We Need to Talk About Europe. Political Contestation, Parliamentary Communication and the Media

Katrin Auel (auel@ihs.ac.at)
Olga Eisele (eisele@ihs.ac.at)
Lucy Kinski (kinski@ihs.ac.at)

Institute for Advanced Studies Vienna

Work in progress

ECPR Joint Sessions
Warsaw, 30 March – 2 April 2015
We Need to Talk About Europe. Political Contestation, Parliamentary Communication and the Media

Katrin Auel, Olga Eisele and Lucy Kinski

Abstract

National parliaments have the potential to serve as transmission belts between the European Union (EU) and their citizens. By publicly communicating EU issues, they can enhance the visibility, public accountability and ultimately the legitimacy of supranational governance. Not least since the eurozone crisis, this task has become increasingly important in the ever more politicised context of EU integration characterised by public and partisan contestation. Most citizens, however, experience politics mainly through news coverage in the media. The aim of the paper is therefore twofold: The first aim is to investigate the communication efforts of national parliaments in EU affairs and, in particular, to analyse the impact of the levels of contestation of EU issues both within the public and the parliamentary arena on their communication activities. The second aim is then to explore whether and under what conditions parliamentary communication activities are covered by the national media and thus have a better chance of actually reaching the citizens. For the analysis, the paper draws on two unique and extensive quantitative datasets covering parliamentary communication activities in Austria, Finland, France, Germany Poland, Spain and the UK between 2010 and 2013 as well as data derived from a quantitative content analysis of three newspapers in each member state (two quality papers and one tabloid) over the same time period.

Introduction

National parliaments have the potential to serve as transmission belts between the European Union (EU) and their citizens. Much of the existing literature has focused on the role of parliaments in scrutinising, monitoring and controlling (their government’s) EU policy-making. Recently, however, the parliamentary communication function in EU affairs has gained increased attention: National parliaments are crucial as arenas for the debates over important EU issues and their national implications (Auel 2007; Auel and Raunio 2014a and b; de Wilde 2011; Rauh 2015, Wendler 2014a and b). By communicating EU affairs to their citizens, they not only legitimise national politics in EU affairs, but can also add to the legitimacy of EU governance. This task is especially important within the broader discussion on the democratic legitimacy of the EU (e.g. Curtin et al. 2010, Follesdal and Hix 2006), where the opaqueness and lack of accountability have been identified as core elements of the democratic deficit. Parliamentary communication of EU issues can contribute to making EU policy processes more transparent, and thus more accessible to and for their national public.
In addition, by holding their governments accountable - that is by inducing them to explain European issues and decisions, to clarify European negotiation situations and to justify their negotiation behaviour - national parliaments contribute to the public accountability of EU policy-making (Auel 2007). Thus, the ‘communicative performance of national parliaments in EU affairs is directly related to the often discussed democratic deficits of supranational governance: if MPs raise European issues, they offer a remedy to the otherwise opaque procedures, the overwhelming complexity, and the difficult attribution of political responsibility in decision-making beyond the nation state’ (Rauh 2015: 118). Importantly, this contribution of parliaments to the public accountability of EU policy-making depends crucially on whether they ‘make the choices and political alternatives involved in European integration visible to the wider public they mean to represent’ (ibid: 117, emphasis added; see also Norton 1998: 1; Proksch and Slapin 2015: 3). Scrutiny of EU documents, monitoring and influencing the government or voting on resolutions can – and often does (Auel and Raunio 2012: 16ff.) - take place behind the closed doors of parliamentary committees and still fulfill representative functions such as the representation and aggregation of the interests of the represented. Parliamentary communication, however, is a fundamental precondition for public accountability and the exercise of democratic popular control over government activities.

The democratic duty of representatives ‘to give convincing accounts of their actions to the represented’ and ‘to communicate their reason for action” (Esaiasson et al. 2013: 26) has become ever more important in EU politics with the growing salience and public contestation of EU issues in both public opinion and national party politics (De Wilde and Zürn 2012, Hutter and Grande 2014; Kriesi and Grande 2014, Rauh and Zürn 2014; Statham and Trenz 2012). The impact of EU decisions is, especially in the context of the eurozone crisis, increasingly (and painfully) evident for the citizens in the EU (Hurrelmann 2014). While the famous term ‘permissive consensus’ (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970) has long served well to describe the friendly ignorance of citizens towards the European Union, it has given way to a more ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe and Marks 2009) marked by growing public Euroscepticism and contestation of EU politics (Serricchio et al. 2013, Usherwood and Startin 2013). This sentiment is at the core of the profound disconnect between the EU and the citizens. Importantly, the rising public dissatisfaction with European integration has also filtered through to party politics (Conti 2014) resulting in increased contestation of EU issues by political parties and turning EU politics into a subject of party competition (Kriesi et al. 2010). This has again become especially evident during the recent Eurozone crisis with the increasing success of Eurosceptic parties in domestic and European Parliament elections.

Thus, we can observe a growing contestation of the EU both within public opinion and within party politics, and both potentially impact the communication function of national parliaments. One the one hand, the growing public awareness of the relevance and ‘consequentiality of EU decisions’ (Hurrelmann 2014: 88) has led to a greater demand for public explanation and justification of EU policy-making, and ‘parliaments are one of the primary arenas for the public [explanation and] justification of decisions taken in the context of supranational governance’ (Wendler 2014a: 549). On the other hand, parliaments ‘are an
important setting for ... party political contestation and polarization’ (Ibid.), where parliamentary (party) actors can also actively supply policy choices and position themselves strategically for their electoral advantage (Rauh 2015: 117).

As we will argue in more detail below, contestation can provide both incentives and disincentives for MPs and parliamentary party groups ‘to go public’. Against this background, the first aim of the paper is to investigate the communication efforts of national parliaments in EU affairs by focusing on plenary debates and oral questions. While parliaments certainly have other means of communicating political issues to their citizens, the plenary is the most visible arena, and plenary activities are key mechanisms to communicate policy positions to the citizens. Plenary debates are among the most important parliamentary means to communicate issues on the political agenda (Auel and Raunio 2014a; Marschall 2001, Mayhew 1974; Proksch and Slapin 2015: 21ff., Rauh 2015). Debates as such are, of course, no guarantee for transparency or accountability as information and justifications can remain incomplete or even be obscured by strategies of ‘blame shifting’ and ‘credit claiming’ (Lord and Pollak 2010: 977ff.). Yet they do provide the means by which the justifications of some (government or governing parties) can be continuously challenged by others within (the opposition) and outside the parliamentary arena (e.g. the media) and can thus be exposed to ‘the best of disinfectants, sunshine’ (Brandeis 1914). Parliamentary questions, in turn, can be used by MPs to communicate issues in various, direct and indirect, ways, for example by requesting information publicly, by compelling the government to making a public statement and pressing it for action, or by publicly advocating constituency interests (Russo and Wiberg 2010). ‘Parliamentary question time’ also seems to attract considerable media attention (Rozenberg et al. 2011), at least where ministers or heads of government have to react to questions not known beforehand (Salmond 2014, see also Van Santen et al. 2015).

The success of parliamentary communication efforts will remain limited, however, if they do not reach the wider public. In today’s ‘audience democracy’ (Manin 1997: 220), this task is fulfilled by the media acting as a relais between political arenas and the citizens (Bennett and Entman, 2001, Chaffee et al. 1970, Hickethier 2003, Maletzke 1972). ‘Information in the mass media becomes the only contact many [citizens, the authors] have with politics ... most of what people know comes to them “second” or “third” hand from the mass media or other people’ (McCombs and Shaw 1972: 176, see also Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999: 254). Yet the media are, of course, not just a mouthpiece of political elites but relatively free in selecting what news they deem worthy of covering and thus in creating realities by categorizing and framing events and actors (Chong and Druckman 2007, Edelman 1993, Gamson and Modigliani 1987, Tuchman 1978). This role becomes even more important in the case of complex and ‘remote’ topics such as EU politics for citizens (De Vreese and Boomgarden 2006: 421).

As studies have shown, the media have responded to the increasing contestation of the EU with a greater general interest in this now more salient, potentially more conflictive and therefore more newsworthy topic and have contributed to bringing Europe on the public agenda (Michailidou and Trenz 2010: 328, see also Koopmans and Pfetsch 2006). To what extent this includes national parliaments, however, is another question: In our increasingly
mediatised societies (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999, see also Hjarvard 2008), scholars have observed a decrease of coverage of the institution of parliament that, in comparison with other political actors, does not seem to qualify for entertaining and interesting news with its often ritualised, rigid, lengthy and almost anachronistic procedures (Marschall 2001: 408; see also Marcinkowski 2000; Marschall 2002, 2009, Negrine 1999). The second aim of the paper is therefore to explore whether and under what conditions parliamentary communication activities are covered by the national media and thus have a better chance of actually reaching the citizens.

For the analysis, the paper draws on two unique and extensive quantitative datasets: the first consists of data on parliamentary activities (here: plenary debates and oral questions) on EU issues in seven member states (Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Spain and the UK) over a period of four years (2010 to 2013). The second consists of data on newspaper articles covering parliamentary (communication) activities in EU affairs derived from a quantitative content analysis of three newspapers in each of the above member states (two quality papers and one tabloid) over the same time period.

The paper is structured as follows: The first section provides an overview of the, so far fairly scarce, literature on parliamentary communication in EU affairs and on the news coverage of parliamentary actors. The next section develops the theoretical framework to explain variation in parliamentary communication activities as well as the news coverage thereof based on rational choice and agency theory. Drawing attention to the fact that communication mainly refers to the role of MPs as agents of their citizens, we develop hypotheses on the impact of electoral incentives and disincentives on parliamentary communication, but also take institutional factors into consideration. We then formulate hypotheses on the extent of newspaper coverage based on the news supply by national parliaments as well as public and parliamentary contestation as incentives in terms of newsworthiness. Section three presents the data, followed by the empirical analysis in sections four and five. The final section discusses the findings and concludes.

**Beyond Scrutiny: National Parliaments and the Communication of EU Affairs**

The role of national parliaments in the EU has generated considerable academic interest over the last years (for excellent overviews see Winzen 2010, Rozenberg and Hefftler 2015). Yet, due to the main focus on the scrutiny and control function of national parliaments in EU matters, we still know little about parliamentary communication in EU affairs. Empirical research focussing on parliamentary communication prior to 2010 gave little reason to be very optimistic. A study by Bergman et al. (2003: 175) found a generally weak involvement of the plenaries in EU affairs. ‘Europe’ seemed rarely a topic outside of debates about Treaty changes (Maatsch 2010) or on sessions of the European Council (Van de Steeg 2010). Similarly, a comparison of EU debates in four national parliaments during 2002 and 2010 confirmed that, with the exception of the German Bundestag, especially day-to-day EU matters were rarely debated (Auel and Raunio 2014b). Debates did, occasionally, take place
on high profile EU decisions, such as the Service Directive, but often only after an ex-ante politicisation of the issue by actors outside the parliamentary arena and intensive reporting in the media (Miklin 2014). Interestingly, De Ruiter (2014) found a similar reluctance to communicate EU matters regarding policy issues integrated under the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) – even though OMCs deal with policy issues that are highly relevant from an electoral point of view, such as employment or social policy. Garcia Lupato’s (2014) analysis of budget and investiture debates in Italy and Spain, finally, showed ‘that there is not a real debate on European issues in general parliamentary debates. This de-politicization can … produce a clear deficit in the relation between the parliamentary debate, political competition and the voters’ (ibid.: 106).

Yet there are indications that the EU has since become a more important topic in Europe’s plenaries. Rauh’s study of plenary debates in the German Bundestag, for example, shows that ‘the degree to which the supranational polity, its politics and its policies are mentioned in the publically visible plenary debates has significantly and substantially increased over the last 23 years’ (Rauh 2015: 13). Other studies suggest that especially the eurozone crisis had a rather strong effect in terms of parliamentary communication. Auel and Höing (2015), for example, conclude that the crisis had a considerable impact on plenary debates between 2010 and 2012: across all 27 national parliaments of the EU, on average more than 40 per cent of all EU debates focused on crisis-related issues. Studies have also found an increased politicisation of the EU in the plenaries due to the crisis, although the findings differ with regard to the lines along which polarisation took place. Puntscher Riekmann and Wydra (2013: 575-6) show that opposition parties in Austria, Germany and Italy fiercely contested ‘the socio-economic orientation of the policies (e.g. social European market order vs. neoliberal) as well as the advocacy of allegedly inevitable accompanying measures (e.g. further austerity measures), and demanded a different direction for policies (e.g. a financial transaction tax; more equitable distribution of tax burdens)’. Wendler’s results (2014b) suggest a deepened party polarisation over both, EU integration and competing party ideologies in the debates on the crisis management and EMU development in Austria, France, Germany and the UK. Closa and Maatsch’s (2014) findings highlight the impact of parliamentary Euroscepticism and the government-opposition divide on debates regarding the European Financial Stability Facility. In contrast, Maatsch (2014) concludes that debtor or donor status with regard to the crisis bailouts had a stronger impact on parties’ positioning in debates on anti-crisis measures than the parties’ ideological position on the left-right dimension. These findings suggest that the growing public politicisation of EU politics is, at least as far as eurozone crisis issues are concerned, mirrored within domestic parliamentary arenas.

Media contents concerning EU issues, in turn, have been analysed intensely within the broader discussion about the democratic deficit of the EU. This was based on the normative assumption that a common public sphere is a necessary condition for the legitimation of Europe. Elections to the European Parliament served as an ideal period to investigate the Europeanisation of media coverage, but other, more specific, topics such as the financial crisis, the introduction of the Euro or the potential accession of candidate countries have also
been analysed (instead of many more: Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw 2009; De Vreese et al. 2006; Koopmans and Statham 2010; Meijers 2013; Michailidou and Trenz 2014; Peters et al. 2005; Trenz 2004; for a general overview see also De Vreese 2007). The findings of these studies suggest a rising interest of the media in EU issues as a result of the growing contestation of European integration (Michailidou and Trenz 2010). Analyses focusing on the news coverage of parliamentary actors in EU affairs, in contrast, are fairly rare. Existing studies analysing both members of the European Parliament (Gattermann 2013; Gattermann and Vasilopoulou, 2015) as well as national parliaments (Brüggemann et al. 2009, De Wilde 2012, Koopmans 2007, 2010) suggest, however, that parliamentary actors tend to play a minor role in news about Europe in comparison to their executive colleagues.

This seems to mirror a more general development as scholars have noted an overall decrease of coverage of parliaments over time (Marschall 2001, 2009; see also Pollak and Slominski 2012; Van Aelst and Vliegenthart 2014) – an observation which is usually explained by the decrease of national parliaments’ power over decisions that are taken outside of, but still impact on, the national context. In addition, parliaments have to compete for attention in an increasingly unpredictable and fluid public arena due to the ‘digitalization of traditional media spheres and the practices of publishing, sharing and commenting political news online’ (Michailidou and Trenz 2013: 262). General studies on parliamentary actors in the news often focus on the time of national elections and take a closer look at the interaction between media and politics (e.g. Semetko and Schönbach 2003 for Germany, Lengauer and Winder, 2013 for Austria). Semetko and Schönbach analyse news coverage of elections by the German tabloid newspaper BILD and find that the extent of coverage is related to the degree of party competition (Semetko and Schoenbach 2003). As Tresch notes, higher visibility in a political debate seems to increase the chances for a parliamentary actor to be covered by the media significantly (Tresch 2009 for Switzerland). But by being more visible, MPs also tend to be covered more negatively (Midtbo 2011 for Norway). Schiller (2002) compares the TV coverage of the German Bundestag and the British House of Commons, concluding that the parliament receives coverage when the basic news factors of conflict and prominence are met, which leads to a focus on some selected politicians acting in the plenary. In a similar vein, Van Santen et al. (2015) in their contribution on the coverage of oral questions in the Dutch press find that questions containing criticism of the government (see also Ettinger 2009 for Switzerland) are more likely to receive attention from the media. In addition, surprising or unexpected elements seem to be more newsworthy for journalists (see also Negrine, 1998, Salmond 2011). Oral questions are also in general found to be of greater news value than other instruments (Salmond 2014) such as written questions. Investigating the Dutch case, Van Aelst and Vliegenthart (2014) conclude that ‘about half of oral questions are indeed covered in the national press, mostly without mentioning the initiating role of the MP. Also the written questions appear in the press, but because of their growing number the chance for a written question to receive media attention has declined over the years’ (Van Aelst and Vliegenthart 2014: 404). An increased volume of parliamentary communication, thus, also increases the competition for space in the media (see also De Wilde 2012).
As a result, studies mainly support a basic assumption of media studies regarding newsworthiness, namely that conflictuality and negativity are features that seem to make news about MPs worthy of being covered (Galtung and Ruge 1965, Cook 1989, Gans 1979, Shoemaker and Reese 1991, Harcup and O’Neill 2001, see also Schiller 2002). Drawing attention to the newsworthiness of individual parliamentary actors more explicitly, Gattermann and Vasilopoulou (2015) in their study on broadsheet papers in Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy find that the most decisive factors to make it in the news are the length of tenure, the kind of political office and the position of the MEP in the domestic party structure. These findings are supported by Tresch’s (2009) study on the presence of politicians in Swiss newspapers. While she investigates coverage on a pro EU campaign in Switzerland the aim of her study is to find out about reasons for MPs prominence in the news in general, not in EU affairs explicitly. She concludes that senior members of parliaments – also in terms of seniority or relevance in specific topics – as well as ‘party chairpersons and parliamentary party group leaders have higher chances of being present in the media than the average member of the national parliament’ (Ibid. 121, see also Schönbach et al. 2001, Sheafer 2001, Tresch 2008). Studying the parliamentary election campaign of Flemish candidates, Van Aelst et al.’s (2008) results further back these observations but add the ‘non-political celebrity status’ of candidates as a powerful explanatory variable of media attention for MPs (ibid.: 204, see also Wolfsfeld and Shaefer 2006). Overall, while there are a number of studies investigating the coverage of parliamentary communication, they usually focus on parliament in general (and not on EU affairs) and are more often than not limited to very small-n case studies. Nevertheless they provide useful indicators as to what factors influence the visibility of communication by parliamentary actors in EU affairs in the news.

In the following, we develop our theoretical framework. We first develop hypotheses based mainly on electoral incentives and disincentives for members of parliament (MPs) and parliamentary party groups (PPGs) to communicate European issues to their citizens. In addition, we take institutional factors into account. We then develop hypotheses on the extent of news coverage of such parliamentary activities based on the news supply by national parliaments as well as public and parliamentary contestation as incentives in terms of newsworthiness.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Synthesising common features of both classic and more recent accounts of the parliamentary communication function (e.g. Bagehot (2009 [1867]; Mill 1998 [1861]; Patzelt 2003; Packenham 1970; Raunio 2011), parliamentary communication can be defined as public efforts by a parliamentary actor of informing, educating and/or mobilizing citizens. Such communication can be provided by parliamentary actors at three different levels (Marschall 1999: 23): individual MPs, PPGs and by the parliament as an institution. Communication by MPs and PPGs follows a different logic than communication by the
parliament as an institution (Sarcinelli and Tenscher 2000: 86; Pollak and Slominski 2014): Because the former compete for votes, they follow the rules of political competition and mainly focus on mobilisation. Parliaments as institutions, in contrast, provide neutral and balanced parliamentary information. Communication is more of an ‘educational undertaking’, a ‘civic education project aiming to enhance the political knowledge of the electorate’ (Pollak and Slominski 2014: 111).

In this study, we focus on communication by MPs and parliamentary party groups in the plenary and draw on rational choice and agency theory. Both have become prominent approaches to the study of political representation in general and the role of national parliaments in EU affairs in particular. Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991: 239-40) define an agency relationship as ‘established when an agent has delegated … the authority to take action on behalf of … the principal’. One of the basic assumptions of agency theory is that any delegation of power to an agent creates risks for the principal in terms of agency loss (Lupia 2003). Within the literature on national parliaments in EU affairs, the main focus has so far been on the various means of scrutinising and controlling their agent – the government - they can employ to prevent agency loss in terms of EU policy output and outcome. When it comes to the communication function, however, the logic is somewhat different from that underlying scrutiny and oversight activities: Here, MPs act as agents of their citizens – and in most cases they would very much like to keep that job. In one of the most influential contributions, Mayhew (1974: 5) argued that legislative behaviour could be best understood if legislators were seen as ‘single-minded seekers of reelection’. We follow Cox and McCubbins (1993: 100; see also see also Katznelson and Weingast 2005: 8; Schlesinger 1991: 39-40) in accepting ‘the usual emphasis on re-election’ as not necessarily the only, but the most important component of legislators’ motivation that ‘is reasonable to consider in isolation’.

To be re-elected by their voters, MPs and PPGs must demonstrate credibility and signal to their voters that they represent their interests (Behnke 2008: 14, see also Fenno 1977: 898-9). In other words, they have to convince their own principals that agency loss is negligible. We therefore expect them to communicate EU issues more frequently if they are faced with high levels of salience of and scepticism towards EU issues within the general public (external contestation). At the same time, however, contestation of EU issues within parliament, especially between governing parties, may make it more difficult for them to signal trustworthiness and thus may decrease parliamentary communication of EU issues (internal contestation). In the following, we develop hypotheses on the impact of electoral incentives based on external and internal contestation on the level of parliamentary communication in EU affairs. Moreover, institutional aspects are considered.

External Contestation: EU Salience and Public Euroscepticism

As outlined above, we assume that in member states where public opinion is generally more critical of EU integration, MPs as citizens’ agents have an incentive to communicate
EU affairs due to the potential electoral impact of EU politics. The greater the level of public Euroscepticism, the more MPs and their parliamentary party groups need to try and (re-)gain voters’ trust in the European integration project in general and their own European policies in particular. Public Euroscepticism, however, can be expected to have less of an electoral impact, if coupled with lukewarm salience of EU issues. Studies have indeed repeatedly shown the importance of high EU issue salience for issue voting in national elections (e.g. De Vries 2007, 2010a). In other words, if EU issues do not play a vital role in voters’ considerations, it does not matter as much whether or not they hold Eurosceptic opinions. MPs in member states, where EU issues are more salient, are therefore expected to have a greater electoral incentive ‘to profile themselves on these issues and signal their positions to voters’ (De Wilde 2010: 72).

**H₁: Public Euroscepticism:** The stronger Euroscepticism in public opinion, the more MPs/parliamentary party groups communicate EU affairs.

**H₂: Public EU Salience:** The more salient EU affairs are in public perception, the more MPs/parliamentary party groups communicate EU affairs.

**Internal Contestation: Parliamentary Euroscepticism and Coalition Disagreement**

Above, we discussed our assumptions about the general impact of electoral incentives on parliamentary communication efforts and highlighted public Euroscepticism and the salience of EU issues. However, these general assumptions have to be qualified as it may not always be in the interest of parties to politicise EU issues (Auel and Raunio 2014b). For mainstream parties (and especially governing parties, see below), EU issues are often more a liability than an asset (De Vries 2010b). Reasons are internal dissent over EU integration (Edwards 2009) or the fact that they are generally more Europhile than their voters (Mattila and Raunio 2012). This leads to two expectations: First, we expect the electoral incentives discussed above to be greatest for Eurosceptic parties on both ends of the political spectrum. While Eurosceptic parties on the right tend to capitalise on issues of national sovereignty and identity, parties on the left appeal more to fears of a ‘neoliberal’ Europe and social insecurities (De Vries and Edwards 2009). Hence, both left and right wing Eurosceptic parties have an incentive to politicise EU topics, not least by triggering public confrontations in parliament, and may thus also force mainstream parties to respond.

**H₃: Share of Eurosceptic parties:** The greater the share of Eurosceptic parties in parliament, the more MPs/parliamentary party groups communicate EU affairs.

Second, while mainstream parties are usually more supportive of European integration we can also find parties that are much less enthusiastic – the British Conservatives being the most famous example. This creates problems especially for coalitions. While disagreements between coalition partners increase the incentives to ‘police the bargain’ (Martin and Vanberg 2004, see also Winzen 2013: 304-305), governing parties have no incentive to wash their dirty laundry in public, but rather to smooth out dissent internally to uphold ‘the public
impression of efficiency and competence’ (Schüttemeyer 2009: 5, see also Auel 2007). Thus, stronger disagreement between coalition partners on EU issues is expected to act as a disincentive for parliamentary communication.

**H4: Coalition disagreement over EU integration:** The greater the disagreement over European integration between governing parties, the less MPs/parliamentary party groups communicate EU affairs.

**Institutional (Dis)incentives**

Finally, we also take into account that legislative behaviour in general not only depends on electoral, but also on institutional incentives (Shepsle 1989, Strom 1997). One institutional factor that immediately comes to mind is the classic distinction between working and debating parliaments (Loewenberg and Patterson 1979; Polsby 1975). However, recent studies have found this classic distinction to play no role when it comes to the communication of EU politics (Auel and Raunio 2014b). This finding is related to a second factor, the degree of delegation of EU affairs to committees (Ibid.). While we can generally observe a strong emphasis on committee work in EU affairs, national parliaments differ with regard to whether committees are able to take decisions on behalf of the whole parliament or whether the plenary has to be involved. Yet the assumption that the level of delegation has an impact on the debating activity of national parliaments in EU affairs has also been disconfirmed in recent research (Auel et al. 2015).

What research has shown, however, is that the level of EU scrutiny activity of national parliaments depends to a considerable extent on their institutional strength in EU affairs (Auel et al. 2015). This is not surprising, given that institutional opportunities are a precondition for effective scrutiny activity. When it comes to parliamentary communication of EU issues, however, it has been argued that a different logic may be at play and that stronger institutional power may indeed lead to less communication of EU issues. Governing parties, in particular those of strong national parliaments, may rather want to monitor the government behind closed doors without public criticism that might damage the reputation of the cabinet (Auel 2007, Auel and Raunio 2014b). For example, the main parties in the strong Nordic parliaments have deliberately ‘depoliticised’ European integration through cross-party cooperation in the EAC with the aim of manufacturing consensus in national integration policy (Bergman and Damgaard 2000; Raunio 2014). Thus, it can be expected that MPs in institutionally strong parliaments, i.e. those with effective oversight instruments, focus more on influencing policy behind closed doors in committee or parliamentary party group meetings. On the contrary, MPs in institutionally weaker parliaments may try to compensate this lack of control via a stronger focus on the communication function (Auel and Rittberger 2006).
**H₅: Competition between control and communication function:** The stronger parliamentary control and oversight powers in EU affairs, the less MPs/parliamentary party groups communicate EU affairs.

Regarding the **media coverage** of parliamentary communication activities in EU affairs, we equally expect the levels of contestation over EU issues both within the public and the parliamentary arena to have explanatory leverage. In addition, we take the formal strength of parliaments in EU affairs and their actual supply of communication into account. Within our rational choice framework, journalists are – much like MPs and PPGs – conceptualised as strategic and interest-driven actors. The literature identifies several journalistic aims (such as transmitting political information objectively, McQuail 1994, Tuchman 1978; Statham 2010: 127; acting as political advocates, Patterson and Donsbach 1996; or investigating politicians’ and public officials’ performances, Statham 2010: 127). However, in line with the focus on MPs’ aim of re-election above we focus here on the main aim of journalists/newspapers, namely to sell their product. As economic actors, they are driven by market share concerns in that they aim to maximize readership (Sparrow 2006, Zaller 1999). ‘Given finite organizational resources and an infinite supply of potential raw material’ journalists seek ‘to deliver, within time and space limitations, the most acceptable product to the consumer in the most efficient manner’ (Shoemaker and Reese 1996: 103-104).

To be read, newspapers have to select those kinds of events that appeal to their readers’ interests and tastes. As mentioned above, there is an abundance of literature on ‘news factors’ and ‘news values’ (instead of many: Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O’Neill, 2001; Östgaard, 1965; Schulz, 1976; Staab, 1990; comprehensive overview Eilders 2006), which investigates the specific characteristics of events that guide journalistic judgments regarding the news selection.

‘This news judgment is the ability to evaluate stories based on agreed-on news values, which provide yardsticks of newsworthiness and constitute an audience-oriented routine. That is, they predict what an audience will find appealing and important; and, in practice, they direct gatekeepers to make consistent story selections’ (Shoemaker & Reese 1996: 106).

Empirically, some news factors have repeatedly shown to guide the journalistic selection process, most prominently relevance and importance, conflict and negativism as well as prominence and influence (Eilders 2006: 10-11). Relevance and importance of an event are commonly conceptualised as the perceived impact and consequences it has on the readership (Galtung and Ruge 1965). In our case, it specifically refers to the relevance and importance of EU issues for the readership, i.e. their perception of being (adversely) affected by EU issues. Conflict in terms of newsworthiness, in turn, relates mainly to the degree of contestation of EU issues within the parliamentary arena. Here, the underlying assumption is that readers are engaged by political conflict, but bored by political consensus (Zaller 1999). This is related to negativism which is best captured by the phrase ‘the only good news is bad news’ (Harcup and O’Neill 2001: 272). Finally, prominence and influence of political actors are usually understood as power in the classic Galtung and Ruge approach: ‘the more threatening or beneficial the consequences that their actions may have for citizens, and the
greater the number of citizens affected, the more “relevant” they are’ (Schönbach et al. 2001: 520). In our case, power refers to the strength of the respective parliament in EU affairs. In the following, we develop hypotheses on the impact of external and internal contestation as well as the parliamentary context on the level of media coverage of parliamentary communication in EU affairs.

**News Supply and Relevance of Parliamentary Actors**

A first consideration to take into account is that media coverage of parliamentary EU communication depends on the actual supply of events that can be turned into news in the first place. Here, journalists act in their role as chroniclers of political reality, and parliamentarians should therefore be covered according to their parliamentary activity (McQuail 1992: 213). What parliamentarians actually do becomes decisive (Tresch 2009) and the straightforward expectation is that the more parliaments actually create news by communicating EU affairs, the more likely it is for journalists to report on them.

**H6: Supply of parliamentary EU communication:** *The more parliaments communicate EU affairs, the more journalists will report on them.*

The extent of media coverage does, however, not only depend on what parliaments themselves supply, but also on their formal control and oversight powers in EU affairs. As Schönbach et al. (2001) have argued, the more power and influence political actors have, that is the more their actions affect citizens, the more newsworthy they are: ‘Simply put, we expect that the chances of actors to penetrate the media depend on their actual influence in the decision-making process’ (Koopmans et al. 2010: 64). As discussed above, research has in fact repeatedly shown a dominance of executive actors in media coverage (Brüggemann et al. 2009; Koopmans 2007, 2010; Wessler et al. 2008). Parliamentary actors do less frequently make it into the news, because of – among other things – ‘the lack of competencies in promoting and monitoring European policies’ (Trenz 2004: 301). Thus, it can be argued that the more actual power and influence they have with regard to EU affairs, the more likely it is for them to be in fact reported on.

**H7: Institutional Strength in EU Affairs:** *The stronger parliamentary control and oversight powers in EU affairs, the more newspapers will cover parliamentary communication activity in EU affairs.*

**External Contestation: EU Salience, Public Euroscepticism and Trust in Parliament**

As outlined above, we assume journalists to be mainly driven by readership demand. More precisely, we expect that in member states where public opinion is generally more critical of EU integration, journalists have an incentive to cover EU affairs in general due to the potentially negative impact readers perceive EU issues to have on their lives (Brüggemann and Kleinen-von Königslöw 2009: 31). The greater the level of public Euroscepticism, the
more journalists find EU issues newsworthy and the more likely they will cover them. This generally higher newsworthiness of EU issues is expected to then ‘spill over’ to coverage of parliamentary activities in EU issues as well. The underlying argument here is that the more EU issues are likely to be covered, the more likely it is for parliamentary activities in EU affairs to be covered more frequently as well.

Again, public Euroscepticism, however, can be expected to have less of an impact on parliamentary media coverage, if coupled with lukewarm salience of EU issues. If readers do not base their voting decisions on EU issues, they are not interested in what parliamentary actors do with regard to EU affairs regardless of whether or not they hold Eurosceptic attitudes. Hence, journalists in member states, where EU issues are more salient, and thus figure more strongly in voters’ electoral considerations (see above), are therefore expected to have a greater incentive to report on the parliament in EU affairs.

H8: Public Euroscepticism: The stronger Euroscepticism in public opinion, the more newspapers cover parliamentary communication activities in EU affairs.

H9: Public EU Salience: The more salient EU affairs are in public perception, the more newspapers cover parliamentary communication activity in EU affairs.

Internal Contestation: Parliamentary Euroscepticism and Coalition Disagreement

Finally, based on the literature on news values we expect the degree of contestation within parliament to be decisive as well. Research has repeatedly shown that media tend to paint a conflict-driven picture of competitive democratic elements (i.e. Ettinger 2005). In (comparative) case studies, the degree of conflict between parliamentary actors is in fact often found to be among the determinants for coverage (i.e. Donsbach and Wenzel 2002; Schiller 2002).

The degree of internal contestation is then both supplied by the MPs/PPGs and demanded by the readership that is interested in political controversy rather than harmony. For actors both at the national and EU level, Michailidou and Trenz (2010: 328) suggest

‘While the consensual style of politics that has marked European integration over the first decades has frequently not created sufficient news value to make European politics salient in the media, the progressively intensifying politicization of European integration has been subject to substantial news coverage’.

As discussed above, especially Eurosceptic parties on both sides of the political spectrum are expected both to benefit from and actively to contribute to politicising EU issues. We therefore expect that the greater the share of Eurosceptic parties as especially newsworthy actors in parliament, the more newsworthy parliamentary communication on EU issues will become.

H10: Share of Eurosceptic parties: The greater the share of Eurosceptic parties, the more newspapers cover parliamentary communication activity in EU affairs.
Second, and as also mentioned above, governing parties have no incentive to make internal dissent on EU integration publicly visible, but this is precisely what journalists tend to consider ‘bad news’ and thus newsworthy: Signs of internal division that may impair the governing coalition’s ability to govern effectively. ‘If internal disagreement cannot be settled, becomes known or is even leaked to the media deliberately, it is a clear sign of failing mechanisms of cohesion-building’ (Schüttemeyer 2009: 5). Thus, stronger disagreement between coalition partners on EU issues is expected to act as an incentive for media coverage.

**H1: Coalition disagreement over EU integration:** *The greater the disagreement over European integration between governing parties, the more newspapers cover parliamentary communication activity in EU affairs.*

**Case Selection, Data and Operationalization**

For the empirical analysis we selected the parliaments (lower houses only) of Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Spain and the UK. These seven member states were chosen to provide a representative subgroup in terms of size, length of membership, geographical location and public opinion on EU integration. In addition, their parliaments differ in terms of their formal power in EU affairs (Auel et al. 2014), the share of Eurosceptic parties as well as the type of government.

**Dependent Variables**

Parliamentary Communication activities

The dependent variables consist of oral questions and plenary debates on EU issues in these seven parliaments over a period of 4 years (2010 to 2013). To ensure that results are not biased by the size of parliament, we divided the absolute number of oral questions by the number of MPs. In addition, we accounted for differences in parliamentary rules and routines by calculating the share of questions on EU issues out of all questions as well. Similarly, to take into account that the length of debates varies between parliaments, we not only looked at the absolute number of debates on EU topics in 2010-2013, but also at the share of plenary debating time spent on debating EU issues.\(^1\) Data on the parliamentary activities was collected in the context of the PACE\(^2\) research project, using mainly parliamentary websites

---

\(^1\) Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain information on the overall number of debates on all issues. We can therefore only compare the share of plenary time spent on EU debates.

\(^2\) [http://www.ihs.ac.at/pace/index.html](http://www.ihs.ac.at/pace/index.html)

\(^3\) The data collection took place between November 2013 and September 2014. Data for the Congreso and [http://www.ihs.ac.at/pace/index.html](http://www.ihs.ac.at/pace/index.html)
as sources. In addition, we draw on data collected in the context of the OPAL project (see Auel et al. 2014).

Media Coverage

The dependent variable consists of the number of articles covering parliamentary communication activities in three newspapers per member state between 2010 and 2013 on a monthly basis. For each member state, we selected the two largest quality broadsheets (one conservative, one liberal) and the largest tabloid (see table 1, see also De Vreese et al. 2006; Koopmans and Statham 2010). To obtain a more nuanced picture of the coverage of parliamentary communication activities, we distinguish between articles covering plenary debates and oral questions, but also include the number of all articles on parliamentary actors or activities in EU affairs. Finally, we take into account that the extent of coverage can vary considerably by also analysing those articles that cover the activities above as the main topic as opposed to just mentioning it in passing. The data was collected in the context of the PACE project as well, using both newspaper-owned online archives as well as online data bases of newspaper articles (Lexis-Nexis, Factiva). Articles were searched on the basis of several Boolean search strings combining EU- and parliament-related keywords and then selected and coded manually by mainly native speakers (2 coders per country).

Table 1 about here

Independent Variables

Public Euroscepticism: To test the impact of public Euroscepticism, we draw on Eurobarometer data that measures the percentage of citizens stating that they ‘do not trust the EU’ per year (annual average of the Eurobarometer Surveys 73-80).

Salience: Unfortunately, the salience of EU issues or EU integration in public opinion is difficult to measure. We therefore used the trend in turnout across the elections of 2009 and 2014 as a proxy. We are, of course, aware that turnout at EP elections depends on a number of factors. Yet, inter alia, turnout can be interpreted as the percentage of voters for whom the EU is salient enough to take part in the elections. Whether they do so because they are Eurosceptic or more Europhile is not relevant for the measure of salience. We use the change

---

3 The data collection took place between November 2013 and September 2014. Data for the Congreso and the Nationalrat was coded by members of the project team. Coders for the other parliaments received extensive training in two workshops. In addition, the data was checked by the PI of the project.

4 The data collection took place between December 2013 and March 2015. Coders received extensive training in two workshops. Each coder was responsible for articles from all three newspapers for half of the period of observation (i.e. two years) with alternating months. Conducted reliability tests resulted in Holsti coefficients between 0.839 and 0.910 for the country teams. In addition, the coding was triple checked by three members of the project team.

5 The data was retrieved through the Eurobarometer Interactive Search System, online at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/cf/index.cfm?lang=en
in turnout between the elections in 2009 and 2014 to capture whether the salience has increased or decreased over the course of our period of investigation.\(^6\)

**Share of Eurosceptic parties in parliament:** To measure the strength of Eurosceptic parties within parliaments, we calculated the seat share of all Eurosceptic parties for each parliament based on the Chapel Hill 2010 data set (Bakker et al. 2015).\(^7\)

**Coalition disagreement:** Inspired by Winzen (2013: 310), we calculated the standard deviation of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) 2010 scores for the position on EU integration for the governing parties.

**Institutional Strength in EU affairs:** To test the impact of the institutional strength in EU affairs, we draw on the OPAL score of institutional strength (Auel et al. 2014), which measures parliamentary strength in EU affairs along three dimensions: access to information, the parliamentary infrastructure and oversight powers. Since we are especially interested in the trade-off between parliamentary influence and communication, we use the scores for formal oversight powers only.

**Parliamentary News Supply:** To measure the news supply by national parliaments, we use the absolute number of oral questions, plenary debates as well as general EU activities per parliament per month.

Table 2 provides an overview over our dependent and independent variables.

- Table 2 about here -

---

\(^6\) An alternative measure would have been the share of respondents who named the EU among the greatest problems facing their country in the European Election Study, EES (De Vries 2010a). However, given the wording of the question, this mainly measures salience in terms of negative attitudes.

\(^7\) The Chapel Hill data is based on expert surveys; respondents were asked to assess ‘the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the course of 2010’ on a scale from 1 = strongly opposed to 7 = strongly in favour. A party was considered as Eurosceptic if it had a score of 3.5 or below.
As table 3 shows, formal oversight rights of national parliaments do have the expected impact on the number of oral questions, but overall our assumptions on weaker parliaments using communication to compensate for the lack of strong oversight rights could not be confirmed. Most importantly, strong oversight rights increase both, the number (but not significantly at the 95% level) and the share of plenary time spent on debates. Thus, although strong parliaments may try to influence the government behind (closed) committee doors, there is no indication that this comes at the expense of public debates in the plenary (see figures 1 and 2).

This is an interesting result that contradicts findings from periods before 2010. The German Bundestag, the Austrian Nationalrat and the Finnish Eduskunta are all parliaments with very strong oversight powers and active debaters at the same time. Auel and Raunio (2014b), in contrast, have found hardly any plenary debates in the Eduskunta between 2002 and 2010. The same is true for the Nationalrat, where Bergman et al. (2003) found an only ‘weak’ involvement of the plenary in EU affairs (see also Miklin 2015). Although our data does not allow a comparison with parliamentary communication activities before 2010, there are, as mentioned above, clear indications that the eurozone crisis has had a decisive impact on debating patterns in these parliaments. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of debates by EUR-lex classification to which we added two categories, debates on government declarations covering a range of EU topics, and debates on domestic provisions for EU politics. As the figure demonstrates, debates concerning the European Monetary Union (EMU) were important for all parliaments, but especially for those of Austria and Finland.

Given the importance of the crisis it is hardly surprising that parliamentary communication was also clearly a reaction to public opinion. Both public Euroscepticism and, especially, salience seem to provide incentives for parliaments to go public. Where the EU is an important topic – even if the public is less sceptical of EU integration – parliaments felt compelled to communicate EU issues – possibly precisely to avoid (further) increase in Euroscepticism.

While the above shows that parliamentary actors are responsive to public opinion and contestation when it comes to communicating EU issues, contestation of EU integration within parliament, in contrast, rather leads to a de-emphasis of EU issues: Different positions within coalitions on European integration decrease the absolute number of all types of activities, and especially the number of plenary debates (Figure 4). These results confirm our expectation that coalition partners that disagree over EU issues try to avoid airing out their differences in public. Yet this result is challenged by the fact that parliaments with internally divided coalitions do spend a greater share of plenary time discussing EU issues, and this impact becomes only a little weaker once we remove the two outliers (FI11 and FI13; see figure 5) from the data set (see also table 4). One reason could be that EU affairs in general and the eurozone crisis in particular sparked especially long plenary debates in parliaments with internally divided coalitions, which clearly merits further investigation.
A somewhat surprising finding is that – at least in the parliaments under investigation – Eurosceptic parties had a fairly weak impact on parliamentary communication efforts. A stronger presence of Eurosceptic parties leads to a statistically significant, but rather small increase in the number of both oral questions and debates – and it even has a negative impact on the share of plenary time devoted to EU issues. This is especially unexpected regarding the number of oral questions: While Eurosceptic parties (with the exception of the British Conservatives in our sample) as smaller opposition parties often lack the institutional power to set the plenary agenda, oral questions could be considered as an ideal communication instrument for them. However, as figures 6 and 7 demonstrate, the number of oral questions is much more driven by the salience of EU issues rather than the presence and strength of Eurosceptic parties. The findings also remain true when we omit outliers from the data (see table 4).
Anyone Listening? Empirical Analysis of Newspaper Coverage

To test the hypotheses on the newspaper coverage, we first take a simple look at the relationship between ‘news supply’ and coverage. Table 5 provides the results of the pairwise correlations (Pearson’s r), first for articles covering parliamentary actors and activities in EU affairs in general (once for all articles and once for articles where the parliamentary actor or activity is the main topics covered). Here, we use the number of all coded parliamentary activities as the independent variable for ‘news supply’. These are followed by the results for articles covering plenary debates (all and main topic only) as well as oral questions (all and main topic) using the number of plenary debates as well as oral questions per month, respectively.

- Table 5 about here -

As table 5 shows, there is a clear and significant relationship between parliamentary activities and the news coverage for both the activities in general and for plenary debates. In both cases, the relationship is even stronger for articles covering them as the main topic. However, the same is not true for oral questions. Although the literature has identified oral questions as one of the most newsworthy parliamentary activities, this does not seem the case with regard to EU affairs in our sample. In addition, the relatively low coefficients strongly suggest that ‘news supply’ is significant, but not the only factor impacting the extent of coverage.

In a second step, therefore we included all the explanatory variables and ran a multiple linear regression analysis using STATA 13 (table 6). Since our data covers a period of four years on a monthly basis and in seven member states, we used a cross-sectional time series model. As above, we use all articles covering parliamentary actors in EU affairs in general (all and main topic only), then the articles covering plenary debates (all and main topic only) as well as oral questions (all and main topic only) as dependent variables. For each, the corresponding ‘news supply’ is used as one of the independent variables in the model. All other independent variables remain the same across the models. For an alternative, negative binominal regression analysis (due to over-dispersed count data), see the appendix (table A1). As the results for both regressions are fairly similar (with main differences consisting of an increase in significance for a number of coefficients in the negative binominal regression), we refer to the linear regression in the text because results are easier to interpret.

- Table 6 about here -

The results in table 6 confirm the findings above. ‘News supply’ is a highly significant predictor for the extent of newspaper coverage of all activities as well as debates. Thus, greater parliamentary communication efforts through debates do pay off: active debaters (and more active parliaments in EU affairs in general) get more coverage, both in terms of the sheer number of articles and in terms of more in-depth coverage. In turn, news supply is again not a significant factor when it comes to the coverage of oral questions.

Figure 10 illustrates the findings by contrasting the number of plenary debates and oral questions with the number of articles covering these activities (all articles and as main topic).
In most parliaments, the number of oral questions is much greater than the number of articles that mention them or cover them more fully. The cases where oral questions receive most attention are the Nationalrat, the Eduskunta and the Congreso. In all three parliaments – and in the Nationalrat in particular –, oral questions are generally comparatively rare, which might explain why they attract media attention. For Assemblée Nationale or the German Bundestag, in contrast, where oral questions are a much more frequently used parliamentary instrument in EU affairs, the law of diminishing returns seems to apply: the more questions get asked, the more they are part of the parliamentary routine and thus less newsworthy. Only in the UK do we find a combination of both relatively frequent questions and newspaper articles, which may be due to the general attractiveness of ‘parliamentary question time’ for the media (Salmond 2014). The results for the Sejm, finally, also seem to confirm our expectations: Oral questions on EU issues are extremely rare, and we find hardly any articles on them. Yet given the results for Austria, Finland and Spain, the lack of media interest in those that do get asked remains a bit of a puzzle.

- Figure 11 about here -

The results also partly confirm our expectations regarding the relevance of the parliament in terms of newsworthiness. While the formal power of parliaments in EU affairs has no significant impact on the number of articles in general, it does impact the number of all three types of ‘in-depth’ articles.

Turning to internal contestation, coalition dissent proves to be a significant predictor for all of our dependent variables. This clearly supports our expectations about intra-coalition conflict as a news factor. The results for Eurosceptic parties, in turn, are again surprising. The share of Eurosceptic parties in parliament has an, albeit weak, impact on the number of almost all types of articles, but this impact is negative. Thus, all other things being equal, the greater the potential internal contestation by Eurosceptic parties, the less debates and questions are being covered by the media. Above, we found that the impact of the share of Eurosceptic parties on the communication efforts of national parliaments was also relatively weak, but the effect was positive. One reason could again be related to the law on diminishing returns: The larger and the longer established Eurosceptic parties are in parliaments, the more ‘normal’ they are as political actors and the less newsworthy for the media. Yet, this result clearly calls for a more detailed analysis of the news coverage by parties and by type of newspaper. Another explanation may well be that quality newspapers, which in general tend to have a more pro-European editorial line and to cover EU issues more extensively than tabloids (Kleine-von Königslöw 2010; Koopmans and Pfetsch 2006; Patterson and Donsbach 2003), might be slightly more reluctant to provide Eurosceptic parties a public platform.

Our final, and equally unexpected, result is that public contestation, i.e. Euroscepticism and salience, have almost no impact on the news coverage. Where predictors are significant, the impact is extremely low. In addition, in some cases the coefficients are even negative, especially for salience. This clearly disconfirms our expectations about a spill-over from the generally higher newsworthiness of EU issues due to increased public contestation to a more
frequent and extensive coverage of parliamentary (communication) activities in EU issues. Thus, public contestation may explain the overall coverage of EU news, but not the coverage of parliamentary communication activities.

Conclusion

Especially since the outbreak of the eurozone crisis, EU issues have gained in importance both for national politics as well as public opinion. Against this background, the aim of this paper was to analyse the impact of political contestation on parliamentary communication of EU affairs. We expected public communication of MPs and their parliamentary party groups to follow the logic of political contestation, and we distinguished between electoral and institutional incentives for communication. Regarding the former, our data reveals that greater political contestation in public opinion has a positive impact on communication of EU affairs. In other words, across our sample of national parliaments a more ‘constraining dissensus’ acts as a ‘catalysing dissensus’ with regard to communication. Our results on the impact of political contestation within parliament, however, are more ambiguous: The presence and strength of Eurosceptic parties is surprisingly not a decisive factor for parliamentary communication, while disagreement between the governing parties decreases the overall number of communication activities. Overall, this does suggest that parliamentary contestation of EU issues does little to further parliamentary communication, and may even harm it in the case of internal coalition dissent. Finally, we can also not confirm that strong formal oversight rights in EU affairs come at the expense of parliamentary debates.

While this aspect needs to be analysed in more detail, our findings do suggest that they are influenced by the fact that our period under investigation covers the most turbulent time of the eurozone crisis. Parliamentary actors, both at the individual (MPs) and collective level (PPGs), reacted to greater levels of public Euroscepticism and especially the increased salience of EU issues. This is even true for institutionally strong parliaments that previously dealt with EU affairs mainly within the committees and provided little in terms of communication, such as Austria and Finland. Thus, at least with regard to the sheer level of communication efforts, our results support the findings in the literature on the politicisation of EU issues within national parliaments. Whether this is a more durable trend that will extend beyond the eurozone crisis, is another question.

As the subsequent newspaper analysis showed, a greater effort made by national parliaments to communicate EU issues is also rewarded by greater publicity, at least when it comes to plenary debates. Although newspapers hardly cover every EU debate, active debaters do have a greater chance of appearing in the media and to have their debates covered in depth. Thus, when parliaments talk, the media does listen. We still need to investigate this further, but our findings do imply that this chance is greater in the case of intra-coalition dissent. This suggests that communicating EU issues can present rather a challenge for governing parliamentary party groups. Coalitions that are divided over EU issues may have no incentive to air their dirty laundry in public, but it is exactly their dirty laundry that makes them interesting for the media.
List of References


De Wilde, Pieter (2010). How Politicisation Affects European Integration: Contesting the EU Budget in the Media and Parliaments of the Netherlands, Denmark and Ireland, Oslo: University of Oslo.


Midtbø, Tor (2011). Explaining Media Attention for Norwegian MPs: A New Modelling Approach, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 34:3, 226-249


## Tables and Figures

### Table 1: Overview over Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member state</th>
<th>Conservative Broadsheet</th>
<th>Liberal Broadsheet</th>
<th>Tabloid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Die Presse</td>
<td>Der Standard</td>
<td>Kronenzeitung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Aamulehti</td>
<td>Helsingin Sanomat</td>
<td>Iltasanomat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>Le Parisien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</td>
<td>Süddeutsche Zeitung</td>
<td>Bild Zeitung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Rzeczpospolita</td>
<td>Gazeta Wyborcza</td>
<td>Super Express</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>ABC</td>
<td>El Pais</td>
<td>El Mundo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>The Sun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Overview Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No oral questions/MP/year</td>
<td>.071</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share oral questions/year</td>
<td>5.073</td>
<td>5.095</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No debates/year</td>
<td>21.36</td>
<td>12.93</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of plenary time/year</td>
<td>8.17</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>23.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All articles/month</td>
<td>16.030</td>
<td>15.766</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All articles, main topic/month</td>
<td>5.214</td>
<td>6.465</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles on debates/month</td>
<td>1.440</td>
<td>2.140</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles on debates, main topic/month</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>1.539</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles on oral questions/month</td>
<td>.420</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles on oral questions, main topic/month</td>
<td>.179</td>
<td>.455</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Euroscepticism</td>
<td>54.96</td>
<td>10.31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>-1.06</td>
<td>4.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurosceptic parties</td>
<td>20.83</td>
<td>17.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition dissent</td>
<td>.665</td>
<td>.598</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal oversight rights</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All parl. Activities/month</td>
<td>30.795</td>
<td>30.786</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debates/month</td>
<td>1.780</td>
<td>2.038</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral questions/month</td>
<td>3.143</td>
<td>5.086</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Regression results parliamentary communication activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Oral questions</th>
<th>Share Oral questions</th>
<th>Number of debates</th>
<th>Percentage of plenary time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal oversight rights</td>
<td>-.161***</td>
<td>11.860**</td>
<td>8.045</td>
<td>26.635***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.023)</td>
<td>(3.285)</td>
<td>(9.784)</td>
<td>(1.925)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurosceptic parties</td>
<td>.002*</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.786**</td>
<td>-.217***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.001)</td>
<td>(.054)</td>
<td>(.166)</td>
<td>(.031)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition dissent</td>
<td>-.092**</td>
<td>-5.392**</td>
<td>-14.761*</td>
<td>4.460***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.024)</td>
<td>(1.391)</td>
<td>(4.978)</td>
<td>(.656)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>.033**</td>
<td>.516</td>
<td>5.364**</td>
<td>-.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.005)</td>
<td>(.216)</td>
<td>(1.259)</td>
<td>(.171)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Euroscept.</td>
<td>.001*</td>
<td>.199*</td>
<td>.473***</td>
<td>.109**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.060)</td>
<td>(.083)</td>
<td>(.029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>-10.043</td>
<td>-21.204</td>
<td>-10.441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.009)</td>
<td>(3.824)</td>
<td>(11.533)</td>
<td>(2.528)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td>.364</td>
<td>.681</td>
<td>.683</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes: Entries are coefficients with standard errors adjusted for 7 country clusters in parentheses. N = 28, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.*
Table 4: Regression results parliamentary communication activities – outliers omitted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Oral questions</th>
<th>Share Oral questions</th>
<th>Number of debates</th>
<th>Percentage of plenary time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal oversight rights</td>
<td>-.131***</td>
<td>3.609**</td>
<td>8.045</td>
<td>26.771***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.016)</td>
<td>(.534)</td>
<td>(9.784)</td>
<td>(1.446)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurosceptic parties</td>
<td>.002**</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.787**</td>
<td>-.198**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(.019)</td>
<td>(.166)</td>
<td>(.036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition dissent</td>
<td>-.062***</td>
<td>-3.127**</td>
<td>-14.761*</td>
<td>3.837**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.009)</td>
<td>(.830)</td>
<td>(4.978)</td>
<td>(.792)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>.280***</td>
<td>.921***</td>
<td>5.364**</td>
<td>-.123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.002)</td>
<td>(.103)</td>
<td>(1.259)</td>
<td>(.155)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Euroscept.</td>
<td>.001**</td>
<td>.094**</td>
<td>.473**</td>
<td>.133**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.000)</td>
<td>(0.26)</td>
<td>(.082)</td>
<td>(.028)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>-1.384</td>
<td>-21.204</td>
<td>-11.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.016)</td>
<td>(1.342)</td>
<td>(11.533)</td>
<td>(2.494)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.877</td>
<td>.670</td>
<td>.681</td>
<td>.809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Entries are coefficients with standard errors adjusted for 7 country clusters in parentheses, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 5: The Relationship Between ‘News Supply’ and Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All articles</th>
<th>Articles main topic</th>
<th>Articles debates</th>
<th>Articles debates, main topic</th>
<th>Articles Questions</th>
<th>Articles questions, main topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All EU activities</td>
<td>.437***</td>
<td>.295***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.217***</td>
<td>.201***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Entries are Pearson’s r coefficients, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. 
Table 6: OLS regression results newspaper articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>All articles</th>
<th>Articles main topic</th>
<th>Articles debates</th>
<th>Articles debates main topic</th>
<th>Articles on Questions</th>
<th>Articles on questions main topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All EU activities</td>
<td>0.149***</td>
<td>0.0481**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0357)</td>
<td>(0.0155)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.227***</td>
<td>0.159***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0612)</td>
<td>(0.0439)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0153</td>
<td>0.0101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0117)</td>
<td>(0.00603)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal oversight rights</td>
<td>-3.350</td>
<td>7.777**</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>1.334*</td>
<td>0.431</td>
<td>0.396*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.034)</td>
<td>(2.615)</td>
<td>(0.871)</td>
<td>(0.625)</td>
<td>(0.381)</td>
<td>(0.197)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share Eurosceptic parties</td>
<td>0.0180</td>
<td>-0.108*</td>
<td>-0.0386*</td>
<td>-0.0371**</td>
<td>-0.0144*</td>
<td>-0.00788*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.115)</td>
<td>(0.0499)</td>
<td>(0.0169)</td>
<td>(0.0121)</td>
<td>(0.00714)</td>
<td>(0.00369)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet dissent</td>
<td>6.315*</td>
<td>4.333**</td>
<td>0.910*</td>
<td>0.804*</td>
<td>0.517**</td>
<td>0.251*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.014)</td>
<td>(1.306)</td>
<td>(0.453)</td>
<td>(0.325)</td>
<td>(0.194)</td>
<td>(0.100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>1.245</td>
<td>-0.167</td>
<td>0.0242</td>
<td>-0.0743</td>
<td>-0.0898*</td>
<td>-0.0442*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.659)</td>
<td>(0.286)</td>
<td>(0.0839)</td>
<td>(0.0602)</td>
<td>(0.0397)</td>
<td>(0.0205)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euroscepticism</td>
<td>-0.0274</td>
<td>0.0516</td>
<td>-0.0159</td>
<td>-0.00699</td>
<td>0.0146*</td>
<td>0.00710*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0991)</td>
<td>(0.0430)</td>
<td>(0.0143)</td>
<td>(0.0102)</td>
<td>(0.00592)</td>
<td>(0.00306)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Constant                   | 9.072        | -3.652              | 2.040*           | 0.459                      | -0.603                | -0.408                          |
|                            | (6.875)      | (2.979)             | (1.033)          | (0.742)                    | (0.433)               | (0.223)                         |

R2                         | 0.247        | 0.159               | 0.078            | 0.081                      | 0.064                 | 0.050                           |

Notes: Entries are coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, N= 336, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
Figure 1: added variable plot ‘no debates/formal oversight rights’

Figure 2: added variable plot ‘share debates/formal oversight rights’
Figure 3: Parliamentary Debates by Topic (% of all EU debates in each parliament)

Note: Since debates can cover more than one EUR-lex category, the percentages per parliament can add up to > 100%.
Figure 8: Share of oral questions by parties’ government/opposition and pro/anti-EU status

Figure 9: Comparison of seat share and share of oral questions for Eurosceptic parties
Figure 10: Comparison of number of communication activities (debates and oral questions) and articles (all and main topic)
Appendix: Alternative Regression Analysis

Taking into account that our dependent variables consist of over-dispersed count data, we also ran a negative binominal analysis. The results for both regressions are still very similar, with the main difference compared to the OLS regression consisting of an increase in the significance for a number of coefficients. In addition, salience becomes a significant predictor for all articles and public Euroscepticism for all articles, main topic, but the coefficients remain small in both cases (in bold).

Table A1: Negative binominal regression results newspaper articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>All articles</th>
<th>All articles, main topic</th>
<th>Articles debates</th>
<th>Articles debates, main topic</th>
<th>Articles questions</th>
<th>Articles questions, main topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All EU activities</td>
<td>0.00723***</td>
<td>0.00882***</td>
<td>0.183***</td>
<td>0.253***</td>
<td>0.0346</td>
<td>0.0615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00191)</td>
<td>(0.00263)</td>
<td>(0.0443)</td>
<td>(0.0615)</td>
<td>(0.0268)</td>
<td>(0.0328)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal oversight rights</td>
<td>-0.110</td>
<td>2.010***</td>
<td>-0.131</td>
<td>1.522*</td>
<td>0.0345</td>
<td>3.285**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.322)</td>
<td>(0.429)</td>
<td>(0.587)</td>
<td>(0.774)</td>
<td>(0.931)</td>
<td>(1.264)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share</td>
<td>-0.000809</td>
<td>-0.0237**</td>
<td>-0.0317**</td>
<td>-0.0534***</td>
<td>-0.0455*</td>
<td>-0.0603**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00600)</td>
<td>(0.00808)</td>
<td>(0.0116)</td>
<td>(0.0159)</td>
<td>(0.0185)</td>
<td>(0.0244)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurosceptic parties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition dissent</td>
<td>0.409**</td>
<td>0.843***</td>
<td>0.728*</td>
<td>1.117**</td>
<td>1.380**</td>
<td>1.684**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.156)</td>
<td>(0.206)</td>
<td>(0.310)</td>
<td>(0.426)</td>
<td>(0.495)</td>
<td>(0.643)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>0.0788*</td>
<td>-0.0496</td>
<td>0.00810</td>
<td>-0.114</td>
<td>-0.236*</td>
<td>-0.299*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0340)</td>
<td>(0.0467)</td>
<td>(0.0540)</td>
<td>(0.0750)</td>
<td>(0.0985)</td>
<td>(0.137)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euroscepticism</td>
<td>-0.00325</td>
<td>0.0155*</td>
<td>-0.0136</td>
<td>-0.0104</td>
<td>0.0385**</td>
<td>0.0548*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.00507)</td>
<td>(0.00716)</td>
<td>(0.00996)</td>
<td>(0.0136)</td>
<td>(0.0147)</td>
<td>(0.0221)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.365***</td>
<td>-0.681</td>
<td>0.942</td>
<td>-0.656</td>
<td>-3.865***</td>
<td>-4.628***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.356)</td>
<td>(0.496)</td>
<td>(0.700)</td>
<td>(0.957)</td>
<td>(1.110)</td>
<td>(1.709)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inalpha</td>
<td>-0.844***</td>
<td>-0.375***</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.616***</td>
<td>0.335</td>
<td>-0.771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>(0.0868)</td>
<td>(0.104)</td>
<td>(0.149)</td>
<td>(0.183)</td>
<td>(0.289)</td>
<td>(1.123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Entries are coefficients with standard errors in parentheses * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001