



Contesting the EU Budget and Euroscepticism *A Spiral of Dissent?*

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Abstract

The current Eurosceptic political climate in the European Union, known as the 'constraining dissensus', may place negotiations on the multiannual EU budget center-stage. If media portray political conflict about the budget as international polarization pitting Member States against each other or against European Union (EU) institutions, it may increase Euroscepticism as such polarization resonates with exclusive national identity perceptions. If the budget is polarized transnationally, emphasizing conflict within Member States, it may alleviate the constraining dissensus as it negates exclusive national identity while strengthening cross-cutting cleavages. This study tests hypotheses about patterns and trends in politicization of the EU budget in three budgets (Delors II, Agenda 2000, Financial Perspectives 2007-2013), three countries (the Netherlands, Denmark and Ireland) and two forums (media and national parliaments) using claims-making analysis and controlled multivariate comparisons. It finds predominant international polarization with no clear trend over time and no clear difference between countries. It therefore seems likely that politicization of the EU budget reinforces the constraining dissensus, rather than loosening it. However, the more politicized budget debates become, the less likely they will stimulate Euroscepticism as the dominance of international polarization decreases.

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Introduction

Imagine, having finally managed to ratify the Treaty of Lisbon after the long and difficult Laeken process and the fiasco of the Constitutional Treaty, European Union (EU) Member States decide not to engage in formal Treaty revision for the foreseeable future. Imagine further that, given clear hostility among many EU citizens, there will be no major enlargements in the foreseeable future either. Relatively uncontroversial countries like Croatia and Iceland may join, but significant enlargements – with Turkey or the Ukraine for example – are put off until further notice. In such a scenario, the main high profile political event in European integration in the next twenty five years or so may be the negotiations over the EU's multiannual budget. "Budget, budget, budget" – to paraphrase Aaron Wildavsky (2001: xxxiii) – "may be all the EU can do unless and until we Europeans once again agree on what kind of society and which sort of government we want". Even in periods when the EU does engage in Treaty revision and enlargement – like the past twenty five years – the European Council meetings in which decisions are made on the EU budget are high profile political events, with strong resonance in mass media (Galloway 1999; Laffan 2000; Lindner 2006). As such, negotiations on the EU budget have had, and may continue to have, profound impact on public opinion on European integration.

This study asks the question of how politicization of the EU budget – i.e. intensity of debate, polarization of opinion and public resonance (De Wilde 2007) – may affect Euroscepticism among EU citizens and thus influence the 'constraining dissensus' (Hooghe and Marks 2009) that currently arguably characterizes the political climate of the EU. In other words, how does the way and extent to which the EU budget is contested in public affect citizens' attitudes towards European integration and, thereby, the freedom political elites enjoy to decide on further steps in European integration? This study theorizes a relationship between politicization of the EU budget and Euroscepticism based on how the budget is *framed* in the public sphere and empirically tests three hypotheses about patterns and trends in this politicization.

Firstly, this paper conceptualizes two different forms polarization of the EU budget – part of more general politicization – may take, each with a different impact on Euroscepticism. On the one hand, polarization could be *international* when Member States are portrayed as pitted against each other or against supranational institutions, notably the European Commission and the European Parliament. On the other hand, polarization could feature *transnational* conflict in which political parties or other domestic groups are pitted against each other based on ideological cleavages, government vs.

opposition dynamics, sectoral interests or regional cleavages. Whereas international polarization is likely to stimulate Euroscepticism as it resonates with exclusive national identity perceptions, transnational polarization is likely to alleviate Euroscepticism as it strengthens cross-cutting cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), creating a more complex image of politics in the EU and exposing national publics to a wider variety of arguments.

Secondly, this study tests three hypotheses about patterns and trends in polarization of the most recent three EU budgets – Delors II, Agenda 2000 and Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 – in newspapers and national parliamentary debates in the Netherlands, Denmark and Ireland. With a controlled comparison over time, this article tests whether polarization has become more international over time, which one might expect given increasing diversity between Member States as a result of enlargement. A controlled comparison across countries functions to test whether polarization in net-contributor countries and net-recipient countries is more international than in countries paying as much as they receive. Finally, a comparison of media coverage with parliamentary debates highlights possible media effects in transmitting budget negotiations to the public, where we test if the framing of international polarization is stronger in media than in parliamentary debates.

Politicization of the EU Budget and the Constraining Dissensus

How does politicization of the EU budget affect Euroscepticism and, thereby, the constraining dissensus? Underlying this question is the assumption that the EU is currently in a ‘constraining dissensus’, meaning that rising importance of Euroscepticism has created public ‘dissensus’ about the merits of European integration resulting in a ‘constraint’ on political elites to take further steps in the integration process (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 8-9). This section sets out first to define and conceptualize politicization in the context of the EU budget, arguing that the budget potentially has a wide range of conflicts that could be portrayed in public debates. With increasing intensity of debate, polarization of opinion and public resonance, such dormant conflicts become *politicized*. Politicization of the EU budget may take different forms of polarization of opinion: one emphasizing international dimensions of conflict, and another emphasizing transnational conflict. These two different forms of polarization are causally linked to Euroscepticism with opposite effects, due to their different interaction with dynamics of the public sphere and national identity perceptions.

The multiannual EU budget potentially holds a large variety of political conflicts. It is a large package deal combining all revenues and expenditures of

the EU and the negotiations on this package deal includes many political actors within the EU polity. Firstly, since financial contributions are largely based on Member State GDP and revenues may also be counted at country level, there is potential conflict between net-contributors – countries which pay more to the EU than they receive – and net-recipients. Secondly, there may be conflict between those advocating a larger redistributive role for the EU for the sake of safeguarding solidarity and those advocating a free market polity only. Thirdly, since a large part of the budget is still spent on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), conflict may erupt between farmers and consumers, between countries with large agricultural sectors and more industrialized countries, or between different agricultural subsectors. Fourthly, the potential revenues and costs of the Structural Funds could pit poorer subnational regions against richer ones. There is thus a possibility for a variety of intergovernmental conflicts, partisan conflicts, sectoral conflicts and centre-periphery conflicts. Whether these potential conflicts become salient and the extent to which they interact with Euroscepticism, depends on whether they are actively politicized by political actors in the media.

Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue that ‘politicization’ is the key mechanism turning the political climate of the European Union from a permissive consensus to a constraining dissensus. If politicization has been the key mechanism in creating the constraining dissensus on which the opening scenario of this paper builds, then politicization – or *depoliticization* – of the EU budget may also function to solidify, exacerbate, or loosen the constraining dissensus. It is therefore important to theorize how politicization of the EU budget may interact with Euroscepticism.

The concept of ‘politicization’ has been used in EU studies in different contexts. Like any word ending in *-tion*, it refers to both a process and a product. It is here defined as *an increase in polarization of opinion, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the European Union* (cf. De Wilde 2007: 20). Defining politicization as an issue-related process points to the necessity of locating changes in political contestation in time and space. In other words, the *process* of politicization may lead to different *products* of politicized debates located in time and space, depending on different constellations of shaping factors and contingencies. Rather than speaking of the general politicization of the European Union, we are therefore interested in developments of politicization and depoliticization in ‘episodes of contention’ (Imig and Tarrow 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2007) surrounding specific issues in specific times and places with a bearing on the more general process of European integration and the nature of the EU polity.

Defined in such a way, the concept of politicization provides us with the analytical tools to study contestation surrounding policy-formulation processes on the multiannual EU budget as taking the form of either international or transnational polarization. On the one hand, politicization of the EU budget may be characterized by international conflict, when polarization of opinion takes place *between* Member States or pits supranational institutions – i.e. European Commission and the European Parliament – against Member States. On the other hand, when polarization of opinion takes the shape of partisan, sectoral, or regional coalitions, politicization of the EU budget takes the form of transnational conflict – or conflict *within* Member States – as opposing groups cross-cut national boundaries. These two analytically distinct forms of polarization are relevant to the constraining dissensus, as they interact with Euroscepticism in different ways.

International polarization resonates positively with Euroscepticism, because it triggers and amplifies the relevance of one of Euroscepticism's main causal factors: exclusive national identity perceptions. In today's mediatized democracies, mass media may not determine what people think, but they do structure which issues people think about and in what terms – or frames – people think about these issues (De Vreese 2007; De Vreese and Kandyla 2009; Gamson 2004; McCombs and Shaw 1972; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Through framing the conflict in different ways, media may present citizens with different 'in-groups' (to which they belong) and 'out-groups' (to which they do not belong), thus stimulating self-identification by contrasting the opinions, values or interests of the in-group to those of the out-group (Bruter 2009; Siapera 2004; Smith 1992; Tajfel 1974; Tajfel and Turner 2004). If the in-group is framed to be the nation and other nations are framed as out-groups, national identity perceptions are evoked and reproduced in an exclusive way. In other words, national identity is presented as the foundation of a common national interest and it is contrasted to the interests of other nationalities in a zero-sum game where the final policy outcome will be either good for 'us', or for 'them'. Thanks to extensive previous research, we know that citizens who characterize themselves as belonging to their nation only and contrast this to feeling 'European' – e.g. with an exclusive national identity – are more inclined to oppose European integration (Carey 2002; Haesly 2001; Hooghe and Marks 2005; 2007; McLaren 2007). If, on the other hand, the in-group is framed to be within the nation with possible allies in other nations and the out-group is also composed of people in multiple nations, exclusive national identity perceptions may be dampened or negated.

The public sphere(s) in the EU – dominated by mass media – are highly fragmented based on nationality. That is to say, citizens of any particular

Member State predominantly rely on national mass media in their own Member State for political communication. Language is a strong factor here, but mass media are also organized on a national basis with very few European wide media (Semetko et al. 2001). Since media cater to national publics, reporting is of a strongly national character. That is to say, editors publish stories with a national dimension of interest and arguments made by national political actors receive much more coverage than arguments made by foreigners (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Koopmans 2007; Koopmans and Erbe 2004). As a result of national public spheres, international polarization exposes citizens to one side of the story only. National actors will defend a 'common national interest' together, which is presented as diametrically opposed to the opinions, interests or values of other Member States or supranational institutions. Those foreign interests will receive little coverage and sympathy, since they do not have national actors defending them. Assumedly, one-sided media coverage in the case of international polarization will strengthen Euroscepticism among citizens as those who already have an exclusive national identity perception will be reinforced in their convictions that such an exclusive identity is both appropriate and relevant to actual EU policy-formulation and those without exclusive national identity perceptions may be inclined to shift their perspective. On the other hand, transnational politicization will result in a more plural debate in the media as national political actors defend opposing policy preferences in potential coalition with actors in other Member States. Citizens are exposed to both (or multiple) sides of the story, thus negating both the relevance of national identity as a guiding principle for EU policy-formulation and the exclusiveness of interests attached to national identity. In effect, transnational polarization results in cross-cutting cleavages as citizens identify with other citizens in their own Member State based on national identity and with citizens in other Member States based on the relevant opinions, interests or values articulated through politicization (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Transnational polarization may therefore be expected to dampen, or even reduce, Euroscepticism.

A Comparative Research Design

In order to analyze different forms of politicization of the EU budget, this study takes a comparative approach. This section will develop three hypotheses about patterns and trends in polarization of the EU budget based on existing literature. A comparison across time, space and forums allows for testing these respective hypotheses, controlling for developments in the EU and its budget, national particularities, and institutional incentives. To facilitate this comparison, this study uses claims-making analysis, which is specifically aimed at capturing dimensions and dynamics of political conflict

in different contexts by means of rigorous qualitative content analysis of both media and parliamentary documents.

Since 1988, the EU adopts multiannual budgets – known as ‘Financial Perspectives’ – covering first five, and later seven, years periods. Consecutively, the four Financial Perspectives to date are known as ‘Delors I’ (1988-1992), ‘Delors II’ (1993-1999), ‘Agenda 2000’ (2000-2006) and ‘Financial Perspectives 2007-2013’ (FP07-13) (2007-2013). In the current system, the European Commission has sole right of initiative to present an encompassing package deal incorporating all revenues and expenditures of the EU. After negotiations on sections of the proposal in different settings of the Council of Ministers, EU Heads of State and Government adopt a unanimous position in the European Council, based on the principle that ‘nothing is agreed until everything is agreed’. Following this intergovernmental procedure, the budget is then renegotiated between the Council, Parliament and Commission leading to an ‘Inter Institutional Agreement’ (IIA). This IIA holds detailed expenditure ceilings and commitments for the multi-year period allowing only for marginal adaptations in annual budget reviews. If the EU should fail to adopt new Financial Perspectives in time, the old budget deal is extrapolated until the new budget is agreed upon. As a result of the many veto-players and the old budget as fall-back position, it is not surprising to find that consecutive Financial Perspectives feature only incremental changes (Daugbjerg 2009; Laffan 1997). Still, in the long run, clear changes can be recognized. Most notably, the Common Agricultural Policy has been reduced from taking over 70% of EU expenditure in the early 1970s to little over 40% in FP07-13 (Begg 2005: 33).

Thus, it is important to compare politicization of the EU budget over time. Particularly, income disparities between Member States have increased as a result of enlargement, facilitating international polarization. On the other hand, the budget itself has become more diverse as new expenditure posts have been added to already existing ones. Next to expenditure posts on agriculture and regional policy, there are now EU funds for research and development, transport and energy, environment and nature, culture, and the EU’s ‘external dimension’. As this creates new and plural subnational recipients of EU funds, we would expect more transnational polarization. However, since enlargement arguably presents the most fundamental change in the EU with respect to the budget, and new expenditure posts are still limited in size, we hypothesize the effects of diversification of the EU as follows:

HYPOTHESIS 1: Budget negotiations are increasingly framed as international conflict over time since enlargement has created greater wealth diversity among Member States between 1992 and 2005.

To test this hypothesis, this study incorporates the last three negotiated Financial Perspectives – Delors II, Agenda 2000 and FP07-13 – in a comparison over time. It studies public debates surrounding the negotiations from the beginning of the month in which the Commission presented its proposal to the end of the month in which the European Council adopted a common position. It thus studies the following periods: 1 February 1992 – 31 December 1992, 1 July 1997 – 31 March 1999 and 1 February 2004 – 31 December 2005.

Past research has focused on intergovernmental conflict between net-contributors and net-recipients. Particularly in focus have been the United Kingdom's battle for the British Rebate, with Margaret Thatcher's well known proclamation of 'I want my money back' in 1984 (Laffan 1997). A less forceful but similar argument for a reduction in net-contributions was made by German governments in the 1990s (Laffan 2000; Lindner 2006). On the other hand, net-recipient countries led by Spain have argued forcefully for increased Structural Funds and against reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (Begg 2005; Laffan 2000). In the twelve countries that were Member States in the entire research period of 1992 – 2005, three groups may be discerned: net-contributors (Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom), net-recipients (Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain) and countries paying more or less as much as they receive (Belgium, Denmark, France and Italy). Based on existing literature, one may assume that transnational politicization arises when different national constituencies have different interests in the EU budget. Thus, in countries where some receive substantial amounts of money from the EU, and others pay, the potential for transnational polarization is largest. Alternatively, in countries where most constituencies either pay or receive, one would expect more international polarization as the collective national interest is clearer. This leads to hypothesis 2:

HYPOTHESIS 2: Polarization of the EU budget in net-contributor and net-recipient Member States is predominantly international, whereas polarization of the EU budget in countries which pay as much as they receive is predominantly transnational.

This study therefore focuses on three Member States – the Netherlands, Ireland and Denmark – to cover each of the three groups. In taking three small Member States, comparability is maximized as neither one of these countries could dictate the negotiations in a way bigger Member States could, and all

three countries represent relatively homogenous, unitary states with multiparty systems and parliamentary democracy (Lijphart 1999).

Finally, this study takes account of different institutional structures that may affect the politicization of the EU budget in different public spheres. In particular, it studies differences between politicization in newspapers and in plenary debates in national parliaments. As already briefly mentioned, the logic of news value stimulates mass media to report on political news favoring a national dimension (Galtung and Ruge 1965). Furthermore, to the extent that media cover EU affairs, they are particularly geared towards European Council meetings and the intergovernmental conflict taking place there (Koopmans and Erbe 2004). To isolate these effects, politicization of the budget in this institutional setting is compared to plenary debates taking place in national parliaments of the Netherlands (Tweede Kamer), Ireland (Dáil Éireann) and Denmark (Folketinget). Parliaments are arguably ideal settings for transnational polarization, as parliaments are the primary arena for political conflict between domestic political parties (King 1976). Additionally, countries with some form of regional representation through electoral districts, like Ireland and to a lesser extent Denmark, may stimulate regional conflicts within Parliament. We thus hypothesize a bias in media towards international polarization and a bias in parliaments towards transnational polarization.

HYPOTHESIS 3: As a result of institutional incentives, polarization in mass media is predominantly international, whereas polarization in national parliaments is predominantly transnational.

To summarize then, this study presents a 3 (budgets) x 3 (countries) x 2 (forums) comparative research design (Yin 2003) in order to establish both patterns and trends in a series of controlled comparisons.

Data and Method

Such a comparison across time, space and forums to test the three mentioned hypotheses requires a structured methodology capable of measuring different forms of politicization in different contexts while upholding methodological rigor and comparability. To ensure this, this study uses claims-making analysis (Koopmans 2002; Koopmans and Statham 1999) as a specific form of qualitative content analysis. Claims-making analysis is very suitable for measuring politicization in diverging contexts as it takes a very small unit – a ‘claim’ – as unit of analysis and measures relevant variables at that level, allowing for both aggregation towards the level of budget, country and forum.

A claim is defined as a unit of strategic or communicative action in the public sphere: '*... which articulate[s] political demands, decisions, implementations, calls to action, proposals, criticisms, or physical attacks, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors in a policy field*' (Statham 2005: 12). The archetypical claim would be a verbal speech act concerning some political good that could be loosely translated as: "I (do not) want ...". However, the definition above is far more inclusive, including claims such as meetings of the European Council, protests by farmers, resolutions tabled by parliaments and critical comments by journalists. In textual terms, a claim can be as short as a few words, or as elaborate as several paragraphs, as long as it is made by the same claimant(s), making a single argument on a single topic related to the EU budget.

A sample of newspaper articles and parliamentary debates was coded using ATLAS.ti software, which were consequently exported to SPSS for quantitative analysis. The newspapers included in the sampling are *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw* and *Algemeen Dagblad* for the Netherlands, *Berlingske Tidene*, *Politikken* and *B.T.* for Denmark, and *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* for Ireland. This study thus incorporates both quality and sensation-oriented newspapers of different political signature in all three countries. As differences between quality and sensation outlets are larger than between different media – e.g. TV and newspapers – this sample arguably forms a representative sample of national media (Semetko et al. 2001). Newspaper articles and plenary debates were sampled from digitalized archives using the search string: "European budget" OR "EC / EU budget" OR "Delors II / Agenda 2000 / financial perspectives", with the exception of plenary debates from 1992 in the Netherlands and Denmark, which were manually selected from the physical archives of the *Tweede Kamer* and *Folketinget*. For the Netherlands and Denmark, every fourth newspaper article in chronological order and all plenary debates were selected for coding thus providing a very encompassing sample. Sampling for Ireland was twice as restrictive to cope with a larger amount of data. In total, 462 newspaper articles and 133 parliamentary debates were coded, resulting in 4435 claims.¹

Coded variables of claims include WHERE and WHEN, WHO makes a claim, on WHAT, HOW, addressing WHOM, for/against WHOSE interests and WHY. The 'why' variable here refers to how the EU budget is 'framed'. In other words, how claimants organize '*... an apparently diverse array of symbols, images and arguments, linking them through an underlying organizing idea that*

¹ The codebook, the heuristic ATLAS.ti files and the SPSS database can be obtained from the author upon request.

suggests what is at stake on the issue' (Gamson 2004: 245). It is particularly through such framing that politicization may affect the constraining dissensus, as claims framing the policy-formulation process on the EU budget cue citizens in different ways on how to think of this particular process, and the EU polity and integration project by proxy (De Vreese 2007; De Vreese and Kandyla 2009). During the coding process, possible ways of framing the EU budget negotiations were inductively construed, resulting in multiple forms of both international and transnational polarizations of opinion as well as other forms of framing. For the purpose of the analysis, international and transnational polarizations of opinion are aggregated into two groups, while other or missing frames are ignored.

The aim of this study is comparative, rather than explanatory. Thus, instead of understanding countries, budgets and forums as proxies for 'independent variables' explaining polarization of the EU budget, this study restrains itself to mapping patterns and trends. The findings will therefore be presented in three controlled comparisons reporting chi-square measures of association, rather than in a single binary logistic regression analysis. There will thus be first a comparison across time, followed by comparisons across countries and forums respectively. Each of the comparisons will be conducted as a multivariate, controlled association analysis in the form of a crosstabulation of unweighted claims. These quantitative findings will be further illustrated with qualitative findings from the process-tracing coding exercise, thus providing triangulation in the form of a 'hierarchical' mixed-method research design (Read and Marsh 2002).

A Comparison across Budgets

Recall that we expect diverging trends over time, due to the diversification of the EU itself and the EU budget. On the one hand, increasing wealth differences between Member States will create both more net-contributors and more net-recipients with increasing distance between them, thus stimulating international polarization. On the other hand, the diversification of the EU budget may increase the potential for transnational polarization as there will likely be interested constituencies in all Member States. However, we hypothesize increasing international polarization over time, as the impact of enlargement is deemed more substantial than that of budget diversification. Table 1 provides a crosstabulation of budgets and polarization controlling for countries, and Table 2 provides a crosstabulation of budgets and polarization controlling for forum. The cell numbers represent unweighted amounts of claims.

The results displayed in Table 1 are very mixed. In the Netherlands, there is no significant association between the budget and polarization ($\chi^2(2, N = 621) = .151, p < .927$). In Denmark, there is a significant association as the budget has become relatively more transnational over time ($\chi^2(2, N = 488) = 20.127, p < .000$). Ireland shows the exact opposite trend, with polarization becoming relatively more international over time ($\chi^2(2, N = 752) = 32.201, p < .000$).

Table 1: Crosstabulation of Budget and Polarization, Controlling for Countries

			Budget			
			Delors II (1992)	Agenda 2000 (1997-9)	Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 (2004-5)	Total
the Netherlands	Polarization	International	42	187	247	476
		Transnational	14	58	73	145
		Total	56	245	320	621
Denmark	Polarization	International	39	159	137	335
		Transnational	6	53	94	153
		Total	45	212	231	488
Ireland	Polarization	International	92	229	147	468
		Transnational	56	189	39	284
		Total	148	418	186	752

There is clearly no overall trend. As a result, there is no evidence to support hypothesis 1. Rather, the data may be an indication that the two different ways of diversification act to counter each other's effect. In general, we can conclude that all budget debates – in all three countries on all three budgets – display a plurality of international polarization over transnational polarization. The ratio between international and transnational polarization ranges from 1.5:1 in Denmark on FP 07-13, to 6.5:1 in Denmark on Delors II.

Table 2: Crosstabulation of Budget and Polarization, Controlling for Forum

			Budget			
			Delors II (1992)	Agenda 2000 (1997-9)	Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 (2004-5)	Total
Media	Polarization	International	93	377	364	834
		Transnational	5	114	75	194
		Total	98	491	439	1028
Parliament	Polarization	International	80	198	167	445
		Transnational	71	186	131	388
		Total	151	384	298	833

When analyzing the association between budget and polarization controlling for forum, we find a clear significant association in the media. Although all

three budgets are framed predominantly as international polarization, this dominance is significantly less in Agenda 2000 compared to FP07-13 and even more so compared to Delors II ($\chi^2(2, N = 1028) = 19.110, p < .000$). Interestingly, Agenda 2000 was also clearly the most intensely debated budget with a total of 491 claims including either international or transnational framing in the media, compared to 439 claims during FP 07-13 and only 98 in Delors II. Thus, as far as debates in the media are concerned, increasing politicization in general correlates with a more equal balance between international and transnational polarization. On the other hand, parliamentary debates appear to feature a more stable balance between international and transnational polarization, with no significant association between the consecutive budgets and polarization ($\chi^2(2, N = 833) = 1.366, p < .505$).

A Comparison across Countries

Recalling hypothesis 2, we would expect more international polarization in the Netherlands and Ireland than in Denmark, since the first two countries have a clearer economic collective national interest concerning the EU budget.

Table 3: Crosstabulation of Country and Polarization, controlling for Budget

Budget			Country			
			the Netherlands	Denmark	Ireland	Total
Delors II (1992)	Polarization	International	42	39	92	173
		Transnational	14	6	56	76
		Total	56	45	148	249
Agenda 2000 (1997-9)	Polarization	International	187	159	229	575
		Transnational	58	53	189	300
		Total	245	212	418	875
Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 (2004-5)	Polarization	International	247	137	147	531
		Transnational	73	94	39	206
		Total	320	231	186	737

During all three budget negotiations, there is a significant association between the countries the debate took place in, and the polarization of the debate: Delors II ($\chi^2(2, N = 249) = 10.810, p < .004$); Agenda 2000 ($\chi^2(2, N = 875) = 42.522, p < .000$); FP 07-13 ($\chi^2(2, N = 737) = 27.322, p < .000$). However, this pattern does not provide evidence to support hypothesis 2. If anything, it provides mixed evidence contradicting hypothesis 2. The debate in Denmark on Delors II - where there was clearly the lowest intensity of debate and low national economic interest in terms of net-contribution - the framing was most skewed towards international polarization with a ratio of 6.5:1. On the other

hand, high intensity debates with strong national economic interests featured more equal balance between the two forms of polarization, such as in Ireland on Delors II and Agenda 2000 and in the Netherlands on Agenda 2000 and FP07-13. Still, international polarization remains more prominent than transnational polarization throughout all debates. Rather than providing evidence for hypothesis 2, the findings presented here suggest that the balance between international and transnational polarization may correlate with the intensity of debate. The higher the intensity of debate, the more equal the balance between international and transnational polarization.

Table 4: Crosstabulation of Country and Polarization, controlling for Forum

Forum			Country			
			the Netherlands	Denmark	Ireland	Total
Media	Polarization	International	271	296	267	834
		Transnational	55	52	87	194
		Total	326	348	354	1028
Parliament	Polarization	International	205	39	201	445
		Transnational	90	101	197	388
		Total	295	140	398	833

Country differences in polarization become clearer when we control for the forum in which the debate takes place, i.e. media or parliament. The association between country and polarization in the media is significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 1028) = 11.886, p < .003$), with the Irish media framing the budget less in terms of international polarization than the Dutch and Danish media. This is largely the result of a relatively well organized Irish agricultural sector and the vocal defense of its interests by the IFA (Irish Farmers Association) in public (e.g. MacConnell 1998). However, taking a look at table 4, the ratio of international polarization to transnational polarization does not show a clear difference across the countries. Looking at the parliamentary debates, however, provides a strikingly different picture. Whereas the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* features more than twice as many claims framing the budget as international conflict than claims framing the budget as transnational conflict, the Danish *Folketinget* features a rare - and strong - plurality of transnational polarization, while the Irish *Dáil Éireann* features a balance between the two ways of framing. Association between country and polarization in parliament is clearly significant ($\chi^2(2, N = 833) = 68.749, p < .000$).

Thus, increasing politicization in terms of intensity of debate tends to coincide with a plurality of dimensions of conflict. Substantially, this means that debates about the EU budget that are relatively depoliticized, tend to frame the budget negotiations as a conflict between *other* Member States, with one's own Member State hardly affected. The debate in Denmark and the

Netherlands during the negotiations on Delors II focused on conflict between the UK and Germany on the one hand, and Mediterranean Member States and the European Commission on the other hand, with minor attention for the preferences of the Danish and Dutch governments (e.g. Brummelman 1992; Nielsen 1992; Tweede Kamer 1992). Once domestic interests are more prominently advanced publicly by political actors, and politicization therefore increases, these interests tend to be both contrasted to other domestic interests and to foreign interests independent of whether the country in which the debate takes place is a net-contributor, net-recipient or pays as much as it receives. Rather than reinforcing dominant patterns of polarization, increasing politicization balances dominant international polarization with increasing transnational polarization, creating a more plural image of political contestation and interests at stake.

Hypothesis 2 is, however, supported by the data in parliamentary debates. The Dutch *Tweede Kamer* features more international polarization, reflecting its position as a net-contributor. Reversely, the Danish *Folketinget* features more transnational debate, reflecting its balanced position in terms of contributions. The fact that the Irish debate in *Dáil Éireann* features a balance between international and transnational polarization may on the one hand be explained by Ireland's status as a large net-recipient, giving it the clear 'national interest' to keep receiving as much money as possible. On the other hand, its large agricultural sector provides incentives for transnational polarization between farmers and consumers and between agriculture-dependent regions and more industrialized regions within Ireland. Furthermore, the Irish electoral system creates incentives for Members of Parliament to represent their local constituency - fostering subnational regional conflict - as opposed to the single district proportional representation of the Netherlands. The strategy by the Fianna Fail dominated government to get as much money from Brussels as possible was highly criticized by the Fine Gael party in opposition as a despicable 'begging bowl' policy where other Member States would see Ireland merely as a beggar holding out her hand for more funds (*Dáil Éireann* 1992a; 1992b; 1998). The discussion on the begging bowl policy between Fianna Fail and Fine Gael is a very good example of how international and transnational polarization may reinforce each other, rather than crowd each other out, in a process of politicization. The debate was as much about defending 'the national interest' vis-à-vis other Member States and the European Commission, as it was about domestic party politics on what kind of policy and strategy to follow and who could represent the Irish interests best.

A Comparison across Forums

Tables 5 and 6 provide crosstabulations to test the third and final hypothesis. Recall that we hypothesized debates in the media to feature more international polarization due to its nation-based organization and news value criteria. Parliaments, on the other hand, are the primary arena for domestic party contestation and are therefore expected to feature transnational polarization predominantly. The crosstabulation in table 5 shows a clear association between the forum and the polarization advanced in framing, irrespective of the budget in question: Delors II ($\chi^2(2, N = 249) = 49.243, p < .000$); Agenda 2000 ($\chi^2(2, N = 875) = 60.829, p < .000$); FP 07-13 ($\chi^2(2, N = 737) = 63.665, p < .000$).

Table 5: Crosstabulation between Forum and Polarization, controlling for Budget

Budget			Forum		
			Media	Parliament	Total
Delors II (1992)	Polarization	International	93	80	173
		Transnational	5	71	76
		Total	98	151	249
Agenda 2000 (1997-9)	Polarization	International	377	198	575
		Transnational	114	186	300
		Total	491	384	875
Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 (2004-5)	Polarization	International	364	167	531
		Transnational	75	131	206
		Total	439	298	737

Table 6: Crosstabulation of Forum and Polarization, controlling for Country

Country			Forum		
			Media	Parliament	Total
the Netherlands	Polarization	International	271	205	476
		Transnational	55	90	145
		Total	326	295	621
Denmark	Polarization	International	296	39	335
		Transnational	52	101	153
		Total	348	140	488
Ireland	Polarization	International	267	201	468
		Transnational	87	197	284
		Total	354	398	752

Supporting hypothesis 3, polarization framing in the media is much more international than transnational in all three budget debates. This is further confirmed when we control for countries, as displayed in Table 6. Again, the media in all three countries show a significant bias towards international

polarization in comparison to parliamentary debates: the Netherlands ($\chi^2(2, N = 621) = 16.092, p < .000$); Denmark ($\chi^2(2, N = 488) = 1.518E2, p < .000$); Ireland ($\chi^2(2, N = 752) = 49.508, p < .000$).

Thus, media across Member States do not vary much in their ways of framing EU budget debates. Parliaments, on the other hand, differ strongly from each other. A difference in scrutiny mechanisms may account for the observed relationship. As shown by De Wilde (2009), it matters which phase of the policy-formulation process and media coverage cycle parliamentary scrutiny mechanisms are linked into. Whereas the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* has ex post debates following European Council meetings – and is thus linked into a strongly intergovernmental phase in the policy-formulation process when media attention is high – the Danish *Folketing* has ex ante control mechanisms, with debate taking place in the early, more exploratory, phases of policy-formulation when there is low media coverage. Irish plenary discussions took place throughout the policy-formulation process. Parliamentary debates coinciding with high profile European Council meetings and accompanying media coverage with international framing, have more international polarization in their debates than parliaments holding debates decoupled from both European Council meetings and media coverage.

We thus conclude there is support for hypothesis 3 in terms of stable media patterns across budgets and countries with a bias towards international polarization. To the extent that citizens are relying on mass media for political communication, rather than following national parliamentary debates directly, this indicates that politicization of the EU budget is likely to reinforce Euroscepticism. Perhaps more surprising, hypothesis 3 is not confirmed as far as parliamentary debates are concerned. Despite institutional arrangements strongly favoring competition between domestic political parties with expected transnational polarization, we only find this expected pattern in the Danish *Folketing*. The Irish *Dáil Éireann* shows a balance between the two forms of polarization and the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* even shows strong predominance of international polarization. As argued above, this remarkable finding can largely be explained due to a difference in EU scrutiny mechanisms. However, we also need to consider the power of national identity as a factor structuring conflict, even in a relatively hostile institutional environment. Whereas international polarization reinforces Euroscepticism through strengthening exclusive national identity perceptions, such perceptions in turn influence patterns and trends in politicization of the EU budget. The power of national identity to affect framing in national parliaments may be amplified by the agenda-setting power of media coverage on parliamentary debates, when debates and coverage coincide in time (De Wilde 2009).

Conclusion

As a result of increasing political relevance of Euroscepticism restricting the actions of Europe's political elite, the political climate in the European Union can now arguably be described as a 'constraining dissensus' (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Since this will make Treaty changes and Enlargement difficult, the EU's public image in the near future may well be shaped by its third largest high profile package deals: the multiannual EU budget, or Financial Perspectives. The way many potential political conflicts inherent in the budget are amplified or ignored in public debates has the potential to strongly affect the future of European integration. In other words, whether the constraining dissensus persists, becomes even stronger or dissipates, may be affected by the politicization of the EU budget. The main findings of this comparative empirical study are that international framing of the budget is more dominant than transnational framing, making it more likely that public contestation over the EU budget reinforces Euroscepticism. On the other hand, this dominance of international polarization dissipates as politicization increases. In other words, the more politicized the EU budget becomes, the less likely it is to reinforce Euroscepticism.

To study politicization of the EU budget, this study employs a comparative research design to establish patterns and trends. To allow comparisons across budgets, countries and forums, political debates on the Financial Perspectives of Delors II (negotiated in 1992), Agenda 2000 (1997-1999) and Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 (2004-2005) in the Netherlands, Denmark and Ireland in national newspapers and plenary parliamentary debates are incorporated. Using claims-making analysis, this study presents original data to analyze the ways in which the EU budget negotiation is framed by actors in these different public spheres, using controlled multivariate analysis.

When comparing over time, we find no clear trend in the balance between the two forms of polarization. Rather, increasing diversity in wealth of Member States may be offset by the increasing diversity in expenditure posts of the budget, creating winning and losing constituencies in nearly all Member States. Furthermore, the two forms of polarization seem to reinforce each other, rather than form alternatives. That is, more intensely debated budgets – particularly Agenda 2000 – also feature a more equal balance between international and transnational polarization, compared to less controversial budgets, such as Delors II. We can therefore not conclude that budget debates stimulate Euroscepticism more now – in an enlarged EU – than they did in the early 1990s.

When comparing across countries, we find that net-contributor and net-recipient countries do not feature more international polarization, compared to countries receiving an equal amount of funds from the budget as they contribute. Quite the opposite, strong 'national interests' in the form of large net-contributions or received funds seem to stimulate both international and transnational conflict as contestation focuses on what exactly the national interest is and who could represent this interest best. More politicized debates are characterized by a more equal balance between international and transnational polarization and are therefore less likely to reinforce Euroscepticism than depoliticized debates.

Finally, when comparing debates in newspapers to those in parliaments, we find predominantly international polarization in newspapers, and highly varying polarization in parliaments. The media clearly frame the budget negotiations predominantly as international conflict in all three countries and budgets under study. However, parliamentary debates greatly differ as a result of different scrutiny mechanisms. Despite clear national differences between parliaments, we still find a remarkably strong presence of international polarization in a setting that should favor domestic party politics, and therefore transnational polarization. Thus, national identity perceptions are not just reinforced by international polarization, they in turn stimulate political actors to frame EU budget negotiations in international conflict dimensions, creating a self-reinforcing mechanism. The power of national identity to structure debates even in 'hostile' institutional settings is amplified by the agenda-setting power of media, when media coverage and parliamentary debates coincide in time.

It seems likely that negotiations on the multiannual EU budget in the near future will reinforce, or even increase, the current constraining dissensus characterizing the political climate of the European Union, because international polarization may strengthen Euroscepticism by resonating with exclusive national identity perceptions. The EU may thus be facing a self-reinforcing mechanism, where Euroscepticism increases the importance of the EU budget in the public perception of European integration and the EU budget reinforces Euroscepticism.

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