(0.154)
Constant	0.078	-0.417+	-0.223	-0.731***	0.066	-0.461+
	(0.139)	(0.232)	(0.166)	(0.203)	(0.142)	(0.242)
Observations	168	168	168	168	168	168
R²	0.008	0.121	0.018	0.187	0.011	0.119
Adjusted R²	0.002	0.088	0.012	0.157	0.005	0.086
F Statistic	1.372	22.176**	1.150	35.263***	1.860	21.777**
<i>Note:</i>	+ p<0.1; * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p< 0.001					

Does the perceived EU politicization affect election results? A study of four western European countries

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Introduction

In electoral studies, politicization is generally understood as the conflict over a specific issue within a political system (Grande and Hutter, 2016; Kriesi, 2016) that shapes party competition and might affect voters' electoral behaviour. The effects of politicization over the issue of the EU were neglected until recently, when debate over the topic was mobilized by political entrepreneurs (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004). However, thanks to the acceleration of European integration, the consequences of EU politicization on electoral behaviour and the outcome of elections in general have drawn increasing scholarly attention. In particular, in the last two EP elections, the relevance of the EU issue has grown as a consequence of the Eurocrisis, giving political scientists new food for thought. Indeed, EP elections have been traditionally interpreted according to the second-order election model, which suggests that voters tend to be more concerned with domestic than supranational issues. Yet the Eurozone crisis seems to have changed this trend. Political competition in 2014 and especially in 2019 was predominantly driven by stances over European integration (Galpin and Trenz, 2019): the EU became more politicized in the national debates, and voters turned to Eurosceptic parties to show their discontent with the measures taken by the EU to stem the economic crisis (Hobolt, 2015; Hobolt, 2019). Under these changing conditions, scholars have argued that the 2019 EP elections deviated from

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the second-order model, and have been defined as the first case of purely ‘first-order polity’ elections (Galpin and Trenz, 2019) where the legitimacy of the EU becomes central to parties’ agenda and public debate. Against this background, in this chapter we investigate whether EU politicization has indeed played a role in the electoral calculus of voters in the 2019 EP elections. In other words, were parties’ stances on the EU important *per se* in voters’ electoral choice?

Although the study of the effects of EU politicization on electoral behaviour is not new to the literature (Hobolt and Spoon, 2012; Hobolt and de Vries, 2016), there is generally little focus on how party competition within the EU is perceived by voters, and how such perceptions affect voting behaviour and its macro-level consequences. Consistent with the scope of this book, in this chapter we intend to study the electoral consequences of EU politicization. To do so, we rely on a definition of politicization that takes voters’ perceptions into account, i.e. parties’ positions on the EU issue as perceived by voters (understood as the distance between one party’s position on the EU and the average position of all the other parties in the system). By studying EU politicization subjectively rather than as a characteristic of the political system, we avoid the assumption that voters understand the *actual* parties’ discourse and focus on how they grasp political competition.

Our analyses investigate both the individual and the aggregate consequences of the perceived EU politicization by exploring (1) if a party’s ability – in voters’ eyes – to acquire a distinct position on the EU issue actually matters in individual decision making at the ballot box, and (2) how such a dynamic affects the aggregate electoral performance of Euroscepticism *vis-à-vis* mainstream parties. To be specific, the first point is tested by means of logistic binary regression models where the party voted for in the 2019 EP elections is regressed on the issue of perceived EU politicization. The second point is studied by means of a tailored simulation strategy, where respondents’ party choices at the 2019 EP elections are estimated under different scenarios in which the weight of the perceived EU politicization in voting decisions is statistically manipulated. To state it better, we observe how party choice would have changed if the perceived EU politicization had counted less (or not counted) in voters’ electoral calculus.

For the analyses, we rely on data from the last wave of the European Election Voter Study (2019 EES; Schmitt et al., 2020). We focus on the 2019 EP elections since, unlike previous elections, they have been said to deviate clearly from the second-order elections model (Galpin and Trenz, 2019), and to be characterized by the importance of the stances over the EU in the political debate. Moreover, we select countries where parties have been widely described – by both scholars and public commentators – as deriving their success from a successful politicization of the EU (e.g. Treib, 2020). In particular, Hobolt (2019), although stressing that the 2019 EP elections did not bring the expected surge of Eurosceptic parties, identifies four countries where parties with anti-EU traits have witnessed a gain of vote shares.² In particular, Italy, with the success of Salvini’s Lega; the UK, where the only six-week-old Brexit Party performed well at the

² France is not included since Marine Le Pen’s National Rally had a lower share than in 2014 (Hobolt, 2019).

elections; Belgium, with the comeback of *Vlaams Belang*; and Spain, where *Vox* (defined as a ‘soft’ Eurosceptic party, see Real-Dato and Sojka, 2020) entered the parliament for the first time (Hobolt, 2019). In selecting these countries, we do not mean to expect only the above-mentioned parties to be affected by the politicization of the EU issue. Indeed, we know that often more than one party in a system may effectively politicize its debate over the EU (for example in Italy, along with the Northern League, the M5S compete over Eurosceptic stances and *Europa+* is clearly pro-Europe). We instead aim to narrow down the focus to those countries where EU politicization might indeed have played a role (as demonstrated by the elections’ results), but investigating the effect of politicization across all parties in those countries. This is made possible by the statistical approach we employ in this study (please refer to the ‘Data and Methods’ section for further details).

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, we provide an overview of the existing literature on the relationship between EU politicization and electoral behaviour. Based on this, we introduce our research expectations, which can be summed up in the idea that political contestation over the EU project generally ‘matters’, both at the individual and the election level. To follow, the methodological section enters into the details of our dataset, and of how we adapt it to a proper enquiry through the above-mentioned research questions. Next, the empirical section presents the figures obtained by means of our empirical process, followed by a final paragraph devoted to a wider discussion of the results and of future research perspectives on the topic.

EU politicization: what effects on electoral outcomes?

In the literature, scholars have often interpreted EP elections according to the ‘second-order national election’ theory (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). This model suggests that, compared to national elections, in second-order elections there is ‘less at stake’, and people are more concerned with domestic matters. As a consequence, voter turnout is lower, there is a higher percentage of invalidated votes, a higher probability of success for small parties and a decline in support for government parties depending on the electoral cycles. Specifically, when elections take place in the midterm, the chances are higher that the government parties will be ‘punished’ by the voters and not perform well (see Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Schmitt, 2005).

Hobolt et al. (2009), studying voting behaviour at the 1999 and 2004 EP elections, did not question that domestic concerns are important in European elections, but advanced the idea that also EU-based considerations play a relevant role in the electoral choice. They showed indeed that voters who are more sceptical about EU integration compared to the party they supported on the national ballot are more likely to defect or abstain from EP elections. On a similar note, Hobolt and Spoon (2012), by focusing on voting motivations at the 2009 EP elections, confirmed that the greater the distance between voters and their national party on the EU integration issue, the more voters alter their behaviour in the EP elections by switching to another party or abstaining. Moreover, the degree of politicization of the EU integration

issue in the domestic debate is found to moderate the effect of EU distance on the probability of abstaining or switching. Generally, these findings do not repudiate the second-order model, but suggest that concerns over the EU matter to voters and shape their electoral choices.

In the context of the Eurozone crisis, the EU issue gained new relevance, both in the domestic political discourse and in voters' minds. Hobolt (2015) argued that the 2014 EP elections have been more 'European' than ever before: the EU issue was central to the national public debate across Europe, although with different perspectives on and interpretations of the economic situation (see Kriesi and Grande, 2014). Thus, it is not surprising that the Eurosceptic parties witnessed a surge in their electoral support, a clear signal that voters were more concerned with EU issues. Indeed, the growing role of the EU in co-determining budgetary measures in the countries most affected by the crisis (i.e. Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland; see also Otjes and Katsanidou, 2017) has shifted the blaming mechanisms from the government to the EU (see Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). In such a context, as Hobolt (2015) pointed out, the success of Eurosceptic parties was mainly driven by ideological factors linked to disapproval over EU measures during the crisis. Not by chance, Eurosceptic support was higher among those who were hit harder by the economic crisis, although with important variations across Europe. Specifically, in Northern Europe, where the right-wing Eurosceptic parties performed better, the drivers of Eurosceptic support were the opposition to immigration and to further EU integration. On the contrary, in the debtor states, where the left-wing Eurosceptic parties critical of the EU's austerity policies were more successful, Eurosceptic voters were not more opposed to immigration and EU integration than voters for pro-European parties (Hobolt, 2015; Hobolt and de Vries, 2016).

Although pundits and commentators expected the anti-EU parties to become dominant in the 2019 EP elections to the detriment of pro-European parties, this was not the key outcome of the elections. Instead, the electoral result was a highly fragmented European Parliament, with smaller right-wing populist, liberal and Green parties performing well (Hobolt, 2019). Nevertheless, this does not mean that EU issues did not play a role in the elections. On the contrary, as Hobolt (2019) argued, the EU has progressively become more politicized in the domestic debates, and European citizens seemed more inclined to take part in the elections, as the higher turnout rates reveal. In a context characterized by discussions over the implications of Brexit and fear over the success of Eurosceptic parties, the 2019 EP elections have been said to deviate from the 'second-order elections' pattern, and to have been transformed into a competition genuinely driven by stances on European integration (Galpin and Trenz, 2019). Against this background, Galpin and Trenz (2019) defined the 2019 EP elections as 'first-order polity elections', with the legitimacy of the EU being central to the public debate.

Drawing upon this recent research, we investigate the effects of EU politicization on electoral behaviour and election outcomes. To do this, we focus on an 'individual' definition of politicization – i.e. parties' positions on the EU as perceived by voters – in order to grasp the extent to which the EU issue is indeed mobilized by parties in the perception of voters. By testing the effect of EU politicization on electoral choice,

we explore whether voting behaviour is driven by EU-related mechanisms at the individual level. In particular, we expect that:

H1: The more a party is perceived to have a distinct position on the EU compared to its opponents, the higher the probability that individual voters will vote for it.

Alongside individual electoral choice, we can expect to see the effects of perceived EU politicization also at the aggregate level. In particular, scholars have pointed out that politicizing the EU issue should reward those parties that take extreme positions on this issue (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004), i.e. the Eurosceptic parties. Building on this, we intend to test whether perceived EU politicization actually contributed to the success of Eurosceptic parties at the 2019 EP elections. To do so, we rely on a counterfactual approach, through which we compare the actual situation (the baseline models) to scenarios where the effect of EU politicization is progressively and artificially decreased towards ‘zero effect’. In technical terms, we investigate how the aggregate support for anti-EU parties would have changed if the perceived EU politicization had counted less (or not counted at all) in voters’ minds. This strategy enables us to respond to the question: to what extent did EU politicization affect the outcomes of the 2019 EP elections?³ Specifically, we expect that:

H2: The lower the influence of perceived EU politicization in orienting voters’ decisions, the lower the aggregate support for anti-EU parties.

Data and methods

We test our hypotheses based on the 2019 European Election Study (EES) dataset. As other studies have already stressed (Schmitt et al., 2020), this is a well-established statistical source whose design particularly fits for comparative analyses of electoral behaviour. First, this is due to its large-scale nature, which allows us to test the same hypotheses across different countries based on identical series of variables and indicators. Secondly, its stratified random sampling strategy enables a proper accounting of national differences in the analysis (Marsh, 2002).⁴ Last but not least, given its proximity to the timing of the European elections (its fieldwork traditionally starts in the weeks immediately following), the 2019 EES survey represents the best empirical standpoint for observing EU politicization processes and their effects on individual choices at the ballot box. In this respect, as mentioned above, in this chapter our gaze will be specifically turned to cases where Eurosceptic parties gained support in comparison to the previous elections, or gained representation for the first time; these are Italy, the UK, Belgium and Spain (Hobolt, 2019). In practical terms, this

³ Although counterintuitive, this strategy is best when we want to test whether one factor counted for a specific outcome. Doing the opposite, i.e. manipulating the effect of EU politicization so as to increase its weight, would instead show how much this variable would have counted in a hypothetical situation that has not yet occurred.

⁴ The only exceptions to such a procedure were Malta and Cyprus. For further information, see: <http://europeanelectionstudies.net/european-election-studies/ees-2019-study/voter-study-2019>

means that the original EES cross-country sample has been reduced to four separate sub-samples – one for each of the selected countries.

For the sake of our analysis, however, it is important to specify that such derived sub-samples cannot be analysed in their original format (i.e. the ‘respondent*variable’ structure) if the aim is to answer questions such as those we target (van der Eijk, 2017). Indeed, the overall (and not party-specific) dynamics underlying electoral decision-making and their consequences can be meaningfully explored only if EES data are put in so-called stacked form⁵ (e.g. van der Eijk et al., 2006; Franklin and Renko, 2013). A stacked dataset is a reshaped version of an original ‘respondent*variable’ dataset, where each case is multiplied by the number of parties he/she gets to choose from in an election. Within such a framework, our *dependent variable* – i.e. party choice in the 2019 European Election – is a binary variable which assumes value 1 in correspondence with the party the respondent votes for, and value 0 in the case of all other competing parties. This variable has been used to test both H1 and H2, but in the latter case it is aggregated so as to get a measure of party vote shares.

Moving on to the independent variables, it is worth saying that – along with a measure of the perceived EU politicization among parties – our models include controls for all the main theories of voting behaviour. To start with, we rely on the ideological distance between voters and parties on the left–right spectrum, as ideology has been said to count in electoral choice (e.g. Lachat, 2008). This is measured, for each respondent, as the difference between his/her self-placement on left–right spectrum and his/her perceived position of each political party on the same continuum, represented by a scale ranging from 0 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right). Then, the models include an indicator of party identification, which consists of merging two different variables: closeness to a political party in generic terms (where 1 stands for feeling close to a party and 0 identifies all other non-partisan cases) and ‘strength’ of party identification, which assigns to partisan respondents the values of 1, 2 or 3 corresponding to their reporting of a ‘weak’, ‘moderate’ or ‘high’ sense of closeness to a particular party. Within a stacked data matrix, these two pieces of information are combined in such a way that a cell either assumes value 0 (this is the case with parties the respondent does not identify with) or a value of 1, 2 or 3, indicating the strength of their attachment to the party they identify with. Next, we take into account issue voting by including in our models respondents’ positions on both socio-economic and cultural policy issues, each of which is measured on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (very much against) to 10 (very much in favour). To be exact, the variables involved in our estimates concern individual opinions towards economic redistribution, state intervention in the economy, same sex marriage, immigration and environmental protection. However, since in a stacked environment the units of analysis are no longer individual respondents but dyads (‘respondent*party’ combinations), these policy variables have to be adjusted accordingly so as to reflect a relationship between

⁵ The stacked form, defined also as long form, is necessary when we want to study the effect of certain independent variables on the calculus of voting for each party in the context under study (van der Eijk, 2018). In the short form of the dataset, these analyses would require dummy variables for all the parties and multiple regression models (i.e. as many models as the number of parties in the system).

individuals and each political party. To do that, we relied on an established strategy based on regressing the actual vote choice on each policy issue position (e.g. van der Brug et al., 2000).⁶ The resulting predicted probabilities (i.e. *y-hats*) have then been subtracted to a constant term per party so as to prevent any party-specific disturbance in the estimates, and included in the dataset as a proxy measure of voter-party proximity on each predictor (see also Baudewyns and Camatarri, 2020). The same procedure has been applied to the sociodemographic predictors accounting for socio-structural voting theories. These variables concern, in order: gender, age, education, living area (rural vs. urban), church attendance, objective and subjective social class, belonging to a trade union, marital and citizen vs. foreign status in the country. In this case, however, a single 'summary' *y-hat*, or predicted value, has been derived based on multiple regressions involving, for each party, EP vote choice, on the one hand, and all these predictors at once, on the other hand.

Last but not least, our key *independent variable*, i.e. perceived EU politicization, has been calculated as the absolute distance on the EU integration issue between each national party and the mean of its party system, as perceived by individual respondents. This means that the higher the value, the higher the ability/success of the concerned party in differentiating from all others on the EU issue. In the EES, survey-perceived party positions on EU unification are measured on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'it should be pushed further' and 10 means 'it has already gone too far'. Please refer to Table 1 at the end of this section for a comprehensive overview of all the independent variables we employ and of their descriptive statistics.

As mentioned at the beginning, the test of our second hypothesis relies on a manipulation of this variable's effect on party choice in each of the four countries in our analysis (Camatarri, 2020; van der Brug et al., 2007). More specifically, the relevance of perceived EU politicization in orienting individual choices is going to be progressively weakened by artificially bringing its regression coefficient towards zero (i.e. a null effect).⁷ Simultaneously, the aggregate impact of such a decrease is going to be estimated based on a rather established procedure. First, for both the 'baseline' and the simulation voting models, we will compute the resulting predicted probabilities of voting for each party. Afterwards, based on the assumption that 'highest probability = choice', we will calculate individuals' predicted vote under both real world and counterfactual conditions. Such information will be then aggregated at the level of each party so as to provide an overview of election results under each estimated scenario.

⁶ For further information on the questions' wording, please see: <http://europeanelectionstudies.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-EES-post-electoral-survey-Master-questionnaire.pdf>

⁷ For the record, election results are first simulated under the assumption that EU politicization had two-thirds of its baseline effects in a country (e.g. $B=0.086$ in Spain) then one-third ($B=0.043$) and finally no effect. Concretely, this is fulfilled by computing a new vote function (i.e. variable) for each fictitious scenario, where all the elements on the right side of the equation reflect exactly the sequence of independent variables above, multiplied by their B coefficient. In conclusion, we transformed the resulting predicted values in probability form, in line with our binary logit framework.

Table 1. List of Independent Variables and Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Min.	Max.	St.dev.	N (respondents*party)
Left-Right proximity to stack party	6.59	0	10	2.87	23,319
Feeling of closeness to stack party	0.26	0	3	0.69	18,279
Attitude towards government's intervention in the economy (y-hat)	0.50	0.17	0.84	0.08	19,197
Attitude towards immigration (y-hat)	0.50	0.08	0.83	0.12	20,490
Attitude towards same-sex marriage (y-hat)	0.50	0.16	0.81	0.10	20,641
Attitude towards environmental protection (y-hat)	0.50	0.07	0.88	0.10	20,722
Attitude towards redistribution towards the poor (y-hat)	0.50	0.14	0.83	0.10	20,303
Socio-structural characteristics (y-hat)	0.52	0	1	0.20	18,726
Perception of stack party's EU politicization	1.97	0	8.57	1.63	22,463

Source : 2019 European Election Voter Study

What 'shaping power' for EU politicization? An empirical test of individual reasoning and its aggregate outcomes

In the theoretical section of this chapter, we put forward two specific expectations regarding the electoral impact of EU-based politicization among political parties as perceived by voters. Based on the output of a regression analysis, Table 2 provides an answer to our H1. The regression coefficient of the perceived EU politicization at the party level (as perceived by voters) appears stably positive and statistically significant in each of the involved countries. Within the scenario of a stacked 'generic' analysis, this means that the more politicized a party appears, i.e. differentiated from its competitors, the higher the probability it will be voted for. Importantly, such a relationship holds whatever the characteristic of the party (be it populist, mainstream, etc.) and whatever the 'direction' of EU politicization ('pro'- or 'anti'-integration/unification). Similar specifications cannot be disregarded as non-essential since they indicate that the perceived EU politicization, in voters' eyes, *matters per se*. Indeed, citizens appear somehow to appreciate 'clarity' on the EU issue, and to privilege political parties that hold a distinct stance on that topic, even apart from the actual 'content' of their policy platform (i.e. its 'pro-' or 'anti'-European character).

Importantly, this should not instil the false assumption that all other predictors we included are overall negligible. Indeed, the fact that our explanatory models

reached such high levels of explained variance (the Pseudo R^2 never falls below 0.40 in all the four countries) is mostly due to the presence of mid- and long-term predictors of voting behaviour, which are statistically significant across all models and able to cover a relevant portion of the dependent variable. The reference is to party identification, ideological proximity to a party and socio-structural factors. When it comes to policy positions, on the other hand, the picture appears rather less homogeneous, as opinions on socio-economic topics appear to count systematically less than cultural issues in all the countries. Moreover, within this latter group, same-sex marriage and – above all – immigration emerge as clearly prominent compared to environmental protection.

Table 2. Explaining of EP vote choice in four countries: regression outcomes

	Italy	Belgium	United Kingdom	Spain
Left–Right proximity to stack party	0.294*** (0.0479)	0.247*** (0.0460)	0.279*** (0.0468)	0.333*** (0.0459)
Closeness to stack party	2.478*** (0.108)	2.409*** (128)	1.425*** (0.0795)	2.904*** (0.140)
Attitude towards government's intervention in the economy (y-hat)	0.722 (1.509)	2.437** (1.235)	1.564 (1.366)	1.600 (1.015)
Attitude towards immigration (y-hat)	2.215*** (0.635)	2.204 (1.484)	4.403*** (0.721)	0.706 (0.778)
Attitude towards same-sex marriage (y-hat)	1.757** (0.822)	4.979*** (1.380)	1.842* (1.065)	0.0505 (0.967)
Attitude towards environmental protection (y-hat)	2.131* (1.290)	1.215 (960)	1.042 (0.809)	0.507 (1.126)
Attitude towards economic redistribution (y-hat)	-0.422 (1.397)	0.0340 (1.022)	-1.884 (1.157)	-0.0181 (0.874)
Socio-structural characteristics (y-hat)	1.322*** (0.512)	3.396*** (487)	1.169*** (0.422)	1.566*** (0.495)
Perception of stack party's EU politicization	0.161*** (0.0496)	0.141** (0.0610)	0.281*** (0.0472)	0.130** (0.0534)
Constant	-9.909*** (1.047)	-12.53*** (1.335)	-9.808*** (0.849)	-8.245*** (0.839)
Pseudo R^2	0.64	0.56	0.40	0.63
Observations	3,481	2,440	2,304	2,834

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Source: 2019 European Election Voter Study

All that being established, we can now focus our attention on the second question at the centre of this chapter (H2). As mentioned before, in a context where ‘the assignment of policy competencies to the European Union has reduced the divergence of party policy positions nationally’ (Nanou and Dorussen, 2013, p. 71), we could expect that the parties putting more effort into politicizing the EU (and getting rewarded for it) are the anti-European ones. In counterfactual terms, this would also mean that if voters were less sensitive (or simply more indifferent) to EU-related competitive dynamics, the same anti-European parties would be the most negatively affected from an electoral standpoint. Table A1 in the appendix presents the outcomes of the electoral simulation strategy described in the previous section. As one can see, each row is devoted to a specific electoral scenario, i.e. a baseline EP election outcome (based on prediction on actual data) and three ‘fictitious’ outcomes relying on an artificially decreased effect of the EU politicization factor. The last row corresponds to the hypothetical situation where this variable approximates a ‘zero effect’ in citizens’ electoral decisions at the 2019 EP Election.

To start with the case of Italy, it is rather clear even at first sight that there are not significant changes across the estimated scenarios. Switching indeed from a baseline condition to an ‘extreme’ situation where perceived EU politicization did not matter at all for the voters in May 2019, there are no relevant changes to be reported, especially for what concerns centre-right parties and the Five Star Movement. On the other hand, the Democratic Party would gain 0.3% of the votes under the ‘zero’ EU politicization effect hypothesis, while Europa+ would perform slightly less well. This latter figure should not pass unnoticed, as it indicates that higher EU politicization does not necessarily benefit only anti-EU parties but also specific forces that mobilize the EU issue in a ‘positive’ sense, e.g. associating it with the issue of civil rights, environmental protection, etc.⁸

Moving on to the UK, our numbers appear to tell a rather similar story, in the sense that a decreasing effect of our EU politicization variable does not seem to imply major changes in parties’ electoral sizes at the 2019 EP Election. Yet, unlike in the Italian case, a slightly improved record of traditional parties across the four estimated scenarios (i.e. Labour and especially the Conservatives) is here clearly counterbalanced by the lower success of the Brexit Party. Such a pattern interestingly aligns with our counterfactual expectation that in a world where EU politicization would not matter, the most likely to ‘suffer’ electorally at the EP elections would be parties that strongly invested in contesting EU policies (if not of the whole EU project). Regardless, it must be stressed that the shifts in parties’ performances across scenarios are all in all pretty minor (they hardly exceed 2 per cent of the total votes), which makes the perceived EU politicization basically inconsequential to parties’ electoral fortunes in the country.

Similar results apply to Belgium. Indeed, along with most of the other parties, the record of both relevant Eurosceptic actors in the country (i.e. the Front National and Vlaams Belang in Wallonia and Flanders, respectively) appears totally unaffected by

⁸ As shown in appendix (Tables A1b and A1c) in particular) this interpretation seems also confirmed by the fact that, in the case of ‘zero’ EU politicization effect, the Greens would have performed less well both in Belgium (the French-speaking part) and in the UK.

the perceived importance of EU politicization to voters' decisions. Despite this, EU politicization still turns out to play a decisive role in determining the 'local' winner in Wallonia. This is not surprising given its high level of party fragmentation in that territory (see also De Winter et al., 2006; De Winter and Baudewyns, 2015). Indeed, if EU politicization was out of the picture, the Socialist Party would be able to unseat Ecolo and gain the first place with only a minimal increase in its total votes (+0.6).

To complete the picture, also in Spain election results look overall poorly affected by EU-related competition dynamics. Indeed, the distribution of the total votes between parties remains strikingly the same both under 'real world' conditions and in each simulated scenario. This also applies to the newcomer VOX, a party that despite its nationalist support base (Turnbull-Dugarte et al., 2020) does not appear to owe any portion of its electoral success to how it appears politicized on the EU in public debates.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, we have studied the electoral consequences of EU politicization. As the volume of studies in this field clearly speaks to, this is far from being a neglected topic in political research. Yet, as mentioned before, scholars have been so far mostly focused on explaining its effects either on voting for specific parties, such as anti-EU ones (e.g. Camatarri and Zucchini, 2019), or on vote switching (Spoon and Klüver, 2019), often overlooking if and how party competition on EU issues characterizes electoral decision-making as a whole and its consequences on election results. Not only that, but apart from a few exceptions (e.g. van Spanje and de Vreese, 2011), current studies have measured EU politicization by means of expert surveys, party manifestos and media content (e.g. Hutter and Kriesi, 2019), without going into the details of how voters actually perceive such processes and how their perceptions of EU politicization come to affect their individual choices at the ballot box, as well as the aggregate consequences of this.

In this contribution, we have tried to advance the existing knowledge on all these fronts by focusing on four countries where successful EU politicization strategies have been repeatedly hypothesized to underlie parties' performance, and particularly the huge success of anti-EU forces at the 2019 EP elections. We did so by analysing electoral data collected within the framework of a well-established international survey program: the 2019 European Election Voter Study. As explained in the results section, the takeaways of our empirical examination are basically two, and can be summarized as follows. First, citizens' perceptions of EU politicization among political parties *matter* for their electoral choices, all the other factors considered. As our models in Table 2 show, the regression coefficients associated with this variable are in fact stably positive and statistically significant (the p-value of these estimates never goes beyond 0.05). This finding complements the results of Le Corre Juratic, Carmo Duarte and Versailles (chapter 1, in this book), who find that when parties provide clearer cues, citizens develop more diverse attitudes, with an important share of negative attitudes

towards the EU. Combining these two findings, we can conclude that EU politicization not only affects citizens' attitudes, but also their voting behaviour.

With respect to the effects of this same predictor on aggregate election results, however, the picture looks radically different. Our simulation models show indeed that if perceived EU politicization had no weight in citizens' decisions, very little (if anything, especially in Spain and in the Belgian Flanders) would have changed at the level of the aggregate distribution of total votes in our four countries. Importantly, this applies to both Eurosceptic and Europhile parties, although in our results some of these actors (i.e., the Brexit Party, Europa+, the UK Greens, Ecolo and DéFI) appear to benefit slightly from the politicization of the EU in public debates.⁹ Interpreting this counterintuitive result has represented the challenge of this research. In fact, the contrast between these two findings reflects the substantive difference – too often overlooked in studies of voting behaviour – between the drivers of individual party choices on the one hand and the factors affecting the results of elections on the other hand (Converse, 1975). The former concern indeed the individual psychology of the voter, while the latter are macro-level phenomena that, as such, may be amenable to multiple factors, including party competition. Against this background, it is entirely plausible that EU issues, although enjoying a significant effect in voters' reasoning, have a weak impact on election results. Indeed, excessive competition among too many actors (or overly ambitious positions) on that topic (e.g. Hobolt and Rodon, 2020), could have led, in the aggregate, to a dispersion of citizens' preferences across the party spectrum. Future studies on this topic should be more aware of the analytical distinction between psychological and party-level effects of EU politicization, and should enquire more systematically into what party competition patterns within the EU allow EU issue voting to produce visible aggregate effects beyond the 'sphere' of individual voting behaviour. This study represents a first attempt in this direction, using a limited number of country cases. However, the increasing availability of cross-country electoral data sources provides a rich and promising ground for high-quality comparative analysis in the future, not only limited to the field of European elections, but also to first-order electoral contests in both Western and Eastern countries.¹⁰

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⁹ It needs to be acknowledged that tiny changes in the aggregate vote shares can still imply substantive differences in how specific parties manage (or fail) to overcome the minimum thresholds necessary for accessing representation (this is usually the case for minor and/or several challenger actors) in the European election framework.

¹⁰ Among the many, we mention here the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems, a long-standing collaborative project between a relevant number of National Election Studies worldwide. For more information, see: <https://ces.org>.

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Appendixes

Table A1a. EU politicization in voters' reasoning and how it affects electoral outcomes: a counterfactual analysis, Italy (%)

	Left	Democratic Party	+Europe	Go Italy	Brothers of Italy	Northern League	5 Star Movement
Baseline conditions	2.54	23.41	5.99	6.72	8.35	33.94	19.06
1st simulation	2.36	23.77	5.81	6.72	8.35	33.94	19.06
2nd simulation	2.36	23.96	5.63	6.72	8.35	33.94	19.06
3rd simulation (zero effect)	2.54	23.77	5.63	6.72	8.35	33.94	19.06

Table A1b. EU politicization in voters' reasoning and how it affects electoral outcomes: a counterfactual analysis, United Kingdom (%)

	Green Party	Labour Party	LibDem	Conservatives	SNP	UKIP	Brexit Party
Baseline conditions	5.18	27.79	14.44	26.43	5.45	2.45	18.26
1st simulation	5.18	28.07	14.44	27.25	5.45	2.45	17.17
2nd simulation	4.90	28.07	14.71	27.52	5.72	2.45	16.62
3rd simulation (zero effect)	4.90	28.07	14.71	27.79	5.72	2.45	16.35

Table A1c. EU politicization in voters' reasoning and how it affects electoral outcomes: a counterfactual analysis, Belgium (%)

<i>Wallonia</i>	Ecolo	Socialist Party	PTB	MR	cdH	FN	DéFI
Baseline conditions	21.34	20.73	9.15	20.73	17.68	1.22	9.15
1st simulation	20.12	21.34	9.15	20.73	18.29	1.22	9.15
2nd simulation	20.12	21.34	9.15	20.73	18.29	1.22	9.15
3rd simulation (zero effect)	20.12	21.34	10.37	20.12	18.29	1.22	8.54

<i>Flanders</i>	Greens	PvdA	Sp.a	Open VLD	CD&V	VB	N-VA
Baseline conditions	9.76	5.69	10.98	9.76	6.10	21.54	36.18
1st simulation	9.76	5.69	10.98	9.76	6.10	21.54	36.18
2nd simulation	9.76	5.69	10.98	9.76	6.10	21.54	36.18
3rd simulation (zero effect)	9.76	5.69	10.98	9.76	6.10	21.54	36.18

Table A1d. EU politicization in voters' reasoning and how it affects electoral outcomes: a counterfactual analysis, Spain (%)

	Compromise	We can	Socialist Party	Citizens	People's Party	Republics Now	VOX
Baseline conditions	1.23	13.99	36.83	14.20	18.93	4.32	10.49
1st simulation	1.23	13.99	36.83	14.20	18.93	4.32	10.49
2nd simulation	1.23	13.99	36.83	14.20	18.93	4.32	10.49
3rd simulation (zero effect)	1.23	13.99	36.83	14.20	18.93	4.32	10.49

CHAPTER 3

Political implications of the different manifestations of politicization: examining the news coverage of the EU in Greece and Portugal before and during the Eurozone crisis

Tiago Silva, Yani Kartalis, Susana Rogeiro Nina¹

Introduction

This chapter presents a diachronic analysis of EU politicization in Greece and Portugal, before and after the Eurozone crisis. Focused exclusively on traditional media coverage of national legislative elections, our in-depth content analysis of EU politicization in these two countries sheds some light on the debate surrounding the consequences of politicization on national politics. More concretely, by comparing the cases of Portugal and Greece, we speculate on whether the salience and contestation surrounding the dimension of European integration might have hindered the accountability of national political systems. Two aspects make the comparison between these two countries relevant. On the one hand, Greece and Portugal, up until the Eurozone crisis, strongly resembled one another regarding EU attitudes and political/party-system characteristics. More importantly, both countries were comparably affected by the crisis, having to resort to financial bailouts from the *TROIKA*,² which led

¹ To cite this chapter: Silva, T., Kartalis, Y., and Rogeiro Nina, S. (2023), 'Political implications of the different manifestations of politicization: Examining the news coverage of the EU in Greece and Portugal before and during the Eurozone crisis', in Houde, A.-M., Laloux, T., Le Corre Juratic, M., Mercenier, H., Pennetrau, D., and Versailles, A. (eds), *The politicization of the European Union: from processes to consequences*. Brussels: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, pp. 67–85.

² *TROIKA* refers to the decision group composed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

to equally steep increases in EU politicization during post-bailout national elections. On the other hand, when it comes to performance voting in those critical elections, mainstream/incumbent parties were only harshly punished by the Greek electorate.

Based on the existing studies on the domestic implications of EU politicization, our main argument is that differences in the two countries, in terms of the levels and nature of EU politicization, might also potentially explain the divergent electoral outcomes of the Eurozone crisis in Greece and Portugal. More concretely, our expectation is that the level of EU contestation during post-bailout elections was higher in Portugal, which, to a certain extent, has blurred the responsibility of national governments for the financial and economic crisis. We test this expectation with a manually coded dataset of 8,659 articles from eleven elections held between 2002 and 2015. We depart from existing comparative studies of the magnitude of politicization in two ways. The first way is by analysing all articles mentioning the EU rather than looking only at political parties' statements or samples. Second, we examine not only salience and contestation but also the types, or manifestations, of the European integration dimension discussed in the media. Our results indeed confirm that, in substantive terms, the two countries politicized the EU in very different ways during the post-bailout *critical* elections. In light of what Camatarri and Gallina (chapter 2) found on the effects of citizens' perceptions of the EU on voting behaviour, the potential role of differentiated versions of politicization becomes crucial.

The present chapter is structured in five sections. The first section after this introduction focuses on the concept of politicization, its implications for domestic politics, how it has been measured and, finally, its different manifestations/forms. The second section contextualizes the cases of Greece and Portugal, focusing on their political/party systems, their relationship with the EU and the political consequences of the Eurozone crisis in their national political systems. The third section of the chapter presents briefly the data and methods used, with the subsequent section detailing the results of our analysis. The final section of the chapter summarizes our main findings, reflecting on its potential implications, as well as its main limitations.

EU politicization, its magnitude, implications and manifestations

The EU politicization hypothesis, first introduced by Schmitter (1969), has become a central concept in the study of the European integration process. According to Schmitter, EU politicization refers to the idea that the progress of EU integration will inevitably lead to great and broader interest in, but also increased contestation of, European integration (Schmitter, 1969). More recently, it has been defined as an 'increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation' (de Wilde, 2011, p. 559). Even though the understanding of EU politicization can vary between the disciplines and focuses of study, it has been broadly understood as a three-dimensional concept that

anticipates (i) *an increasing salience of the EU dimension*, (ii) *the polarization of opinions towards it* and (iii) *the expansion of the actors interested in it* (de Wilde et al., 2016, p. 4).

For a long time, the EU was neither a salient nor a controversial topic in most of its member states. Even though there were previous instances of EU politicization (Hutter and Grande, 2014), the Maastricht Treaty was a turning point that made the EU 'ripe for politicization' (van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004). Indeed, Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue that, after Maastricht, public opinion towards the EU changed from a *permissive consensus* to a *constraining dissensus*. This premise was supported by several episodes of politicization, such as the French and Dutch rejection, in 2005, of the proposed new European constitution. Prompted by this perceived shift in attitudes towards the EU, several studies have assessed the magnitude of its politicization (e.g. Hutter and Grande, 2014; Hoeglinger, 2016; Grande and Hutter, 2016; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019). Those existing assessments of the salience and polarization of the EU dimension, mostly looking at the media and political actors' statements, have suggested that EU politicization, rather than following a linear trend over time, has been a punctuated phenomenon that varies considerably across time and by country (Hutter et al., 2016, p. 280).

To a great extent, the observed surges in politicization have been tied to and have circumscribed certain EU-related events and geographical regions (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019). In this regard, the 2009 Eurozone/financial crisis was a key event that bolstered considerably the salience and contestation of the EU in southern European countries, particularly Portugal and Greece (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019). However, the implications of these surges in politicization in governance remain relatively untapped and an open question – a question that, according to Hutter et al. (2016, p. 298), should be answered by looking at the debtor countries. The next section offers a comparison between the two countries, focusing on their political and party systems, their relationship with the EU and the implications that the Eurozone crisis had on their national political systems.

While increases in EU politicization have been properly shown in the literature, its implications for European and national governance remain far more controversial and an open question. On the one hand, some views suggest that EU politicization has had a positive effect. According to some authors, the increase in salience and polarization around the EU contributes to the emergence of a transnational community, which can be fundamental for furthering the process of European integration (Statham and Trenz, 2013; Risse, 2010). On the other hand, some authors are less optimistic and highlight the political uncertainty that can arise from the politicization of the EU (Hutter et al., 2016). This uncertainty results, in general, from the fact that, for a prolonged period, mainstream political parties have insulated themselves from electoral constraints with a strategic *depoliticization* of the EU question (Mair, 2000, 2005). In this sense, the implications of politicization on national politics should vary depending on the source of politicization (e.g. Eurozone crisis, refugee crisis) and the national context where it occurs (e.g. parties' position on the subject of the EU, public opinion towards the EU).

Despite the denoted uncertainty regarding the effects of politicization, the literature has also shown us that the salience and contestation of the EU can have important implications for national political systems, particularly for the attribution of responsibility (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014) and, consequently, also the vote for incumbents (Lobo and Pannico, 2020, 2021). While the literature has convincingly demonstrated

the role of economic perceptions/evaluations as a key determinant of voting behaviour (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000), the ‘integration hypothesis’, put forward in Lobo and Lewis-Beck (2012), shows how the effect of economic voting decreases when people held the EU responsible for the economic situation. Indeed, even though the EU is seldom used as a scapegoat by national political actors, Hobolt and Tilley (2014, p. 117) show that the EU has been strategically used to ‘muddy the waters of responsibility’, dispersing blame and diverting attention from certain problems. In this sense, to put it in other words, the politicization of the EU should affect the accountability of the national political systems by making performance voting harder for the electorate. This aspect is particularly relevant in the context of the Eurozone crisis which, by putting the EU on the national political agenda of the debtor countries, called for a re-examination of the economic voting literature (Lewis-Beck and Lobo, 2017) and the importance of the moderation effect of *clarity of responsibility* (Powell and Whitten, 1993).

Recent studies have also demonstrated the importance of the EU issue in national legislative elections. According to Jurado and Navarrete (2021), the congruence between parties and voters on the EU issue has a positive and significant effect on the likelihood of voting for a particular party. This finding also suggests citizens’ increasing awareness of the European integration process. Nevertheless, the impact of EU politicization on accountability by EU member states’ political systems is mediated by external factors. The complexity of the governmental set-ups is clearly one of them, but also the electors’ party identification (Stoekel and Kuhn, 2018) and knowledge around the EU and its institutions, or the sense of political efficacy (Baglioni and Hurrelmann, 2016). Still, the manifestations of EU politicization have been an overlooked dimension in comparative assessments of politicization. As Baglioni and Hurrelmann (2016) suggest, some of the problems to understand the implications of EU politicization might arise from an undifferentiated treatment of the phenomenon. In this sense, going beyond the *degree* of politicization and focusing on its *nature* might be a crucial step in understanding the implications of EU politicization on national politics.

The debate surrounding European integration can assume different characters. Mair (2004, 2007) identifies two distinct, but in a way intertwined, dimensions of conflict about the EU. The first one is the *Europeanization dimension*, dealing with the creation, consolidation and territorial reach of EU institutions. The second one focuses instead on the penetration of EU legislation into the domestic sphere. Authors like de Wilde (2011) have built on this distinction, identifying three groups, or manifestations, of EU politicization: (i) *institutions* (the Europeanization dimension), (ii) *decision-making processes* (focused on processes and day-to-day functioning of EU institutions) and (iii) *the politicization of issues*. Finally, Hurrelman et al. (2015) differentiate between issues emanating from the EU and domestic ones that emerge in national politics as a consequence of EU membership. This distinction is particularly important in the context of the Eurozone crisis, where domestic issues (i.e. budget cuts mandated by EU institutions) assumed an important role.

Overall, the different dimensions of conflict in EU debates should have different implications. Given their exceptionality, this expectation should be analysed, as Hutter et al. (2016) also suggest, by looking at the debtor countries of the Eurozone crisis. Following that advice, the next section compares the cases of two of those

countries, Greece and Portugal. It compares the two countries in terms of their political arrangements and their relationship with the EU, and concludes by looking at the potential impact and political consequences of the Eurozone crisis in those two countries.

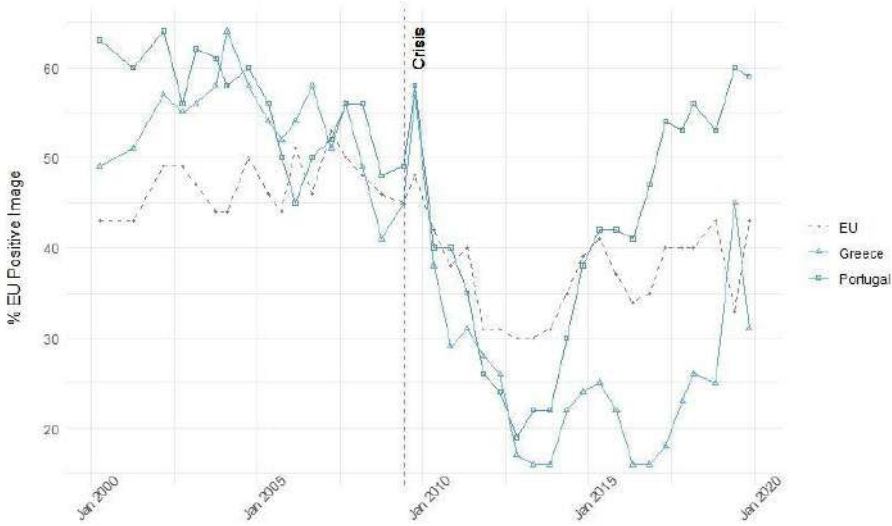
Greek chaos vs. Portuguese resilience

Until the outbreak of the Eurozone crisis, Portugal and Greece shared strong similarities when it comes to their political systems and relationship with the EU. The two countries not only became democracies in the same decade, during the third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991), but also share political, cultural, social and historical features that correspond to the *Mediterranean model of democracy* (Lijphart et al., 1988). More importantly, these similarities were more discernible with regards to the stability of their party systems, and also regarding people's attitudes towards the EU.

The Portuguese and Greek party systems emerged as legacies of the shared authoritarian past. The ideological cleavages across the right-left spectrum defined the political competition and alternation in power in both countries (Gunter, 2005; Jalali, 2007). In Greece, seven years of military rule (1968–1974) did not manage to eradicate the previously established two-party system structure. Greek politics have been dominated by the right-wing party New Democracy (*Νέα Δημοκρατία* – ND) and the socialist Panhellenic Socialist Movement (*Πανελλήνιο Σοσιαλιστικό Κίνημα* – PASOK). The two would gather well over 75 per cent of the vote in every legislative election until 2012, forming one of the most stable two-party systems in Europe, and labelled by some as *la partitocrazia* (e.g. Anthopoulos, 2008). The situation in Portugal has been similar, particularly since 1987, with two parties – the centre-left Socialist Party (*Partido Socialista* – PS) and the centre-right Social Democratic Party (*Partido Social Democrata* – PSD) – sharing more than 70 per cent of the popular vote (Freire, 2006; Jalali, 2009). Overall, when it comes to government composition, neither of these countries has experienced large government coalitions that could hinder the attribution of responsibility for the economic and financial situation by the Greek and Portuguese electorate.

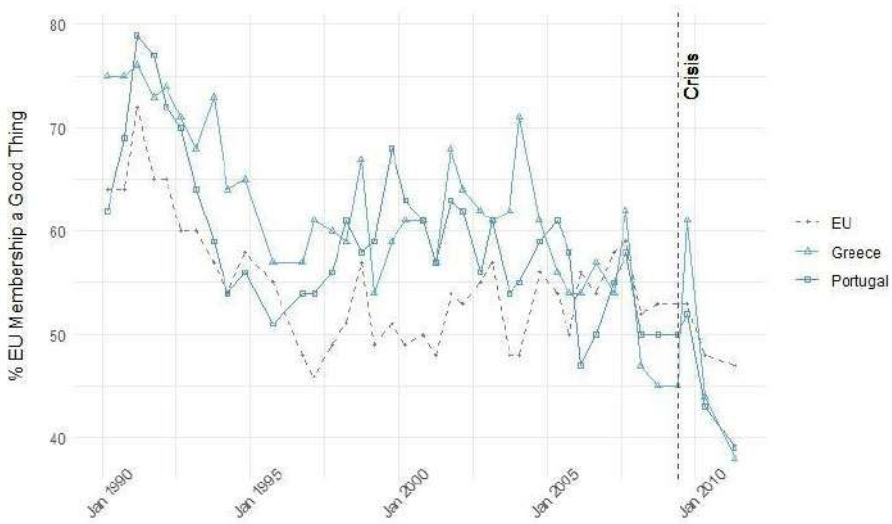
When it comes to the relationship with the EU, Greece and Portugal also have a very similar history. Both countries joined the European project in the 1980s – Greece in 1981 and Portugal 1986. In the aftermath of the authoritarian regimes, EU integration became a consensual priority for their governments and mainstream political parties. The pro-European sentiment of the main institutional actors was also clear in the public opinion of the two countries (Verney, 2011; Clements et al., 2014). As we can see in Figures 1 and 2, up until the Eurozone crisis, the Portuguese and Greek citizens' support for the European integration process has practically always been higher than the EU average.

Figure 1. Long-term attitudes towards the EU: European Union conjure up a very positive, fairly positive image.



Source: Eurobarometer

Figure 2. Long-term attitudes towards the EU: Country's membership in the EU is a good thing.



Source: Eurobarometer

These two countries, which shared many characteristics, were also two of the countries most affected by the Eurozone crisis. In May 2010, the Greek government

announced an economic adjustment programme that entailed a series of austerity measures and a three-year, 110-billion euro loan from the IMF in order to prevent an insolvency situation in the sovereign debt crisis. One year later, Portugal was fully hit by the financial crisis. The Portuguese government responded to international market pressure by introducing new austerity programmes (Lourtie, 2011), and applying in April 2011 for a bailout. In both countries, harsh austerity measures were imposed by the so-called *TROIKA*, which were geared towards shrinking the public sector, imposing cuts in public services and flexibilizing the labour market.

As Parker and Tsarouhas (2018) noted, the external constraints imposed on Portugal and Greece contributed to the increased frustrations towards the EU, in general, and membership, in particular. Additionally, both countries' centre-left incumbent parties were punished electorally as a result of the negative economic situation (Magalhães, 2014a). However, the degree to which the two-party systems were affected varied considerably.

On the one hand, in the Greek case, the main centre-left party, PASOK, faced massive losses in the post-bailout election of 2012, leading to a severe reorganization of the electoral offer. The Greek ultra-stable two-party system ended with the two consecutive elections in May and June of 2012, being replaced by a volatile and polarized multi-party scenario (Tsatsanis and Teperoglou, 2016). The traditional parties lost electoral weight, and the effective number of parties surged, from 2.6 in 2009 to 4.8 in the May election of 2012. A figure that eventually decreased to 3.2, in September 2015, when SYRIZA won an absolute majority (Tsatsanis and Teperoglou, 2016).

Along with the collapse of the two-party system, new anti-establishment parties became prominent (e.g. Freire and Santana-Pereira, 2012; Margalhães, 2012; Martín and Urquizu-Sancho, 2012; Borghetto et al., 2014; Tsatsanis and Teperoglou, 2014). The Coalition of the Radical Left (*Συνασπισμός Ριζοσπαστικής Αριστεράς* – SYRIZA) was the party which gained more support (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014; Lefkofridi and Nezi, 2019). The party went from being a political outsider with a mere 4.6 per cent of the vote in 2009 to winning 36.4 per cent of the vote in January 2015. SYRIZA managed to not only challenge the incumbent government and the main opposition, but to successfully break the historical duopoly by eventually forming a government in 2015 (Aslanidis and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2016).

On the other hand, the 'surprising' outcome of the two Portuguese legislative elections post-bailout (2011 and 2015) suggested that the Portuguese case was exceptional (De Giorgi and Santana-Pereira, 2016). The properties of the party system, in terms of parties with parliamentary representation, remained largely unaltered, both in the first- and second-order elections (Gunter, 2005; Freire, 2006). As Magalhães (2014b, p. 130) explained, the Portuguese elections after the bailout were mostly 'about sanctioning the incumbent and rewarding the main alternative'. In fact, the first national elections post-bailout brought nothing like the dramatic party-system change experienced in Greece. Despite losing the election, the Socialist Party (PS) still obtained 28 per cent of the votes, and remained the main opposition party. The main alternative to PS, the Partido Social Democrata – PSD, won the first post-crisis election with 39 per cent of the vote. Furthermore, in the local elections of 2012 and European elections

of 2014, despite a trend of lower shares for the two main parties, the balance between the two mainstream parties and their smaller counterparts remained relatively intact³ (De Giorgi and Santana-Pereira, 2016).

The resilience of the Portuguese party system was already a distinctive feature of the country in the subset of crisis-stricken and/or bailed-out European peripheral democracies (Bosco and Verney, 2012): the main parties survived not only the severe economic crisis and the bailout but also the harsh austerity measures implemented thereafter. The 2015 national election offers us additional evidence, with its electoral result contradicting the punishment pattern observed in previous elections in Portugal and other countries (Dinas and Rori, 2012; Garzia, 2011; Magalhães, 2012). While in Greece or Spain, new parties like SYRIZA or *Podemos* experienced exponential growth, Portugal did not see any upheaval at the electoral level (Fernandes, 2016). According to Teperoglou and Belchior (2020, p. 3) ‘the most striking transformation relates to the changing inter-party dynamics that led to a collaboration between the parties of the left for the first time since the transition to democracy in the mid-1970s’.

The cases of Portugal and Greece, and their diverging outcomes, allow us to explore the implications of EU politicization on national-level politics. We hope to contribute to the study of the magnitude and implications of EU politicization in the context of the Eurozone crisis, by addressing two limitations of the existing comparative studies. The first one is limiting our analysis exclusively to political parties’ statements but considering, instead, all mentions of the EU in the media. This is particularly important in the context of the Eurozone crisis, since the EU became debated by a more diversified set of actors (Fominaya and Cox, 2013). The second one is conducting a differentiated analysis of EU politicization. Building on the idea that the EU can be politicized in different ways, we explore not only the degree but also the type of EU politicization that has occurred in Portugal and Greece from 2002 until 2015.

Expectations, method and data

As we discussed, when it comes to the role that the politicization of the EU played in legislative elections after the Eurozone crisis, Portugal and Greece are extremely interesting cases. We know from the literature that the crisis has increased considerably the salience and contestation of the EU in the two countries. However, having similar democratic and EU integration experiences, the potential impact of the EU politicization in the outcome of those elections seems to have been completely different, with some literature suggesting, as we mentioned, a *Portuguese exceptionalism*. As we saw, while the politicization of the EU seems to have, in the case of Portugal, indeed blurred the responsibility of the incumbent and mainstream parties for the financial situation, the same did not happen in Greece.

³ There was a trend of lower vote shares for the two main parties taken as a whole vis-à-vis 2011, which is typical of second-order elections such as local and European elections.

This prompted us to formulate the following expectation: if the concept of politicization can indeed play an important role in shaping and influencing domestic political competition, by affecting the national systems' accountability, given the considerably different electoral outcomes, it is then possible that EU politicization in the post-bailout elections of Greece and Portugal was not as similar as the existing comparative studies suggest. By using an undifferentiated vision of politicization and narrowing the analysis exclusively to political parties, these studies might have missed important differences in how the politicization of the EU occurred in those countries. For this reason, our main expectation is that, given the resilience of the Portuguese political system after the bailout, the politicization of the EU was higher in Portugal than in Greece. This is an expectation that, to some extent, defies the existing studies and conventional wisdom on how salient and contested the EU was in those two countries.

We test this expectation using a dataset of 65,790 articles collected from relevant sections of four newspapers. The articles were published in the thirty days before the legislative elections that occurred in Portugal and Greece between 2002 and 2015.⁴ We used this dataset to identify a total of 8,659 newspaper articles that mentioned EU-related terms. Those articles were then manually coded by a team of trained coders. We exclusively referenced quality newspapers with a comparatively high readership. Table 1 indicates the number of articles analysed for each newspaper and election/year.

Table 1. Number of articles analysed per newspaper and election

Greece	2004	2007	2009	2012	2015i	2015ii	# of articles
<i>Kathimerini</i>	383	353	434	820	599	587	3176
<i>Ta Nea</i>	314	203	282	643	285	201	1928
Portugal		2002	2005	2009	2011	2015	
<i>Diário de Notícias</i>		263	298	358	547	308	1774
<i>Público</i>		310	378	254	498	341	1781

We assess the level of EU politicization in the media by looking at six distinct variables: *salience of the EU* (proportion of articles that dealt extensively with EU-related issues – Is the article about the EU or not?); *EU and election* (proportion of EU articles that were also about the ongoing legislative election/campaign); *Conflict* (proportion of EU articles that dealt with conflict between different actors); *Tone* (the overall direction of the article towards the EU); *EU dimension* (manifestation of EU politicization). These variables aim to capture the main components of politicization (i.e. salience and contestation), but also important aspects regarding its nature. Our codebook was adapted from the codebook of Maier et al. (2014), which analyses the politicization of the EU in the media. Additionally, the variables about conflict were adapted from media framing studies of European elections (Maier et al., 2011). For the

⁴ Although the elections did not occur in perfect synchronization, the goal of this comparative analysis is not to track the election-by-election differences between the two countries, but rather the overall pre- and post-crisis picture of electoral competition.

EU dimension variable, we use the typology of Hurrelmann et al. (2015) that identifies four types of manifestations of EU politicization (*membership; constitutional structure; EU policies* and *domesticated policies*).⁵ Throughout the analysis, the values indicated for each election correspond to the average of the two newspapers of each country. Even though the differences between newspapers are outside the scope of this chapter, all of the results found for each election do not differ significantly between newspapers, and indeed are strongly correlated.

Results

The first aspect of EU politicization analysed concerns the visibility that the EU dimension received in the Greek and Portuguese press during the legislative elections analysed. We explore this dimension by comparing two indicators: the proportion of newspaper articles focused on the EU and the proportion of EU articles about the election. This allows us not only to understand how salient the EU was in this crucial period of political competition but also to what extent the discussion of the EU was actually connected to the ongoing election/campaign. Similar to existing studies, our results – in Tables 2 and 3 – confirm that the Eurozone crisis indeed bolstered the salience of the EU in the news coverage of the two countries. In this regard, the two countries show very similar levels of EU salience both pre- and post-2009. In fact – as we can see in Table 2 – the proportion of EU articles in both countries, in their respective 2009 elections, was exactly the same (5.2 per cent), a figure that more than doubled in the subsequent election in the case of Portugal (13.8 per cent), and even tripled in Greece (18.4 per cent).

Table 2. Percentage of articles about the EU

	Greece		Portugal
2004	5.9	2002	7.7
2007	4.1	2005	6.2
2009	5.2	2009	5.2
2012	18.4	2011	13.8
2015a	13.9	2015	12.1
2015b	11.9		

The proportion of EU articles that also dealt with the EU in the context of the election and its campaign also increased after 2009 in the two countries (Table 3). Once again, not only were there no clear differences between the two countries but it was also Greece, in the first election of 2015, that registered the highest visibility of

⁵ The data was collected and coded in the context of the MAPLE project, ERC no. 682125. The codebook and more information are available upon request. See: <http://www.maple.ics.ulisboa.pt/about/>.

the EU in the context of the election. In that year, about 47 per cent of the newspaper articles dealing with the EU were also linked to the legislative election. It was also Greece, in 2007, that registered the lowest proportion of EU articles dealing with the election. In the case of Portugal, the prominence of the EU dimension in the legislative elections has been gradually increasing. Nevertheless, if we compare the elections of 2009 and 2011, it is clear that the crisis had an impact on the prominence of the EU in the context of the campaign.

Table 3. Percentage of EU articles that also mentioned the legislative election/campaign

	Greece		Portugal
2004	22.3	2002	22.5
2007	14.9	2005	24.6
2009	31.9	2009	22.9
2012	37.8	2011	34.9
2015a	46.6	2015	36.2
2015b	32.6		

Overall, regarding the salience of the EU, two important aspects were underlined in this analysis of the press. The first one is that, after 2009, the European Union indeed noticeably became a more salient aspect in the news coverage of legislative elections in the two countries. The second aspect is that, when it comes to the levels of EU visibility, the cases of Greece and Portugal were very similar, both before and after the crisis. If we were to look only at the salience of the EU we could say that, for the period analysed, the magnitude of politicization was similar for both countries, with the EU reaching its peak of visibility in the Greek election of 2012. These results are aligned with the existing comparisons between the two countries. However, our results become far more interesting when we look at the variables of EU contestation. When we do so, the similarity between the two countries completely disappears.

When it comes to the salience of conflict (i.e. the proportion of EU articles that deal extensively with conflict/disagreement between actors), two important differences between the two countries, in terms of EU politicization, become clear. The first one is that the salience of conflict in the news coverage of the EU has been considerably higher in Portugal (see Table 4). Overall, while only about one-fourth of the EU-related articles in the Greek press dealt with conflict, in the case of Portugal, the vast majority of the articles focused on the EU (about three-quarters) also showed some sort of conflict between the actors.

While interesting, these substantive differences might simply result from different journalistic styles when reporting political events, and in the attribution of news-value. However, and perhaps more interestingly, the second difference is that only the Portuguese case suggests more clearly – when it comes to the salience of a media frame of conflict – the impact of the crisis in the politicization of the EU. In Portugal, the percentage of EU-related articles dealing extensively with conflict increased from 63.8

per cent in 2009 to 80.7 per cent in 2011. In 2015 this figure increased even more, with 88 per cent of EU news items dealing with conflict. In the case of Greece, on the other hand, the proportion of EU articles dealing with conflict in 2009 (21.6 per cent) was similar to the respective figure in 2012 (26.3 per cent).

Table 4. Percentage of EU articles that also showed or dealt with conflict between different actors

	Greece		Portugal
2004	23.1	2002	75.3
2007	18.8	2005	69.0
2009	21.6	2009	63.8
2012	26.3	2011	80.7
2015a	27.8	2015	88.0
2015b	26.7		

Besides the salience of conflict, there are also substantive differences between Greece and Portugal when it comes to the overall direction or tone of the articles towards the EU. As we can see in Table 5, in the case of Greece, the EU dimension has been predominantly portrayed in a neutral way. This was particularly evident in the first three elections analysed, where more than three-fourths of the EU articles were neutral towards the EU. Conversely, in Portugal, for all periods analysed, the majority of the articles had some sort of EU evaluation, most of the time a balanced one (i.e. referring to both positive and negative aspects of it). However, the results also display the impact of the Eurozone crisis on the articles' tone towards the EU.

Table 5. Overall tone of the EU articles towards the European Union and the European Integration Process

	Greece					Portugal			
	Neutral	Negative	Balanced	Positive		Neutral	Negative	Balanced	Positive
2004	66.2	6.6	10.7	16.4	2002	27.0	11.3	47.3	14.4
2007	72.3	4.3	14.4	9.0	2005	23.8	9.5	46.5	20.2
2009	70.3	11.5	10.3	7.9	2009	37.9	8.6	39.0	14.5
2012	39.9	7.6	36.3	16.2	2011	21.0	25.5	45.2	8.4
2015a	49.8	8.4	26.5	15.3	2015	15.3	25.9	51.9	7.0
2015b	56.1	9.8	23.5	10.6					

The crisis reduced the relative proportion of neutral articles in both countries, confirming that the EU indeed became a more polarizing subject with the crisis. In Portugal, as one would expect, the crisis led to a substantial increase in negativity towards the EU. In the 2011 and 2015 Portuguese elections, about one-fourth of the articles (25.5 and 25.9 per cent) were negative, a result considerably higher than the 8.6 per cent in 2009. Additionally, the relative proportion of positive articles also

decreased from 14.5 per cent to 8.4 per cent in 2011 and 2009, respectively. However, we observed the reverse pattern in the case of Greece. After the 2009 election, not only did the relative proportion of negative articles decrease, but the relative proportion of articles with positive evaluations towards the EU also increased. Our analysis indeed confirmed that the politicization of the EU, in the elections following the Eurozone crisis, differed considerably from the news coverage of the Portuguese and Greek press, with the proportion of conflict and negative EU tone being considerably higher in Portugal.

Table 6. The main dimension of the EU that was discussed in the EU articles

	Greece					Portugal			
	M	C.S.	EU P.	D.P.		M	C.S.	EU P.	D.P.
2004	19.2	11.5	48.3	21.0	2002	3.1	19.9	42.1	34.9
2007	7.1	5.0	66.4	21.5	2005	4.4	17.1	45.2	33.3
2009	8.1	11.2	48.2	32.5	2009	4.0	22.1	43.4	30.5
2012	38.2	3.1	32.9	25.9	2011	3.1	6.6	20.4	70.0
2015a	27.1	4.8	40.5	27.6	2015	5.1	1.7	41.6	51.6
2015b	12.1	2.6	48.1	37.2					

Notes: M. stands for Membership; C.S. stands for Constitutional structures; D.P. stands for Domesticated policies.

Finally, we also found some differences between the two countries' news coverage when it comes to the dimensions of the EU discussed (see Table 6). Overall, compared to Portugal, the Greek media gives more visibility to the membership dimension of the EU topic. The Eurozone crisis seems to have accentuated this difference. In contrast, at least for the three elections that preceded the crisis, the constitutional structure dimension was comparatively more salient in Portugal than Greece. Again, the most noticeable impact of the crisis discussed in the media occurred in Portugal. More concretely, with the crisis, the relative salience of the *domestic policies* dimension increased considerably. This was an anticipated result since the expected higher debate of the 'EU imposed' austerity measures fit this category. More surprising was not finding a similar result in Greece.

Overall, if we focus on the two 'critical elections'⁶ of Greece and Portugal, 2012 and 2011, respectively, our analysis clearly shows that EU politicization manifested in very different ways. On the one hand, in Portugal, the domesticated dimension was prominent in 70 per cent of the articles about the EU. This dimension dealt mostly with the national policy measures imposed by the creditors, or were framed as the inevitable consequences of regional integration. Consequently, this type of debate is more likely to 'externalize', or blur, the responsibilities of the incumbents regarding the crisis. On the other hand, only 26 per cent of the EU-related articles in Greece dealt

⁶ The first election that occurred after each country's bailout.

with domestic policies. In this sense, our results not only confirm that the EU was debated very differently in the two countries, but also that those differences are in line with our main expectation. We proposed in this chapter that not only the magnitude, but also the nature, of EU politicization is important to understand electoral outcomes. While far from definitive, these results seem to offer an important piece of the puzzle regarding the differences explored in this chapter.

Conclusions

The implications of the Eurozone crisis, and subsequent EU politicization, on national politics are indeed a very interesting and puzzling subject. In the debtor countries, the crisis subverted the reasons for political parties to politicize the EU, presenting both a challenge and a paradox for incumbents, as well as the Eurosceptic opposition. The incumbents, on the one hand, *finally got* an incentive to politicize the EU, in order to shift, or blur, their accountability for the financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures. Nonetheless, they also had to maintain a sense of legislative elections' legitimacy, since it would have been unwise for them to admit or suggest that their hands were tied (Mair, 2000, p. 47). On the other hand, for the Eurosceptic opposition, while beneficial for advancing their own political agenda, the politicization of the EU can be a double-edged sword that could potentially benefit the incumbents by wearing down their responsibility for the country's economic and financial situation. Given the unpredictability of different actors' decisions, it is not surprising that, under similar circumstances, the EU is politicized to different degrees and in different ways.

In this chapter, we have explored the question of whether the politicization of the EU could have played a role in the accountability of political systems and, therefore, on the outcome of the Greek and Portuguese elections that occurred after the Eurozone crisis. Indeed, our results strongly support this idea. While we did not find substantive differences when it comes to the salience of the EU in the Greek and Portuguese news coverage, the analysis has shown that the tone and content of articles relating to the EU were very different in those two countries. In fact, after the Eurozone crisis, while the Portuguese news coverage of the EU became considerably more negative, and focused on domestic EU issues; in contrast, the Greek media started reporting on the EU dimension in a more positive light. These somehow surprising results provide some support to the idea that a differentiated politicization of the EU can potentially impact voting behaviour by blurring the responsibility of incumbent and mainstream parties.

Even though our expectations were supported by the data, one should not overestimate the impact that EU politicization had on the electoral results of the two countries. While it is true that the *negative politicization* of the EU in Portugal in 2015 might have blurred the responsibility of the incumbent for the economic situation (Lobo and Pannico, 2020, 2021), several other factors beyond simple economic voting models might have contributed to the different electoral outcomes observed in Greece and Portugal post-Eurozone crisis that are outside the scope of this particular chapter. Some important determinants for the electoral outcomes of the post-bailout elections

concern, for example, the existence of available and clear alternatives, party identification, level of knowledge, as well as multiple socio-economic factors. Furthermore, some authors have also advanced explanations for the observed Portuguese exceptionalism. An important one, advanced by Ferreira da Silva and Mendes (2019), was the fact that the Portuguese economy had already been declining since 2002 (in contrast to solid economic growth in the other bailout countries), which can also have contributed to the resilience of the Portuguese party system.

Furthermore, it is important to stress that our analysis focuses on the news coverage of quality newspapers. While these newspapers remain the most important agenda setters, and therefore are used as a proxy to study the news coverage in different countries, there are nowadays alternative channels where the EU⁷ can be politicized. Furthermore, some differences between the two countries' media systems (e.g. journalistic/editorial norms, levels of parallelism between media and politics) can contribute to some of the differences found in this chapter, particularly in terms of news framing (i.e. salience of conflict) and tone towards the EU. It is difficult to say, and is outside the scope of this chapter, if our findings result from differences in media systems or the strategic politicization of certain political actors. What we can say however, regardless of the reason or the drivers, is that the Greek and Portuguese citizens were exposed to very different politicizations of the EU by traditional news media.

Overall, this exploratory analysis shows us that the manifestations (or characteristics) of EU politicization and the level of contestation (percentage of conflict and tone towards the EU) also varied considerably in the two countries, despite equally high levels of EU salience. Without making any causal claims, the main argument of this chapter, in tandem with what Camatarri and Gallina (chapter 2) found, is that these differences should be taken into consideration in studies of the electoral and political implications of EU politicization. Nonetheless, further research is required to bring more validity to this claim, particularly exploring the different implications of debates about EU membership versus domesticated EU policies. As our analysis suggests, the two might have different implications for the accountability of national political systems.

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⁷ The role of the Internet and Social Media is particularly important in the case of Greece where, according to Eurobarometer data [92 (11/2019)], its citizens, compared to EU averages, have more trust in the Internet/social media, and have considerably less trust in more traditional news sources such as television and the press.

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PART II

**Consequences on public
discourses**

Emotional politicization in times of crisis: the case of the German discourse on Europe during the 2015 migration crisis

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Introduction

In 2015, hundreds of thousands of migrants entered the European Union (EU) during what has come to be known as the *Flüchtlingskrise* (refugee crisis) in Germany. The significant inflow of asylum-seekers constituted a critical challenge to the EU and its Member States (MS), and accordingly elicited diverse and contradictory reactions across different governments and societies. Elite discourses were politicizing concepts such as *humanitarianism*, *security*, *diversity* and *protectionism* in order to legitimize whichever position they adopted (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018). At the European level, coming up with a unified response proved difficult, as no consensus could initially be reached among Member States as to what strategy to implement. Consequently, as it became clear that the inflow of migrants would not subside anytime soon and especially not by itself, the crisis became more and more politicized and, as a leading actor in the situation, so did the EU (see, for example, Börzel and Risse, 2018). The European response to the crisis, or the lack thereof, was also widely discussed in European capitals. As Jabko and Luhman (2019) argue, ultimately it was EU leaders' *fear* of a collapsing Schengen area that created momentum to reform it and tackle the migration crisis. While we agree that emotions such as fear are crucial to understanding politicization processes and policy outcomes, much of the contemporary literature uses them as 'self-evidently important and [...] unproblematized' (Crawford, 2000,

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p. 118). In other words, although studies about politicization have been flourishing for many years, especially in the European context, the role of emotions in politicization processes remains understudied (see Gellwitzki and Houde, 2022 for a notable exception). This is somewhat surprising considering that both emotions (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008; Crawford, 2000; Ross, 2006) and politicization (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019) spike in times of crisis.

As this edited volume focuses on the outcomes of politicization, this chapter emphasizes how the politicization of the EU during the migration crisis elicited emotional responses among the German political elite and these emotions' political consequences. We follow de Wilde's (2011) definition of politicization, and understand it in light of three components: intensification of the debate, the polarization of opinions and public resonance, though only the first two points are empirically investigated in this chapter. We draw inspiration from the recent Emotion turn in IR to argue that emotions are best understood as embodied and 'socially recognized, structured episodes of affectively valenced response[s]' (Hall and Ross, 2015, p. 849), which are integral to understanding the implications of politicization. They are intrinsically linked with the political processes of framing, projection and propagation, as well as identity (Hall and Ross, 2019) and thereby ultimately make room for political manoeuvres, privileging certain policies over others (see Bonnamy and Dupont, chapter 7). In other words, to understand why politicization leads to specific outcomes, it is imperative to investigate the emotions of actors, defined as embodied mental processes and felt experiences that influence thought and behaviour (Hall and Ross, 2015), regarding the politicized issues. Indeed, emotions are present at all stages of politicization processes, as they guide actors' preferences on certain issues (Gellwitzki and Houde, 2022). In that sense, emotions can be seen either as manifestations of politicization – acting as a reinforcing factor – or as results of politicization, since the process itself incites other emotions as well (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008).² For this chapter, we focus on the latter. Using these insights, this chapter analyses the German government's discourse on Europe in the context of migration in 2015. To do so, an emotion discourse analysis is employed to investigate the usage of emotional terms and emotional connotations, as well as emotion metaphors, comparisons and analogies (see Koschut, 2018) in ninety-one speeches of German officials between March 2015 and March 2016.

We find that the politicization of the migration crisis as a European issue has had one significant implication: a mobilization of emotional vocabulary in the government discourse surrounding the EU in the context of the refugee crisis. This is indicative of an invocation of emotions through the process of politicization, and thereby an emotional involvement by German political elites. We furthermore find that as Europe became increasingly politicized, German government discourse used emotionally positive rhetoric about the EU, at times anchored in a shared historical context, while other MS, especially the Visegrád states, are viewed negatively, and an array of negative

² Those two functions of emotions should not be seen as competing relationships, as emotions can be both a vehicle/manifestation and an implication of politicization. While we are focusing on the latter, we are by no means arguing that emotions are only consequences of politicization rather than factors. We simply emphasize in this chapter the function of outcome rather than of driver.

emotions such as anger are expressed towards them. This emotional discourse is thus a clear implication of the EU's politicization as it narrows down the discursive space, which ultimately privileges some policy options while excluding others. In other words, exclusively framing the EU in emotionally favourable terms has been used as a means of justifying the German leaders' decision-making during the crisis, and to stabilize the relational structure of Germany as firmly established within the EU, as well as a way of (re)constructing German identity as explicitly European.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, we review the literature on politicization, as well as the literature on emotions in EU studies; second, we look into previous research on emotions, especially in the field of International Relations, and discuss its application to the study of EU politicization; third, we elaborate on how to operationalize the study of emotions through discourse analysis, before finally discussing our main findings and conclusions.

Politicization, emotions and the European Union in times of crisis

For over a decade now, scholars of European studies have been writing about the politicization of the European Union (EU): what it entails, how it is shaped and why it is a good (or a bad) thing for the future of Europe. Broadly speaking, we understand the politicization of the EU through Hooghe and Marks (2009) as a process bringing an end to 'permissive consensus' or, in other words, as the process by which the European Union became contested and entered the political sphere. To operationalize this definition and apply it to today's context, we rely on the largely accepted definition in European studies elaborated by de Wilde (2011), which postulates that politicization can be understood through the observance of three criteria: salience, polarization, and expansion of actors. Those criteria thus imply that for politicization to occur in the EU, the following elements have to be found: a conflict or a reconsideration of what is politically or morally essential (Hay, 2014), an intensification of the debate, and a resonance among the public (Beaudonnet and Mérand, 2019). As Hutter and his colleagues showed in their large-scale study from 2016, Europe has become politicized through the different events it experienced, whether at the European level around Treaty-related conflicts or at the national level around party competition over European issues. Furthermore, phenomena like the economic crisis or the migration crisis have also been critical moments of politicization during which the EU reached high levels of salience (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019; Statham and Trenz, 2015). Studying the implications of the politicization of the so-called refugee crisis, scholars have for the most part found little trace of further European integration, but rather signs of deadlock and non-compliance among Member States (Biermann et al., 2019; Börzel and Risse, 2018; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019; Schimmelfennig, 2018). Hutter and Kriesi (2019) also found evidence of higher inter-party conflict about Europe in times of conflict but argue that the consequences and implications of European crises need to be studied further.

One of the implications that has been largely neglected in the study of these crises is the variation in emotional discourse, as emotion research in EU studies so far has primarily investigated individual citizens' emotions on voting behaviour and attitudes (see, for example, Atikcan, 2015; Delmotte, 2008; Delmotte et al., 2017; Garry, 2014; Van Ingelgom, 2014; Vasilopoulou and Wagner, 2017). However, as politicization is primarily understood as a collective process, we argue that the focus of analysis needs to be emotions at a collective, i.e. discursive, level. For that reason, in this chapter we focus on government discourse in the German context. Notably, only through the process of representation do emotions gain a collective dimension (Hutchison, 2016; Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014) and these representations are circulated and shared in the process of politicization. Indeed, the migration crisis of 2015 could only become an extremely emotional event through its politicization by European governments, parliaments and the media. As the situation worsened for migrants and host countries alike, the emotional discourse on the EU expanded. On the one hand, it called for more solidarity, and on the other hand, for action (Adler-Nissen et al., 2020). Either way, emotions and emotional discourse constituted a resource for political mobilization.

Emotions in politicization processes

To understand the role of emotions in politicization processes, we draw on the extensive theoretical and methodological literature on emotion research in IR (for overviews, see Clément and Sangar, 2018; Koschut, 2020; Koschut et al., 2017; Van Rythoven and Sucharov, 2020). However, the literature on emotions, in IR as well as in other disciplines, is exceptionally diverse in its ontological, epistemological and methodological tenets due to the extreme complexity and multidimensionality of the concept of emotion. As psychologist Carrol Izard (2010, p. 363) puts it, the phenomenon of emotion 'cannot be defined as a unitary concept' but is nonetheless of 'critical significance to science and society'. In IR, scholars tend to differentiate between three related concepts that all fall within the umbrella category of 'emotion': *affect*, which is a 'range of diffuse and often unconscious embodied experience and processes, including moods, sentiments, and attachments', *emotions*, which are '[s]tructured and socially recognized embodied experiences such as joy, fear, or anger', and *feeling*, which is a 'conscious experience of an emotion' (Van Rythoven and Sucharov, 2020, p. 2). However, the boundaries between these concepts are contested and arguably best understood as a spectrum rather than three distinct categories (Hutchison and Bleiker, 2014; Van Rythoven and Solomon, 2020). Unless specified otherwise, we utilize the term 'emotion' to denominate all above-described embodied experiences.

In general, divergences and diversity in the study of emotions in politics are nothing negative but essentially inevitable, as different approaches emphasize different aspects of emotions. At the same time, a complete and holistic appreciation of the phenomenon is impossible, especially within the constraints of social scientific research. This chapter cannot and does not aim to provide an extensive overview of the study of emotion but rather to illustrate why emotions need to be considered a

crucial implication of politicization processes. This we will do with a short theoretical discussion supported by empirical research.

To begin with, it is necessary to clarify a common misconception of emotions ‘as something that only produces irrationality, that is all consequence and never cause’ (Mercer, 2006, p. 299). Indeed, while there is a controversial debate over how emotions should be understood and studied, there is a consensus across academic fields as diverse as psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology and feminist theory that it is necessary ‘to oppose two stereotypical views of emotions: that they are purely private and irrational phenomena’ (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008, p. 123). Instead, emotions are an indispensable part of human experience without which normal, let alone political, life is impossible (Hall and Ross, 2015). As Van Rythoven and Sucharov (2020, p. 1) put it, ‘the significance of emotions in world politics is pervasive’, and ignoring ‘the embodied dimension of world politics is increasingly seen as an impoverishment of the discipline – an untenable estrangement of scholarship from how international life is experienced and practised by real human beings’. Insights from other disciplines support this view. In a now-seminal study, neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1995, p. xiii), for example, found that while emotions do not ‘make’ decisions for individuals they are essential for rational thinking, as ‘certain aspects of the process of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality. At their best, feelings point us in the proper direction, take us to the appropriate place in a decision-making space, where we may put the instruments of logic to good use’. On a societal level, emotions are a prerequisite for political mobilization (Koschut, 2018; see also Ross, 2006). Therefore, they constitute an essential link between politicization processes and their far-reaching political, social and policy implications.

For its theoretical framework this chapter draws on the work of Andrew Ross (2014), and of Todd Hall and Andrew Ross (2015, 2019). Ross’ (2014) framework combines psychological and neuroscientific insights on emotions and their influence on individuals’ behaviour with micro-sociological findings on interpersonal social relations and group emotions. He conceptualizes emotions as ‘composite phenomena’ (Ross, 2014, p. 17) that he calls ‘circulations of affect’, that is ‘conscious and unconscious exchanges of emotion occurring in and through the process of social interaction’ (Ross, 2014, p. 16) that are the product of biological and social processes. This means that Ross (2014) treats emotions simultaneously as psychological phenomena that reside within individuals and social phenomena that connect individuals with one another in social contexts. In terms of definitions, we follow Hall and Ross’ (2015, p. 848) notion of affective dynamics as the ‘range of ways embodied mental processes and the felt dimensions of human experience influence, thought and behaviour’, and the definition of emotions as ‘socially recognized structured episodes of affectively valenced response, such as joy or fear’. This recognizes the existence and the prevalence of single-emotion categories in politics and does not dismiss their analytical utility, while simultaneously acknowledging that when used in isolation, ‘they lack the analytical leverage needed for the historically layered and culturally diverse social environments involved in global politics’ because emotions in politics are ‘unlikely to involve clear and distinct emotion types over time’ (Ross, 2014, p. 18). The consideration of broader affective dynamics thus allows a more holistic analysis and has mainly methodological implications for

the construction of the codebook, as this enables us to code for negative and positive valence, and then to code for emotion categories in a second round of coding (see below).

Following this conceptualization, the critical question is how emotions are linked to the outcomes of politicization. To reiterate, emotions are *social* phenomena (see, for example, Koschut, 2020; Van Rythoven and Sucharov, 2020), and therefore a clear distinction can be drawn between individuals such as government officials, governmental discourse, citizens and society cannot be drawn. While our focus is on government discourse and, therefore, on individual politicians and their speeches, their emotional articulations do not exist in a vacuum. They will have repercussions and consequences on citizens and society as a whole. However, these consequences of politicization are beyond the scope of this paper. Drawing on Hall and Ross (2015), we argue that politicization processes incite, shape, transmit, and reinforce affective states and emotional responses of political actors on two levels, the individual and the social. On the individual level, salient concerns and emotional dispositions can be activated through politicization processes that problematize sensitive issues. This, in return, may elicit high-intensity responses. On the social level, politicization processes engender emotions via ‘emotional contagion’ (Ross, 2014) through public discourse. Emotional contagion can be facilitated when other actors mirror an actor’s emotional display. This mirroring occurs when ‘people observe emotional expressions in others, [and] their brains initiate the neural and bodily response associated with the observed emotions [...] Through these mirroring processes, we not only receive others’ emotions but emulate and transmit them in turn’ (Hall and Ross, 2015, p. 855). Emotions can also be elicited by the invocation of emotionally laden symbols, emotional narratives, and emotional discourse more broadly (Hall and Ross, 2015). Through these processes, politicization can lead to a synchronized collective emotional experience, ultimately resulting in a narrowing of the discursive space for a manoeuvre.

When an emotional response is widely shared, as through governmental discourse as explored in this chapter, and highly salient politicization can even lead to what Hall and Ross (2015, p. 859) refer to as ‘affective waves’, that is a ‘collective, high-intensity affective response capable of overriding pre-existing goals and concerns’ that, however, are ‘difficult to sustain over time and thus subside without further simulation’. These waves, then, constitute ‘windows of political opportunity’ before they subside. Even after the affective wave died down, however, concerns and dispositions are changed for good, and with it the political imagination and possibilities. When political actors articulate positions on a subject and give speeches on a specific topic, the media reports and circulates them, and thereby the emotional expressions are shared with the broader population. In other words, through politicization processes, affective dynamics and concrete emotions are shared with and by the wider population, rendering politicization a form of emotional echo chamber that generates and reinforces collective affective experiences across society.

Analysing emotions in discourse

Studying the emotional side of politicization processes can take many different forms, for instance discourse and elite communication (see Gheyle, chapter 11). We draw on a constructivist view that focuses on the role of language and discourse. As Solomon (2017) notes, language is productive and actively constructs both social relations and identities, as well as the affective orientations and emotional attachments associated with them. Solomon further argues that the work of production is not merely reducible to the actual linguistic utterance, as there is likely ‘an affective component that accounts for how some instances of language become efficacious and some do not’ as ‘[I]anguage and emotions blend together to do the political work of social production’ (Solomon, 2017, p. 497). Sasley (2011, p. 472) goes a step further and argues that ‘language devoid of emotions is literally meaningless’, which in reverse means that language is *always* emotional, rendering discourse a perfect vehicle to analyse social emotions. Moreover, as Hall (2015) points out, emotional language can convey messages about the perceived salience of an issue to a speaker, as well as the speaker’s intention. From this perspective, the study of the implications of EU politicization can at most generate an inchoate understanding of the embodied experiences of actors involved in politicization processes if emotions are not taken into account.

The locus of this chapter’s analysis is verbal representations of emotions in government discourse, the ‘process by which individual emotions acquire a collective dimension’ (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008, p. 130) and thereby shape social and political responses towards the migration crisis. The analysis of discourse has been a widely used method in the study of emotions in IR (Koschut, 2020), as emotions significantly influence and delineate political discourse and practices. Accordingly, we treat politicians’ speeches as evidence of the speakers’ emotional state (Hall, 2017). Whether an emotion is genuine or not does not matter in this context, as through the process of mirroring, even insincere emotions can elicit emotions both in the speaker himself and the audience. As Bleiker and Hutchison (2008, p. 130) put it, ‘representations matter and [...] they do so in a highly politicised manner’.

We follow Koschut’s (2017, 2018, 2020) operationalization of emotional discourse analysis (EDA) and analyse three specific representations of emotions (emotion terms, emotional connotations, and emotion metaphors, comparisons, and analogies) to explore politicization’s implications on the emotional vocabulary of German elites during the migration crisis, and the concomitant structuring of discursive space. First, emotion terms refer to explicit mentions of feeling, whether they be nouns, adjectives, adverbs, or verbs. Second, we look at emotional connotations, or connotations that contain

context-invariant value judgment or opinion that conveys the emotional attitude of the speaker. Some words such as genocide, terrorist, rogue state, outlaw, and massacre are affectively ‘loaded’ in the sense that their semantic utterance is linked to emotions such as anger, contempt, or hate [whilst] emotional connotations such as peaceful, freedom fighter, hero, honest broker, and responsible member of the international community indicate emotions such as pride, joy, or sympathy. (Koschut, 2017, p. 483)

Emotional connotations can also be intensified by verbal means. Third, we look into figures of speech like metaphors, analogies and comparisons that use symbolic images to convey emotions. For instance, in the context of the migration crisis, any mentions of a 'wave of refugees' or similar expressions should be considered as communicating emotions. Finally, we look into the notion of 'othering', and how speakers talk about 'the other' discloses emotions. In that sense, we distinguish between emotions directed towards the subject, the other (Hutchison, 2016) and the object.

This structure of subject-other-object is derived from the 'triangle of mediation' (Bauer and Gaskell, 1999), which argues that the production of meaning of an object is always contextual. In the case of this chapter, the object was the EU, the subject of knowing the government officials. The Other was not a preconceived coding category but who/what was discussed by the government officials while talking about the EU. As Bauer and Gaskell (1999, p. 170) point out, '[m]eaning is not an individual or private affair, but always implies the 'other', concrete or imagined'. In other words, talking about an object always entails talking about an Other in the context of which the communicative process makes sense. For the coding itself, we translated the subject-Other-object scheme into the software NVivo. In a first round of coding, we looked for the aforementioned tropes in the discourse before coding them more specifically in a second round for affective attachments but also for the object/self/other dimensions in order to know towards what the affect is directed. As mentioned before, emotions are most visible in times of crisis. In that sense, the migration crisis constitutes a good context for analysing emotional politicization. Due to its utmost importance in the management of the 'crisis', the consequences it had on its policies and its specific historical connection to both migration and European integration, Germany represents an excellent case study.

Politicization, Germany, and the migration crisis of 2015

In April 2015, a tragic boat accident in which about 800 migrants drowned in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea foreshadowed what would later be known as the European migration crisis, or *Flüchtlingskrise* in German. The media echo, and the political repercussions across the EU, were immense and arguably constituted the first spike in the politicization of the crisis as a European issue. Using a dataset composed of 91 speeches of German officials between March 2015 and March 2016, we thus analyse the government's emotional response towards Europe in the context of the politicization of the European migration crisis.

On 22 April, the German Bundestag initiated a debate on the '*Flüchtlingskatastrophe im Mittelmeer*', during which the situation had not yet been perceived as a crisis, and the rhetoric predominantly revolved around empathy and help for migrants. One emotionally significant aspect here is that both German government officials and media throughout the crisis predominantly invoked the term '*Flüchtling*' (refugee) rather than '*Migrant*' (migrant) or '*Asylsuchende*' (asylum seekers). This move has several implications, as the notion of refugees invokes empathy, and helping them

is perceived as a moral duty. Moreover, after WWII, millions of Germans had been refugees themselves, rendering this an emotionally significant and sensitive topic anchored in collective memory. As such, it is socially unacceptable to express negative feelings towards refugees, and even those who do, such as the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), only speak negatively about migrants, immigrants, or asylum seekers, while mainly avoiding the term ‘refugee’ altogether (see, for example, the AfD election manifesto for the national election of 2017).

The debate furthermore illustrates that from the beginning, the migration crisis was understood as a European issue, and that the idea of Europe is emotionally significant in German politics. In the statements made in support of refugees, there are already discernible traces of what Koschut (2014) calls an ‘emotional community’, like remorse, grief, sorrow, and other negative emotions are expressed towards the catastrophe, and discursively both were linked to a common European identity shared with the other EU Member States. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (2015b), for instance, said about the incident that ‘[t]he truth is that [the boat catastrophe] does not only shake us as fellow human beings – thank God that too – but it has to shake us in a very special way as Europeans [...] the tragedy that we are talking about today not only affects the refugees, it also affects Europe.’³ Accordingly, he argued that it is the EU’s ‘humanitarian responsibility’ to rescue ‘humans from certain death’. Interior Minister Thomas De Maizière (2015) claimed along a similar line that ‘we also have a shared responsibility in Europe for the refugees who are being saved’, and that the EU needs to handle the situation in a joint solidarity effort ‘in Europe and for Europe’. Over the following months, the issue became emotionally less salient in government discourse until September, when the Schengen agreement was temporarily suspended, and an unprecedented number of migrants entered Germany.

As demonstrated by an abundance of scholarship, migration as a European issue – as well as the EU more generally – was extremely politicized during this period (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019). The EU became more salient among German government members and political elites, as they called for a European response to the crisis rather than a national one. Europe was exclusively framed in positive and inclusive terms in this context, indicating a discursive construction of Europe as a significant aspect of German identity. As Chancellor Angela Merkel (2015g) put it, ‘human dignity, the rule of law, tolerance and solidarity unite us in Europe not only culturally. They are a founding idea; they are an integral part of the [European] treaties and the basis for joint action of the European Union. The invocation of shared European identity in the form of culture and values, as well as responsibility, is a recurring theme in the discourse epitomized by the recurrent referencing of community. Angela Merkel, notably, referred to Europe as a ‘*Wertegemeinschaft*’ (community of values) (see, for example, Merkel, 2015a, 2015e, 2015f, 2015h) but also as ‘*Rechtsgemeinschaft*’ (community of law) (Merkel, 2015d, 2015g); ‘*Verantwortungsgemeinschaft*’ (community of responsibility) (Merkel, 2015a, 2015b; see also Vice-Chancellor and Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy Gabriel, 2015) and ‘*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*’

³ All translations are done by the authors.

(community of destiny) (Merkel, 2015d). As demonstrated by Koschut (2014), the term community is endowed with positive emotional connotations, implying togetherness and amity. The German government constantly (re)constructed German identity as firmly entrenched within a unified Europe, and as demonstrated by Sasley (2011) and Mercer (2014), identities are emotionally charged and significant. As emotions are reinforced through politicization, this robust positive emotional construction of the EU significantly narrows the discursive space for political manoeuvres concerning the migration crisis.

This process is simultaneously complemented with what Koschut (2017, 2018) refers to as ‘emotional othering’, as the European ‘community’ is positioned in stark contrast to threatening, thus anxiety- and fear-inducing challenges: ‘others’. These ‘others’ included terrorists, the so-called Islamic State, the ‘bad migrant’ and other EU Member States, but *never* the EU itself. Those ‘othered’ Member States were essentially discursively deprived of their ‘Europeanness’, accused of not sharing European values, norms and rules, and therefore identity. While calling for a ‘fair sharing’ of the ‘burden’ of the migration crisis, Sigmar Gabriel, for instance, claimed that ‘Europe is not endangered by Greece, but by the growing national selfishness of its Member States’ (Gabriel, 2015). He also called for MS to cooperate more in the migration crisis, pointing out that the EU is not merely an economic union and explicitly emphasizing that the issue is not the EU, specifically Jean-Claude Juncker, but some MS (Gabriel, 2015). Similarly, Angela Merkel (Merkel, 2015c) underlined the positive role that Jean-Claude Juncker played in the negotiations for a European response to the crisis. Steinmeier (2015b) got more explicit, pointing out that

[i]t is not Brussels that is spitting in our soup⁴ at the moment. Quite the contrary. When we have expectations towards European asylum and migration policies, we get support from Brussels. It is individual Member States that do not allow laws or legal requirements to be enacted in Brussels that would actually help us to get the refugee numbers down significantly.

‘Spitting in the soup’ is a relatively common German idiom; in the context of the speech of a government official it can be interpreted as a strong expression of contempt directed towards EU MS that undermine shared, emotionally significant European values. In a different speech, Steinmeier (2015a) repeated his critique with the same emotional tone:

[i]t cannot be that not even a handful of countries are currently accepting all refugees in Europe! [...] The European solidarity which has suffered so much in the financial crisis cannot be limited to financial aid! European solidarity includes the fair distribution of burdens across all Member States. That must not prompt us to complain about Brussels. It is not Brussels that stands in our way. On the contrary! President Juncker showed great courage when he presented his proposal for a fair distribution system against the resistance of many Member States. The

⁴ German idiom similar to ‘rain on one’s parade’ in English.

problem lies in the European capitals, where people like to call for solidarity when European funds are distributed but duck away when the sea gets a little rough.

This quote exemplifies the government's discourse surrounding the migration crisis and is full of emotion directed towards different entities. First, there are clear signs of indignation towards EU Member States that do not comply with European values. This is aggravated by the perceived lack of solidarity of other MS that have, from Steinmeier's point of view, been demonstrated by Germany. Simultaneously, the EU, as an emotionally salient and integral part of modern German identity, cannot be and is not criticized. Instead, anger is expressed towards the perceived lack of solidarity of other MS, and thereby their ultimately un-European behaviour. Thus, at the same time, these techniques of emotional othering increased the salience of the emotional attachments to European identity while also narrowing down discursive space and possible policy options. Unlike, for example, in Hungary and Greece (Clements et al., 2014; Csehi and Zgut, 2021) in German government discourse, there was no place to contest the EU itself due to the emotional involvement partially engendered through the process of its politicization.

However, politicization does not only bind political subjects more tightly to their identities but also constitutes the basis for political mobilization. There is a clear tendency in government discourse to link the migration crisis with the flight and expulsion of German speakers during and after WWII. This is, quite obviously, a highly emotional topic, and this discursive link taps on the emotional potential of this past experience and social memory (for a detailed account, see Campbell, 2020; Pace and Bilgic, 2019). In combination with the self-constructed understanding of Germany as a European country, this discursive link was used to formulate compelling moral imperatives, which significantly narrowed possible public policy responses to the migration crisis. Angela Merkel's speeches illustrate this point brilliantly when she argued that

[t]he fates that millions of Germans have suffered due to flight and displacement are also a reminder and a mandate for us today to ensure that we and future generations are spared such suffering. The best answer to the challenge of securing peace, freedom, and stability is and remains European unification. (Merkel, 2015b)

The German chancellor thereby linked positive emotional concepts such as peace and freedom with the idea of a unified Europe while contrasting it with fear and anxiety, inducing social memories that are highly salient to German identity (see, for example, Banchoff, 1999; Dingott Alkopher, 2018). This form of politicization emotionalizes the idea of Europe by merging it with concepts that are associated with positive emotions. Hence, the EU gets emotionally more significant. At the same time, the alternative, a Europe without a union, is constructed as threatening, undesirable and even fear-inducing, as without the EU, war and suffering might come back to the continent. Once again, this narrows the room for political manoeuvre. It is noteworthy that this is a recurring theme in government discourse, and one that is often directly linked to policy proposals. In a different speech, Merkel stated that

[f]inding a viable answer to the refugee movements is and remains a European and, of course, global task. Because since the Second World War there have never been so many refugees as now. I know that the way to accomplish this task is arduous. But it is a question of humanitarianism, a question of economic reason, and a question of the future of Europe – a Europe whose values and interests have to assert themselves in global competition. Our answer can only be a pan-European answer. We are working on this with all our strength (Merkel, 2016).

Once again, Merkel referred to WWII in her appeal to the audience, invoking a highly emotional topic as she justified the need for Europe. By linking a European answer to the refugee crisis with a common European future, she reinforced the idea of a European identity, using the pronoun ‘we’ and insisting on the moral imperative stemming from a common response to the situation.

Concluding remarks

Politicization and political performances incite emotion across political elites and societies (Gellwitzki and Houde, 2022; Hall and Ross, 2015, 2019; Ross, 2014). Our case study empirically demonstrates the mobilization of emotional vocabulary by the German government as an outcome of EU politicization. Indeed, if the European Union had not been politicized, emotions towards it would not have been so strong. This vocabulary reveals government officials’ underlying affective and emotional attachments to the EU. The process of emotional contagion makes it tenable to assume that the government discourse, at the very least, engendered emotional reactions in the audience whereby, considering media coverage, opinion polls and studies by think tanks, a considerable part of the German population also shared the government’s sentiments. However, future research is needed to investigate the exact emotional consequences of EU politicization for German society, as this lies outside the scope of this chapter. Nevertheless, it is possible to speak of an ‘affective wave’ within the German government that opened a unique ‘window of opportunity’ (Hall and Ross, 2015) through which Germany’s government adopted a so-called ‘open door policy’ (Pinkerton, 2019) and made the unprecedented decision to temporarily suspend the Schengen agreement.

Times of crisis reveal emotional attachments to identities (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2008). The positive emotions towards the European Union, as well as calls for a common response to the crisis, and the reiteration of shared European values and a shared future mark a definite tendency among German officials to situate their country’s identity as part of the EU. In fact, the response to the *Flüchtlingskrise* can be seen as a reinforcement and reification of Germany’s European identity and its positive emotional attachments to the EU. This reinforcement had political implications, significantly narrowing the discursive space and political imagination within which actors could navigate, as the government justified moral imperatives with positive claims about the EU, anchored in emotionally compelling historical subjects. These extremely positive emotions towards the EU precluded the possibility of criticizing the polity, thereby transferring

any negative emotions such as anger towards other MS, specifically the Visegrád states, which were accused of undermining European identity. This, of course, might change in the future, as emotions and identities are both constantly evolving processes rather than static entities. In any case, one of the consequences of the politicization of the EU during the migration crisis was that emotions became salient in discourse. However, they also, in turn, had further implications, serving to justify some government decisions, but also leading to a (re)construction of the German identity.

However, emotions did more than structure the room for political manoeuvre. They led to a ‘synchronization’ of government officials’ emotions towards the EU and towards other MS. Paradoxically, this means that EU politicization during the Migration Crisis led to an increased salience *within* the government. In contrast, it simultaneously led to a depolarization of opinion on the EU *within* the same government, while views critical of the EU or its policies were strongly antagonized. Importantly, this chapter only observed such a de-polarizing effect of emotions in government discourse. It is up to future research to determine whether there was a similar effect in other arenas of politicization at the time and, more broadly, whether depolarization or de-politicization themselves are general outcomes of politicization or rather context-specific. Either way, we argue that politicization’s emotionalization of the EU has manifold consequences on both society and politics, which renders it a significant area for future research.

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Ever more politicized and Europeanized? Public debates over European integration in France and Germany

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Introduction

The European integration process has left its mark on the public spheres, thereby enhancing both the Europeanization and the politicization of national public spheres. Scholars have shown that national political parties, especially challenger parties from the right, drive domestic politicization, resulting in highly contentious public debates over the future course of European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). The French and Dutch referenda on the European Constitution in 2005 illustrate the dynamics at play. A European integration step became highly salient within national politics. It massively polarized political actors as debates became publicly visible through mass media coverage (Statham and Trenz, 2013). Recently, the Euro and the Schengen crisis reinforced conflict dynamics all over Europe, thereby complementing politicization over traditional European integration steps such as treaty reforms and enlargement rounds (Hutter et al., 2016; Hutter and Schäfer, 2021). Subsequently, this chapter examines the domestic politicization of public debates over European integration steps, measured by the salience of European issues, the polarization of national political actors over European issues and the expansion of national political actors (de Wilde, 2011; Hutter et al., 2016).

In the wake of European integration, domestic public spheres also transformed via de-nationalization. Increasing transnational communication between actors of

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different member states on the one hand (horizontal Europeanization), and between national-level and EU-level actors on the other hand (vertical Europeanization), has led to what scholars conceptualize as the Europeanization of public spheres (Benert and Pfetsch, 2020; Koopmans and Erbe, 2004). Although both phenomena – i.e., politicization and Europeanization – transform national public spheres, research on the two has evolved somewhat separately. Koopmans highlights that, '[d]espite numerous studies about the Europeanization of public spheres that have appeared in recent years, we still lack a reliable answer to the question of the shape that the politicization of European affairs is taking' (Koopmans, 2015, p. 54). Thus, a systematic study of the consequences of domestic politicization for the Europeanization of public spheres seems necessary. Taking up Koopmans' call, I examine in this chapter under what conditions domestic politicization around an integration step enhances the Europeanization of public spheres.

I argue that the enhanced Europeanization of political actors may under specific conditions result from high levels of domestic politicization around an integration step. While European integration issues are primarily politicized at the domestic level, instances of high domestic politicization can spill over to other European member states, thereby causing horizontal Europeanization. Ultimately, increased domestic politicization may unleash Europeanized politicization dynamics by revealing contentiousness across domestic, foreign European and EU-level actors alike. The Schengen crisis, but particularly the Euro crisis, have triggered such a close politicization-Europeanization nexus. In Europe's latest crises, domestic politicization has fed back into the European Union (EU) politics that it originated from.

This chapter focuses on developments in France and Germany. A study of the two countries is particularly relevant because they are traditionally considered as the main driving forces of European integration. The two countries also have different potential to increase politicization and Europeanization. Although many leading French politicians have advocated the European project, France has held two contentious referenda splitting political parties over European integration. Germany's political parties are considered pro-European across party lines, however, the German government has become hesitant towards increasing integration in recent years (Grande and Kriesi, 2015; Jachtenfuchs, 2002). Consequently, taking a closer look at politicization and Europeanization dynamics within and across France and Germany helps us better understand how politicization shapes Europeanized public debates.

Empirically, the analysis of politicization and Europeanization is based on a relational core sentence analysis (CSA) using media articles from two quality newspapers in France and Germany. An original data collection effort has been undertaken on the Schengen crisis to complement the existing 'poldem-debate_eu' data set (Grande et al., 2020; Hutter et al., 2016) on issues of European integration across multiple integration steps, from the first enlargement round to the Euro crisis. The comprehensive dataset covers public debates from the 1970s until 2016, allowing an assessment of the short- and long-term relationship between politicization and Europeanization.

The chapter is structured as follows: The first section sketches an understanding of domestic politicization around European integration steps. The second section elaborates the nature of Europeanization to highlight how one can understand the potential relationship between politicization and Europeanization. The third section introduces the spillover effects of domestic politicization and horizontal Europeanization across France and Germany, before emphasizing how the Euro and the Schengen crisis may have enhanced Europeanized politicization dynamics in the fourth section. Section five briefly introduces the data and methods before presenting the empirical results. The chapter concludes with a discussion that includes the limitations of this study and directions for future research.

Theorizing the (domestic) politicization of European integration steps

The process of European integration follows a path of widening by integrating new member states, and of deepening by expanding European institutions' competencies across policy areas. Treaty reforms and enlargement rounds traditionally characterize European integration, but recently, European crises complement the integration process. Since the 1970s, the level and scope of European integration have increased substantially. Transferring authority from the national to the European level strains nation states, and directly relates to a loss of sovereignty (de Wilde and Zürn, 2012). The allocation of power has shifted from national majoritarian institutions, particularly national parliaments, to European non-majoritarian institutions such as the European Court of Justice or the European Council (Zürn, 2019). Moreover, the EU's twenty-seven members represent a wide array of political attitudes, polities and judicial systems. At first, technocratic decision-making favoured de-politicization at the domestic level. Until the 1990s, citizens' attitudes towards the EU were characterized as a 'permissive consensus' (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970, pp. 249–51). However, populist right-wing parties began mobilizing against growing external threats from European integration. Foregrounding identity issues, they successfully re-politicized multiple party systems across Europe, leading to a 'constraining dissensus' (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Moreover, they moved Europe from an elitist bubble towards domestic public spheres, increased polarization and a new cleavage that turned integrationists and demarcationists into opponents (Börzel and Risse, 2009; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Kriesi et al., 2008). Le Corre Juratic and colleagues (chapter 1) show in this volume how party-driven politicization indeed affects public attitudes towards European integration.

Subsequently, I employ a threefold concept of this domesticated politicization. Most important is the *salience* of European issues – the attention they garner in public debates. Second, *polarization*, or the degree of conflict over issues, is necessary for politicization. Lastly, polarization often connects with a wide range of political actors that advocate various opinions. The third pillar of politicization, *actor expansion*, thus accounts for the range of national actors (de Wilde, 2011; Grande and Hutter, 2016a).

This operationalization allows domestic politicization to be measured in longitudinal perspective, tracing European integration steps, including treaty reforms, enlargement rounds and Europe's crises. Previous studies reveal that the level of politicization depends on the country and on the integration step (de Wilde and Zürn, 2012; Hutter et al., 2016). For example, debates about the European Constitution at the beginning of the 2000s were highly politicized in France and the Netherlands in the wake of the national referenda. However, this has been less consequential for other European member states (Statham and Trenz, 2013).

Europeanized public spheres: transnational public debates in the absence of politicization?

Public debates about European integration also take place beyond the national realm. Enhanced European integration resulted in the Europeanization of public spheres via the multiplication of transnational communication flows. Early on, Karl W. Deutsch diagnosed the increasing exchange of persons, goods and communication within Europe as eventually creating a close network of transnational relations (Deutsch, 1969, pp. 46–58). Those various forms of cross-border relations favoured the creation of 'transnational social spaces' (my translation) (i.e. Europeanized public spheres) (Kaelble et al., 2002b, p. 9). Public spheres mediate between political system actors and the general public; mass media take up the issues and amplify them (Trenz, 2005, p. 99).

In this vein, 'Europeanization is conceived of as a gradual, relational and multidimensional process of transnational communication flows across Europe. [It] assess[es] the density of communication within nations (indicating a national scope) in comparison to communications that transcend national borders (thus denoting a transnational scope)' (Pfetsch and Heft, 2015, p. 34). Consequently, more transnational communication compared to domestic communication means a higher degree of Europeanization. Next to transnational communication, the Europeanization of national public spheres comprises debating European issues and framing them from a European perspective (Benert and Pfetsch, 2020; Gerhards, 1993). Concerning the types of political actors engaged in those debates, scholars differentiate between horizontal Europeanization (foreign actors appearing from other European member states within the national public sphere) and vertical Europeanization (EU-level actors appearing within national public spheres) (Koopmans, 2015). This chapter systematically compares the role of domestic and European actors (foreign European and EU-level actors) in debates over European issues, differentiating between the Europeanization of actors in general and the horizontal Europeanization between France and Germany in particular.

So far, the Europeanization of public spheres has been widely studied in theoretical terms (see Benert and Pfetsch, 2020; Eigmüller and Mau, 2010b), as well as in empirical terms (see Bach, 2000; Gerhards, 1993; Kaelble et al., 2002a; Risse, 2010, 2015; Trenz, 2005). However, a systematic linkage to politicization has not yet been codified in academic discussion. Generally, public debates over European issues may

involve conflict or cooperation and comprehension. Conflict enhances the resonance and visibility of political issues, and may trigger responses from a broad range of actors (Eigmüller and Mau, 2010a; Trenz, 2005, pp. 71–90). Subsequently, conflict can emerge between and among domestic, foreign European and EU-level actors alike, thereby giving rise to various national and European conflict constellations. As follows, those public debates that are politicized *and* Europeanized in terms of the contesting actors are labelled as ‘Europeanized politicization’ throughout the chapter.

However, numerous studies have shown that politicization is typically rooted within the national realm and driven by national political parties. Right-wing challenger parties in particular have successfully pursued political mobilization against European integration at the national level by foregrounding cultural issues of identity. Moreover, research on politicization has revealed conflicts within and across mainstream parties, which add to the domestic politicization over European integration (Hoeglinger, 2016; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Hutter et al., 2016; Zürn, 2019). Of course, European actors (foreign European and EU-level actors) are relevant to domestic public spheres, as research on Europeanization has shown (Börzel and Risse, 2009; Koopmans et al., 2010; Risse, 2015). During politicization, however, national political parties crowd out European actors. In an encompassing study on politicization in Europe, Grande and Hutter (2016b) even report a strong negative correlation between vertical and horizontal Europeanization and politicization. They claim that a higher level of politicization yields a lower level of Europeanization.

With these considerations, I formulate my first hypothesis:

H1: The more debates over European integration are politicized, the less Europeanized they are.

I expect that domestic actors are predominant in politicized public debates over European integration steps within the national public sphere, whereas the share of foreign European and EU-level actors is higher in less contentious debates. I address this puzzle by systematically investigating the link between politicization and Europeanization from a longitudinal perspective in the context of France and Germany – the couple that takes centre stage in the European integration process.

Transnational spillover effects between domestic politicization and horizontal Europeanization

Lately, scholarly voices for an integrated perspective linking European and domestic politicization dynamics have grown louder. Zürn (2019) assumes politicization and contestation unfold at all political levels, from the domestic to the European and international level. To address this theoretical assumption empirically, it is crucial to investigate instances of politicization which lead domestic politicization back to the European level. Therefore, I want to clarify whether politicization can Europeanize public debates.

A case study by Statham and Trenz (2013) shows signs of increasing transnational communication flows during high politicization. The analysis of public debates about the European Constitution in France, Germany and the United Kingdom between 2000 and 2005 reveals strong domestic politicization over European integration in France and substantial contestation among French political actors within the British and German public spheres. Another study confirms that France and Germany account for the highest share of foreign European actors in public debates between 1990 and 2002. Next to the United Kingdom, Germany and especially France have very Europeanized public spheres (Koopmans et al., 2010). Moreover, the Franco-German axis is particularly relevant for the European debate, as Adam (2007, pp. 192–4) shows for politicized public debates about the European Constitution. Accordingly, the debates favoured cross-border communication between French and German political actors. Subsequently, highly politicized European integration steps within national public spheres are likely to *transnationalize* and enhance horizontal Europeanization among French and German political actors.

My second hypothesis about transnational Europeanization dynamics is as follows:

H2: Transnational spillover effects link domestic politicization over European integration in one member state with horizontal Europeanization in another member state.

Subsequently, I expect highly politicized public debates over European integration steps among domestic actors within the French public sphere to increase the share of French political actors in the German public sphere. Similarly, the share of German political actors within the French public sphere will increase during highly politicized domestic debates about European integration steps in Germany.

Europeanized politicization as the ultimate alignment of politicization and Europeanization?

A natural next step is asking whether domestic politicization could enhance the politicization of European-issue debates across domestic, foreign European and EU-level actors alike, thus favouring Europeanized politicization. From the perspective of public spheres, conflict is a central mechanism structuring Europeanized national public spheres. Subsequently, politicization allows a fragmented social bubble of opinions to resonate in the public sphere of communication and mutual observation (Trenz, 2005, pp. 71–80).

To address the above question, it helps to focus on the recent European crises. Arguably, crises often mark a critical juncture and cause a ‘return of politics’ (van Middelaar, 2016). The Euro and Schengen crises are exemplary events. Scholars describe the two crises as highly politicized European integration events at the domestic level (Börzel and Risse, 2018; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2018; Hooghe and Marks, 2018). Gellwitzki and Houde (chapter 4), for example, demonstrate in the preceding chapter of this volume that public debates over the Schengen crisis are emotionally charged in

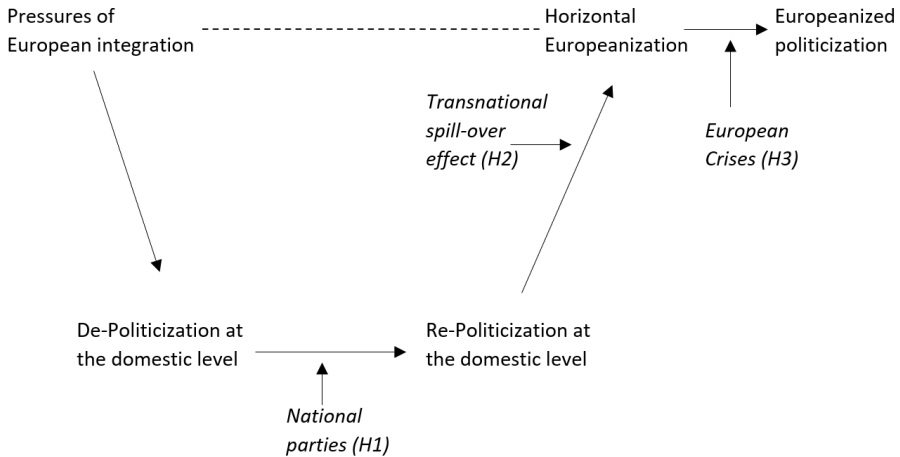
Germany as a response to the increased politicization of the EU. Following Genschel and Jachtenfuchs (2018), the politicization of related public debates mainly results from integrating core state powers, pushing sovereignty and solidarity issues via burden sharing.

In line with Heft (2017), I also argue that these two crises allow the politicization of foreign European, EU-level and domestic actors. Heft provides empirical evidence for Germany and Spain during the Greek and the Euro crisis. Accordingly, the media debates in Germany equally involve domestic and European actors, but European actors clearly dominate in the Spanish debate. She continues, '[it] is Europeanised and shaped by national orientations at the same time. The transnational politicization of European politics fosters the simultaneous visibility of issues of common concern across national borders' (Heft, 2017, p. 49). Schild (2013) further suggests that a similar effect for France and Germany is possible. Accordingly, the main 'creditor' countries Germany and France had the same political goal of tightening the Euro area, including Greece. However, strong conceptual differences in how to achieve that goal split the two countries between their respective supporters. This probably stimulated increased politicization dynamics between France and Germany and across Europe. Hutter and Kriesi (2019, p. 997) claim, 'two types of conflict [...] fed into each other – intergovernmental conflicts at the European and inter-party conflicts at the national level'. Subsequently, the two crises could enhance mutually reinforcing politicization dynamics at multiple levels (Zürn, 2019), which should ultimately be reflected in contestation between domestic, foreign European and EU-level actors in the two countries under scrutiny in this chapter. Thus, the third, more abstractly formulated, hypothesis assumes:

H3: The Euro crisis and the Schengen crisis have triggered domestic and Europeanized politicization over European integration.

Subsequently, I expect more or less equal shares of domestic, foreign European and EU-level actors, and high levels of overall politicization across all actors in public debates over European integration during the crisis period in France and Germany.

To sum up, all theoretical considerations, including the three hypotheses, are illustrated in Figure 1, which explains the dynamic relationship between the politicization and Europeanization analysed throughout this chapter. The upper level denotes the European level, and the lower level shows the process at the national level.

Figure 1. Visualization of the relationship between politicization and Europeanization

Data and methods

The empirical analysis uses the dataset ‘poldem-debate_eu’ (Grande et al., 2020), which covers media debates in France and Germany concerning European integration steps between the 1970s and 2010, including the Euro crisis. I complemented the original dataset by collecting data on the Schengen crisis of 2015 and 2016. According to theoretical considerations, the entire data set can be divided into five phases of European integration. The first phase comprises the northern and the two southern enlargements and the Single European Act; the second phase is the Maastricht Treaty debate; the third phase includes debates about the EFTA and the two Eastern enlargements, the Amsterdam and Nice Treaty debates; the fourth phase comprises the Turkish accession debate, the Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty debates; and the fifth phase comprises the Euro and the Schengen crises (see Hutter et al., 2016 for further explanation).

France and Germany were selected for the empirical study due to their specific relevance to the European integration process. Moreover, the two leading countries will likely maintain a close relationship and have a key role within the EU. The data set uses a relational content analysis of major newspapers in France and Germany, *Le Monde* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, respectively. Core sentences from each newspaper article were identified and coded regarding European integration. The subject (political actor), object (issue) and direction of the statement (opinion) are the core categories.

To update the existing dataset, articles on the Schengen crisis were selected via press search engines and a search string adapted for each language. For the Schengen crisis, we coded every fifth newspaper article in the German press and every third article in the French press over a period of thirteen months between April 2015 and May 2016. The exact time period is empirically chosen, and it defines the beginning of

European action to solve the so-called refugee crisis and the last institutional decision regarding the crisis by the EU.

To compare the data on the Schengen crisis with the data on European integration steps, I emphasized peak periods of high salience, which are treated as the most critical dates. The Schengen crisis' politicization index is then calculated using the mean of the peak periods and the average value of politicization of the entire crisis period. An equivalent measurement applies to the Euro crisis. Overall, the longitudinal politicization index is calculated via the product of the salience and the sum of polarization and actor expansion² for each European integration step or European crisis (Grande and Hutter, 2016a). The domestic politicization index only comprises national political actors. The Europeanization index is the share of all statements by European actors, defined as EU institutions (vertical Europeanization) or foreign political actors from other European member states (horizontal Europeanization), relative to all statements.³ Both indices are calculated based on actor-actor and actor-issue⁴ core sentences by political actors in the selected French and German newspapers. They can take on values between zero and one.

The dynamic interplay of politicization and Europeanization over the course of European integration

In the following, I empirically address the relationship between domestic politicization and Europeanization. I first present a general trend over time for France and Germany. Then, I focus on horizontal Europeanization dynamics across the two countries before finally explaining Europeanized politicization dynamics during the Euro and the Schengen crisis.

Politicization crowding out Europeanization across European integration steps

Table 1 provides initial insight into the distribution of domestic politicization and Europeanization in France and Germany. Broadly speaking, it shows that French public debates over European integration steps are substantially more politicized among domestic actors than are German debates. Subsequently, European integration issues trigger an average of 46 percent domestic politicization, with all steps taken together, compared to 27 percent in Germany. Interestingly, public debates over European integration steps are Europeanized in both countries to nearly the same extent. In general, European actors substantially affect public debates over European

² Politicization index = salience * (polarization + actor expansion); for detailed information on the measurement, see Hutter, Grande and Kriesi (2016).

³ Europeanization index = European actors' statements / all statements.

⁴ To calculate the polarization index as part of the politicization index only actor-issue sentences were used because it shows the polarization of political actors relative to the issue.

integration steps. Political actors from other European member states make up about two-thirds of all European actors in the debates, as indicated by the values of horizontal Europeanization.

Table 1. Averages of domestic politicization and Europeanization in France and Germany

	France	Germany	Total
Domestic politicization	0.46	0.27	0.36
Europeanization	0.62	0.65	0.64
Horizontal Europeanization	0.38	0.40	0.39
Vertical Europeanization	0.24	0.26	0.25

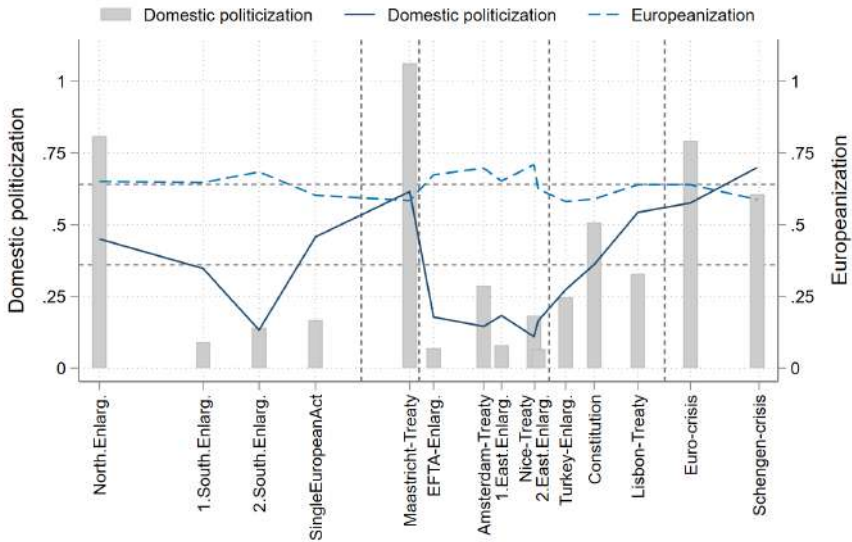
Note : range of the indicators 0-1.

So far, we do not know how the two indices are distributed over time. The first hypothesis assumes the domestic politicization of European integration debates negatively relates to the share of European actors present in those debates.

The line graph in Figure 2 shows the domestic politicization index for France and Germany as moving averages via the solid line, and the Europeanization (horizontal and vertical) index for France and Germany as moving averages via the dashed line. The European integration steps appear on the x-axis. The grey bars show the actual average of domestic politicization for each integration step. At first glance, Figure 2 clearly supports the first hypothesis of politicization across domestic actors in the absence of Europeanization. The curves of the two indices seem to alternate. For example, the Maastricht Treaty is the most domestically politicized event throughout European integration, but it is only marginally Europeanized. However, the second enlargement phase produced high levels of Europeanization yet very low levels of domestic politicization. Only since the Lisbon Treaty debates in 2007 do the two curves align during the crisis period, evening out at a high level of politicization (and Europeanization).

Regarding the correlation coefficients in Table 2, the strong general correlation of -0.69 supports the first hypothesis that high levels of politicization generally accompany low levels of Europeanization along European integration steps. France's r-value in the first row is somewhat higher than that of Germany, which indicates cross-country differences in public debates across the European integration steps. Figure 2 suggests an alignment of the two curves during the crisis period, so I also calculated the correlation coefficients without the crisis period. Such an alignment of the two curves would indicate a stronger correlation during the pre-crisis period. This is indeed true for Germany, suggesting more domestic debate until the crises hit. Consequently, the lower correlation coefficient during the crisis period may be a first indicator of politicized debate across domestic *and* European actors. Below, I will examine the crisis period in more detail.

Figure 2. Domestic politicization and Europeanization indices by European integration step



Note : The figure shows the domestic politicization (solid line and grey bars) and Europeanization (dashed line) indices for the fifteen steps of integration for France and Germany together. The index of politicization includes only domestic actors with over five statements. For the two crises, two highly salient peak periods of three months each were included when calculating the politicization index to better compare the long-term crisis events with other short-term debates on European integration steps. The peak periods are the first Greek bailout and the Stability and Growth Pact for the Euro crisis (see Kriesi and Grande, 2016). The first peak period for the Schengen crisis is autumn 2015, with first border closures, a European summit and Merkel's famous speech welcoming refugees. Early spring 2016 is the second peak period with far-reaching border closures, controls and negotiations on the EU-Turkey deal. The Europeanization index comprises the share of EU-level and foreign European actors as compared to all political actors. Both indices use information from French and German newspapers. The lines show moving averages of politicization and Europeanization for each step, and these averages are calculated as the mean of the previous step, the current step and the following step. The grey bars show the actual averages of politicization per step.

The steps are arranged by average year per debate, which is the average of all dates coded during an integration debate. The vertical grey lines indicate the five time periods used throughout this chapter; the horizontal grey lines indicate the mean values of politicization (0.36) and of Europeanization (0.64) for both countries taken together for all fifteen steps.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients of domestic politicization and Europeanization for France and Germany

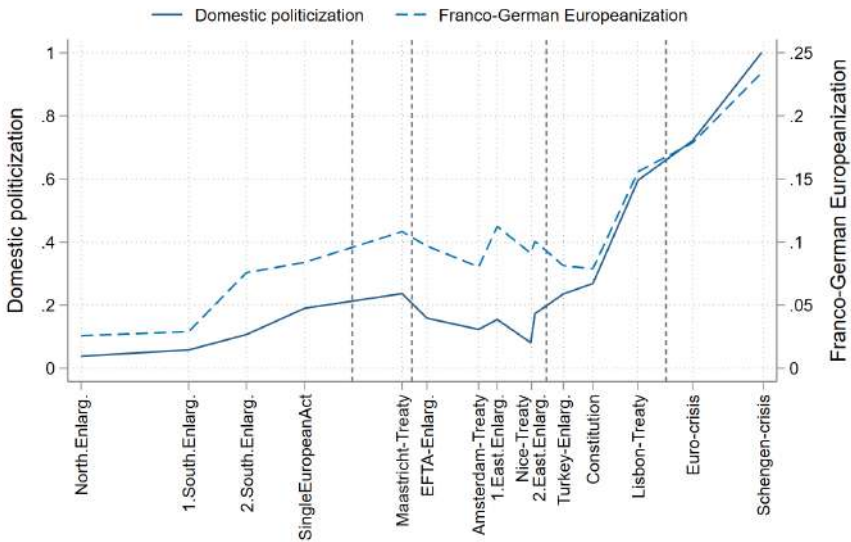
	France	Germany	Total
All integration steps	-0.75	-0.61	-0.69
Without Euro and Schengen crises	-0.75	-0.79	-0.70

Franco-German horizontal Europeanization of domestically politicized European integration steps

In general, Figure 2 shows that the domestic politicization of European integration hinders the Europeanization of public debates. Europeanization is generally lower when domestic politicization is high. However, a fine-grained analysis of Franco-German public debates reveals domestic politicization’s effect on horizontal Europeanization, as assumed in Hypothesis 2. This focus means excluding any Europeanization of EU-level actors and other foreign political actors from any country other than France or Germany.

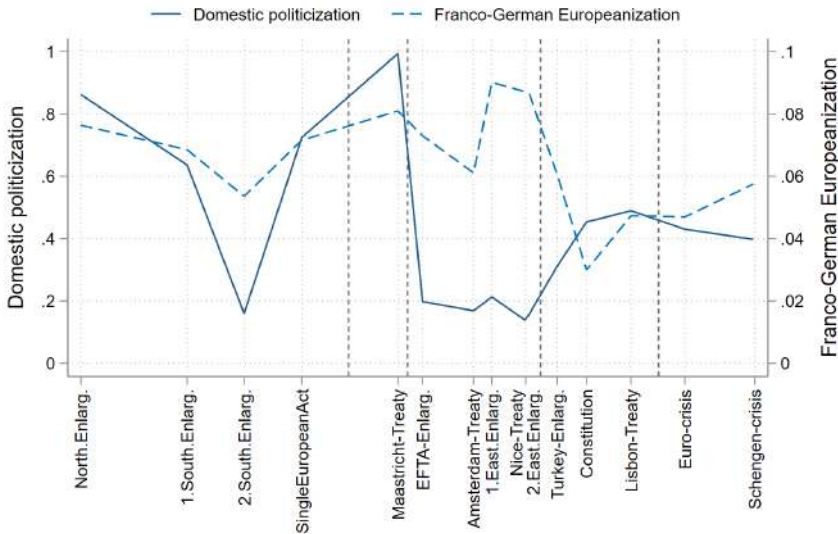
To address this effect, Figure 3 shows domestic politicization in Germany with a solid line, and the Europeanization of German political actors in the French press is indicated by a dashed line. At first glance, both lines seem to follow a similar trend across the European integration steps. The figure clearly shows that domestic politicization and horizontal Europeanization increase (and decrease) at the same points in time. Hence, highly contested German debates about European integration steps or about European crises entered the French public sphere. Similarly, an integration step that was not very politicized in Germany included fewer German political actors in the French public debate. Thus, German politicization dynamics are reflected in France’s Europeanization dynamics to a great extent, and they spill over, which aligns with the second hypothesis.

Figure 3. Domestic politicization in Germany and German Europeanization in France over European integration steps



Note : The figure shows domestic politicization in Germany (solid line) and German Europeanization in France (dashed line) over the fifteen steps of integration. For more details, see note below Figure 2.

Figure 4. Domestic politicization in France and French Europeanization in Germany over European integration steps



Note: The figure shows the domestic politicization in France (solid line) and French Europeanization in Germany (dashed line) for the 15 steps of integration. For more details, see note below Figure 2.

Figure 4 shows France's politicization dynamics over time with a solid line; these mainly correspond to the dynamics of horizontal Europeanization by French political actors in the German press, as indicated by the dashed line. French domestic debates about the Maastricht Treaty became transnational, and appeared in German public debate. Moreover, debates about the Lisbon Treaty and about the two major European crises helped *transnationalize* French political actors that were highly or moderately politicized in the domestic debate. Arguably, the time during the Eastern enlargement rounds does not reflect a high interdependence of French domestic politicization and horizontal Europeanization in Germany. The two Eastern enlargement rounds and debates about the Nice Treaty were barely politicized in the French press, but French political actors particularly shaped the German public sphere. This unusual pattern needs further explanation.

In general, enlargement rounds represent the type of integration step that is least politicized over time as compared to treaties, which are substantially more politicized, and compared to crises with the highest average levels of politicization.⁵ However, this pattern does not explain the high level of Europeanization during the enlargement phase. Why do French political actors take centre stage within the German debate despite low politicization in their own country? No straightforward answer exists for this question. However, three interrelated bargaining issues may have caused increasing horizontal Europeanization in both countries. First, while Germany

⁵ Data not shown.

explicitly favoured Eastern enlargement, France advocated a cautious stance bridging national interests and European leadership (Wunsch, 2017). For France, enlarging the EU by ten states necessitated major institutional reforms and conditions. Thus, both countries emphasized membership conditions and the Copenhagen Criteria for accession countries. Second, by pushing its agenda during the Nice Treaty debates, France triggered Europe-wide criticism in the wake of the European presidency. France was accused of prioritizing national interests over its neutral presidency role mainly regarding the issue of reducing the College of Commissioners (Engel, 2006; Schout and Vanhoonacker, 2006). Third, additional agricultural and budgetary conflicts worsened its relationship with Germany (de La Serre, 2004). Eventually, the European member states agreed on the Treaty of Nice. Hence, the mixture of controversial Franco-German positions and recurring attempts to maintain the common leadership enhanced horizontal Europeanization. Particularly the rigid positioning of France and the open conflict with German political actors may have resonated strongly with French actors in the German press. Interestingly, domestic politicization remains largely unaffected by the developments.

The correlation coefficients in Table 3 show overall support for the positive correlation between domestic politicization dynamics and horizontal Europeanization for France and Germany. Highly politicized debates about European integration in France *transnationalize* and expand into the German public sphere. The French public sphere is even more sensitive to German public debates over European integration steps and European crises, revealing a very strong correlation of $r=0.87$. To summarize, politicization and horizontal Europeanization across France and Germany are tightly intertwined and support the concept of a Franco-German couple within the EU, from a public sphere perspective. Subsequently, the assumption of transnational spillover effects between domestic politicization in one member state and Europeanization in another member state, as outlined in the second hypothesis, can be confirmed despite greater fluctuation in French transnational spillover effects. In all, domestic politicization over European integration issues enhances horizontal Europeanization, as demonstrated here for France and Germany.

Table 3. Correlation coefficients of domestic politicization and horizontal Europeanization for France and Germany

	r
Domestic politicization in Germany and German Europeanization in France	0.87
Domestic politicization in France and French Europeanization in Germany	0.28

Europeanized politicization or: the crisis-effect

So far, the empirical results reiterate the typical primacy of politicization by domestic actors. However, the comparative analysis of the French and German public debates over Europe also suggest that domestic politicization may in some

circumstances drive horizontal Europeanization. As the German debates during the Euro and Schengen crises have indicated, we may observe a fundamental change in the direction of the relationship between politicization and Europeanization: from negative to positive. By closely examining the types of political actors which dominate the politicized public debates during this crisis period to the pre-crisis years, I now take a further step in examining this politicization–Europeanization nexus.

Table 4. Percentage of statements by type of actor and by country during the crisis and the pre-crisis period

Type of actor	Crisis period		Pre-crisis period	
	France	Germany	France	Germany
Foreign executives	40.35	24.47	28.99	34.91
<i>German executives</i>	19.61	-	5.67	-
<i>French executives</i>	-	5.36	-	6.10
<i>Other foreign executives</i>	20.74	19.11	23.32	28.81
EU institutions	24.16	19.88	21.39	25.15
Foreign parties	3.8	5.86	6.28	3.77
<i>German parties</i>	2.11	-	1.05	-
<i>French parties</i>	-	0.28	-	0.13
<i>Other foreign parties</i>	1.69	5.58	5.23	3.64
National executives	15.39	20.98	16.59	22.70
National parties	5.91	18.77	18.76	9.12
Others	10.39	10.05	7.99	4.36
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 4 reports the share of statements for different domestic and European actors during the Euro and Schengen crises, as compared to the pre-crisis period. Most importantly, the results indicate that foreign executive actors from other European member states and actors from EU institutions clearly dominate the politicized public debates in the two countries during the crisis period. This is even more true in France, where national parties (the main drivers of domestic politicization in the pre-crisis period) fundamentally lost their salience. Instead, the crises helped Europeanize France's domestic politicization. Moreover, German executives constitute about half the share of all foreign executives among the French press during the crises. The same holds true for German political parties, which are extremely strong among all the foreign political parties entering France's public sphere. It seems as if a Europeanization of politicization took place during the crisis period in France that reinforced the contention across domestic, foreign European and EU-level actors. Table 5 shows the average values of this *overall* politicization with all types of actors compared to domestic politicization, i.e. the conflict among national actors only. This

comparison reveals the predominance of what I called Europeanized politicization and the decrease in domestic politicization during the crisis period in France. As more detailed analyses indicate, this dynamic is most prevalent during the Euro crisis and less so during the Schengen crisis. As indicated above, German political actors are one of the main drivers of this development in France.

Table 5. Average domestic and overall politicization by country during the crisis and the pre-crisis period

	Crisis period		Pre-crisis period	
	France	Germany	France	Germany
Domestic politicization	0.39	0.97	0.47	0.15
Overall politicization	0.53	0.83	0.57	0.29

Note: The domestic politicization index includes only domestic actors, whereas the overall politicization index includes domestic, foreign European and EU-level actors. The indices range from 0 to 1.

In Germany, the politicization observed during this period of crisis also has a strong European component, with foreign executives and EU institutions making up a large share of the actors visible in the public sphere (again, see Table 4). However, in Germany, national executives and political parties are just as important in the public conflict during the Euro and the Schengen crisis. Table 5 reveals these extraordinarily high levels of both domestic and overall politicization in Germany during the crises, reinforcing each other, as Zürn (2019) suggested. In contrast, the low levels of politicization in the pre-crisis period indicate that, despite their high shares, European actors were not involved in highly politicized debates in Germany until the Euro crisis ‘hit’. It is the Euro crisis that unleashes such Europeanized politicization in Germany for the first time. This strong and encompassing politicization may pose a threat to European governance in times of crisis, as Nicoli and colleagues examine in this volume (chapter 12). Overall, the results are thus in line with the third hypothesis, which claimed that the Euro and Schengen crises saw both domestic *and* Europeanized politicization. However, note that this finding is mainly due to the dynamics observed during the Euro crisis.

Conclusion

This chapter delivered empirical insights into the consequences of domestic politicization for the Europeanization of political actors within national public spheres. Specifically, the chapter addressed what circumstances led to domestic politicization over European integration to enhance Europeanization based on a systematic study of politicization and Europeanization dynamics in France and Germany across a set of European integration steps from the first enlargement rounds to the latest period of multiple crises. The key consequence of politicization is that high levels of domestic

politicization may trigger both the Europeanization and the politicization of public debates in times of crisis. As follows, I will highlight three more specific findings.

First, in line with the scholarly literature, the politicization of European issues is driven by domestic actors until crises hit. Pressures concerning European integration are firstly debated among domestic political actors entering the national mass-mediated public spheres. However, second, in times of high domestic politicization, such public controversies are 'exported' to foreign public spheres. The empirical analysis shows that high levels of politicization in Germany have enhanced the horizontal Europeanization of German political actors in the French press. Conversely, a Europeanization of German debates is triggered by French political actors in the case of high levels of domestic politicization in France. Subsequently, high levels of domestic politicization favour the transnationalization of national public debates.

Third, European crises (the Euro crisis in particular) drive the Europeanization of politicization over European integration, thereby increasing conflict across domestic, foreign European and EU-level actors alike. In France, low politicization among domestic actors gave way to the Europeanization of politicization during the crisis period. In Germany, however, the crises favoured the mutual reinforcement of the domestic *and* Europeanized politicization of European issues. Those developments that occur during the crisis period are mainly driven by the highly politicized Euro crisis and less so by the Schengen crisis. In all, the empirical findings mark a potential threat to European governance resulting from increasing domestic and Europeanized politicization, which Nicoli and colleagues describe in this volume as the 'politicization trap'.

Overall, the chapter deepens our understanding of the politicization-Europeanization nexus. It uses empirical evidence to confirm recent scholarly assumptions concerning politicization's shift to the European level (Benert and Pfetsch, 2020; Börzel and Risse, 2018; Heft, 2017; Koopmans, 2015; Zürn, 2019). The geographical focus on France and Germany exemplifies findings relevant to understanding broad European developments. However, future studies in a broader set of (smaller) member states should complement the empirical findings herein because this case study's scope is limited. Moreover, concerning transnational conflict constellations across domestic, foreign European and EU-level actors, the chapter also only scratches the surface. To deepen understanding of the consequences of politicization for (Europeanized) public spheres, studying transnational conflict constellations, however, seems necessary.

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 6

The politicization of values in the European Union: implications and outcomes of the controversy over the LGBTI-free zones in Poland

Fabio Bolzonar¹

Introduction

In her first speech on the state of the Union on 16 September 2020, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen defined Europe as an ‘open society of values’, and claimed that European values are ‘more important than ever’ (2020). Von der Leyen’s acknowledgement of the relevance of values was not an isolated statement of principles. Values, notably the rule of law, the respect for human rights and the protection of minorities, have been increasingly invoked by EU authorities to define the identity of the EU, have been used to justify policy measures and are the criteria that candidate countries seeking access to the EU should fulfil. In other words, values have been politicized in the EU, namely they have acquired political salience, the potential to shape policy choices and have played a role in the decisions on the process of European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2012, p. 840).

The emphasis on values by European institutions has intensified since the beginning of the new century. The 2008 economic and financial crisis has weakened justification for the European project on the grounds of its material outputs, and it has reactivated a competing narrative that stresses the status of the EU as a community of values (Calligaro and Foret, 2012). Studying the role of values in politics is challenging

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because they are polysemic symbolic references and we do not have a measurement scale to evaluate their impact. Despite this methodological shortcoming, some scholars have argued that values matter in EU governance in three interlinked, but not excluding, dimensions: first, as problems to solve, that is, issues that require difficult ethical choices; second, as communicative resources invoked by political entrepreneurs in a quest for legitimacy; third, as triggers of legal and political conflicts (Foret and Calligaro, 2018, pp. 15–6).

This chapter uses this interpretative framework to explore the implications of the politicization of values in the EU. However, it also adds a fourth dimension as it considers the capacity of values to shape policy outcomes. It argues that although values have a significant impact in moulding the discursive framing of the actors involved in political controversies on normative disputes and they radicalize the positions of antagonistic actors, it is still uncertain that they can exert an effective influence on the controversies on value-laden issues.

To investigate the implications and outcomes of the politicization of values in the EU, this chapter studies the controversy between the European and Polish authorities on the so-called LGBTI-free zones established in this country by some local municipalities since 2019. Although anti-gender mobilizations by right-wing parties and conservative religious groups have attracted great scholarly attention (Henning, 2018; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Verloo, 2018), transnational value controversies over LGBTI rights involving the EU institutions and national governments is still under-researched. This chapter would like to fill this gap.

Gender equality and LGBTI rights have acquired growing political salience in the EU since the late 1990s (Mos, 2014). Combating discrimination based on sexual orientation has been enshrined in EU treaties, with the consequence that the promotion of LGBTI rights has symbolized the identity of the EU, for both pro-European and Eurosceptic actors (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2014). Past studies noted that European normative frameworks exerted significant influence on the domestic politics of several member states (Surel, 2000; Radaelli, 2002). This has also been the case for LGBTI equality. During the accession phase to the EU, Central and Eastern European countries introduced anti-discrimination measures to protect sexual minorities in order to strengthen their international credibility (Ayoub, 2015). However, the political incentives to comply with the EU normative frameworks weaken following acquisition of full-membership status (Mos, 2020). Since the early 2010s, the EU's authority has been increasingly contested by Eurosceptic populist radical-right parties that politicize identity issues (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). This has led to a backlash against LGBTI rights, which has been particularly evident in Poland since the victory of the Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* - PiS) party in the 2015 general elections (Godzisz and Knut, 2018).

The chapter proceeds as follows: after discussing some findings of the current scholarship on the politicization of value-laden questions in the EU, it describes and explains the politicization of the principle of LGBTI equality in the dispute over the LGBTI-free zones in Poland, in order to highlight the patterns, implications and outcomes of this value controversy. The final section summarizes the key findings of this chapter, and indicates some research avenues that deserve further attention.

Value conflicts on morality issues in the EU

The influence of values on politics has attracted increasing attention following the cultural turn that the social and political sciences have undergone since the last decade of the twentieth century. However, most studies have prioritized ideas over values. For example, Béland and Cox (2010, p. 3) have noted that ideas define values and shape how we understand political problems, elaborate action strategies and communicate about politics. The normative dimension underpinning political controversies has been the object of a more focused debate by scholars of morality politics, a policy field dealing with life and death issues and gender and sexuality matters (e.g. abortion, assisted reproductive technologies, euthanasia, LGBTI rights). The regulation of morality questions revolves around ‘first principles’ rather than material interests, and they tend to provoke uncompromising value conflicts (Mooney, 2001; Tatalovich and Daynes, 2011). The conception of the role played by values in morality controversies varies. Although there is a large consensus acknowledging that religious principles shape morality politics (Knill et al., 2015; Budde et al., 2018), scholars have operationalized the ‘religious factor’ in different ways (Euchner, 2019). While some of them have pointed out that the salience of morality controversies depends on the presence of the secular-religious cleavage in the party system (Engeli et al., 2012), others have studied the agency of religious authorities (Knill and Preidel, 2014; Ozzano and Giorgi, 2015), the level of religiosity of the population (Knill et al., 2020) and the prevailing denominations in a given country (Budde et al., 2017). However, the burgeoning scholarship on morality politics has focused on central-level national politics (Studlar et al., 2013, p. 355) and has principally investigated why morality controversies received great attention instead of exploring their politicization patterns and outcomes (Euchner, 2019).

Studies on value-laden issues at the European level are rare. This gap in the existing scholarship can be explained, at least in part, by two factors. The first is the lack of empirical material at our disposal. Although the EU has gradually extended its remit beyond the provisions of treaties (Risse, 2010) to take into consideration non-economic issues (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2016), it still has limited competences in the sphere of value-laden issues. The second is the difficulty of transposing the theoretical paradigm to understand morality controversies from the national level to the EU level. The ‘secular’ EU polity is characterized by the need to build large coalitions and to search for consensual agreements that can be difficult to reach on value controversies (Foret, 2014, 2015).

Although the increasing invocation of values at the EU level has led the current scholarship to pay more attention to the political implications of normative principles, whether and to what extent values are able to shape the decisions of EU authorities and political conflicts is the object of an ongoing debate. Previous studies have pointed out that defence of the rule of law has provoked vertical conflicts between supranational authorities and some domestic governments on one side, and among national political actors on the other. Values are not abstract symbolic references but principles able to shape political controversies at the transnational and national levels (Coman, 2018, p. 84). Scholars have also remarked that values have influenced the decision of ‘less

political' authorities. For example, analysis of the rulings of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) has shown that this court has not only favoured economic integration through the law but also promoted the values enshrined in European Treaties (Saurugger and Terpan, 2018, p. 100). In contrast to these interpretations, Euchner and Engeli (2018) have sustained the view that the EU is reluctant to become involved in normative disputes. For instance, the EU has refrained from introducing a binding regulatory framework to liberalize abortion policies in member states. The divisive debates on such matters at the national level have acted as an 'agenda repellent' to prevent their politicization in the EU polity (Euchner and Engeli, 2018, pp. 72–5).

However, through the prism of defending human rights, gender equality and protecting minorities, EU authorities have intervened in sustaining access to abortion services (Mondo and Close, 2019) and combating discrimination based on sexual orientation (Ayoub, 2013). The politicization of LGBTI rights, interpreted as human rights and European values, has been particularly impressive (Kollman, 2016). The several resolutions of the European Parliament (EP) that have asked for respect for the rights of lesbian and gay persons, the declarations of EU political elites in support of LGBTI campaigns and the adoption of the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR) of the EU have shown that the EU has become a powerful institutional actor in the promotion of LGBTI rights.² Previous studies have also pointed out that soft-law norms created a structure of political opportunities for expanding LGBTI rights and the EU has provided institutional access points to LGBTI activists that established transnational advocacy networks (Kollman, 2009; Ayoub, 2013). Against this background, it is not an overstatement to say that LGBTI rights symbolize and have become part of the EU institutional identity (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2020).

While the studies carried out in the 2000s noted how the EU played a crucial role in promoting LGBTI equality and pushing member states to introduce anti-discriminatory measures (Koolman, 2009; Ayoub, 2015), more recent works have stressed the ambivalent outcomes of the EU's efforts. For example, the EU does not seem to have been successful in combating discrimination based on sexual orientation in its external relations (Slootmaeckers et al., 2016; Muehlenhoff, 2019). Furthermore, in some Central and Eastern European countries, Eurosceptic populist governments have been able to portray the LGBTI rights sustained by EU authorities as a threat to national cultural values (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2020). In this sense, populists have exploited the increasing dissatisfaction with the EU (Zürn, 2019; Börzel and Risse, 2020, p. 22) and linked it to LGBTI rights to justify anti-gender policies (ILGA, 2020).

In contrast with most of the existing studies that have investigated the politicization of LGBTI rights at the EU level and the national level separately, this chapter takes a slightly different direction and wishes to explore the politicization of LGBTI equality stemming from the dynamic interactions between the EU and the national political arenas. With this purpose in mind, the chapter investigates the controversy of the LGBTI-free zone within European multi-level governance. Although this concept

² Following the coming into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009, the CFR acquired the same legal status of Treaties.

is affected by some degree of ambiguity, it is an analytical perspective that would allow the exploration of the distinct features of the EU polity that consists of the enmeshment of supranational, national and local governments (Marks, 1993, p. 392), as well as the involvement of non-state actors, in overarching policy and advocacy networks (Piattoni, 2009).

This chapter adopts a case study research design. The controversy over the LGBTI-free zones in Poland can be considered a representative case as it exemplified the recent value conflicts between the EU authorities and several Eurosceptic governments that have increasingly taken anti-gender stances and implemented discriminatory policies targeting LGBTI communities. The intensity of this political dispute and the great engagement of European and Polish authorities would also lead to a better understanding of the politicization of LGBTI equality, and their outcomes in comparison with other cases in which policy controversies had received less attention. For its materials, this chapter relies on EU policy papers, declarations of senior European and Polish political leaders, documents issued by civil society organizations, and news in the press published since late 2019, when the controversy on the LGBTI-free zone broke out. The selected sources have been studied using a process-tracing approach to investigate the sequences of events to make inferences about the politicization of values.

The EU opposition to LGBTI-free zones in Poland: symbolic politics without policy outcomes?

LGBTI rights as a contentious political issue

In Poland, as in other Central and Eastern European countries, exposure to the EU opened a window of political opportunity for the promotion of LGBTI rights (O'Dwyer, 2020). The inclusion of the principle of combat against discrimination based on sexual orientation in EU treaties and the ensuing institutionalization of LGBTI rights have pushed member states to comply with the EU normative framework. However, windows of political opportunity rarely remain open for a long time (Gamson and Meyer, 1996). Although in the last decade, Poland has shown rapid growth in the social acceptance of sexual minorities, LGBTI rights remain a divisive issue. According to Eurobarometer, in 2019, a total of 49 per cent of Poles agreed that gay, lesbian and bisexual people should have the same rights as heterosexual people, against 45 per cent who disagreed with this statement and 6 per cent who did not express any opinion. The favourable opinion about the rights of sexual minorities declines when specific rights (e.g. adding a third gender to public documents, gender recognition, marriage) are considered. For instance, 45 per cent of Poles agreed that same-sex marriage should be allowed throughout Europe, against 50 per cent who disagreed with this claim and 5 per cent who did not know (EC, 2019, pp. 1–2). Within this context, the PiS-led government has introduced discriminatory measures targeting LGBTI communities

that cut public funding to policy measures aimed at promoting gender equality and combating the social stigmatization of LGBTI people (ILGA, 2020).

Competing values as discursive framings for antagonistic actors

The diffusion of discriminatory attitudes to sexual minorities in Polish society has provided an electoral incentive for conservative political entrepreneurs to exploit them. That has resulted in the politicization of gender and family issues by traditionalist organizations linked to Polish Catholic hierarchies and populist radical-right parties. To broaden the resonance of their anti-gender message, these actors have made a great effort to link themselves to Eurosceptic attitudes and the defence of national cultural values. In other words, they depicted the respect for sexual minorities asked for by EU authorities as an attempt to water down national values (Graff and Korolczuk, 2017). To contrast these claims, LGBTI activists have made a great effort to forge a persuasive alternative framing. For example, they presented these rights as part and parcel of the process of restoration of democracy (Ayoub, 2018). However, this strategy had limited success in the current Polish political context characterized by the surge in Eurosceptic attitudes (Csehi and Zgut, 2021).

The creation of the LGBTI-free zones has arguably been one of the most contentious issues of recent years, sparking a heated political debate between the EU and Poland on LGBTI equality and respect for sexual minorities. These zones were the districts of those local governments that passed a resolution against the so-called 'LGBTI ideology' or adopted the Local Government Charter of the Rights of the Family. This document was supported by several Catholic ultra-traditionalist groups, notably the Ordo Iuris Institute, an organization that has been at the forefront of all the anti-gender campaigns promoted in Poland in the last decade (Korolczuk, 2020). In the European multi-level governance, civil society organizations have been increasingly involved in overreaching policy networks (Piattoni, 2009), and, as the Polish case shows, well-connected lobbies can also become active agents in the promotion of the politicization of an issue.

The Local Government Charter of the Rights of the Family avoids making any explicit reference to LGBTI rights or homosexuality. The rejection of the principle of LGBTI equality is rather expressed by emphasizing the need to sustain the family, conceived as 'a union of a man and a woman', as asserted in the Polish constitution, and to protect the family 'against influences of the ideologies that undermine its autonomy and identity' (Kwaśniak, 2019, p. 5). Furthermore, the Charter has been presented as a defensive reaction to the supposedly aggressive lobbying pursued by the LGBTI movement and some local authorities, like the mayor of Warsaw, who signed a declaration in support of LGBTI rights. In this sense, the principle of LGBTI equality was contrasted with a competing framework that stressed the traditional family values that had received authoritative recognition from being enshrined in the Polish constitution.

Although the resolutions against the 'LGBTI ideology' and the Local Government Charter of the Rights of the Family approved by Polish municipalities are not legally

binding, they have a powerful symbolic impact, as they formally reject the principle of the equal treatment of sexual minorities and legitimize the efforts of those political entrepreneurs that intend to curtail the rights of LGBTI individuals and organizations.

Since March 2019, nearly 100 local governments, mostly situated in the southeast of Poland, have passed a resolution declaring themselves LGBTI-free zones.³ The EU immediately condemned these resolutions. The EP took the lead in controverting these decisions. Confirming its long-lasting commitment to combating discrimination based on sexual orientation, on 18 December 2019 the EP, with 463 votes in favour, 107 against and 105 abstentions, adopted a text that called

on Poland to firmly condemn discrimination against LGBTI people, including when it originates from local authorities, and to revoke resolutions attacking LGBTI rights, including local provisions against 'LGBTI ideology', in accordance with its national law as well as its obligations under EU and international law. (EP, 2019, Section 24)

The EP also asked the Commission to check if there was any infringement of the Treaties and to take appropriate measures. The activism of the EP further strengthened the critical stance of the Commission against Polish authorities. In April 2020, the Commission released a reply to the requests raised by the EP, in which it said that

the European Commission strongly condemns any form of discrimination, intolerance or violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics, as this goes against the fundamental values on which the EU is founded and which are enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) as well as Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (EC, 2020, p. 1).

Then, it was added that 'the Commission is committed to uphold the fundamental values of the Union with all the means at its disposal' (EC, 2020, p. 6). In this sense, the Commission presented the controversy on the LGBTI-free zones not only as a kind of discrimination but also as a threat to the European values enshrined in EU treaties.

Values as triggers of conflictualization

Despite the pressure from the EP and the Commission, the Polish authorities did nothing. However, the controversy over the LGBTI-free zones gave further salience to LGBTI rights, and the issue became a polarizing theme of the 2020 presidential elections. During the electoral campaign the PiS's candidate, the incumbent President Andrzej Duda depicted himself as the best defender of traditional moral values threatened by 'LGBTI ideology', considered as a product of external pressure. The aim of this strategy was to capitalize on the disfavour towards sexual minorities and Eurosceptic attitudes to attract the vote of the most conservative and nationalist constituencies. To broaden the resonance of this positioning, in a speech given on 13 June, Duda even claimed that

³ Ash, L. (2020) 'Inside Poland's 'LGBT-free zones', *BBC*, 20 September, Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-54191344> (Accessed: 10 December 2021).

‘LGBTI ideology’ was worse than communism and described LGBTI movements as a kind of neo-Bolshevism. Then, he added that, ‘we [Polish] have our tradition. We have our culture that is based on over 1,050 years of history [...] We won’t allow [Poland] to be taken away from us.’⁴

Against this background characterized by a growing conflictualization around LGBTI issues between the European and Polish authorities, the Commission started to take action. Even though the top executive branch of the EU has seldom intervened in normative disputes (Euchner and Engeli, 2018), the high political salience of the controversy over the LGBTI-free zones and the fact that the EU funding values were at stake pushed the Commission to take a position. At the beginning of June, the Commission wrote to the marshals of the five Polish provinces that had passed resolutions against ‘LGBTI ideology’ or adopted the Local Government Charter of the Rights of the Family to ask them for some clarification on this matter. The Commission pointed out that the operations supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds should comply with applicable Union law, including ‘the respect for Article 2 of the Treaty on EU on fundamental values on which the European Union is founded, as well as provisions of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.’⁵ In this sense, the Commission not only politicized values as a discursive strategy to highlight the identity of Europe as a community of values, but also employed them as criteria regulating policy arrangements with which national authorities should comply. In other words, the politicization of the principle of LGBTI equality overflowed from the normative field to the policy sphere.

Values as a justification of political and policy decisions

In this context characterized by the escalation of the controversy over the LGBTI-free zones, on 28 July, the European Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli wrote on Twitter that ‘EU values and fundamental rights must be respected by Member States and state authorities. This is why 6 town twinning applications involving [sic] Polish authorities that adopted “LGBTI free zones” or “family rights” resolutions were rejected.’⁶ However, Dalli’s decision was rejected by the Polish government. Even though Polish central state authorities were not directly concerned about this decision, they nonetheless rallied around those local municipalities that had passed anti-gender resolutions. The rejection of the principle of LGBTI equality and the efforts of the Commission to ask for its respect indirectly promoted a coalition between Polish local and national authorities against EU bodies. At the beginning of August, Minister of Justice Zbigniew Ziobro replied that the Polish government would fund the municipalities mentioned by Helena Dalli. In referring to the case of the city of

⁴ Shotter, J. (2020) ‘Poland’s president says ‘LGBT ideology’ worse than communism’, *Financial Times*, 13 June. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/f16890b1-781f-4eda-98a7-a59e3f5f8efb> (Accessed: 16 July 2020).

⁵ Ambroziak, A. (2020) ‘The European Commission intervenes on LGBT-free zones. Its letter could be groundbreaking’, *Oko.press*, 4 June. Available at: <https://oko.press/the-european-commission-intervenes-on-lgbt-free-zones/> (Accessed: 10 June 2020).

⁶ Helena Dalli (@helenadalli), 28 July 2020.

Tuchow, whose application for a twinning programme was rejected after its councillors passed a motion against ‘LGBTI ideology’, Ziobro added that the city would receive state funding because ‘We are supporting a municipality that has a pro-family agenda, promotes support for well-functioning families, and fights against the imposed ideology of LGBTI and gender, which is being pushed by the European Commission.’⁷

Until mid-2021, the implications of the Commission’s politicization of LGBTI equality in the controversy with Polish authorities were more at the symbolic level than at the policy level. Two kinds of reasons lead to this conclusion. First, the Commission targeted the international reputation of those Polish municipalities that passed a resolution against ‘LGBTI ideology’ or adopted the Local Government Charter of the Rights of the Family to highlight their exclusion from the EU as a community of values. Second, the exacerbation of the political controversy over LGBTI-free zones strengthened the salience of LGBTI rights. The indirect consequence of questioning the collective values of a given community can often be a stronger sense of attachment to these values and a more committed effort to defend them (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Whereas the Polish authorities showed a growing engagement in rejecting LGBTI rights as a paradigmatic example of the European elites’ attempt to overthrow national values, the EU authorities reacted by solemnly affirming the central role of LGBTI rights for the EU identity.

Against this background, we can better understand the recent declarations of the Commission and the positions taken by the EP. In her 2020 speech on the state of the Union, Ursula von der Leyen emphasized that ‘LGBTIQI-free zones are humanity free zones. And they have no place in our Union’ (von der Leyen, 2020). In March 2021, the EP adopted a resolution by 492 votes in favour, 141 against and 46 abstentions, in which it states that ‘the authorities at all levels of governance across the entire European Union should protect and promote equality and the fundamental rights of all, including LGBTIQ persons, and ensure their rights in full [...] hereby declares the European Union an “LGBTIQ Freedom Zone”’ (EP, 2021).

However, the interventions of EU authorities did not have only a symbolic impact. On 15 July 2021, the Commission declared that it ‘considers that Polish authorities failed to fully and appropriately respond to its inquiry regarding the nature and impact of the so-called “LGBT-ideology free zones” resolutions adopted by several Polish regions and municipalities’ (EC, 2021). Consequently, it ‘is launching infringement procedures against Hungary and Poland related to the equality and the protection of fundamental rights’. According to the top executive branch of the EU,

equality and the respect for dignity and human rights are core values of the EU, enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union. The Commission will use all the instruments at its disposal to defend these values (EC, 2021).

Concerned by the fact that the Commission froze funds to five Polish regions that declared themselves LGBTI-free zones, at the end of September 2021, four of them

⁷ Reuters (2020) ‘Polish ‘LGBT-free’ town gets state financing after EU funds cut’. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-eu-lgbt-idUSKCN25E1QP> (Accessed: 20 August 2020).

repealed their anti-gender motions. Officials in Podkarpackie also passed a resolution that declared Podkarpackie ‘a region of well-established tolerance.’⁸ However, it is uncertain that all the local administrations that passed a motion against the ‘LGBTI ideology’ or adopted the Local Government Charter of the Rights of the Family would repeal their anti-gender motions or the Polish government would not counter-balance the pressure by EU authorities by sustaining the intransigent positions of those local administrations that declared themselves LGBTI-free zones.

Besides the strong reactions from the EU authorities, the controversy over LGBTI-free zones also fostered some grassroots initiatives in solidarity with the Polish LGBTI community. The politicization of values in a controversy between the EU and a member state can sometimes broaden its resonance and overflow into the transnational public arena. Although it would probably be an overstatement to say that a European public sphere is emerging, there are nonetheless signs of an embryonic cross-border process of identity-building structured around shared European values. Several European municipalities ended twinning programmes with Polish municipalities that declared themselves LGBTI-free zones. In May 2020, for example, the German city of Schwerte terminated its thirty-year-old partnership with the Polish city of Nowy Sącz. In the letter addressed to the mayor of Nowy Sącz, the mayor of Schwerte wrote: ‘The decision made by your councillors is in contradiction with the European idea of diversity and mutual understanding [...] This is an unacceptable attitude for me and the inhabitants of my city.’⁹ A similar decision was taken by the Dutch city of Nieuwegein in July. Interviewed by *The Guardian*, an executive councillor of Nieuwegein claimed that, ‘We [Nieuwegein’s citizens] are a rainbow city. And we are both part of Europe, in which we believe that whoever you are, regardless of your orientation, you can be there in public space. It does not include a gay-free zone.’¹⁰

Concluding remarks

This chapter has discussed the political controversy between the EU and Poland over the LGBTI-free zones to highlight how competing values have been politicized by EU political elites and Polish authorities. The aim of our analysis was to illustrate the dynamic interactions of politicization patterns triggered by values, and to unpack some of the most evident implications of such a process.

⁸ Kość, W. (2021) ‘Polish regions beat a retreat on anti-LGBTQ+ resolutions’, *Politico*, 28 September. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/polish-regions-retract-anti-lgbt-resolutions-after-threat-eu-funding/> (Accessed 11 January 2022); Shotter, J. (2021) ‘Polish regions row back on anti-LGBT stance after EU threat to funds’ *Financial Times*, 28 September. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/d10727af-1530-441d-8457-09b936fb297b> (Accessed: 11 January 2022).

⁹ Pitoń, A. (2020) ‘Niemcy zrywają współpracę z Nowym Sączem. Powód: akceptacja dla projektu Ordo Iuris’, *Wyborcza Gazeta*, 20 May. Available at: <https://krakow.wyborcza.pl/krakow/7,44425,25960006,niemcy-zrywaja-wspolprace-z-nowym-saczem-powod-strefa-wolna.html?disableRedirects=true> (Accessed: 11 October 2021).

¹⁰ Boffey, D. (2020) ‘Dutch town ends ties with Polish twin declared “gay free zone”’, *The Guardian*, 16 July. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/16/dutch-city-ends-ties-with-polish-twin-declared-gay-free-zone-nieuwegein-pulawy> (Accessed: 20 August 2021).

We think that three conclusions of this chapter deserve to be taken into consideration. First, the case of the LGBTI-free zones shows how values can be politicized for different purposes and with various outcomes: forging discursive framings, as problems to solve, for building a coalition of like-minded actors and to justify political positions and policy decisions. In this sense, our analysis confirms the interpretative framework on the role played by values in the EU governance presented in the Introduction section of this chapter. Second, the politicization of values that we have discussed was the outcome of a dynamic process involving local, national and EU authorities, and it was characterized by a growing radicalization of the positions of the various actors engaged in the controversy over the LGBTI-free zones. Third, the contentious debate over this issue had some influence at the policy level. However, it was more the concern for losing the EU funds than the invocation of EU values that pushed some Polish local administrations to repeal their anti-gender resolutions. This evidence highlights how the ‘soft power’ consisting in the invocation of values would not have a significant impact unless it were accompanied by the ‘hard power’ of economic means. The ruling of the ECJ on 16 February 2022, in which the EU’s highest court rejected the complaints of Hungary and Poland about the conditionality of EU funds to the respect for the rule of law may have some implications beyond this case, and strengthen the Commission’s authority to defend EU values. As noted by the ECJ, compliance with the common values on which the EU is founded is a condition for enjoying all the rights deriving from Treaties, and ‘compliance with those values cannot be reduced to an obligation which a candidate State must meet in order to accede to the European Union and which it may disregard after accession’ (ECJ, 2022, p. 3). However, whether and to what extent the EU authorities would be able to tie the EU funds to respecting EU values is uncertain territory.

To deepen our understanding of the outcomes of the politicization of values in the EU, it would be necessary to consider the implications of value controversies over long periods. In this sense, the study of the medium- and long-term developments of the dispute over LGBTI-free zones may bring a promising perspective. Likewise, greater attention would also deserve value controversies in other Central and Eastern European countries such as Hungary, Romania, and Croatia, in which, as in Poland, conservative and populist Eurosceptic governments have recently introduced or attempted to implement discriminatory measures against LGBTI people. A comparative perspective on the dynamics of the politicization of values would shed further light on their outcomes in the EU polity.

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PART 3

**Consequences on EU
policy making**

Framing activism in the EP: the politicization of Visa Code and Copyright reforms

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Introduction

Two surprisingly long reform processes marked the last mandate of the European Parliament (EP): the Visa Code recast and the Copyright directive. Both had been discussed since 2014, with final versions of the texts only adopted in spring 2019, just a few weeks before the new elections. Caught up in the institutional constraints of the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP), these two reforms also saw clashes between actors and between values. In particular, the EP was the scene of many twists and turns: death threats against the copyright directive's rapporteur,² the unexpected rejection of the humanitarian visa resolution because MEPs had left for lunch,³ which were widely reported in the media. How to explain such a dramaturgy?

Although they addressed very different issues, these reforms serve as examples of the politicization of the EU, understood by de Wilde et al. (2016) as a growing salience of EU affairs, polarization of opinions and increase in the number of actors involved in the political process. While many scholars recently studied EU politicization by focusing on Juncker's 'Political Commission' (Kassim et al., 2017; Mérand, 2021), we choose to address in this chapter the role of EP actors in the politicization of the Visa Code and Copyright Directive. How do EP actors drive the politicization of the legislative process? More precisely, how do they create room for agency within the institutional constraints of the ordinary legislative procedure?

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² *Financial Times* (2018), 'EU copyright reforms descent propaganda wars'. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/53f2cc84-8012-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d> (Accessed: 7 November 2020).

³ The media Brut released a video on this 'incident'. Posted on 16 December 2018, it has almost 270,000 views. Available at: <https://twitter.com/brutofficial/status/1063369314806444032> (accessed: 24 February 2021).

In this chapter, we study one specific set of strategies, conceptualized as ‘framing activism’. We define framing activism as the promotion by an actor of an antagonistic conception of a public problem, as a means of engaging conflict with other actors and ‘existing’ in the collective dramaturgy of policy-making (Beaudonnet and Mérand, 2019). We understand framing activism as a form of political work, defined by Mérand (2021) as a ‘set of strategic and emotional practices that enlarges the room for agency’, ultimately leading to increased politicization.

The comparison of these very different political issues allows us to highlight possible common features in terms of the dynamics of politicization. We collected qualitative data on these two cases during two distinct fieldwork periods conducted in Brussels between 2018 and 2020, in the context of the co-authors’ respective PhD research. Both cases rely on a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with EU officials from the Commission, the Parliament and the Council,⁴ who participated in the legislative processes, as well as on an in-depth analysis of the different Commission and Parliament’s document related to the Visa Code recast (proposals and reports), and of the parliamentary debates on the copyright directive.

This chapter is divided into two theoretical and two empirical sections. The first section briefly depicts the state of the art on the politicization of the Parliament. The second section explains the conceptualization of framing activism and why it is a relevant approach to study politicization. The third section looks back at the reform of the visa code, which was an opportunity for Parliament to defend (in vain) a humanitarian framing, in opposition to the more conservative positions of other decision-makers. The fourth section looks at the competition within the EP between framings to reform copyright: culture, open-access and market. We conclude by discussing the different types of framing activism strategies identified in our cases, as well as broader remarks on the implications in terms of consequences of the politicization of the EU decision-making process.

Politicization of and *within* the European Parliament: a brief overview

Without necessarily labelling this evolution as politicization, political scientists have paid attention to the emergence of the Parliament as a political actor. From the first direct elections in 1979 to the Lisbon treaty in 2009, the assembly was given new powers, changing from simply talking shop to becoming a co-decider (Ripoll-Servent, 2017). In the legislative area, the co-decision procedure (OLP) puts the Parliament on an equal footing with the Council (Dehousse, 2017).

⁴ For the Visa Code case, two interviews were conducted with EU Council officials, and one with a Commission civil servant. For the copyright case, eleven interviews were conducted with Commission officials, nine interviews with Parliament officials, and one interview with a permanent representative within the Coreper (Council). Due to anonymity requirements, no further details can be given on the interviewees.

Beyond the extension of the Parliament's formal powers, a growing body of literature has recently discussed the Parliament's strategies of empowerment – i.e. its capacities to confront other institutions. For instance, Meissner and Schoeller (2019) have built a typology of Parliament's strategies of self-empowerment. They identify six bargaining strategies: obstructing (by delaying or sanctioning), issue-linking within the Parliament or with other arenas, building alliances with actors that also have formal rights in decision-making, moving first and finally mobilizing public opinion. However, this tends to reduce the study of empowerment to an efficiency issue. Fromage (2018) argues that despite the Parliament being given new tools of control after the euro crisis, it was not able to translate them into policy outcomes. This literature is then limited in the sense that it excludes sequences of politicization that do not lead to concrete political results. Thus, our chapter aims to include failure in terms of policy outcomes, to reach a more complete study of politicization.

In addition, a number of scholars study the politicization of the Parliament as the venue for political conflicts. In this context, politicization is operationalized as the growing partisanship logic along a left–right axis (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2007). Repartition of votes, group cohesion and number of amendments are the main indicators of politicization in this literature. From a more interpretivist perspective, Foret and Markoviti (2020) characterize the European Parliament as 'the arena where a limited politicization occurs through the expression of conflictual national and ideological preferences' (p. 435). A growing literature pays more attention to informal parliamentary work. Thus, Roger and Winzen (2015) consider committees as the centre of policy-making. They observe politicization through informal intra-party coordination inside committees. Along the same lines, Servant-Ripoll and Panning (2019) studied the role of shadow meetings focusing on the pre-trilogue preparatory bodies of the Parliament and comparing a non-politicized (revision of the statute and funding of EU political parties and foundations) and a politicized issue (asylum package). They conclude that the more an issue is politicized, the more informal is decision-making. In line with this concern, we include in our analysis both formal and informal parliamentary work.

A recent piece of work by Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood (2021) combines inter-institutional conflict, and both internal and informal politicization through the study of trilogues as a form of secret but highly politicized diplomacy. To make sense of the empirical puzzle between the OLP's claim of transparency and the reality of silent negotiation practices between policymakers, they chose to focus on actors and their narratives. By bringing the role of actors back into the study of EU politicization, the authors are in line with calls to establish meeting points between neo-institutionalist and sociological explanations of EU institutions and processes (Jenson and Mérand, 2010). We include our approach in the same research agenda. This chapter studies the EP's politicization by focusing on actors, but rather than analysing their silent practices, we are interested in their visible political work. More precisely, we use the concept of framing activism as a type of political work to study politicization, as detailed in the next section.

Framing activism: a specific type of political work driving politicization

In this chapter, we seek to understand the role of MEPs with respect to the politicization of public policies. To do so, we draw upon the concept of ‘political work’ that has been identified by sociological approaches studying policy-making (Jullien and Smith, 2012) as a central ‘driver for politicization’ (Mérand, 2021, p. 1). This has been defined as a ‘set of strategic and emotional practices that enlarges the room for agency vis-à-vis institutional or diplomatic constraints’ (Mérand, 2021, p. 2). It also refers to the *problematization* of a public policy, which, according to Jullien and Smith (2012), can lead to a process of politicization when it takes the form of a debate of values. As such, it is following the understanding of politicization as decision-making through ‘value-loaded’ ideological conflict, as opposed to compromise-oriented decision-making (Foret and Markoviti, 2020). From that perspective, values are defined in a broad sense, encompassing political ideologies as well as moral values (on the latter, see notably Bolzonar, in this volume). In other words, political work is crucial in determining whether an issue will produce political conflict or not.

In his recent work on the European Commission, Mérand (2021, p. 3) distinguishes two types of political work ‘(Type-1) the purposeful exercise of discretion vis-à-vis institutional rules; (Type-2) the embrace of partisan and ideological conflict rather than its euphemizing vis-à-vis national interests.’ By looking at the political work of MEPs, we focus on Type-2, and we argue that the concept of *framing* can help to refine and operationalize it, building up what we call *framing activism* as a Type-2 kind of political work. Indeed, as Daviter (2011) has demonstrated, ‘policy framing’ by political actors shapes the decision-making process, and as such, is key to explain the arousing of conflicts. Framing is understood in the sense put forward by Hall (2007), that is, as the action to connect specific policy issues to broader sets of value-loaded ideas. In line with the work of Crespy and Parks (2017) on coalition-building among civil society actors and MEPs on policy issues, we draw on the literature on social movements (Snow, 2004) and on interest groups (Littoz-Monnet, 2014), where the framing is intrinsically linked to the idea of *strategy* and agency. Thus, we analyse political conflict as a competition between rival framings of public policies driven by actors’ strategies to promote competing value-loaded frames.

In a nutshell, we define framing activism as a type of political work that implies the promotion by an actor of an antagonistic conception of a public problem, as a means of engaging conflict with other actors and ‘existing’ in the collective dramaturgy of policy-making (Beaudonnet and Mérand, 2019). We argue that MEPs develop different kinds of framing activism strategies to defend frames that compete with other institutions or even other MEPs’ views on the same problem, eventually leading to political conflict. Thus, we investigate two cases of politicized legislation, the Visa Code reform, and the copyright directive, to identify and classify the different framing activism strategies implemented by MEPs during these two legislative processes.

A visa to protect borders or a visa to protect people? The politicization of the EP during the Visa Code reform

When they signed the Schengen agreement that came into effect in the mid-1990s, EU Member States⁵ abolished controls at their internal borders. They also tightened controls at their common external borders. To regulate entry into EU territory, Member States adopted a common short-term visa policy, also known as the Schengen visa policy, which applies for stays of a maximum of three months. This policy relies on a uniform visa granting access to all Schengen states, harmonized procedures of issuance and frequently updated ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ lists of third-country nationals (TCN) falling under visa obligation. Before the Amsterdam treaty and the full absorption of Schengen regulation into the EU acquis, Schengen cooperation was only intergovernmental. Negotiations of common consular instructions were non-transparent and not very constraining. The communitarization of the Schengen visa policy led to the adoption of a legally binding Community Code on Visas in 2009. In its proposal, the Commission pushed for the harmonization and transparency of the procedures to promote a ‘unified Europe’, making the Schengen visa a symbol of European unity in the same way as the single currency. Debates in the Parliament gave evidence of a similar frame, in opposition to Member States’ restrictive approach. MEPs have also pursued a more ‘applicant-oriented’ reform to enhance the notion of a friendly Europe, for instance by reducing visa fees from 60 to 35 euros (Infantino, 2019).

The Visa code recast, which was in process between 2014 and 2019, highlights competition between three other frames. The first is a *market-oriented frame*. Put forward by the Commission in its initial reform proposal, it aims to put the Schengen visa at the service of economic competitiveness and tourist attractiveness. The second is a *security-oriented frame* prioritizing preventing the risks associated with migration and strengthening border controls. So far mobilized by the Member States only, the Visa Code reform shows that some MEPs can also use this frame. The last framework is a *humanitarian frame*. Defended by the Parliament, it conceives the visa as providing international protection, especially in the context of the refugee crisis. The section below explores how EP actors actively engage in a framing competition between these three framings of the Schengen visa.

Market-oriented vs. security-oriented frames: the case of touring visa proposal

In the first stage of the reform, the conflict arises from the Commission’s market-oriented reframing of the visa policy, which conservative MEPs and the Member States strongly resist. The Visa Code required a first evaluation report three years after it came into force. However, as stated by a policy officer at the Visa Unit of the DG Home, there was pressure from the Commission’s cabinet to draft a new text:

⁵ The Schengen area includes 22 Member States and 4 Associated Countries.

At first, we wanted to discuss the evaluation report with the Member States. But the political level said no, no, no, we have to make a proposal right away. At that time, we were under the pressure of DG Grow: 'we have to open', 'we need tourists' (Interview 1, our translation).

In the early 2010s, the tourism sector in Europe is seen as surprisingly resilient to the economic downturn. However, it needs to be sustained by new global travel markets, especially from 'emerging' countries such as India or China, whose nationals are under Schengen visa obligation to travel to the EU. In April 2014, the Commission presents a market-oriented package with two proposals, titled 'A smarter visa policy to spur growth'. The first proposal is a Visa Code recast. Considering that 'the overall objective of tackling irregular immigration [...] has been met' (EC, 2014a, p. 7), it introduces new facilitations for travellers, such as fewer supporting documents and shorter delays. The second text establishes a new type of visa, the touring visa, which allows travellers to stay in the Schengen area beyond the three-month limitation provided that they do not stay for more than three months in the same Member State. It would apply to performing artists, sports professionals or retirees with an interest in 'touring around' European countries. These proposals share a clear economic objective: attracting foreigners who might have been deterred from travelling to Europe because of visa procedures. An impact assessment (EC, 2014b) coming with the two proposals estimates Schengen visa deterrence is responsible for an annual loss of 4 to 12 billion EUR and of 80,000 to 250,000 potential jobs.

However, from summer 2015, the Commission's ambition to make the Schengen visa regime more attractive is overtaken by the dramatic episode of undocumented migration, and the growing hostility of Member States to soften external border control. The new political context makes it difficult to advocate for a more attractive visa policy. Moreover, the nomination of Brice Hortefeux (EPP) as rapporteur on the proposal for a touring visa contributes to the failure of the market-oriented frame carried by the Commission. This conservative MEP, formerly at the head of the French Ministry of Immigration and National Identity under Nicolas Sarkozy's mandate (2007–2009), is well-known for hardline stances on migration in a national context. In other words, both his political career and the political conjuncture predispose him to defend a conservative frame of the touring visa proposal. In his report published in April 2016 (LIBE 2016a), MEP Hortefeux opposes the creation of this new visa, whose implementation modalities are 'too vague', 'not very prudent' and lacking 'security guarantees [...] in order to limit the risks of fraudulent exploitation, abuse or illegal immigration'. He finally insists that the protection of EU borders and territory should be the priority.

Postponed until further notice, the text is finally withdrawn in 2018. According to the DG Home policy officer, the MEP aligned with an intergovernmental position: 'The Member States immediately said, "We can't control it, it will be hijacked by applicants." Then, unfortunately, Mr Hortefeux very skilfully destroyed the touring visa in the Parliament, with great eloquence. He had many Member States on his side' (Interview 1). Hence, the touring visa's failure is an example of the Parliament being co-opted by national interests in the Justice Liberty and Security (JLS) sector. As underlined

by Ripoll-Servent (2017) in her work on JLS decision-making dynamics during the 2014–2019 legislature, the Council was likely to reach agreements with the more conservative fringes of the EP, explaining a lack of major policy change in this sector.

Humanitarian frame of the Visa Code reform: one MEP alone against all

In the second stage of the reform, the framing competition continues between a conservative frame and a humanitarian frame. The latter is promoted by Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar (S&D), who is appointed rapporteur on the proposal for a Visa Code recast. Former Spanish Minister of Justice, former President of the LIBE Committee during the 7th legislature, MEP Lopez Aguilar presents a very different profile and record than MEP Hortefeux. For instance, he played an active role in the adoption of the Schengen visa exemption for Peru and Columbia in 2013. As rapporteur, he also uses the refugee crisis as a window of opportunity to re-frame the debate on visa policy in an opposite direction than MEP Hortefeux. In his report, published in 2016, he recommends creating a new type of Schengen visa, the humanitarian visa. The amended proposal provides ‘the possibility of applying for a European humanitarian visa directly at any consulate or embassy of the Member States’ (LIBE, 2016b, p. 13). In the explanatory statement, the rapporteur declares he ‘strongly believes that safe and legal ways of accessing the territory of the EU for persons fleeing from prosecution are necessary and that the issuing of a Schengen visa is one way’ (LIBE, 2016b, p. 96). In the European media, the rapporteur further develops the reframing of the Visa Code reform as a necessity for humanitarian assistance:

*The wake-up call for that goal was the current migration crisis, particularly, the unacceptable death toll in the Mediterranean. The extent of the tragedy proves beyond doubt the necessity of the objective. A humanitarian Visa is needed to provide for one legal pathway to reach the territory of the Member States for persons seeking international protection.*⁶

Humanitarian visas already exist, but only in national law. In other words, they can be issued at the discretion of a Member State only. Moreover, national humanitarian visas have a ‘limited territorial validity’, meaning they are valid for the territory of the issuing Member State only. In that sense, since humanitarian visas are under national responsibility and authority, a common regulation would bind Member States’ decisions to issue humanitarian visas to TCN. For a national expert sitting at the visa working group (VWG) of the Council: ‘There was no question of having a humanitarian visa. It would be used for settlement purposes, so it’s not a Schengen competence’ (Interview 2). As a result, inter-institutional negotiations between the Council and the Parliament on the visa code reform are blocked, as DG Home’s policy officer sums up:

⁶ Newrope (2020), ‘Humanitarian Visas: an asset of the EU’s response to the Refugee emergency!’, available at: <https://www.newrope.eu/article/humanitarian-visas-asset-eus-response-refugee-emergency/> (Accessed: 8 November 2020).

We reached an agreement with the Council, but not with the Parliament because the rapporteur wanted to create a new humanitarian visa. We did not want a humanitarian visa either, especially not in the visa code reform. We tried to expose other solutions, but two years passed and they were still blocking. (Interview 1)

For the Commission and the Council, the reform is on standby because of the inflexibility of the EP, more especially the rapporteur. To a national representative of the VWG, 'the rapporteur based his entire legislature on this reform' and 'he turned the humanitarian visa into an absolute totem' (Interview 3), which he defends in trilogue and in the press. In 2017, a ruling of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) deals a blow to the Parliament's blocking strategy. In litigation opposing a Syrian family who applied for a national humanitarian visa and the Belgian council of immigration who denied the application, the CJEU states that Member States are not required, under EU law, to grant humanitarian visas to persons who wish to apply for asylum because they would stay in Europe more than three months. However, EU law is only competent for short stays. In other words, humanitarian visas can be granted only based on national law and cannot be part of Schengen law (CJEU, 2017), comforting Member States' and the Commission's position.

At the request of Mr Juncker's cabinet, the Commission finally withdraws the visa package in March 2018 and immediately drafts a new proposal without touring visas or humanitarian visas. The LIBE committee appoints MEP Lopez Aguilar as rapporteur once again. The LIBE Committee is delaying the report, which is only adopted in December 2018. In the meantime, it passed a non-binding resolution inviting the Commission to draft a proposal for a European humanitarian visa. From the VWG representative's point of view, this strategy did not pay off:

The EP has played the clock badly. They lost time getting the Parliament to adopt this resolution on the humanitarian visa, which is non-binding anyway. They didn't have enough time left to fight over the rest and had to give in on everything else [...] They were constrained by the elections, especially since the rapporteur built his whole legislature on the visa policy reform. He needed results, so we counted on that to get the text adopted (Interview 3).

The text is finally adopted in April 2019, and mostly reflects the Council's positions. The scope of the reform is very limited, addressing technical points only. It is a statu quo reform, reflecting neither the Commission's market-oriented frame, nor the Parliament's humanitarian frame.

To conclude, this case study reveals political work specific to MEPs but also specific to the JLS sector. On the one hand, it shows how the defence of a security frame by MEP Hortefeux meets conservative positions of the Member States, forming a coalition to resist the Commission's attempts to liberalize visa policy. The protection of the status quo in migration policy is therefore beneficial to transinstitutional strategies. On the other hand, MEP Lopez Aguilar turned the promotion of a humanitarian frame of the reform into a personal political battle. Although it did not bring any significant outcome, the adamant defence of a humanitarian visa reinforced the symbolic role of the Parliament as a strong advocate of fundamental rights and freedoms. Eventually,

a conjuncture factor emerges from this case study, as the salience of the refugee crisis shaped the framing strategies of MEPs. The Schengen visa, a technical instrument, is the container of larger cleavages on European migration policy, polarized between the imperative for assistance and the imperative for control.

A copyright set for creators, internet users or digital companies? Framing activism in the Parliament during the Copyright reform (2014–2019)

In April 2019, the EU co-legislators adopted a directive regulating copyright within the Digital Single Market (DSM) (EP and Council, 2019). This text was the result of a four-year decision-making process marked by significantly polarized and salient negotiations within the Parliament. Indeed, the MEPs were so divided that in June 2018, they rejected the Legal Affairs (JURI) committee's mandate to have a debate in plenary (Rule 71 of the Parliament).

The directive proposal of the Commission published in September 2016 aimed to adapt European copyright rules to the digital world (EC, 2016). Despite the consecration of four exceptions to copyright, the proposed text appeared as rather protective of intellectual property. Two specific points crystallized all the tensions: Article 11 (now 15) and Article 13 (now 17). The first created a new related right to copyright for press publishers, forcing platforms such as Google News to remunerate the latter for the use of snippets. The second established the responsibility of digital platforms regarding respect for copyright by their hosted content.

In all our interviews, as well as in the press coverage, the debate was described as opposing anti-copyright liberals to pro-copyright conservatives. A meticulous analysis shows that the reality was more nuanced. Indeed, each side gathered surprising coalitions of actors, with different, if not contradictory agendas. For instance, among the opponents of the text, one could find both US-based Big Tech together with free internet activists. The Parliament constituted a central stage for the discursive confrontation of these coalitions, with MEPs advocating for or against the text. The discourse analysis of the plenary session's debate allows us to distinguish three different types of arguments corresponding to three competitive framings of the European copyright policy (for a detailed analysis, see Bonnamy, 2021): a cultural frame, a market frame and an open-access frame. Each one assigns a different policy goal to copyright and is based on different values; the politicization of copyright does not become straightforwardly polarized. Then, the reconstitution of the chronology of the negotiations and debates from September 2014 (creation of a working group dedicated to copyright) to the final adoption of the directive in April 2019 allows for tracking the framing activism of specific MEPs. Two main strategies emerged, as in the case of touring visas: a transinstitutional strategy, and a politicization of expertise strategy.

Three alternative frames: culture, open-access and market

In what we call the culture frame, copyright is considered as an instrument of support for European creators (artists and journalists) and the rest of the cultural sector value chain (editors, producers, distributors, etc.) and protection of the latter against American Big Tech. This frame is advocated for by a coalition of actors such as the French government, most of the French MEPs, the JURI EPP rapporteur Axel Voss, the JURI ALDE shadow rapporteur Jean-Marie Cavada, the Culture and Education Committee (for opinion), the Commission and representatives of the cultural sector. This frame is based on values-loaded elements such as the preservation of 'cultural diversity', the protection of 'European culture and values', and the protection of 'cultural industries'. Its goal is the protection of cultural production. Overall, the Commission's proposal and the final text were considered as embedded in this frame that was mainly mobilized by supporters of the directive and especially of Articles 11 and 13.

The open-access frame sees copyright as an obstacle to free and open internet, and thus, as an instrument of constraint for internet users, favouring big publishers rather than culture. It is notably mobilized by free internet activists, supporters of 'creative commons', consumers' associations, the LIBE Committee (for opinion), the JURI Green shadow rapporteur Julia Reda, and the IMCO rapporteur Catherine Stihler (S&D). The core value of this frame is freedom of speech, and its goal is the defence of the internet as an open and public space. Its advocates are opposed to every version of the text, and especially Article 13, framed as a tool of censorship.

Finally, in the market frame, copyright is an obstacle to fair competition, innovation, and the free circulation of digital goods. Internet users are seen as consumers, and both actors of the cultural and the digital sectors are considered as suppliers. The goal is to build a free common market that stimulates innovation. It is the dominating frame for a large part of the Polish MEPs, the ECR group, the Deutsch, Italian, Finnish, Polish and Luxembourgish governments, and representatives of the digital sector and Big Tech. We distinguish here between fair competition as a legal basis coming from EU competition law and equally used as a rationale by all sides, and fair competition, access to goods and innovation both as values and policy goals (for an example of the use of competition law supporting a culture frame, see Bellon, 2016). Thus, supporters of this frame are largely opposed to the Commission's proposal, which eventually explains the counter-intuitive alliance, or at least the common position of pro-open-access and defenders of the market frame.

These three frames are advocated for by multiple actors, not limited to the Parliament. However, the parliamentary sequence appears as a moment of 'tripartization' of the debate, as the open-access frame accesses the institutional arena, and the culture frame is reinforced through the framing activism of specific MEPs.

MEPs' framing activism on copyright: interinstitutional alliance against the politicization of expertise strategies

By the time the Commission publishes its directive proposal, the subject has already been discussed within the Parliament: an own-initiative report on the reform of Directive 2001/29 regulating copyright is adopted in June 2015, following the announcement by the Juncker Commission of its upcoming action regarding copyright. The rapporteur is Felix Reda. A German member of the Green group, Reda is the only elected member from the Pirate Party, a political group advocating for an open internet. Thus, they initiate open-access framing activism before the publication of the proposal. Reda builds their mandate around this copyright issue. They don't have any academic background in intellectual property – they studied political science and journalism, and dedicated their career to their involvement in the Pirate Party – but recruits an assistant with strong expertise in copyright – a lawyer trained in France, co-founder of the pro-public domain NGO Communia. Together, they come up with a draft report in line with the open-access frame. This 'Reda report' initiates vivid debates and conflicts within the Parliament. Largely ignored by the Commission while preparing its proposal, those debates act as a rehearsal for the upcoming discussion in the Parliament.

In addition, a 'Working Group on Intellectual Property Rights and Copyright Reform' was set up by the JURI Committee in September 2014 and met once a month until October 2016. Coordinated by Jean-Marie Cavada, it gathered ten MEPs, including Reda and Stihler. It aimed to meet with stakeholders, and to gain expertise for the debates to come on intellectual property. It was informally agreed that it would be dissolved after the Commission proposal's publication. Considered as rather anecdotal by our interviewees, it has little impact on the decision-making process, and neither of the future JURI rapporteurs was a member of this group. However, five of them became JURI shadow rapporteurs (including Cavada and Reda) or IMCO rapporteur (Stihler), all defending different framings for copyright. From that perspective, the working group can be seen as an antechamber for upcoming institutional positions and legitimacy-building.

Thus, when the directive proposal arrived in the Parliament, some MEPs had already built an image of 'copyright expert', confirming the social role of the 'expert MEP' analysed by Beauvallet and Michon (2012). The rehearsal and the antechamber were spaces for the accumulation of expertise capital for some MEPs. Thus, the EPP appointed Teresa Comodini, shadow on the Reda report, as rapporteur for the JURI Committee. She presented a draft report in March 2017 amending the proposal within a market frame. Rule 57 of the Parliament was applied to Article 13, and the IMCO became the associated committee for this specific point of the directive, with Stihler as rapporteur. Everything was leading towards a confrontation with the Commission. But a turn of events changed the scenario: Comodini was elected in the Maltese parliament and left her European mandate in June 2017. As nobody in the EPP wanted to take over what had become a very tense dossier, Axel Voss, German MEP and Vice-Chair of the JURI committee replaced her. Without much expertise capital on the matter, he is – in

contrast to Mrs Comodini – close to the Commission’s position, and the official line of the EPP regarding copyright. He substantially changes Comodini’s draft.

The shadow discussions begin in Fall 2017, and confrontation between competing frames started again among the shadow rapporteurs, with, on the one hand, Voss and Cavada defending a culture frame, and on the other hand, Reda and Stihler arguing for open-access. The Voss report was eventually adopted with a tight vote (14 to 9, 2 abstentions) in the JURI Committee in June 2018. The IMCO report was also adopted by a short majority (19 to 7, 6 abstentions) in October 2016. Thus, the political conflict on copyright within the Parliament does not begin with the first plenary vote in July 2018, which rejected the Voss report, but much earlier.

After the adoption of the Parliament mandate for trilogues in September 2018, the political conflict between shadows kept going, through the Voss vs. Reda opposition, defying the compromise culture of informal meetings. Two strategies of framing activism emerge. Voss’ line is actually the same as the Commission’s. He and his team worked together with the Copyright Unit of DG CONNECT to get the text through the trilogues while maintaining its culture frame. Voss was neither perceived as a copyright expert – even though he has a law background – nor a particularly brilliant communicant, but he has strong institutional capital, being rapporteur and vice-chair of the JURI committee – and thus chairing the trilogues. He is a key player for the Commission, with whom he shares a common political view on copyright. Its framing activism is thus deeply rooted in institutional and interinstitutional capital.

Reda’s strategy was different. Their voice is rather marginal in the Parliament, but they still manage to appear as a key player. They apply a principle of transparency and would be vocal on social media about their disagreements during these discussions. If this transgressive behaviour regarding the social norms of the institution is condemned by most participants, Reda is still perceived, even by their opponents within the institutions, and especially within the Commission, as a real expert on copyright issues. If in the end, they fail to have the copyright directive rejected, Reda still performs framing activism to promote open-access, managing to bridge two poles of the ‘Eurocratie field’ (Georgakakis, 2012): the technocratic and the political. They combine their political capital and *savoir-faire* to mobilize outside of the institution, with their expertise capital to be taken seriously by the most technocratic pole. They use this expertise to defend a very political stance on copyright, translating it into concrete technical amendments. In that sense, we argue that Reda’s framing activism on copyright is the politicization of expertise strategy.

Through this brief overview of the debate and negotiations, we see two main strategies of framing activism. First, Voss’s alliance with the Commission to defend a culture frame throughout the whole process can be characterized as a transinstitutional strategy, similar to Hortefeux in the Visa case. Secondly, from a marginal position as a pirate party single elected member, Reda starts with a rather classical accumulation of expertise capital that they then mobilize through the politicization of expertise strategy to support an open-access frame. If it fails regarding policy outcome, it nonetheless allows for this frame to become a plausible alternative, that is still, while we write, very present in the national debates on the transposition of the directive.

Conclusion: understanding the role of agency within politicization's dynamics

The comparison of these case studies highlights contrasting results. Although both processes were highly contested, the policy outcomes were divergent. In the case of the Visa Code, the competition between the frames results in a technical text aligned with the security frame. There are not one but two overlapping sets of conflicts: one between the market frame and the security frame, and another between the humanitarian frame and the security frame. Regarding the copyright directive, all three frames compete with each other at the same time. The cultural frame prevails over the two others, even if the open-access frame is likely to keep polarizing debates when the directive is transposed.

To address our research question, these two cases demonstrate that MEPs managed to create room for agency within the constraints of the OLP through three main types of framing activism strategies: 1) One can see two illustrations of *transinstitutional strategies*; that is, for instance, the alliance between Brice Hortefeux and the Council on a security-oriented frame for the touring visa proposal, and the alliance between Axel Voss and the Commission on a culture frame for the copyright directive. 2) The Visa case also demonstrates a *blocking strategy*; that is, the inflexibility of Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar to advocate for a humanitarian frame. 3) Finally, with the copyright case we identify a *politicization of expertise strategy*, with Felix Reda's framing activism triggering both political and expertise capitals to defend an open-access frame.

We defined framing activism as a type of political work that implies the promotion by an actor of an antagonistic conception of a public problem, as a means of engaging conflict with other actors and 'existing' in the collective dramaturgy of policy-making. It allows one to analyse MEPs' political work, and to understand how they manage to create room to manoeuvre within the institutional constraints of the OLP. In both cases, we saw how different strategies of framing activism drove political conflict, confirming the heuristic value of the concept of political work pointed out in recent literature (Smith 2019; Mérand 2021) to understand the dynamics of politicization. Regarding the theoretical contribution of this chapter, we believe that with the concept of framing activism, 1) we contribute to refining the typology of *political work* initiated by Mérand (2021), and 2) we propose a conceptual tool fitted to understand better the role of *agency* within the dynamics of politicization. Regarding our empirical contribution, we complete previous work (such as Fromage, 2018) by showing how policy failure such as the touring visa proposal can work as timely cases to study politicization. The concept of framing activism proved useful to understand such failures, and specially suited to small-*n* case studies.

Drawing on our findings, and going over the initial aim of this chapter, we can identify two kinds of possible effects of politicization driven by framing activism:

- An output or substantive effect: politicization through framing activism affects public policy itself. This effect is two-fold. The field of possible framings opens up when the legislative proposal reaches out to the Parliament. Thus, the humanitarian frame and the open-access frame became concrete

alternatives for the Visa Code and copyright reforms through the activism of MEPs. It would be interesting, for future research, to see how much this opening-up can affect the rest of the process, for instance, the transposition of the directives within Member States. Another type of output effect is the failure of the initial framing, which results in the Visa touring case, in a failure of public policy, as the text was abandoned.

- An input or institutional effect: politicization through framing activism affects the institutions themselves. This effect is four-fold. With transinstitutional framing strategies, we see a reinforcement of alliances between institutions based on common framings, such as the Parliament and the Council (security-oriented frame for touring visa), the Parliament and the Commission (culture frame for copyright), or the Council and the Commission (against the humanitarian frame for Visa code reform). Then, it can have a symbolic effect on the image of the Parliament appearing as the sole defender of humanitarian concerns against the two other institutions. It can also allow for rather marginal actors – both in terms of initial political and institutional resources, such as Julia Reda – to access the centre of the European decision-making space. Finally, it can lead to a politicization of consensual negotiations and behind-closed-doors institutions such as trilogues, as in the copyright case. As such, the latter is in line with the findings of Hoppe (this volume) on the importance of the agency to explain the politicization of trilogues. Thus, the framing strategies we identify could also be analysed as ‘politicization management strategies’ (Hoppe, this volume) that would work as an alternative way to conceptualize political work.

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Politicization in trilogues – Investigating an unlikely couple

Alexander Hoppe¹

Introduction

It is a conventional prejudice that EU legislation is agreed under debatable democratic circumstances. Somewhere in a secluded room in Brussels, a chosen few negotiate directives or regulations with considerable impact on European citizens. This procedure is called a trilogue – and negative assessments as to its democratic quality abide, both in academia and in the wider public (Reh, 2014; Roeder-Rynning and Greenwood, 2015; Laloux, 2020; Brandsma and Hoppe, 2020; European Ombudsman, 2015).

In the last two legislative turns, trilogues have rapidly replaced whichever formal routes the treaties had foreseen legislative proposals to take in the ordinary legislative procedure. By now, virtually all legislative proposals that need negotiations between the European Parliament (EP) and the Council of the EU (Council) pass trilogues. In trilogues, (a few) representatives of the EP, the Council and the Commission negotiate legislative files on the basis of the Commission proposal and negotiation mandates issued by the legislative institutions (Laloux, 2020). These negotiations take place ‘in camera’ (Curtin and Leino, 2017). Complementary documents are hard to trace and access, and reporting back, both to the public and to the respective institutions, is of varying quality at best (Brandsma, 2019). In a wider European and EU political landscape which is increasingly politicized (de Wilde et al., 2016), trilogues are hence a prime example of what many would call depoliticized policy making.

Recent insights give reason to doubt this rather one-dimensional view on trilogues. Since their inception, trilogues have undergone a considerable institutionalization. The trilogue process has been diversified and now offers different options for the negotiating actors to, possibly, factor in and use wider societal politicization in their favour. This

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analysis investigates the impact of wider politicization on what has been called the ‘machine room of EU policy-making’ (Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood, 2020). The question, hence, is not whether EU politicization occurs, but how the politicization of EU politics impacts policy- and decision-making in trilogues and how we can make theoretical sense of it.

In the following, both politicization and trilogues will be conceptualized. Based on these conceptualizations, a causal model will be developed as to how we can expect politicization tendencies to impact trilogue negotiations. Afterwards, the trilogue negotiations of a highly politicized legislative file – the posting of workers directive – will be analysed, in order to produce first findings on the impact of politicization on trilogues.

Permeable doors? Theoretical perspectives on trilogues and politicization

Given the impressive institutional trajectory trilogues have taken in the last two decades, scholarly interest has increased, as has our understanding of trilogues. Space does not allow for a comprehensive summary of this literature here – luckily, this has been excellently done elsewhere (Laloux, 2020). Instead, we will present a short outline of what trilogues are and what we know about them, with an eye to this analysis.

The earlier statement that all legislation passes through trilogues is not an exaggeration. In the 2014–19 legislative turn, out of 401 pieces of legislation that were agreed, none entered the third reading, and only four entered the full second reading phase (European Parliament, 2019). The other 397 were agreed early – either at the first or early second reading. We know that whenever this is the case, trilogues were the chosen venue of negotiations. How exactly do these negotiations come about?

After the Commission issues a legislative proposal, both the EP and the Council internally negotiate a mandate for their respective negotiators or negotiation teams to enter trilogue negotiations. For the Council, the rotating presidency takes on this role. For the EP, a negotiation team is headed by both the rapporteur of the file and the chair of the respective committee(s) responsible. In addition, shadow rapporteurs from each political group complement the negotiation team. For the Commission, mostly several representatives of the respective DG(s) are present in trilogues, again from varying hierarchical levels (Brandsma and Hoppe, 2020).

Once the institutions have issued their mandates, the negotiators can officially start the trilogue process. In a variable number of secluded trilogue meetings they negotiate a final version of the text. In between meetings, the negotiators report back to their institutions and if needed have their mandates updated (Håge and Naurin, 2013). Once the negotiators agree on a preliminary result, the legislative file needs to be agreed formally by both institutions.

What is of specific interest for this analysis is what exactly happens in the time between a mandate is issued and preliminary agreement. The above short summary is not comprehensive in that, in place of just a few full or ‘political trilogues’, the

negotiators engage in a plethora of other meetings. Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood (2015) have shown that negotiators interact in a three-layered institutional setup: At the highest hierarchical level, there are political trilogue meetings in which all negotiators are entitled to be represented. Second, so-called technical meetings or technical trilogues take place in between political trilogues and assemble representatives of all negotiators at the technical or assistant level. Third, informal negotiations often take place between a limited set of actors, often only involving the chief negotiators: the presidency representative and the EP rapporteur (Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood, 2015).

It is especially this multi-layered character of trilogues as an institution which has led to first cautious revisions of the view of trilogues as *only* a depoliticizing device developed to insulate EU policy negotiations from societal politicization. In general, recent studies especially emphasize the institutional flexibility within trilogues – the possibility that negotiators themselves or other factors may decisively alter the institutional practices and routes a legislative file follows (Farrell and Heritier, 2003, 2007; Reh and Heritier, 2012; Judge and Earnshaw, 2011; Delreux and Laloux, 2018; Brandsma and Hoppe, 2020). Further, the three venues identified above differ in aspects relevant to politicization: Both the range and political hierarchy of participants, as well as accessibility to third parties (interest representatives and civil-society organizations (CSOs)) (Greenwood and Roederer-Rynning, 2019). Trilogues have been conceptualized as ‘politicized diplomacy’, in which the political nature of negotiations in the EP collides with the diplomatic tradition in the Council (Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood, 2020). Hence, despite the first impression of trilogues as depoliticization devices, this informal institution actually does offer institutional space for politicization. The question then is how politicization processes are gone about.

The Agency perspective on politicization

Politicization research has blossomed in the last two decades. Again, comprehensive and insightful summaries of this literature are given elsewhere, both in this volume and beyond (de Wilde and Zürn, 2012; de Wilde et al., 2016; Bresanelli et al., 2020). And while there are many arguments for rethinking the currently established definitions and conceptions, this analysis will stick with the conventional definition of politicization developed by de Wilde and others: ‘(a) the growing salience of European governance, involving (b) a polarisation of opinion, and (c) an expansion of actors and audiences engaged in monitoring EU affairs’ (de Wilde et al., 2016, p. 4). This definition of politicization has a rather broad, societal component and is issue-sensitive, seeing politicization as an issue-specific development rather than a broader condition of the Union. The aim of this study is to link, first theoretically and then empirically, the politicization of EU policy issues to the very heart of EU decision-making in trilogues.

How then do we theorize this link? Following Bresanelli et al. (2020), the above-mentioned domestic politicization can be seen as bottom-up pressure on EU-level actors (both national and supranational) (Bresanelli et al., 2020, p. 330). Accordingly, ‘under such pressure EU-level actors have to respond’ (ibid.). We can hence logically

expect EU-level actors to respond to politicization pressures, and this also counts for actors in trilogues. It is this response which primarily determines whether and how politicization influences decision-making in trilogues.

Following Schimmelfennig, we take an agency-based perspective on politicization. ‘Member state governments and supranational actors have strong incentives to overcome the constraints of domestic politicization pressures or use these pressures to their advantage’ (Schimmelfennig, 2020, p. 343). Broadly speaking, this ‘reactive politicization management’ has two potential directions:

By (re-)framing and (re-)packaging policies, selecting and changing decision-making processes and (re-)designing institutions, EU actors can prevent or deflect politicization that would limit their room to manoeuvre. Alternatively, they may choose to be responsive to domestic pressures or even ‘ride the wave’ by fuelling and exploiting politicization pressures for their own purposes (Schimmelfennig, 2020, p. 343).

As an institution, trilogues can be and have been considered (albeit not necessarily explicitly so) as reactive depoliticization (Shackleton and Raunio, 2003; Reh, 2014; Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood, 2015). This analysis aims to dig deeper and focus on the individual actors within single trilogue negotiations in situations of contentious policy-making. Having developed into a complex institutional framework, we can expect politicization to have differentiated effects on trilogue negotiations. Following an actor-centred view on politicization, it is to the actors within the trilogue process that we ascribe a central role in the causal model.

The role and influence of trilogue actors was a focus of analysis early on in the literature on trilogues. In the so-called relais-actor thesis, Farrell and Heritier argue that specifically rapporteurs gain disproportionate influence in trilogue negotiations relative to MEPs outside of trilogues (Farrell and Heritier, 2004, p. 1208). To date, there is no consensus on the actual influence relais actors have as negotiators in trilogues, especially as concerns the content of the legislation agreed upon (Laloux, 2020; Brandsma and Hoppe, 2020). Yet, negotiators do have influence when it comes to the process of negotiations. Research has shown that negotiators have important leeway in determining this process, especially when it comes to choosing between the three layers of negotiations outlined above, as they have the freedom to ‘steer the actual negotiations away from [political] trilogue meetings towards even more informal bi- and multilateral consultations’ (Brandsma and Hoppe, 2020, p. 360). When analysing the impact of politicization on trilogues, it is exactly this procedural dimension of actors’ influence which we need to focus upon. In terms of this procedural influence, we can expect the rapporteur and the Council presidency to be the most central trilogue actors with the biggest influence in shaping the negotiations. How, then might a causal model explaining the impact of politicization in trilogues look?

A first, crucial step in a potential impact of politicization on trilogue negotiations is of course the existence of a politicized policy issue. Often, policy issues negotiated in trilogues are highly technical and hardly attract public attention. Hence, a first

necessary precondition for politicization to impact actors in trilogues is a *high degree of politicization around the policy issue under negotiation*.

In case a policy issue is politicized, there is a range of possible reactions during the process of trilogue negotiations. The assumption is that it is actors' preferences which drive their behaviour. Neither the origin of their preferences nor the role of institutional and ideational factors on these preferences can be further elaborated on in this study.

The only distinction that can be assumed to be of theoretical importance is that which exists between the two different types of preferences and the opportunities and constraints created by politicization for actors to pursue these preferences.

First, actors have a substantive policy interest, i.e. an interest in shaping the content of the resulting piece of legislation in a specific way. It is reasonable to assume that all actors involved, both MEPs and representatives of the Member States, have a specific policy preference in any negotiation. Second, actors have what can be called a procedural interest, i.e. an interest in concluding the negotiation with a positive result (legislation being adopted) or not. File adoption, i.e. the successful conclusion of long and costly (in terms of time, etc.) negotiations is a good in itself, and within the EU institutions it is of high importance, as 'efficiency constitutes a primary goal of EU actors and is an important motivation behind the creation of decision-making institutions' (Mühlböck and Rittberger, 2015, p. 7). The negotiators (especially the presidency and rapporteur) have a strong incentive to bring negotiations to a positive result – *especially* with a politicized file, where positive file conclusion generates media attention.

Concerning these preferences of the actors involved, high degrees of politicization involve both opportunities and constraints for the actors to achieve their preferences. Specifically, politicization could represent a constraint, as file conclusion can be expected to be more difficult the higher the interest in the file, and the less negotiators are 'left alone' to find compromises among themselves. In contrast, policy-seeking actors might be able to use the increased interest and publicly push for their referred positions. Hence, in terms of substantive policy interest, politicization could offer opportunities. Following Schimmelfennig, we assume that actors will apply different politicization management strategies according to their preferences and their respective means of influencing the negotiation process (Schimmelfennig, 2020, p. 345). Accordingly, *actors will use strategies of politicization management to advance their specific interest*. They either try to make use of the new opportunities offered by politicization (reactive politicization), or to find a way of diminishing the constraints coming with a politicized file (reactive depoliticization).

Actors have three main avenues for impacting the negotiation process: (1) changing the institutional venue of negotiations (within the three-layered setup described above); thereby (2) expanding or restricting the range of trilogue insiders present in specific moments of the negotiations; (3) Insulating the negotiation process through informalization or opening it up to the wider public. The exact behaviour within these three avenues of action will depend on actors' preferences (both on policy content and on file conclusion) and their ability to manipulate the course of action

during trilogues. Either way, the negotiating *actors with the power to do so will (partly) determine the process of trilogue negotiations* as a means of politicization management. Figure 1 summarizes the causal model.

Figure 1. Causal Model

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Policy issues in trilogues exhibit high degrees of public politicization	Actors in trilogues use politicization management strategies	Actors (partly) determine the process of trilogue negotiations
	Actors reactively try to either use strategies of politicization or depoliticization management in order to advance their interest in negotiations	By broadening or decreasing the audience and/or choosing specific institutional venues for negotiations, actors will change the course of trilogue negotiations due to their strategies of (de)politicization management

Methods

Having developed a first causal model for politicization in trilogues, a plausibility probe is the appropriate method to put the theoretical expectations to a first empirical test. Plausibility probes ‘involve attempts to determine whether potential validity [of a model] may reasonably be considered great enough to warrant the pains and costs of testing, which are almost always considerable’ (Eckstein, 1975, p. 108). It ‘allows the researcher to sharpen a hypothesis or theory, to refine the operationalization or measurement of key variables, or to explore the suitability of a particular case as a vehicle for testing a theory before engaging in a costly and time-consuming research effort’ (Levy, 2008, p. 7). Given that the agency-perspective on politicization is relatively recent and, to the author’s knowledge, the politicization potential of trilogue actors has never been theorized, the plausibility probe provides a good opportunity to test whether our theoretical expectations can be considered reasonable. It allows us to ‘shed light on [the] plausibility’ (Eckstein, 2000, p. 124) of the assumed causal connection between politicization and proceedings in trilogues. Applying the theoretical model to the case allows us to determine whether it is supported by the empirical realities. Thereby, we can (1) establish whether it is worthwhile testing the model across a broader range of cases and contrasting cases with divergent degrees of politicization, and (2) possibly refine and develop the model further on the basis of the in-depth analysis of the case.

The case chosen for this analysis is the negotiation process on Directive (EU) 2018/957 on the posting of workers. It can be considered a most likely case for seeing the effects of politicization in trilogues. This directive amends the original 1996 directive. While the case will in detail be introduced below, the directive can be considered one of the most important files of the legislative turn of 2015–19, and

certainly exhibits degrees of politicization which are unlikely for day-to-day EU policy-making.

In order to analyse the negotiations on posting, several data sources are used. Firstly, official EU documents accompanying the negotiations will be utilized, such as the Commission proposal, the EP draft report, report and amendments, and different presidency documents from the Council, especially during the mandating phase. Second, so-called ‘four-column documents’ are used as the main negotiation documents by the institutions. In four columns, they depict the original Commission proposal, the positions of the EP and the Council and, lastly, compromises struck during the negotiations. Lastly, eleven participants in the trilogue negotiations were interviewed in 2018 within the framework of a broader research project on trilogues. The interviews aim to cover all involved institutions. Table 1 gives an overview of the institutional positions of interviewees.

Table 1. Institutional positions of interviewees

Position	Quantity
MEP	2
Commission representative	1
EP administrative staff/policy advisor	4
Member State representative	2
Council administrative staff	2

The respondents have been promised anonymity, which is why they will be referred to as ‘R(espondent)1’ to ‘R11’ in the analysis.

In the following, first the directive will briefly be explained, as well as the degree of politicization of the file. Secondly, the negotiation process will be described, with a focus on the events and processes relevant to politicization management. Afterwards, strategies of politicization and depoliticization management used by actors during trilogue negotiations will explicitly be mentioned and linked to the theoretical considerations above.

The Posting of workers directive

The posting of workers directive has ‘basically [been] the most important proposal in the social area’ (R11) of the 2014–19 legislative term. It regulates the conditions of employees who ‘have a genuine employment relationship with the employer in the country of origin/sending country [and are posted for] the temporary provision of a service within the territory of the receiving country’ (Voss, 2016, p. 44). Even though they only account for a limited percentage of the total workforce in the Union, posted workers have caused intense debate. They are often seen as a reason for wage-dumping

and unfair competition for employees in high-wage countries, and have therefore featured in many Eurosceptic narratives.

The legislative environment around posted workers was outdated, which is why the left parties in the EP made their support for a new Commission President Juncker dependent on the promise of revising the original 1996 directive.

Juncker kept his promise, and the Commission published a proposal for a revision of the posting of workers directive in 2016 (European Commission, 2016). While some of the issues will again be touched upon later, the actual policy content is secondary for the aim of this analysis, which will focus on the negotiation process rather than outcome.

Politicization management at play? The degree of politicization

The first step of the theorized mechanisms includes a simple, yet crucial aspect: For politicization to affect the negotiations, the issue must be politicized. The data shows that this has clearly been the case in the negotiations on this directive. The directive was perceived as ‘one of the most political files, and the most controversial and the most discussed [in the media], which ‘adds some dimensions in the negotiation process’ (R1). One of the signs of the high salience of the file was that, early on in the process, eleven parliamentary chambers issued a so-called reasoned opinion, together filing a ‘yellow card’ and forcing the Commission to revisit the proposal and justify in case it wants to stick to it. Since the inception of the procedure in the Lisbon treaty, national parliaments have only made use of this procedure three times (Cooper, 2015).

As an exceptional case in EU law-making, the issue of posting ‘was discussed very emotionally. In the media, it was flared up very passionately’ (R8, but also R4, R5, R7, R11). For some of the presidencies, ‘it was a very hyped-up topic. Throughout the media, it was the most important file’ (R3). Accordingly, the range of actors scrutinizing the negotiations was experienced as particularly high: ‘It was followed from all different actors and sides. Associations, communities, both sides, business communities, and trade union communities, as well’ (R5).

In both legislative institutions, the polarization of opinions figured prominently from the beginning. One line of political separation ran geographically across the continent, with Member States more in the east of the Union generally opposing strict legislation, while especially receiving Member States in the west and north of the Union wanted strict legislation (R2,4,5,8,11). The file ‘divided Europe almost more than migration. We were in the middle of the migration crisis² and Europe was divided. [...] When the Commission came with the proposal for revising posting, it divided even more’ (R5).

Not only have there been clear dividing lines, but the opposition between the camps has also been experienced as particularly tense: ‘It was constantly “give and

² The refugee crisis of 2015/16

take". I have never seen that with other proposals that you were so aware constantly that you are giving or taking from someone'. (R3) The polarization also shows in the intra-institutional processes towards reaching a negotiation mandate. Both the Council and EP needed around one-and-a-half years to agree on a mandate within their institutions (Council of the European Union, 2016). The actors involved in the negotiations were hence not only aware of an increase in polarization but considered the posting of workers directive to have 'divided people in a very, very heavy way' (R5).

The negotiation process

On 14 November 2017 inter-institutional negotiations began with the first of eight political trilogues. Customary trilogue practice would have expected us to see that these political trilogue meetings would have been accompanied by technical meetings, involving technical-level staff and political advisors. These technical meetings normally precede and follow-up political trilogues to prepare compromise and substantiate political agreements found. Yet, the posting negotiations stand out in that none of these technical meetings took place.

A curious choice: The absence of technical trilogues

This fact can be attributed to the choice within the EP negotiation team, and especially the two co-rapporteurs, to prevent these technical meetings (R1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11). The two biggest party-groups in the EP, EPP and S&D had early on in the process decided to share the rapporteurship, as neither wanted to pass on this leading role in a file of such political importance (R1,3,5,6,11). Together, the two rapporteurs Elisabeth Morin-Chartier (EPP) and Agnes Jongerius (S&D) decided that 'this file was so politically important, there is nothing technical' (R9), and that technical meetings would not be appropriate (R2,9,10,11). This decision was far from undisputed.

Many trilogue participants disagreed (R1,2,4,8,11), as 'it's also technically a very complex file. And to explain in the trilogue technical issues is impossible' (R5). Especially the Council negotiators 'tried several times [...] to at least do the preparatory steps, which is normal for any negotiation round. You have to prepare it. But it was refused, they said there is no discussion anywhere else except in that political forum of trilogues' (R1).

Disputed or not, the rapporteurs succeeded in preventing technical meetings until the very end of the negotiation process, which only proceeded slowly in the beginning. The first trilogue is often merely a first meeting in which the respective institutions officially present their positions, while no compromises are agreed yet. Only in the second trilogue were compromises first reached, with slow progress in the following two trilogues until the end of 2017.

A new presidency and stagnating negotiations

The change of years after trilogue four also saw an important change in the composition of negotiators. With the rotating presidency changing as of January 2018, Estonia left the chair of the negotiation team on the Council side and gave way to the Bulgarian presidency. This change of presidencies had been accompanied by substantive worries among some of the participants (R1,3,4,6,7,11). While both Estonia and Bulgaria had been countries in which parliamentary chambers participated in the yellow card procedure, the Estonian presidency had been widely acknowledged for its political neutrality on (not only) the posting of workers file. This perception of honest and neutral brokering among Member States and the EP was expected by some to change with the Bulgarians taking over.

Yet, these fears turned out to be ill-founded. On the contrary, the Bulgarian presidency was acknowledged in all institutions for its splendid and impartial approach to the negotiations: 'The Bulgarians were very constructive. I didn't expect that in the beginning, also because it was not clear which position they would take due to their yellow card, but they tried to advance the file' (R9, but also R1,3,4,6,11).

Despite the constructive role of the presidency, the negotiations in early 2018 still progressed very slowly and even, according to some participants, came to a halt, which was mainly attributed to the high degree of polarization of positions (R3,5). What made the situation so difficult was in part the involvement of very high-level governmental actors. The most interesting case for this analysis is the strategy by the French delegation and, especially, (then) newly elected president Emmanuel Macron.

External actors: The involvement of Macron and too many cooks

The proposal on a revision of the directive coincided with the competition for the French presidency in 2017. The candidates' positioning towards the EU and the general growing Euroscepticism of the French electorate became important topics. In this campaign, Emmanuel Macron was strongly positioned as pro-European, and he specifically used the posting of workers directive in his campaign (Briaçon, 2017). While Macron's aim was to reduce the risk of unfair competition in general, he was explicitly vocal on a specific issue of the directive, namely what (wrongly) became publicly known as the length of posting.

One provision on the proposal was to lay down the number of months after which 'all the applicable terms and conditions of employment which are laid down in the Member State where the work is carried out' apply to a posted worker (European Commission, 2016). Hence, after a certain period of time the posted workers would fully fall under the labour and social regulation of the receiving Member State. In contrast to how it often has been portrayed in the media the posting would not stop after this period of time. Initially, the European Commission envisioned this switch to occur after 24 months. Macron, however, in his electoral campaign, publicly promoted 'posting to end' after 12 months, and after his election this became the official position of the French government.

The consequence of such high-profile involvement of Heads of State and Government became clear during the negotiations. The twelve months for the Council became a 'red line on which we couldn't move' (R1). That is why everybody was aware that in the negotiations, 'we couldn't do anything on these two points during trilogue negotiations' (R9), which was considered 'not really helpful, because we could not touch this deal they agreed' (R9). This is a good example of how polarized the positions were:

We had quite tight majorities, it means when you have one Member State in either block [and] the Member State has a very strong position on something, by compromising on that you risk that they fall out of a supporting qualified majority, and then you have no qualified majority at all. So always, it is a manoeuvre on the brakes, we have to be very careful because if we give in here, we risk to lose them, if we give in on that we risk to lose others, so it was really a balancing act throughout the negotiations (R1).

For EP actors, which arguably have less potential to adhere to the public, a common strategy used especially by the left parties (and the Greens) has been the heavy involvement of trade union representatives (R2,3,5,6,7,10,11). 'The trade unions were obviously one of the biggest stakeholders for us to work with. Sometimes, [this way] we had more influence instead of going directly' (R4). Union representatives could use the leverage they had with some Member States in the Council and try to push the EP's positions indirectly.

To some, this involvement was a burden, with the feeling prevailing that 'there were too many cooks involved' (R7). Compromising on their own positions, which is so essential in trilogue negotiations, was considered losing, 'and nobody wanted to lose' (R3). In a situation of high polarization, many participants experienced the negotiations stagnating at the beginning of 2018: 'It was definitely locked at some point. There was a stage where it was in my opinion completely locked, particularly in the beginning of the Bulgarian presidency, up until it suddenly started moving very fast' (R4).

High-level resolutions

How could the standstill be resolved? The data shows that the chief negotiators used a well-known trilogue strategy to foster agreement: Informal exchange involving a selected few. In political trilogue seven, a general understanding was reached, and the four-column documents show us that both before and especially after trilogue seven the great majority of the compromise cells had been filled. This was only possible due to the extensive informal talks involving only the co-rapporteurs, the presidency and the Commission at the highest political level (R1,2,4,5,7,8,11).

'What of course happened, especially towards the end, were informal contacts between [the rapporteurs], the Commission and the presidency, to see how the file could be concluded' (R9). In principle, the chief negotiators would meet before trilogue negotiations to exchange the positions within their own institutions, but also possible negotiation strategies in the upcoming trilogues in the spirit of being able to conclude

the file (R1,2,4,6,7,9,11). ‘It was the highest political level, meaning [the] ministerial [level] and Commissioner; there were direct contacts between them’ (R1).

Next to a general awareness as to the existence of these informal meetings, they can also be recognized during the negotiations: ‘I think a lot took place behind closed doors, in the sense that the rapporteurs met with the respective presidency and the Commission, that’s quite clear that there were agreements. You also noticed that in the talks and the dynamics, where it was difficult and where it proceeded a lot quicker’ (R10). These informal talks between the chief negotiators were what facilitated agreement to a degree that the eighth and last trilogue was perceived as ‘a theatre performance, where more or less all elements were pre-agreed in a very small circle of about six actors’ (R8). It is interesting to see that while the co-rapporteurs considered this file too important to have their assistants and advisors hold technical meetings with their counterparts in the Commission and the Council, they did get involved in highly informal talks, severely insulating actual negotiations from public pressure.

Politicization dynamics in trilogues

The case of the posting of workers directive offers manifold insights on the consequences of politicization in trilogue negotiations. Let us briefly revisit the causal model step-by-step to evaluate what the process illustrates.

First, the issue of posting was politicized to a high degree. Already before the negotiations started this was perceived as one of the most important files of the legislative turn of 2015–19. Second, we expected that actors would use strategies of either politicization or depoliticization management that would suit their personal or institutional preferences. The case study showed that both re-active politicization and depoliticization strategies were employed.

Politicization

An early trace of clear politicization was the rapporteurs’ decision to prevent technical meetings. Their official reasoning was directly linked to the politicization of the file: Given the strong political interest in and importance of the posting of workers directive, they considered it inappropriate for anything to be discussed at a technical level only, without the involvement of high-level political actors (read: themselves). While nobody disputed the political importance of the file, many opposed the decision.

Accordingly, with the actual need for technical meetings acknowledged by most actors except the rapporteurs, there is reason to believe that the decision was driven by strong motives. Indeed, some interviewees suspect the fear of ‘losing out’ in technical meetings was a reason for the chosen strategy. This is in line with earlier findings on the perception in all institutions that while in general, political trilogues have fostered the position of the EP vis-à-vis the Council, it is in technical meetings where the Council and possibly the Commission still out-perform parliamentary representatives (Roederer-Rynning and Greenwood, 2020). This seems in line with

our theoretical expectations: Actors with the power to shape the negotiation process use a politicization-strategy in accordance with their interest, specifically using the opportunities offered by politicization to advance their own policy interests.

A second example of politicization strategies could be witnessed in the Council. The strategy of the French delegation was clearly based on using the societal politicization of the file to (1) publicly state their position already during the mandating phase and thereby (2) establish it as a steady red line in the negotiation. Not only did Macron use the salient issue to position himself in his electoral campaign, by re-framing the issue, he managed to mobilize public support, which was afterwards difficult to argue against. In addition, all actors involved were aware that after such active public statements the French delegation could not move away from the twelve-month position. As a consequence, this strategy hardened the positions in the Council. The strategy of the French hence, willingly so or not, strengthened the negotiation position of the Council on this issue and complicated negotiations. Again, an actor used reactive politicization strategies to foster his interest, both within as well as beyond the negotiations, but with severe consequences for the latter.

Parliamentary actors especially tried to gain leverage by extensively involving Trade Union representatives in the negotiations, not only to make sure these actors were satisfied with the outcome but also, in part, to reinforce their positions by using the often very influential Unions as partners. While arguably the politicization of the file was helpful in that it led to greater overall Union-interest in the file, the data does not allow the conclusion that this strategy was case-specific and thereby in direct relation and reaction to the societal politicization of the file. While in general this strategy extends to the actors involved in the negotiation, and could be considered a reactive politicization strategy, we cannot conclude that it was triggered by overall societal politicization – or rather it is a very common trilogue phenomenon.

Depoliticization

The case study has also shown, as has been established in earlier research (Reh, 2014; Brandsma and Hoppe, 2020), that trilogues offer influential actors possibilities for further depoliticization strategies. Indeed, the chief negotiators, especially towards the end of the negotiations, made extensive use of the possibility to meet in very informal settings, not involving more than a few influential actors to prepare the political trilogue meetings and at least carve out potential avenues towards finding agreement. The data does not provide reasons to believe that the rationale behind these meetings was pushing through their own policy preferences. Rather, the ultimate goal of informally negotiating was to reach an agreement and lead the negotiations to a successful end.

In line with our expectations, it seems to not only be policy preferences that drive actors in choosing reactive (de)politicization strategies: The strong wish of all actors to arrive at an agreement has driven the choice for reactive depoliticization by shielding negotiations even further, not only from the public eye, but also the members of their respective institutions and even some of those who are entitled to a seat at the table.

Actors have tried to reduce the constraints associated with increased politicization by further insulating the negotiations. What becomes clear is that the general agency perspective on politicization needs to be adapted in the case of trilogue negotiations, as the preference to conclude a file is of the highest importance in explaining chief negotiators' behaviour.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown that the public politicization of contentious policy issues has an impact on trilogue negotiations. Additionally, the chapter provides first insights into just how this happens: Just as politicization in the public sphere does not happen 'out of the blue' and has to rely on the agency of influential actors, this agency is also needed if politicization is to impact the proceedings in Brussels (Bresanelli et al., 2020; Schimmelfennig, 2020). Trilogues offer different roads for negotiations to take and different venues for issues to be negotiated at, and this analysis shows that politicization is one of the factors determining this trajectory. Of the different strategies of politicization management, especially reactive politicization by trilogue actors has figured prominently and could directly be linked to earlier public politicization. These tendencies are also in line with hypotheses on reactive politicization formulated elsewhere (Schimmelfennig, 2020).

While also reactive depoliticization has played a role in these negotiations, it is unclear how far they are triggered by prior politicization or simply belong to the normal trilogue routine. This is one interesting future line of research: Does the prior public politicization of an issue determine the degree of depoliticization within trilogues (mainly through further informalization of the negotiations), or has this become an inherent part of trilogue negotiations independent of public interest in a file. We need to know more about the conditions under which actors decide to apply which strategy in relation to politicization. This also ties into a broader debate about our understanding of politicization: Is it an issue-sensitive phenomenon, or can politicization be considered the current condition of the EU, so that all institutional developments need (also) be interpreted in light of this overarching condition?

Another interesting question concerns the normative implications. Should future research confirm the first signs that politicization impacts trilogue negotiations, can this be considered a positive development from a democratic perspective, given that it means societal developments find their way into the Brussels 'machine room'? Trilogues have traditionally been considered depoliticization devices par excellence. Should we be able to trace a consistent impact of politicization on trilogue negotiations, this could be applauded from a citizen perspective: What happens in Brussels' machine rooms is not fully detached from broader societal developments.

Yet, tracing an impact of politicization, especially conceptualized and theorized as in this study, does not necessarily increase the role of 'the public', or societal actors. It merely means that trilogue actors have to react to politicization. How exactly public politicization hence impacts trilogues depends to a large degree on a few

central actors. In this reading, politicization could be seen as broadening the choice of a set of already privileged actors, especially in an institutional setting of trilogues which offers well-functioning institutional setups to escape the constraints posed by societal politicization. From a third perspective, the politicization of trilogues could be regarded critically, as ‘messy politics’ could complicate mostly technical discussions on the best design of European legislation. In this technocratic view of trilogues, political fights are to be fought elsewhere (especially in the EP and the Council), while trilogues are simply an institutional setting to allow finding the compromises the EU is dependent upon. In short: The normative assessment depends on the interpretation of the role of trilogues within the EU institutional setup. Especially in light of ongoing discussions on a potential reform of trilogues, it is very important to further reflect on these questions.

In other words, we have only just begun to understand how politicization matters for decision-making processes in Brussels. Any future study can learn from the insights provided above, and should not deter the actors so pivotal for politicization from entering decision-making routines in Brussels.

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Mute under pressure? The domestic politicization of European affairs and the participation of MEPs in plenary debates

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Introduction

Debates in the parliament plenary are a common feature of legislative decision-making. In the EU legislative process, the European Parliament (EP) Plenary is the locus for such debates, which are usually held before the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) vote on legislation. Debates enable MEPs to publicly express their views on the legislative policies to be adopted, and so constitute an important arena for deliberation and public communication (Bachtiger, 2014). The number of MEPs actually taking the floor in the plenary to publicly express their views varies greatly from one debate to another. This variation has not yet been explained comprehensively. Against this background, the aim of this chapter is to contribute to explaining differences in MEPs' participation in legislative debates in the EP. Assuming that the decision to intervene in the plenary is based on a cost-benefit analysis (Slapin and Proksch, 2010), we expect MEPs' participation to be linked in part to the degree of politicization of European affairs in their member states because politicization is likely to increase the visibility of their intervention, and thereby the benefit they derive from it.

We base this expectation on the idea that MEPs participate in legislative debates because they can benefit from doing so (Bäck and Debus, 2016). Whereas

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their speeches can hardly impact legislation, as legislative debates in the EU mainly concern compromises already negotiated (Laloux 2020), they use plenary sessions as a communication forum in order to signal their activities to either their colleagues or an external audience (Slapin and Proksch, 2010). Hence, plenary speeches are a crucial tool for MEPs' communication. Yet participating in debates is not purely beneficial; it also entails costs for the MEPs. Among others, the time spent preparing and writing speeches is time that cannot be spent on other tasks. More importantly, there is an opportunity cost to taking the floor during a debate. As speaking time in the plenary is a limited resource, not all MEPs can speak in all debates. Therefore, in order to speak in a particular debate, MEPs must give up the opportunity to speak in subsequent debates that might also benefit them. As a result, MEPs are likely not to engage in legislative debates randomly, but to make choices about which debates to engage in.

Since MEPs principally intervene in plenary debates to communicate, they are likely to do so when this communication is the most effective, that is to say, when the spotlight is on them. Accordingly, they have more incentive to take the floor when European affairs enjoy a greater visibility in the domestic arena, putting the spotlight on actors and institutions at the European level. Indeed, MEPs are particularly sensitive to the public agenda within their own constituencies, i.e., within their own member states (Ripoll Servent, 2018). Not only are they re-elected by their member states' citizens, but national parties also play an important role in their career possibilities. Yet, the extent to which European affairs are politicized varies in time and across member states (Grande and Hutter 2016). Therefore, it is probably more beneficial for MEPs to participate in a plenary debate when European affairs are politicized in their member states because it makes their communication more visible, as more attention is devoted to actors at the European level at that time.

Yet, no studies have hitherto examined this potential effect of domestic politicization of European affairs on MEPs' participation in plenary debates. This chapter therefore aims to fill this gap by testing whether the level of politicization of European affairs in a member state is linked with the number of MEPs from this country to take the floor in legislative debates. In doing so, we contribute to two different strands of research about the EU. On the one hand, in connection with the purpose of this book, examining the consequences of the domestic politicization of European affairs on MEPs' behaviour helps us further understand the consequences of EU politicization. Whereas a rather extensive literature has investigated the question of politicization – mainly focusing on defining, mapping and explaining the extent of the phenomenon – less is known about its consequences for the EU, and especially for the functioning of the supra-national institutions (for recent exception: Koop et al., 2022). In sum, our work contributes to this literature by assessing whether politicization matters for the daily functioning of the EU. On the other hand, the reasons why certain debates attract more MEPs than others remain understudied and thereby unclear. Therefore, by aiming to explain the extent of participation in legislative debates, this chapter also contributes to improving our knowledge of MEPs' behaviour. It thereby also sheds light on the political dynamics at work within the European Parliament. Particularly, we examine whether MEPs are attentive to what is happening at the national level.

We measure politicization through the salience of European affairs in domestic press coverage, following previous studies considering salience in mass media as a fundamental ingredient of politicization (Statham and Trenz, 2013; Hutter et al., 2016). In addition, we have built a dataset of participation in legislative debates over ten years and for ten member states. Then, we test our hypothesis by means of regression analyses. While we expected MEPs to be more active when European affairs are more salient, our main result is that the effect of public salience varies across countries. For some it has, as expected, a positive effect on MEPs' participation; for others it has a negative one, and for most it does not have a significant effect. The fact that we find varying effects – including the opposite of what we expected – calls for further explanations and research. In addition, the significance of these findings varies between our two measurements of the independent variable (dictionaries), calling for caution when we choose any measurement strategy.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses the literature investigating the effect of politicization on EU legislative decision-making, as well as on plenary debates in the EP. Section 3 develops our hypothesis. We then turn to the empirical analysis, with section 4 addressing the data collection and operationalization, while section 5 presents the results.

Politicization, salience and MEPs' behaviour

This chapter draws on two streams of literature: studies on the politicization of the EU and its consequences, and studies on the EP and legislative debates therein. Regarding the first stream, while the politicization of the EU has been a major research topic since the landmark articles of Hooghe and Marks (2009) and de Wilde (2011), the consequences of this politicization have mainly been addressed only from a theoretical point of view. Pieter de Wilde and Christopher Lord (2016) look at three types of conflict dynamics that politicization can generate. In their own words, these 'actually existing trajectories' of politicization are remote conflict, international conflict and domestic conflict. In other words, they elaborate on the feedback effect that politicization can have in general terms on conflict, and the type of new conflict it generates. Recently the way actors respond to politicization and pressure has also been conceptualized. The argument is that EU-level actors, driven by the preservation of the EU as well as their own room for manoeuvre, can try to either politicize or depoliticize decision-making, behaviour and policy outcomes at the supranational level (Bressanelli et al., 2020). In the same special issue, Schimmelfennig (2020) postulates that the politicization management strategies of EU-level actors depend on both the actors and the issue. More precisely, while unelected actors prefer depoliticization strategies, elected actors tend to politicize issues, except in the case of high-risk policies.

The few existing empirical studies on the consequences of EU politicization suggest that it has an impact on the EU and on the functioning of its institutions. Analysing public declarations of the three institutions comprising the Troika (ECB, IMF and European Commission), Moreira Ramalho (2020) shows that the Troika

was discursively responsive to politicization. It reused the dominant crisis narrative to argue for the necessity of the solutions it promoted. The consequences of politicization may also be substantive. For instance, comparing 17 legislative drafting processes and relying on first-hand insider accounts of involved officials, Rauh (2016) found that the politicization of consumer protection issues has made EU policies in that regard more favourable to consumer interests. The analysis also reveals an enhanced conflict potential within the Commission and beyond, which threatens to undermine the efficiency of legislative decision-making in the EU. Furthermore, analysing Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms in Europe, Herranz-Surrallés (2020) shows that politicization generates ‘authority shifts’ that are either a vertical transfer of authority from the national to the European levels or a horizontal rebalancing from private to public forms of governance.

The interactions between EU politicization and the (policy) responses that it generates at the European level have also been studied. Linked with the work of Rauh mentioned earlier, De Bruycker (2020) observed that salience and polarization in the media influence the responsiveness of EU legislative institutions, but to a lesser extent than civil society mobilization. De Bruycker (2017) also underlined that an increase in issues’ politicization by civil society influences elites, in that it leads them to evoke the public interest more when justifying their actions. Criticized for its lack of responsiveness, the Council has been shown to react to politicization. More precisely, it has been shown that contestation between governments during Council deliberation is partly driven by their responsiveness to domestic public opinion (Hobolt and Wrátil, 2020). When policy issues are salient at the national level, governments appear to be more responsive to public opinion when communicating policy positions. Similarly, the European central bank expands the scope of its communication and reduces the salience of monetary issues when public opinion is more negative (Moschella et al., 2020). In other words, these studies suggest that the politicization of EU issues in different arenas triggers legislative responses by EU institutions. However, less attention has been devoted to how this affects MEPs’ behaviour in particular (see Bonnamy and Dupont in chapter 7). The consequences of politicization on European Parliament internal dynamics remain to this day among the territories to be discovered.

Noteworthy is that previous research has focused on investigating the politicization of Europe in the national arena, and more particularly the public salience of European affairs in the domestic press (see Silva et al. in chapter 3). These studies mostly conclude that the politicization of Europe is not a uniform phenomenon. The extent of the public visibility and public contestation of European affairs varies across settings, countries and time (de Wilde et al., 2016). Major political events and integration steps such as referendums on EU matters, EU treaty revisions and EU enlargements trigger press coverage of European affairs (Hutter et al., 2016; Statham and Trenz, 2013). Political conflict and party polarization also play a role in increasing public salience when actors such as parties pick up the issue of European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Moreover, the recent economic, financial and so-called migration crises in Europe have made European affairs salient (Risse, 2015; Kriesi and Grande, 2016). In sum, the previous literature offers a broad view of the many factors that can increase or decrease the public salience of European affairs (see Le Corre Juratic et al. in chapter 1). We

argue that these variations of domestic public salience across countries and time are likely to represent different incentives for MEPs to take the floor in plenary debates.

The second stream of research examines plenary debates in the European Parliament. So far, this literature has mainly focused on the content of the speeches made therein. Its purpose has been mainly to analyse the stances expressed by MEPs and, thereby, the main lines of conflict across MEPs, political groups or member states (e.g. Frid-Nielsen, 2018; Slapin and Proksch, 2010; Vesan and Corti, 2019) or transparency in the negotiation process (Pennetreau and Laloux, 2021). Fewer studies have focused on why MEPs take the floor. Those focused mainly on individual characteristics of the MEPs to try to unravel the individual reasons behind their choices.

The results suggest that MEPs mainly use debates as a forum for communication with other actors, be they their fellow MEPs or their electorate, to increase their odds of re-election (Proksch and Slapin, 2010, 2015; Sorace, 2018). In other words, they do not use debate to influence the content of the legislation. This is not surprising since, in actual practice, the majority of legislative debates concern pre-cooked agreements between the co-legislators (Laloux, 2020). MEPs' interventions during plenaries can thus have hardly any impact on the content of the legislation (see Hoppe in chapter 8). Hence, MEPs generally take the floor to communicate their position and promote themselves to either their European group, their national party or their constituents (Proksch and Slapin, 2010, 2015). In other words, although they cannot have an impact on the content of the legislation, plenary debates matter for MEPs in that they are an important communication tool. This means that a greater number of MEPs from a member state are likely to speak in a debate when the context in that state makes that communication more valuable.

More politicization, more participation?

To date, scholars mostly have focused on explanatory factors related to the individual MEP level (e.g. their positions vis-à-vis their political groups) and not to the debate level. In other words, overall, the existing research has paid little attention to factors related to the legislative issues under debate, nor to the broader context in which debate is taking place, such as the politicization of European affairs. Therefore, we know little about the factors explaining which kinds of the debates attract MEPs' interest. To our knowledge, the only study investigating which debates MEPs engage in is Laloux and Pennetreau (2019). Yet, that analysis was limited to comparing files according to the characteristics of the EP committees that were responsible for it. The conclusion is that debates about files from more conflictual committees are more debated. In sum, while we know that MEPs mainly use debates as a signalling tool for their re-election, we do not know much about the possible influence of contextual and policy-related factors in their choice to take the floor.

This is surprising since those factors are likely to be an important driver of participation. This is particularly true according to the 'strategic and partisan-rhetoric approach' (Bächtiger, 2014), which, in line with rational choice theory, focuses on

the strategic rational decisions of political actors to make a speech during debates (Bächtiger, 2014; Bäck and Debus, 2016). The core argument of this approach is that participation in debates is costly in terms of resource and opportunity costs to speak in other debates. Therefore, MEPs are more likely to participate in debates when it is more beneficial for them (Slapin and Proksch, 2010). In other words, MEPs rely on a cost-benefit assessment to determine the debates they engage in. In turn, this cost-benefit assessment is likely based on the context in which the debate is taking place.

Note that, far from overlooking the communicative dimension of MEPs' speeches (Garssen, 2016; Slapin and Proksch, 2010), this perspective considers it one of the key elements MEPs take into account when they decide to participate or not in a debate. Thus, if MEPs make speeches to communicate in order to promote their re-election, the benefit of doing so is greater when they have more visibility, i.e. when their communication is more likely to have an audience. In other words, they have more incentive to speak up when they have the attention of those who will decide on their re-election: their voters and their national party. Scholars have already shown that, in other dimensions of their activities, MEPs tend to prioritize the issues that matter the most for their national citizens in order to foster their re-election (Font and Pérez-Durán, 2016; Broekmeulen, 2020).

Thus, to return to the main objective of this chapter, two findings are of particular relevance. First, European institutions are sensitive to national politicization. Second, MEPs use their speeches as a communication tool with their constituents. Therefore, the more salient European affairs are to a member state, the more likely it is that the plenary speeches of MEPs from that member state will be visible at the national level and thus useful for them. As a result, MEPs will be more inclined to take part in plenary debates when European affairs are politicized in their country. Hence, our hypothesis is that the more politicized European affairs are in a member state during a plenary debate, the more MEPs from that member state will speak.

Data and method

Since we are interested in which debates attract participation, and by the effect in that regard of politicization at the level of member states, our dependent variable is the number of MEPs from a member state who participated in the debates. Following Laloux and Pennetreau (2019), we only considered the interventions made by rank-and-file MEPs, that is, we did not consider the interventions reserved for key actors in the procedure (i.e. rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs). The reason is that the latter are appointed at the beginning of the procedure and then speak. Therefore, their intervention cannot depend upon contextual factors, such as the politicization of European affairs in their country. The record of EP debates is publicly available on the European Parliament website.² For each debate, we collected the names of all participants under which category they took the floor (i.e. if they spoke as a rapporteur,

² <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/search/search.do?sitting=x,20220307,20220310>.

on behalf of a political group, as part of non-particular interventions or under the catch-the-eye procedure), their nationality and political group. Then, for each member state, we computed the number of MEPs who took the floor at each debate.

Our independent variable is the politicization of European affairs at the domestic level. We measure politicization as the salience of European affairs in the domestic press coverage. In order to measure this independent variable, we have collected major newspapers' accounts as published on Twitter. Mass media in general and 'quality newspapers' in particular are considered good indicators of issues' public salience. For example, in the literature on the politicization of Europe, many scholars have analysed the public salience of European issues in mass media (e.g. Hutter et al., 2016; Statham and Trenz, 2013). Nowadays, newspapers have their own Twitter accounts that they use to publish the latest news, and to disseminate their articles and content to the public.

A tweet published by the account of a newspaper usually contains a link to the full article together with one or two short sentences introducing the subject, or even summarizing its content. Such tweets are therefore a good indicator of the content of media coverage. Since we use media coverage as a proxy for public salience, collecting these messages allows us to measure our independent variable, i.e. the politicization of European affairs in member states by measuring the frequency of tweets mentioning European affairs. On this basis, we measure the public salience of the EU in member states before a debate by the proportion of tweets from this member state's press discussing EU affairs in the thirty days before the debates.

To assess whether a tweet discusses EU affairs, we followed a text-as-data approach and performed automated content analysis techniques to measure issue salience (Versailles, 2021). We use the straightforward dictionaries approach, the principle of which is that the computer assigns words, or other text units such as multi-word expressions, to a priori defined categories (the dictionary). We use two different dictionaries. The first dictionary is the 'simple dictionary', and it matches all occurrences of 'EU', 'Europe' and 'European(s)'. It is a very short dictionary with relatively vague entries. There is therefore a risk of having false positives. However, we still consider this dictionary to be a relevant indicator of the salience of European affairs because it suits the communication style on Twitter. The brevity of tweets forces one to be concise, and to get straight to the point while making sure that the topic is clear for the public audience. Tweets are more likely to include general keywords such as 'Europe' rather than technical vocabulary such as the full names of institutions and procedures.

The second dictionary we use is the one developed by Christian Rauh (2015). This dictionary, which we call here the 'Rauh dictionary', includes a much longer list of more precise entries. It covers references to the EU polity such as 'EU', 'Lisbon treaty' or 'European institutions'; EU politics (political actors and institutions) such as 'ECB', 'European Council' or 'MEP'; and EU policies such as 'CFSP', 'European directive' or 'Eurozone'. The risk of false positives is therefore much lower than with the first dictionary, since each entry is a specific reference to an element of European governance. However, this dictionary considers tweets about very specific EU policies and institutions that might not resonate for the public, nor for some MEPs who are not interested or do not know them well. Hence, whereas the press would formally discuss EU matters, it might not actually increase the salience of European affairs for

the public. Then, the risk of false negatives is higher with this second dictionary, as keywords such as ‘Europe’ are not included. We consider these two dictionaries as complementary, that is why we use them both and compare their results.³ The measure of public salience is computed as the share of tweets mentioning European affairs in the last thirty days before the debate, averaged at the national level.

We selected two quality newspapers in each country, except for Belgium, where we selected two French-language and two Flemish-language newspapers. The media and electoral landscapes are disconnected to the point that we decided to consider them as two separate cases in our analyses. The newspapers we selected are: Die Presse and Standard (Austria), Le Soir and La Libre (French-speaking Belgium), De Morgen and De Standaard (Flemish-Speaking Belgium), Le Figaro and Le Monde (France), Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Süddeutsche Zeitung (Germany), The Irish Times and Independent (Ireland), La Stampa and Repubblica (Italy), De Volkskrant and NRC Handelsblad (Netherlands), El Mundo and El País (Spain), Público and Diário de Notícias (Portugal), The Times and The Guardian (United Kingdom). In all, we collected the 5,731,629 tweets published by these newspapers between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2019. This large corpus of daily-published messages allows a longitudinal and fine-grained analysis of the public salience of European affairs.

We also controlled for several variables likely to affect the number of MEPs taking the floor. First, we controlled for the conflictuality of the files as we assume that the more diverging positions there are, the more MEPs will want to express their own. Practically, we used two variables to measure conflict: the length of the procedure to assess inter-institutional conflict, and the percentage of the EP voting for the compromise, to assess intra-institutional conflicts. Eventually, we control for the scope of the debates, that is, the extent to which policy effects are spread out over multiple policy fields (Mahoney, 2008). We expect that more MEPs will take the floor when the scope is large because there are simply more topics to address in those cases. Following Van Ballaert (2017), the scope of a debate is proxied by the number of policy fields referred to by a proposal’s EUROVOC descriptors for the files debated.

Unexpected results: the higher the salience of EU affairs, the lower the participation of MEPs

Before analysing MEPs’ reactions to the public salience of European affairs, it is worth looking at the public salience of European affairs in national press coverage during the 2009–2019 period. Figure 1 displays the proportion of tweets discussing European affairs each day according to each dictionary. Salience varies from one member state to another, as well as within member states over the period. On average, the German and Austrian press devote the most attention to European issues. German newspapers publish 4.1% (simple dictionary) or 2.7% (Rauh dictionary) tweets about Europe, and Austrian newspapers publish 3.8% or 2.7%. In contrast, the Dutch-

³ Aggregated at the weekly level, measurements from the two dictionaries correlate fairly well: $r=0.661$, $p<0.000$.

speaking Belgian press are the least attentive to European affairs, with 1.9% or 0.9% of their tweets being about Europe. The British press is the most versatile with, at times, the lowest attention rates and, at other times, some of the highest.

Figure 1. Daily public salience of EU affairs over the period 2009–2019 (Simple Dictionary)

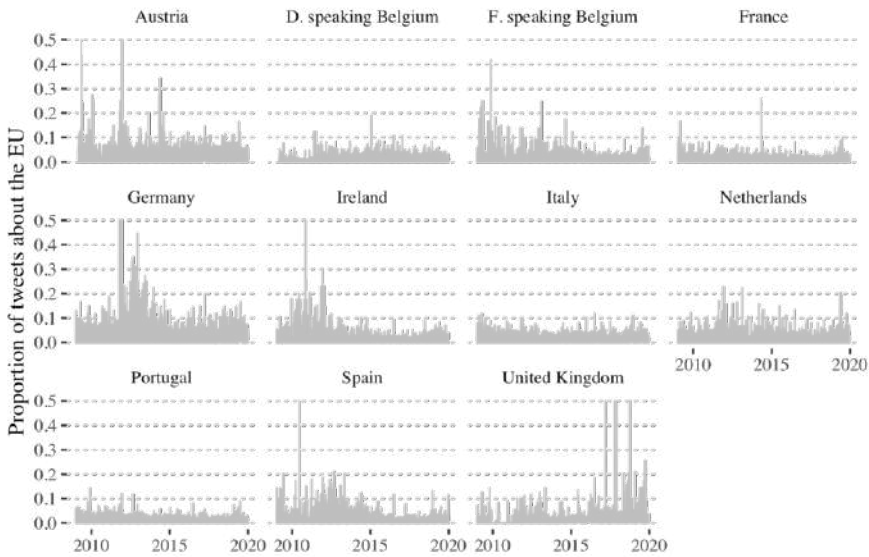
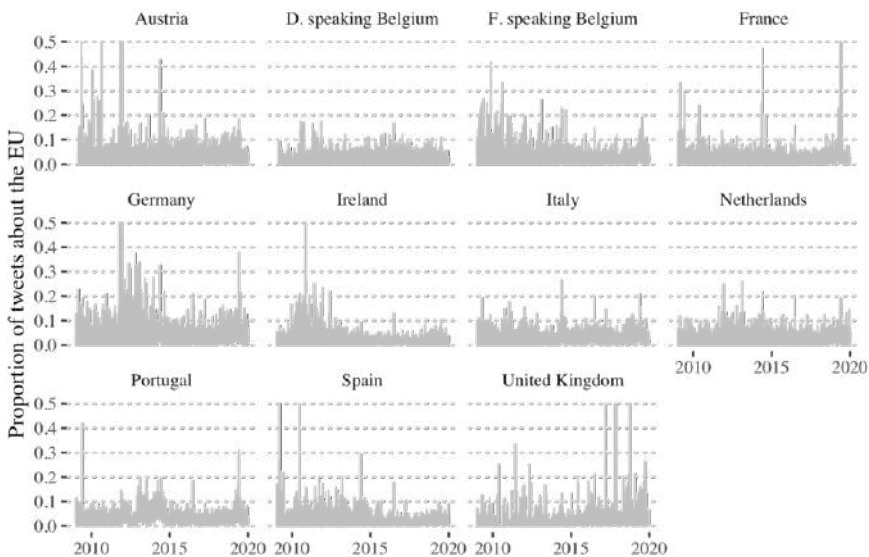


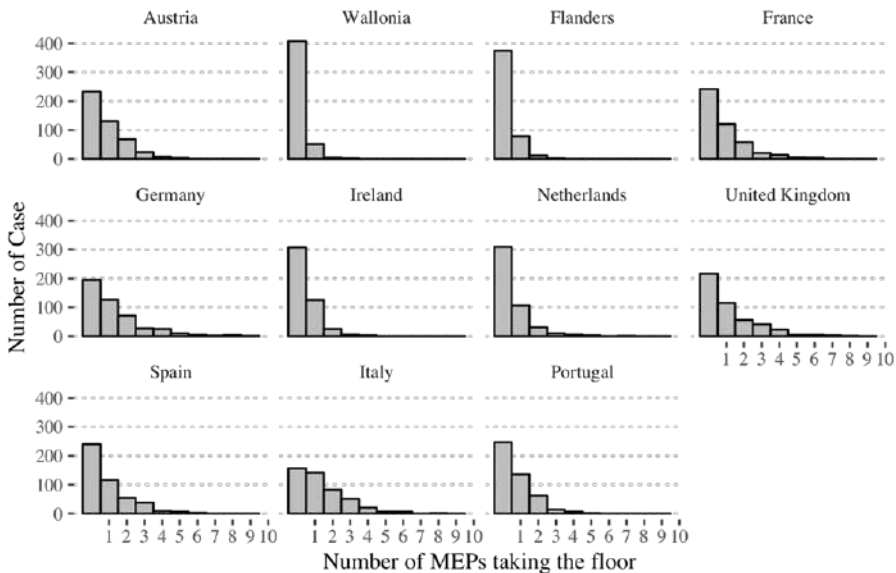
Figure 2. Daily public salience of EU affairs over the period 2009–2019 (Rauh Dictionary)



Another interesting feature is that peak periods are not necessarily synchronized between countries. One possible explanation lies in the different interpretations of the same event in different member states. This can be observed at the end of the sample period. While this corresponds to lower attention rates for other countries, the post-Brexit period corresponds, in contrast, to a peak of attention in the British press. Moreover, in addition to calling for caution about a possible Europeanization of the public spheres, this asynchrony underlines the fact that EU affairs are not in the media spotlight at the same time.

MEPs' participation in the debates also varies during the period and across countries. (cf. Figure 3) As the participation rates of Austrian MEPs underlines, the total number of national MEPs only cannot account for the differences between countries, since Austrians participate more than Belgians and Dutch, while they have a smaller delegation of MEPs. The participation of MEPs in the debates is left-skewed: in most cases, no MEP from the member state participates in the debate. The much-formalized organization of the plenary sessions and the limited speaking time do not give MEPs the opportunity to speak whenever they wish (Brack and Costa, 2018). This is specifically true for large national delegations such as Germany or France, as the political groups ensure that representatives of smaller member states can express their views.

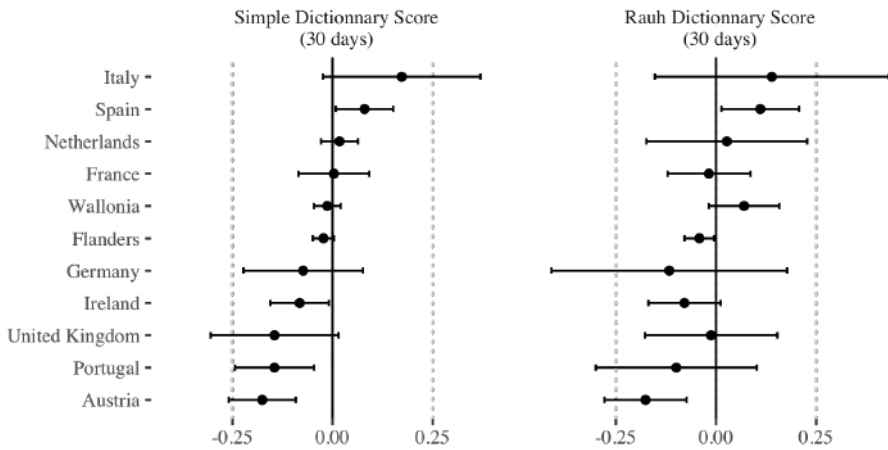
Figure 3. Distribution of the number of MEPs participating in a debate per country



To test our hypothesis, we conducted a quasi-poisson regression for each country and each dictionary. This enabled us to take into account the structure of our data, as our dependent variable is a count variable (namely, the number of MEPs who participated in a debate), and the data are nested by country; that is, not only does

the number of participants vary between countries depending upon the size of the country's delegation, but the link between the dependent and independent variables may also possibly differ between countries. The choice of quasi-poisson models was justified by the over-dispersion of the data (Ver Hoef and Boveng, 2007). Hence, in all we tested twenty-two models. For each model, figure 3 displays the marginal effect of the main independent variable with the confident intervals of each.⁴

Figure 4. Marginal effect of UE saliency for all the countries in our sample



The first observation is that the effect of public salience largely varies across countries. Only for Spain is our hypothesis of a positive effect of politicization confirmed. More MEPs from this country take the floor in EP plenary debates when national newspapers cover more European issues. We also find similar results for the Netherlands and Italy, however without the effect being significant. Then, contrary to our expectation, we find the reverse effect in a higher number of cases. In Austria, Portugal, Ireland and Flanders, we find a negative relationship between media coverage of European affairs and MEPs participation. Although this result is significant with both dictionaries only in the case of Austria.

Finally, we must note that we do not find any significant result for most countries in our sample, namely the UK, Wallonia, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. Regarding the control variables, they all have a significant effect, except for the duration of the legislative process. So far, we do not have an explanation for the variation across countries. The content and tone of media coverage about the EU or the general dynamic of the public debate may be different in those countries (or regions), which would encourage their MEPs to take the floor when the EU is not salient, unlike their colleagues. Domestic political events could also help account for those differences.

⁴ As robustness checks we also used a fifteen -day time lag and tested other kinds of models (negative binomial and poisson regressions), with similar results.

One possible explanation for the negative results – which would be in line with our theoretical frameworks – is that MEPs do not take the floor to take advantage of the national spotlight but rather to put it on them. That is to say, they make a plenary intervention to increase media attention when it is low. This would mean that MEPs are active vis-à-vis their national media and not passive as we expected. Another possible explanation for this unexpected finding is a risk aversion behaviour from MEPs, that is to say, they are less keen on taking part in public plenary debates when the EU is already the focus of national media attention. In other words, MEPs shy away, rather than take the floor, when the domestic salience of European affairs is high. This could be because MEPs perceive it as risky for them to be in the spotlight at that time. Perhaps the media coverage of these episodes of EU salience is rather negative, discouraging MEPs from participating in the debate. At the end of day, this would mean taking the floor is more a cost than a benefit when the EU is politicized. We do not measure the tone of media coverage here, but this opens possibilities for further research.

It should also be noted that the results differ between the two dictionaries. In other words, different operational choices for measuring our independent variable lead to different levels of confidence in our results. One possible explanation for this difference comes from the different precision of each dictionary. The simple dictionary measures the salience of European affairs in a broad sense, whereas Rauh's dictionary focuses on specific institutions and procedures. Yet, as we have pointed out, it is likely that some of these specific institutions and procedures may be unknown to the public,⁵ which is therefore less likely to associate these tweets with the EU, especially since they tend not to have a good understanding of how the EU works (Pannico, 2017).

Therefore, this means that while the Rauh dictionary can determine precisely whether the media are talking about the EU, it does not necessarily measure whether citizens see these specific institutions or procedures as 'European' and link them with the EU. In other words, it may not allow us to assess the exact degree of politicization of the EU among the public. In contrast, the simple dictionary contains only broad entries that are easily linked to the EU and European affairs for less informed citizens. In sum, the effect of the first dictionary is clearer because MEPs may be more attentive to the salience of European affairs in general. Meanwhile, the mention of other specific EU institutions and procedures affects them less because citizens are less likely to see the link with European affairs, and are therefore less likely to pay attention to their MEPs' speeches.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to assess the impact of the domestic politicization of European affairs on the behaviour of MEPs. To do so, we examined whether MEPs were more likely to speak during plenary debates when European affairs are more salient in their member state's press coverage. Notably, we used two different dictionaries to

⁵ For example, this might be the case for words related to the Common Foreign and Security Policy or the Stability and Growth Pact.

measure whether tweets discuss EU affairs: a simple ‘European’ dictionary and one more specific about EU institutions and procedures. We test this relationship for the MEPs of ten different Member States by means of multiple regressions.

While we expected MEPs to be more active when European affairs are more salient, this is hardly what we found. Instead, the main observation is that the effect of public salience varies across countries. Spain is the only country for which we found some support for our hypothesis, while we found the reverse effect in Austria, Portugal, Ireland and Flanders; the more salient European affairs are among the press of these member states, the less MEPs from these countries participate in legislative debates. Eventually, we did not find a significant relationship for the other countries. Importantly, most of these positive and negative relationships are significant only for the simple dictionary.

Overall, those findings have two – related – implications in regards to the current literature. First, they suggest that, in some member states, MEPs are attentive to what is happening at the national level and which issues are – and are not – salient. The significant link between the domestic salience of European affairs and the number of MEPs participating in debates indeed supports the hypothesis that MEPs consider their national agenda when acting in day-to-day EU policy-making. This implies that the level to which the EU is politicized in its member states matters for the daily behaviour of certain actors therein. In other words, and to come back to the main topic of this book, our findings suggest that the politicization of the EU does have consequences on the functioning of EU institutions. Second, however, it is very noteworthy that this effect is far from constant across member states. On the contrary, the relationship differs between our cases, which suggests that the effect of EU politicization depends upon the EU actors and, notably, their national characteristics.

The fact that this relationship is mostly negative or non-existent raises questions about the responsiveness of MEPs. On the one hand, one would expect MEPs to be responsive to the concerns of those they represent, i.e. to discuss and debate European policies when their salience is high to their constituents. On the other hand, it potentially indicates that MEPs’ agendas do not entirely depend on the media. They follow a medium-term agenda, which would be a positive sign of mature representation. Besides, speaking of the media agenda, the results could also be different if TV or alternative media had been looked at.

Moreover, the divergent results between the two dictionaries also have some implications for how researchers measure politicization – and concepts more generally. We argue that the specific features of the Rauh dictionary may still not resonate with European citizens, unlike the broader, ‘simple’ dictionary. If this is the case, it would mean that the Rauh dictionary – although relevant to measure whether the press is talking about the EU – might not be as robust in assessing the public salience of European affairs for citizens, and the impact of the media in this matter. To a certain extent, this makes sense, as that dictionary was initially developed to assess parliamentary attention to European affairs, not public salience in the mass media. In any case, this raises questions about how politicization is measured, and whether an operationalization can validly ‘travel’ from one context (e.g. the media) to another (e.g. the public).

Further, if anything, one of the main conclusions of our results is that they call for further research. First, our analysis found not merely variation but even the opposite of what we expected in some cases, and those results therefore beg explanation. While we proposed a potential explanation as to why public salience might decrease the number of MEPs participating in debates, more research is thus necessary to test whether they are correct, and thereby to explain this result. More generally, we only examined the effect of the national politicization of European affairs in general, though the MEPs' behaviour might possibly be influenced by the politicization of more specific European issues. Hence, future studies could further examine the impact of national politicization on MEPs' behaviour by assessing whether other issues matter as well. To illustrate, one could investigate whether the public salience of a particular legislative file triggers MEPs to take the floor, or to vote against their political group.

Eventually, we found some support for the national politicization of the EU impact on the legislative behaviour of the EP, but the EU is limited neither to the EP nor to its legislative procedure. Hence, scholars should investigate the impact that EU politicization might have on other institutions and procedures of the EU political system, for instance on the delegation of executive tasks by the Council to the Commission. Such research is necessary to better understand the phenomenon of EU politicization, and in particular its implications for European institutions and citizens.

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Depoliticization through agencification in the EU's Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

Laura Schmeer¹

Introduction

Agencies have been considered as important instruments of depoliticization in the EU's Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ). Designed as technocratic expert bodies to support operational co-operation among member states, they have been part of a strategy of EU decision-makers for keeping potentially salient issues like migration, border control and the rule of law out of broader public debates (Wolff, 2015, pp. 138–42).

However, more recently, AFSJ agencies, their mandates and activities have, in some measure, been repoliticized. The newly created European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) has led to serious concerns from legal experts and national representatives due to its far-reaching implications for national judicial systems. Strikingly, controversies emerged regarding the EU's 'hotspot approach'² to the unprecedented migration flows in 2015/16, in which the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) plays an increasingly important role. Similarly, the EU's border agency Frontex has attracted serious criticism from NGOs and citizens for whom the agency is emblematic of 'Fortress Europe'.

Following Hegemann and Schneckener (2019, p. 137), I conceive politicization as the 'opening up of the political process to include a broader variety of actors, arenas and arguments'. In this contribution, I join the 'definitional consensus' (Zürn, 2019,

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² European Commission (2020), *The hotspot approach to managing exceptional migratory flows*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/2_hotspots_en.pdf (Accessed: 26 October 2020).

p. 977) and operationalize politicization along three dimensions: (i) the salience of an issue, (ii) the range of actors involved and (iii) the polarization of opinion (de Wilde et al., 2016, p. 4).

Politicization has ‘significant effects on the quality of political decision making’ (Zürn, 2014, p. 48). Because politicization constrains decision-makers, they may adopt strategies to deal with it. This chapter raises the question of what the implications of politicization are for decision-making regarding AFSJ agencies. More precisely, I investigate how politicization leads decision-makers to strengthen the role of agencies to manage such politicization. The analysis of relevant policy documents reveals how EU decision-makers present AFSJ agencies as preferred policy instruments in the pursuit of a depoliticization strategy. In a second stage, I explore recent ‘(re) politicization backlashes’ against such agencies themselves, questioning the relative success of the ‘depoliticization through agencification’ strategy.

The objectives of this chapter are fourfold: (i) to go beyond narrow understandings of politicization by investigating its different forms in the understudied context of AFSJ agencies; (ii) to explore the implications of politicization for decision-making practices in terms of EU policymakers’ depoliticization strategies; (iii) to go beyond static understandings of politicization by linking processes of de- and repoliticization; and (iv) to expose normative implications of politicization by scrutinizing the sustainability of depoliticization strategies.

Studying the (de)politicization of core state powers

The AFSJ is one of the most recent areas of EU activity. Formally included in the EU’s institutional framework as ‘Justice and Home Affairs’ by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, it covers asylum and immigration policy, border management and police and judicial co-operation. These policy areas ‘substantially affect [...] the state’s core coercive and redistributive powers and the identity and self-determination of national communities’ (Schimmelfennig, 2020, pp. 352–3). The integration of such core state powers is thus particularly sensitive regarding national sovereignty, and bears considerable potential for politicization (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2016, p. 49).

While many consider politicization as an essential characteristic of post-Maastricht European integration, few authors have analysed the phenomenon in the context of the AFSJ. After all, the AFSJ is one of the EU’s main new areas of activity and, as demonstrated above, particularly prone to politicization.

Whereas politicization is neither good nor bad by nature, it does impose certain constraints on political actors. Consequently, EU decision-makers may adopt strategies for ‘politicization management’ (Schimmelfennig, 2020). Among those, we find depoliticization strategies. Such strategies ‘aim to “reclaim the shadow”; that is, while recognising the need to intervene, they are targeted at making the new conflict of integration deliberately and explicitly less visible, less polarising and less salient’ (Bressanelli et al., 2020, p. 335).

Flinders and Buller (2006) provide a useful framework for analysing depoliticization. They distinguish between three elements of depoliticization: (i) 'an acceptance that the *principle* (macro-political level) of depoliticization is an appropriate one for governments to pursue'; (ii) 'the *tactic* (meso-political level) used to realize this goal'; and (iii) 'a particular *tool or form* (micro-political level)' to support the principles and tactics of depoliticization (ibid., p. 298). In the present chapter, I focus on the meso (tactics) and micro levels (tools).

Here, the tactic adopted by EU decision-makers corresponds to institutional depoliticization. Institutional depoliticization consists of establishing a 'formalised principal-agent relationship [...] in which the former (elected politician) sets broad policy parameters while the latter (appointed administrator or governing board) enjoys day-to-day managerial and specialist freedom within the broad framework' set by the principal (ibid., p. 298–9). One form of institutional depoliticization is the creation of 'non-majoritarian' institutions (Majone, 2001), such as EU agencies.³

Which tools may decision-makers, then, use to support the tactic of institutional depoliticization through agencification? The following insights from (de)politicization literature provide some ideas.

According to Bressanelli et al. (2020, p. 335), the three main components of depoliticization strategies are: (i) to 'turn to decision-arenas that are secluded and reserved for narrow special interests and epistemic communities'; (ii) to 'display consensus-seeking behaviour' in negotiations in case of visible conflict, 'with wider communication conducted in technical terms'; and (iii) to 'produce outcomes that are problem-driven and presented as output-oriented and responsible'.

Moreover, securitization theorists have ascribed the matter of security a particularly depoliticizing effect. Following the Copenhagen School's argument, decision-makers may frame issues as security threats and, thereby, facilitate the adoption of measures that would otherwise have been difficult to adopt. We can conceive securitization as an 'extreme version of politicization' (Buzan et al., 1998, p. 23), though only on one of the dimensions defined above (increase in salience of a securitized issue) whereas the range of involved actors and polarization of opinion are intended to decrease. Accordingly, I consider securitization as a tool whereby extreme politicization on one dimension (salience) contributes to achieving overall depoliticization:

One [sic] the one hand, securitizing actors use alarmist security rhetoric in order to draw public attention to a specific issue and enable a certain political response. On the other hand, the effect of successful securitisation moves is not to open up political debates and public controversies, but rather to constrain 'normal' democratic politics by narrowing the choice of available policy options, limit the repertoire of political actions and reduce the number of legitimate actors, arenas and arguments (Hegemann and Schneckener, 2019, p. 135).

³ Lacking an official or generally accepted definition of 'EU agencies', I define them as permanent bodies under EU public law, established by the EU institutions through secondary legislation and endowed with their own legal personality (Chamon, 2016, p. 10).

So far, scholars have mostly studied the depoliticization strategies of EU actors in the context of the Eurocrisis. There is, notably, no investigation of how policymakers deal with politicization in the AFSJ by delegating authority to EU agencies.

In fact, though, ‘depoliticization through agencification’ has happened increasingly in this area. Thus, the AFSJ is being depoliticized through the use of EU agencies as the preferred policy instruments (Wolff, 2015, p. 131). Wolff argues that they were originally ‘conceived as expert bodies that coordinate the work of the member states’ – ‘[b]y removing issues from the political debate, agencies [...] help legitimize policy making and “neutralize” the policy debate’ (ibid., pp. 141–2).

However, Wolff also draws attention to a certain repoliticization of AFSJ agencies: ‘[t]heir creation, mandate, and operations have in fact been highly politicized’ (ibid., p. 141). This view of AFSJ agencies as in-between de- and (re)politicization suggests that politicization processes can have important implications on EU governance. Nonetheless, we still lack a more thorough exploration of this phenomenon.

The present chapter, therefore, proposes to examine in two stages what the implications of politicization are for decision-making practices in the AFSJ.

First, I analyse what role EU agencies play as part of a depoliticization strategy in this field. The preceding insights from the literature provide us with four tentative hypotheses in this regard:

- i. To depoliticize potentially salient and controversial issues, EU decision-makers frame AFSJ agencies as expert bodies aimed at the operational support of member states.
- ii. Outcomes of decision-making on AFSJ agencies tend to be problem-driven and presented as output-oriented and responsible.
- iii. Decision-making regarding AFSJ agencies tends to exhibit consensus-seeking behaviour in cases of conflict.
- iv. EU policymakers revert to securitization strategies to legitimize and facilitate the creation or strengthening of AFSJ agencies.

Second, the chapter explores if the ‘depoliticization through agencification’ strategy of EU decision-makers is limited by a certain (re)politicization of AFSJ agencies, their mandates and activities.

As noted in the introduction to this volume, it is crucial to specify the ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘how’ of studying politicization. Here, I study the politicization of EU policies (those of the AFSJ) and EU institutions (EU agencies) – rather than the politicization of the EU itself. Regarding the moment of politicization, I study ‘dramatic’ and ‘exceptional’ moments of crisis (like the 2015/16 migratory flows), but also the politicization of ‘everyday’ politics, for example through the increased involvement of specific institutional actors (Kauppi and Trenz, 2019, p. 263). The main arena of politicization included here is the institutional one, since I am interested in the depoliticization strategies of EU decision-makers – through the strengthening of other institutional actors, that is, EU agencies. However, I also consider politicization more broadly in the media and citizens’ arena. Regarding the ‘how’ of studying the

politicization of the AFSJ, I opt for investigating its implications using a qualitative-interpretive approach rather than measuring causal links between politicization and presumed consequences.

Politicization of the AFSJ

Because of the close connection between AFSJ policies and national sovereignty, this area of activity has become an important object of politicization. Before analysing EU decision-makers' depoliticization strategies, let us first retrace the politicization of the AFSJ along the three conceptual dimensions defined above: (i) salience; (ii) range of actors; and (iii) degree of polarization.

First, the *salience* of the AFSJ implies an increased level of public awareness of the topic, and requires that 'the population assigns key importance to international institutions for managing a growing proportion of problems' in that context (Zürn, 2014, p. 52). Surveys show that Europeans have indeed attached great importance to essential elements of the AFSJ. When asked what respondents think are the most important issues facing the EU at that moment, immigration, terrorism and, more recently, crime reliably rank among the top answers of European citizens (Eurobarometer).

The high salience of AFSJ-related issues also implies that citizens place certain expectations on the EU to act on those matters. The EU is, thus, 'increasingly held accountable for problems and failures' in the field (Hegemann and Schneckener, 2019, p. 143). For example, after the Brussels terrorist attacks in March 2016, public reactions included accusations that 'the EU had not done enough', but, at the same time, also allegations that, with its counter-terrorism efforts, the EU 'is creating problems itself' (ibid.).

Another prime example are the unprecedented 2015/16 migration flows to Europe (see Gellwitzki and Houde, chapter 4). While immigration had already been an important issue for Europeans before that, the high influx of asylum-seekers, refugees and other migrants – and the resulting political complications – have made it a consistently high-profile issue. Topics like the danger involved in migrants' routes and the question of how to receive and integrate those arriving have led to 'heated political debate' (Bossong and Carrapico, 2016, p. 6).

Second, the *range of agents of politicization* in the AFSJ – that is, 'the individuals or groups who participate in the political process' (Zürn, 2014, p. 51) – has expanded over the past years. Several treaty reforms have strengthened the European Parliament's (EP) involvement in the field. Together with the expansion of qualified majority voting in the Council, this has reinforced the potential for politicization of AFSJ decision-making (Occhipinti, 2014, p. 100). Although, since its empowerment, the EP has moderated its traditionally critical positioning on AFSJ policies (Trauner and Ripoll Servent, 2016), it still represents an 'important platform for public deliberation' (Hegemann and Schneckener, 2019, p. 144).

Along with the EP, national parliaments also hold an important position in the AFSJ, leading to further expansion of the involved actors. According to Article 69 TFEU (the so-called ‘yellow card’ procedure), national parliaments play a special role in ensuring compliance of legislative proposals on criminal law and police co-operation with the principle of subsidiarity (Van Keulen, 2014, p. 18).

Societal actors and NGOs have also gotten more involved with the AFSJ. Organizations such as Amnesty International have put pressure on EU actors on various issues (Hegemann and Schneckener, 2019, pp. 143–4). For instance, NGOs like EDRI, Access Now and Statewatch, but also MEPs and think tanks voiced criticism regarding the 2013 ‘Smart Borders’ legislative package (Jeandesboz, 2016, pp. 233–4).

In sum, ‘the range of actors active and interested in European security increasingly reached beyond technocratic and administrative experts’, and there is now ‘a growing range of critical voices’ (Hegemann and Schneckener, 2019, p. 145).

Third, matters concerning the AFSJ are increasingly *contested* and opinions *polarized*. Today, the debate on the AFSJ ‘features a broad array of opinions with different views that cannot be reduced to a purported elite consensus’ (ibid.).

As stated, the 2015/16 migration flows have provoked major conflict. Asylum and migration policy had already been the object of fierce political struggle prior to 2015, however. In 2011, a French-Italian row erupted over the treatment of asylum-seekers fleeing the Arab Spring upheavals, which finally resulted in a reform of the Schengen Borders Code. Phull and Sutcliffe have noted that EU migration, asylum and border policy is a ‘sector that is frequently controversial as a result of its connection to state sovereignty’ (2016, p. 178). Accordingly, the 2015/16 events ‘led to an unprecedented depth of politicization and to a more uncompromising clash between security and other values’ (Bossong and Carrapico, 2016, p. 4), like human rights and freedom of movement.

Another striking example is the Brexit referendum. Before the vote on the UK withdrawal from the EU, fierce debate arose between the ‘Remain’ and the ‘Leave’ camps. Both sides actively campaigned on key aspects of the AFSJ, like immigration, security and freedom of movement. While ‘Leave’ employed catch phrases like ‘Let’s take back control of our borders’,⁴ the ‘Remain’ campaign argued that ‘[w]e are safer thanks to the European Arrest Warrant’, and that the EU is ‘[g]ood for young people who are free to travel, study and work abroad’ and ‘for security’.⁵

Studying politicization management through discourse

This chapter is interested in how decision-makers in the AFSJ attempt to manage politicization by reverting to ‘depoliticization through agencification’. I examined this question in the context of three agencies: the EPPO, EASO and Frontex. These

⁴ Vote Leave Ltd., *Why should we Vote Leave on 23 June? Vote Leave, take back control*. Available at: http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/our_case.html (Accessed: 20 October 2020).

⁵ Campaign Posters of Britain Stronger in Europe (The In Campaign Ltd).

are active in the three major fields of activity of the AFSJ: EU criminal justice, the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and the Schengen regime, respectively.

Epistemologically, the chapter adopts a discourse-analytical approach in the sense that I consider the discourse on AFSJ agencies as a vehicle for both meaning (how EU decision-makers perceive such agencies) and action (the translation of meaning into reality through concrete political decisions). Accordingly, I do not consider discourse as neutral, but as motivated by political interests, ideology, etc. The goal was therefore to study how, in the official discourse, EU decision-makers put forward AFSJ agencies as instruments of depoliticization. In that sense, I conceive 'depoliticization through agencification' as a discursive strategy of politicization management (see Gheyle, chapter 11).

I conducted a qualitative analysis of 211 official documents, issued by the Commission, the Council and the European Council between 1999 and September 2020.⁶ I used the software MAXQDA to code the data. In a directed approach to coding, I examined the relevance of a set of themes deducted from existing conceptualizations (see hypotheses) while being open to additional themes emerging during the analysis. This combination of deductive and inductive approaches allowed me to complement existing insights with new elements emerging from the analysis. Whenever the data revealed relevant themes not covered by the deductive hypotheses, I added them to my code list.

I conducted the analysis in an overall interpretive manner to appreciate the meaning that decision-makers attribute to AFSJ agencies. Some mixed-methods elements allowed me to assess the comparative relevance of themes in terms of occurrence and relationships between themes (see Table 3 in the annex).

Depoliticizing the AFSJ through EU agencies

The results confirmed, with some limitations, the four hypotheses derived from existing literature on the 'depoliticization through agencification' strategy: (i) EU decision-makers frame AFSJ agencies as expert bodies aimed at the operational support of member states; (ii) outcomes regarding AFSJ agencies tend to be problem-driven and presented as output-oriented and responsible; (iii) decision-making tends to exhibit consensus-seeking behaviour in cases of conflict; and (iv) policymakers revert to securitization strategies to legitimize and facilitate AFSJ agency expansion. I discovered three additional forms of depoliticization throughout the analysis, namely a focus on (i) sovereignty, (ii) externalization and (iii) preparedness.⁷ The subsequent paragraphs present each of those themes. Table 1 provides an overview of the results regarding the four deductive themes, including meaningful examples from the analysed

⁶ The communications, European Council conclusions, outcomes of Council meetings, press releases, reports, speeches and statements were collected from the Commission Press Corner and the Council Document Register. Documents had to mention EPPO, EASO or Frontex in a meaningful way to be included in the dataset.

⁷ These are the inductively generated themes that were (i) meaningful as forms of depoliticization and (ii) relevant in terms of occurrence.

data to illustrate the argument. Table 2 provides the same overview with regards to the inductively discovered themes. Table 3 in the annex shows the coverage of the themes inside and across the three cases.

The idea that AFSJ agencies serve as policy instruments aimed at the *operational support* of member states and the production of *expert knowledge* proved highly relevant, however only for the EASO and Frontex. As Table 3 shows, in these two cases, between 10 and 16 per cent of coded segments referred to operationalization (understood as reference to practical tasks performed by the agencies), agencies' mission to provide support to member states and/or to produce expert knowledge (including the gathering and sharing of information). Moreover, the results show that these three themes – operationalization, support and expert bodies – frequently occur simultaneously. The example from the data quoted in Table 1 illustrates how this was phrased in the context of EASO.

As expected, the discourse on AFSJ agencies included many references to *problem-driven, output-oriented and responsible results*. References to problem-driven outcomes, including outcomes driven by challenges or limitations of the status quo, were particularly relevant, especially for the EASO and, even more so, the EPPO. How this was phrased for the latter, for example, is shown by the quotation in Table 1. AFSJ agencies and their activities were seldom framed as problem-driven, output-oriented and responsible all at once, though. Rather, only one or two of those elements was emphasized at a time.

Moreover, the results show that EU decision-makers may display *consensus-seeking behaviour* or hide conflict when it occurs. This was most relevant for the EPPO, and only to a lesser extent for the EASO and Frontex. In the analysed documents, this theme showed a certain proximity to the previous theme (problem-driven, output-oriented and responsible outcomes). The quote from a follow-up document on the 2015 *European Agenda on Migration* (see Table 1) illustrates how an emphasis on consensus-seeking was combined with problem-driven and output-oriented results.

Fourth, the *securitization* theme was generally very important: around 11 per cent of all coded segments referred to it in some way (see Table 3). The results also show that securitization was understood in diverse ways across the case studies. Regarding the EPPO, security was overwhelmingly understood as protection of the EU budget against crime. Regarding the EASO and Frontex, security was framed variously in vague and general terms, in terms of protection of the EU borders (Frontex) or in terms of protection of people in need (EASO and Frontex). Sometimes, references to securitization were combined with problem-driven outcomes. The example quoted in Table 1 shows how this was phrased in the case of Frontex.

Table 1. Results of the Analysis (Deductive Categories)

Theme	Example from data	Relevance	Combinations
(i) Expert bodies aimed at operational support of member states	'[The EASO] will [...] provide operational assistance to national administrations in order to improve the quality and coherence of their decisions, for example by bundling and making available information on the countries of origin, organising joint training sessions and coordinating asylum teams made up of experts whose task will be to assist Member States faced with an emergency.' ⁸	EASO Frontex	Subthemes often used simultaneously
(ii) Problem-driven, output-oriented and responsible results	'Existing EU bodies such as the EU Anti-Fraud office, OLAF, cannot prosecute in the Member States but have to hand over their files to national bodies. This can make it more difficult to pursue cross border cases and to bring cases to a timely conclusion. The new EU public prosecutor will do exactly that – make sure that criminals are brought to justice and that misspent money is recovered much more quickly.' ⁹	EASO EPPO	Often only one of the subthemes at a time
(iii) Consensus-seeking behaviour	'Over the last six months, the European Commission has consistently and continuously worked for a swift, coordinated European response. It tabled an extensive series of proposals designed to equip Member States with the tools necessary to manage the large number of arrivals, many of which have already been adopted by the European Parliament and the Council.' ¹⁰	EPPO (EASO) (Frontex)	Often used together with theme (ii)
(iv) Securitization	'[The European Border and Coast Guard] was established in 2016, building on the existing structures of Frontex, to meet the new challenges and political realities faced by the EU, both as regards migration and internal security. The reliance on voluntary contributions of staff and equipment by Member States has however resulted in persistent gaps affecting the efficiency of the support the European Border and Coast Guard Agency could offer.' ¹¹	EPPO EASO Frontex	Often used together with 'problem-driven outcomes'

⁸ Barrot, J. (2008) *The future of EU asylum policy: working towards a genuine area of protection*. [Speech presented at the Ministerial conference 'Building a Europe of Asylum' extended to civil society in Paris, France]. 8 September, p. 5.

⁹ European Commission (2017), *Joint Statement by Commissioners Oettinger and Jourová on the European Parliament's consent to establishing the European Public Prosecutor's Office*. Brussels, 5 October, p. 1.

¹⁰ European Commission (2016), *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the State of Play of Implementation of the Priority Actions under the European Agenda on Migration*. Brussels, 10 February, p. 3.

¹¹ European Commission (2019), *EU delivers on stronger European Border and Coast Guard to support Member States*. Brussels, 8 November, p. 1.

In addition to the four themes distilled from the literature, the analysis revealed three other ways in which AFSJ agencies were framed to depoliticize potentially salient and contested issues: emphasis on (i) national sovereignty; (ii) externalization; and (iii) enhancing preparedness. Table 2 summarizes the results regarding those inductive themes.

The first additional tool of depoliticization was a focus on *national sovereignty*. As stated, the integration of core state powers bears a high potential for politicization. Emphasizing national sovereignty can help depoliticize the delegation of authority to the EU by reassuring member states and national publics that the creation/strengthening of EU agencies is not a threat to national prerogatives. This theme was predominantly relevant in EPPO documents. The quote in Table 2 provides an illustration.

Second, the analysis showed that *externalization* is an important tool of depoliticization. Here, externalization refers to the external dimension of agencies' activities, meaning co-operating with and carrying out activities in non-EU countries. This was particularly relevant for the two migration agencies: EASO and Frontex. In migration policy, a focus on externalization (by addressing root causes of migration, preventing departures or increasing returns) may shift the perceived problem from the internal to the external, thereby decreasing the potential for internal politicization. In the analysed texts, externalization was frequently combined with references to EU agencies as expert bodies aimed at operational support (see example in Table 2).

A third important theme that emerged during analysis was the goal to enhance *preparedness*, meaning the agencies' ability to (re)act, e.g. based on sufficient equipment and general readiness. By framing the strengthening of EU agencies as necessary to be prepared for effectively and efficiently tackling potential problems, EU decision-makers may legitimize such decisions and, thereby, depoliticize related problems. The idea of preparedness is closely linked to the 'problem-driven and output-oriented outcomes' theme, since preparedness is a condition for the output to be adequate. The preparedness theme was frequently combined with other themes, specifying how to achieve preparedness, e.g. through expertise or operational capacity. For the EPPO, the two sub-themes 'effectiveness' and 'efficiency' were most relevant, and they often occurred together with references to problem-driven outcomes and security (see example in Table 2). For the EASO and Frontex, general preparedness was more relevant. Moreover, the analysis of code relations showed that preparedness was often framed here in terms of operational capacity, expert knowledge and/or externalization.

Table 2. Results of the Analysis (Inductive Categories)

Theme	Example from data	Relevance	Combinations
(i) Emphasis on national sovereignty	'The proposal [on the EPPO] is based on respect of the national legal traditions and judicial systems of the Member States.' ¹²	EPPO	
(ii) Externalization	'The Council today agreed a partial general approach on the proposal on the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG), covering the provisions linked to return and cooperation with third countries. [...] The proposed rules will allow the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) to provide technical and operational support to member states in return operations. They will also contribute to strengthening cooperation with third countries, by giving the agency wider scope for action and not limiting its possibilities for cooperation to neighbouring countries.' ¹³	EASO Frontex	Often used with themes 'expert bodies' and 'operational support'
(iii) Enhancing preparedness	'Not least, the EPPO should have a slim and lean structure to efficiently protect the EU budget in a cost effective manner. We will build on existing resources to generate economies of scale. In short, we want to better tackle fraud at lower cost. To sum up, the EPPO will add value by bringing changes in the cycle of enforcement - detection, investigation, prosecution and trial. This cycle of enforcement has proved to be weak, uneven and fragmented.' ¹⁴	EPPO EASO Frontex	Often combined with other themes ('expert body', 'operationalization', 'problem-driven outcomes')

Those results and their summary in Tables 1 and 2 show that how decision-makers put forward EU agencies in an attempt to depoliticize the AFSJ differs to some extent between the EASO and Frontex, on the one hand, and the EPPO on the other hand. Some tools of depoliticization are mostly limited to either the EASO/Frontex or the EPPO. In the analysed documents, above all the EASO and Frontex were framed as expert bodies with a big focus on operationalization and externalization (of migration policy). Other discursive categories, however, such as the focus on national sovereignty and – to a lesser extent – consensus-seeking behaviour were rather limited to the EPPO.

¹² European Commission (2013), *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the national parliaments on the review of the Proposal for a Council Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office with regard to the principle of subsidiarity, in accordance with Protocol No. 2*. Brussels, 27 November, p. 4.

¹³ Council of the European Union (2018), *Outcome of the Council Meeting Justice and Home Affairs*. Brussels, 6 and 7 December, p. 5.

¹⁴ Reding, V. (2013) *Strengthening the basis for EU criminal law and judicial cooperation*. [Speech presented at the CRIM Special Committee, European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium]. 19 March, p. 5.

Mission failure? (Re)politicization of AFSJ agencies

How sustainable are such depoliticization strategies in the context of AFSJ agencies? Wolff (2015) has already alluded to AFSJ agencies' struggle between politicization and depoliticization. By means of indicative examples, this section considers how these agencies have become (re)politicized. The goal here is exploratory: without claiming to deliver a complete account or definite answers, signs of a 'politicization backlash' hint at a potentially important phenomenon that deserves further investigation. Based primarily on media coverage and NGO activities, and along the three dimensions of politicization (salience, range of actors and polarization), I explore how the projected 'depoliticizers', the EPPO, EASO and Frontex, have become an object of politicization themselves – an evolution that may challenge the 'depoliticization through agencification' strategy of EU decision-makers.

The EPPO itself and related issues have gained salience in recent years. First, the very idea of establishing such a body has raised concerns regarding national sovereignty and the subsidiarity principle.¹⁵ Second, the nomination of the first European Chief Prosecutor has sparked open interinstitutional conflict, increasing the salience of the EPPO and rule of law issues.¹⁶ The range of actors who have politicized the EPPO includes politicians in different arenas (members of national and European parliaments, national governments), academics and practitioners in the field of EU criminal justice. Generally, opinions on the necessity of the EPPO are polarized between proponents, who demand determinate action against EU fraud, and those who consider the body a violation of national sovereignty in the sensitive field of criminal justice.

Regarding the EASO, notably its role in the 'hotspots' at the EU's external borders (Lisi and Eliantonio, 2019),¹⁷ but also its activities more generally have gained salience.¹⁸ Important points have been primarily the agency's respect of normative standards, like standards of accountability or asylum-seekers' fundamental rights. Another salient aspect has been the alleged maladministration of the agency. The actors involved in this politicization of the EASO range from politicians over academics and NGOs to EU control bodies – like OLAF, the EU Ombudsman, the European Court of Auditors and the European Data Protection Supervisor – that have opened investigations into

¹⁵ The 2013 Commission proposal on establishing the EPPO was followed by an important involvement of national representatives (Fromage, 2016, pp. 13–14). Ultimately, parliaments in eleven member states expressed concern about the proposal not respecting the subsidiarity principle, triggering the 'yellow card' procedure. Because of continued resistance by some member states, the EPPO was ultimately set up under enhanced co-operation among, to date, twenty-two states.

¹⁶ The EP and the Council were unable, during several rounds of negotiations, to agree on a candidate. Laura Codruța Kövesi, ex-head of Romania's National Anticorruption Directorate and the EP's preferred candidate, encountered fierce opposition from her own government who lobbied against her in the Council. The Romanian government's attempt to obstruct the nomination of Kövesi, whose fight against corruption had become inconvenient for Romanian leaders, provoked lively debates about the rule of law.

¹⁷ GISTI (2016) *EU-Turkey Statement: the Great Deception*. Available at: https://www.gisti.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_gisti_mission_gre_ce_2016_eng_complet_light.pdf (Accessed: 26 October 2020).

¹⁸ ECRE (2017) *Agent of Protection? Shaping the EU Asylum Agency*. Available at: <https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Policy-Note-04.pdf> (Accessed: 26 October 2020).

EASO's activities.¹⁹ Opinions on the EASO are, thus, also quite divergent: some see the agency very critically whereas others consider it more favourably as guardian of the CEAS.

Among the three cases studied here, Frontex has probably been (re)politicized in the most striking way. Frontex has gained exceptional salience over the past years regarding its activities at the EU borders and its respect for normative standards, like migrants' fundamental rights and standards of accountability and transparency.²⁰ A broad range of actors has contributed to the (re)politicization of Frontex: again, EU control bodies like the Ombudsman and the CJEU,²¹ as well as NGOs and citizen movements, MEPs²² and researchers (see Bossong, 2019; Karamanidou and Kasperek, 2020). Recently, media reporting on the alleged involvement of Frontex in violence against migrants, and illegal pushbacks at EU borders have put an additional spotlight on the agency.²³ This has resulted in an increased awareness among citizens of the agency and its activities, but also in renewed calls for better accountability mechanisms. In light of these events, the EP has even set up a Frontex Scrutiny Working Group to assess the agency's functioning.²⁴ Generally, involved actors defend increasingly polarized opinions regarding the agency: one extreme presents Frontex as a solution to the perceived problem of migratory pressure – the other extreme, as an incarnation of 'Fortress Europe'.

While the preceding discussion only provides a snapshot, it still suggests that (i) an important number of issues relating to the three agencies have gained salience over the years through (ii) the involvement of a broad range of actors (politicians, NGOs, EU control bodies, academics, citizens) who (iii) defend increasingly polarized opinions.

¹⁹ European Court of Auditors (2018), *Annual report on EU agencies for the financial year 2017*, https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/AGENCIES_2017/AGENCIES_2017_EN.pdf (Accessed: 26 October 2020), p. 211-230;

POLITICO (2018) 'Watchdog Finds Range of Misconduct at EU Asylum Agency'. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/watchdog-finds-misconduct-at-european-asylum-support-office-harassment/> (Accessed: 26 October 2020);

Wiewiórowski, W. (2019) *Letter concerning a consultation on EASO's social media monitoring reports (case 2018-1083)*. Brussels, 14 November.

²⁰ ECRE (2018) *Comments on the Commission Proposal for a Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard*. Available at: <https://www.ecre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ECRE-Comments-EBCG-proposal.pdf> (Accessed: 27 October 2020);

PRO ASYL (2019) *Frontex – eine Grenzschutzagentur der Superlative?*. Available at: <https://www.proasyl.de/news/frontex-eine-grenzschutzagentur-der-superlative/> (Accessed: 27 October 2020);

SEEBRÜCKE (2019) *Frontex unterstützt illegale Polizeiaktionen*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/SeebroeckeSchafftsichereHaefen/posts/896092214096296/> (Accessed: 27 October 2020).

²¹ Judgment of the General Court of 27 November 2019, *Luisa Izuzquiza and Arne Semsrott v European Border and Coast Guard Agency*, Case T-31/18.

²² Strik, T. (2020) *More than 100 Members of European Parliament joined my call on the European Commission to immediately investigate the shootings at the Greek-Turkish border*. Available at: https://twitter.com/Tineke_Strik/status/1260177579815899137/photo/1 (Accessed: 27 October 2020).

²³ Deutsche Welle (2019) 'EU border force Frontex implicated in migrant abuse'. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-border-force-frontex-implicated-in-migrant-abuse/a-49892097> (Accessed: 27 October 2020);

Bellingcat (2020) 'Frontex at Fault: European Border Force Complicit in "Illegal" Pushbacks'. Available at: <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2020/10/23/frontex-at-fault-european-border-force-complicit-in-illegal-pushbacks/> (Accessed: 27 October 2020).

²⁴ European Parliament (2021) *Frontex: MEPs to investigate alleged violations of fundamental rights*. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210222IPR98303/frontex-meps-to-investigate-alleged-violations-of-fundamental-rights> (Accessed: 25 March 2021).

These opinions range from the view that these agencies are useful solutions to certain problems, to the view that these agencies are either unnecessary, intrusive or harmful in some way. All this points to an important ‘repoliticization backlash’: whereas the agencies were intended to circumvent public attention, they and their activities have instead made them salient again.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that politicization has important implications for decision-making practices in the AFSJ. Decision-makers in the field may feel compelled to act on politicization, and EU agencies in particular – like the EPPO, EASO and Frontex – play a significant role in decision-makers’ depoliticization strategies.

Such strategies allow decision-makers to move issues from the public arena, and the potential for politicization that such a publicity implies, to an arena of ‘restricted access’. To do this, especially the EASO and Frontex are presented as policy instruments supporting operational co-operation among member states and providing expert knowledge. This is combined with a narrative of preparedness that legitimizes agency expansion to enhance capacity-building. These themes are connected with a focus on externalization, making it possible to shift perceived problems linked to migration management outside the purview of domestic politicization.

The chapter revealed another important tool of depoliticization, applied in all three cases: securitization and/or problematization. Certain issues – protection of the common budget against crime, of common borders against migratory pressure, of people in need against risks to life or fundamental rights violations – are framed as (security) problems. This legitimizes and facilitates the proposed solutions: the expansion of AFSJ agencies.

Simultaneously, the chapter has shown that ‘depoliticization through agencification’ strategies may not be that sustainable. Hence, a certain ‘(re)politicization backlash’ limits the effectiveness of such strategies. Concurrently to being put forward as ‘depoliticizers’, AFSJ agencies have gained salience in recent years – the agencies themselves and their ‘right to exist’, like in the case of the EPPO, but also their activities (at external borders) and their implementation of certain normative standards (accountability, fundamental rights, transparency, etc.). Whereas the aim of depoliticization strategies is to focus on ‘instrumental questions about problem-solving and effectiveness’, mounting politicization increasingly adds ‘procedural issues and normative aspects’ to the debate (Zürn, 2014, p. 59). The range of politicizing actors in this context is considerable. Politicians at the EU and national level, but also EU courts and control bodies, NGOs, citizen movements, academics and practitioners have discussed and, sometimes, harshly criticized AFSJ agencies and their activities.

This concurs with Flinders and Buller, who assert that one ‘paradox of institutional depoliticization is that the process of delegation away from elected politicians may well stimulate greater political and legislative attention than would otherwise have been the

case' (2006, p. 303), and that 'depoliticization and politicization may actually take place concurrently' (ibid., p. 313).

Accordingly, some of the identified depoliticization tools are explicitly intended to depoliticize AFSJ agencies themselves. Thus, when establishing the EPPO, decision-makers emphasized the respect for national sovereignty since '[t]he assignment of authority to international institutions is contested and requires justification' (Zürn, 2014, p. 47). 'Depoliticization through agencification' in the AFSJ may, therefore, aim not only at depoliticizing connected, potentially salient issues, like migration. It may also aim at defusing contentious aspects of agencies themselves.

Moreover, the chapter has shown that EU decision-makers do not use the depoliticization tools highlighted in the analysis in a uniform way across the three cases. Future research may shed further light on the reasons for this. More research is also welcome on the '(re)politicization backlash' of EU agencies that the present chapter was only able to briefly touch upon.

One goal of this chapter was to expose normative implications of depoliticization strategies. The '(re)politicization backlash' resulting from the violation of normative standards by AFSJ agencies suggests that EU decision-makers should not pursue depoliticization to the detriment of accountability and control (Horii, 2018). Especially depoliticization tools like the externalization of EU migration management may seem like a comfortable solution (in the sense of 'what the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve over'). But European citizens appear to be less and less willing to accept breaches of fundamental rights and transparency standards in the name of the EU.

All this demonstrates that it is a challenging task – not only for decision-makers, but also for a researcher – to deal with distinct but intertwined processes such as politicization, depoliticization and repoliticization in a coherent way.

While discussing only a narrow aspect of EU politicization, the present chapter nevertheless suggests that politicization has important implications for EU policy-making. Decision-makers currently seem caught between strategically responding to politicization with depoliticization, on the one hand, and a certain backfiring of this approach in the form of (re)politicization, on the other hand. This confirms suspicions that politicization challenges 'the technocratic behind-closed-doors logic of decisions and decision-making processes in and about international institutions' (Zürn, 2014, p. 52).

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Appendix

Table 3. Coverage of Codes

Codes	EPPO		EASO		Frontex		Total	
	Percentage*	Number of segments	Percentage*	Number of segments	Percentage*	Number of segments	Percentage	Number of segments
Problem-driven outcomes	11.9%	76	6.3%	45	4.6%	49	7.02%	170
Output-oriented outcomes	1.1%	7	2.9%	21	3.2%	34	2.56%	62
Responsible outcomes	3.0%	19	0.3%	2	0.3%	3	0.99%	24
Sovereignty	4.9%	31	0.7%	5	0.9%	10	1.90%	46
Securitization...	20.2%	129	7.8%	56	8.5%	91	11.40%	276
...Protection of the EU budget	15.8%	101	0.4%	3	0.8%	9	4.67%	113
...Protection of EU taxpayers	3.9%	25	0%	0	0%	0	1.03%	25
...Security of EU citizens	1.4%	9	0%	0	0.2%	2	0.45%	11
...Security of borders	0.3%	2	1.4%	10	3.0%	32	1.82%	44
...Protection of people in need	0%	0	4.5%	32	3.0%	32	2.64%	64
Externalization	0.6%	4	7.8%	56	10.6%	113	7.14%	173
Operationalization	3.8%	24	15.3%	110	15.7%	167	12.43%	301

Codes	EPPO		EASO		Frontex		Total	
	Percentage*	Number of segments	Percentage*	Number of segments	Percentage*	Number of segments	Percentage	Number of segments
Expert body	1.1%	7	11.7%	84	10.3%	110	8.30%	201
Support	0.2%	1	15.5%	111	12.1%	129	9.95%	241
Consensus-seeking behaviour	6.9%	44	3.9%	28	3.9%	42	4.71%	114
Preparedness...	7.2%	46	10.9%	78	12.6%	134	10.65%	258
...Effectiveness	9.2%	59	4.0%	29	5.2%	55	5.90%	143
...Efficiency	8.5%	54	6.6%	47	5.2%	55	6.44%	156
SUM	100%	638	100%	717	100%	1067	100%	2422
N = Documents	92 (43.6%)		68 (32.2%)		93 (44.1%)		211 (100%)	

*based on the sum of coded segments per case.

Part IV

Consequences on EU legitimacy

Reacting to EU politicization: a critical addition to responsiveness, relegitimation and politicization management research

Niels Gheyle¹

Introduction

For EU political analysts and observers, it has become commonplace to speak of the politicization of European integration. Once seminally defined as ‘an increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU’ (de Wilde, 2011, p. 566), this concept broadly refers to the development whereby the EU features much more prominently and frequently in mass, competitive and partisan politics (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Papadopoulos and Magnette, 2010). In this contribution, I specifically interpret it as an expansion of the scope of conflict, characterized by discursive political mobilization constitutive of visible public debates in parliaments, (mass and social) media or on the streets (see Gheyle, 2019a for a broader conceptual discussion). The increasing frequency or cumulation of these episodes since the 1990s has triggered authors to speculate about the end of the ‘permissive consensus’ surrounding EU integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), drawing public attention to the EU, and hence making politicization an important consequential force to reckon with in the study of EU politics (see Zürn, 2016).

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One fundamental consequential relationship that has received particular attention revolves around the added value of politicization to democracy in the EU (see Nicoli et al., chapter 12 in this volume), with several contributions making the case that visible political conflict can improve accountability through the construction of an emerging public sphere (see Schäfer, chapter 5), by clarifying policy choices, or by establishing a communicative link between domestic politics and EU-level decisions (Trenz and Eder, 2004; Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Kröger and Bellamy, 2016). Yet much of this presumed beneficial link depends on if and how EU actors react to politicization. As Crespy (2016) argues, ‘Democratic legitimacy does not only depend on the possibility for expressing dissent, but also on *the actual possibility to trigger responsiveness from the political authorities* and thus shape policy making’ (p. 15 emphasis added). The crucial consideration is therefore whether visible political conflicts trigger responses from EU authorities, and what these consist of.

Luckily there is no shortage of empirical studies looking into this relationship between politicization and EU responses, which is taken up in various connected yet distinct literatures. In this respect, the first goal of this paper is to review and link the three literatures (originating from different political scientific areas) that explicitly deal with this question: the literature on (i) EU responsiveness, (ii) (re)legitimation of international organizations (IOs) and (iii) EU politicization management. This review documents that EU authorities are indeed responding to pressures resulting from domestic politicization in various ways, and that authors categorize the types of decision-makers’ reactions similarly. This enables the creation of an analytical framework that shows there is a large degree of coherence in mapping these reactions.

The second objective of this chapter consists of a critical addition to these literatures. Indeed, these contributions all assume that finding different types of reactions is *prima facie* evidence of normatively ‘good behaviour’. While I do not disagree with this line of argument, I want to add that focusing on the mere existence (or absence) of these responses should not be the only or end point of analysis, since we then neglect the underlying nature of conflict and how it is resolved, and so may (unwittingly) take the side of the ‘rulers’ instead of the ‘ruled’ (Hurd, 2019). Doing so could also lead to an overly optimistic evaluation of the capacity and performance of EU responses, and the value of politicization accompanied with it. Assessing the democratic impact of politicization in terms of responsiveness, re-legitimation or politicization management should therefore be looked at in all its dimensions, in-depth, and with an appreciation of the longer-term effects these responses might produce.

In the remainder of this chapter, I concisely review the literature on responsiveness (section 2), (re)legitimation of IOs (section 3) and politicization management (section 4). In section 5, I highlight areas in which these literatures overlap, and in light of these, discuss critical approaches to the questions presented here. Finally, in section 6 I use the politicization of EU trade policy as an example of how to critically assess the consequences of politicization with respect to EU responses.

Responsiveness

A first literature strand that adds to our understanding of decision-maker reactions to politicized situations is the one dealing with '(government) responsiveness'. In its most general sense, responsiveness implies that policy is a function of public opinion, or in other words, that there is some congruence between the (shifting) demands of the public, and what governments provide (Wlezien and Soroka, 2016). It is therefore considered a key characteristic of representative democracy (Dahl, 1971). In empirical research, two types of responsive behaviour are often distinguished: rhetorical and policy responsiveness (Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008). The former points to discursive types of responsiveness: elites communicatively reacting to public opposition, discussing public concerns, or signalling that demands are being heard. The latter focuses on actually changing policy in reaction to shifting citizen demands, either in terms of policy agendas, budget spending priorities, or substantive policy changes.

In the EU context, responsiveness takes on particular importance, as formal channels of accountability to the European Commission (such as direct elections) are lacking. Responsiveness can therefore be one of the few strategies remaining to uphold its reputation or legitimacy when confronted with (changing) citizen demands (Rauh, 2019). In responsiveness research, the role of salience or (more comprehensively) politicization has been occasionally looked at, as these are considered to provide the circumstances (i.e. visibility, conflict) that spotlight and emphasize competences and decisions. Hence, the domestic pressure stemming from politicization should act as a trigger for responsive behaviour (De Bruycker, 2020; Rauh, 2019).

Is the EU responsive under politicized circumstances, and if so, what does responsive behaviour look like? One way research tackles this question is through the so-called 'thermostat' model (Wlezien, 1995): when the policy 'temperature' diverges from what the public prefers, public demands to adjust policy will increase. Once the policy is adjusted in the direction of the preferred 'temperature', public demands decline again. Such a congruent thermostat relationship is found in research on the EU as well, showing indeed that EU public policy output is fairly congruent with the issue prioritizations of the public (Toshkov, 2011; Bølstad, 2015). Importantly, De Bruycker (2020) showed that this thermostatic relationship is especially triggered in a context of politicization. Under more politicized conditions, the adoption of EU policy decisions is preceded by increasing public support and followed by decreasing support for policy change.

Other studies also use large-scale datasets, yet focus on more concrete manifestations of responsiveness. De Bruycker (2017), for example, shows that political elites address public interests in the news much more often during politicized episodes, showing that rhetorical responsiveness is linked to politicization. Van der Veer and Haverland (2018) find that domestic politicization affects the behaviour of the European Commission with respect to the country-specific recommendations they provide in the context of fiscal policy coordination. This pattern is also applicable when focusing on government representatives in the Council of Ministers, a forum traditionally secluded from much public attention. Hagemann et al. (2017) find

that government representatives in the Council of Ministers voice opposition more often when the EU issue is salient in domestic politics, labelling this as ‘signalling responsiveness’ – a form of rhetorical responsiveness. Likewise, Hobolt and Wratil (2020) provide evidence that governments in the Council are responsive to issue-specific public opinion, when the issues at stake are salient in domestic public opinion. Finally, Schneider (2020) shows that even the possibility (and not actual realization) of politicization during election times increases the signalling of responsiveness by issuing public commitments.

There are, finally, some studies that zoom in on specific cases through which the depth and quality of responsiveness can be assessed in more detail. Rauh (2016) analysed 17 policy proposals in the area of consumer policy, finding that the individual salience of a proposal, combined with overall strong politicization tendencies, made the Commission reinforce the regulatory distribution of rights and risks among producers and consumers in favour of the latter. This confirms one of the theses put forward by Zürn (2014), that politicization motivates international organizations to cater to public demands. Bazzan and Migliorati (2020) equally show in the context of the policy implementation of a glyphosate ban that with increasing issue visibility and subsequent politicization, the Commission behaved as a ‘responsive bureaucrat’ by using political moves such as delaying votes, shifting the blame, directly engaging with the public through public statements and press releases, and in the end trying to respond to concerns by proposing compromise-based measures.

All in all, there is compelling evidence that politicization triggers either rhetorical or policy responsiveness – even though the depth and quality of these commitments is difficult to assess in large-scale studies (cfr. *infra*).

Relegitimation of international organizations

Politicization also serves as a consequential dynamic in a widely used framework on the legitimacy and legitimation of international organizations (Zürn, 2018; Tallberg and Zürn, 2019), with various studies showing that the types of (re)legitimation narratives of IOs expand as a response to politicization.² Within this framework, the occurrence of contestation and politicization is argued to be endogenous to the rising political authority of IOs, defined as ‘prescriptions, rules and orders that are recognized as being collectively binding’ (Zürn et al., 2012, p. 87). Such an exercise of authority always requires justification, both from a normative point of view, and as a matter of practice in real life (Zürn, 2018, p. 63). This justification is commonly referred to as legitimation: ‘the social process through which legitimacy beliefs are produced’ (*ibid.*, p. 63). The legitimacy of international authority hence exists by virtue of the public perception of it (Lenz and Viola, 2017; Dellmuth and Schlipphak, 2020), meaning that

² In International Relations studies, the EU is often conceptualized as an international organization, albeit a unique one with far-reaching competences. In this section, I follow this train of thought for the sake of the argument, without claiming that I deem the EU merely an international organization.

‘international organizations need to engage in legitimation (i.e. claiming legitimacy) to justify their role and practices and ground them in their wider social context’ (Zaum, 2013, p. 8).

Within this framework, politicization originates from a mismatch between authority and legitimacy beliefs (Rauh and Zürn, 2019): the greater the political authority becomes, the more it affects the autonomy of governments and non-state actors, which ‘would trigger increasing societal demands for the public justification of decision making in the supranational/international realm’ (Rauh, 2016, p. 7). Given that many IOs originally had a rather narrow ‘functional’ operating rationale, ‘it is to be expected that the technocratic legitimation narrative is challenged’ as insufficient (Zürn, 2018, p. 102).

Hence, the key consequential dynamic of politicization following the growing intrusion of international authority into domestic domains, is that IOs need to react by re-legitimizing their authority, existence or policies (Tallberg and Zürn, 2019; Dingwerth et al., 2020), which in turn is normatively desirable. The first and most straightforward way in which this can happen is communicative: (re)legitimation as a discursive practice, as ‘public justifications of institutional reforms, framing of IO policies, use of value-laden symbols, and other rhetorical measures aimed at nurturing beliefs in the legitimacy of an IO’ (Dingwerth et al., 2020).

Various studies confirm that the types of (re)legitimation narratives of IOs expand following politicization. By studying the protests and debates around the WTO, Dingwerth (2019) finds that ‘protests in the wake of enhanced international authority provoked a recalibration of the legitimation discourse’. Looking at the WTO, IMF and World Bank, Rauh and Zürn (2019) find that a higher presence of civil society actors (as a component of politicization) goes together with additional and more prominent legitimation narratives in elite-level discourse, focusing on transparency, participation or fairness. Dingwerth et al. (2020) find for 20 IOs that ‘the politicization of international authority emerges as the main driving force behind the democratic turn in IO legitimation’ (p. 716). The importance of discursive strategies is also testified in a study by Ecker-Ehrhardt (2018), who shows that IOs have strongly invested in centralizing public communications in response to politicization, as the message they spread is almost as important as the actual content of the policies. The EU as well began expanding its traditional functional and peace narratives with those embedded in the language of democracy (Sternberg, 2015). Even in specific policy areas like EU trade policy (de Ville and Siles-Brügge, 2018) or monetary policy (Moschella et al., 2020), scholars have witnessed how contestation and politicization led to a broadening of narratives to include transparency, participation or fairness.

While the focus is predominantly on discursive re-legitimation, several authors argue that there are non-discursive legitimation practices as well. This often means adapting the so-called ‘sources’ of legitimacy embedded in both decision-making procedures (procedural source) and IO performance (substantive source). In other words, convincingly claiming that your organization is, for example, democratic or transparent partly depends on accompanying procedural or substantive changes. In this sense as well, there is ample evidence that episodes of contention and politicization

have been followed by moves to open up IOs to civil society actors (Woods and Narlikar, 2001; Tallberg et al., 2018), to increase transparency (Smythe and Smith, 2006; Gheyle and de Ville, 2017) or to establish international parliamentary institutions (Rocabert et al., 2019). Some authors also focus on how policies themselves are affected in the face of politicization. Heupel et al. (2018) show how some IOs introduced human rights safeguards as re-legitimation efforts after human rights violations were exposed by civil society organizations.

Politicization management

The third research area invoking politicization as a consequential dynamic is one labelled as ‘politicization management’ – the research most closely related to the core study of politicization of European integration in EU Studies. Several authors contributing to this topic aim to explore, systematize and explain how and why EU-level actors respond to the pressures of domestic politicization (Bressanelli et al., 2020).

The key dynamic these authors consider is of domestic politicization as a bottom-up pressure, which is either functional in nature (expectations to manage certain policy challenges or crises) or political (confronting the EU with conflict going beyond the contained economic/regulatory conflicts of the past) (Bressanelli et al., 2020). Under such pressures, ‘EU-level actors have to respond, as maintaining the status quo is untenable’ (ibid., p. 330), but they do not simply face a ‘constraining dissensus’ as hypothesized by postfunctionalist integration theory (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Rather, these domestic pressures can equally function as an opportunity (an ‘enabling dissensus’), which makes actor responses to these pressures largely strategic, i.e. they are not deterministically pushed towards a certain (in)action. These strategic responses will in themselves further politicize or depoliticize decision-making, behaviour and outcomes at the supranational level (ibid.).

Both Bressanelli et al. (2020) and Schimmelfennig (2020) propose classifications of these strategic reactions that largely overlap in terms of the types of responses outlined in the previous sections: (i) discursive/presentational, (ii) policy design and (iii) decision-making procedures. First, there are ‘presentational strategies’ which focus on the communication of policy-making. This can either be ‘politicizing’, when the amount of public communication increases and tries to publicly justify positions, or ‘depoliticizing’ when it reduces communication, shifts the blame to someone else, or tries to reframe the debate in such a way that it seems as if the issues at stake are technical and non-political. The latter is very much in line with what scholars studying post-politics or post-democracy have labelled as discursive depoliticization: ‘recourse to ideological or rhetorical claims in order to justify a political position that a certain issue or function does, or should, lie beyond the scope of politics or the capacity for state control’ (Flinders and Buller, 2006).

Secondly, policy strategies refer to the design of policies – a redefinition of the issue. This can imply including (potentially) controversial elements in a policy area,

or trying to cut them out to reduce the risk of politicization. This watering down or sequencing of policy proposals resembles some of the exit mechanisms from the famous ‘joint decision trap’ (Falkner, 2011; Gheyle, 2022).

Thirdly, decision-making strategies involve changes to the institutional environment and decision-making procedures that govern a policy area. This refers, on the one hand, to transparency and participation. Policy-makers can react by expanding participatory options, or opening up by releasing more documents, both of which are considered as politicizing strategies. Seclusion, secrecy and actively limiting the participation of other actors have a depoliticizing character. On the other hand, this also refers to the design and choice of institutional venues. Majoritarian institutions with partisan membership and public deliberations have a politicizing character, while depoliticization implies shifting decision-making to non-majoritarian venues that largely operate behind closed doors. This dynamic is reflective of arena shifting (Flinders and Buller, 2006) or the politics-of-scale phenomenon (Raza, 2016). Again, this is reflective of an exit from the joint decision trap, by trying to put actors other than politicians in the driver’s seat to circumvent a deadlock imposed by politicization (Falkner, 2011; Gheyle, 2022).

These strategic responses can be seen in action in specific policy areas, along with the circumstances under which domestic pressures lead to varying responses by EU-level actors. Blauburger and Martinsen (2020), for example, show that different combinations of pressures lead to either a constraining of the ECJ or a further depoliticized ‘integration through law’. Reh et al. (2020) show how the constellation of domestic pressures impacts the Commission’s strategy to withdraw a legislative proposal. Franchino and Mariotto (2020) show how the mass politicization of the EU’s economic governance structure did not lead to policy-makers caving in, or to renationalizing competences, but to ‘tightening, pooling and delegation’, a strategy labelled as assertive politicization. Finally, Hoppe (chapter 8) shows how members of EU trilogues use and channel politicization pressures in various ways.

Analytical framework and a critical addition

The above overview of the three literature strands dealing with the consequential nature of politicization makes clear that there are overlaps in the way scholars categorize the types of responses that follow a politicized situation. As table 1 below shows, we can distinguish between three types or levels of (non-)responses: discursive reactions, policy changes, and alterations to decision-making procedures. Every literature field described above deals with all three of them, except for the responsiveness literature, which does not consider changes to decision-making procedures.

Table 1. Types of responses to politicization, alongside their manifestations and scholarly origins

Type of response	Manifestations	Academic origins
Discursive	Amount of communication (Re)framing Public justifications	(i) Rhetorical responsiveness (ii) Discursive relegitimation (iii) Presentational (de)politicization strategy
Policy	Substantive policy changes Policy design (inclusion/splitting)	(i) Effective/policy responsiveness (ii) Substantive source of legitimacy (iii) Policy (de)politicization strategy
Decision-making procedure	Transparency Participation Venue/arena choice	(i) - (ii) Procedural source of legitimacy (iii) Decision-making (de)politicization strategy

While the advantage of such an overview is that it indicates considerable consensus on the varying types of reactions to politicization – and hence no need to start from scratch in creating frameworks of politicization consequences – there is also a common risk entailed by all three of them. As stated in the introduction, the common theme overarching these literature fields is the concern with EU democracy and accountability, and what visible political conflict can add to this. We then look for responsiveness, relegitimation efforts or the strategic management of politicization, and when finding evidence hereof, we (implicitly) attach normatively positive evaluations to it. Given that we work in a consequentialist framework ($X \rightarrow Y$), this is often the end-point of our analysis.

The critical addition I want to make is that researchers need to look at (or at least be aware of) these responses (i) in all their dimensions combined, (ii) in-depth and (iii) with an appreciation of the longer-term feedback effects this deeper analysis might uncover. Otherwise, as I will show below, we might risk neglecting the content and the specific resolution of conflict, make overly optimistic evaluations of EU decision-makers' responses or overly optimistically assess the role and value of politicization. Below, I specify what I mean with these three suggestions and apply them (in section 6) to the example of the politicization of EU trade policy.

First of all, there should at least be an awareness of the different layers and types of responses set out in the table above. Especially if we also aim to attach normative considerations to decision makers' reactive behaviour, it makes little sense to draw far-reaching conclusions based on one dimension only. This tendency to focus on only one type of response is most pressing for the discursive reaction. When looking at the studies described in previous sections, there is a heavy emphasis on presentational strategies. And for good reason: it would be very unlikely that major policy or decision-making shifts occur without any type of communication. Yet in the context of relegitimation efforts, Hurd (2019) warned that such a discursive reaction might 'risk being more of a marketing strategy than an engagement with its substantive effects in the world' (p. 725). Given the powerful role of language, discourse and perception in these reactions, it is of utmost importance not to neglect substantive (non-)changes accompanying discursive shifts or reactions, or at least the connection of these debates

with policy change considerations. Otherwise we risk attaching normatively beneficial evaluations to reactions that remain purely discursive, and disconnected to substantial debates. In sum, studying these dimensions in combination, and with an explicit recognition of the multi-layered nature of responses, is necessary.

Secondly, we should not only aim to look at the three types of responses together, but also investigate how far-reaching each of the adaptations actually is. Changes to policy or decision-making procedures can be symbolic, minimal, and hence suggestive of an attempt to contain conflict without genuinely wanting to adapt – or the idea that ‘something must change in order for everything to remain the same’. Several authors found that EU or IO decision-makers have often responded to claims of lack of transparency and participation in such a symbolic way, notwithstanding their proactive talk of transparency or democracy in their institution (Woods and Narlikar, 2001; Smythe and Smith, 2006; Zürn, 2014). When coupled with a convincing narrative, these symbolic changes can survive immediate opposition, diminishing pressures for more substantive changes. On the other hand, responses can be extremely adaptive and far-reaching. Of course, there is no objective benchmark to argue that something is substantive or merely symbolic. Yet recognizing that very point should make us wary of loosely attaching the label ‘responsive’ or ‘legitimate’ behaviour, but rather delve into the conflict and how it has been resolved.

A related point that needs to be taken into consideration is the question of to whom the reactions are primarily geared. The politicization of European or international governance brings a multitude of actors into play, which have differing interests and aims, with some further removed from official policy circles than others. In considering the (types of) responses, we should therefore include an appreciation of the extent to which responses address the concerns of particular players (cfr. de Wilde and Rauh, 2019). It may, for example, be enough for EU decision-makers to dampen the opposition by singling out the concerns of the most resourceful player, or the one necessary to gain a parliamentary majority. These considerations are important because broadly carried mobilization or politicization in the EU is not a situation easily reached (or sustained), as it requires the collective attention of multiple actors. The pivotal actor in such an environment is not necessarily the median voter, but can be a strategic subsection. Serving the wishes of that subgroup or organization may hence decimate the dynamics of the opposition.

Thirdly, we should also consider what the politicization responses mean for the future possibility of contestation or politicized episodes. In this light, the ‘politicization management’ literature adds an important insight by arguing that strategic responses can themselves further (de)politicize a policy area. Minimal strategic changes to policy and decision-making procedures, backed up by a convincing narrative, might squash immediate opposition and make it more difficult to organize effective opposition later on. Changes in the decision-making process or venue shifting are *responses* to conflict yet may make the future possibility thereof more difficult (see Schmeer, chapter 10). Viewed in this way, responsive behaviour can be seen as a depoliticizing tool, as clever strategic moves to take the wind out of the sails of a growing mobilization, if it mostly serves to dampen conflict by providing *some* type of response. This also relates to the policy feedback literature, which for example shows that policy (designs) can be used

strategically to trigger some type of policy preference (Soss and Schram, 2007). In turn, this may make us evaluate this behaviour not as responsiveness but as strategically proactive behaviour.

Concluding example: reacting to the politicization of EU trade policy

As a conclusion to this chapter, I apply the insights of the previous section to a concrete example, to show how I think this critical addition to EU authorities' reactions to politicization could look. For this, I turn to the politicization of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), a heavily politicized trade agreement that was being negotiated between the EU and the US over the course of 2013–16. The analysis here is based on earlier work of mine, in combination with arguments made by other authors.

First of all, we need to consider all three types of possible reactions, to not run the risk that we attach overly optimistic evaluations to decision-makers who might have restricted their response to one (discursive) type only. In this respect, there certainly was a large-scale reaction by the European Commission, who responded to the unprecedented politicization of TTIP in every type considered above. Discursively, there was an incredible increase in the amount of communication, with public justifications now focusing on transparency, fairness of outcomes, and democracy, accompanying the more traditional narratives of efficiency and growth (de Ville and Siles-Brügge, 2018; Gheyle, 2019b). Policy-wise, one of the most controversial elements of the deal (investor-state arbitration) was modified to take into account several concerns raised, while plans for far-reaching regulatory cooperation were downgraded. In terms of decision-making, the procedures for transparency and participation were overhauled by proactively releasing documents and setting up new participatory channels for civil society groups (Coremans, 2017; Gheyle and de Ville, 2017). In sum, every research tradition previously covered would label this as responsive behaviour, comprehensive re-legitimation and assertive politicization, especially since politicization and mobilization post-TTIP dropped significantly.

Secondly, delving deeper into each of these responses is necessary to assess how far each of these reactions actually went, and to whom these might actually be geared. First, transparency and participation were 'overhauled' only to the extent that it appeased MEPs, while mostly neglecting the views of the wider civil society on how transparency and participation should look (Gheyle and de Ville, 2017). Similarly, participation was opened up to some more reformist actors, who now explicitly received a seat at the table in a specific trade expert group. In the past, authors have already shown how actors critical of EU trade policy have been deliberately pulled into the decision-making machinery to make them less critical, giving them a seat at the table without giving them actual influence (Hocking, 2004; Hopewell, 2015). Policy-wise, the changes to ISDS have been welcomed by 'reformist' actors and MEPs who were on the fence, but are still fundamentally challenged by many others who

think this has no place at all in trade agreements (Dietz et al., 2019). Moreover, the EU is actively leading the effort to establish a Multilateral Investment Court, which can be read as an arena-shifting move to make it more difficult to raise awareness about these parts in the future. It also aims to ‘split’ agreements in the future (a policy design choice), with the potentially controversial elements in a separate agreement, so they cannot spill over into contention more widely. All in all, the underlying driver of the politicization of TTIP (and the key reference points of the debate) was the way in which modern trade agreements tilt the balance of power towards corporations, to the detriment of governments and people. It is an open question whether the citizens and organizations backing this original claim would now (after the policy and decision-making changes) argue that EU trade policy is firmly in the public interest, given that the content of trade agreements has not fundamentally changed (Young, 2019).

Thirdly, because of the changes – even though some consider them minimal – it is now much more difficult to convincingly contest these elements in the public sphere compared to the period pre-politicization. Before TTIP, contestants could credibly claim, for example, that the EU was not transparent, that it only met with big business, and that its policies were geared ‘for the few, not the many’. By having made changes to different parts – whatever its depth and quality – the EC can now more credibly claim that it has listened to the debate, has the most transparent trade policy in the world, and is actively fighting for free *and* fair trade, and for European values. Contestants claiming otherwise can now be set aside more easily as fear-mongers, myth-spreaders, or people for whom it will never be enough (Gheyle and de Ville, 2017). Even the discursive shift towards terms like democracy, fairness and modernity is not harmless in this respect. As de Ville and Siles-Brügge (2019) argue, these terms are being equated with ‘EU trade policy 2.0’, and in a context of Brexit and Trump, contrasted one-on-one with backward nationalist protectionism. This puts any contestant of EU trade policy firmly in the camp of ‘nationalist protectionists’, even though the basis of its criticism might not be protectionist in the first place. In sum, the reactions to politicization may have made it more difficult to successfully contest EU trade policy in the future, without it necessarily looking much different than before.

The point of this example is to show that awarding the EU a label of responsive behaviour in politicized circumstances should not be taken lightly. In generic terms, the reaction to the politicization of TTIP is certainly a case of responsive behaviour – one that may even have made EU trade policy too responsive, making it difficult to conclude agreements in the future (e.g. De Bièvre and Poletti, 2017). Yet when unpacking these reactions further, critical observations can be made that qualify the labels we attach to this behaviour. Awareness hereof is important, because as academic researchers, our claims of (non-)responsive behaviour bear weight. As Robert Cox famously argued, ‘theory is always for someone and for some purpose’ (1981, p. 128), stressing the value-laden dimension of theories and frameworks. When we study the consequences of politicization in terms of responsiveness or re-legitimation, we do so with positive normative benchmarks in mind. Hence, by focusing on the question if and how policy-makers react to politicization, rather than by (also) looking at what was being demanded and received, we might unwittingly be taking the side of the rulers, instead of the ruled (Hurd, 2019). Hence, researchers studying reactions to

politicization should assess these processes holistically, in-depth and with a time frame in mind that allows for possible feedback effects.

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The politicization trap and how to escape it: intergovernmentalism, politicization and competences mismatch in perspective

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Introduction

The politicization of European integration, and its far-reaching consequences discussed in the earlier chapters of this volume, are a complex phenomenon. Many different views on it co-exist, some of them presented in this volume “(Camatarri and Gallina, chapter 2; Silva, Kartalis and Nina, chapter 3; Bolzonar, chapter 6, Gheyle, chapter 11). In this concluding chapter, we approach the long-term tensions politicization creates for the European Union. What are the long-term consequences of politicization for hybrid polities such as the EU? With this goal in mind, we begin by providing an encompassing view of the phenomenon. Generally, politicization can be described as a process through which the political dimension of issues moves to the foreground; and in so doing, politicization activates political conflict and affects the capacity of agents of ‘authoritative allocation of values’ that defines modern politics. At the EU level, this can happen through two distinct processes. On the one hand, politicization pertains to EU-level policy issues that were once considered ‘technical’, but have become increasingly politicized in public opinion. In this case, de Wilde et al. (2016) and Rauh (2018) define politicization as the simultaneous increase in the *salience* of the issue, in *polarization* in the public on said issue, and on the consequent

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mobilization of public opinion. This is the classical definition of politicization, also adopted as a starting point (but not as an end point) in this contribution. In other cases, some issues that were originally dealt with on the national level have always been *political*, and when for some reason or another they become coordinated or managed at the European level, such transfer of competences is accompanied by politicization of the institution acquiring such new competences (Schmidt, 2019; Nicoli & Schulz, work in preparation). This definition of politicization as discretion, or empowerment, of supranational institutions is closer to some approaches presented in this volume, for instance in the chapter by Bonnamy and Dupont (chapter 7), or by Gheyle (chapter 11); it is also the landing point of our analysis.

It is important to note that these two views are not at odds with each other, but they provide an overall understanding of the different vectors of politicization. They are, in fact, two facets of the same issue, and in this chapter they are used as complementary definitions. We argue that some of the problems arising from *issue-politicization* (for instance, intergovernmental standoffs) can be solved through *institutional politicization* (for instance, through parliamentary empowerment). We therefore establish a link between the dynamics of integration and politicization: in fact, even though the politicization of the European Union is a widely studied phenomenon, its *dynamic* relationship with the process of integration remains largely unexplored. We therefore explore the circumstances under which politicization can become ‘an opportunity’ for the EU, allowing for further European integration, rather than constraining the reach of European institutions;² this is particularly the case, in our view, when institutional politicization is a viable option to resolve problems created by issue politicization and intergovernmentalism.

Some have argued that the goal of the Union was, to start with, *de-politicizing* policy-making, for good (Majone, 1999; Moravcsick, 2002) or for bad (Scharpf, 2009). That was the logic, for instance, that pushed Italy and Greece to adopt the Euro, so as to enforce a ‘*vincolo esterno*’ on domestic economic policy. As noted by Hooghe and Marks (2009), and many since, however, the era of ‘permissive consensus’ is now over, and – one way or another – policy-makers have to deal with gathering popular support for EU-level policies and facing backlash when policy decisions do not meet the preferences of increasingly mobilized electorates. In fact, whether politicization is an opportunity in the sense that it could provide a chance for a wider, deeper and more legitimated EU, or a cost, in the sense that it would make the exercise of current affairs politically harder, and that it would undermine the chances of a wider, deeper and more legitimated EU, remains disputed. Zeitlin et al. (2019) emphasize the risk to effective governance that *domestic* politicization entails: as national electorates become increasingly politicized, the spaces for compromise at the European level shrink, rendering EU policy responses less and less effective and timely in front of the

² Throughout the chapter, we use a semantic palette inclusive of words such as ‘opportunity’ and ‘threat’. These are not so much related to our personal preferences, but rather are intended to be used in relation to the success or failure of the EU in ways that are internally consistent. Henceforth, when we use vocabulary related to ‘opportunity’, we mean that the EU itself would thrive, regardless of whether we (as authors) would personally consider these developments as positive or negative vis-à-vis our own preferences.

multiple, simultaneous crises Europe is facing, and in so doing undermining Europe's 'output legitimacy' and thereby fuelling further mobilization against Europe. From this perspective, the domestic politicization of European issues modifies the classical 'two-level game' à la Putnam, dramatically reducing the freedom of action of national executives. Politicization is therefore presented as 'a trap', in the sense of a situation that produces costs as long as it lasts but which is difficult to move away from, which could set Europe on a self-fulfilling spiral of destruction.

Others maintain, however, that politicization does not need to necessarily occur at the national level: European-level politicization may also take place, and if so, it would widen, rather than constrain, the capacity of European leaders to act (Zürn, 2019; Schmidt, 2019). In fact, if the 'permissive-consensus' period had been famously described as 'politics without policies at national level, and policies without politics at European level' (Schmidt, 2006), then genuine European-wide politicization would sear the cleavage that characterized the early days of European integration, and in so doing protect the democratic credentials of the Union. Similarly, Follesdal and Hix (2006), Hooghe and Marks (2018) and Nicoli (2020) argue that the politicization of European integration is the consequence of the changing competences of the supranational layer of governance. In the classical parliamentary model of Follesdal and Hix (2006), the increased competences of the EU lead to shifting-up of the left/right cleavage. In the neo-Lipset-Rokkian framework of Hooghe and Marks (2018) and Nicoli (2020), the increase in powers of the EU produces a new political cleavage between supporters of the 'new centre', and supporters of the 'old centres', which become increasingly peripheral as powers flow towards Brussels (much akin to the original argument in Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and, earlier, in Haas (1964)). Either way, politicization is seen as the natural next step in European integration, the logical consequence of progressive power transfer, and the approaching of a *cycle of genuine transformation* (Schmitter, 1970), which theorists and policy-makers alike have described as heralding the coming of Europe's *finalité politique*.

In this chapter, we focus on the consequences of politicization on the process of European integration, which in our view become especially relevant when the EU is under pressure to reform due to *crises*.³ We start by reconfiguring the 'trap' presented by Zeitlin et al. (2019) into a *trilemma*. We argue that EU-level politicization poses a problem to European integration when the decisions are to be taken at the intergovernmental level under the unanimity rule. This is the case in a few policy fields (for instance foreign policy, taxation and budgetary negotiations) but becomes especially problematic when the EU needs to change its allocation of competences across the layers of the multilevel polity (i.e. expanding or reducing EU competences). This is typically the case in major crises, when EU-level action is required, but few provisions for its action in the fields touched by the crisis had been agreed beforehand. In crises, even though policy salience is high (which normally would mean that legislative process is accelerated – Cross and Vaznonytė, 2020), the Union can seldom

³ By crises, we mean critical junctures of an endogenous or exogenous nature that are somehow connected with the interdependent nature of policy-making in Europe, and therefore *require* a degree of EU-level action to be solved, but for which insufficient autonomous powers had been devolved yet to the EU.

react efficiently because it lacks clear competences and the power to act. When the EU needs to act at the ‘margins’ of its attributed competences, it often needs treaty reforms or institutional build-up to do so; this, however, can only happen with the unanimous consent of the contracting parties: the states.

Crises are therefore the natural incubator of politicization because they *require* European action, which however can often be achieved only by unanimity agreement at the national level *and* ratification in every national parliament, meaning in turn that agents seeking visibility, bargaining power, or aiming to increase their domestic credibility are likely to seek the opportunity to politicize and stall the decision-making process.

While past literature has tended to describe politicization as a *cost* in such situations, insofar as it prevents swift agreement and effective policy-making, we suggest that politicization also offers ways forward that are consistent with a wider, deeper and more legitimated European Union – and therefore, it can be seen *also* as an ‘opportunity’. By reconfiguring the problem into a trilemma, we show that whether politicization is a cause of paralysis (and therefore a cost) or a source of legitimation (and therefore an opportunity) depends on the choices made regarding institutions and decision-making processes. Therefore, we discuss next what happens in each of the possible direct solutions of the trilemma, and we briefly describe the type of reform needed for harnessing the potential of politicization.

The politicization trap as a trilemma

As discussed in the introduction, politicization is at times seen as a ‘trap’ for European integration. The latter point of view is, for instance, put forward by Zeitlin et al. (2019) in their introduction to the 2019 Special Issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy*. At its core, politicization can bring European integration to a *standstill*, whereby no progress can be made in addressing outstanding challenges. The source of such standstill is the potential intergovernmental deadlock that national-level politicization entails. As national leaders grow afraid of electorates mobilized by nationalist agents activating latent dissensus potential (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), their opportunities for compromise at the European level decrease. In other words, national-level politicization can induce a deadlock within the intergovernmental decisional systems of the European Union. In the following sections, we discuss the key elements of the trilemma – misaligned politicization, the intergovernmental method and the EU action at the margin (crises situations).

Misaligned politicization and domestic public spheres

We begin by defining *misaligned* politicization, or between-country polarization. Starting from the de Wilde-Rauh definition of politicization as mobilization, salience and polarization, we consider misaligned politicization as a form of politicization where polarization occurs *between* countries, with each country predominantly

mobilized to one end or the other of the spectrum of possible positions on an issue. In other words, different national electorates are mobilized, but they tend to take up opposite positions on the issue at stake. In such a case, politicization is *misaligned* across national public spheres. We call this *EU-level politicization*. Political discourse in different public spheres frames the national interest, or the ‘good/bad’ for the people, in distinct terms. Sometimes crises (as discussed below) may generate cleavages between countries (Zeitlin et al., 2019); sometimes different cultural attitudes or diverse socioeconomic compositions are at the root of different perceptions of what is best for the country.

Does any level or type of politicization lead to a European-level ‘trap’? We maintain that this is not the case. As discussed later in this chapter, some forms of institutional politicization (i.e. empowerment) actually *resolve* the political trap. But in some cases, even the classical definition of politicization advanced by de Wilde and Rauh does not trigger a deadlock. Consider, for instance, a salient and mobilized issue whereby polarization patterns follow the very same structure in all countries. In this case, polarization is not misaligned across national boundaries, featuring instead consistent majorities and minorities on given issues. If so, then supranational agreements (one way or the other) could be relatively swift. For instance, this was observed in 2020 in the first months of the COVID-19 crisis, when governments managed to make extremely ambitious progress on fiscal integration. Such *aligned* politicization is not a problem. Misaligned public spheres, and therefore misaligned politicization, instead, can bring the Union to a standstill. The next sections illustrate this point to a greater extent, but the scenario is straightforward: a crisis may cause a specific issue or policy to become highly salient, but it can also generate diverse interpretations of the associated national interest in different countries. If the electorates become mobilized domestically on such issues, then polarization can occur *between* countries. In such a case, intergovernmental bargaining becomes impossible: national leaders feel compelled by their mobilized electorate to maintain one position or the other, and spaces of compromise grow thin.

To illustrate the above-mentioned argument, based on nationally representative samples from the European Social Survey from 2012, Figures 1a and 1b provide a snapshot of polarization patterns between – and within – countries regarding public opinion on two policy issues: migration and European integration. Attitudes towards migration are operationalized with a question asking whether the immigration of people from outside the EU invokes a positive or negative feeling, measured on a scale ranging from ‘very positive’ (1) to ‘very negative’ (4). Attitudes towards European integration are operationalized with a question asking whether someone is in favour of or opposed to Eurobonds, measured on a four-point scale ranging from ‘totally opposed’ (1) to ‘totally in favour’ (4).

Figure 1a. Issue: migration

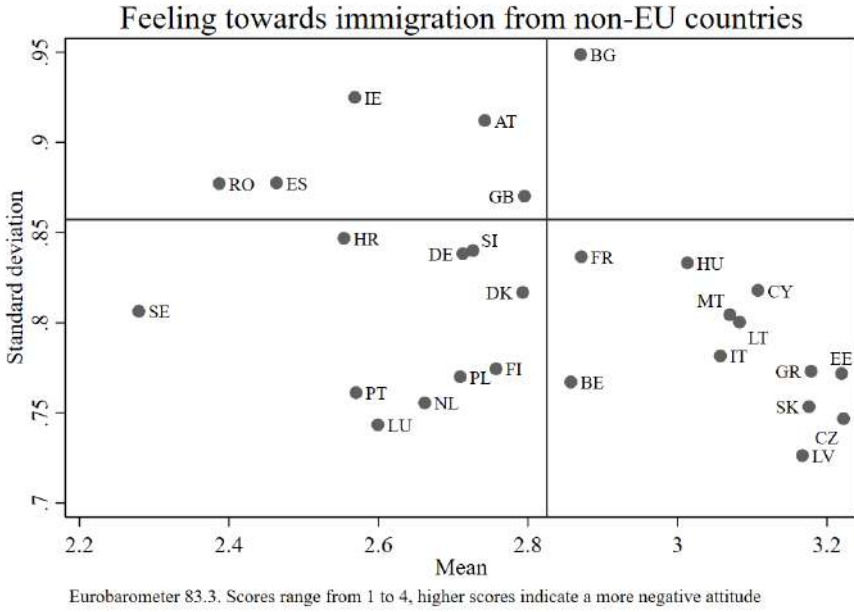
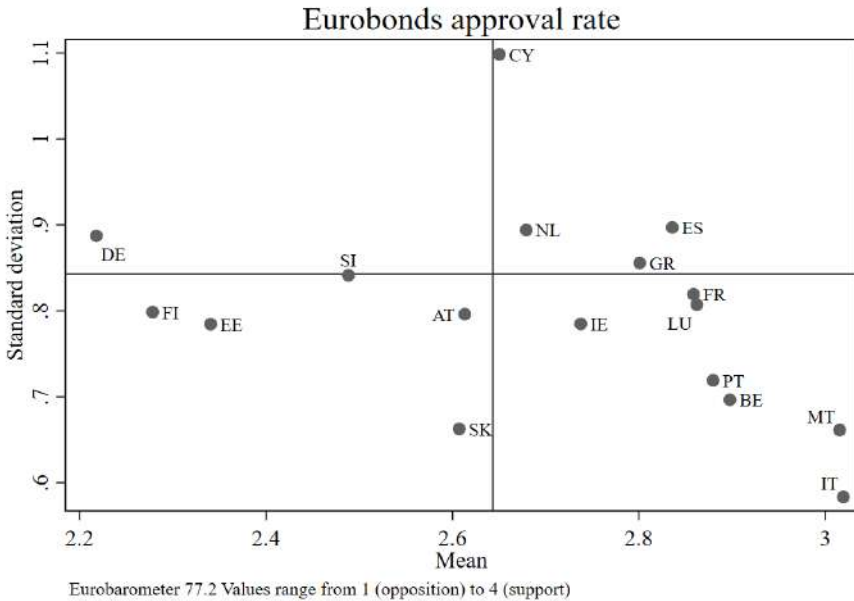


Figure 1b. Issue: integration



The horizontal axis captures the average position on an issue; the vertical axis captures the standard deviation of all positions within a country. The two lines identify the between-country average position on the mean, and the between-country standard deviation. The closer countries are to the vertical line, the more aligned they are with the rest of Europe. If they are located above the horizontal line, it suggests that internal country polarization is higher than between-country polarization, while if they are located below, it suggests that countries have relatively more unitary positions than Europe as a whole. For instance, in the case of migration, all countries below the horizontal line in Figure 1a show levels of national polarization that are lower than the between-country level of polarization captured by the EU standard deviation; the resting point of their position was quite differentiated before the beginning of the migration crisis. Instead, on the issue of European integration broadly speaking – here represented by the approval of Eurobonds (figure 1b), which was extremely salient in 2012 – there was as much division within as between countries, with clear clusters at high or low levels of preference. As such, the extent to which issues can be politicized *within* Member States and the extent to which issues are politicized *between* Member States varies per issue.

Intergovernmental decision-making

The intergovernmental nature of decision-making is essential in describing ‘the trap’. Were the decisions to be taken on the salient issue at stake to be decided within a *representative assembly deciding by majority*, then the composition effects of *between-country* polarization would simply constitute a particular form of geographical composition – not differently from assemblies representing interests strongly divergent, say, between urban and rural areas, or landlocked and seafaring regions. Instead, the intergovernmental method prevents an effective compromise, for the hands of national leaders are tied if their countries are mobilized in a certain direction.

Intergovernmental politics in the European Union, however, is in itself a complex institutional phenomenon. Differently from all other international organizations, the EU has different voting rules in its intergovernmental institutions, precisely to avoid intergovernmental deadlocks. Qualified majorities (or reversed qualified majorities) are now the norm in the great majority of policy fields already falling under the competence of the Union. Unanimity remains essential only on EU-level taxation, enlargement issues and foreign policy more broadly. The potential damage that politicization can cause in those areas cannot be overstated. In current affairs, examples are typically found in foreign and enlargement policy. For instance, the Netherlands held a consultative referendum on the issue of Ukraine’s Association Agreement with the EU in 2016. The threshold was 30 per cent of the electorate; about 32 per cent went to vote, with a resounding 61 per cent majority against the deal. The Dutch government largely ignored the non-compulsory referendum, but could have instead respected the outcome and blocked the agreement, as had the British, fully respecting the outcome of their non-compulsory, consultative referendum a few months later. Now, if other countries had the same referendum laws applied in the Netherlands, a quick calculation shows that the smallest possible blocking minority is staggeringly

small. Luxembourg, for instance, has an eligible electorate of approximately 260,000 registered voters. If only the 50 per cent plus 1 of the 30 per cent of these (i.e. the Dutch referendum law) can exert a veto, we find out that mobilizing fewer than 40,000 people in the right constituency could in principle block any legislation requiring unanimity voting – a death sentence in a political system of 430 million people. For these reasons, in most areas of everyday policy-making the EU has moved beyond the unanimity vote, opting for different forms of qualified majority, with the exception of a few areas.

There are of course counter-balances to the progressive reduction of fields where unanimity is required. First off, institutionally, qualified majorities, rather than simple majorities, are needed. These super-majorities are often extremely hard to achieve in practice, since a handful of member-states are often able to muster blocking minorities. From a point of view of internal institutional culture, moreover, national governments are reluctant to force each other into corners, knowing all too well they might be forced into such a position next time. Hence, a culture of consensus at all costs continues to characterize the Council of the European Union, whereby no decision is effectively taken if it runs against the fundamental interests of one country or another, even when majority voting *could* be used to force it through (Finke, 2017). Thus, because the institutional infrastructure and culture of the EU institutions strongly promotes consensus, national mobilization can form an obstacle to intergovernmental decision-making. And if the problem of national mobilization is mildly problematic for the Union's everyday life, it becomes a source of paralysis in times of crisis, where European action is needed *at the margin of European attributed competences*.

Crisis and marginal action

As it has been argued, 'Europe is made through crises and it is the result of solutions given to them' (Monnet, 1978). The relationship between crises and integration is widely studied, especially when it comes to the potential of crises to challenge the status quo in the balance of competences between the Union and its member-states (Schmitter, 1970; Jones et al., 2016; Nicoli, 2020). Yet the effect of crises is not limited to the potential imbalances they reveal (and sometimes, create) in the distribution of competences across layers of governance. In fact, crises have a threefold effect – on legitimacy, salience and competences mismatch. Each of these components plays a role in understanding the politicization trap.

First, by definition, they undermine the *output legitimacy* of the European Union (if the Union were able to easily and effectively cope with them, we would not call these events 'crises' to start with). In doing so, they put the Union's institutional structure in a precarious situation: prolonged failures in solving problems may fuel discontent and mobilize electorates against *the polity* itself. Hence, the Union has an urgency of action, putting its own survival at risk. Second, in a crisis, the issues at stake are usually highly salient: crises are punctuations well represented on national media. It comes as little surprise that important shares of the population in Europe put economic and financial stability at the top of their concerns in 2011, migration in 2015, and healthcare in 2020. Because of their high salience the issues at the centre

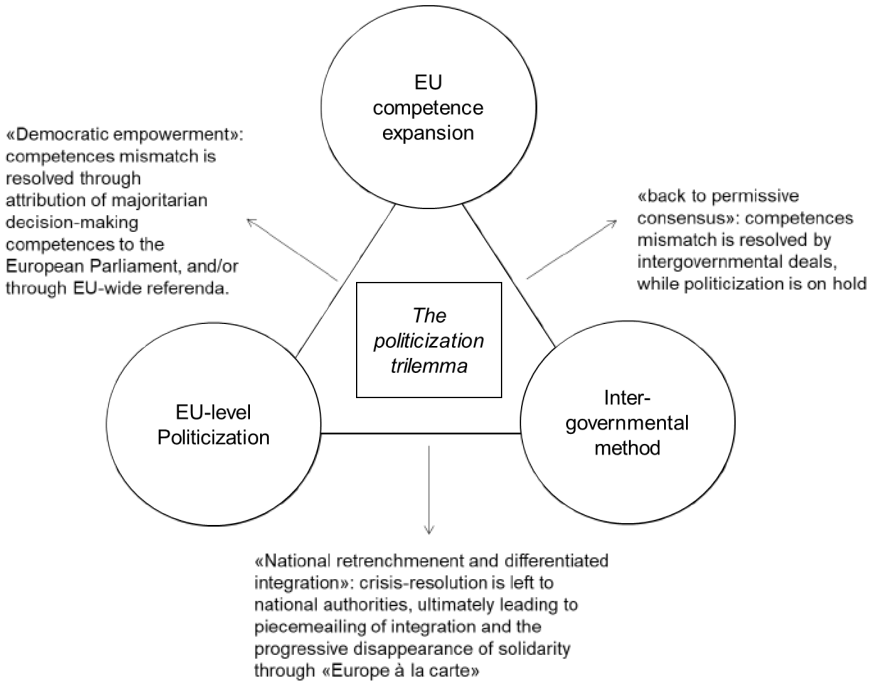
of crises become the natural drivers of mobilization: political entrepreneurs do not hesitate to mobilize electorates around salient issues. The third feature that makes crises particularly problematic when they become politicized is that they often touch upon competences at the fringe of the European sphere of action, competences for which the Union has limited or no autonomy of decision. This has been the case, for instance, in the three last major crises. Some even argue that these are crises *precisely* because the Union lacks effective means of action. But when crises *require* action at the margin, the Union is paralysed.

Theoretically speaking, such EU action at the margin is always possible. It may seem paradoxical, but the Union can always, by definition, act *outside* the scope of the treaties, *outside* its constitutional frame, expanding its legal basis. This is possible because its supreme authority, the European Council, is – when it decides unanimously – at the same time the sovereign in Europe and the sovereign in every single member state of the Union. The Congress of the head of states and governments, which is a genuine EU institution, can create new bases for action by changing the treaties or by creating new ones; and this has been done extensively during the Eurocrisis, which featured one treaty change, two new primary treaties, and one major ‘intergovernmental agreement’. There are limits in national constitutions to this, but national constitutions themselves can be amended. Hence, the Union *can* act at the margin, and often can extend its legal bases to provide action where needed. It is, therefore, able in principle to cope with all these crises that call into question the *allocation of competences* between the nation-states and their Union. It can do so, however, only by strict unanimity, and therefore, crises that require action at the margin of the treaties present the highest risk associated with politicization.

The politicization trilemma

The above-mentioned conditions – EU-level politicization (misaligned politicization), intergovernmental method and EU competence expansion (i.e. crisis situations) – present the key elements of the politicization trilemma:

Figure 2. The politicization trilemma



In the event of an EU-level crisis, domestic politicization of its possible resolutions can create a problem for the EU two-level system, depending on the form and object of the politicization. Specifically, when the domestic politicization of EU-level crisis resolution results in EU-level politicization, it will effectively block EU-level crisis resolutions, because as long as national leaders remain accountable solely to their national publics, the *polarization* of public opinion at the national level prevents effective EU-wide compromises from being forged to address crises. In such situations, the predominant political position within a country becomes a hallmark for 'national interest', restraining executives' capacity to forge compromises of a wide scope. Examples abound of crises that produce domestic politicization that is ultimately seared along national lines. In the Eurocrisis, polarization – and then politicization and henceforth paralysis – mainly occurred along the creditor-debtor cleavage across member states. In the migration crisis, two different cleavages intersected: between countries of arrival, transit and destination, and between Western and Central-Eastern countries. The first of these two crises featured cultural and ideological arguments (Brunnermeier et al., 2016), although sheer interests also played a role. However, EU member states did eventually reallocate competences, as the initial standstill was revealed to be costly for debtor countries, whose fallback position in the case of no-agreement was unsustainable. These countries therefore needed an agreement regardless of the demands made by the Northern countries, and regardless

of domestic mobilization against such concessions. As expected, the compromise was framed as countering national interest by political entrepreneurs, who used it to fuel politicization and prevent further progress on the governance dossier (while of course accruing significant domestic power in the process). The migration crisis also became very politicized along cultural lines, with the cleavage being so strong that it prevented effective joint action and stopped any progress beyond what was already possible within the spheres of action of the Union.

In fact, not every crisis needs to produce such politicization along national lines. While the early days of the COVID-19 crisis also saw a creep towards deep national-level politicization, as Austrian, Finnish, Dutch and Danish leaders attempted to block the construction of a common recovery fund, the intensity of the shock, as well as its symmetry, have been sufficiently strong to put ‘constraining dissensus’ on a temporary hold, as public opinion aligned across countries vis-à-vis the design of a common recovery instrument (Beetsma et al., 2020; Bremer et al., 2020). This, however, shows how critical the interaction between domestic public spheres and intergovernmental politics can become. A politicized two-level game, under these conditions, can truly bring integration to a standstill, preventing effective crisis resolution and destroying the EU’s legitimacy, which still depends to a large extent on its capacity to solve problems. This can even result in a destructive self-fulfilling cycle, whereby lack of competences constrains the capacity for action, leading to a drop in output legitimacy, which leads to discontent, and in turn fuels mobilization against integration, thereby further constraining spaces for action, and so on.

Escaping the politicization trilemma

In the discussion outlined in the previous sections, three elements are reciprocally inconsistent: EU-level crisis resolution, which requires the Union to overcome a competence mismatch by acting at the margins of its field of action; *misaligned EU-level politicization*, which polarizes national electorates on certain issues along national lines; and intergovernmental decision-making, which ensures that national executives, as opposed to a common assembly, are responsible for decisions. These three features represent a trilemma (Figure 2). When they are simultaneously present, the Union is at risk of paralysis: crises require re-allocation of competence; this can only take place through intergovernmental method via unanimity, but national leaders are prevented from reaching an agreement by their electorates, mobilized in opposite ways. As with every trilemma, multiple ways out exist. Each vertex of the trilemma represents a ‘constraint’ which is incompatible with the other two together. Each combination of two constraints provides a pathway for solutions, but such a pathway is blocked by the presence of the third vertex. We can therefore *release*, or *relax* each constraint by applying one of the three solutions to the trilemma. In doing so, opportunities for escaping the institutional stalemate and for fostering EU integration are created.

In the following subsections, we consider three possible ways out of the trilemma: permissive consensus, national retrenchment and democratic empowerment. In each of them, we combine two elements of the trilemma as presented below.

Back to permissive dissensus

Let us compare the pair represented by EU competence expansion and the intergovernmental method. Grand bargains, whereby executives of the member states negotiate mutually acceptable ‘package deals’ out of a crisis, have characterized the better part of European integration (Scharpf, 2009). Domestic politicization makes the grand bargain much harder, if not impossible, to achieve, if leaders will have to pay the political cost of any deal that is not supported by their mobilized domestic audiences. In principle, if one could release the *politicization* constraint, shifting, in a way, the clock back to the era of permissive consensus that characterized Europe in the years before Maastricht (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), then it would be possible to achieve effective crisis resolution, including competences accrual or relocation, with a certain degree of impunity for national leaders. Or to put it bluntly, a natural way out of the politicization trap is to reverse politicization.

How realistic is such a scenario? In our view, not very. There are a few cases where this is a possibility. Three in particular are worth mentioning. First, delaying a problem with patchwork, short-term solutions may help decreasing mobilization and salience, until public attention is shifted away from the issue in question to new issues, allowing for more structured solutions. This is, for instance, what happened during the migration crisis of 2014–2016: as Europeans’ attention shifted to migration issues, important progress was achieved on the strengthening of the EMU.

Second, while the potential for politicization is present in many crises, the actual distribution of costs and benefits in any given crisis is what determines whether *constraining dissensus* kicks in. For instance, if costs and benefits are distributed similarly among member states, mobilization is likely to occur in similar ways. In other instances, if the shock of a crisis is strong enough, this can (perhaps temporarily) put ‘constraining dissensus’ on hold, creating windows of opportunity for national policy makers to act. This latter mechanism has played a role in the past: for instance, in the first years of the Eurocrisis, fears of the consequences of national defaults held public opposition back in several countries, and allowed some initial agreement on crisis resolution (even though politicization followed relatively fast, leading to strong populist surges in Spain, Italy, Greece and France). More recently, Bremer et al. (2020) argue precisely that the shock of the COVID-19 crisis has been sufficiently strong, and sufficiently even across countries, to halt constraining dissensus and allow a leap forward in fiscal integration. Escaping the politicization trap by reversing constraining dissensus is therefore possible, although in our view generally unlikely and highly contextual on the specificities of each given crisis.

Even though there are potential mechanisms allowing for constraining dissensus to be ‘held back’, many contributions in recent literature – and several chapters of this

volume⁴ – suggest that politicization is a structural phenomenon. Schmidt (2006) argues that national mobilization against European politics is to be expected, as competence transfer to the EU progressively transforms national polities into entities *with politics, without policies*; contestation will therefore be addressed where policies are now located. Schmitter (1970) and in general, neofunctionalist and postfunctionalist literature argues that the ‘spilling over’ of EU competences into fields of action characterizing the *core* of modern political life – economic and security decisions – are bound to bring about increased levels of mobilization on EU-level issues. De Wilde and Trenz (2012) suggest that late phases of integration are characterized by *polity* contestation; Nicoli (2017) suggests that contestation is the consequence of attempting to put forward fiscal integration without EU-level structures of representation of democratic politics. Along a similar line, Haas (1964) and Etzioni (2001) had seen politicization as an unavoidable step in the transition from international organization to proto-state. In sum, a substantial literature argues that politicization is here to stay and cannot be easily reversed, even though on certain occasions and under certain conditions it can be avoided. When this happens, the intergovernmental deal-making machinery remains effective as long as politicization is held back, allowing an escape route from the trilemma.

National retrenchment and differentiated integration

A second solution to the trilemma involves rejecting the idea of EU-level solutions. Taken to the extreme, national retrenchment would lead to a concentration of crisis resolution actions at the national level, even when there might be clear negative spillovers on other countries, or if the capacity of action of individual countries is heavily curtailed by the situation at hand. Typically, this would happen when the costs produced by a crisis are low, and European inaction is less costly than giving in to a disliked agreement, even though common action may be more effective than national action. In that case, the fallback position of the negotiating countries (i.e. the status quo) is sufficiently solid to withstand a failure in negotiations: in this scenario agreeing to a compromise is politically costlier for national leaders than isolated domestic action. When the EU is acting at the margins of its competences, unanimity is required, and therefore it is enough for a single country to have this structure of interests to stall a deal. Of course, a single country or a cohesive block of countries could be ‘bought off’ by extending the deal so as to include into the grand bargain issues they like sufficiently to offset the costs of an agreement, but this is not always possible, and might lead *other* national publics to become politically mobilized too. Short of such a grand bargain option, whose likelihood is lower the stronger the constraining dissensus, the only reasonable alternative to failure is a *coalition of the willing* approach. Indeed, differentiated integration is one of the main pathways identified by Zeitlin et al. (2019), and features prominently in recent research (particularly notable in this area of research is the work of Franz Schimmelfennig: see Holzinger and Schimmelfennig,

⁴ See the chapters by Schäfer (chapter 5) and Le Corre Juratic, Carmo Duarte, and Versailles (chapter 1).

2012; Schimmelfennig et al., 2015; Schimmelfennig 2014, 2016; Schimmelfennig and Winzen, 2017).

Pathways for differentiated integration exist within the treaties and have been widely applied: besides the Euro and the Schengen area, other notable examples include the Banking Union, the European Patent, and more recently the European Public Prosecutor. There is, however, a fundamental problem with differentiated integration. Not all crises can be solved with short-term Pareto-improving solutions. In some cases, there might be short-term winners and losers. In other cases, the effects are well distributed, but only over the long run – a point which will be hard to sell in very politicized environments. Furthermore, in some cases, some agreements deviate from equal distribution of gains and losses because they need to compensate for past mistakes: countries that were ‘net losers’ in the past might seek slightly higher ‘net gains’ in the present, thus improving the *overall intertemporal* equality in the distribution of gains from integration, even though short-term developments *appear* unbalanced. Thus, differentiated integration implies that any country perceiving no short-term gains from a certain change will simply opt out, even more so if its domestic public is mobilized against a given reform. Over the long run, this can only imply the progressive disappearance of *solidarity* between member-states, since countries will simply never agree on choices they consider harmful in the short term. Crisis-resolution through ‘coalitions of the willing’, therefore, can work as a patchwork (this is the case, for instance, of the ESM in 2013; and it might be the case again in 2020, should Hungary and Poland maintain their veto on the new multi-annual budget), but will progressively harm the capacity of the Union to deal collectively with crises having redistributive effects, in the broader sense of the term. The final outcome of a generalization of the practice of differentiated integration – a Brexiteer’s wet dream – is an inextricable intersection of separate ‘clubs’, each containing only the countries with a direct and positive interest in it. These are likely to be characterized by a plethora of tailored decisional mechanisms, whose multiplicity and complexity will probably further deter democratic oversight, fostering opposition. More fundamentally, such micropartition of participations will render the Union unable to provide any meaningful solidarity even when sorely needed. *In ultima analisi*, these failures are likely to lead to a negative spiral of failing output legitimacy and increasing constraining dissensus, whereby dissensus curtails the Union’s capacity to act, undermines its capacity of delivery, and fails to deliver, destroying output legitimacy, feeding dissensus.

Democratic empowerment

The third way out from the politicization trap requires a bold step forward in integration by changing the fundamental mechanisms through which European policies and reforms are decided upon. This, of course, requires two slightly different approaches when it comes to competences allocation (i.e. constitutional reforms) and when it comes instead to the use of policies already part of the EU’s sphere of decisions but still under the unanimity rule (fundamentally, budget, taxation and foreign policy). In both cases, a solution that protects the Union without limiting politicization is possible. When it comes to current areas where unanimity is required, the solution is

parliamentary empowerment, namely bringing these competences under the Ordinary Legislative Procedure (OLP). This way, political pressures are redirected from targeting the polity to targeting policies or elected officials. As aptly noted by Lipset and Rokkan (1967, p. 4, emphasis ours), ‘a competitive party system protects [...] against the discontent of its citizens: grievances and attacks are deflected *from the overall system* and *directed towards the current set of powers holders*’. In other words, such *institutional politicization* – achieved by expanding executive-legislative autonomy at the European level and therefore through the empowerment of the parliament and the electoral contestability of offices, as Simon Hix has long promoted (see for instance Follesdal and Hix, 2006, p. 552) – provides avenues for politicization to express itself without endangering the polity: opposition to the system becomes opposition in the system. Such parliamentary empowerment would be even more effective in channelling the positive forces of politicization, if parliamentarians gained *right of initiative*, which currently constitutes the main limitation to the democratic legitimacy of the European Parliament itself.

However, even with a right of initiative, a full-fledged European Parliament would still not be able to act on issues at the margin of attributed competences, where new authority transfer is required. Nor could this be resolved by simply allowing European-level institutions to allocate competences as they wish: the states remain, for the time being, the masters of the treaties, and national Constitutional Courts such as the German Bundesverfassungsgericht maintain that the EU, as an institution, cannot acquire a *kompetenz-kompetenz*; that is, the autonomous capacity of defining its own competences (even though, among others, some legal scholars like Garben (2020) argue that such a limit is void in front of resolute EU action). Yet, in order for politicization to be consistent with crisis resolution, mechanisms to circumvent national vetoes are needed. How to solve such a conundrum? The current mechanism for treaty reform is burdensome, involving a Convention, an Intergovernmental Conference, a unanimity decision, and the twenty-seven-distinct national ratification processes that are needed to yield unanimous ratification, even with the simplified procedure laid out in art. Forty-eight TEU, unanimous European Council approval, followed by unanimous ratification, is needed. Both processes offer plenty of occasions for polarized national electorates to stop the negotiation or ratification process. Yet there is no way around it: democratic sovereignty is perceived by the European publics as still strongly anchored in national parliaments (even though, we maintain, this is a fictional representation of democracy: a very small minority of Maltese, Luxembourg or Lithuanian voters could still block European treaties even when every other parliament is in favour, clearly violating the democratic principle of majority voting). Only an indisputably democratic display of superior order can be accepted as equally democratic, a process that uncontroversially can deliver ‘the will of the European people’, while simultaneously offering ways around national vetoes. We maintain that any such instrument should fulfil three criteria: (i) provide the opportunity for citizens to directly express their views, since direct expression of democratic preference is indisputably superior to the respective executive or even parliamentary vote; (ii) deliver indisputable majorities representative of the European people as a whole, and (iii) prevent the emersion of unreasonably small (and thus, undemocratic) blocking minorities.

These three principles are consistent with the introduction of a novel instrument of direct participation, which we call a Double Qualified Majority Referendum (DQMR). Through such an instrument, a European Convention – under the ordinary treaty reform procedure – could call for DQMR ratification on a proposed treaty reform. The thresholds for such DQMR could for instance be the same as in the Council voting in the OLP: a simple majority of 50 per cent plus 1 in 55 per cent of the states, and an overall majority of 65 per cent of the population (here to be intended as 65 per cent of the overall voters). Countries have already agreed, after all, to the fundamental idea that such thresholds guarantee the sufficient right of both states and citizens to be equally represented. In any national constitutional reform process, a procedure delivering a 65 per cent majority in favour would be seen as unquestionable support for said constitutional reform; hence, the double majority of the procedure should guarantee its democratic qualifications. Some may even consider a ‘super-majority’ of 65 per cent of the population in fact excessive. However, the double majority of the proposed procedure has another specific feature. Because it requires both a majority of the member states and a ‘super majority’ of the population, it ensures that any such procedure can be successful *only* when politicization is high; in fact, without mass mobilization of the population, a 65 per cent threshold is hardly conceivable. This would inherently prevent any treaty reform that does not lead to mobilization from succeeding. For this reason, the DQMR procedure should *accompany*, but not *replace*, the ordinary and simplified treaty reform procedures; states should remain free to act unanimously and reform the treaty, but the proposed DQMR offers them a chance to break impasses on highly salient and highly politicized issues by empowering the European peoples to take such decisions.

Conclusions

This chapter, taking stock of the contributions in this volume and the broader direction of the literature on politicization, has shown that politicization constitutes both a danger and an opportunity for the European Union in the 21st century. In the introduction to this chapter, we suggested that issue politicization as defined by de Wilde et al. (2016) and Rauh (2018), which is inherently constraining in its effects on European integration, needs to be complemented by a notion of institutional politicization, which involves the supranational empowerments of political bodies. This broadened definition allows us to identify alternative paths through which politicization will affect the future of the Union. We are in fact warned: politicization is structural and is here to stay. However, it remains to be seen whether the Union decides to give in to the challenges posed by politicization and embark on a long (and possibly destructive) process of atomization and differentiation, or whether it will harness the inherent potential that politicization entails to empower its institution and its people.

On the first path, the Union’s chances rely on ‘smart’ differentiations, attempting to preserve mechanisms of solidarity whenever possible. The constraining potential of politicization, as identified by de Wilde et al. (2016) and Rauh (2018), will dominate the EU’s political life, preventing the effective resolution of conflicts. On the second path,

the Union's success depends on the capacity of empowering its legislative institutions further, strengthening their oversight on the European executive while reducing national executives' control, and, ultimately, in creating instruments of collective political participation through which the competences of the Union can be put to the direct approval of the European people. The latter path is more complicated in the short run than the former, and probably requires a maturity not yet there among the Member States. Yet of the alternatives, it seems the only one through which politicization does not become a tool of resurgent nationalism but the natural evolution of a polity whose nature has already grown beyond its original technocratic roots.

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THE POLITICIZATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

From Processes
to Consequences

Anne-Marie Houde
Thomas Laloux
Morgan Le Corre Juratic
Heidi Mercenier
Damien Pennetreau
Alban Versailles
(eds.)

What are the consequences of the politicization of the European Union (EU) for the EU and European societies? While it is commonly assumed that politicization processes shape the EU, this book argues for the necessity to analyse politicization processes in terms of their consequences. It unpacks such consequences with a methodological pluralism which mobilizes conceptual approaches ranging from political sociology to intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism. This book encompasses discussions on topics as diverse as public opinion, voting behaviour, public discourses, EU policy and policymaking, and European integration. These critical conversations make three key contributions to advance the scholarship. First, they show that both citizens and actors are reactive to the constraints and opportunities engendered by EU politicization. Second, they highlight how EU politicization produces differentiated consequences across countries, contexts, and issues. Third, the book strongly suggests that such consequences are best grasped in a dynamic way, reflecting on how episodes or strategies of (de)politicization are often complex rather than linear and systematic. Thus, our focus here shifts from analysing EU politicization processes *per se*, to in-depth empirical and normative analyses which grapple with their consequences.

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