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# Communicating supranational governance? The salience of EU affairs in the German Bundestag, 1991–2013

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**Abstract**

Against democratic deficits of European Union (EU) governance, recent literature emphasizes the communicative function of national parliaments. Yet, arguments from the broader EU politicization literature have been only rarely applied to public parliamentary debates. This article integrates arguments about supranational authority and partisan competition as key drivers of debates on the EU and tests respective implications by an automated text analysis that retrieves EU references in all 1,393 plenary debates of the German Bundestag during 1991–2013. A panel analysis identifies authority transfers as the strongest predictor for EU salience in the plenary. EU references furthermore increase with supranational policy output, public EU visibility, and a differentiating public opinion. With regard to partisan emphasis, mainstream and particularly governing parties push European issues in the German Bundestag.

**Keywords**

European integration, national parliaments, politicization, salience, text analysis

**Introduction**

National parliaments play a prominent role in the ever simmering debate on democratic deficits of the European Union (EU). Being the major bearers of democratic legitimacy in the member states, the engagement of national parliaments with issues of European integration promises to link the wider public to the procedures and

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products of supranational governance. In this vein, existing research has intensively studied the control functions of national parliaments in EU affairs (Raunio, 2009; Winzen, 2010). These works show that virtually all national parliaments by now have developed increasingly sophisticated control mechanisms in EU affairs (Sprungk, 2013; Winzen, 2012).

Such control functions are, however, only one side of a link between the wider public and executive decisions at the supranational level. National parliaments will only help to remedy the Union's democratic deficits if they also perform a *communicative function* in EU affairs (Auel, 2007; Auel and Raunio, 2014b; De Wilde, 2012). Where only committees of specialized EU experts scrutinize supranational decisions behind closed doors, little legitimacy can be gained. Parliaments will enhance the public accountability of European decisions only if they make the choices and political alternatives involved in European integration visible to the wider public they mean to represent. The key question is whether this potential is exploited: to what degree do national parliaments actually 'go public' on EU affairs? What drives the salience of European issues in the publically visible activities of national parliaments, most notably the plenary debates?

The broader literature on EU politicization suggests two general arguments on why European integration becomes a topic in public debates. In the first perspective, political debates on EU affairs should mirror the consecutive authority transfers to the supranational level and the accompanying societal politicization of European integration (De Wilde and Zürn, 2012; Rauh and Zürn, 2014; Statham and Trenz, 2012). Given a greater recognition of supranational powers among the wider public and increasing societal demands for the justification of these powers, political elites are expected to adapt their public emphasis of European issues in response to the consecutive pooling and delegation of national competences in Brussels. A second perspective emphasizes the elite supply of political debate about Europe (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Wendler, 2013). In these approaches, the salience of EU affairs in public debates is expected to vary with the roles and positions of different parties in the wider political system. Political elites should emphasize European integration strategically, depending on the comparative electoral advantages generated by supranational issues.

Empirical knowledge on whether these two generic explanations of EU politicization also account for the salience of supranational matters in domestic plenary debates remains limited so far. While we have systematic information about the contents of partisan debate when decidedly European issues have already made it to the plenary agenda (De Wilde, 2011a; Miklin, 2014; Wendler, 2013), we know little about the factors that push EU affairs onto the parliamentary agenda in the first place. The most notable exception is provided by Auel and Raunio (2014a), who compare the share of designated EU debates in the plenaries of the British, Finnish, French, and German parliaments between 2002 and 2012. By this measure, parliamentary attention given to EU issues has increased over time and seems not to be greater in countries with stronger partisan conflict or a more sceptic public opinion on the EU.

The existing work leaves two important gaps, however. First, by focusing solely on debates that are flagged as explicitly European on the parliamentary agenda, we cannot assess whether parliamentarians actually engage in ‘mainstreaming’ EU affairs (cf. Gattermann et al., 2013). Given the growing scope of supranational competences that increasingly constrains domestic policy and provides a means to circumvent domestic opposition, a sole focus on debates that are explicitly about European integration in the first place may underestimate the overall EU salience in parliament. Members of parliament (MPs) may refer to the supranational level in a range of issues that originally appear as domestic topics on the parliamentary agenda. Whether such issue linkages occur is, in fact, a much more powerful test for EU politicization. Second, analyzing only individual debates at individual points in time cannot empirically integrate the theoretical expectations sketched above. To assess to what extent salience of EU affairs in plenary debates is driven by authority and/or specific set-ups of partisan competition requires continuous analyses over longer time spans.

In order to address these gaps, the article analyzes all 1,393 plenary debates in the German Bundestag between 1991 and 2013 on the basis of a semi-automated text analysis. The data highlight that the communicative performance of this domestic parliament has significantly improved during the 23-year period, which is mainly a function of the consecutive long-term authority transfers to the supranational level. EU references on the plenary floor furthermore increase with supranational policy output, public EU visibility, and a differentiating public opinion. Selective partisan emphasis is less pronounced in the German Bundestag and mainly the governing parties push European issues in the publicly visible plenary debates.

### **EU affairs in the national plenary: Theoretical expectations**

The communicative function of parliaments figures prominently in both representative and deliberative conceptions of democracy (De Wilde, 2012: 11–12). In the former domain, parties in parliament need to communicate political choices to voters so as to turn elections into a meaningful mechanism of preference aggregation. In the latter domain, parliaments are major deliberation arenas where differing perceptions of the public good are articulated to hammer out the collective will. In both conceptions, the visibility of political choices and their communicative link to citizen preferences are a precondition for a democratically meaningful control of national executives by elected MPs. As such, the communicative performance of national parliaments in EU affairs is directly related to the often discussed democratic deficits of supranational governance: if MPs raise European issues, they offer a remedy to the otherwise opaque procedures, the overwhelming complexity, and the difficult attribution of political responsibility in decision-making beyond the nation state. Only where parliamentary activity makes the relevance and alternative interpretations of supranational decisions visible, the subsequent exercise of parliamentary control functions completes the link between domestic electorates and executive decisions in Brussels.

How can parliaments make European issues visible? Besides transparent European affairs committees or parliamentary public relations activities, the key instrument for the communicative performance of national parliaments are plenary debates (Auel and Raunio, 2014a; Gattermann et al., 2013: 15–16). While not all receive equal press coverage (De Wilde, 2014), these debates are generally open to the wider public. Unlike in committee meetings, an MP stepping to the speaker's desk in a plenary debate well knows that anything that is to be said can resonate among the wider electorate. What, then, drives MPs to raise (or not raise) issues of European integration in these debates?

### *The demand for public justification in EU affairs: Authority transfers and societal politicization*

A first set of expectations focuses on the societal demand for public justifications in EU affairs. They rest on the argument that the rising authority of inter- and supranational governance—that is, the degree to which collectively binding decisions are taken beyond the nation state—accounts for an increasing societal politicization of these arrangements (Zürn et al., 2012). The more national competences are delegated to, or pooled at, the supranational level, the more this level should become an addressee of societal demands. This argument is driven by the normative claim that political authority in modern societies requires justification. Yet, it has clear behavioral components as well. Policy-seeking MPs should have an incentive to provide justification if they acknowledge that most pressing challenges can only be tackled by cross-national cooperation. Likewise, office-seeking political elites have an incentive to respond to societal demands in order to signal their own sustained relevance in issues that gradually migrate to the supranational realm.

In fact, the authority of the EU has significantly increased over time. With each consecutive treaty revision more competences have been delegated to EU institutions such as the European Commission (EC), and an increasing number of national powers were pooled by majority voting in the Council (Biesenbender, 2011; Börzel, 2005). Taken together, this lets us expect that the salience of EU affairs in the plenary increases in line with the consecutive accumulation of political authority at the European level:

*H1:* The salience of EU affairs in national parliaments increases with the degree to which national competences are delegated to or pooled at the supranational level.

However, the authority-politicization nexus may be mediated by 'discursive opportunities' (De Wilde and Zürn, 2012). The first and most immediate opportunity for politicization is the degree to which the EU actually exercises its authority by producing collectively binding decisions. Specific supranational policies provide crystallizing points for debates in national parliaments (Miklin, 2014). EU directives in particular should matter in this regard. These legislative instruments usually present the most encompassing and politically far-reaching policies and have to be

formally transposed into domestic law (Hix, 2005: 116). Plenary debates should thus be particularly responsive to these supranational instruments if we expect that EU affairs are actually ‘mainstreamed’ into domestic politics:

*H2:* The salience of EU affairs in national parliaments increases with the amount of directives adopted at the supranational level.

Besides responses to concrete policy output, societal demand for public justification of EU affairs rises when new priorities of the EU are set. European Council meetings—the summits of the heads of states and governments—thus provide a discursive opportunity for the authority-politicization nexus. In addition, intergovernmental negotiations render the democratic control of national executives particularly relevant. If MPs indeed want to enhance the public accountability of supranational governance, we should accordingly see stronger parliamentary EU salience in parallel to such summits. This effect should be even more pronounced where such meetings directly address authority transfers to the EU. Where primary EU law has to be ratified in the domestic arena, the societal demand for public information and justification should be strongest. In fact, the empirical literature on various aspects of societal EU politicization indicates clear spikes in visibility and mobilization indicators around major EU summits and treaty ratifications (e.g. Boomgaarden et al., 2010; Rauh, 2012; Uba and Uggla, 2011). We thus expect that:

*H3:* The salience of EU affairs in national parliaments increases during EU summits and EU treaty ratifications.

Finally, for three reasons, the societal demand for public justification of EU affairs may vary beyond policy output and EU-level events in the short term. First, politicization may also occur when the supranational level fails to adequately exercise the authority it controls (Zürn et al., 2012). Where the wider public acknowledges that the EU can, in principle, take binding decisions but fails to tackle given societal challenges, public demands for justification may rise without actual EU activity. Second, there might be issue competition. Public attention and the plenary agenda are limited, and if other pressing issues unrelated to the EU warrant consideration, European affairs may move to the background. Finally, even where the EU exercises its authority, the demand for justification will be lower if the wider electorate by and large agrees (or agrees to disagree) on European questions. Translating these short-term variations in societal politicization of EU affairs, we can expect that:

*H4a:* The salience of EU affairs in national parliaments increases with the contemporaneous visibility of European affairs in the wider public.

*H4b:* The salience of EU affairs in national parliaments increases with the contemporaneous polarization of public opinion on European affairs.

Taken together, hypotheses 1–4 provide observable implications of the more general claim that MPs' engagement with EU affairs in the plenary is driven by the consecutive authority transfers to the supranational level and the societal demands for public justification it produces. While this is most welcome from the vantage points of representative and deliberative theories of democracy, it assumes that MPs are responsive to the preferences held by the wider society. Alternative accounts of EU politicization start from different assumptions and emphasize supply-side considerations of political elites as core drivers of EU salience in public debates.

### *The supply of political debate on EU affairs: Strategic partisan competition*

Approaches in this vein assume that whether the EU becomes a topic in domestic political debates hinges first and foremost on the strategic considerations of individual parties and their competitive situation (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Kriesi, 2007). This focus on the elite supply of debates about European integration rests on two cornerstones. First, elites are seen to have considerable freedom to actually 'cue' public opinion (Gabel, 1998; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Zaller, 1992). Second, these approaches are anchored in the saliency theory of partisan competition. Parties are not assumed to compete on the same issues, but will rather selectively emphasize topics on which they assume to have a comparative electoral advantage (Budge, 1982; Dolezal et al., 2014). For the present article, the resulting expectation is that EU salience in plenary debates of national parliaments mainly varies over parties.

Four empirical implications can be derived from this basic expectation. Most immediately, the salience of EU affairs in statements of individual MPs should depend on the degree to which their party strategically emphasizes issues of European integration relative to other parties. Following saliency theory, this relative importance granted to European issues in domestic election campaigns reflects strategic considerations on the comparative advantages a party ascribes to this issue. This 'issue ownership' argument leads us to expect that:

*H5:* The salience of EU affairs in national parliaments is driven by parties that emphasized European integration more strongly than other parties in the last domestic election.

Furthermore, the degree to which a party emphasizes European issues should hinge on the conflict potential these issues generate among prospective voters and party members. The seminal 'sleeping giant' thesis highlights that the electorates in virtually all member states including Germany are much more split on issues of integration than on socio-economic cleavages (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004). Thus, the risk of alienating prospective voters by raising European issues should increase with the size of the constituency of a given party. Particularly leaders of mainstream parties tend to hold much more EU-friendly positions than their electorates (Mattila and Raunio, 2006). In contrast, parties with smaller and

thus more cohesive constituencies either on the extreme left, criticizing the EU for its neoliberal stance, or on the extreme right, criticizing the EU on the basis of identity issues, should have much less to lose from raising European affairs in plenary debates. On the contrary, knowing that European affairs might be a 'wedge issue' for their mainstream contenders (Tzelgov, 2014), they should push respective topics to the fore. Following a similar and partially related logic, parties might face significant internal dissent on European issues among their actual partisan activists, factions, and leadership (Gabel and Scheve, 2007; Ray, 1999). Given that internal quarrels and mixed messages are disadvantageous in electoral competition, parties with a high degree of internal dissent among their active membership should also have incentives to downplay issues of European integration. Applying these arguments to plenary debates leads to two additional implications:

*H6:* The salience of EU affairs in national parliaments is driven by parties with smaller constituencies and those that face less internal dissent on matters of European integration.

A final implication distinguishes government and opposition. In the politicization literature, it is frequently assumed that incumbent parties have a far more limited room of maneuver in debating European issues, as their representatives have to formally approve intergovernmental decisions at the supranational level (cf. Crum, 2007; Holzhaecker, 2002). Even if MPs from the governing coalition want to control their executives' activities in Brussels, they should prefer to do so behind closed doors as public criticism damages the reputation of the cabinet and decreases re-election chances (Auel, 2007). In turn, opposition parties can rather cheaply criticize the incumbent government for supranational policy choices it only controls partially. However, for three reasons it is plausible that especially government parties raise European issues on the plenary floor. First, government coalitions may use plenary debates to exploit the 'paradox of weakness' in the two-level game of supranational politics (Bailer and Schneider, 2006). Tying their hands in front of the domestic audience can be used as a means to make supranational concessions more costly, thereby increasing national bargaining influence. Second, particularly since 1992 the German government has strong parliamentary reporting duties on EU affairs (Auel, 2006). Third, enhanced government emphasis is consistent with the argument that greater authority transfers and societal EU politicization push executive elites into justification efforts: since governments have the strongest influence on supranational decisions, they especially have something to lose if they fail to explain and justify their actions to domestic audiences. The combined effect of these three logics in the German Bundestag leads to the expectation that:

*H7:* The salience of EU affairs in national parliaments is driven by parties from the governing coalition.



Taken together, hypotheses 5–7 offer empirical implications of the more general claim that the communicative function of national parliaments in EU affairs is driven by supply-side considerations of partisan elites. As the deduction of the individual hypotheses has shown, however, this competes only partially with the expectations rooted in the societal demand for public justification of supranational authority. Rather, both perspectives complement each other. Elite cueing and responsiveness to public opinion are known to be reciprocal processes (Franklin and Wlezien, 1997; Steenbergen et al., 2007). At the same time it is plausible to assume that an over-time increase in the societal politicization of supranational decision-making amplifies partisan incentives to compete on European issues (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). While the first set of explanations emphasizes the structure of supranational governance as a driver of EU salience in public debates, the second set stresses the agency of political elites. Whether and to what extent these expectations travel to the parliamentary context is an empirical question that requires integrating both sets of arguments into a common model.

## Research design

To devise such a model, I analyze all 1,393 plenary debates in the German Bundestag between March 1991 and September 2013. This covers the 12th to the 17th legislative period in one of the most powerful EU member states and holds the institutional context, an alternative source of varying EU salience in the plenary (Auel and Raunio, 2014b), constant. The only major institutional change occurred right at the beginning of the investigation period, when the participation rights of the Bundestag gained constitutional status in 1992. The German Bundestag is a ‘working parliament’, but MPs control the plenary agenda and opposition parties hold comparatively strong rights in this regard (Sieberer, 2006). A European Affairs Committee exists and may act on behalf of the plenary, but such delegation is empirically rare (Auel, 2006; Auel and Raunio, 2014a). In this institutional context, the rhetorical salience of EU affairs can sufficiently vary over time and parties.

The investigation period furthermore ensures sufficient variation in the independent variables. It covers major authority transfers to the supranational level from Maastricht over Amsterdam, and Nice up to Lisbon. In addition, the investigation period stretches over six different domestic governments, the rise of a Green and a far-left party (PDS/Linke) as well as various government participations and subsequent electoral decline of the social democrats (SPD). Taken together, the German parliament between 1991 and 2013 provides a suitable testing ground to integrate both the authority- and party-based hypotheses.

### *The salience of EU affairs in the plenary: A text-mining approach*

The dependent variable—salience of EU affairs in plenary debates—is defined as the degree to which plenary statements of individual MPs make reference to the

supranational polity, politics and policies of the EU. To operationalize this concept, I proceed in three steps.

Firstly, I retrieve all *verbatim records of the plenary debates* between 12 March 1991 and 3 September 2013 from the document server of the German Bundestag.<sup>1</sup> I then set up various R scripts that remove agenda, appendices, and other boilerplates leaving nothing but the plain MP statements given on the plenary floor. Based on encompassing lists of all contemporaneous politicians with parliamentary speaking rights, another set of scripts splits the protocols into individual statements. Each observation contains the full statement text, the speaker's name and partisan faction, as well as a range of descriptive variables such as the statements' length, the number of unwarranted interventions etc. The resulting *data set* contains a total of 148,869 individual statements.<sup>2</sup> The majority of statements comes from the factions of the CDU/CSU (48,792) and SPD (43,337), followed by the liberal free democrats FDP (22,562), the green party (19,822), and finally the far-left PDS/Linke (14,356). Statement length ranges between 21 and 17,200 words with an average of 550.5 terms per statement.

Secondly, I develop and validate an encompassing *dictionary* of possible references to the EU in German political speech (see online appendix). It covers references to the overall supranational polity, the major institutional actors in this polity, as well as to the various supranational policies and policy instruments. The dictionary published with this article also covers the gradual name change from the European Communities to the EU and reliably detects EU references independent of inflections, plurals or compound terms that occur in natural German language.

Thirdly, I set up a tagging script that loops over dictionary and statements to retrieve the overall count of EU references from each plenary statement during the investigation period. With this operationalization EU salience increases if a given statement contains more term-level references to the EU. Note that this is a rather sensitive measure with regard to selective emphasis. Even if parliamentary debates are subject to contagion effects—to a certain extent MPs have to respond to preceding statements—it captures nuances of rhetorical strategies where an MP, for example, refers to the EU only in passing to then essentially speak about other topics in the remainder of his or her statement.

### *Data structure and variables*

For the multivariate analysis, the salience data are aggregated to a panel of 1224 party-months. The *dependent variable* 'salience of EU affairs' thus captures the average number of EU references per statement across each of the five partisan factions in each month.<sup>3</sup> Independent from the number of statements available to each partisan faction, this provides a monthly measure of how strongly each party stressed EU issues in the plenary.

I complement this panel with various *independent variables*. EU authority (*HI*) is conceptualized as an additive function of scope, delegation and pooling of

formerly national competences at the supranational level. Resorting to data on the respective EU treaty in force in Biesenbender (2011), the variable sums the number of policy areas covered by EU primary law (scope), the share of EU decision-making powers with a Commission right of initiative (delegation), and the share of EU decisions subject to simple or qualified majorities in the Council (pooling). This measure allows for testing of whether the salience of EU affairs in the German plenary has systematically increased with the consecutive, stepwise authority transfers in each accepted treaty revision. The indicator for supranational policy output (*H2*) is the moving average of EU directives adopted in the preceding six months and was retrieved from the EUPOL dataset (Häge, 2011).<sup>4</sup> Short-term fluctuations in the societal demands for public EU justification around EU summits (*H3*) are tested by an event marker that has a value of 1 during the event month, .5 in the immediately preceding and subsequent months, and zero otherwise. This smoothed event window assesses whether the parliament also communicates EU affairs during preparation and follow-up of summit meetings. A treaty ratification dummy (*H3*) marks each month in which laws transposing a supranational treaty agreement were at least once on the formal plenary agenda. Contemporaneous public visibility of the EU (*H4a*) is proxied by the share of articles in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ) that refer to the EU/EC in the headline.<sup>5</sup> To ensure causal direction, these data enter the model as a moving average of the preceding six months. Finally, I assess the influence of the polarization of public opinion on the EU (*H4b*) by relying on the variance in attitudes towards Germany's EU membership drawn from the seminal Eurobarometer item.<sup>6</sup>

Turning to strategic partisan competition, I evaluate the "issue ownership" hypothesis (*H5*) with data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2014).<sup>7</sup> The variable sums the share of positive and negative references to European integration in the most recent party manifesto and subtracts the party mean from the average among its four competitors. It thus captures the degree to which a party emphasized European issues in the last election relative to its Bundestag counterparts. The expectation that EU salience in the plenary is driven by parties with smaller constituencies (*H6*) is operationalized by the electoral share each of the five Bundestag parties exhibits in the monthly, Germany-wide polls conducted by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen.<sup>8</sup> Dissent on European integration among party activists (*H6*) is operationalized with the seminal item from the Ray and later Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (Bakker et al., 2012; Ray, 1999). I combined and interpolated the various waves and rescaled the variable to the 0–1 range (cf. Hooghe and Marks, 2009: 8). The hypothesis that EU salience is driven by government parties (*H7*) is evaluated along a dummy indicating a party's participation in the contemporaneous governing coalition. Finally, I include a control for electoral cycles, measuring the distance from and to the next Bundestag and European Parliament election in a quadratic fashion (reaching 1 in the mid-term and zero during the election month).

Table 1 summarizes the available indicators. These data allow us to integrate the theoretical expectations in a common explanatory model for the degree to which an important national parliament performs its communicative function in EU affairs.

## **Results: Increasing salience of EU affairs but limited partisan variation**

### *Descriptive findings*

How did the salience of EU affairs in the plenary of the German Bundestag evolve? This section provides descriptive information on the degree to which MPs refer to the polity, politics and policies of the EU. Figure 1 averages the number of EU references across plenary statements by month and plots the aggregates throughout the investigation period.

The most immediate finding is that the amount of references to the EU is extremely volatile within and across months. Overall, our salience measure ranges from zero references in July 1996, October 2005 and October 2009 to an average of 6.25 references during August 2009. Usually the inaugural parliamentary sessions make little reference to the EU as they mainly contain votes on the incoming government without many speeches. The strongest positive outlier in August 2009, in contrast, refers to a single Bundestag session (16/232) that had both the ratification of the Lisbon treaty and legislative responses to the Lisbon judgment of the German constitutional Court on the agenda. Though not as strong, we can also observe positive outliers during all treaty ratifications (1992, 1997–1998, 2001–2003, 2009).

Applying a smoother to these data also underlines the importance of authority transfers to the supranational level (Figure 1). Not only are the peaks around individual treaty ratifications confirmed but we also observe level effects: after each treaty revision, the average number of EU references per statement increases. Data on the post-Lisbon phase is limited but the expansion of EU salience in the plenary neatly mirrors the consecutive, stepwise authority transfers, which provides strong descriptive evidence for a causal influence of EU authority (*H1*). More generally, Figure 1 indicates that the German Bundestag has significantly improved its communicative function in EU affairs over time.<sup>9</sup>

However, the rather large monthly standard deviations may hide significant variation in the emphasis of EU affairs across parties. To shed descriptive light on this suspicion, Figure 2 aggregates the average number of EU references per statement on the partisan level and—for reasons of readability—to 3-month periods.

The figure shows little selective partisan emphasis of EU affairs in the Bundestag plenary. Both the treaty ratifications as well as the initial responses to the Eurocrisis in the second quarter of 2010 account for short-term salience peaks across all parties. These common peaks might be due to very specific agenda effects

**Table 1.** Summary of hypotheses and data (N = 1224 party-months).

Hypothesis	Indicator and data source	Mean	Median	Min	Max	SD
DV: Saliency of EU affairs	Average number of EU references per plenary statement, party and month	0.62	0.5	0	6.25	0.57
<i>Authority/politicization</i>						
H1:	EU Scope (# of policy areas) + EU delegation (% decisions with Comm. initiative) + pooling (% decisions with majority voting in Council); Biesenbender (2011)	152.3	150.9	135.4	159.5	7.15
H2:	Moving average of EU directives adopted during the preceding six months; Häge (2011); Data ends 12/2012 (35 missing)	4.14	4	0.5	11.5	1.81
H3:	I during summit month, .5 in preceding and subsequent months, zero otherwise	0.51	0.5	0	2	0.34
Summits						
Ratification	I during each month treaty ratification was at least once on formal plenary agenda, zero otherwise	0.02	0.00	0	1	0.15
H4a:	Share of FAZ articles with EU references in title, moving average of the preceding six months	0.77	0.78	0.43	1.23	0.18
H4b:	Variance in responses to Eurobarometer membership item; GESIS; Data ends 07/2011 (110 missing)	0.5	0.5	0.34	0.76	0.08
<i>Partisan competition</i>						
H5:	Deviation of the share of EU related statements in last election manifesto from the mean of competing parties, CMP data (Volkens et al., 2014)	0	0.03	-3.25	3.5	1.98
H6:	Electoral support (share) in monthly opinion polls, Forschungsgruppe Wahlen	19.23	11	1	56.5	15.82
<i>Constituency size</i>						
Internal dissent	Chapel Hill Expert Survey, various waves (Bakker et al. 2012; Steenbergen and Marks 2007; Ray 1999), rescaled to 0 to 1 range	0.27	0.27	0.04	0.5	0.11
H7:	Dummy: Partisan participation in government	0.4	0	0	1	0.49
<i>Government</i>						
<i>Controls</i>						
BT election cycle	Decaying in quadratic form from 1 during mid-term to zero during BT election	0.67	0.75	0	1	0.3
EP election cycle	Decaying in quadratic form from 1 during mid-term to zero during EP election	0.67	0.78	0	1	0.3

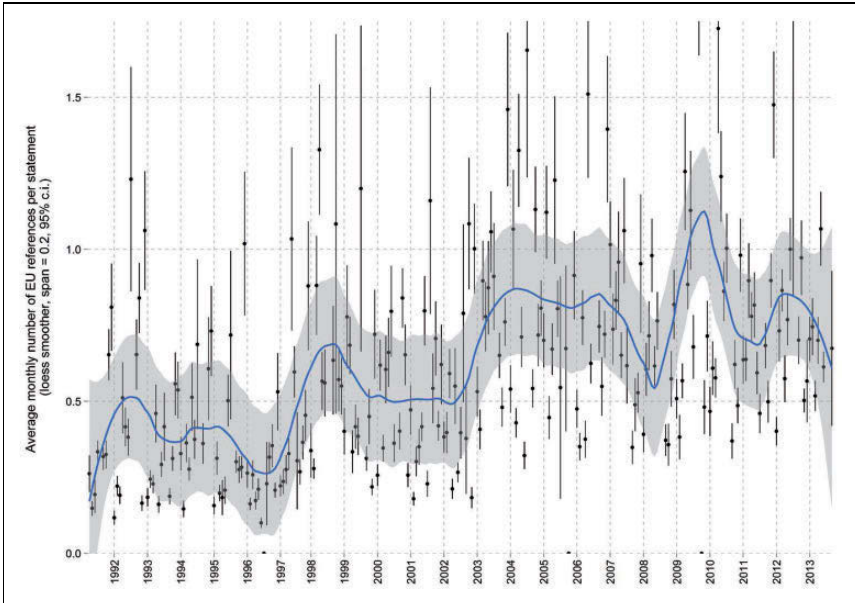


Figure 1. Monthly averages of EU references per plenary statement in the German Bundestag.

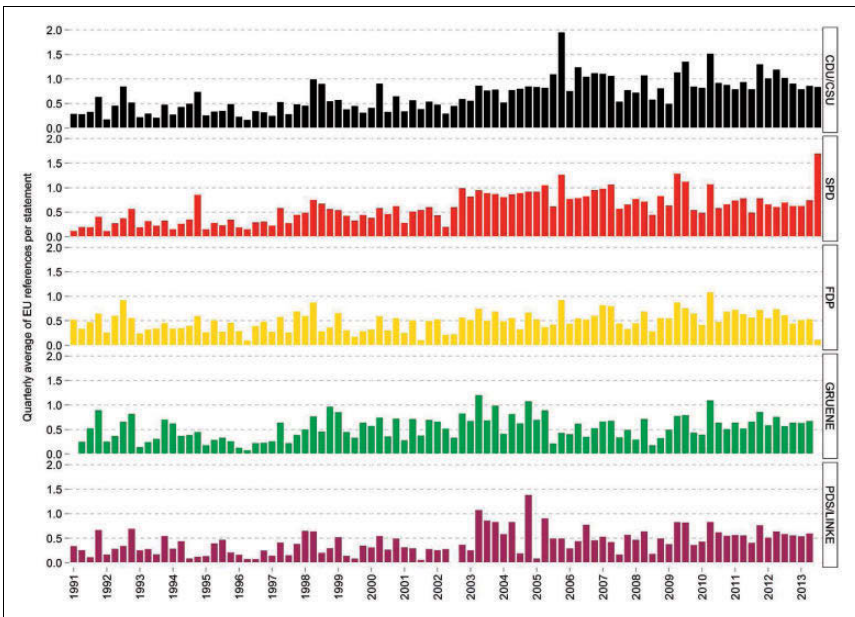


Figure 2. Quarterly averages of EU references per partisan plenary statement.

thereby masking selective partisan emphasis of EU affairs during more normal periods. Yet, the long-term trends also equal each other. In particular, the major increase of EU references after the Treaty of Nice is driven by all parties. Data on the monthly level (not shown here) exhibits a correlation of .78 in the average number of EU references in statements by the two German mainstream parties, the Christian democrats (CDU/CSU) and the social democrats (SPD). This relationship is robust across different government compositions: CDU/CSU and SPD commonly emphasized the EU during their grand coalition (2005–2009), but also in times in which one of them was the opposition leader.

Indeed, although our salience measure is independent from overall numbers of statements per party, the data in Figure 2 suggest that these two mainstream parties contribute most to parliamentary communication on EU affairs. The average EU emphasis in statements by the Greens (GRUENE) and the liberals (FDP) is lower in absolute terms. Yet the values of these parties also correlate strongly with each other as well as with the mainstream parties ( $> 0.6$  across all governments covered). The far-left opposition (PDS/LINKE) stands somewhat outside this pattern. EU emphasis by this party is more volatile leading to lower correlations with other parties ( $\sim 0.45$ ). The multivariate estimation will show whether these patterns in EU salience can be meaningfully explained by the hypotheses derived above.

### *Multivariate analysis*

An adequate specification of the statistical model is a key choice in this regard. Panel data structures may result in biased conclusions if the estimation disregards errors clustered over time (months, in our case) or units (parties). Fixed effects (FE) models provide one solution to this challenge. Similar to regressions with unit dummies, such models would ‘explain’ cross-sectional variation in salience by a vector of fixed partisan effects. While this has some advantages in controlling for omitted variables on party level, it results in ‘within specifications’ that mainly leave variation over time for statistical analysis (Wooldridge, 2003: 473). These models also limit the explanatory power of only rarely or slowly changing variables (Kittel and Winner, 2005: 271–275) as, for example, government participation or electoral strength of parties in the current application. It is unclear whether respective party differences are absorbed into the fixed effect vector or (correctly) attributed to the rare variation in the independent variable (Plümper et al., 2005). Given that we explicitly want to compare effects that vary mainly over time to effects that mainly vary over parties, FE models seem ill-suited. Random effects models offer an alternative, but assume that unit-specific effects are a random variable, meaning that unobserved unit effects are uncorrelated with the independent variables of the model. Under the stability of cross-partisan variation in Figure 2, and the inclusion of key electoral competition variables in the model, this assumption seems too heroic here. I thus rely on a simple pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) model and complement it with extensive post-regression diagnostics. As shown in the

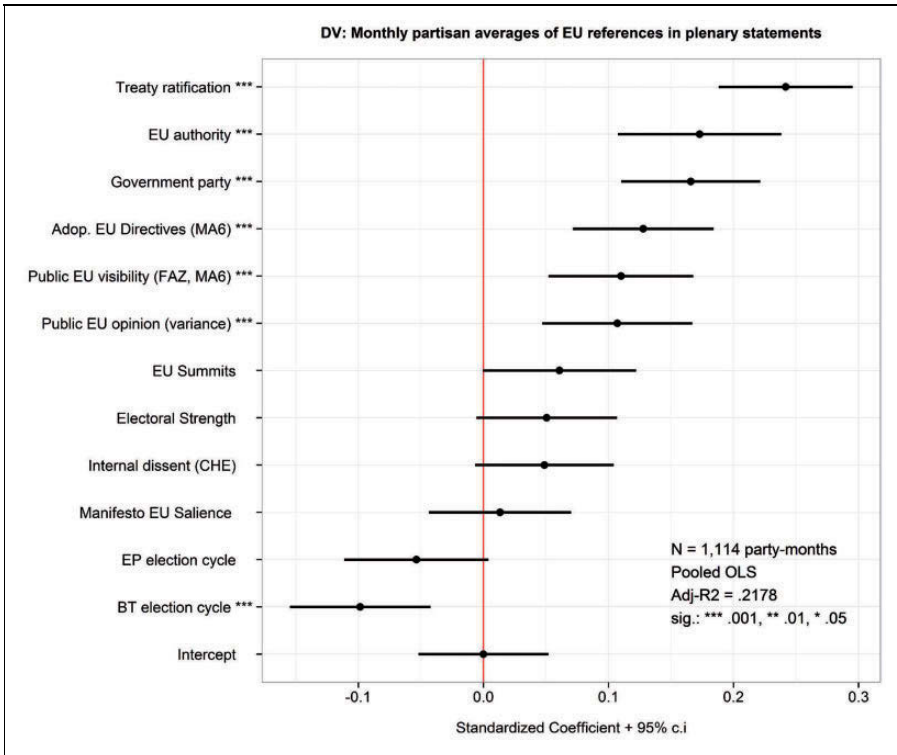


Figure 3. Multivariate regression results.

online appendix, estimation residuals do not cluster by party or vary systematically over time.

Figure 3 summarizes the estimation results on the 1,114 complete observations. Since we are mainly interested in evaluating the relative contribution of the different hypotheses, standardized regression coefficients are shown. The figure indicates how a one standard deviation shift in the respective independent variable affects the average number of EU references per statement for each party and month (also expressed in standard deviations, cf. Table 1).

The results show that the descriptive conclusions hold in the multivariate setting. The domestic ratification of authority transfers to the European level exhibits the strongest effect on EU salience in the Bundestag plenary (*H3*). During months in which authority transfers to the supranational level are explicitly at stake, MPs refer significantly more often to EU affairs. While this is not all too surprising, the multivariate model strikingly also confirms that the consecutive authority shifts exhibit mean level effects on the salience of EU affairs in the domestic plenary (*H1*). In fact, the EU authority variable is the second most important predictor for the average number of EU references per plenary statement. This adds a solid



statistical foundation to the strong support *H1* has already received in the visual inspections above.

The regression results furthermore indicate that the degree to which the EU actually exercises this political authority, as proxied by the average number of directives adopted during the last six months, has a statistically significant effect (*H2*). The more the EU takes encompassing legislative decisions, the more it is referred to in the domestic plenary. EU summits, in contrast, exhibit a weaker and statistically less robust effect (*H3*), which may be due to varying integrative ambitions of the various summits during the 23-year period studied here. In sum, these results indicate that both short-term transfers and long-term shifts in EU authority increase the domestic parliamentary communication of EU affairs.

In the same line, variables approximating short-term fluctuations of societal EU politicization hold explanatory power as well. The salience of EU affairs in the plenary statements of MPs clearly increases with the public visibility of European issues in a major quality newspaper during the last six months (*H4a*). Likewise, increasing variance in the public attitudes towards EU membership generates a statistically robust prediction for an increasing prominence of EU affairs in the plenary (*H4b*). The latter variable again points to the complementary nature of both explanatory approaches covered in this article. A differentiating public opinion clearly raises the demand for justifying authority transfers to Brussels, but it may also increase the electoral incentives for individual parties to selectively raise European issues.

Indeed, the effects of the electoral cycle variables point to some electoral relevance of European issues. Recall that these variables reach 1 during mid-term and decrease to zero during the preceding or subsequent election. Accordingly, the statistical effect for the Bundestag election cycle implies that the salience of EU affairs increases the closer in time the major domestic elections are. Though smaller in size and statistically less robust, the same tendency can be found for European elections. These two effects suggest that Bundestag MPs seem to expect some gains from publically emphasizing European issues more strongly during election time. Yet, on party level the 'issue ownership' hypothesis finds no clear support (*H5*). The relative emphasis of European integration a party has signaled in its last election manifesto exhibits only a weak positive association to partisan EU references in parliamentary debates and fails to reach statistical significance by far. Parties that more strongly rely on supranational issues to attract voters are not necessarily the ones that also raise supranational issues in plenary debates.

The results also contrast findings on selective partisan emphasis of EU in seminal analyses of domestic election campaigns. Contrary to the expectation that mainly parties with smaller electorates use supranational issues to challenge mainstream parties that are assumed to face a more split electorate in this regard, EU references in the plenary of the German Bundestag increase with the electoral support the respective party enjoys in monthly polls (*H6*). Likewise, internal dissent on European integration among active party members is positively associated to the average frequency of partisan EU references on the plenary floor (*H6*).

Both variables narrowly miss the conventional significance threshold of 0.05 but their positive tendency implies that partisan dynamics on European integration may differ between electoral and media campaigns on the one hand and parliamentary debates on the other. It is possible that in parliamentary activity grand party strategy matters to a lesser degree than characteristics and strategies of individual MPs (cf. Wonka and Rittberger, 2014). Based on the data supplied with this article, future research may for example scrutinize whether the amount of individual references to the EU depends on the preferences of specific electoral constituencies of individual MPs.

Finally, the most striking finding with regard to partisan variation concerns the selective emphasis of EU affairs by MPs from the incumbent coalition. Contrasting the findings that opposition parties use European integration as a ‘wedge issue’ in election campaigns or media debates, the data from more than 20 years of plenary debates in the German Bundestag under varying governments show that it is mainly the governing coalition that refers to the polity, politics and policies of the EU (*H7*). The government participation variable exhibits the third strongest effect size, being only trumped by the short- and long-term effects of authority transfers. To what extent this finding is driven by strategic considerations in two-level games of supranational politics, by enhanced reporting duties or by greater demand for the justification of executive decisions in Brussels, is a question for future research. Studying variation in the actual contents of EU-related plenary statements by government and opposition parties along the data provided here offers a promising avenue in this regard.

Beyond individual hypotheses, two qualifications of the statistical model are in order. First, it may be criticized for a comparatively low fit as the hypotheses explain ‘only’ roughly 22% of observed variation. Note, however, the extraordinarily high short-term volatility of EU salience in the plenary uncovered in Figure 1. While the model does not capture all of this (partially idiosyncratic) volatility, the post-estimation diagnostics as well as an encompassing outlier analysis in the online appendix build sufficient trust. Removing outliers even emphasizes the level effects of EU authority more strongly. In addition, potential interaction effects between the authority- and the party-based explanations are scrutinized in the online appendix. The results indicate that the effect of government participation has slightly increased with EU authority over time while the positive sign of the constituency size variable becomes statistically significant only after the Maastricht Treaty entered into force. However, these interaction effects are not fully robust and, moreover, do not increase the model fit. Overall, the encompassing diagnostics do not provide evidence for systematically omitted variables.

Second, the uncovered effects may initially appear somewhat small. For example, a one standard deviation increase in the EU authority variable (SD: 7.15), leads to an increase of .18 standard deviations in our salience variable (SD: 0.57). However, these figures imply that the move from Amsterdam to Nice (approximately one standard deviation in the authority variable), for example, accounts for an average increase of one additional term-level EU reference in every tenth

statement. Given that issues of supranational governance have to compete with every other conceivable issue that can make it onto the parliamentary agenda and that each of statements is limited to only 550 terms on average, this is quite a substantial effect. If we furthermore consider that debates typically contain around 200 statements, the move from Amsterdam to Nice alone, holding all other variables at their mean, accounts for 20 additional EU references per plenary debate.

## Conclusion

The encompassing analysis of all 1,393 plenary debates of the German Bundestag between March 1991 and September 2013 provides good news on the communicative performance of the German Bundestag in EU affairs—at least in relative terms. The data presented in this article show that the degree to which the supranational polity, its politics and its policies are mentioned in the publically visible plenary debates has significantly and substantially increased over the last 23 years. What is more, the functional form of this increase follows the transfers of political authority to the supranational level. Thus, plenary Bundestag debates have at least helped in dampening the opaqueness of widened and deepened EU decision-making. Whether this relative increase over time is also considered sufficient in absolute terms and lives up to the normative benchmarks in representative and deliberative theories of democracy is, however, a different question. Future research may generate additional insights by either comparing the level of EU references to a bunch of other political issues (c.f. Hutter and Grande 2014), or by linking the variation uncovered here to the degree to which domestic legislative processes are actually Europeanized (König and Mäder, 2009).

With regard to drivers of EU salience in the plenary, particularly the short-term and long-term effects of the consecutive authority transfers to the supranational level as well as the exercise of this EU authority, appear as the strongest predictors. Similarly, short-term fluctuations in the societal politicization such as the differentiation of public opinion on European integration and the public visibility of EU affairs affect the number of EU references positively. Selective emphasis of EU issues by different parties also plays a role, but its overall explanatory power is lower and does not perfectly correspond to findings in other arenas of public debate about Europe. Contrary to domestic election and referendum campaigns or wider mediatized debates, the multi-annual data from the German Bundestag suggest that parties with larger constituencies, more internal dissent on European integration, and—most importantly—parties with executive responsibility emphasize supranational governance in public parliamentary debates.

Caution is warranted, though, when generalizing the findings on selective partisan emphasis beyond the German case. Agenda setting rights and governmental reporting duties differ across domestic parliaments. More important, the political landscape in Germany entails comparatively less pronounced conflicts on European integration along cultural lines and, for a long time, lacked challengers

from the populist right that drove partisan competition over Europe in other countries (Kriesi et al., 2006). With the foundation of the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in February 2013, Germany has only recently experienced the emergence of a party that opposes aspects of European integration openly. The findings presented so far thus warrant extension and cross-national comparisons and the research design developed here should prove useful in this regard.

Finally, it has to be noted that the salience of EU affairs is only one element of politicization processes (De Wilde, 2011b). For the question of whether increased salience also implies more political alternatives in debates, particularly the direction of evaluations and political benchmarks used by MPs would be of interest. Combining the data set introduced here with recent methodological advances in the automated content analysis of political text (for overviews, see Cardie and Wilkerson, 2008; Grimmer and Stewart, 2013; Monroe and Schrodt, 2008) holds highly interesting prospects in this regard. Even rather simple analyses of the Bundestag corpus introduced here suggest, for example, that the evaluative tone in EU-related sentences immediately switches once a party enters or leaves government. Likewise, frequently co-occurring terms in partisan EU references neatly map to their ideological stances. In this vein, the semi-automated analysis of large scale textual data offers multiple opportunities to better understand public debates about supranational governance in the European member states.

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### Notes

1. <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btp/> (accessed: 25 May 2014) Peter Land from the Bundestag's scientific services kindly supplied some missing or damaged protocols. The first 12 sessions of the 12<sup>th</sup> Bundestag had to be dropped due to poor scan quality of the PDF files.
2. This excludes all statements given in the role as parliamentary president (or deputy), as well as all statements shorter than 20 words. Such statements only refer to debate organization without having political content.
3. Note that this figure excludes all months without plenary debates. Furthermore, the panel is unbalanced since some parties did not give any plenary statements during certain months.
4. <http://www.frankhaege.eu/blog/eupol-dataset-description-published-european-union-politics> (accessed: 17 March 2014). The cleaning script is available upon request.
5. The FAZ is Germany's major conservative quality newspaper. Unfortunately, the archive of its major left-leaning competitor, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), has structural breaks

- in the total numbers of articles which biases the EU-share measure. The available SZ data until 2004, however, correlate with the FAZ shares by 0.7 so that the employed measure should not be biased by political newspaper orientation.
6. The membership item was part of two waves per year based on roughly 1000 respondents. They were asked whether they consider their country's EU membership as 'a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad'. This is a widely used measure of public support for European integration since membership is the most 'existential fact' of the integration process (Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007: 133). Variance on this item (calculated on the basis of the national weights and extrapolated to the complete half year of fieldwork) captures the likelihood that two randomly drawn individuals differ in their opinion on German EU membership. Unfortunately, the Commission dropped the item from autumn 2011 onwards, which limits the period available for multivariate analysis. All Eurobarometer data were retrieved from GESIS. Catalogue numbers, replication data and aggregation procedures are available upon request.
  7. <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/> (accessed: 31 January 2014). Indicators used are Per108 and Per110 (positive and negative references to European integration).
  8. [http://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Langzeitentwicklung\\_-\\_Themen\\_im\\_Ueberblick/Politik\\_I/](http://www.forschungsgruppe.de/Umfragen/Politbarometer/Langzeitentwicklung_-_Themen_im_Ueberblick/Politik_I/) (accessed: 12 March 2014)
  9. This also becomes clear if we look at the data in a slightly different way: the share of plenary statements with at least one EU reference has continuously increased from approximately 10% in the early 1990s to more than 22% after 2010.

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