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## **Setting the EU on fire: A quantitative analysis of the impact of politicization on the public opinion of European integration**

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*Setting the EU on fire: A quantitative analysis of the impact of politicization on the public opinion of European integration*

Bachelor Project: The European Union in Crisis: Challenged, Compromises, Results

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# 1.Introduction

The relationship between the European Union's history of crisis and public opinion on European integration has been speculated and researched since the creation of the EU in 1992. This research project sets out to explore this relationship between the period of 2000 and 2009, focusing on the constitutional treaty crisis and the euro crisis, respectively. In this paper, politicization is used as the link between the impacts of the European Union's crises and their effects on the public opinion on EU integration, due to the concept's link to the public sphere.

In general, politicization is more often than not referred to as a concept which has a guaranteed negative effect on EU integration. This popular opinion is rightfully supported by the mechanism of politicization, which transfers the majority of the decision making power to the political sphere, therefore empowering politicians and bureaucrats against the other actors in society (Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou, Wodak, 2018, p.4). Additionally, the politicization of political debates automatically forces the issues at hand to be integrated into the popular political rhetoric at the moment, thus often resulting in their ideologization (Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou, Wodak, 2018, p.5). This can be seen in the issue of immigration, which has, without question, become one of the most politicized topics in EU integration. The concept of mediatization is seen as one of the main vehicles for politicization but also its potential resultant ideologization (Krzyzanowski, Triandafyllidou, Wodak, 2018, p.6). That being said, there are instances in which politicization has catalyzed positive results, such as the French referendum on the accession of the U.K. to the EU, and on the Maastricht treaty (Grande and Kriesi, 2016, p.295). Therefore, it is not correct to equate politicization with a negative outcome, but rather it is more accurate to take politicization as a cause of uncertainty in the decision making of the EU.

For the purpose of this text, the public opinion on European integration is taken literally. The measure for this will be calculated using official Eurostat data from surveys on public opinion. While different theories give different importance to the public in general, and its opinion, when it comes to European integration, for this paper, this potential link will not be questioned or extensively addressed.

The silent consensus of the academic world is that politicization is guaranteed to result in a negative impact on European integration. This is mostly due to the implied assumption that politicization will contribute to Euroscepticism. Euroscepticism can overall be broadly defined as a sentiment of disapproval towards European integration (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016, pp.9-10). When taking a closer look at the theoretical link between politicization and public opinion on European integration, it becomes clear that Euroscepticism is the link, since Euroscepticism is reliant on the public opinion on European integration, according to the definition above. It is important to investigate to what extent this relationship holds empirical significance, due to its widely assumed existence.

The Eurozone crisis is arguably the first instance of exceptionally high politicization in the last two decades. That being said, its peculiar politicization showed an untraditional side of the concept. Politicization did not take place

on the traditional culture-identity rhetoric, but rather created a rhetoric of division based on austerity (Hutter et al., 2018, p.20). This divide fueled the debates between creditor and debtor countries, which have probably contributed to a long-term politicization of general European economic debates (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019, p.1001). The peculiar nature of the politicization witnessed during the eurozone crisis is characterized by the rather weak presence of political parties when looking at the drivers of politicization (Kriesi and Grande, 2016, p.275). Kriesi and Grande also debate the actual extent of the politicization of the debates, stating that while the debates were highly salient and resulted in the increased prominence of EU politics in national arenas, they did not catalyze the change of EU politics into mass politics (Kriesi and Grande, 2016, p.273). Contrary to Kriesi et al. Hobolt and Wrátil frame the eurozone crisis as “the clearest example of Europe-wide politicization of the integration issue” (Hobolt and Wrátil, 2015, p.238). They motivate this claim by arguing that the crisis led to an increased awareness of the interdependence that monetary integration had created, due to its politicization by political entrepreneurs (Hobolt and Wrátil, 2015, p.241).

The constitutional crisis which occurred in 2004–2005 started in 2001, with the initiation of a “constitution making project”, aimed at “bringing Europe to the people and constructing a legitimate European political community (Statham and Trenz, 2013, p.695). Due to the project’s implied overstepping over the sovereignty of member states, its resulting significant politicization would not be a surprise to any European integration scholar today; neither would the backlash that this politicization caused, when it comes to the public opinion on European integration. Two main factors enabled this crisis to happen. Firstly, the opening of the “institutional opportunity structure” when French President Jacques Chirac announced the referendum that thus allowed political opponents to challenge the French government over its European alignment (Statham and Trenz, 2013, p.976). Secondly, due to the high relevance of the referendum, as well as the public’s little awareness of this topic, the matter of the constitutional treaty received significant media attention (Statham and Trenz, 2013, p.976). The constitutional crisis was the first significant occurrence of politicization, which generated significant backlash towards the European integration efforts of the elites at the time, as well as on the public opinion on European integration.

This quantitative analysis is focused around the question: “To what extent does the politicization of the EU in the media impact public support of European integration?”. While aiming to answer this question, this paper has three main goals. Firstly, to statistically test the relationship between the occurrence of politicization, in times of EU crisis, and the public’s support for European integration. Secondly, to establish which of the two crises, the constitutional crisis and euro crisis, respectively, resulted in a higher degree of politicization. Lastly, to realize which crisis’ politicization had a more significant impact on the public opinion on European integration.

This paper is divided into six parts. The first part provides an introduction to the key information regarding this quantitative analysis. The second part addresses the theoretical background of this paper, including a more

developed conceptualization of politicization, as well as an overview of the relevant theories of European integration and the relevant empirical studies conducted on this topic so far. The third part outlines the expectations of this study, followed by the description of the research design in part four. Part five contains the results of this statistical analysis, as well as their explanation. This paper concludes with part six, which includes the conclusion, limitations, contributions as well as the future recommendations.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Defining politicization**

The concept of politicization is still not set in stone, its definitions ranging from looking at the contestation of EU matters in the media, to the involvement of the public's opinion. A key shortcoming of present definitions is that there is no universally agreed upon measures and standards to establish when a matter has been politicized. Even if there is consensus over the politicization of an event or matter, for example the euro crisis, there is no uniform standard that determines how much salience and/ or contestation is needed for a matter to qualify as being politicized. In their 2015 work, Statham and Trenz specify that the EU's politicization is "linked to an increased salience of European integration within national and transnational public spheres", reinforcing the vague standards related to the concept of politicization (Statham and Trenz, 2015, p.288).

Since the 1980s it is common to look at politicization in terms of the "increasing awareness, political mobilization and polarization surrounding EU issues" (de Wilde and Zurn, 2012, p. 149). In his 2011 contribution, de Wilde argues that politicization is a much broader process covering multiple manifestations and functions compared to the generally assumed empty links between unrelated matters. He defines politicization as "an increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU" (de Wilde, 2011, p.576). In 1969, Schmitter described politicization as having four key elements. Firstly, joint decisions become more controversial. Secondly, an increase in the population actively interested in European integration. Thirdly, the redefinition of mutual objectives; and lastly, "a shift in actor expectations and loyalty toward the new regional center" (Schmitter, 1969, p. 166.). While Schmitter's definition does not explicitly include the media, this can be implied through the inclusion of the controversy element.

Schmitter's definition described above, implies that politicization has a positive effect on European integration. The debate of whether politicization is pro/ anti/ neutral towards European integration is still very much alive. The newfound interest in the matters of the EU by the public is the main trigger for politicization, the impacts of which have "has been depicted as causally related to a general decline of public support for European integration"(Statham and Trenz, 2015, p.288). Borzel and Risse, 2009, state that politicization does effect European integration to the extent that the core assumptions of major treaties begin being questioned and challenged (Borzel and Risse, 2009, p.218). While not directly stated, this effect of politicization also has an

implied negative effect. This opinion of the impacts of politicization is the silent consensus accepted by the academic world, also being supported by Hooghe and Marks (2009), de Wilde and Zurn (2012), as well as Statham and Trezn (2013).

Hooghe and Marks take politicization from being a concept thought about as self-creating or media-stipulated, to one that can be triggered by political actors in multiple ways, such as triggering referenda (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p.22). The authors also highlight that politicization is a result of party strategy, as well as public opinion. Hooghe and Marks are the scholars most adamant about the irreversibility of politicization. In other words, the authors do not see politicization as every going away (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p.22). Statham and Trezn, as well as de Wilde and Zurn agree with Hooghe and Marks, when it comes to actors utilizing political tools to achieve their aims (Wilde and Zurn, 2012; Statham and Trezn, 2013).

Based on the definitions of politicization discussed above, as well as their expectations in terms of European integration and the public's opinion on this matter, this qualitative analysis defines politicization as: "the transfer of EU policy discussion from behind the doors of the EU to the public sphere of the member states or the EU, characterized by salient and contested debates facilitated by national/ international media". This definition does not define the expected effect of politicization upon EU integration, staying neutral and choosing to be open to both positive and negative effects.

## **2.2 Theories of European integration**

### **2.21 Neofunctionalism**

In his theory of neofunctionalism, Haas deemed the power of citizens as unimportant when it comes to European integration. Following from this, Haas went even further in his exclusion of the public's impact on European integration by not factoring in public opinion; even though he was aware of the potential of Euroscepticism as a factor hindering European integration (Haas, 1958, p.18). Haas motivates his ignorance of the public and their opinion. Firstly, he brings forward the argument that the public is uninterested in European integration, and lacked the knowledge needed to comprehend the topic. Secondly, he also argues that the public's opinion of European integration does not matter, as decision makers are often protected from the public, due to the European Union's bureaucratic nature (Haas, 1958, pp. 17–18).

Unlike Haas, Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) focus on the public's opinion of European integration due to the potential for skepticism. This is due to their assumption that European policy makers will remain pro-European. Based on their analysis of public opinion data from multiple outlets between 1950 and 1960 they concluded that both the public's support of the system and its collective identity were becoming more positive. Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) established that there is a 'permissive consensus' when it comes to the public's opinion of further integration.

In his 1969 work, Schmitter acknowledges the public's opinion potential impact on the EU's integration. That being said, in 2009, Schmitter reiterated the neo-functionalist rhetoric that politicization should not have a negative impact on the public's opinion on European integration. 'What was *not* predicted was that this mobilization would threaten rather than promote the integration process. In the neo-functionalist scenario, mass publics would be aroused to protect the *acquis communautaire* against the resistance of entrenched national political elites determined to perpetuate their status as guarantors of sovereignty' (Schmitter, 2009 p.211; italics in original). What is important to note, is that in the case of politicization, neofunctionalism expects the public to protect its formed common identity, i.e. being European, rather than their national identity (Kuhn, 2019, p.1217). Therefore neofunctionalism does not create a negative relationship between politicization and the public's opinion on European integration.

In conclusion, neofunctionalism is one of the only theories of European integration that does not give credit to politicization and public opinion in terms of their negative impacts (Kuhn, 2019, p.1218). Even though skeptical of the occurrence of politicization to begin with, if it does happen, neofunctionalists would expect its impacts to be pro-European integration. Due to the main two reasons brought forward by Haas in his 1958 work, neofunctionalism does not give identity politics any merit in becoming a threat worth considering to Europe's integration.

## **2.22 Postfunctionalism**

In contrast to neofunctionalism, Postfunctionalism, proposed by Hooghe and Marks in 2009, argues that due to the politicization of European integration, the public's opinion can no longer be overlooked by EU political elites. Additionally, Hooghe and Marks (2009) also point out that the European public's dissent over European integration has become more limiting since the Maastricht Treaty. The main reason for this is the relevance that European integration now has to the daily lives of many citizens, which has thus increased the politicization and prominence of European integration issues (Kuhn, 2019, p. 1220).

Hooghe and Marks (2009) point out that one of the reasons for the impact of politicization on European integration is the EU's democratic elements which carry forward the public's opinion and integrate it into the EU's everyday life. These elements include national and regional elections, referenda, as well as the members of the EU parliament (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 8). Assuming a strong relationship between politicization and the public's opinion on the EU in general (not only on integration issues), it can be said that politicization's effect on political decisions in the EU has increased. The authors argue that this phenomenon is exemplified by the increased similarities between the interests and demands of the EU parliament and those of the Council of the EU.

Postfunctionalism does not treat identity as exclusive; this means that one person can maintain both an European and national identity in parallel, without one being harmful to the other (Kuhn, 2019, p. 1221). That being said,

Hooghe and Marks argue that while the change from a national identity to a European one is very possible, such change would take place at a significantly slower rate than that of the growth of the EU, especially from an institutional perspective. Supporting their argument of dual identity based on research from 1990 until 2009, “there is no evidence of an aggregate shift towards less exclusive national identities” (Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 12). Hooghe and Marks continue by arguing that only a change in generation when it comes to European citizens would help ease the tension between the different rates of change mentioned above.

In conclusion, postfunctionalism focuses on the limiting effect that the politicization of national identities can have on European integration. Issues of European integration and identity have become closely linked due to the increased democratization of the EU, as well as the infiltration of national sovereign issues by EU policy. Due to this increased connection between national identity and European integration, issues of integration have increased in prominence at the European level. The tension created by the created salience is only intensified by the different progress rates of a united European identity versus the much faster development of EU level institutions and policies.

### **2.23 Democratic functionalism**

Democratic functionalism has become a significant theory of European integration with the 2013 work of Statham and Trezn “How European Union Politicization can Emerge through contestation: The Constitution Case\*”. If we are to look at the two theories mentioned above as a path towards the inclusion of public opinion as an important factor of European integration, and politicization, democratic functionalism would be our final stop. In their 2015 paper, Statham and Trezn expand on their 2013 contribution by discussing the importance of the public sphere at great lengths. The public sphere approach, as the two authors address it, describes “an expanding public discourse that makes executive decisions transparent, which in turn provides important critical feedback to decisions – all carried by an independent self-steering mass media – as a necessary requirement for democracy” (Statham and Trezn, 2015, p. 290). The inclusion of the public’s influence in European integration, as well as that of the media, is a breath of fresh air when compared to other theories of European integration.

When it comes to politicization, democratic functionalism and public sphere scholars remain neutral in regards to the type of effect that it can have on European integration, i.e. whether it is positive or negative. However, Statham and Trezn do point out that politicization can contribute to democracy within the European Union (Statham and Trezn, 2015, p. 290). According to Habermas, democratic legitimacy is a result of the interaction between “institutionalized consultation and decision making processes”, as well as the informal process of public debates and opinion forming which is catalyzed through the mass media (Habermas, 2006, p. 102). Additionally, politicization is seen as a phenomenon that originates at the national level, being carried by the national media to the European level (Statham and Trezn, 2015, p. 291). That being said, “the solution does not consist in constructing a supranational public sphere, but in transnationalizing the existing national public spheres”



(Habermas, 2009, p. 183). Building on Habermas, the key idea is that having a European public sphere is not a revolutionary demand, it can easily be met by connecting the national public spheres to each other, allowing for the media to not only provide key information to their host countries, but other countries within the EU too. If this proposal were to be followed, it is very likely that politicization would also be able to transcend the national level to the European one (Statham and Trenz, 2015, p. 291).

Rise brings to light the necessity of the Europeanization of national public spheres, and politicization, for the existence of European politics (Rise, 2010, p. 232). Additionally, this change is seen as crucial for European democracy, going back to Habermas and his agreeing concepts. The public contestation of EU matters and policies is seen as an indispensable part of the democratic cycle of the EU. Democracy can be seen as having a formal side, characterized by elections, and an informal side, characterized by the electors' expression of their opinions about the decisions made by their elected officials. In the case of the EU, the formal side of democracy is limited, as elections are only carried out for the members of parliament directly at the European level, while government representatives in other EU bodies are mostly indirectly elected at the national level, e.g. ministers. Due to this limitation of formal democracy in the EU, the informal side becomes more important and significant than in a national circumstance. This is because the informal democratic processes become the main way in which electors, i.e. the European public, can express their opinion and degree of satisfaction with the EU's decisions and policies.

To conclude, democratic functionalism brings to the table what neofunctionalism and postfunctionalism chose to ignore, the importance of the public sphere (Trenz and Eder, 2004). In doing so, democratic functionalism brings itself into the relevance of today's globalized and mediatized world, by acknowledging the merits of these changes when it comes to their contribution to European democracy. Additionally, this theoretical school also gives the public sphere credit for its impact on European integration. That being said, the theory still has two main shortcomings. Firstly, the extent of politicization necessary to gather media attention and mobilize the public needs to be given dimension (Maricut-Akbik, 2018, p.394). Secondly, the relationship between contestation in the public sphere and the politicization of an issue needs to be granted a temporal element (Maricut-Akbik, 2018, p.394).

### **2.3 Past empirical studies**

In their 2012 contribution, De Wilde and Zurn point out a key flaw in the way in which EU leaders have dealt with preventing politicization when it comes to constitutional matters. Instead of taking into account the public's opinion and the debates that resulted into politicization, the EU has not put "constitutional issues on the agenda of political integration", thus choosing to avoid the issue all together. While this can be said to close an important channel for politicization, De Wilde and Zurn mention that the "exogenous crises putting the EU into the spotlight" still remain as secondary channel for politicization to occur (De Wilde and Zurn, 2012, p.150). In their

conclusion, De Wilde and Zurn express their assumption over the reoccurrence of this secondary path to politicization. The introduction of a second possible channel for the occurrence of politicization compliments the variety of mechanisms that can lead to politicization within the EU, be it under a crisis background or not, as mentioned by the other academic sections discussed in this section.

Statham and Trezn bring forward the association between Euroscepticism and politicization (Statham and Trezn, 2015, p.288). While it is impossible to say which came first, the relationship between Euroscepticism and politicization can be looked at as a never-ending continuous loop. ““Euroscepticism” can overall be broadly defined as a sentiment of disapproval towards European integration, and this classification includes both ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ Eurosceptic parties” (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016, pp.9-10). While “hard” Eurosceptic parties refer to those that totally disagree with the existence of the EU and therefore argue for their respective country’s withdrawal from the union, “soft” Eurosceptic parties are not against the integration of the EU but oppose specific projects and policies (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016, pp.10). Hobolt and De Vries conclude that being affected by the crisis of the EU result in a more likely vote for a Eurosceptic party (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016, p. 19). This finding further develops by creating an association between voting for left-wing Eurosceptic parties and having experienced economic effects of the crisis, and voting for right-wing Eurosceptic parties and being displeased with the EU (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016, p. 22). Nativism is one of the key forms of Euroscepticism, being the motto behind many of today’s popular right wing populist parties, that manage to steer the public’s concerns over a possible loss of national identity and a threat to their culture into votes for their corresponding parties (Maricut-Akbik, 2020, p.4).

In his 2016 work Rauh sets out to look at the temporal element of the politicization of European integration, when it comes to Commission policy. He concludes that the politicization of European integration is neither a constant nor an isolated short-term phenomenon (Rauh, 2016, p.23). While in general the Commission does face higher levels of politicization than in the past phases of European integration, there is no universal pattern in the occurrence of politicization. Rauh supports this by pointing out that while the Maastricht treaty caused high levels of politicization, the Lisbon Treaty was adopted rather quietly (Rauh, 2016, p.23). The all-time high spike in politicization in 2009 further proves that predicting the phenomenon is not as easy as pointing to integration policy passed by the commission. Rauh’s work offers a statistical analysis of politicization using a custom made index, which is also the basis of this paper.

In their 2016 work, Kriesi and Grande debunk the myth of politicization when it comes to the euro crisis. While being “exceptionally salient”, the debate over the crisis has not catalyzed the change from European politics to mass politics (Kriesi and Grande, 2016, p.273). The authors point out that “sovereignty conflicts associated with additional transfers of authority to the EU” are the key issues that have escalated the political conflict of the euro crisis (Kriesi and Grande, 2016, p.274). The analysis of the political debates of the euro crisis concluded that

while salient, the debates “lacked the institutional opportunity structure, the political drivers and the political explosives which produced very high levels of politicisation in other national debates” (Kriesis and Grande 2016, p.276). This is a significant conclusion as it works against the stereotypical perception that the euro crisis, as well as every crisis, cause high levels of politicization, and are therefore detrimental to European integration.

De Wilde, Leupold and Schmidtke also conclude point to the variability of politicization. They point out that the EU faces “differentiated forms, degrees and manifestations of politicisation depending on the time, setting and location in which it unfolds”. This variety extends to the people’s demands through politicization, making it virtually impossible for the EU or its member states to be able to respond. This difficulty of response is due to the ever changing demands, changing according to settings, countries and timing (De Wilde et al, 2016, p.15).

The authors point out that how much influence a member state thinks that it has on the EU’s governance establishes how likely it is for that member state to politicize additional issues, rather than just membership (De Wilde et al, 2016, p.15). Additionally, a member state “that perceives itself as powerless in EU governance is unlikely to feature politicisation save for the ultimate question of membership” (De Wilde et al, 2016, p.15). In other works, the less power a state thinks it has over EU governance, the less likely it is to employ politicization against the EU’s anti-politicization bureaucracy. The authors also link the contestation of migration and the contestation of governance, arguing that as long as it is the same actors who contest both issues, the politicization of EU will most probably last while migration remains a contested topic in the European society (De Wilde et al, 2016, p.16).

Hutter, Kriesi and Vidal adopt a qualitative most different systems design for their analysis of the political spaces of four different countries (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019, p.14). The authors conclude on four main findings. Firstly, they point out that in order to comprehend the political debates in Southern Europe, especially in the early 2010s, both political and economic issues are key (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019, p.20). Secondly, with exception to Italy, the authors find “a strong alignment of opposition to domestic austerity and calls for democratic renewal in the political spaces” (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019, p.20). Thirdly, Hutter et al highlights a key aspect of their results; there is a difference between their findings in Southern Europe and their findings in Northern Europe. This is a very important conclusion, as it directly implies that different perspectives should be applied when looking at the political spheres of countries in different regions of Europe, instead of casting a universally European shadow over all twenty-seven member states. Lastly, the authors see the potential shortcoming in their third conclusion, of differentiating between Southern and Northern Europe, the assumption that there are no differences between the countries that make up those regions (Hutter, et al, 2019, p.20). This qualitative work indicates the importance of not treating all member states as the same, when it comes to their political sphere.

Hutter and Kriesi, in their 2019 work, conclude that generally, European integration has encountered significantly more politicization during the Euro and Refugee crises. (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019, p.1012). The authors also point out that radical parties, be it radical left or radical right, are the most likely political parties to politicize European integration negatively, i.e. towards Euroscepticism (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019, p.1013). Hutter and Kriesi highlight the need for integration theorists to expand their approach when it comes to the impacts of politicization, beyond the standard approach of “‘more or less’ politicization” (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019, p.1014). This expansion refers to looking at the impacts of domestic conflicts, as well as the impacts of Euroscepticism, on European integration in the future. Due to this shortcoming of current integration theorists, the authors argue that the “conclusions about the power of politicization to explain the (different) outcomes of the recent crises have been premature”, and should therefore be revised and re-analyzed, instead of being taken for granted (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019, p. 1014).

All of the theories of European integration discussed, namely Neofunctionalism, Postfunctionalism and Democratic functionalism, have different expectations of the occurrence of politicization. Most importantly, all of the definitions differ in their prediction of the impact that the politicization of an EU crisis will have on European integration, and therefore the public’s opinion on European Integration.

Therefore, it is important for this study to compare its results with the expectations laid out by each theory and provide an updated empirical opinion on the impact that politicization has on the public’s opinion on European integration.

### **3. Theoretical Expectations**

Given this study looks at the politicization of the euro crisis and the constitutional crisis under the research question “To what extent does the politicization of the EU in the media impact public support of European integration?”, it is important to reflect on the expectations of the study based on the theoretical perspectives described above.

While the silent consensus in the academic world is that politicization has a negative effect of European integration, the theories above have mixed expectations when it comes to the effect of politicization on European integration, ranging from negative, neutral to positive. Additionally the expected effect of politicization on the public’s opinion on European integration is also unclear. This study aims to establish which of the theoretical approaches analyzed above, if any, would match the outcome of the statistical analysis carried out. Additionally, this qualitative analysis also aims to establish whether the euro crisis or the constitutional crisis was more politicized, as well as the politicization of which crisis had the biggest effect on the public’s opinion on European integration from the beginning of 2000 to the end of 2009. Therefore, this study has two main hypotheses:

H1: The more politicization occurs, the more public support of European integration declines.

H2: In comparison to the constitutional crisis, the euro crisis has had a higher degree of politicization

- a) The politicization of the euro crisis had a greater effect on the public opinion on European integration, than the politicization of the constitutional crisis.

#### **4. Research Design**

This paper addresses the relationship between politicization and the public opinion on European integration, in the context of the constitutional crisis and the euro crisis, through a quantitative analysis. The cases were chosen for three main reasons. Firstly, each crisis triggered salient public debates over European integration for different key reasons. Secondly, both crises are thought to have resulted in an increase of Euroscepticism. Lastly, both crises ‘took the EU by storm’ and resulted in changes that were previously unthinkable.

The constitutional crisis, resulting from the failed attempt of establishing a European constitution, captured the attention of the public due to its link to the sovereignty of member states (Best et al., 2005). A common European constitution would make the EU much closer to being a federation than any member state, or the European population, would like. This was clearly shown by the negative referendum results regarding the adoption of the constitutional treaty in both France and the Netherlands (Best et al., 2005). The case of the constitutional treaty crisis is a key case in the analysis between politicization and the public opinion on European integration as the treaty was abandoned after the rise of Euroscepticism resulting from its politicization.

The euro crisis is, until the refugee crisis, arguably the most politicized event in the EU’s history. However, besides its magnitude, it is a very significant point in the history of the EU. Firstly, this is due to the resultant debates about the exit of Greece not only from the eurozone, but the EU as a whole. Secondly, its economic nature has surprisingly created a new cleavage within the EU. Politicization did not take place on the traditional culture-identity rhetoric, but rather created a rhetoric of division based on austerity (Hutter et al., 2018, p.20). This divide fueled the debates between creditor and debtor countries, which have probably contributed to a long-term politicization of general European economic debates (Hutter et al., 2019, p.1001).

This analysis utilizes the politicization index created by Dr. Christian Rauh for his 2016 work. Due to the data set chosen, the values for both politicization and public opinion are available from 2000 to 2009. The constitutional crisis unraveled in 2004, thus allowing for the analysis of the potential impact of its politicization on the public opinion on European integration in the following years. The eurozone crisis unraveled in 2008. Due to the time frame of the study, from 2000 to 2009, it will not be possible to look at the long term impacts of the resultant politicization and its impact on the public opinion on European integration. However, this study will look at the short term ‘immediate’ impacts in the years of 2008 and 2009.

The independent variable of this study is the politicization of the EU in the media. This is the value for ‘contestation’ in dr. Rauh’s data set. This variable is scale in nature, ranging from a value of 0 to a value of 4.

The values used in this analysis are calculated per year, therefore averaging the values of certain months to obtain a yearly value. Please consult the Appendix for a more detailed explanation of how the yearly values were calculated.

The dependent variable of this study is the public opinion on European integration. Created into a composite value from the Eurobarometer survey, using the question of “What’s your perceived image of the EU?”. Originally being a Linkert scale, the survey data had to be converted into a composite value for each data point. In accordance with the independent variable, the dependent variable is also calculated per each year, using the average of the same months as the independent variable. The calculations done to convert the survey data can be found in the Appendix.

This research project utilizes a quantitative analysis in order to look at the significance of the relationship between politicization and the public’s opinion of the EU. Graphs of the independent and dependent variables will be used in order to be able to draw an accurate conclusion about their correlation over time, as well as the temporal development of each variable individually. While the data is divided into six countries (Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, The Netherlands and, Luxembourg), this distinction will be ignored for the statistical analysis in order to have a look at the general relationship. It is important to note that the conclusions of this analysis will not be able to be extended to a set of European regions. These are the Nordic countries, the Balkan countries, and the EU member states of East Europe.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1 Public Opinion on European integration from 2000-2009

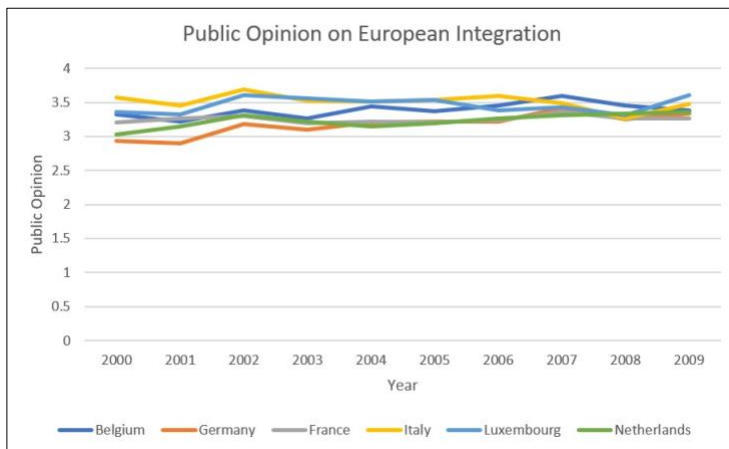


Figure 1: The Public Opinion on European Integration from 2000-2009 (scale 0-4)

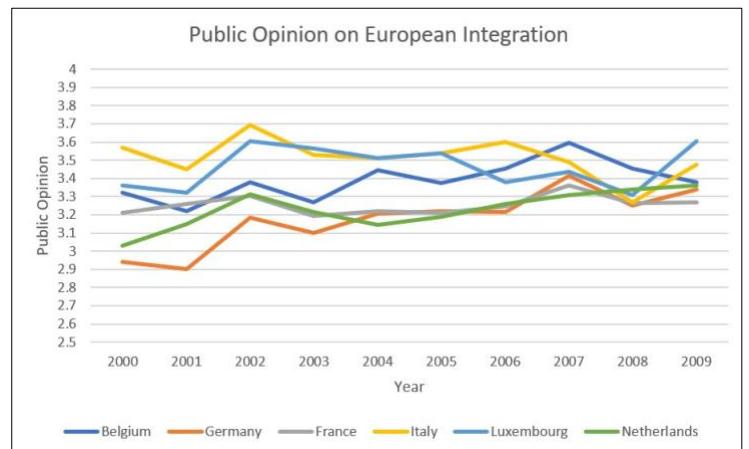


Figure 2: The Public Opinion on European Integration from 2000-2009 (scale 2.5-4)

Figure 1 illustrates the general trend of the public opinion on European integration from 2000 to 2009, on its natural scale. Figure 2 illustrates the exact same data, on a scale more appropriate for analyzing. When looking at Figure 2, four main observations can be made. Firstly, 2001 represented a year of decrease for public opinion, in all but two countries analyzed, France and the Netherlands, respectively. Secondly, all countries experienced a

higher public opinion on European integration in 2002. Thirdly, four of the six countries analyzed experience another public opinion high in 2007, besides the Netherlands and Italy. Lastly, 2008 represents a low point in the public opinion when it comes to all countries but the Netherlands.

When looking at the period of time associated with the constitution crisis, namely 2004 and 2005, the data is mixed. Public opinion remains constant for both years in Italy, Germany and France. Luxembourg exhibits a very slight improvement, while in Belgium the values rise significantly from 2003-2004 only to drop in 2005. The Netherlands exhibits a peculiar trend, with their public opinion on European integration steadily increasing from 2004 until the end of the observed period in 2009.

When looking at the period of time associated with the euro crisis, 2007-2009, the data is more uniform. All countries but the Netherlands experience a drop in values from 2007 to 2008, the most potent year for the crisis. Interestingly, all countries but two see a rise in the public opinion on European integration from 2008 to 2009. The exceptions are France, who's value stays constant, and Belgium, who's value declines further.

As a general note, the best years of the public opinion on European integration have been 2002 and 2007. In 2002, all countries saw an increase from their 2001 value. In 2007, all countries except Italy saw an improvement to their public opinion from 2006. The worse years for public opinion were 2001, 2003 and 2007. In 2001, all but two countries, The Netherlands and France, saw a decrease in their public opinion on European integration. 2003 saw all six countries analyzed decreasing their value, compared to 2002. Lastly, 2007 saw a decrease in all countries expect the Netherlands. On average, Italy had the most positive public opinion on European integration, while Germany showcased the most negative values.

## 5.2 Politicization of the EU from 2000-2009

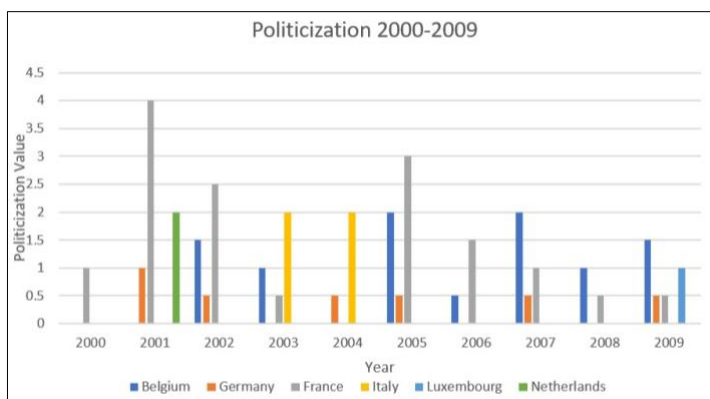


Figure 3: The Politicization of the EU from 2000-2009 (scale 0-4.5)

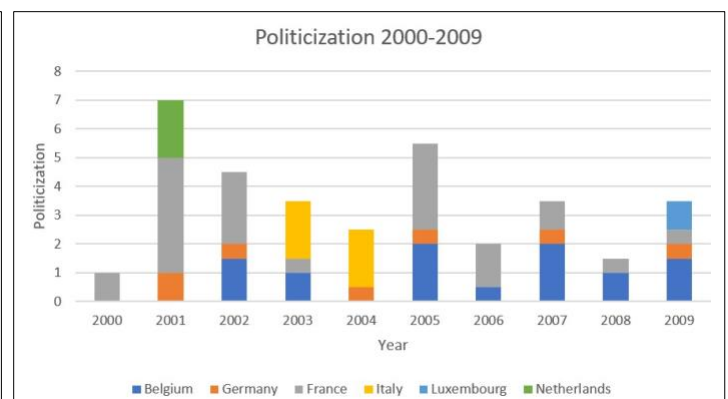


Figure 4: The Politicization of the EU from 2000-2009 (scale 0-8)

The politicization of the EU can be seen to vary in both Figures 3 and 4. Figures 3 and 4 illustrated the same data in different formats, Figure 3 showcasing the individual values of each member state analyzed per each year, while Figure 4 illustrates the total politicization of each year by aggregating all countries.

Looking at Figure 3, two countries stand out. Both France and Belgium can be seen to be the most frequently politicized to a significant extent, i.e. showing a value of over 0.5. On the other side of the spectrum Luxembourg can be seen to be the least politicized country, being featured in the graph only in 2009. The Netherlands also exhibits politicization in only on year, 2001. Italy, shows minimal politicization in general, only appearing in 2003 and 2004, but this isolated time of politicization does carry significant values. The most interesting case is Germany, showing a constant, yet minimal, politicization in six of the ten years analyzed. This can indicate that politicization is a constant feature of German politics .

In order to analyze the politicization of the constitutional crisis in 2004-2005 Figure 4 will be used. The aggregated politicization in 2005 is the second highest in the ten years studied. While the figure in 2004 is fairly low in comparison to the rest of the years, it is possible to say that the constitutional crisis did potentially result in politicization. This claim is made with some reserve as all of the mechanism of politicization are not yet fully known nor agreed upon, therefore the observed politicization could be resultant of due to another cause.

Figure 4 also allows for the analysis of the politicization in 2007-2009, the period of the euro crisis. The observed pattern are quite unexpected following the theoretical predictions and empirical findings in section 2. 2007 sees a significant rise in politicization from the 2006 value, however politicization dramatically decreases in 2008. This is followed by a rise in politicization to 2007 levels in 2009. Due to the findings mentioned, it is possible to say that the impacts of a crisis on politicization are delayed by about a year.

### 5.3 The relationship between politicization and public opinion on European integration from 2000-2009

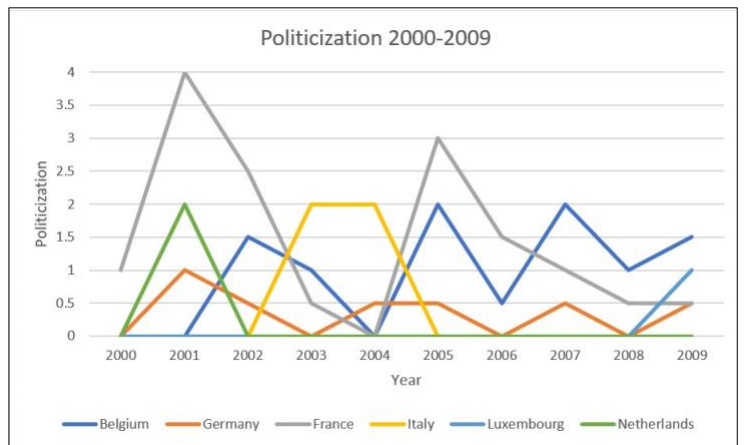
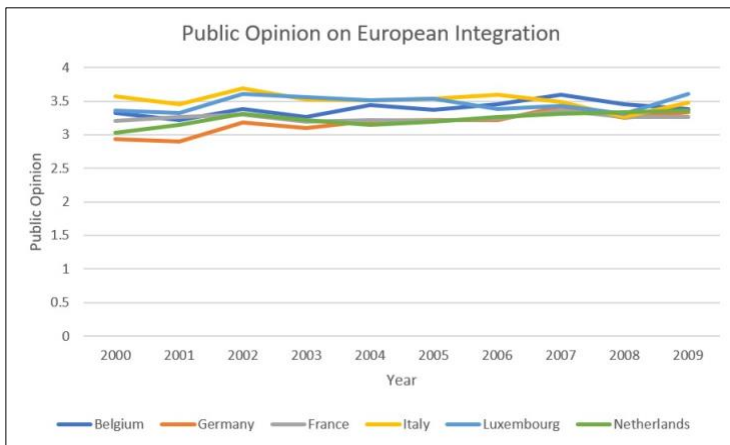


Figure 1: The Public Opinion on European Integration from 2000-2009 (scale 0-4)

Figure 5: The Politicization of the EU from 2000-2009 (scale 0-4)

The observed relationship between politicization (Figure 5) and the public opinion on European integration (Figure 1) is unexpected. Both graphs have been adjusted to have the same scale for this comparison. In 2001, public opinion plummeted while politicization rose to a sky high values. In 2002, while public opinion rose, politicization does not exhibit a clear direction. 2008 can be seen to be characterized by a decrease in both public



opinion and politicization, with both values rising in 2009. 2005, a year of high politicization, shows no direction in its public opinion.

Due to the comparisons made above it is safe to say that the relationship between public opinion on European integration is not as straight forward as assumed. Secondly, the silence consensus that supports the negative effect of politicization on public opinion is clearly not accurate, as it is only proven in 2001, but disproven in 2002, 2008, and 2005. 2008 and 2009 show a positive correlation between politicization and public opinion, both values moving in the same directions. Both 2004 and 2005 do not illustrate a correlation between the politicization of the EU and the public opinion on European integration.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **-General**

In conclusion, this quantitative analysis has showed that the relationship between politicization and public opinion on European integration is not as clear as has been expected. When looking at the hypotheses of this paper:

H1: The more politicization occurs, the more public support of European integration declines.

This hypothesis cannot be said to be proven true. While this relationship is observed in 2001, as described in Section 5.3, it is not observed in any other year analyzed. This conclusion agrees with Hutter and Kriesi, who also mention that the conclusions of the nature of politicization have been premature and require revision (Hutter and Kriesi, 2019, p. 1014).

H2: In comparison to the constitutional crisis, the euro crisis has had a higher degree of politicization

Continuing from the statement made in Section 5.2, that it is very likely for the politicization of a crisis to be delayed by about a year from its start, if this hypothesis were correct, 2005 would have a significantly lower aggregated politicization value than 2008 or 2009. However, this is not the case illustrated by the data. 2005 is the second most politicized year, after 2001. Therefore, the opposite of this hypothesis is true, i.e. the constitutional treaty has had a higher degree of politicization than the euro crisis. Kriesi and Grande also debate the actual extent of the politicization of the debates, stating that while the debates were highly salient and resulted in the increased prominence of EU politics in national arenas, they did not catalyze the change of EU politics into mass politics (Kriesi and Grande, 2016, p.273).

- a) The politicization of the euro crisis had a greater effect on the public opinion on European integration, than the politicization of the constitutional crisis.

Due to the fact that this hypothesis does not name a required direction of the effect of politicization on public opinion, i.e. whether positive or negative, it can be said to be proven true. As mentioned in section 5.3, 2008 and

2009 show a positive correlation between politicization and the public opinion on European integration, while 2004 and 2005 do not show a correlation.

This paper adds to the discussion over the mechanism of politicization, and its relationship with the public opinion on European integration. Going back to section 2, this paper agrees the most with Neofunctionalism, due to the gradual but positive trend in the public opinion on European integration regardless of politicization. The implications of this conclusion can be significant. Debunking the myth that politicization results in Euroscepticism would be motive for EU to increase its transparency and allow its elites to become more accountable to the public. This analysis would benefit from a revised politicization index in order to be able to draw conclusions about the EU as a whole, not just the six countries studied. Additionally, a statistical temporal analysis could determine the significance of any correlation between the dependent and independent variables in this study.

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## Appendix

### Politicization Data

The dataset used in this paper was obtained from Dr. Christian Rauh. He has measured the levels of contestation of EU matters in the media of six countries. For more information, or access to the data set, please contact Dr. Rauh. The data politicization used can be found below.

Year	Belgium	Germany	France	Italy	Luxembourg	Netherlands
2000	0	0	1	0	0	0
2001	0	1	4	0	0	2
2002	1.5	0.5	2.5	0	0	0
2003	1	0	0.5	2	0	0
2004	0	0.5	0	2	0	0
2005	2	0.5	3	0	0	0
2006	0.5	0	1.5	0	0	0
2007	2	0.5	1	0	0	0
2008	1	0	0.5	0	0	0
2009	1.5	0.5	0.5	0	1	0

### Public Opinion Data

Using the public opinion survey from the European Commission, the values of public opinion below were obtained. For any questions on how these values were calculated, please contact the author of this paper.

year	Belgium	Germany	France	Italy	Luxembourg	Netherlands
2000	3.32	2.94	3.21	3.57	3.36	3.03
2001	3.22	2.9	3.26	3.45	3.32	3.15
2002	3.38	3.185	3.305	3.695	3.605	3.315
2003	3.27	3.1	3.195	3.53	3.565	3.215
2004	3.445	3.205	3.22	3.51	3.51	3.145
2005	3.375	3.22	3.21	3.54	3.54	3.19
2006	3.455	3.215	3.245	3.6	3.38	3.26
2007	3.595	3.415	3.36	3.49	3.435	3.31
2008	3.455	3.252	3.265	3.27	3.31	3.34
2009	3.38	3.34	3.27	3.475	3.605	3.36

All of the graphs included in this paper were made using this data.