Politicisation of European Integration:
Bringing the Process into Focus

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Abstract

This conceptual paper provides a working definition of politicisation of European integration, based on a literature review. Politicisation has often been used by political scientists interested in European integration. We observe that research using the concept is rarely interested in the process of politicisation, but rather in its product. By answering why politicisation is relevant to European integration, where it can be observed, and what causes it, this study argues there is a need for further investigation of the process of politicisation to address remaining vagueness and fragmentation in the literature concerning its product. Despite initial appearances, I argue that research on politicisation shares a common overarching understanding of the concept. The literature shares a broad societal understanding of politics and targets the increasing involvement of a broad range of societal actors in European politics. Based on these observations, the process of politicisation of European integration is defined as an increase in polarisation of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the European Union.

1. Introduction

The concept of 'politicisation' has recently been used by a wide range of political scientists studying European integration. Research interests using the concept in one way or another range from analysing specific policy areas of the European Union (EU) (e.g. Buonfino 2004) to reassessment of general theory of European integration (Hooghe and Marks 2008). Rapid changes in the constellation of European politics have made the dynamic concept of politicisation particularly appealing to students of the EU. Public opinion has become markedly more concerned and sceptic towards European integration. This is often referred to as "the end of the permissive consensus" (Hix 2005: 149). Societal actors like political parties, social movements and interest groups have increasingly become involved in public debates over the direction, content, speed and finalité of European integration. A quick scan through a political science database will reaffirm the popularity of the concept in EU studies. This paper does not aim to provide an assessment of the empirical extent of politicisation in the EU, nor does it provide a comprehensive theoretical or analytical framework. It does, however, aim to reconstruct the conceptual meaning of politicisation of European integration by reviewing the existing literature. Despite initial appearances, there are overarching features connecting the diverse literature that deals with politicisation of European integration, which will form the basis of a working definition. This will finally be deconstructed into a set of interrelated processes to facilitate further research.

According to Hacking: "Most words ending in 'tion' are ambiguous between process and product, between the way one gets there, and the result." (1999: 36 [emphasis in original]). Studies on politicisation of European integration tend to focus on the *product*, rather than the *process*. Although politicisation features often in the literature, it is rarely at the core of research. Rather, the concept is used as a descriptive tool for the purpose of answering a wide range of research

questions. Furthermore, I will argue that the focus on the *product* of politicisation has expanded our knowledge about phenomena like euroskepticism, increased influence of party politicians in the European Commission and the extent of coverage of EU politics in national media. However, the lack of interest in the process of politicisation leaves us questioning *how* these products come into being and *how* they are related to one another. To answer this question, we need to understand politicisation as a complex process of human interaction. Investigating politicisation as process may contribute to the research agenda. As we are faced with the handicap of no clear definition of politicisation and a lack of studies on the process itself, this study takes an encompassing approach to the literature in order to develop a grounded definition. It starts with a bird's-eye perspective mapping the functions of politicisation, investigating the effects of politicisation on European integration in general, thus pointing our attention to the relevance of a better understanding of this concept. In other words, this first section answers the 'so what' question. Narrowing our vision, we then turn to the manifestations of politicisation, asking 'where' politicisation occurs. This step also investigates whether there is scope for a single understanding of the concept. The most detailed account will be provided discussing the causes of politicisation, in an attempt to answer 'why' politicisation occurs. This will draw our attention to the different segments of politicisation. The diverse literature leaves us with a challenge to connect segments of politicisation, address theoretical ambiguities and piece together manifestations, causes and functions.

2. Politicisation and the European political order

The literature attributes different functions to the process of politicisation. This section outlines these functions to provide us with an understanding of the potentially profound impact on European integration, thus emphasising the importance of investigating this concept in more detail. At the most elementary

level, politicisation structures political conflict over issues related to European integration in a pluralist setting. As political contestation becomes more structured it forms dimensions of conflict. These increasingly resemble ideological patterns of contestation in the European Union. In the longer run, the increasing prominence of party political contestation may significantly affect the constellation of the European polity. It may alter the balance within and between European institutions, but also the relations between national and supranational institutions. At the same time, party profiling on European issues increases salience. As increased political conflict sensitises people to fundamental changes due to European integration, the question of legitimacy is raised. Political claims voiced on EU issues often signify both an expression of dissatisfaction with the status quo and an attempt to correct this perceived injustice. This third function of politicisation leads to the question how the EU should be constructed in order to accommodate these divergent claims. These questions may again influence dimensions of conflict and the institutional set-up of the EU-polity. The three functions of politicisation are thus related to one another.

2.1. Structuring political conflict

As political conflict over European policies increases, it becomes clear who the proponents and opponents of specific policies are. Both proponents and opponents then group into advocacy coalitions to maximise their influence on policy formulation. In the EU, political parties increasingly perform the role of articulating an initial plurality of opinions within society on issues related to the EU, into a more focused and coherent claim on policy. Thus, politicisation functions to crystallise and change dimensions of conflict. Besides sectoral politics involving stakeholders and experts and territorial politics dominated by national governments, European political conflict increasingly involves mass politics dominated by political parties. However, it remains unclear *how* these patterns of

conflict come into being. This contributes to ambivalence about dimensions of conflict taking shape.

After studying political party behaviour in Europe, Hix and Lord (1997: 49-53) conclude that European politics can be characterised by two independent dimensions: a left-right economic dimension and a pro-contra integration dimension of politics. Left-right represents the main cleavage line within domestic politics in the member states that has been transposed to the European level. The second dimension refers to whether parties are in favour of further integration or not. Marks and Wilson (2000) find that the two dimensions introduced by Hix and Lord are in fact not independent. In the early days of integration, right wing parties were more in favour of European integration than left wing parties. To them, European integration was a defence against communism and an advancement of liberal markets. However, social democratic parties have warmed up to European integration following the clear failure of traditional national Keynesian economics and the launch of a European social policy in the early 1980s (Marks and Wilson 2000). To be more precise, the two dimensions of conflict may be related differently, depending on the national context. In Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon member states the two dimensions coincide, where either the political left is in favour and the political right against European integration (UK) or the other way around (Denmark and Sweden). In these countries, there is a linear relationship between the two dimensions. In continental Christian-democratic member states on the other hand, party positioning on the two dimensions can be characterised by an inverted U-curve, where the centre is in favour of European integration and both the extreme left and extreme right are against (Brinegar et al. 2004; Hix 2005: 172). Finally, cultural differences may structure political conflict over European integration. Globalisation and European integration may divide Western-European populations into winners and losers (Kriesi et al. 2006). This may result in Green,

Alternative and Libertarian (GAL) parties opposing Traditional, Authoritarian and Nationalist (TAN) parties (Hooghe et al. 2004).

2.2. Altering the course of integration

The structuring of political conflict, may affect relations between and within political institutions. Parties direct their influence both through the European Parliament towards the Commission and through national parliaments towards the Council of Ministers (Mair 2005). As the relations within and between institutions change, this may incline parties to redirect their claims further and in the long run function to alter the course of European integration (Haas 2004). Although interrupted by periods of stagnation, supranational institutions have increased their influence over intergovernmental institutions in the EU and gained competencies in new policy areas. This is referred to as an increase in the level and scope of integration respectively (Börzel 2005; Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). As a result of this increase in level and scope of integration, political parties and interest groups shift their attention to the EU-polity, creating 'political spill-over'. By organising at the supranational level and transferring their policy demands from the national level to supranational institutions, an EU-polity not unlike the pluralist polity of the USA comes into existence (Haas 2004: 313). Also, the continued existence and success of supranational institutions would incline Euroskeptic societal groups to accept the EU. In other words, besides political spill-over, there would also be 'attitudinal spill-over'.

"Politicization thus refers initially to a process whereby the *controversiality* of joint decision-making goes up. This in turn is likely to lead to *a widening of the audience or clientele* interested and active in [European] integration. Somewhere along the line *a manifest redefinition of mutual objectives* will likely occur" (Schmitter 1969: 166 [italics in original]).

Politicisation would thus function as a final phase of European integration including political and attitudinal spill-over which forms a prelude to the EU's finalité of a federal United States of Europe.

The expectation that European citizens and their organisations would redirect political claims to the supranational level and become more positive towards integration now seems questionable (Hooghe and Marks 2005b). In contrast, political expectations remain focussed on national political elites and public opinion has become distinctively more negative about European integration. To some extent than, political spill-over took place as societal groups started voicing demands concerning European integration, but attitudinal spill-over did not occur. The 'permissive consensus' has turned into a 'constraining dissensus' (Hooghe and Marks 2006: 248). Rather than leading to a federal Europe, politicisation hinders further integration and is more likely to bring about re-nationalisation. Besides structuring political conflict which results in changing dynamics between and within institutions, politicisation also functions to emphasise and alter the relations between national and supranational political institutions on the one hand, and citizens on the other. This relationship focuses our attention on the legitimacy of the EU.

2.3. Raising the question of legitimacy

Integration was long the prerogative of national political elites and organised business interests. The speed and direction of European integration seemed uncontrollable by Europe's citizens. Furthermore, there is a lack of transparency and accountability in the EU. These characteristics caused by the institutional set-up of the EU, prevent citizens from choosing alternative government and policies and thus create a 'democratic deficit' (Føllesdal and Hix 2006). By emphasising the importance of the EU due to increased controversiality and salience of issues related to European integration, politicisation functions to

highlight this democratic deficit. First, it proves that citizens question the legitimacy of the EU, because they mobilise and voice their discontent with existing policies enacted by the EU. Secondly, it may be a remedy to the democratic deficit, because citizens' preferences become more clear and better voiced, making it possible (and hard to avoid) for elites to accommodate those preferences (Trenz and Eder 2004). Because political parties increasingly perform the role of aggregating and polarising the plurality of opinions on European issues, a strengthening of both national and supranational channels of representative democracy in the EU takes place (Ladrech 2007; Mair 2005). By increasing debate on European issues, politicisation functions as a move towards more deliberation and participation, strengthening the legitimacy of the EU following an 'ethics of participation' (Bellamy and Warleigh 1998).

Whether 'politics' is the right medicine for the EU remains debatable (see Fossum and Trenz 2006; Hix and Bartolini 2006; Moravcsik 2006). Consociationalists who stress that the EU does not have a single demos, argue that the stability of the EU depends on cooperative elites that are allowed to negotiate and reach compromises outside the spotlight of public scrutiny (e.g. Chryssochoou 1994; Gabel 1998a). Because there are no significant cross-cutting cleavages, there is not enough solidarity and understanding to hold the polity together in face of publicly adversarial political conflict. Politicisation would work as a centrifugal mechanism, stressing unbridgeable differences between the interests, norms and values of the peoples of Europe.

As democratic legitimacy currently is the most prominent form of legitimacy in Europe, a lack of democracy may endanger the stability of the EU (Eriksen and Fossum 2004). Accommodating the EU to citizens' perceptions of legitimacy may therefore be a necessary way of safeguarding its stability. Thus, this third function of politicisation is clearly related to the previous two functions. Structured political conflict alters the relations between and within political

institutions and thus the course of integration. This is further affected by the increased involvement of citizens and the need for the institutional arrangement of the EU to accommodate standards of democratic legitimacy.

The existing literature has demonstrated the profound impact of politicisation on European integration as citizens and their representatives become more involved in the decision-making and institutions of the EU. We know the process of politicisation functions to structure political conflict, affect the course of integration and raise the question of legitimacy of the EU. Again, however, the literature discussed above sheds little light on *how* these functions are performed and what may determine different outcomes of this process. We need to look at the mechanisms that link the 'controversiality of issues' to a 'widening of the audience' and 'redefinition of objectives'. Such a process orientation may increase our understanding of how different functions of politicisation are related to each other and thus what the impact of politicisation on European integration is.

3.   The politicisation of what?

The previous section discussed profound impact of politicisation on European integration including changes within and between institutions and the connection between European institutions and citizens. We run the risk of conceptual overstretch by attributing so many functions to one concept. This section therefore aims to reconstruct from the literature where and in what forms politicisation of European integration occurs, in order to establish whether we are in fact faced with a single coherent process. We thereby zoom in from our sweeping discussion on functions to more concrete manifestations of politicisation. These manifestations can reasonably be categorised in three distinct groups: institutions, decision-making processes and issues. The first category refers to the supranational, intergovernmental and national political institutions of

the multi-level EU-polity, including most notably the European Commission, European Parliament (EP), Council of Ministers, member state governments and national parliaments. The second category includes the procedures, rules and practices that make up the day-to-day functioning of the political institutions. Politicisation in this sense refers to increasing importance of elected or appointed politicians in decision-making processes at the expense of professionals, like bureaucrats and lawyers. Finally, politicisation of issues refers to an increase in salience and diversity of opinions on specific societal topics discussed, mostly in the form of policy fields. If issues become more contested and there is an increasing demand on public policy, they become increasingly 'politicised'. It can thus be argued that these three manifestations concern the 'input' into political systems in the form of demands becoming issues and their direct impact on the political system (Easton 1957).

3.1. Political conflict and cleavage lines in institutions

Egeberg speaks of "[a] growing party politicization of the College of Commissioners" (2006: 5). Commissioners develop tighter links to the party federations in the EP. Together with the notion that the EP has increasing control over the Commission in other ways, this stresses the increasing importance of party politics and ideological cleavage lines in European politics (Majone 2002). Politicisation thus resembles increased party political conflict within the EP, leading to a stronger representation of parties in the European Commission. Ideological conflicts also become more prominent in preferences of national governments (Aspinwall 2002). Here, national political parties increase their influence on their government's behaviour in Brussels through national parliaments, allowing them less leeway to deviate from party preferences (Raunio 2005). Besides territorial and sectoral dimensions of conflict, party politics and an ideological dimension of conflict increasingly structure EU politics, at both European and national levels. Politicisation also represents increasing influence of

societal actors in state institutions and executive powers in particular. This is demonstrated in the next paragraph.

3.2. Dominance of politicians in decision-making processes

Politicisation is also used to describe a change in decision-making processes, representing a development away from technocratic decision-making. During this process, decision-making is increasingly subjected to pressure by different advocacy coalitions (Beyers and Kerremans 2004; Christiansen 1997: 79). With a shift in importance to political negotiation, decisions are taken at a higher – political – level within institutions. In light of its institutional surrounding, characterised by continuous political negotiation with the member states and the European Parliament: "the [European] Commission is a 'politicized bureaucracy', faced with a dilemma between its duty to develop and apply common rules and continuous political pressure for deviation" (Christiansen 1997: 77 [emphasis in original]). At first, the reader may be inclined to perceive this as an application of politicisation to an institution: the Commission. However, it is in fact referring to a change in the way decisions are made, which affects the institution as a whole. In other words, decisions made within institutions like the Commission become more contested and subject to pressure from opposing interests, articulated and polarised by political parties. This is further substantiated by Fouilleux et al (2005), who see politicisation and depoliticisation as the grey area between the ideal types of political and technocratic decision-making. They argue that there is no clear division between technical and political decisions taken within the Council of Ministers. Instead, bureaucrats try to reach as much agreement as possible. Only if agreement can not be reached by bureaucrats, is the decision passed on towards the political level. In this sense, politicisation of decision-making procedures occurs due to an increase in the controversiality of issues, reflected in a stronger role for politicians

in decision-making. The politicisation of decision-making thus directs our attention to the politicisation of issues.

3.3. The controversiality of issues

Politicisation of issues manifests itself as an increase in electoral importance (Franklin and Wlezien 1997). This salience results from societal actors like political parties, interest groups, social movements and mass media paying more attention to European issues and increasing their public claims for common policy, thus emphasising at the same time the importance and controversiality of issues.

Recently, studies of politicisation of issues related to European integration tend to be directed at specific policy fields, focussing for instance on immigration policy (Buonfino 2004) and agricultural policy (Epstein 2006) or taking a comparative analysis of several issues (Koopmans 2007). They describe increased and changing profiling of politicians on these issues. Secondly, they report increased debate over European issues in national media. Taken together, these two developments reflect an increase in salience. However, the largest part of research focuses on politicisation of European integration as one issue. This connotation resembles the combination of such general issues, such as membership of the EU or the Eurozone, the extent of sovereignty pooling and the geographical borders of the EU.

To conclude, politicisation is a popular descriptive tool to describe phenomena of interest in very different applied fields of research within EU studies. At first instance, there does not seem any overarching aspect to the use of politicisation as descriptive tool. In contrast, this section argued that politicisation of institutions, decision-making processes and issues are in fact related products of politicisation at different levels of aggregation. Thus, there appears to be scope

for a single understanding of politicisation, manifested at different levels. Furthermore, this discussion corresponds with our observation that the manifestations of politicisation reflect increased input in the form of demands by societal actors. We do not know, however, *how* this increased involvement translates into the manifestations observed or *how* different manifestations perform the functions discussed in the previous section. Thus, the discussion above of three manifestations of politicisation, which can be argued to reflect different levels of aggregation of same process, reinforces the need to clarify the process of politicisation and its causal mechanisms.

4.   The movers and shakers of politicisation

The previous section raised the questions how societal demands translate into the observed manifestations and how these manifestations are related. To substantiate these questions, we now ask the question *why* societal demands on European integration are raised. In the attempt to explain a still under–defined product, empirical research has focused on a wide range of explanatory factors. It has thereby tended to focus on segments of societal claims–making, like public opinion, party positioning and media coverage. This section takes the final step in our increasingly detailed review of the literature. It emphasises explanatory factors of politicisation ranging from nation–state specific institutional arrangements to characteristics of individual citizens. The usefulness of a process oriented approach is reiterated by the apparent problems to explain the product of politicisation, demonstrated by remaining theoretical controversies and the scarcity of attempts to integrate segments of societal claims–making into a coherent analysis.

4.1. Reproduction and transformation of society

There are studies that perceive European integration in light of a *reproductive* society, with robust, stable patterns of politics and studies that argue society is

transformative (Schmitter 2004: 43). The reproductive argument states that contestation over the issue of European integration is structured by existing and robust cleavages in party systems (Marks et al. 2002) or demographics (Gabel 1998b). These robust patterns of politics are reflected in rather 'frozen' party systems that have not significantly changed since the 1920s (Mair 1987), making politicisation of European integration subject to stable dynamics of politics.

Alternatively, politicisation over European integration is seen as subject to a fundamentally transformative process in European societies. This leads to a long-term trend in politicisation, rather than cyclical movement. Inglehart (1970) argues that the rising levels of living standards and education in Western Europe since the end of World War II foster cognitive mobilisation and post-materialist values. As more citizens become well educated and gain access to the world via television and internet, they become more able to identify themselves with remote institutions like those of the EU. Also, when their basic material needs are satisfied, they start to care more about immaterial interests, like peace across Europe, the environment, democracy and human rights, leading to a more pro-European public opinion. However, cognitive mobilisation and postmaterialist values have lost explanatory power over public opinion on European integration since the mid 1980s, implying that this transformative logic no longer applies (Gabel 1998b; Inglehart et al. 1987). Politicisation of European integration may also be a symptom of a more general growing divide between Europe's elites and citizens (Katz and Mair 1995; Manin 1997: 228ff). As distance between elites and citizens in European societies grows, this is reflected in their respective opinions on European integration (e.g. Hooghe and Marks 2006: 249).

4.2. Elite and Mass-driven

The second important theoretical divide in the literature is whether politicisation of European integration is understood as *elite-driven* or *mass-driven*. Studies of

party politics implicitly indicate that the structure of national party systems and strategic behaviour of political elites determine politicisation of European integration (Ladrech 1997; Marks and Wilson 2000; Marks et al. 2002; Ray 1999). On the other hand, public opinion studies indicate that citizens' opinions enables or disables political elites to debate European integration and further determine its course (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Niedermayer and Sinnott 1995). The latter is a bottom-up perspective of politicisation, which is shared by a body of literature studying increased public claims-making and protesting of interest groups and social movements concerning European integration (Imig and Tarrow 2001; Marks and McAdam 1999).

A nuanced position is taken up by media studies. Some studies understand the media as a neutral forum in which different actors voice their opinion. Media coverage provides insight into the positions of political parties, interest groups and citizens and how well these different positions are reflected in national public debates (Koopmans 2007; Kriesi et al. 2007). Others highlight to what extent media constitute an independent actor in the public debate over European integration as agenda setters (de Vreese 2001; Trenz 2004). Even though media have some agenda-setting powers, their own influence on public opinion or the political agenda is repeatedly reported as marginal. Rather, media honour their name in the sense that they 'mediate' between the opinion of the public and those of political elites (Trenz et al. 2007). A growing consensus is forming that public opinion and party politics influence each other (Hooghe and Marks 2005a). "Europeans may not be complete *tabulae rasae* when it comes to European integration, but neither are their views completely determined and unsusceptible to persuasion and information." (Steenbergen et al. 2007: 18).

4.3. Europe-wide and nation-state specific

The extent to which societal actors develop and advance an opinion on European integration may be influenced by the impact of European policies in member state societies. Thus, as the level and scope of European integration increase, so would societal claims on common European policy. In other words, politicisation would be a *Europe-wide* phenomenon. An individual's opinion on European integration is influenced by the level and scope of integration and her personal level of education and access to media, not by whether she is German or British (Inglehart 1970; Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). After the first enlargement in 1973, it became apparent that support in the UK and Denmark was significantly less than in the original six. However, it was expected that this difference would even out eventually. Only after the end of the 1980s, when it became increasingly apparent that differences between member states were more permanent than expected, did theories on public opinion start including the nation state in their analysis.

Kritzinger analyses public support for European integration in relation to individuals' assessment of national political and economic performance. She finds that "[c]itizens use domestic realities as proxies for their attitudes towards the EU." (2003: 321). Whereas Germans and Italians perceive the EU as an alternative to the nation state, both politically and economically, British and French citizens see European integration as a reinforcement of their nation state, especially in economic terms.

4.4. Structure and agency

Some studies focus on the behaviour of actors, mainly individual political parties and media/journalists to explain politicisation. Following saliency theory, political parties have an interest to politicise issues when three conditions hold: their policy position is closer to the majority of voters than that of other parties,

they are not internally divided on the issue and their policy position fits their general ideological profile (Steenbergen and Scott 2004). Individual case studies of how political parties position themselves on the issue of European integration have also attributed considerable explanatory power to the actions of party leaders or factions and contingent contextual factors (Gaffney 1996; Johansson and Raunio 2001; Larsen 1999). Journalists can contribute to politicisation as agenda setters. They may report on European integration because it has news value, or because they perceive it as their moral duty to scrutinise government activity, educate citizens and communicate public opinion to the political elite (Trenz et al. 2007).

Alternatively, politicisation may be largely inhibited or enabled by structural factors. Bartolini (2005) argues that European integration has largely been a boundary removing enterprise. The removal of boundaries in political, administrative and economic terms increases exit options and thus reduces the pressure on people to organise themselves and manifest themselves politically within the system. The specific characteristics of the EU-polity thus inhibit politicisation. Other studies focus on how party systems restrict the extent to which political parties can profile themselves on European integration. Party families are a major explanatory factor for an individual political party's stance towards European integration (Marks et al. 2002). Thus, historically grown cleavage structures largely structure political contestation – and the lack thereof – over European integration (Mair 2001).

4.5. Instrumentalism, identity and framing

Explaining divergence in support for European integration has been a central research aim within politicisation research, especially research studying public opinion. A rational choice explanation argues that citizens support European integration when they think it benefits them. Hence, white-collar workers with

higher education, skilled proficiency, living in border areas support European integration more than do blue-collar workers. As the integration process has liberalised capital more so than labour, these citizens stand to gain the most from European integration (Gabel 1998b).

Alternatively, citizens may base their opinion not only on perceived economic benefits, but on identity perception (Haesly 2001; Hooghe et al. 2004). In his comparative study on public opinion among Scots and Welshmen, Haesly found that citizens can be categorised in three groups based on their own identity perception: Euroskeptics, Europhiles and instrumental Europeans. Only the last group makes an instrumental assessment of European integration and this is not exclusively based on economic benefits. For example, European integration might be seen as a way to achieve more regional autonomy or environmental protection (Haesly 2001: 97).

To what extent the citizenry of Europe consists of Euroskeptics, Europhiles or instrumental Europeans may depend on national political elites. If the national dominant discourse on European integration is instrumental like in the UK and Denmark – stressing costs and benefits of European integration – one might expect individual citizens to make a similar calculation (Larsen 1999). However, if integration is framed as a rehabilitation after WWII or the best strategy towards modernity and international prestige, like in Germany and Spain respectively, more citizens may become Europhiles (Diez Medrano 2003).

The debates on causality illustrate best the focus within research on the *product* of politicisation. Through this endeavour, we have gained extensive knowledge on Euroskepticism, media coverage of European issues and the positions of political parties on European integration. However, we lack knowledge on how explanatory factors interact and cause different constellations of outcomes in different circumstances. More detailed empirical research into the *process* of

politicisation and its mechanisms could be used to trace politicisation, investigating changes in more detail. It would enable us to investigate the impact of contingent and structural factors and elaborate on the type and scope of effect different explanatory variables have in context. It thereby leaves the possibility of equifinality open in which politicisation can be the result of different patterns of human interaction. Furthermore, it would allow us to investigate the conditions under which politicisation is affected by different external factors. Focussing on politicisation as process, rather than product may thus provide us with a new line of inquiry that may shed a new light on existing theoretical debates. To do this, we need a more encompassing definition of politicisation to allow for the incorporation of different segments of societal claims and an analytical toolkit of the mechanisms that comprise the process of politicisation to study the effects of different causal factors within the process. To provide a comprehensive analytical framework is beyond the scope of this paper, but a clearer definition of politicisation and its components will be developed in the next section.

5.   Towards a working definition

The lack of a clear definition has contributed to the fragmentation of the study of politicisation of European integration, focusing on different functions, manifestations and causes without coherently explaining the relationship between these segments or solving the theoretical ambiguities within. There are only a few exceptions to this pattern. The fragmentation and vagueness in the literature can partially be explained by a focus on politicisation as *product*, rather than *process*. This is also reflected in a predominant focus on variables and their correlations. A process approach, on the other hand, would understand politicisation as a set of interrelated processes in which human interaction is central. Defining politicisation as a set of interrelated processes of human interaction is in my opinion a necessary step in exploring *how* causal factors affect segments of society in which politicisation takes place and *how* different

manifestations perform the functions attributed to the process. We should keep in mind though, that the literature discussed above resembles broad, long-lasting theoretical debates within political science. A clear working definition of the *process* of politicisation will not be able to resolve these debates. Therefore, the definition should be versatile enough to be used by a variety of researchers within different research traditions, while still providing for a clear encompassing understanding of the concept as process allowing for systematic building of knowledge at a descriptive level.

This section provides a working definition of politicisation of European integration based on two overarching features in the literature discussed above. It will then be argued that the process of politicisation of European integration can be deconstructed into a set of three interrelated processes. The first overarching feature is general consensus on a societal understanding of politics. In order for us to understand European integration, we need to study more than just the actions of member state governments and European institutions. Rather, the concept of politicisation is used to describe the involvement in EU politics of societal actors, like political parties, mass media, interest groups, social movements and individual citizens via public opinion. Second, in a dynamic and societal understanding of politics, politicisation is a characteristic of the 'input' side of the political process. Miller defines politics as "a process whereby a group of people, whose opinions or interests are initially divergent, reach collective decisions which are generally regarded as binding on the group, and enforced as common policy" (1987: 390). In respect to this definition, politicisation is not an aspect of the 'collective decisions' or the 'common policy'. Rather, it concerns the involvement of 'a group of people' and their 'divergent opinions or interests'.

I argue that politicisation of European integration can be defined as *an increase in polarisation of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the European Union.* This

definition can be deconstructed into three interrelated processes that can form the starting point for operationalisation. These processes are polarisation of opinion, intensified debate and public resonance.

5.1. Polarisation of opinion

An issue or question can only become politicised, when there are at least two different opinions on the subject (see also Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 180). These opinions have to be voiced by representatives like interest groups or political parties who perceive of themselves or their constituency as having an interest in the topic at hand. As demonstrated above, politicisation is reflected in observable manifestations, whether issues, decision-making processes or institutions. Politicisation thus requires purposive engagement by societal actors. Initially then, polarisation of opinion consists of an increase in the diversity of opinion. A crystallisation of advocacy coalitions will likely occur in light of the need to advance a common position towards collectively binding decision-making. As this crystallisation takes shape, the debate likely includes more and more claims on other parties, besides arguments on the content of the issue at hand. Structural polarisation of opinion in which more or less the same advocacy coalitions disagree on multiple issues will result in dimensions of conflict (Hix and Lord 1997; Hooghe et al. 2004). Societal actors might differ more or less of opinion. For instance, they may agree on the goals to be attained, but not on the way to achieve these goals or the sacrifices they are willing to make. However, differences of opinion between interested parties might also be very strong and irreconcilable. Besides the content of positions voiced, there may be more aggressive language indicating a stronger divergence of opinion. Hence, the more opinions of involved parties diverge and crystallise into opposing groups, the stronger polarisation of opinion resulting in increasing politicisation.

5.2. Intensified debate

Interested parties may have very different opinions, but if they do not voice them, politicisation remains inhibited. The more an issue is discussed, the more politicised it becomes. Thus, when Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) argued that the issue of European integration was a 'sleeping giant', they meant that there was a strong polarisation of opinion on European integration, but not an intense debate. The relevant question for Van der Eijk and Franklin was if and when political parties would pick up this polarisation of (public) opinion and start profiling themselves – increasing the intensity of debate – on the issue of European integration. It follows that intensity of debate consists of two aspects. First, it refers to how much, long and often a specific issue is discussed by the interested parties or their representatives. Secondly, it refers to the number of different parties involved in the debate. As more parties become involved and more resources are spent, debates intensify and become politicised.

It would seem logical to expect polarisation of opinion and intensified debate to mutually support each other. The stronger a difference of opinion on a specific topic, the more time will likely be spent to convince other parties or work out a compromise in order to be able to achieve collectively binding decisions. However, as indicated by the 'sleeping giant' metaphor, this is not always the case. We should therefore include polarisation of opinion and the intensified debate as two analytically independent but interrelated processes of politicisation.

5.3. Public resonance

The final process of politicisation is public resonance of polarised and intense debate. This differentiates politicised issues, decision-making processes and institutions from debates linked to decision-making processes like intergovernmental bargaining, lobbying and technocratic regulation. In order for a debate to gain 'public' resonance, there needs to be an audience present and/or

able to follow the proceedings of the debate. Potential access to (an interpretation of) the proceedings of the debate by all citizens will further strengthen this resonance. Thus, transparency of the debate contributes to public resonance. Secondly, public resonance consists of participation of the public in the debate (Trenz and Eder 2004: 9). This might be direct (e.g. through voting in elections or referenda) or indirect participation (e.g. through opinion polls or forum discussions). Public resonance thus involves more and more people in politics, resembling a socialisation of conflict (Schattschneider 1960: 40).

The best way to illustrate the relevance of this criterion is by elaborating situations in which a polarisation of opinion and intensified debate occur, but which remain relatively depoliticised: intergovernmental bargaining and technocratic debates. The first is a classic diplomatic intergovernmental debate or decision-making process. In this case, the issue at hand is discussed in secret behind closed doors. Thus, there is no audience present or able to follow the proceedings of the debate. Even though opinions of different member states represented in this setting might diverge largely (polarisation of opinion) and a lot of time and effort is spent to reach a compromise (intense debate), it would not be called politicised unless its proceedings find resonance in mass-media or plenary parliamentary debates that involve the public. A similar situation takes place when issues are dealt with by bureaucrats that evolve around technocratic solutions. Technocratic decision-making may be contested by stakeholders, but it remains relatively depoliticised as long as they do not become part of more general societal political conflict through more elaborate public resonance, at which point they would stop being strictly 'technocratic'.

To conclude, based on the broad societal and dynamic understanding of politics displayed in the literature using the concept of politicisation, a working definition has been presented. It characterises the process as in principle contentless. In other words, politicisation can be about *any* topic related to

European integration, affect *any* political institution in the EU polity and/or its decision-making processes and involve *any* societal actor. Therefore, it can describe an episode of EU politics along *any* dimension of conflict. However, a significant number of authors use the concept to describe the increasing involvement of political parties in European politics since the 1990s and subsequently increasing prominence of ideological dimensions of conflict within the EU. Politicisation always concerns the 'input' side of politics and consists of three interrelated processes: polarisation of opinion, intensified debate and public resonance. It provides us with building blocks for operationalisation, which may facilitate further empirical research. It will help us identify episodes of politicisation and depoliticisation as actors draw public attention to the controversiality of issues and opposing advocacy coalitions become apparent. Alternatively, an episode of depoliticisation would likely see a compromise being reached, apparent consensus on the issue in question, and a decrease in the extent to which it is debated.

6.   Conclusion

This study has reconstructed the meaning of politicisation of European integration. We have extensive knowledge concerning the products of politicisation, including euroskepticism, increased prominence of political parties in European institutions and more attention of the press for EU affairs. To map the existing knowledge, this paper employed a literature review that went from the macro functions of politicisation, through its manifestations to a detailed account of different causal factors. Investigating the functions of politicisation has pointed our attention to the relevance of knowledge on this concept for our understanding of European integration. It answered the 'so what' question by highlighting that politicisation functions to structure political conflict over European integration, alters the relations between and within EU institutions and involves citizens in EU politics, thus raising the question of the legitimacy of the

EU. While discussing 'where' politicisation occurs, we found out that politicisation manifests itself in institutions, decision-making processes and issues. These represent different levels of aggregation of the same process. It was demonstrated that although the literature has very different research interests, a common understanding of politicisation refers to increased involvement of societal actors – particularly political parties – in EU policy-formulation. There remains vagueness as to how politicised institutions, decision-making and issues are related to one another. Investigating the causes, or 'why', of politicisation has indicated five theoretical debates explaining different segments of politicisation. The lack of a clearer understanding of the process has both fostered fragmentation of these studies and hindered further clarification of the relative influence of different explanatory variables. It did however illustrate different relevant segments involved in politicisation, like public opinion, media coverage and political party profiling. This focused our attention on the role of contestation and polarised opinions as components of politicisation. From this literature review, it can be concluded that politicisation concerns an increase of societal actors in EU politics. Citizens tighten their grip on the political institutions of the EU, both at supranational and at national level.

These overarching features in the literature were used to develop a working definition of politicisation as process. Politicisation can be defined as an increase in polarisation of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the European Union. The definition stimulates stringent use of the concept, while at the same time allowing for versatile application in empirical research. More important, defining politicisation as a process of human interaction opens up new research possibilities to clarify relationships between functions, manifestations and causes of politicisation. To facilitate this further, three interrelated processes of politicisation were introduced: polarisation of opinion, intensified debate and public resonance. Structuring inquiry into politicisation of European integration

this way, may increase our knowledge of how different outcomes of politicisation occur due to crucial mechanisms linking explanatory factors to manifestations and functions. It may help us escape from categorical discussions on whether particular institutions, decision-making processes and issues are politicised or not. Rather we should ask ourselves *how* institutions, decision-making processes and issues have become more or less politicised than they were before. This way, our attention is drawn to when and why episodes of politicisation and depoliticisation occur. We can thus study politicisation in context and allow for intricate interaction between explanatory factors, including possible equifinality, and the mechanisms that trigger different functions.

I should make a final nuanced remark. This paper has stressed politicisation in different forms and appearances, to further our understanding of the concept. In doing so, it may have overstressed its impact. European integration is still an elite-dominated process. To the extent that it has involved citizens in political conflict, this is largely as spectators. In other words, politicisation of European integration is predominantly public conflict between (political party) elites. Also, political conflict has so far been rather benign. There have been very few cases of confrontational contentious politics, like violence. Several commentators have stressed the remarkable lack of politicisation (Mair 2001, van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Citizens still see 'Europe' as less salient than other issues. Referring to debates about the EU, Bartolini concludes that "…there are few historical examples of politicians, bureaucrats, and scholars searching so frenetically for 'democracy' and 'legitimacy' that no citizen has demanded." (2005: 407 [emphasis in original]). Finally, technocratic and secretive traditions within European institutions appear highly ingrained and resilient. The overall impact of politicisation on European integration is thus challenging, interesting and noticeable, but modest for the time being.

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