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Dissent, Discourse, and the Intra-Party Politics of Parliamentary Debates

The Politicisation of the Euro Crisis in the German Bundestag

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The Eurozone crisis has not only exposed the weaknesses of the European Monetary Union and political tensions within the European Union (EU) but also triggered intense contestation at the domestic level. In the German Bundestag, the crisis and policy responses have challenged two established norms: the pro-European consensus of the main political parties and high levels of party unity. This dissertation comprises three original peer-reviewed articles that conjointly examine the dynamics and party politics of the parliamentary contestation of the Eurozone crisis in the Bundestag between 2010 and 2015 and an introduction that sets out the study's larger theoretical framework and context.

The project is guided by three strands of literature: (a) the role of national parliaments in EU politics, (b) politicisation and depoliticisation, and (c) party unity and discipline. The 'communicative turn' in extant studies on national parliaments in the EU highlights their important role as sites of public debate 'closer' to EU citizens. I draw on democratic theory to define politicisation as *the making visible of conflicting alternatives in matters of collective concern*. Approaching and operationalising politicisation from a discursive perspective, I arrive at the rationale that the level of contestedness is contingent on the mobilisation of a plurality of actors, which, in turn, raises questions about the incentives and obstacles to participation.

The main premise of the study is that to enhance our understanding of what is (and is not) politicised and how, we need to shift the focus from parliaments or parties as collective actors to individual-level incentives and constraints. As members of hierarchically organised parliamentary party groups (PPGs) operating in a highly ritualised and regulated environment, members of parliament (MPs) are enabled and constrained by party control mechanisms, procedural rules, and other organisational factors.

I pose three central research questions: Who drives or impedes politicisation in parliament? How do controversiality and dissent become visible? What role do roles, rules, and party control play in this process?

The main conceptual contribution of the dissertation is a refinement and operationalisation of a discursive understanding of politicisation around three dimensions – salience, contentiousness, and mobilisation. This places the relationship between agency and the substance of political conflict at the heart of the analysis. Methodologically, the dissertation bridges the gap between actor-centred and content-focussed approaches in political science, introducing discourse network analysis to the study of legislative behaviour (and complementing it with association-rule learning for robustness). To capture the dynamics of contestation and party (dis)unity, this study (a) maps and visualises political conflict over time through network graphs, (b) measures group coherence using network statistics, and (c) systematically identifies the most disputed issues and measures overall contentiousness with a novel contestedness score. In addition to these conceptual and methodological advancements, the dissertation provides compelling empirical evidence of

the silencing effect of party-controlled floor access and insights into the dynamics and different stages of how MPs express dissent.

Drawing on three main data sources – roll-call votes, plenary speeches, and vote explanations – the articles included in this dissertation present a nuanced picture of the dynamics and determinants of the contestation of the euro crisis in the Bundestag in the wider context of the politicisation of European integration and the common currency. The analysis shows that PPG leaders, especially from the government parties, utilised party-centred rules of floor access to contain dissent and maintain party unity in plenary debates. Confirming cleavage theory, the Christian Democrats struggled the most to keep a united front. It was precisely those MPs who tended to be excluded from speaking in debates (namely backbenchers, women, and less experienced MPs) who used written vote explanations as an alternative, though less visible, channel to voice their views. Interestingly, an MP who gave a vote explanation was more likely to defect from the party line in the next vote. For the first time, this study demonstrates the discursive effect of gatekeeping in terms of reducing the overall contentiousness, limiting the range of issues and conflict dimensions, as well as the coherence of narratives in the plenum. As a result, disputes around the EU's and EMU's institutional framework, the meaning and importance of solidarity, the effects of austerity, and political alternatives to the Greek bailout packages were largely kept out of the spotlight of the plenary assembly.

The findings carry wider implications for representation, as citizens do not see the breadth and depth of alternative views and policy options that their elected representatives held in one of the most visible forums of political debate. The findings also speak to a long-standing debate about the management of the 'plenary bottleneck' and the fair distribution of scarce speaking time, and they could, therefore, also inform reform considerations in the Bundestag, pointing towards the need for less party-centred rules that could open the floor to a more diverse range of MPs.

Acknowledgements

If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes more than a student to do a PhD. Although only my name is printed on the cover of this dissertation (and on top of two of the three articles included here), many more people have – knowingly or unknowingly – contributed to the success of this project. And success here means completion because that is what this journey became about: not losing sight of the finish line.

I had the best possible start to my PhD, largely thanks to Tero Erkkilä. He hired me as a research assistant during my Master's studies. (I think based on the recommendation of people I worked with during an internship at the Network for European Studies, which I got because of a previous internship at the Representation of the European Commission in Berlin, which I got because of an Erasmus work placement I did in Brussels … you get the point: cumulative advantage.) Working with Tero, Ossi Piironen, and Jemima Repo gave me first-hand experience and a realistic idea of what it entails to do excellent research (from writing proposals all the way to proofreading publications). Since I was hesitant to pursue doctoral studies, their encouragement proved crucial as well. Some lovely conversations over lunch were another good reason to stay. Tero then kept me employed part-time during the first months of my doctoral studies until I had secured funding for my PhD project. Without this employment opportunity at the start, I would have had to find a job outside academia (and was already looking, in fact). Once out, I am not sure if I would have found my way back into academia.

Even though I had not met her personally, I was very keen on having Hanna Wass as my second supervisor. She was a referee for my Master's thesis, and she was very precise and constructive in identifying the limitations, possibilities for improvement, and (yes) strengths of the work. I was delighted when she agreed to be my supervisor and even more so when we got to know each other on a more personal level. I have very fond memories of a 'supervisor meeting' at Newgrange in Ireland. With Tero and Hanna, I was extremely lucky to have two mentors who provided ample moral and practical support when needed. When my PhD journey slowed down due to several moves abroad, two maternity leaves, other research work, and a global pandemic, they were very understanding and patient with me.

Along the journey, I met some fellow travellers who walked with me part of the way or provided directions, fuel or a place to rest. For my first article, I joined forces with Achillefs Papageorgiou. Not only did I learn a lot from him about advanced

statistical analysis but also about collaboration: We had great communication and a clear division of labour. Achillefs was patient with me while I navigated the process of publishing for the first time. When I still lived in Helsinki, fun and insightful chats about academia and our department with the more experienced Jenni Rinne and Salla Huikuri were very valuable to me.

Sourav, my companion in life, led me to Dublin and then Cambridge. In 2015/2016, I was lucky to be hosted by Aidan Regan at University College Dublin. In addition to getting the chance to develop my research further at the biggest politics department in Ireland, I am personally grateful to Aidan for helping me to tackle my uneasiness with economics. After moving to the UK and having our first child, I was looking for opportunities to meet and present my research to fellow parliamentary scholars. Attending the PSA Parliaments conference in 2019 (on my birthday) was a pivotal moment. I met (my now mentor and collaborator) Stephen Holden Bates for the first time and also Cristina Leston-Bandeira, with whom I share a niche interest in vote explanations. I had such a positive impression from this conference that I joined the organising team a few months later, which really helped me to maintain a sense of community during the pandemic. Together with Stephen, Alexandra Meakin, Sean Haughey, Gavin Hart and Chris Monaghan, we tried to maintain regular (virtual) meetings of the PSA Parliaments group and came up with exciting ideas on how to study and promote our sub-discipline. I also started working with Stephen, Steve McKay, William Horncastle, and Calixte Bloquet on backbench roles, specialisation, and committees in the UK House of Commons. I am extremely grateful for these opportunities, as I thoroughly enjoy doing collaborative work. I got a better sense of what I would like to do after my PhD because I am doing it already.

I would like to mention two other scholarly communities where I found support and received valuable feedback on my research plan and article drafts: Firstly, there is the seminar for doctoral students in politics at my home university, organised in turns by Anne Holli, Mikko Mattila, Åsa von Schoultz, and Hanna Wass. Secondly, I got the chance to join a working papers group for parliament researchers, where Calixte Bloquet, Sarah Childs, Marc Geddes, Daniel Gover, Jack Sheldon, Diana Stirbu and Stephen have not only helped me to polish my work but also been very encouraging.

Another factor that made this possible was funding. I got a three-year grant from the Finnish Cultural Foundation, which gave me the stability and confidence to commit fully to this endeavour. I also received a 16-month contract at the Doctoral School in Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki, which allowed me to continue to focus full-time on the research work for the final article.

Many thanks to Tapio Raunio and Claudia Wiesner for examining my dissertation and providing valuable suggestions for final edits before publication. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers whose feedback was instrumental in

improving the articles included in this dissertation. Words of gratitude also go to the special issue editors Caroline Close and Sergiu Gherghina (*Article I*) and Philip Leifeld (*Article II*) for their guidance and dedication to the publication.

Sourav has been by my side since my first year of undergraduate studies as my best friend and true love. Coincidentally, I gave my first presentation as a PhD student the same day that Sourav held his defence. Sourav has been my most important support pillar, sharing the successes and family responsibilities as well as providing a shoulder to lean on during the tougher times – and not to forget, being my go-to expert for bugs in my Python code. It can be challenging to juggle two people's work ambitions while moving to different countries and raising a family. But I feel very lucky that I found a way (and that the department and Finnish system allowed me) to fit the PhD around my life. Viveka and Arvin, now 7 and 3 years old, bring more love, colour, and laughter into our lives and keep reminding us of what is most important, as they do not care about parliaments or machine learning (yet!).

My family and closest friends live in Germany and have supported me from a distance. Ever since I first went to Finland at the age of 16, Mutti, Papa, and Stefan have always given me the feeling that they approve of my life choices, even if they led me physically away from them. The same was true for my grandparents, who have all passed away, but in my head, I often imagine what they would say today. I am not the best at expressing love or asking for help, but my family always shows up when I need them, whether for moving houses, childcare or celebrating milestones like this one. A special shoutout goes to Janet and John (my cool aunt and uncle) for their encouragement over the years. Ma, Baba, and Tubai (my in-laws) have also provided lots of practical support during this time.

My school friend Jana and I have shared many funny stories over the years about doing research (in different fields and countries), following our partners abroad, and raising our children multilingually. Jana's empathy on my lows and joy on my highs has meant a lot. I always feel fortunate when my close friend Katrin, whom I met in beautiful Vaasa in 2006, takes time out of her busy life with four children and a family business because she is the easiest person to talk to and always has something insightful and nice to say. I am also grateful for the support and distractions provided by my Berlin crew, Sarah, Karina and Maxi.

I have been extremely fortunate to be surrounded by so many wonderful people who have supported me and contributed to me reaching the finish line and – at least as importantly – keeping me happy and sane at the same time.

List of abbreviations

CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CSU	Christian Social Union
COSAC	Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (French acronym)
DNA	Discourse network analysis
EAC	European Affairs Committee
EC	European Commission
EFSF	European Financial Stability Facility
EFSM	European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism
EMU	European Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
ESM	European Stability Mechanism
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
PPG	Parliamentary party group
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UK	United Kingdom

Index

List of original publications

This thesis is based on the following publications:

I Bhattacharya, Caroline & Papageorgiou, Achillefs (2019), "Are backbenchers fighting back? Intra-party contestation in German parliament debates on the Greek crisis", *Parliamentary Affairs*, 72(2), pp. 425-444.

II Bhattacharya, Caroline (2020), "Gatekeeping the plenary floor: Discourse network analysis as a novel approach to party control", *Politics and Governance*, 8(2), pp. 229-242.

III Bhattacharya, Caroline (2023), "Restrictive rules of speechmaking as a tool to maintain party unity: The case of oppressed political conflict in German parliament debates on the euro crisis", *Party Politics*, 29(3), pp. 554-569.

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.

1 Introduction

> Das 'Parlament' – das Reden steckt schon im Wort. Wirklich war das Recht der öffentlichen Debatte eine Errungenschaft, erkämpft, mit Leiden bezahlt, mit Blut begossen. [...] Das Parlament ist der Raum, in dem alles spricht. Der Parlamentarier ist einer, der Kommunikation herstellt und verwaltet. Der Plenarsaal ist der Ort, in dem ein Handeln durch Sprechen simuliert oder sogar vollzogen wird. Parlamente steuern, verdichten, prononcieren die politische Kommunikation. Sie waren die erste Adresse für die freie Rede. [...] Das Parlament ist heute der Veröffentlichung der Politik vorbehalten. Hier ist die Politik bei sich, hier existiert sie zu ihren Bedingungen [...]. Das Parlament ist der öffentlichste Raum und doch in manchem so undurchsichtig wie unverständlich.
>
> The 'parliament' – speaking is contained in the word. The right to public debate was a real achievement, fought for, paid for with suffering and bloodshed. [...] Parliament is the space where everything speaks. The parliamentarian is someone who produces and administers communication. The chamber is the place where action is simulated or even carried out through speaking. Parliaments steer, condense, and pronounce political communication. They were the first space for free speech. [...] Parliament is now reserved for the publication of politics. Here politics remains true to itself, here it exists on its own terms [...]. Parliament is the most public space and yet in some ways, it is as opaque as it is incomprehensible. (own translation)
>
> Roger Willemsen (*1955-†2016)
> Das Hohe Haus, 2014, S. Fischer Verlag, pp. 22-23

The Eurozone crisis was a period of economic and political instability for the crisis-afflicted countries and challenged the institutions and governance structures of the European Union (EU) and European Monetary Union (EMU). As the crisis unfolded, it became apparent that it would also become a critical juncture for the other member states. Germany played a central role in the crisis management process due to being the largest member state and creditor, and the country witnessed significant domestic contestation around the crisis responses, with two key attributes of German parliamentarism visibly coming under pressure: high levels of party unity and a cross-partisan pro-European consensus. Another important factor was the looming shadow of the Federal Constitutional Court. Ever

since the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the Court has on numerous occasions reminded the Bundestag of its parliamentary responsibilities to hold the government accountable and to scrutinise executive behaviour at the EU level; and given the course of the crisis and its resolution, the Bundestag's budget authority also entered the limelight. In this context, political observers and scholars alike have noted a deepening politicisation of European politics in Germany with the Bundestag as a – if not *the* – key arena for contestation.

This article-based dissertation presents a comprehensive study examining the parliamentary contestation of the Eurozone crisis in the German Bundestag between 2010 and 2015, zooming in on the Greek crisis, which occupied the agenda for much of this period. Shifting the focus of analysis from the collective level, I examine patterns of individual-level mobilisation and dissent within parliamentary party groups (PPGs) and the government-opposition blocs. In this dissertation, politicisation is defined as *the making visible of conflicting alternatives in matters of collective concern*. To expand the politicisation framework and toolkit to the discursive dimension, I also investigate the evolution of contestation levels and structures in the parliamentary discourse on crisis responses.

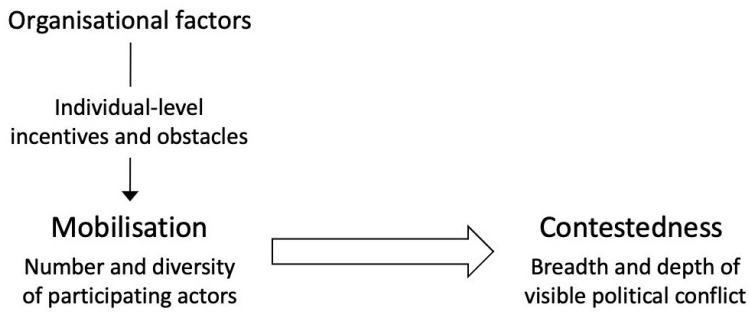

Figure 1: Main research premises

1.1 Research questions and premises

The underlying premise (illustrated in Figure 1) of this study is that the level of contestedness, both in terms of the scope and intensity of conflict and dissent, is contingent on the mobilisation of a plurality of actors. This raises questions about the incentives and obstacles to participation, which then turns our attention to the organisational context in which members of parliament (MPs) operate. This dissertation focusses on three key factors that are likely to shape mobilisation patterns and, therefore, impact what is – and what is not – politicised and how: PPGs are hierarchical organisations with different frontbench, backbench, and expert *roles* and mechanisms to manage internal dissent. The extent to which PPG

leaders can exercise *party control* over their members' communication in parliament is also determined by procedural *rules*.

The central research questions guiding this project are threefold:

- Who drives or impedes politicisation in parliament?
- How do controversiality and dissent become visible?
- What role do organisational factors such as roles, rules, and party control play in this process of making conflict visible?

1.2 Theoretical framework and key concepts

The study's theoretical and conceptual framework draws insights and inspiration from three strands of extant literature: (a) the role of national parliaments in EU politics, (b) politicisation and depoliticisation, and (c) party unity and discipline.

First, I situate the study within the 'communicative turn' in the literature on the role of national parliaments in the EU (see *Section 2.2*), which emphasises the importance of legislative debate as a site for public deliberation of EU affairs. At the same time, the term 'politicisation' has featured increasingly in the scholarly and media analysis of EU politics without any clear consensus on its precise meaning or measurement. Instead of rejecting the term altogether as a "suitcase word that we use to describe, or rather to avoid describing, perhaps dozens of different phenomena" (Minsky, 1998), I demonstrate that it can serve as a useful concept to structure an analysis of the contestation of EU matters in domestic parliamentary politics.

I draw on democratic theory (see *Section 2.3*), particularly Palonen's (2005, 2012) ideas on the contingency of the political and Mouffe's (2005) agonistic understanding of democratic politics, to define politicisation as *the making visible of conflicting alternatives in matters of collective concern*. In addition to examining *what* is being made visible, we should also consider *who* has the power to make something visible or conceal the visibility of alternative choices. In other words, in addition to the substance of political conflicts, agency and processes should become key analytical foci. This dissertation embraces an action-based understanding of politicisation (Wiesner, 2021b, 2023) but does not dismiss how the locus impacts the activities in terms of institutional rules and conventions.

Second, I borrow from the (British) state governance literature to distinguish between institutional, rule-based, and discursive politicisation, the latter of which is the primary focus of the empirical case study. From this discursive perspective, politicisation at its most basic level means "maintaining deliberation, the possibility of disagreement and contestation" (Bates et al., 2014, p. 253) and "the promotion of a topic as a public issue where competing interpretations exist as choices" (Wood & Flinders, 2014, p. 161). The central argument of this dissertation is that

politicisation presupposes a plurality of actors, which raises questions about participation incentives and obstacles.

I then re-examine extant empirical approaches to politicisation in EU studies and propose three refined and interdependent indicators as analytical tools for the parliamentary setting: awareness or salience, contentiousness, and mobilisation. Awareness can be addressed by examining changes in MPs' (self-)perceptions and attitudes towards the importance of the EU dimension in their daily work. I suggest that salience (i.e. the prominence of EU issues in parliamentary debates) can serve as a proxy for awareness but not as a measure for politicisation because in itself it does not tell us anything about the level of contestedness. Controversialisation occurs when the dimensions of conflict increase and/or the contentiousness of a specific dimension or issue intensifies. High levels of awareness should enable MPs to spot contentiousness and opportunities where mobilisation would be worthwhile. Mobilisation refers to an increase in the number of actors and, I add, the *type* of actors engaging in the debate. It is reasonable to assume that a diversity of actors is conducive to a plurality of views, but this proposition needs empirical validation by looking at MPs' activities and parliamentary discourse.

Third, I discuss how the analysis of mobilisation and contestation patterns in the parliamentary setting demands the consideration of organisational factors which shape MPs' incentives and constrain their room for manoeuvre. Parliamentary roles, rules, and party control mechanisms play a particular role here (see *Section 3.2*). The approach to parliamentary contestation proposed in this dissertation is widely applicable but there are some particularities about EU affairs, which I also elaborate on (in *Section 3.1*). In essence, European integration and globalisation have created a new political divide, referred to as the 'transnational cleavage' (Hooghe & Marks, 2018), that cuts across historically established cleavages and party lines, thus challenging party unity. The multi-dimensionality of political competition has troubled conservative and centre-right parties in particular, who face difficulty aligning their support for economic integration with nationalist positions on sovereignty, integration, and identity.

1.3 Methods and case study

To enhance our grasp of the dynamics, drivers, and obstacles of parliamentary politicisation, I propose a relational perspective on MPs and the discourse they produce (in *Section 3.3*). There is a variety of relations (between actors, between actors and claims, between claims, between speeches, and between different parliamentary activities) underlying parliamentary communication. By borrowing and combining methods such as discourse network analysis (DNA), social network analysis, community detection, and association rule mining from other fields, this dissertation advances the study of parliamentary contestation and discourse. In

addition to roll-call votes and plenary speeches, the analysis covers vote explanations, which are an underutilised data source to estimate MPs' preferences, thus not only providing a more comprehensive picture of parliamentary activity but also serving as a critical point of comparison.

The German Bundestag used to be considered an unlikely case for politicisation of EU matters, and the euro crisis became a critical juncture that shifted the incentives for German MPs (see *Section 4.1*). I summarise the empirical findings of each article and lay out how they build on each other to deepen our understanding of the dynamics and determinants of parliamentary contestation more broadly (in *Sections 4.2* and *4.3*). I look at who mobilised in what way and how party control and other contextual factors that affect MPs in varying ways can explain some of the mobilisation patterns. In the next step, I examine how party-centred rules of speech-making, which turn PPG leaders into gatekeepers of the plenary floor, have been utilised to maintain party unity. A detailed and systematic comparison of speeches and vote explanations reveals how the absence of certain types of MPs from plenary debates reduced the aggregate level of contestedness and increased discursive cohesion of government parties in particular but also affected the substance and structure of parliamentary discourse, limiting the range of viewpoints represented in the plenum.

1.4 Main contributions

The conceptual contribution of this dissertation is a refinement and operationalisation of a discursive understanding of politicisation, which places the relationship between mobilisation and contentiousness, in other words, between political agency and the substance of conflicts at the heart of the analysis. Methodologically, the dissertation bridges the gap between actor-centred and content-focused approaches in political science by introducing DNA to the study of legislative debate. Furthermore, I complement DNA with association-rule learning for robustness. To capture the dynamics of contestation and party unity (and disunity), this study (a) maps and visualises political conflict over time through network graphs, (b) measures group coherence using network statistics, and (c) systematically identifies the most disputed issues and measures overall contentiousness with a novel contestedness score. In addition to these conceptual and methodological advancements, the dissertation provides compelling evidence of the multi-stage process of how MPs express dissent and how the silencing effect of party-controlled floor access shapes plenary discourse.

The concluding chapter (*Chapter 5*) synthesises the main contributions of this dissertation to the literature on EU politicisation in national parliaments, the study of party unity, and the analysis of political discourse. It also briefly discusses the implications for potential procedural reform, the limitations of the study, and

future research avenues to further explore discursive contestation and its contextual determinants beyond EU politics.

2 National parliaments in the EU: From scrutiny to communication and politicisation

This chapter summarises central concepts and traces key developments in the literature on the role of national parliaments in the EU, which derived from the wider field of EU studies over the past couple of decades. I focus on two developments: the shift from national parliaments' oversight function to their debating activities – what we can call the 'communicative turn' – and the rise of the term of 'politicisation' in this literature. I then move on to (re-)defining politicisation and conceptualising it in relation to discursive contestation.

The adaptation of national parliaments to European integration and multi-level governance in the EU has commonly been approached from the angle of Europeanisation. According to Ladrech's (1994) well-known definition of Europeanisation, it is top-down and "incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that [EU] political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making" (p. 69). Although this definition contains the notion of reorientation, which implies a cognitive dimension, studies on the role of national parliaments tended to focus on the formal dimension of Europeanisation, that is, the institutional adaptation processes that have redressed the power imbalance and information asymmetry between executive and legislative actors in EU policy-making.

Within the debate on the EU's democratic deficit, political actors and scholars have increasingly identified national parliaments as a second, equally important channel of representation, coexisting with the European Parliament (EP) in a 'multi-level parliamentary field' (Crum & Fossum, 2009). Simultaneously, we have seen a shift in the literature from legislative scrutiny and government accountability to the communicative and deliberative functions of parliament. This 'communicative turn' has been accompanied by the increasing prominence of the notion of politicisation. As Kauppi et al. (2016) rightly observe, we see "a strange autonomisation of the very expression 'politicisation' in the debate on EU politicisation [and] [i]t is as if 'politicisation' would be a reality of its own" (p. 2). In the absence of a consistent theoretical tradition, I draw inspiration from likely places (political theory) and less likely places (governance literature on depoliticisation) to advance the conceptualisation of politicisation and its different

components in the legislative context, thereby increasing its analytical value. In line with agonistic democratic theory (Mouffe, 2005, 2014), I define politicisation as *the making visible of conflicting alternatives in matters of collective concern*. We can distinguish between institutional, rule-based, and discursive faces of politicisation. Although for analyses of parliamentary communication, the discursive perspective, which conceives of politicisation as "maintaining deliberation, the possibility of disagreement and contestation" (Bates et al., 2014, p. 253), is particularly useful, rules and other institutional factors affect agency and, in turn, impact discourses as well.

2.1 The Europeanisation of national parliaments

Over the last couple of decades, national parliaments have gradually adapted to the political and legal realities of multi-level governance in the continuously evolving EU polity. With the Treaty of Lisbon, which came into effect in 2009, national parliaments have for the first time been formally acknowledged in the main treaty text as "contribut[ing] actively to the good functioning of the Union" (Article 12 TEU). The Treaty introduced an early warning mechanism for subsidiarity control, giving national parliaments the formal right to comment on legislative proposals by the European Commission (EC) in view of compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. When at least a third of the member-state parliaments raise concerns, the EC must review its proposal, which to date has happened three times, and only once did the EC decide to withdraw the proposal (though not on the grounds of breach of the principle of subsidiarity).

Conventionally, national parliaments have been portrayed as the 'losers', 'victims' or 'latecomers' of European integration (e.g. Maurer, 2001; O'Brennan & Raunio, 2007), and generally "no institution or actor simply accepts a loss of power without any resistance" (Auel & Benz, 2004, p. 2). It needs to be questioned whether national parliaments can plausibly be regarded as passive victims, given that they "weakened their own constitutional rights by ratifying in recurrent steps the making of a supranational quasi-constitution" (Maurer, 2001, p. 28) without demanding any significant participation rights until the Convention on the Future of Europe (2002-2003), in which members of national parliaments constituted the majority, made recommendations to adjust the balance of power in the Constitutional Treaty, which then entered the Treaty of Lisbon. Haroche (2018) argues that already as early as in the 1960s and 1970s, national parliaments and parties played an active role in empowering the EP to compensate for the loss of parliamentary power at the domestic level by forming an inter-parliamentary alliance and constraining their governments to support the EP's empowerment. Still, in the 1990s, many national MPs thought that democratic legitimacy for the EU should derive largely from the EP, and German MPs, in particular, preferred the EP over national parliaments as

the primary locus of legitimation. The demand for basing legitimation at the EU level with the EP is stronger in parliaments in which the governance function is considered more important than representation (Katz, 1999; Wessel, 2005). This is, for example, the case in the German Bundestag, which is generally considered a 'working' (as opposed to a 'talking') parliament.

Over time, national parliaments implemented a variety of institutional reforms to gain timely access to relevant documents, scrutinise EU decision-making, and hold executive actors accountable. The institutional changes were reactive and incremental rather than revolutionary (Dimitrakopoulos, 2001). By the mid-1990s, all parliaments had established a European Affairs Committee (EAC) (Bergman, 1997; Raunio & Wiberg, 2000). In 1991, the Danish Folketing was the first parliament to open a liaison office in Brussels, and the vast majority of national parliaments have followed suit to gather information (Neuhold & Högenauer, 2016). Inter-parliamentary networks like the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC) have facilitated the identification of best practices for parliamentary scrutiny and benchmarking among national parliaments (Kiiver, 2006, pp. 116-117). Parliamentary oversight institutions and practices tend to diffuse across member states that are culturally similar (Bormann & Winzen, 2016) and whose majority parties display similar constitutional preferences (Senninger, 2020). Yet, the institutional arrangements and powers vary, and scholars have classified and ranked national parliaments by measuring their access to EU documents, information processing capabilities in EACs and sectoral committees, and impact on the government's negotiating position, that is, mandating power (Karlas, 2012; Raunio, 2005; Winzen, 2012, 2013).

As highlighted by Auel (2007), these comparative studies are often based on the assumptions that "national parliaments actually can and do use formal rights to influence the government or, in other words, that formal capabilities equal actual parliamentary behaviour … [and that] the legislative function is the only or at least the most important parliamentary function" (p. 488). More recently, scholars began to look beyond institutional Europeanisation and the government-related functions of parliament, driven by an increasing recognition that the communicative and deliberative functions are at least equally important (Auel & Raunio, 2014a, 2014b; Rauh, 2015) and that there is only a weak correlation between a parliament's institutional strength and the level of debating activity (Auel et al., 2015b). In fact, the government-related and citizen-related functions are interlinked, as greater communication and contestation strengthen the electoral link, leading to ministers in the Council being more in line with their constituencies' interests (Miklin, 2014a).

2.2 The democratic deficit and the 'communicative turn'

In their efforts to strengthen the role of national parliaments, the Convention on the Future of Europe and COSAC focussed predominantly on government scrutiny (Raunio, 2011), and so have the institutional reforms and adaptation processes at the domestic level. The scholarship has broadened the scope of analysis to take into account the debating activities of national parliaments (e.g. Auel & Raunio, 2014b; Miklin, 2014a; Rauh, 2015; Wendler, 2013), and the question of the EU's legitimacy re-emerged – but this time from a citizen-centred perspective, mirroring the embrace of the citizen perspective in studies on representational focus and styles (e.g. Bengtsson & Wass, 2011; von Schoultz & Wass, 2016). When the role of national parliaments was initially discussed against the backdrop of the wider EU's democratic deficit debate, member-state parliaments were regarded as a source of legitimising the EU by holding national governments accountable for their EU-level decisions. According to the deparliamentarisation thesis, holding governments accountable has remained the only meaningful task in terms of providing legitimacy, becoming more complicated with the transition from unanimous voting to qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers (O'Brennan & Raunio, 2007; Raunio & Hix, 2000, p. 142). A common claim regarding the EU's democratic deficit is that the EU is too distant from its citizens, both institutionally and psychologically (Follesdal & Hix, 2006, p. 536). Under President Juncker, the EC increasingly recognised that national parliaments "as the representatives of Europe's citizens at national level, play an important role in bridging the gap between European institutions and the public" (European Commission, 2016, p. 13). Prospects of a supranational public sphere have, in the eyes of many, turned out unrealistic, and the "standard argument now is that national public spheres just need to be more 'open' to the EU and to each other" (Müller, 2016, p. 83). National parliaments can contribute to this vertical and horizontal opening of the domestic public spheres by debating EU affairs as well as transnational issues, thereby raising the awareness among citizens of EU institutions (and the division of labour, coordination, and co-decision-making between them and (sub-)national institutions) and of the interconnectedness of domestic politics and politics at the EU level and in other member states.[1]

As highlighted by Norton (1998), *publicly visible* debates are a core function of parliaments and essential to representation and democratic legitimation:

[1] Auel and Raunio (2014a) remind us that parliaments have several means to communicate EU matters and provide information to citizens, but this dissertation focusses on debating activities.

> "Parliaments provide the means by which the measures and actions of government are debated and scrutinised on behalf of citizens, and through which the concerns of citizens – as individuals or organised in groups – may be voiced. The extent to which they carry out such actions, and are seen by citizens to carry out such actions, may be argued to constitute an essential underpinning of the legitimacy of the political system in the eyes of electors." (p. 1)

This argument can be extended to EU politics: The legitimacy of the EU polity rests to a significant degree on the extent to which MPs publicly discuss or contest matters related to European integration, EU policies, and EU-level decision-making. In this context, legitimacy is best understood in terms of input and throughput legitimacy rather than output legitimacy. In line with the work of Schmidt (2013), the normative underpinning of this dissertation is that an enhanced domestic parliamentarisation of EU politics strengthens the democratic legitimacy of the EU with regard to the responsiveness to citizens as a result of (a) participation *by* the people (input) through electoral representation and (b) governance *with* the people (throughput) through transparency, accountability, inclusiveness, and – the focus of this dissertation – visibility of conflict[2].

I suggest that what links these two dimensions is the idea of 'discursive representation': Drawing on Pitkin's well-known view of representation as "substantive acting for *others*" (1967, p. 209, emphasis added), Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) propose that "'*others*' may be captured in terms of the discourses to which they subscribe" (p. 481, emphasis added). For them, "[w]hether discourses are represented by particular persons is an open question" (ibid.). In *Article III*, I do not consider the degree to which relevant discourses among the electorate or general public are represented in legislative debates but whether those discourses that are present within parliament are visible on the plenary floor.

If we see visibility of discourses and conflict as an important mechanism to enhance democratic legitimacy, then it is important that, first of all, EU issues make it to the agenda of plenary debates, because the plenum is the most public parliamentary forum. Even though not many citizens attend parliamentary sessions or watch debates, as shown by recent research, plenary debates are "[on]e of the most important institutional sources from which journalists obtain information about the most important concerns of citizens" (de Ruiter & Vliegenthart, 2018, p. 656). Furthermore, the visibility of debates on EU matters in the media increases

[2] I refrain from making any normative claims as to whether this parliamentarisation would lead to more effective outcomes for the people (output).

the more parliaments engage in debating activity and publish press releases to draw media attention (Auel et al., 2018).

However, at least until the Eurozone crisis, plenary debates on EU matters were relatively rare (Auel & Raunio, 2014b; Bergman et al., 2003, pp. 175-176) and "so far most parliaments seem not to live up to their task of bringing 'Europe' closer to the citizens or enabling them to make informed political choices" (Auel & Raunio, 2014a, p. 10). Auel et al. (2015a, 2015b) compare all national parliaments and find that formal institutional strength is not a very strong determinant for variation in observed levels of activity, and this is especially the case for plenary debates. Most parliaments focus on either issuing mandates and resolutions or debates in the plenary assembly. According to Auel et al. (2015a), the presence of Eurosceptic parties in parliament tends to correlate with higher levels of debating activity, while Auel and Raunio (2014b) do not find evidence that partisan conflict is a conducive factor. For the case of the German Bundestag, Rauh's (2015) analysis of more than 20 years of plenary debates shows that treaty ratifications and authority transfers to the EU level are the strongest predictors for the amount of EU references made in plenary speeches (including on domestic topics), and societal factors such as media visibility of EU issues and variance in public opinion towards EU membership are significant as well. In addition, he finds that it is mainly government MPs who refer to the EU. Miklin's (2014a) analysis of parliamentary debates on the Services Directive revealed that German and Austrian MPs began to publicly discuss the issue only after its controversiality was detected in the EP and by trade unions and business organisations.

Further research is needed to enhance our understanding of the conditions under which EU issues make it to the plenary agenda. In addition, the number and length of debates or the amount of EU references do not tell us how contested they are. As emphasised by Rauh (2015), "[p]arliaments 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" (p. 117, emphasis added). We should not assume that simply because EU issues feature in plenary debates, voters are offered different interpretations or solutions. Normatively, the visibility of political alternatives in matters of European integration and EU decision-making on the floors of national parliaments is essential to upholding or enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

2.3 Parliamentarisation through the lens of politicisation

Previous studies point to a lack of both communication and opinion congruence between political parties and the electorate when it comes to EU politics. Generally, parties used to be more pro-European than their supporters, and in particular large and mainstream parties have been averse to compete on the EU dimension due to

office seeking ambitions and party cohesion needs (Mattila & Raunio, 2012; Steenbergen & Scott, 2004; van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004), despite the fact that voters display "greater dispersion of attitudes regarding Europe as compared to left/right attitudes" (van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004, p. 39). It became clear that efforts by parties to communicate their divergent views more clearly would fall on fertile ground, and we have, indeed, witnessed in recent years how far-right and Eurosceptic challenger parties have benefitted from this representation gap.

Since the Eurozone faced an existential crisis in the aftermath of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, political leaders and parties across the EU could no longer keep EU affairs off the domestic agenda. The euro crisis has shifted EU decision-making to the forefront of public debate and protest, and the concept of politicisation has travelled from EU studies to the literature on the Europeanisation of national parliaments. For some scholars it signifies the increasing salience of EU affairs in parliament (Rauh, 2015) or the intensification of parliamentary debate surrounding specific issues (Miklin, 2014a, 2014b; Wonka, 2016), while for others politicisation becomes apparent in the polarisation between and within political parties (Wendler, 2013) or the increase in conflict framing (de Wilde, 2012). This literature is empirically driven and would benefit from more theorising and operationalising. As shown in the next section, democratic theory serves as a good starting point, and the state governance literature on depoliticisation helps us to differentiate between different faces of politicisation.

2.3.1 Politicisation in EU studies: A suitcase word or useful concept?

Ever since the birth of EU studies, neofunctionalists anticipated politicisation to increase in the course of European integration. Already in the late 1960s, Schmitter (1969) wrote:

> "Politicization [...] refers initially to a process whereby the *controversiality* of joint decisionmaking goes up. This in turn is likely to lead to *a widening of the audience or clientele* interested and active in integration. [...] The minimal threshold for politicization is a rise in the controversiality of the regional decisionmaking process." (p. 166, italics in original)

After the failed referendums on the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005, EU scholars rediscovered the concept, and it has been commonly used to describe one or more of the following phenomena that have been observed since the Maastricht Treaty (Risse, 2014):

- Increasing discursive salience of EU topics on the domestic agenda (e.g. Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hurrelmann et al., 2015);
- Intensification of public debates on specific policy issues (e.g. Börzel & Risse, 2018; Leupold, 2016; Rauh, 2019);

- Rise of Euroscepticism (e.g. de Wilde et al., 2013; Hooghe & Marks, 2005);
- Growing significance of identity politics in EU matters (e.g. Börzel & Risse, 2018; Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009).

As the interest in the contestation of the European project has increased, the term 'politicisation' has been used frequently but inconsistently, and often synonymously with polarisation. It has become what Minsky (1998) calls a "suitcase word that we use to describe, or rather to avoid describing, perhaps dozens of different phenomena" generally perceived as constraining European integration. Most of the scholarly debate and disagreement has focused on the intensity, durability, and consequences of politicisation (Grande & Hutter, 2016, pp. 3-4), but there has been a lack of debate on the concept as such. To address the conceptual ambiguity, EU scholars should certainly unpack the term and specify the phenomenon they are precisely talking about in each case, but in my view, this does not mean that the term has become useless. By going back to the question of what it means for something to become (more) political, we can assess whether a development or mechanism we observe in EU politics increases the visibility of conflicting choices – or might do the opposite. We should, for example, ask whether salience is a sufficient condition for politicisation. "[N]ot every mention of the EU should count as politicisation" (Zürn, 2016, p. 167), and salience is not necessarily correlated with conflict. Similarly, the emergence and growing importance of Euroscepticism and identity politics only entail politicisation if these developments open the public debate to more diverse arguments rather than reducing the debate to two polar opposite positions – as witnessed, for instance, in the lead-up to the Brexit referendum. If identity politics merely replaces other dimensions of conflict, the potential for politicisation is also limited.

In line with recent edited volumes by Haapala and Oleart (2021) and Wiesner (2021a), this dissertation does not see politicisation, if clearly distinguished from polarisation, in a negative light but rather as conducive to the democratisation of the EU. This line of thinking also does not necessarily comply with the postfunctionalist diagnosis that the 'permissive consensus' among the governing elites has given way to a 'constraining dissensus' which hinders deeper integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), which assumes a unidirectional and top-down view of European integration, where politicisation causes opposition (Wiesner, 2023).

2.3.2 Conceptualising politicisation: Bringing in democratic theory

A conceptualisation of politicisation, which linguistically speaking is the process by which something becomes political in the first place or more political, should start with a theoretical discussion on 'the political' (cf. Kauppi et al., 2016). Palonen (2005) writes:

> "There are no naturally political questions, but only questions that have been politicized. Issues arise only in response to moves or processes of politicization, and only when they are thematized as contingent and controversial topics." (p. 44)

Palonen suggests that the distinction between the political and the non-political is not given by nature nor set in stone and cannot simply be derived by logic. Nothing or nobody is inherently political, but anything can become political. Palonen (2005, 2021) highlights that the political is contingent upon time and context, but he leaves the question of agency aside.

As one of the most prominent advocates of agonistic democracy, Mouffe (2005, pp. 8-34, 2014) has defined 'the political' as the site of conflict and, in the tradition of Schmitt (1996), of friend/enemy relations, as opposed to liberty, common action, and rationality (as proposed by more consensus-focused theories of deliberative democracy). According to Mouffe (2005), "political questions are not mere technical issues to be solved by experts" but "always involve decisions which require us to make a choice between conflicting alternatives" (p. 10). Following this line of thought, I define politicisation as *the making visible of conflicting alternatives in matters of collective concern*. We need to bear in mind that before different interpretations and choices can be communicated, debate may also focus on what is 'of collective concern' to begin with. In addition to the question of *what* is being made visible, we should also consider *who* is in a position to make something visible or obscure the visibility of alternative choices.

In this view, politics presupposes agency and is not narrowly interpreted as government or interactions taking place in the sphere of government, but is dynamic and fluid rather than static and bound to particular institutions (Hay, 2007, pp. 63-64). Hay (2007) proposes an expansive definition of politics as "the capacity for agency and deliberation in situations of genuine collective or social choice" (p. 77). Although he argues that politics can potentially exist everywhere, his typology of (de)politicisation(s) is based on the distinction between the non-political realm of fate and necessity, the private sphere, public sphere, and governmental sphere. Politicisation occurs when an issue is lifted up the ladder into or at least closer to 'the arena of direct governmental deliberation'. Similarly, Buller and Flinders (2006) regard depoliticisation, and correspondingly politicisation, in terms of 'arena shifting': "the politics remains but the arena or process through which decisions are taken alters" (p. 55). According to this rationale, parliaments are an arena where issues are subject to governmental deliberation and policy-making. Does that mean that an issue that appears in the parliamentary arena has been politicised to the full extent and that there cannot be any depoliticisation *within* the parliamentary arena?

As pointed out by Wiesner (2021b, 2023), there are activity-based and spatial or system-based views of politics and politicisation, and the advantage of the former

is that it is process-oriented. If we conceive of the political as contingent upon time and context, we arrive at a view where politicisation is not simply present or absent in certain spheres, because "processes of (de)politicisation can also occur *concurrently* and *within* particular political and social spaces" (Bates et al., 2014, pp. 256-257). Activity-based conceptualisations of politicisation centred on mechanisms, strategies, or tools are therefore well suited for analysis within one organisation or arena, especially if it is a presumably 'political' one. Nonetheless, as Wiesner (2021b) points out, "these approaches are to be understood as ideal-types, not in a simple either-or opposition" (p. 4). This is, therefore, not to conclude that space or locus does not matter because the context is also shaped by the institutional setting with its rules and conventions. If politicisation is about making alternative choices visible, then the external visibility of the arena and the connections to more visible spaces are of interest as well.

2.3.3 Faces of (de)politicisation

We can find inspiration to conceptualise different faces of (de)politicisation in the governance literature, where we have seen a livelier debate on the phenomenon of depoliticisation than politicisation. To give some examples, the concept of depoliticisation has been used to make sense of the rise of good governance indicators (Erkkilä & Piironen, 2009, 2014) or higher education rankings (Erkkilä & Piironen, 2018). In the British politics literature, we find distinctions between different forms of depoliticisation, which we can use to define different forms of politicisation:

In both Flinders and Buller's (2006) and Wood and Flinders' (2014) categories, we find the withdrawal of politicians and delegation of decision-making powers away from direct control and democratically accountable institutions, referred to as 'institutional' or 'governmental' depoliticisation respectively. Accordingly, parliamentary politicisation occurs when an issue or decision-makers become subject (again) to legislative scrutiny and monitoring. As discussed above, in the case of EU affairs, we can approach *institutional politicisation* through the lens of formal Europeanisation. However, previous research (Auel et al., 2015b) shows that while the formal empowerment of national parliaments in EU decision-making has a positive impact on the number of mandates and resolutions issued, institutional strength has only a weak correlation with their debating activity. Palonen (2021) also suggests that parliamentarisation is best understood "as a distinct version of politicisation that differs from others in its procedural and institutional character", since "[t]he key move in parliamentarising a question is to put it to the agenda of the items to be debated in a parliament" (p. 64). But even if EU affairs make it to the parliamentary agenda, we cannot infer that this is sufficient for them to be politicised if we understand politicisation in terms of making conflicting

alternatives visible. In other words, the institutional face of politicisation paints a partial picture at best.

Another form of depoliticisation is rule-based, meaning the "adoption of a policy that builds explicit rules into the decision-making process, which by its very nature minimizes the need for political discretion or need" (Buller & Flinders, 2006, p. 63). Correspondingly, *rule-based politicisation* is the abolition of such rules or the adoption of new rules that increase the visibility of conflict in parliamentary processes of opinion formation and decision-making. To give some examples, this could entail making closed-door committee meetings public or making access to the plenary floor more inclusive.

Thirdly, Flinders and Buller (2006) label 'preference shaping' as a form of depoliticisation that involves the "recourse to ideological, discursive or rhetorical claims in order to justify a political position that a certain issue or function does, or should, lie beyond the scope of politics or the capacity for state control" (p. 307). Wood and Flinders (2014) rightly point out that this represents a fairly state-centric view, and they conceive of discursive depoliticisation as the "promotion of an issue [...] alongside a single interpretation and the denial of choice" (p. 161). Following this line of thought, *discursive politicisation* "would therefore involve the promotion of a topic as a public issue where competing interpretations exist as choices" (ibid.). Similarly, Bates et al. (2014) approach politicisation from a discursive perspective: In its most basic form, politicisation means "maintaining deliberation, the possibility of disagreement and contestation" (p. 253). More specifically, to politicise is "to expose and contest what is taken for granted, or perceived to be necessary, permanent, invariable, essential and morally or politically obligatory within particular social relations" (ibid., p. 246).

When approaching (de)politicisation from this discursive angle, in addition to the content of discourses, we need to consider the role of actors. It is reasonable to suggest that we cannot comprehensively explain *what* is being (de)contested and *how* unless we know *who* is involved in the process, *who* has the capacity to drive it, and *who* is excluded. In other words, politicisation presupposes a plurality of actors. We also need to consider potential interplay effects between different faces of (de)politicisation: Hypothetically, a policy debate could be promoted from closed-door committee sessions to the plenum (rule-based politicisation), but the content of the debate could become depoliticised (e.g. feature more 'there is no alternative' speech) precisely because the increased visibility calls for more party cohesion (discursive depoliticisation).

2.3.4 Operationalising politicisation for empirical research

The definition of politicisation employed in this work differs from de Wilde's (2011) well-known definition of politicisation as "an increase in polarization of opinions,

interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards policy formulation within the EU" (pp. 566-567) in at least two aspects: I argue that the term 'polarisation' does not accurately capture the idea of promoting political alternatives. De Wilde's definition implies a policy impact, which I do not, as I focus on the discursive contestation of EU affairs in national parliaments in its own right and from the normative perspective of representation. Nonetheless, the three indicators of politicisation proposed by de Wilde jointly with Zürn (2012) provide a good starting point to operationalise the concept for empirical analysis: (a) growing awareness of citizens, (b) mobilisation in terms of the number of political actors engaged and the amount of resources they invest, and (c) polarisation, meaning the divergence and increasing extremity of positions and demands. This operationalisation was originally devised for analysing the politicisation of the European project from a macro-level perspective. Similar operationalisations have also been used for meta-level studies (Hutter et al., 2016; Hutter & Grande, 2014; Schmidtke, 2016), comparing politicisation patterns between different member states. In the following section, I demonstrate that we can reformulate this approach for micro-level analysis of politicisation processes within political institutions. This requires not only refining the operationalisation for each indicator (see *Table 1*) but also considering the relationships between them.

2.3.5 Politicisation as an analytical toolbox

As discussed above, the literature has begun to look beyond the formal dimension for a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants and mechanisms through which EU matters become parliamentarised. In this context, the term politicisation features increasingly but tends to be treated like a 'black box'. The purpose of this section is to lift the lid and break down politicisation into analytical tools, enabling us to reach a more nuanced understanding of when parliamentarians make use of the formal instruments at their disposal and invest their time into contesting EU issues.

Awareness and salience

Kiiver (2007) proposes the concept of 'targeted politicisation', "an approach that takes due account of the inherent limitations of national parliamentary activity, but that, in turn, allows for a far more intensive and effective activity in those areas where politicization can truly help embed European policy in society at large" (p. 8). At the core of this concept lies the notion that occasions for politicisation of EU matters arise only rarely, and MPs have to spot these narrow windows of opportunity, which assumes both ability and willingness on their part. The most fundamental requirement for enhanced parliamentary involvement is that MPs acknowledge that EU politics and domestic politics are mutually intertwined and

are aware of their own role in the decision-making process. In turn, MPs are more likely to recognise the domestic implications and controversial nature of a given issue and their individual means of influence (as a member of parliament, standing committee, party organisation, and public sphere).

Thus, the first indicator of politicisation is awareness, and it can be addressed by examining changes in MPs' (self-)perceptions and attitudes towards the importance of the EU dimension in their daily work, which is essentially the extent of informal Europeanisation. Interviews with parliamentarians have been the most common method to study awareness. Rozenberg (2012), for example, analyses interviews with EAC chairs from the UK House of Commons and the French National Assembly to gain insights into their role understandings and motivations. Similarly, Huff (2015) draws on interviews to assess how parliamentary culture, political salience, and party-political dynamics affect MPs' willingness to scrutinise the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Arguably, large-scale surveys, ethnographic research in parliament, and potentially the analysis of autobiographical documents could also provide fascinating insights into MPs' perceptions, responsiveness, and socialisation regarding EU politics.

I suggest that looking at salience presents a shortcut approach to awareness. Salience, meaning how prominently EU issues feature in parliamentary debates, has been used as a measure of politicisation and adequate parliamentary communication. Some studies (Auel & Raunio, 2014b; Raunio, 2015) measure the time invested in debating EU issues in the plenary, while other scholars (de Ruiter, 2013; García Lupato, 2014; Rauh, 2015) use EU references in legislative speeches as a 'test' for EU politicisation. Are these quantitative measures sufficient to capture politicisation? The fact that EU affairs are becoming more prominent in parliamentary communication is not necessarily evidence of contestation. Let us also bear in mind that an issue might not appear on the plenary floor precisely because it is disputed (e.g. among coalition parties or MPs from the same party). If an issue is publicly debated, but its controversiality is hidden behind closed doors or because critical MPs are being silenced, we cannot speak of politicisation. In other words, salience is only the first stage of making conflicting alternatives visible.

Contentiousness

High levels of awareness do not only increase the salience of the EU dimension but should also enable MPs to detect and embrace controversiality in EU debates and specific legislative proposals. Although I follow de Wilde and Zürn's (2012) definition of polarisation as an indicator of politicisation in substance, I prefer the terms contentiousness and controversialisation. When polarisation means that a consensual debate becomes more contentious, we can indeed speak of politicisation, but polarisation could also entail a narrowing of the political space by reducing the discussion to two extreme positions. Controversialisation can occur

when the contentiousness surrounding a specific issue intensifies or when the dimensions of conflict increase. Hurrelmann et al. (2015, p. 45) distinguish between four objects of politicisation: EU membership, the constitutional structure of the EU, policy issues on the EU's agenda, and 'domesticated issues' (e.g. austerity measures imposed from the EU level).

To assess contentiousness, the actual substance of parliamentary communication needs to be analysed. There are a number of existing studies that have employed content analysis, often a mix of deductive and inductive approaches and quantitative and qualitative coding (for an overview, see Gattermann et al., 2016, pp. 95-96). Automated and computer-assisted methods are becoming more and more sophisticated, and scholars in parliamentary and legislative studies have used them especially for the analysis of policy salience or agenda (for an overview, see Slapin & Proksch, 2014). Although recently there have been efforts to use automated textual analysis to detect emotions and sentiments in parliamentary discourses (e.g. Rheault et al., 2016), the vast majority of studies (still) deem hand-coding necessary when they want to go beyond the question of how often a topic or, for instance, a particular EU directive, has been discussed or referred to. Those studies that aim to dissect contestation patterns commonly use discourse analysis (Maatsch, 2014; Puntscher Riekmann & Wydra, 2013), framing analysis (Closa & Maatsch, 2014; Wonka, 2016) or claims analysis (de Wilde, 2012; Wendler, 2013).

Mobilisation

For parliamentary activity on EU affairs to reach the stage of observable mobilisation, the potential for political conflict needs to not only be identified but also acted upon. De Wilde and Zürn (2012) define mobilisation as the "increase over time in the amount of resources spent in conflict on EU issues and the number of political actors engaged" (p. 140). As mentioned above, for the purpose of this framework, salience has been proposed as a measure of awareness. I recognise that salience, whether estimated in terms of time or references, already entails an investment of resources and represents a certain level of activity, but, more crucially, mobilisation signifies an increase in the number *and type* of actors involved. If awareness of the importance of the EU dimension spreads across PPGs and standing committees, it becomes more likely that in addition to the 'usual suspects' (i.e. 'euro wizards') also other MPs with different backgrounds (such as policy expertise, experience or rank) will feel the need to get more actively involved and make their voices heard in plenary debates rather than simply follow the voting brief set by their party leaders and whips. The underlying argument is that a diversity of actors is conducive to a debate with a multitude of viewpoints. However, most of the existing studies on national parliaments and their EU-related activities employ a collective perspective or use the government–opposition cleavage. This is surprising given that European integration is prone to cause intra-party dissent.

Degner and Leuffen (2016) look for individual-level determinants of support for fiscal aid to other member states, and *Article I* examines growing party disunity to explain mobilisation patterns in the German Bundestag during the euro crisis.

Research agenda

In addition to summarising how existing studies on EU politics in national parliaments tend to address and measure one of the three indicators of politicisation, *Table 1* highlights that there are still many questions worth exploring in this growing literature and outlines potential research avenues. I suggest that many of these questions would require not only a broader range of approaches and techniques to generate novel empirical insights but also to build closer links to parliamentary and legislative studies. For example, if we want to explain why some MPs attach more importance to EU issues in their work than others, we can draw insights and get inspiration from studies on pre-parliamentary careers, parliamentary socialisation and roles, as well as the impact of lobbying on legislative behaviour.

Furthermore, we need more knowledge about how the different indicators or faces of politicisation relate to each other. Zürn (2016) briefly discusses the links between the different components:

> "Contestation presupposes and increases awareness; increasing awareness leads to political mobilisation; political mobilisation institutionalises contestation. They are thus not settings or arenas that can be strategically picked, but are indeed different manifestations of the same thing." (p. 168)

Instead of "different manifestations" that simply co-exist, the framework and analytical toolkit outlined here views these dimensions as interdependent stages: I agree with Zürn that awareness is a prerequisite – but not a sufficient condition – for politicisation. As argued above, in order to identify controversial issues, MPs and their staff need to be able and willing to constantly monitor EU-level decisions and policy initiatives in their area of specialisation, to keep an eye on broader European developments and crises and how they might affect the people they claim to represent, and to assess when the investment of their scarce time is worthwhile. The more legislators have a good understanding of the EU multi-level polity and their role within it, the broader the range of MPs who see it worthwhile to get involved in EU debates and the more likely that the contentious nature of certain policies and decisions will be detected in good time. That is why awareness is conducive to both mobilisation and controversiality. The articles included in this dissertation shift the focus to contestation patterns and their dynamics, shedding light particularly on the interdependence between mobilisation and controversialisation (see highlighted research questions in *Table 1*). By 'staging' and communicating political conflict, mobilisation reinforces controversiality. Only when the contentiousness surrounding an issue is made visible through

mobilisation, the issue has been adequately politicised and 'parliamentarised', in the sense that the parliaments and PPGs have fulfilled their communicative function of not only informing the electorate but also offering different interpretations and vote choices.

One of the central propositions of this dissertation, which I also support with empirical evidence, is that the diversity of involved actors is at least as important as the number of active MPs in understanding when and how EU matters become publicly disputed in national parliaments. To enhance our understanding of these processes, we need to focus on the behaviour and activities (or lack thereof) of MPs, which, in turn, entails analysing the structural factors which shape individual-level behaviour. In the sub-discipline of parliamentary studies, there is a long-established scholarship seeking to explain the incentives and constraints MPs face in conducting their duties and trying to achieve their goals. Given that MPs have different roles, motivations, and career ambitions, the stimuli to act in certain ways and the disincentives and impediments limiting their room for manoeuvre are bound to vary as well.

The next chapter discusses the significance of intra-parliamentary factors like roles, rules, and party control for legislative behaviour in general and MPs' behaviour regarding EU politics in particular. Interestingly, although there are case studies of parliamentary contestation of particular events or policies and analyses of the politicisation of certain policy areas in the parliamentary arena, in parliamentary research, we lack a coherent framework for studying parliamentary contestation. As argued in the following chapter, such a framework needs to embrace novel approaches to explore and dissect the dynamic and relational nature of mobilisation and contestation patterns.

Table 1: Refined indicators of politicisation – Proposed operationalisations, research summary, and agenda

Indicator	Operationalisation	Methods and data	Related studies	Research avenues
Awareness	Perceptional and attitudinal changes in MPs regarding the importance of the EU dimension in their work	Interviews with and surveys of MPs	Huff, 2015 Rozenberg, 2012	How do parliamentary socialisation and role orientations affect the importance that (new) MPs attach to EU matters? Are some MPs more readily sensitised by external events and sources (such as MEPs, lobbyists, and media)?
→ Salience	Prominence of EU issues in debates	Statistical analysis of time spent on debating EU affairs or the frequency of EU references and resolutions	Auel & Raunio, 2014b de Ruiter, 2013 García Lupato, 2014 Rauh, 2015 Raunio, 2015	
Mobilisation	Rising level of participation in terms of the number and diversity of actors involved	Statistical analysis of participation patterns as well as actors and their characteristics Network analysis	Degner & Leuffen, 2016	**The interplay between mobilisation, contentiousness, and organisational factors is the main research focus of this work.** *Article I*: Who participates and dissents through which channels, and who or what factors impede mobilisation? *Article II*: How do rules and gatekeepers impact the discursive unity of PPGs and government vs. opposition actors? *Article III*: How does party control affect contestedness levels and the visibility of political conflict?
Contentiousness	Intensification of controversiality, i.e. increase in dimensions of conflict and/or divergence of opinions regarding one or more dimensions	Content analysis of debates (discourse analysis, claims analysis, framing analysis, etc.)	Closa & Maatsch, 2014 de Wilde, 2012 Maatsch, 2014 Puntscher Riekmann & Wydra, 2013 Wendler, 2013 Wonka, 2016	

3 Parliamentary contestation: Novel approaches and the particularities of EU affairs

As shown above, the literature on the Europeanisation of national parliaments evolved from the wider Europeanisation literature and (normative) reflections about the democratic deficit by EU politics scholars. Conventionally, the activities of national parliaments have been analysed at the collective level, and comparative studies often measured salience as a proxy for parliamentary activity. However, salience does not tell us much about the level of dispute, and studies which examine political conflict in parliamentary debates on EU matters generally do not address the question of visibility and participation. As defined above, I understand politicisation as *the making visible of political alternatives*, which raises important questions about structure and agency, or the interplay between the two: How do parliamentary actors navigate existing structural and cultural features, such as rules, roles, and communication channels, to participate in the discourse and/or hinder others from participating? How does gatekeeping affect the structure of the discourse, particularly the visibility of political alternatives? In this dissertation, I shift the focus from parliamentary activity to parliamentary contestation, shedding light on some of the dynamics and the interaction between structure, culture, and agency that shape discursive contestation in the parliamentary setting. More precisely, I (a) examine the interplay between intra-parliamentary conditions and individual-level behaviour, (b) propose a relational approach to parliamentary contestation, and (c) add a discursive perspective to politicisation and parliamentary contestation.

While the approaches proposed here are widely applicable, I highlight the particularities of EU affairs in this chapter, because to gain a more pronounced understanding of when and how EU issues become publicly disputed, it is key to establish to what extent EU politics are just like any other policy area debated in parliament and what is distinctive about EU matters. We know that MPs' individual-level opportunities, incentives, and constraints, thus behaviour, are shaped by intra-parliamentary and extra-parliamentary factors. I briefly summarise what we know about the impact of exogenous conditions, such as events,

the media, lobbying and inter-parliamentary cooperation, on the parliamentary contestation of EU issues. However, the case study presented in the next chapter examines the relevance of rules, roles, and party control, and therefore this section includes a theoretical discussion of these endogenous factors. In my study of Bundestag debates on the euro crisis, I make a case for advancing parliamentary research on party (dis)unity and contestation patterns by introducing a relational and discursive approach, which requires the utilisation of underexplored data sources and the application of new methods.

3.1 EU politics, parliamentary politics, and party (dis)unity

Gattermann et al. (2016) argue that "parliaments are increasingly 'mainstreaming' EU affairs scrutiny, blurring the distinction between national and European policies and involving larger numbers of MPs" (p. 89). They see this trend happening in at least four areas: the increasing involvement of sectoral committees; the adaptation at the administrative level, that is, among parliamentary staff; inter-parliamentary relations and cooperation beyond EU specialists; and the growing salience of EU issues in plenary debates. By placing the concept of mainstreaming on the research agenda, Gattermann and her colleagues also shift the focus to parliamentary actors, suggesting that the increase in decentralisation and integration of EU affairs into day-to-day operations can be observed across committees, MPs, parliamentary staff, and political parties.

However, the mainstreaming approach raises questions about the distinctiveness of EU politics. If the idea of mainstreaming is not merely a change of perspective in the literature but is supposed to describe a qualitative shift, then we need to ask: Why has it not become apparent earlier, given that national parliaments have adapted to the political and legal realities of EU multi-level decision-making for several decades? Are there features inherent to EU politics that make it distinct and, thus, more likely to be treated differently than either domestic politics or foreign affairs? On the one hand, EU matters can concern any sectoral policy area (from foreign and defence policy to agriculture and regional development), which works in favour of (organisational) decentralisation. On the other hand, the most prominent EU-level negotiations and decisions are dominated by events and executive actors, which resonates more closely with foreign policy. However, one key difference is that European integration and EU politics tend to cause more dissent *within* political parties than foreign policy or arguably most policy areas except for conscience issues.

Morality politics are driven by value conflicts, which often do not align with existing dividing lines between parties and where MPs' social identities (such as gender or religious affiliation) become more prominent (Euchner & Preidel, 2017).

Conscience issues also come with high preference heterogeneity within parties, which often compels party leaders to suspend party discipline and give MPs a 'free vote' even – or especially – in highly salient debates. This is generally not the case when it comes to matters of European integration and EU politics.

Another point of comparison is foreign and security policy because in those policy areas, major shifts also tend to be caused by events and crises and shaped by executive actors. Similarly to EU studies, the literature on parliamentary involvement in security policy has moved from classifying formal 'war powers' (i.e. their right to be informed, issue a veto on military deployment, etc.) to less formal means of parliamentary influence and politicisation in the parliamentary arena (Mello & Peters, 2018). Party politics and competition have not received much attention in foreign and security policy studies until recently, and often, the international relations scholarship has emphasised the need for a cross-partisan consensus around the notion of national interest and national security (Raunio & Wagner, 2020a). But Wagner (2020) finds that in many parts of the world, party-political contestation around military interventions is structured along the left–right dimension. Raunio and Wagner (2020b) also show that in the EP, party cohesion and coalition-building patterns around external relations resemble those in other policy areas.

This leaves us with the question: What is it about EU politics that makes it so challenging for party unity? Globalisation and European integration have given rise to a new political divide, which has become known as the 'transnational cleavage' (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). Mainstream political parties "have an interest in blending the issue of European integration into existing patterns of party competition" (Marks & Wilson, 2000, p. 435), but EU and other transnational issues often cut across historically established cleavages, most prominently the economic left–right cleavage and the social libertarian–authoritarian cleavage, and to a lesser extent the Church–state cleavage as well as centre–periphery cleavage (Edwards, 2009).

The multi-dimensionality of political competition challenges party families in varied ways. To give a couple of examples: Social democratic parties are comparatively homogenous, but especially in countries with strong social democratic traditions and achievements, concerns over deepening market integration and heightened economic competition increasing the power of employers over organised labour have caused intra-party dissent among social democrats (Edwards, 2009; Marks & Wilson, 2000). Conservative and Christian democratic parties with a centrist position on European integration face the dilemma that they support international and European integration "on pragmatic grounds, as a means to economic prosperity" (Marks & Wilson, 2000, p. 451) but increasingly reject political integration and the socio-cultural effects of transnationalism. As "the religious cleavage diminishes in salience relative to other sources of right-wing politics" (ibid., p. 452) and the EU has expanded "away from

the traditional heartland of Christian democracy" (ibid., p. 454), the defence of national sovereignty, culture and language as well as traditionalist values has overshadowed the affinity towards supranationalism rooted in Catholicism (less so in the Lutheran church). In addition, Eurosceptic challenger parties emerged and electorally benefitted from the euro crisis (and the subsequent migration crisis), further exacerbating party unity challenges within conservative and centrist parties.

3.2 MPs as individual actors: Opportunities, incentives, constraints

In the parliamentary arena, intra-party divisions manifest themselves through the behaviour of individual MPs, and their actions and inactions are shaped by a combination of personal incentives, party discipline, and the constraints of the legislative environment.

In most democracies around the globe, the imperative mandate has become the exception, and the free representational mandate is now the norm (van der Hulst, 2000, pp. 8-10). MPs are elected as individuals and, as stated, for example, in the German Basic Law (Article 38, para. 1) "shall be representatives of the whole people, not bound by orders or instructions, and responsible only to their conscience". If we place legislators and their behaviour at the heart of our analysis, we need to take into consideration the incentives, opportunities, and constraints they face. There are a variety of theoretical approaches to MPs' motivations, which are commonly grouped into two categories: rational choice approaches (focusing on electoral and career incentives) and approaches based on sociology and social psychology (emphasising group norms and socialisation). Whether subscribing to one of the 'camps' or seeing them as complementary, most would agree that the context within which MPs operate is shaped by intra-parliamentary and extra-parliamentary conditions. I argue here that these conditions and the interaction between them determine the extent to which the increasing awareness of the EU dimension and perceived contentiousness of EU-level decisions or certain aspects of European integration or politics translate into mobilisation and contestation. To speak in biochemical terms, external and internal factors can, in sum, act either as a catalyst or inhibitor for parliamentary contestation. In line with the discussion in the previous section that EU issues tend to challenge party unity, I suggest that party discipline and control are of particular relevance. Before elaborating on organisational factors, such as parliamentary roles, procedural rules, and party control, I briefly summarise the significance of external events, the media, lobbying and cooperation with other parliaments for shaping MPs' opportunity and incentive structures.

3.2.1 External factors

External factors play a significant role in shaping MPs' opportunities and incentives to voice their opinions on EU issues. These factors include events and developments at various levels, from national referendums to international crises; media coverage and public opinion; the influence of lobbying groups; and the interaction with the EP and other national parliaments.

Events

When we think about external factors that shape the context for legislative behaviour, we certainly cannot ignore events. Generally, we know that around EU summits, the salience of Europe rises in national parliaments (Rauh & de Wilde, 2018). The euro crisis and the Schengen crisis have shown how a crisis initially afflicting only some member states can quickly become an issue that enters the domestic agenda of all member states. In addition to events with EU-wide implications, there are national-specific events that may affect how politicians perceive EU multi-level policy-making and their role within it. National referendums tend to be elite-driven but often develop their own dynamics beyond the control of elected politicians (Hobolt, 2009). Furthermore, referendums may be considered as an alternative, rather than a complementary tool, to parliamentary democracy. Either way, they urge MPs to take a public stance, especially in a constituency-focused system.

Media

It is reasonable to suggest that the extent to which extra-parliamentary events impact the dynamics within parliament and the behaviour of all or a subset of legislators also depends on the media. Mass media facilitate "a 'representative relationship' between those who 'perform' in the political arena and those who interpret and evaluate the performance from the balcony" (Michailidou & Trenz, 2012, p. 135). From a demand–supply perspective, it appears that parliamentary activities, especially debates, increase news coverage, but Auel et al. (2018) find that newsworthiness is not so much determined by the level of conflict within parliament (e.g. between coalition partners), but rather by the intensity with which citizens care about the EU. This perspective does not take into consideration that news coverage also impacts whether citizens regard EU politics as important in the first place, and it disregards that the relationship between the parliament and the media is a two-way street. Statham and Trenz (2015) reason that in times of the euro crisis, "the media do not only appear as the general filter of political mobilization and communication by political elites [...] but also increasingly function as a major catalyst that drives popular discontent and conflict" (pp. 297-298).

Lobbying and inter-parliamentary cooperation
Lobbying from interest groups and stakeholders as well as inter-parliamentary cooperation can provide another external stimulus. Studies on EU lobbying look predominantly at EU institutions as the target of interest representation. This does not necessarily mean that lobbying on EU policies takes place only at the EU level. Though occasions may be rare, Miklin (2014a) shows that the controversiality of the Services Directive was spotted by German and Austrian legislators only after national trade unions and business organisations publicly protested. The impetus to become more active and contest certain EU policies can also derive from horizontal interaction with the EP or vertical coordination with assemblies of other member states (e.g. when seeking to trigger the subsidiarity early warning mechanism).

3.2.2 Organisational factors

This dissertation seeks to shed more light on how organisational factors shape when and how MPs contest EU affairs. The specific focus lies on positions and roles, formal and informal rules, and party control.

Positions, roles, and stances
MPs sitting in the same legislature and belonging to the same party differ from each other in many ways, and this variation may affect their behaviour. In addition to demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (such as age, gender or previous profession) and individual ambition, MPs hold different positions within the parliament, standing committees, and their party. Although different theoretical traditions disagree about the extent to which position determines role, there appears to be a consensus that positions are linked, but not identical, to roles (Andeweg, 2014). Drawing on Thornton and Nardi's (1975, p. 872) broader role definition, Holden Bates (2021) recently (re-) defined parliamentary roles as "sets of expectations impinging on incumbents of the social position of Member of Parliament" (p. 31). Similarly to the various ways an MP can interpret their job, there are different ways to exercise the backbench position. For the UK House of Commons, analysing the behaviour across a range of parliamentary activities, we identified seven distinct backbench roles (Holden Bates et al, 2023; Holden Bates & Bhattacharya, forthcoming), which are often a combination of role elements highlighted by previous typologies (e.g. party loyalist or constituency-focussed MP). In the field of role analysis, there is a distinction between representative roles (who do MPs represent) and legislative roles (how do they pursue their work) (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012). As highlighted by Holden Bates (2021, p. 25), the former is more accurately understood as stances that make up part of an MP's overall role.

With regard to the stance or foci of representation in the EU context, Wessels (2005) draws on survey data of MPs from 11 member states and finds a pattern of diversity rather than convergence: In some countries, MPs focus on their party, while in others they focus on the population as a whole or in their electoral district (i.e. their constituents). France belongs to the constituency-oriented group, and this is in line with Navarro and Brouard's (2014) finding that French MPs elected from the border region of Alsace ask more EU-related questions because EU issues are more important to their constituents. With regard to legislative roles, Rozenberg (2012) dissects how EU committee chairs present themselves as either (a) the 'chair' (who manages committee members and civil servants and engages in a game with the government), (b) the 'club member' (who prioritises meetings and facilitates dialogue between stakeholders), (c) the 'inquisitor' (who prioritises government scrutiny in a quest for 'truth'), or (d) the 'one who rubs shoulders with the great and powerful' (seeking status and public recognition through meeting European leaders).

Rules and party control

Another decisive but often overlooked factor are rules of conduct. Although they are not specific to EU policy-making, we need to take rules into account when trying to explain which MPs mobilise in what way around EU issues, especially in cross-country comparisons. As highlighted by Palonen (2012), "[p]arliamentary politics is not just politics that takes place in parliament, but politics that is conducted in a parliamentary manner, in accordance with the rules and practices of parliamentary procedure" (p. 14). Internal rules, of which "the truly important rules are usually formalized" (Müller & Sieberer, 2014, p. 311), shape individual-level behaviour, often more so than constitutional provisions, by constraining MPs' room for manoeuvre and the ways they can express their views (Leston-Bandeira, 2009, p. 699). Furthermore, scarcity of time and the question of how to distribute time fairly have always been inherent to parliamentary politics (Palonen, 2012). This is especially true for the plenary due to the 'plenary bottleneck' created by the legal requirement that (important) legislative bills generally need to pass consideration and approval in the plenary (Cox, 2006).

Here, the interplay between rules and party control is particularly interesting. There is only limited comparative research on rules of speech-making, but we can broadly distinguish between (a) open access to the plenary floor, whereby time is allocated to individual MPs and (b) more restrictive rules, whereby PPGs allocate the time they receive among its members. Giannetti and Pedrazzani (2016) refer to the latter as 'party-centred' rules. Proksch and Slapin (2015) find that party leaders in the German Bundestag are likely to speak themselves in those plenary debates that they attach most importance to, while MPs who are ideologically distant from the leadership tend to speak less often. Interestingly, the opposite is the case in the

UK House of Commons. They explain the variation in party control over public debates with electoral considerations, but Giannetti and Pedrazzani (2016) have extended Proksch and Slapin's argument and remind us that "party leaders are effective in disciplining legislators only when institutional arrangements enable them to do so" (p. 775). In the German case, party-centred rules have the effect of excluding backbenchers in salient EU debates. In contrast, members of the UK House of Commons are much less dependent on their party leadership to speak but need to 'catch the Speaker's eye'. As shown in *Article I*, critical German MPs who disagree with their party leadership strongly enough use other channels of expression, even voting defection, to make their voices heard. These studies provide a good illustration of the interplay between the rule-based and discursive faces of (de)politicisation.

3.3 Parliamentary contestation and intra-party dissent: Embracing a (inter-)rational perspective

The scholarship on parliamentary party unity has traditionally focussed on roll-call votes and has broadened out to other behavioural as well as attitudinal indicators (Close & Gherghina, 2019). When we look at parliamentary contestation, we need to look beyond the government–opposition divide and inter-party conflict to understand the dynamics of intra-party dissent, which constitutes an important aspect of political conflict within the parliamentary setting. If we want to know the level of contentiousness of a debate or issue or understand the ways it became (de)contested, we need data and methods that can capture the dynamics and relational (and inter-relational) dimensions of parliamentary communication.

Relations between actors

Parliament as an organisation and the proceedings within it are inherently relational. The most apparent relations are those between actors. Individual MPs are organised into PPGs, which form the (coalition) government and opposition parties. In the Bundestag and many other parliaments, the government ministers are usually also MPs, which then creates executive–legislative relations among MPs and also within ruling parties. Within PPGs, the division of labour, roles, and hierarchy shape the relationships between members: To state the obvious, without frontbenchers, there would be no backbenchers – and vice versa. Party rebels are defined relative to the party line, which is communicated by the party leaders and fortified by loyal members.

These relationships manifest themselves in various interactions. To tap into the dynamics of voting blocs, cosponsorship alliances, discourse coalitions and so forth, we need methods that can capture the inter-rational nature of parliamentary activities. One such approach is network analysis, which allows us to map and

analyse the relationships and interactions between parliamentary actors. Social network analysis has been applied to study the cosponsoring of legislators (Burkett, 1997; Faust & Skvoretz, 2002; Fowler, 2006), MPs' and MEPs' Twitter behaviour (Sältzer, 2022; Schuhbauer et al., 2022; van Vliet et al., 2024), voting divisions (e.g. Brito et al., 2020; Intal & Yasseri, 2021; Waugh et al., 2011), and MPs' outside interests (Smith & Newman, 2024). In these network graphs, the nodes are parliamentary actors, and the edges represent the respective interactions between them, such as cosponsorship, casting the same vote or communication (sharing or liking a social media post, making the same or opposite claims, etc.). A closer analysis of these networks through cluster analysis and social network centrality measures can identify groups of closely connected actors (i.e. alliances), distinct groups (i.e. factions) as well as the most influential actors.

Relationship between actors and claims

We also need to acknowledge the relationship between actors and discursive claims. The basic premise is that it matters who speaks (for the party), and excluding certain actors impacts the debate content. To understand the content of parliamentary debates in terms of dominant frames, narratives, and the contestation (and importantly also decontestation) of certain claims, we must examine the relationship between debate participation and the arguments presented. Capturing this relationship requires an approach to political contestation that bridges the "gap between content-oriented and actor-centered approaches" (Leifeld & Haunss, 2012, p. 4). Political claims analysis and discourse network analysis do this by combining information on the actors and their statements. Political claims analysis (Beyeler & Kriesi, 2005; Koopmans & Statham, 1999) extends protest event analysis by shifting the unit of analysis from protests to claims to identify patterns and devise timelines of issue salience, participation, and polarisation on a unidimensional scale. Discourse network analysis (Leifeld 2016, 2017; Leifeld & Haunss, 2012) then builds upon this by enabling us to systematically analyse – and map – the deeper structures of discourses, in addition to the actor–claim relations.

Relations between claims

The content of political debate can be analysed at multiple levels, from individual terms to claims, frames, and (meta-)narratives. To measure contestation, we can look at disagreement and consensus around certain claims. However, political conflict is more than direct disputes in the form of opposing arguments. Instead of negating the political opponent's claims, actors often seek to reframe the debate by advancing alternative problem interpretations and solutions or shifting attention to different issues altogether. As Lakoff (2014) writes, "[w]hen you are arguing against the other side, do not use their language" because "[w]hen we negate a frame, we

evoke the frame" (p. 1). Given that discourses are more than an enumeration of discrete and diametric claims, we need to capture these more complex structures and show how individual claims are related and form larger frames or overarching narratives. To do this, we can look at co-occurrence patterns, in other words, the question of which claims tend to be made together in the same speeches or by the same actors. As discussed above, this is the approach discourse network analysis takes. Very frequent and highly co-occurring claims may distort the overall picture towards consensus by overweighing general rhetoric. When clustering the claims, this can be addressed with community detection, and as I demonstrate in *Article III*, the introduction of machine-learning techniques like association rule mining can enhance community detection and, thus, the structural analysis of discourses.

Relations between speeches and between different parliamentary activities

The final set of relations to consider concerns the connection between individual speeches as well as between different parliamentary activities. Palonen (2021) reminds us that a speech in a parliamentary debate, though often prepared beforehand rather than a spontaneous intervention, is embedded in a chain of speech contributions:

> "The rhetorical novelty of parliamentary politics, as compared with classical oratory, lies in shifting the unit of deliberation from single speeches to debate. […] The speeches respond or refer to previous speeches in one way or another or provoke a new turn in the debate […]." (p. 69)

More likely than not, a debate on a certain topic is not the first – or last – time this issue has been discussed in parliament, and previous debates shape the direction of the current one. A vote may follow the debate, and if the vote is a free vote or confidence vote, the debate is likely to reveal different dynamics than if there were no vote or a 'routine' vote.

In this dissertation, I focus on the dynamics over time and across activities: How have contestation and intra-party dissent on one topic evolved over the course of multiple debates and votes? Are there temporal patterns in how disputes and backbench rebellions become visible in different parliamentary activities? Presumably, an MP's dissenting vote is rarely an isolated incident, and since it is a fairly drastic form of rebellion, it has probably been preceded by other (more subtle) expressions of dissent against the party line.

In the research conducted for this dissertation, I employ a combination of methods and draw on three main data sources (speeches, vote explanations, and roll-call votes) to capture these various relations, which make up the complex dynamics of political conflict in parliament.

3.3.1 Advancement of methods and underexplored data sources

In parliament, political conflict becomes most visible in plenary debates and votes, but parliamentary communication also takes place through a range of other activities, and intra-party dissent can surface through other means than voting against the party line. In this dissertation, the challenge was to develop an approach that could access the viewpoints of a broader range of MPs than the few who get to speak in a parliament where party leaders control the limited speaking time allocated to PPGs. In the case of the German Bundestag, vote explanations provide the opportunity to extend the analysis of parliamentary discourse and political cleavages (between and within parties) beyond the spotlight and confines of plenary debates and votes. Vote explanations are written statements that MPs can give individually or co-sign with other MPs to justify their voting behaviour[3]. They are annexed to the official minutes, and MPs often publish them on their website, too. They are used for three reasons: (a) to voice reservations despite voting with the party, (b) to justify a deviant vote, or (c) to give a statement that demonstrates party loyalty (Becher & Sieberer, 2008; Sieberer, 2015). In the German context, they offer the most meaningful data source for estimating intra-party preferences (Zittel & Nyhuis, 2019).

This dissertation contributes to advancing parliamentary studies in the following ways:

Article I takes a comprehensive look at dissent across three parliamentary activities (votes, speeches, and vote explanations), shifting the focus from MPs' preferences to incentives and opportunities as shaped by party control and visibility. Moreover, the paper explores and finds evidence for sequential patterns of individual-level dissent.

Article II advances the scholarship on (parliamentary) party unity as a dynamic and multi-dimensional phenomenon by adding a discursive perspective and introducing DNA complemented by social network statistics as a novel approach to measure coherence within groups over time. As the editor of the special issue and developer of DNA highlights: "Bhattacharya (2020) introduces DNA to the comparative study of legislative politics by measuring party unity and party control in the German parliament with DNA, in a case study of the German response to the Euro crisis and the Greek bailout. This is a promising avenue for future research as we ultimately want to understand if and how discourse networks influence legislative behaviour and decisions" (Leifeld, 2020, p. 182). Furthermore, by

[3] According to the rules, they can be delivered orally lasting no more than five minutes, but following convention, the vast majority of MPs choose to deliver them in writing.

comparing discursive cohesiveness (or lack thereof) in plenary speeches and vote explanations, I demonstrate how party leaders use their gatekeeping powers over the plenary floor to maintain unity.

In *Article III*, I expand on this comparative analysis of speeches and vote explanations to show how keeping more critical (backbench) MPs off the plenary floor actually impacts the content and diversity of viewpoints expressed. I use network analysis and community detection techniques to uncover and compare the structures of parliamentary discourse in these two communication channels and over time. For the first time, this study applies association rule mining in discourse analysis to make it more robust. To systematise discourse analysis further, I develop a contestedness score to identify the most disputed claims (*Article II*) and measure direct disagreement at an aggregate level (*Article III*).

When we approach MPs and the groups they form (PPGs, government, and opposition) as well as the political discourse they produce through a network lens and from a relational perspective, and when we borrow methods and techniques (such as discourse network analysis, social network analysis, community detection, and association rule mining) from other disciplines and fields, we can grasp important dynamics of parliamentary contestation that have been underexplored so far.

Table 2: Scope of analysis of contestation around the Eurozone crisis-related legislative acts passing the Bundestag between 2010 and 2015, sorted by publication (Article I–*A I*, Article II–*A II*, Article III–*A III*)

Date	Acts	Votes	Speeches	Vote explanations
17th term (government: CDU/CSU and FDP; opposition: SPD, The Left, and The Greens)				
7 May 2010	First aid package for Greece	Party unity (*A I*) Individual defection (*A I*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)
21 May 2010	Creation of the EFSF	Party unity (*A I*)		
29 September 2011	Expansion of the EFSF	Party unity (*A I*)		
27 February 2012	Second aid package for Greece	Party unity (*A I*) Individual defection (*A I*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)
29 June 2012	Creation of the ESM	Party unity (*A I*)		
19 July 2012	Rescue package for Spanish banks	Party unity (*A I*)		

18 April 2013	Aid package for Cyprus	Party unity (*A I*)		
	Aid package for Portugal	Party unity (*A I*)		
	Aid package for Ireland	Party unity (*A I*)		
18th term (government: CDU/CSU and SPD; opposition: The Left and The Greens)				
27 February 2015	Extension of second aid package for Greece	Party unity (*A I*) Individual defection (*A I*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)
17 July 2015	Creation of the EFSF	Party unity (*A I*) Individual defection (*A I*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)
19 August 2015	Expansion of the EFSF	Party unity (*A I*) Individual defection (*A I*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)	Individual activity (*A I*) Party cohesion and government–opposition cohesion (*A II*) Discourse networks (*A III*) Disputed and representative claims (*A III*)

4 The contestation of the euro crisis in the German Bundestag: The centrality of party control

The crisis of the Eurozone began to unfold at the end of 2009 when Greece revealed its deficit levels were much higher than previously reported and had to ask for external help in early 2010, followed by Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Cyprus in subsequent years. In response, the EU introduced financial assistance mechanisms: the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM), which were replaced by the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) in 2012. Greece received an EU–International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package in May 2010, another one in March 2012, and a third one in August 2015. Ireland got aid in November 2010 and Portugal in May 2011. In July 2012, a bank recapitalisation programme was approved for Spain. Cyprus received a bailout in April 2013. These packages were conditional on the implementation of austerity measures and structural reforms. The rescue measures, austerity ideology, and crisis management by the Troika (EC, European Central Bank, and IMF) became increasingly contentious, also in the member states who were not directly hit by the crisis but had to ratify the packages. This was certainly true for Germany.

At the EU level, Bailer and colleagues (2015) show that already before the crisis the structural cleavage between poor and rich member states (i.e. net beneficiaries and net contributors of the EU budget) overshadowed left–right conflicts in the Council of Ministers and suggested that this is a "division that will become more pronounced in times of economic stress and hardship" (p. 453). The front pages of (tabloid) newspapers in Germany and Greece certainly fuelled a growing hostility between the two countries during the crisis. Observers seemed to agree that Germany's voice has become too powerful[4], which was not helped by the CDU's PPG

[4] See e.g. Stuart Jeffries, "Is Germany too powerful for Europe?", 31 March 2013, *The Guardian*; Martin Wolf, "Germany is the eurozone's biggest problem", 10 May 2016, *Financial Times*.

leader's proclamation that "now suddenly Europe speaks German" (*Der Spiegel*, 2011). While it is the case that the ordoliberal paradigm persisted, the "emergence and importance of the Troika's knowledge regime also prevented other experts from entering the process who might have offered criticism and existing alternatives" (Nordström, 2024, p. 383). Furthermore, a study by Lundgren et al. (2019) questions the conventional narrative of Germany's dominance by showing that bargaining success in the Eurozone reforms was rather evenly distributed among member states.

A closer analysis of how the rescue measure and reform proposals were contested *within* the German Bundestag and its PPGs also reveals that 'the German position' was not as hegemonic as often portrayed. *Table 2* presents an overview of the decisions that passed the Bundestag between 2010 and 2015 and shows what aspects of parliamentary contestation have been analysed in this dissertation. In sum, the three publications provide a comprehensive analysis of how contestation played out during these years at different levels and from different angles.

4.1 The German Bundestag: An unlikely case for politicisation?

The Bundestag is a mixed-member parliament with half of the members elected from first-past-the-post constituencies and the other half through proportional regional party lists. The electoral threshold of 5% is a key reason Germany should be regarded as a 'high barrier system', in which challenger parties or smaller parties face significant obstacles to entering parliament (Hooghe & Marks, 2017). The Bundestag has also been known for: (a) being a 'working parliament' in which scrutiny in committees is considered more important than heated floor debates, (b) high levels of party unity in roll-call votes (Bergmann et al., 2016), and (c) a solid pro-European consensus among the mainstream parties (Lees, 2008; Wimmel & Edwards, 2011). Taking these features into account, we might expect the German Bundestag to be a less likely case for politicisation of EU issues. Wonka (2016) also writes:

> "[C]ompared to other EU member states, German political parties and the German populace are relatively EU-friendly and populist and radical right parties have not played a role in the Bundestag during the period investigated here [January 2010-February 2013]. Germany can thus be considered an unlikely case for the politicisation of the Euro crisis; politicisation might be considerably higher in countries where the party political and societal conditions provided a more fertile ground for politicisation." (p. 127)

Comparative research by Auel and colleagues (Auel & Raunio, 2014b; Auel et al., 2015b) confirms that despite strong opposition rights and moderately strong scrutiny mechanisms, contestation of EU matters has remained limited in the

Bundestag. But that does not mean that EU issues have been kept off the agenda because "EU issues have been most debated in [national parliaments] where consensus is greatest rather than where it is weakest [and] Germany in particular fits this pattern" (Kröger & Bellamy, 2016, p. 145).

Another interesting factor is the role of the Federal Constitutional Court. Elsewhere, I list some key rulings by the Court that have shaped Germany's response to the euro crisis (Bhattacharya, 2016). I also discuss how the Court acted "as a strong defender of Germany's parliamentary democracy" (ibid.), particularly by reinforcing the parliament's budget autonomy. On the other hand, the Court's indirect "invitation for more lawsuits [became] a political option for the opposition [...] to transfer political decisions into legal ones" (Auberger & Lamping, 2009, p. 289, own translation). We indeed saw that MPs – or even PPGs collectively – appeared as plaintiffs in all of the major euro crisis cases before the Court.

The crisis has shifted the nature of the EU polity and the scope of EU policy-making and decision-making not only into the judicial arena but also into the public spotlight, which made evident that public opinion was more sceptical than elected representatives. The public disapproval ratings of Greece's bailouts ranged between 45% and 70% (see e.g. Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2010, 2012a, 2012b). Furthermore, in autumn 2011, for example, every second citizen viewed the Eurozone crisis as the most important political issue, but 42% either did not know which party best represented their interests in managing the crisis or felt that none of them did. Against this backdrop, the rise of the Alternative for Germany does not appear surprising. The party was founded in February 2013 as a single-issue party opposing not only the management of the euro crisis but the EMU as such. The name itself directly disputes Chancellor Merkel's claim that there was "no alternative" to the first bailout for Greece (only hours after she had ruled it out). Within eight months of its founding, the party gained a 4.7% vote share in the 2013 federal elections, narrowly missing the threshold for entering the Bundestag.

We can safely say that the debates on the Eurozone crisis and the situation in Greece presented German MPs, particularly those on the backbenches, with an unprecedented opportunity to make their views heard, even – or especially – if those were not (fully) aligned with the party leaders' position. When it comes to plenary debates, however, we would expect party leaders to exercise their gatekeeping powers and minimise intra-party dissent by excluding critical voices. The fact that the Speaker of the Bundestag granted extra time to dissenters from the governing parties in some of the debates indicates that party-centric rules of speechmaking have been recognised as a potential obstacle to political representation by reducing the visibility of a divergent range of views.

Table 3: Expected relationships (between visibility, party control, and disunity), hypotheses (H), and results (R) from *Article I*

Activity	Expected relationships	Mandate type	Rank and experience	Gender
Speech	Visibility > Party control > Disunity	H: Mandate type does not matter R: Some evidence that district MPs speak more	H: Frontbenchers are more likely to speak R: Yes H: More experienced backbenchers are less likely to speak R: No, the opposite	H: Women MPs are less likely to speak R: Yes
Voting	Visibility < Party control < Disunity	H: District MPs are more likely to defect R: Not supported	H: Backbenchers are more likely to defect R: Yes H: Experienced MPs are more likely to defect R: Yes H: More experienced backbenchers are more likely to defect R: Yes	H: Women MPs are less likely to defect R: Not supported
Vote explanation	Visibility > Party control > Disunity	H: District MPs are more likely to give vote explanations R: No, the opposite	H: Backbenchers are more likely to give vote explanations R: Yes H: Less experienced MPs are more likely to give vote explanations R: Yes	H: Women MPs are less likely to give vote explanations R: No, the opposite

4.2 Intra-party mobilisation

Raunio and Hix (2000) wrote in their seminal article *Backbenchers learn to fight back: European integration and parliamentary government* about national parliaments gradually reclaiming power from executive actors: "The driving force behind this partial reassertion has been the desire by non-governing parties and backbench parliamentarians to redress the 'information gap' between governing elites and the parliamentary rank-and-file" (p. 163). In *Article I*, we take this rationale – that the parliamentarisation of EU politics requires the involvement of a broader range of MPs than just a small number of frontbenchers and 'Euro-wizards' – a step further. We examine mobilisation and the disintegration of the pro-European consensus in the German Bundestag by investigating three types of activity: voting, speeches, and vote explanations. The overall hypothesis is that dissent within parties was as important as disagreement across party lines.

In terms of mobilisation, that is, the number of actors getting actively involved, there was an increasing number of MPs (up to 21.7% in February 2015) delivering vote explanations while the plenary floor remained closed for the vast majority of MPs because the length of debates stayed fairly constant. This is a much higher activity level than we commonly see with vote explanations (cf. Schindler, 1999, pp. 1790-1791; Sieberer, 2015, p. 28). 45% of MPs who issued vote explanations used them to express some doubts or divergent views despite voting with the party, around one third supported the party line, and 22% explained their dissenting vote. Over the course of the crisis, all PPGs have faced roll-call votes with well below-average voting unity. By choosing a comprehensive approach that looks beyond voting behaviour alone, we shift the focus from MPs' preferences (cf. Degner & Leuffen, 2016) to their incentive and opportunity structures, and how these may vary for different groups of MPs, thus explaining individual behaviour and communication across these three channels of expression.

"[D]efecting from one's party leadership on a vote, especially on one that is both high profile and whipped, constitutes the ultimate act of defiance" (Proksch & Slapin, 2015, p. 26), but once we take into account contextual factors, we would expect that dissenting speeches are even more rare and that the threshold for giving (critical) vote explanations is lower than for a defecting vote. This is because the visibility of the communication channel shapes the level of party control. In the Bundestag, where PPG leaders have strong gatekeeping powers over the plenary floor, we expect party unity to be highest in plenary debates.

However, these control mechanisms and contextual factors do not affect MPs equally. We hypothesise that the threshold for expressing dissent is contingent upon an MP's mandate, experience, and rank within the party, as well as personal characteristics such as gender (see *Table 3* for a summary of the hypotheses and

results). The findings confirm that backbenchers are less likely to get speaking time, but more inclined to use vote explanations and cast a deviant vote. We expect district MPs to be more responsive to the sceptical electorate than list MPs, who are more dependent on their party leadership for re-election. However, the mandate type does not matter for voting behaviour, and district MPs are less likely to communicate through vote explanations. As expected, less experienced MPs lack access to the plenary floor and utilise vote explanations instead to communicate. As highlighted by Bailer and Ohmura (2018), "including career prospects in an analysis of MPs' legislative activity improves our understanding of legislators' accountability toward their party and voters" (p. 493). The combined effect of experience and rank is very strong for vote defection, confirming Bailer and Ohmura's (2018) 'last-period problem' and Kam's (2014) finding that "the most rebellious MPs are those who have been demoted from the front-bench (and who are unlikely therefore to be ministers again), or those who failed to secure a promotion early in their parliamentary careers (and who are likely therefore to languish on the backbenches throughout their careers)" (p. 404). Women MPs speak less in debates on the Eurozone crisis, but the fact that they are more active in the usage of vote explanations contrasts with other studies (e.g. Bäck et al., 2014, 2021) that find an underrepresentation of women in stereotypically masculine policy areas like macroeconomics or fiscal policy.

We also find that defecting in one vote increases the odds of defecting in the next vote by 11 times. Once an MP has crossed the threshold of defection, they have little incentive to change their behaviour, especially since public support for the Greek aid packages was declining during the period. MPs who have previously used a vote explanation are less likely to do so in future votes. One of the most important findings from *Article I* is that there is a dynamic relationship between vote explanations and defection: an MP who issued a vote explanation is two times more likely to cast a deviant vote in the subsequent roll-call. Vote explanations can thus serve as a warning mechanism for party leaders. Particularly for the Christian Democrats, usually showing the highest voting unity (Bergmann et al., 2016; Zittel & Nyhuis, 2019), the extensive usage of vote explanations foreshadowed the increasing fragmentation of party unity throughout the euro crisis.

4.3 The (in)visibility of contentiousness and dissent

In *Article I*, we looked at mobilisation patterns and sought to explain how party control affects individual-level activity across different channels of expression. We showed that backbenchers, less experienced MPs, and women MPs were less likely to speak and more inclined to use vote explanations as an alternative channel of communication. The question is to what extent the exclusion of certain actors from the plenary floor results in discursive absences and silences. In other words, do the

gatekeepers succeed in maintaining party unity on the plenary floor? This is the main question explored in *Article II*, while *Article III* investigates the impact on the actual discourse and representation of different views to demonstrate why it matters who speaks for the party. This is achieved by comparing the content of speeches and vote explanations, the data source that offers the best insight into preferences. Similarly to Wiesner's (2024, pp. 68-80) approach in her comparative study of national EU discourses in Germany and France, I also make a survey of the context, particularly regarding the procedural rules and relations between participants and non-participants, an integral part of the analysis.

4.3.1 Discursive party (dis)unity

In countries like Germany, "where the electoral system creates strong incentives for parties to cultivate and protect a single party image to present to voters, party leaders monitor and control their MPs' access to the floor" (Proksch & Slapin, 2015, p. 9). When cohesion is low, restrictive or party-centred rules of speechmaking are an important instrument in the toolbox that PPG leaders in the Bundestag use to maintain unity (Bailer, 2018). Unity is the "*observable* degree to which members of a group act in unison" (Sieberer, 2006, p. 151, emphasis added), and in line with Van Vonno et al. (2014), I conceive of unity as the outcome of the sequential interaction between agreement, loyalty, discipline, and control. In the absence of preference agreement or cohesion, unity can thus still be achieved through party discipline (i.e. the internal rules and norms that make MPs act in certain ways (Hazan, 2014; Little & Farrell, 2017)) and party control (i.e. the extent to which PPGs and their leaders, rather than individual MPs themselves or other parliamentary actors, determine parliamentary proceedings and activity). There is even some evidence from the EP that the personality of the PPG leader has a latent impact on voting unity (Bailer et al., 2009).

In *Article II*, I compare 380 vote explanations and 74 speeches, amounting to 9,048 claims and 348 concepts, generating subtract networks with the DNA approach and tool (Leifeld, 2019). The networks visualise net congruence (agreement in excess of disagreement) or net conflict (disagreement in excess of agreement) between participating actors. With the help of social network statistics, the networks can be used to identify communities of discursive similarity and measure cohesion. The network graphs and modularity scores show that speeches cluster along the government–opposition divide. In contrast, vote explanations display more complex structures with three clusters that became more internally cohesive over time. An interesting observation is that after the Social Democrats joined the government, they shifted from the opposition cluster into a more central position in plenary speeches, while the vote explanations that their MPs delivered remained congruent with those of opposition MPs throughout the period. In this

study, I use the E-I index and Global Clustering Coefficient[5] as measures of the cohesion of PPG and government/opposition blocs because they capture the extent to which group members mention and agree on the same concepts. The results confirm that the government coalition displays more discursive unity on the plenary floor than in vote explanations, whereas the opposite is the case for opposition parties.

The Christian Democrats (CDU) and their Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), were the largest PPG and, as discussed above, according to cleavage theory, the most prone to intra-party dissent on EU issues. The dissent detected in their vote explanations hardly became visible on the plenary floor. I have developed a contestedness score[6] to identify the most disputed concepts, which reveals that CDU/CSU backbenchers questioned the lawfulness as well as the effectiveness of the aid programmes and the political will of Greek decision-makers. Furthermore, they challenged Chancellor Merkel's 'there is no alternative' mantra and began discussing a potential 'Grexit' from the Eurozone before Finance Minister Schäuble first mentioned it publicly.

Table 4: Expectations and key findings of *Article II*

Expectations:
• PPG leaders should be reluctant to allocate speaking time to dissenting MPs. • Government parties have a stronger incentive to use their gatekeeping powers to maintain discursive unity on the plenary floor. • The CDU and CSU are more prone to intra-party tensions on EU matters.
Key findings:
• Plenary speeches reflect the government–opposition divide; and government MPs appear more united on the floor than in vote explanations, whereas the opposite is true for opposition MPs. • In vote explanations, political coalitions and divisions are more complex. • The discursive cohesion of the CDU/CSU group was lowest in the earlier debates before the number of voting rebels increased drastically, confirming the sequential dynamics of expressing dissent.

[5] They measure the ratio of within-group links compared to links with external actors and the density of within-group ties respectively.

[6] For computing the score, I multiply three normalised factors: (1) closeness, i.e. the balance between positive and negative mentions of a concept, (2) salience, the relative frequency of mentions, and (3) minimum salience ratio to give more importance to frequently mentioned concepts.

The findings highlight that in salient debates, PPG leaders, particularly from the government parties, use their gatekeeping powers to convey a more unified message in plenary debates, which were, as a result, dominated by government representatives, PPG leaders, and experts on fiscal and financial policy. Critical backbenchers and EU experts have challenged discursive party unity through an alternative communication channel, namely the submission of vote explanations. Since vote explanations are much less visible than speeches, we may be inclined to conclude that party leaders succeeded in suppressing conflict. However, we know from *Article I* that vote explanations are not only a manifestation of latent disagreement but also a step towards voting dissent.

4.3.2 Discursive contestation

The absence of certain MPs from the floor affects parliamentary debate not only in terms of party unity but also in the substantive representation of different viewpoints. *Article III* digs deeper into the discourse structures of speeches and vote explanations to demonstrate the silencing effect in floor debates and better understand discursive contestation patterns. Political contestation is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and in this part of the analysis, I focus on two co-existing forms of discursive contestation: (a) direct disputes and (b) competing frames.

To measure how much MPs disagree with each other, I look at the share of contested claims and use the contestedness score from *Article II* to calculate an aggregate score for each debate by communication channel. Only around one-fourth of all claims were directly contested, and this share tends to be higher in speeches than vote explanations. If we combine both document types, the percentage is higher, indicating that MPs use vote explanations to challenge claims that otherwise remain undisputed on the plenary floor as well as raise additional controversial issues. Supporting the evidence from *Article II*, this effect is stronger for government parties. A closer look at the most disputed claims reveals that the politics dimension and particularly the question of whether the Greek government and other political institutions in Greece demonstrated enough political will to fight debt generated most conflict. Important components of the polity dimension, such as the EU's institutional framework and values (democracy, solidarity, etc.), became subject to political conflict in vote explanations but not in speeches. Another interesting observation is the foreshadowing of controversy in vote explanations: For example, there was more concern about the effects of austerity on Greece. Also, the question of whether the crisis could only be overcome with a debt relief deal was disputed in vote explanations before it became contested on the plenary floor.

Table 5: Expectations and key findings of *Article III*

Expectations: • PPG leaders make use of party-centred rules of speech-making because it helps to shape the plenary discourse in a way they prefer. • The exclusion of certain MPs from the plenary floor impacts the quality of discursive representation by obscuring the heterogeneity of views present among MPs, and vote explanations can tell us what viewpoints get pushed from the political centre stage to the less visible periphery.
Key findings: • MPs use vote explanations to challenge claims that remained undisputed on the plenary floor and raise additional controversial issues. • Political alternatives to the bailouts from the left and right, the anti-austerity narrative, and conflict around the meaning of solidarity remained largely in the less visible channel of debate. • The share of representative statements made about Greek communities increased over the course of the crisis.

A comparison of the discourse network structures suggests that MPs' contributions in vote explanations form a more interconnected discourse. Examining the discursive clusters confirms that vote explanations echo the most central claims from the plenary floor but offer more detailed and coherent arguments in addition to raising more contentious issues. MPs focus more on policy choices and less on decision-making considerations and party-political quarrels in vote explanations. This may be partly explained by the written format and lower visibility, which are conducive to more sophisticated argumentation. However, the more in-depth discussion of political alternatives on the right (such as sovereign default and 'Grexit' from the Eurozone) and the left (such as a debt haircut and more public investment) and a much more prominent and coherent anti-austerity narrative found in vote explanations support the hypothesis that party-centred gatekeeping rules reduce the diversity of viewpoints expressed on the plenary floor. In this case, it is particularly striking that the concept of solidarity did not feature much in floor debates but was framed from different angles in vote explanations. Though some MPs from the CDU, CSU, and the Free Democratic Party conceived of solidarity as the mutual responsibility to stick to the rules of the 'stability union', overall, we witness in the written statements more transnational solidarity and a growing representation of Greek grievances, which contrasts the popular international perception at the time that German lawmakers lacked empathy and solidarity with Greece.

In *Article III*, I combine DNA, clustering techniques, and association rule learning in an innovative methodological approach to systematically compare discourse structures over time and across communication channels. There is clear empirical evidence that a party-controlled speakers' list, which lacks diversity, can

lead to a flawed representation of the variety of views and discourses in parliament and be utilised to suppress the visibility of political conflict.

5 Conclusions

The three publications included in this dissertation build on each other to form an in-depth study of the parliamentary contestation of the Eurozone crisis in the German Bundestag between 2010 and 2015 by examining patterns of individual-level mobilisation, dissent within parties and the government-opposition blocs, and the contestation levels and structures in parliamentary discourse. The overarching research questions that guided this project are: Who are the key parliamentary actors driving or impeding politicisation? How do controversiality and dissent become visible? What role do organisational factors like roles, rules, and party control play in shaping this communication?

The dissertation makes a conceptual contribution by (a) refining and operationalising a discursive understanding of politicisation around the key relationship between mobilisation and contentiousness. Methodologically, I introduce DNA to the study of group political behaviour, specifically discursive unity and dissent, in the parliamentary setting. Using network analysis and community detection, I am able to map the structures of political conflict in terms of the relationships between MPs and the competing frames and narratives. I show how discursive unity at a group level and contentiousness at the aggregate level can be measured and compared systematically. Here, I also introduce a new contestedness score and make DNA more robust by applying a machine-learning technique called association-rule mining. The main empirical contribution lies in providing evidence of the silencing effect of party-controlled floor access and insights into the dynamics and different stages of expressing dissent.

The findings of the case study suggest that the depiction of the German Bundestag as an unlikely case for politicisation of EU affairs is outdated. German MPs were not immune to the controversialities emanating from the Eurozone crisis. As the largest EMU member, Germany became the largest creditor country, which heightened public awareness of the interdependence between developments and decisions of individual member states and the stability of the common currency, raising questions about sovereignty and solidarity. In addition to the parliamentary arena, this played out in the judicial arena, became evident in declining public support for bailouts, and led to the founding of a new party, the Alternative for Germany. However, instead of seeing these developments in a purely negative light,

we can also argue that a parliamentarisation of EU politics and the increasing visibility of conflict contribute to enhancing the democratic legitimacy of the EU.

Every PPG in the Bundestag has struggled to display voting unity at some point during the crisis, and confirming the expectation derived from cleavage theory, the Christian Democrats more so than others. Defection from the party line is generally seen as "the ultimate act of defiance" (Proksch & Slapin, 2015, p. 26) but a broader approach to intra-party dissent reveals that due to high public visibility and rules enabling PPG leaders to control floor access, MPs' opportunities to voice dissent in the plenum are even more constrained. Consequently, it is especially those MPs excluded from speech-making – in this case, backbenchers, women, and less experienced MPs – who use vote explanations as an alternative channel. We find an interesting sequential dynamic whereby an MP who issued a vote explanation was more likely to defect in the next vote.

Based on these mobilisation patterns, it is unsurprising that plenary speeches and vote explanations displayed varying levels of contentiousness overall and within the PPGs as well as different discourse structures, which cannot be explained by the format alone. The plenary speeches were clustered along the government–opposition divide, whereas vote explanations revealed more complex and internally cohesive 'camps'. Government parties displayed higher levels of discursive unity in the plenum. The dissent among CDU and CSU backbenchers remained largely limited to written vote explanations except when the Speaker granted extra floor time to Klaus-Peter Willsch, one of the original five government dissenters. When the Social Democrats joined the government coalition in 2013, a discrepancy emerged between their plenary speeches, which shifted to a more central position, and their written contributions, which remained more congruent with opposition actors. Furthermore, the comparison of the two communication channels uncovers that gatekeeping has affected plenary debates on the euro crisis by reducing the set of issues and conflict dimensions as well as the coherence of narratives. Most strikingly, questions around the EU's and EMU's institutional framework, the meaning and importance of solidarity, the effects of austerity, and political alternatives to the Greek bailout packages hardly surfaced in the plenum but were central disputes in vote explanations. For readers interested in EU politics, the analysis, therefore, also reveals that 'the German position' was domestically contested from both the left and right, pro-EU and more Eurosceptical voices. Furthermore, the written contributions demonstrate a notable solidarity with the Greek population and consideration of their grievances among German MPs.

The end of the Eurozone crisis overlapped with the migration crisis of 2015-2016, creating Europe's first 'polycrisis' (Nicoli & Zeitlin, 2024) or, as some would say, the beginning of Europe's 'permacrisis', with the Covid pandemic, Brexit, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine being additional shocks that followed against the backdrop of climate change (Turnbull, 2022; Zuleeg et al., 2021). Transnational

solidarity and representation would be interesting to explore in more detail also in this larger context.

This study examines five years of data on one salient issue from one parliament. Though it provides a glimpse into broader patterns, it would be worthwhile to expand the analysis in breadth and depth to draw more generalisable conclusions. To give a few examples: In its current form, the analysis focusses on comparing contestation patterns over time and across different MPs and PPGs. A complementary interpretative and qualitative investigation of the rhetorics deployed by different actors could further enhance our understanding of the discursive politicisation dynamics at play. The study does not consider MPs' behaviour and communication outside parliament or media content. Hence, I cannot draw definitive conclusions about the invisibility of alternative views and intra-party dissent to the public. It would be interesting to investigate to what extent the silencing effect is mediated by media coverage and MPs' social media communication. Future research should also expand the scope of analysis to other parliaments and other aspects of EU politics and beyond the particularities of EU affairs to other contentious issues (e.g. in morality politics) as well as more routine debates.

What the findings do suggest, however, is that in this case, gatekeeping practices enabled by party-centred rules of speech-making inhibit the accurate representation of existing political divisions and viewpoints in the plenum. Since the plenary assembly is not only the most visible and widely followed parliamentary arena but also a – if not *the* – locus for public deliberation of the most important political issues, this observation raises questions about the democratic quality of the EU's multi-level governance system and German parliamentarism.

The question of how to distribute time fairly is probably as old as parliaments themselves, and the recognition that the management of the 'plenary bottleneck' stands in tension with deliberative ideals is not new either. Palonen (2012) reminds us that already in the 19th-century Westminster Parliament, "many time-saving measures were felt to be oppositional to the idea of Parliament as an exemplary deliberative assembly" (p. 22). The controversiality of the Eurozone crisis has put the spotlight on some of the tensions inherent to the Bundestag's procedural rules. The Speaker's decision to accommodate rebels by giving them extra floor time was met with criticism by all PPG leaders and triggered a legal inquiry (Denkler, 2011). However, it also set in motion a reform proposal that the Speaker can "in agreement with the parliamentary parties" allocate three minutes of speaking time to individual MPs. After increasing resistance among MPs and even threats of a constitutional complaint, this proposal was dropped (Bannas, 2012). The dissertation's findings could inform future reform considerations and point towards the need for rules that open the floor to a more diverse range of MPs.

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