

CHAPTER IX

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

Thomas LALOUX, Damien PENNETREAU, Alban VERSAILLES¹

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 (Bachtinger 2014). However, the number of MEPs actually taking the floor in the plenary to publicly express their views varies greatly from one debate to another, without this variation having 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. Particularly, 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 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 take the floor during

¹ To cite this chapter: Laloux, T., Pennetreau, D. and Versailles, A. (xx) 'Mute under pressure? The domestic politicization of European affairs and the participation of MEPs in plenary debates', in Houde, A-M., Laloux, T., Le Corre Juratic, M., Mercenier, H., Pennetreau, P., and Versailles, A. (eds), *The Politicization of the European Union: From Processes to Consequences*. Brussels: Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, pp. xx.

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 play an important role in their career possibilities. Yet, the extent to which European affairs are politicized varies in time and across member states (Hutter & Grande 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. 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, and thereby to shed light on the political dynamics at work within the European Parliament. Particularly, we examine whether MEPs are attentive to what is happening at 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 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. When policy issues are salient at the national level, governments appear to be more responsive to public opinion when communicating policy positions (Hobolt and Wratil 2020). 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. 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. 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, Leupold, and Schmidtke 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 reduce the public salience of European affairs. 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 & Slapin 2012, 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 can thus hardly have any impact on the content of the legislation. 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 & Slapin 2012, 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 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 (2018). Yet, that analysis was limited to comparing files according to the characteristics of the EP committees that were responsible for it. The conclusion was that debates about files from more conflictual committees were 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 & 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 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 (2018), 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. 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, 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 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 (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). 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 (Rauh 2016). 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 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 results². 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-speaking and two Flemish-speaking 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

² Aggregated at the weekly level, measurements from the two dictionaries correlate fairly well: $r=0.661$, $p<0.000$

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-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)

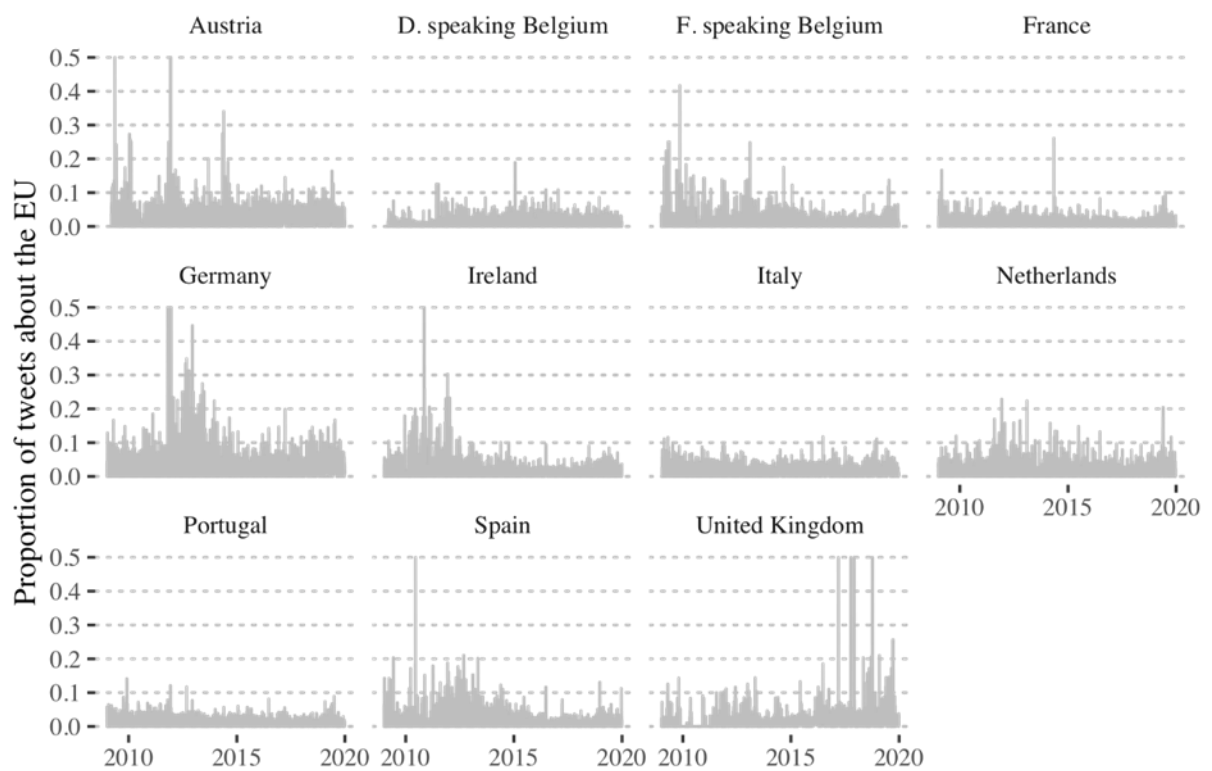
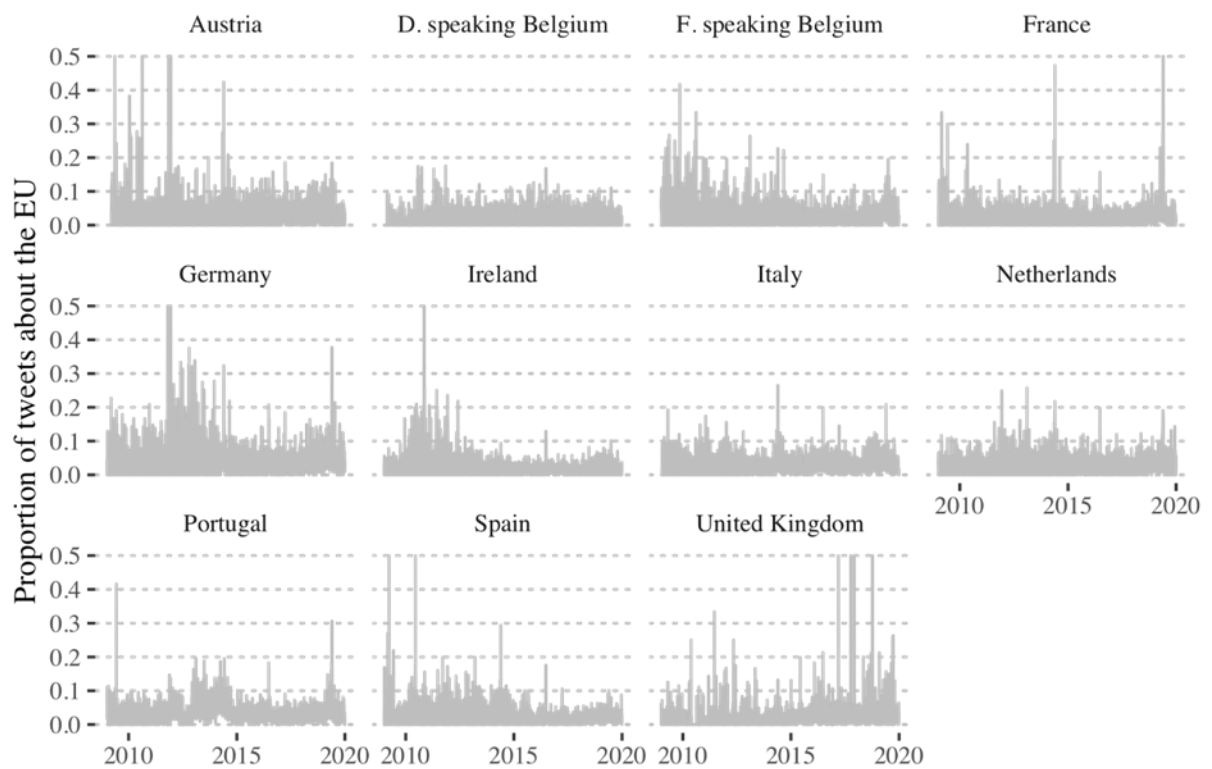


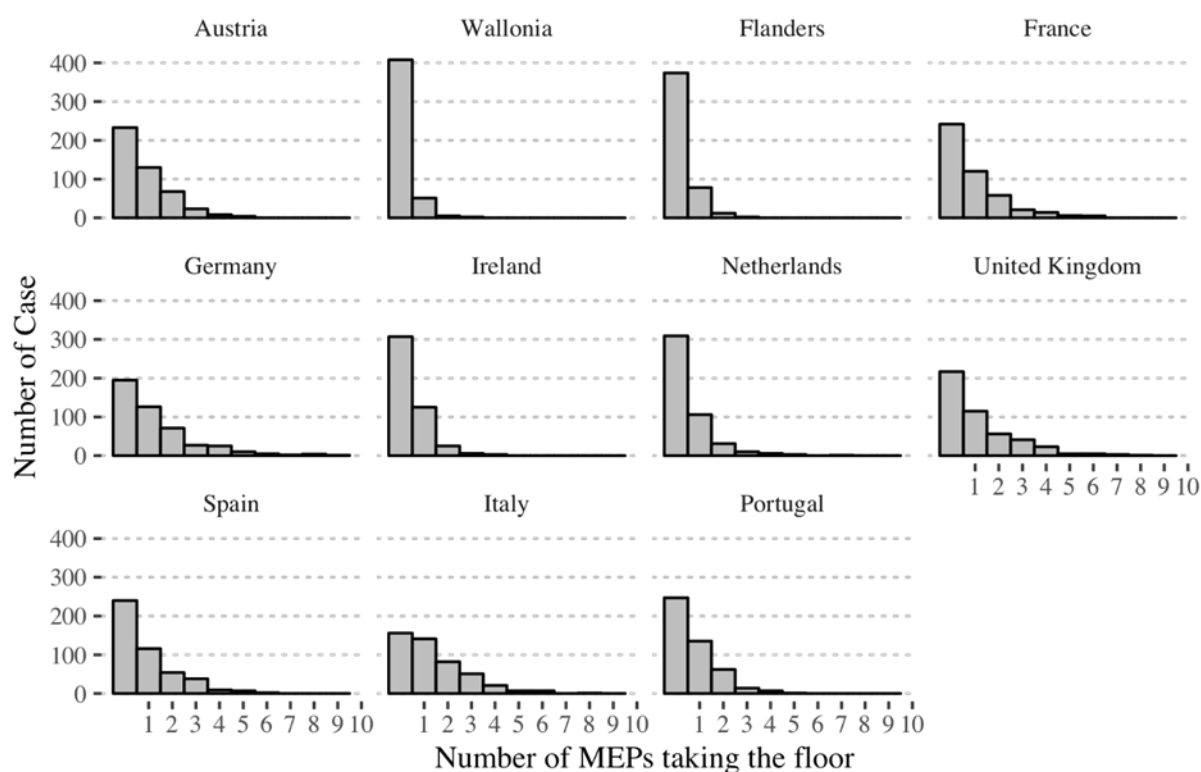
Figure 2: Daily public salience of EU affairs over the period 2009–2019 (Rauh Dictionary)



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.

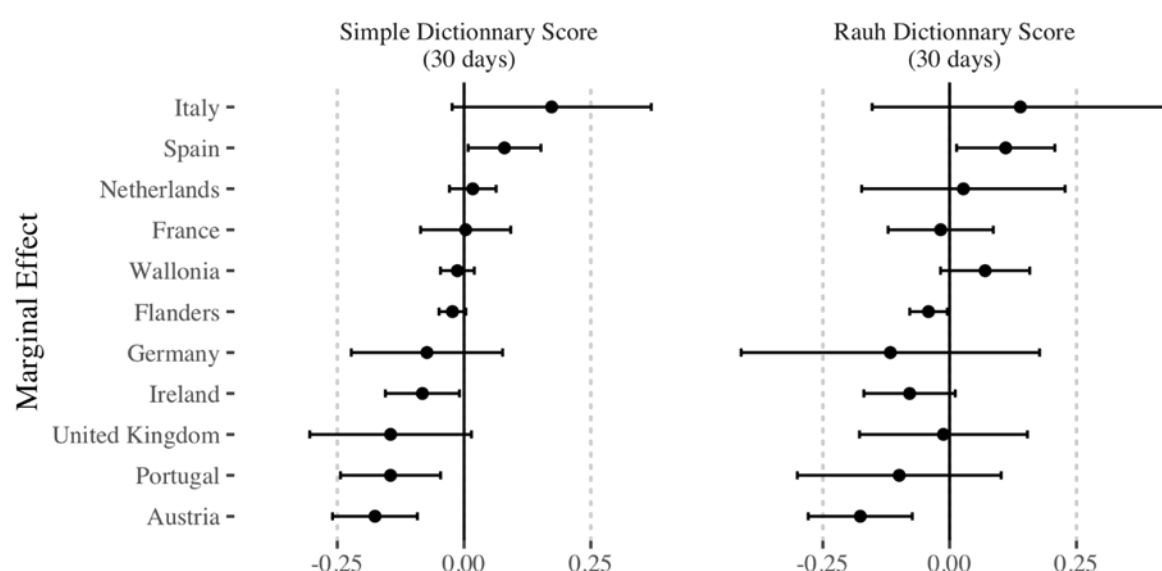
MEPs' participation in the debates also varies during the period and across countries. (cf. Figure 3) As the participation rates of Austrian MEPs underlines, the total number of national MEPs only cannot account for the differences between countries, since Austrians participate more than Belgians and 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 enables 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 each³.

Figure 4: Regressions results



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.

³ As robustness checks we also used a 15-day time lag and tested other kinds of models (negative binomial and poisson regression) with similar results.

Finally, we must note that we do not find any consistency 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.

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 that 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 public⁴, 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

⁴ For example this might be the case for words related to the Common Foreign and Security Policy or the Stability and Growth Pact.

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 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 policymaking. 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 for 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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has received funding from the Fonds de la recherche scientifique (FRS-FNRS). This project has also received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 716208). The authors wish to thank Ferdinand Teuber for his valuable input as regards data analysis, as well as the two reviewers and the participants to the workshop 'The Politicisation of the European Union: From Processes to Consequences' for their comments and suggestions .

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bächtiger, A. (2014), "Debate and Deliberation in Legislatures", in Shane Martin, Thomas Saalfeld and Kaare Strøm (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Bäck, H. and Debus, M. (2016), *Political Parties, Parliaments and Legislative Speechmaking*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bäck, Hanna and Debus, Marc (2018), 'Representing the Region on the Floor: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Electoral Districts and Legislative Speechmaking', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 71 (1), pp. 73–102.
- Brack, N. and Costa, O. (2018), "Democracy in parliament vs. democracy through parliament? Defining the rules of the game in the European Parliament", *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 24 (1), pp. 51–71.
- Bressanelli, E., Koop, C., and Reh, C. (2020), "EU Actors under pressure: politicization and depoliticization as strategic responses", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27 (3), pp. 329–341.
- Broekmeulen, J. (2020). Accountability in the European Parliament: fact or fairytale? MEPs oversight of EU agencies using parliamentary questions. Radboud University Nijmegen
- De Bruycker, I. (2017). Politicization and the public interest: When do the elites in Brussels address public interests in EU policy debates? *European Union Politics*, 18(4), pp. 603-619.
- De Bruycker, I. (2020). Democratically deficient, yet responsive? How politicization facilitates responsiveness in the European Union. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(6), pp. 834-852.
- De Wilde, P. (2011). No Polity for Old Politics? A Framework for Analyzing the Politicization of European Integration. *Journal of European Integration*, 33(5), pp. 559-575.
- de Wilde, P., Leupold, A. and Schmidtke, H. (2016), "Introduction: The Differentiated Politicization of European Governance", *West European Politics*, 39 (1), pp. 3–22.
- De Wilde, P. and Lord, C., 2016. Assessing actually-existing trajectories of EU politicization. *West European Politics*, 39(1), pp.145-163.
- Font, N. and Pérez Durán, I. (2016) The European Parliament oversight of EU agencies through written questions, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23(9), pp. 1349-1366
- Frid-Nielsen, S. S. (2018), "Human rights or security? Positions on asylum in European Parliament speeches", *European Union Politics*, 19 (2), pp. 344–362.
- Garssen, B. (2016), "Problem-Solving Argumentative Patterns in Plenary Debates of the European Parliament", *Argumentation*, 30 (1), pp. 25–43.
- Grande, E. and Hutter, S. (2016). "Beyond authority transfer: explaining the politicization of Europe." *West European Politics* 39(1): 23–43.
- Herranz-Surrallés, A. (2020). 'Authority Shifts' in Global Governance: Intersecting Politicizations and the Reform of Investor–State Arbitration. *Politics and Governance*, 8(1), pp. 336-347.
- Hooghe, L. and Marks, G., 2009. A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus. *British journal of political science*, 39(1), pp.1-23.

Hobolt, S. and Wratil, C. (2020), "Contestation and responsiveness in EU Council deliberation", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27 (3), pp. 362–381.

Hutter, S., Grande, E. & Kriesi, H. 2016. *Politicising Europe*, Cambridge University Press.

Laloux, T., 2020. Informal negotiations in EU legislative decision-making: A systematic review and research agenda. *European Political Science*, 19(3), pp.443-460.

Laloux, T., & Pennetreau, D. (2019). Policies with and without Politics: Committees and the Differentiated Politicization of Legislative Debates in the European Parliament. *Politique européenne*, 64(2), pp. 86-109.

Mahoney C (2008) *Brussels Versus the Beltway: Advocacy in the United States and the European Union*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Moschella, M., Pinto, L., and Martocchia, D. (2020), "Let's speak more? How the ECB responds to public contestation", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27 (3), pp. 400–418.

Moreira Ramalho, T., 2020. The Troika in its own words: responding to the politicization of the southern European crises. *Journal of European Integration*, 42(5), pp.677-693.

Pannico, R., 2017. Is the European Union too complicated? Citizens' lack of information and party cue effectiveness. *European Union Politics*, 18(3), pp.424-446.

Pennetreau, D. and Laloux, T. (2021), "Talkin' 'bout a Negotiation : (Un)Transparent Rapporteurs' Speeches in the European Parliament", *Politics and governance*, 9 (1), pp. 248–260.

Proksch, Sven-Oliver and Slapin, Jonathan B. (2010), "Position Taking in European Parliament Speeches", *British Journal of Political Science*, 40 (3), pp. 587–611.

Proksch, Sven-Oliver and Slapin, Jonathan B. (2015), *The politics of parliamentary debate*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Rauh, Christian and de Wilde ,Pieter (2017), "The opposition deficit in EU accountability: Evidence from over 20 years of plenary debate in four member states", *European Journal of Political Research*, 57 (1), pp. 194–216.

Rauh, C., 2015. Communicating supranational governance? The salience of EU affairs in the German Bundestag, 1991–2013. *European Union Politics*, 16(1), pp.116-138.

Rauh, C., 2016. *A responsive technocracy? EU politicization and the consumer policies of the European Commission*, Colchester., ECPR Press

Ripoll Servent, Ariadna (2018), *The European parliament*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Risse, T. ed., 2015. *European public spheres*. Cambridge University Press.

Schimmelfennig, Frank (2020), "Politicization management in the European Union", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27 (3), pp. 342–361.

Slapin, J. B. and Proksch, S.O. (2010), "Look who's talking: Parliamentary debate in the European Union", *European Union Politics*, 11 (3), pp. 333–357.

Sorace M. (2018), "Legislative Participation in the EU: An analysis of questions, speeches, motions and declarations in the 7th European Parliament", *European Union Politics*, 19 (2), pp. 299–320.

Statham, P. and Trenz, H.J., 2013. How European Union Politicization can Emerge through Contestation: The Constitution Case. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51(5), pp.965-980.

Van Ballaert, B. (2017). The European Commission's use of consultation during policy formulation: The effects of policy characteristics. *European Union Politics*, 18(3), 406–423.

Ver Hoef, J.M. and Boveng pp.L. (2007). 'Quasi-poisson vs. Negative binomial regression: how should we model overdispersed count data?', *Ecology*, 88(11), 2766-2772.

Vesan, P. and Corti, F., 2019. New tensions over social Europe? The European Pillar of Social Rights and the debate within the European Parliament. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57(5), pp.977-994.

