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Debating Europe in National Parliaments

Justification and Political Polarization in
Debates on the EU in Austria, France,
Germany and the United Kingdom

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Abstract

The paper presents a research project by the author on the evolution of plenary debates about European integration within the parliaments of four EU Member States (Austria, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom). Addressing the previously under-explored communicative function of parliaments in the context of EU governance, the project investigates the links between different types of argumentative justification, and patterns of polarization between parliamentary speakers and parties. In theoretical terms, a discourse theoretical approach that distinguishes pragmatic, ethical, and moral types of justification is combined with a theoretical model of differential Europeanization. Building on this model, the approach taken here relates discourse-, actor-related and institutional elements to theorize generalizable links between different types of argumentative justification and political polarization across different cases. Moreover, the model is used to explain comparative variation in the intensity of different kinds of contention on European governance between different topics and countries. In its empirical part, the paper presents some insights from the empirical data gained through the computer-based manual coding of plenary debates between 2005 and 2012. Citing examples from debates about the revision of the EU Treaties and the resolution of the European debt crisis, the paper concludes that the communicative function of national parliaments in relation to the EU is generally a more informative source on political contention about European integration than previously recognized in existing research. Moreover, the findings confirm the existence of links between the argumentative and contestation dimensions, as demonstrated through a distinction between problem-solving, directional and legitimacy debates that each evolve through characteristic patterns of party political polarization.

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I. Introduction

The research literature about the Europeanization of national parliaments has grown quickly in recent years (Raunio 2009, Holzhaecker 2007a,b, O'Brennan/Raunio 2007, Goetz/Mayer-Sahling 2008). However, one aspect of this topic has remained under-explored – namely, the communicative role of domestic legislatures, which evolves through public debate about decisions, policies and institutions of the European Union. Existing research has mostly justified this omission by pointing at the limited amount of plenary time devoted to EU issues, and some contributions have even developed theory-based explanations of the passive role of parliaments as arenas for debate about European integration (Raunio 2011). However, more recent contributions have begun to recognize public communication as an important element of the Europeanization of national parliaments (empirical contributions to this debate are found in Auel/Raunio 2012, Maatsch 2010, 2013, Wendler 2011, 2013d, 2014, see also Raunio 2011: 319, 2009: 319-22 for a discussion of this question).

In empirical terms, this appears justified by the clearly increased number and salience of parliamentary debates as highlighted during the recent Eurozone crisis, when parliamentary controversies about crisis management measures such as the Greek bailout and institutional innovations such as the European Stabilization Mechanism made headline news in several of the Eurozone countries. In normative terms, moreover, the communicative role of national parliaments is of obvious interest to scholars concerned with the role of public deliberation for the alleviation of the EU democratic deficit (Eriksen/Fossum 2002) and the potentially negative effects of European integration on domestic parliamentary democracy (Börzel/Sprungk 2007). At the intersection of these two debates, national parliaments are in a unique position as institutions that are both directly affected by Europeanization and represent the primary arena for the democratic legitimization of and public debate about decisions in the context of European governance. In this context, few other arenas for a direct exchange and discussion between political leaders about European governance come to mind at the level of domestic politics apart from national parliaments (including coverage in the media, where statements are both mediated and speakers unable to directly engage with each other). This assessment even extends beyond the national level and qualifies national parliaments as probably the only forum for public debate

about European integration between political elites at the current stage, as the communicative role of the European Parliament still appears limited.

Moreover, existing research has pointed to limitations on the activity of domestic legislatures within their scrutiny and mandating function towards domestic governments in the context of EU decision-making. Although control mechanisms are formally institutionalized in all European legislatures, they often remain unused or only partly effective as their application is inhibited by time and resource constraints, dilemmas between effective decision-making and executive accountability, and party political constraints particularly on the majority groups controlling parliamentary veto options (Beichelt 2012, Benz/Auel 2005, Pollak/Slominski 2009, Saalfeld 2005). The debating function of parliaments, in turn, may be less affected by these constraints, as the public discussion on European policies is not as strongly affected by decision-making dilemmas or time constraints, and is less dependent on parliamentary majorities to be enacted than scrutiny measures. Against this background, an interesting question both for researchers and practitioners is whether a more active debating role could be a promising perspective for national parliaments beyond their role as scrutinizers of domestic executives. From this normative point of view, national parliaments could develop their role in European governance by strengthening what they are arguably good at: to speak to national publics and to expose competing political concepts for European governance through contentious public debate between speakers with different roles and party political affiliations. To develop this argument, however, we need more insights about the actual evolution of debates, concerning their intensity, the thematic content of debates and evolving styles of political interaction and polarization.

Against the background of these empirical and normative observations, this paper presents the theoretical approach, method and some empirical findings of a research project by the author that looks at the debating role of national parliaments in four EU Member States (the Austrian Nationalrat, the French Assemblée Nationale, the German Bundestag, and the British House of Commons). More specifically, the project approaches this topic by asking about the links between two aspects of public communication about European integration: the discursive content of argumentative justifications and related controversies on the one hand, and the patterns of political polarization that emerge between political actors and parties in the parliamentary arena, on the other. Through this approach, the project seeks to link the literatures dealing with the discursive justification of supranational governance towards the public (Neyer 2006, 2011, Manners 2011, Daase et al. 2012) with the debate on the party political contestation of European politics and its potentially emerging 'politicization' (Marks/Steenbergen 2004, Kriesi et al. 2008, Hooghe/Marks 2008, Zürn/de Wilde 2012, Statham/Trenz 2012). In this sense, the main question of the project is what links can be drawn between different kinds of argumentative justification for European governance, and various modes of political polarization discussed in the party politics literature. In this sense, the project also speaks to the question of a potentially

transformative effect of European integration on existing party political cleavages, as widely discussed in research about party politics in the EU (Marks 2004, for an overview of the debate, see also Statham et al. 2010). Beyond the main research question, the project also seeks to investigate differences between the various national parliaments as an addition to comparative research on legislatures (Arter 2007), and establish comparisons between various thematic segments of the debate on European integration. Against this background, the purpose of this particular paper is to acquaint the reader with the theoretical and methodical approach of the project, and to give an overview of some of the empirical findings at the present state. Some of these results have been published in working papers and journal articles, and are due to be summarized in a forthcoming book by the author. While some of the explanations in this paper therefore need to remain at a relatively general level because of restrictions of space, reference will be made to previously published results and to ongoing research within the project.

The remainder of the paper is structured in four parts: The two following sections present the theoretical framework (ch.2) and the empirical basis and methodology of the project (ch.3). The subsequent section gives an overview of the existing empirical findings (ch.4), which are summarized in a conclusion (ch. 5).

2. Theoretical framework

The research question outlined above requires a theoretical framework that links discursive, actor-related and institutional elements in a comparative perspective, allowing the evaluation of hypotheses about the links between the dimensions of discursive justification and political polarization. To this end, the project combines discourse theoretical elements with a framework that is based on the well-established “Goodness of Fit” model of Europeanization (Börzel 2005, Börzel/Risse 2007, Ladrech 2010: 21-35, Bulmer 2007: 51-55) but adapted to the specific topic of party political debate on European integration in national parliaments.

Borrowing from this model, it is assumed that conflicts about issues of European integration within EU Member States result from adaptational pressures (or a ‘misfit’) between supranational and domestic institutions and policies. These pressures are, however, not assumed as an objectively measurable given but seen as discursively constructed by speakers in the parliamentary arena, depending on their political motives, the institutional environment, and the topic in question. Applying the twofold interpretation of the model in the theoretical languages of rationalist and constructivist institutionalism (cp. Börzel 2005: 52-56), sources of conflict over Europeanization therefore present themselves in two different forms: either as expected changes in the distribution of legal, economic and political resources between domestic actors resulting from European decision-making, or as tensions between normative values, norms and symbols of

both levels. Justifications for European decision-making (and their contestation in the parliamentary arena) are therefore presented in two different forms in the discourse of parliamentary debate: From a resource-based perspective, arguments are proposed by reference to instrumental losses and gains arising from EU-related decisions in relation to actor-specific goals (in terms of economic, legal or political resources). From a norms-based perspective, arguments are based on the reference to three sets of norms: the culturally defined identity of a group or individual, the principled views defended by a speaker, or the norms used in public discourse to establish concepts of justice and legitimacy.

To capture this distinction empirically, the theoretical approach adopts the discourse theoretical distinction between pragmatic, ethical-political, and moral types of argumentation, initially established by Jürgen Habermas and used in numerous contributions to research about the discursive dimension of European politics (Habermas 1991, Sjursen 2002, Lerch/Schwellnus 2006, Ecker-Ehrhardt 2007, cp. also framing approaches based on this distinction such as Helbling et al. 2010: 500-502). This distinction can be used to operationalize the discursive construction of resource- and norms-based justifications and conflicts, as different rationality principles are used to establish arguments within the three types of discourse: Pragmatic arguments rely on a consequentialist form of reasoning about cause-effect relationships between decisions and outcomes and are used to assess the utility of decisions for the achievement of actor-specific goals which are seen as fixed and not open to contestation. From the perspective of pragmatic argumentation, European institutions and decisions therefore appear justified when they are effective in realizing actor-specific goals and in resolving problems of collective action (such as in a statement endorsing the benefits from the common currency for German or French economic interests, or a positive appraisal of majority voting as a step towards more effective decision-making in the EU). The basis of justification for these kinds of arguments, therefore, is the reference to returns which specific decisions or institutions have for exogenously defined resources of actors. Disagreement about these arguments is therefore understood to indicate the discursive construction of resource-based conflicts in relation to European integration.

In turn, the use of both ethical-political and moral arguments indicates a norms-based variant of justification. However, while both types of argumentation are essentially normative by referring to standards that are used to define socially appropriate behaviour, an important difference between both is the reference group on whose behalf normative claims are made: The ethical-political justification of decisions refers to the principled values and identity of a social group in comparison and contrast to other values and collective identifications (and therefore essentially remains particularistic). In this sense, European decisions and institutions appear justified from an ethical-political perspective when they resonate with the key values and collective identifications of a social group (such as in a statement endorsing the Charter of Fundamental Rights as an expression of a collective European heritage of civilizational values, or in a statement

supporting the idea of European integration as a lesson from German history). By contrast, the reference to moral arguments is based on principles that must be presented as universally generalizable across a variety of social contexts and value-based orientations. From the perspective of moral justification, European decisions and institutions therefore appear justified when they can be based on universal concepts of justice and legitimacy – such as in a statement praising the Lisbon Treaty as a step towards the democratization of the EU through the empowerment of the European Parliament (for a more detailed discussion, cp. Wendler 2014).

In this context, it is important to add that this distinction is used as an analytical tool for the assessment of the discursive structure of argumentative justifications, but not as an explanation of political action: Speakers using normative arguments are therefore not seen as more sincere, idealistic or less interested in the strategic pursuit of their own political goals, and speakers using utility-based arguments are not necessarily egoistic or not attached to normative principles. The aim at this point, however, is to uncover the argumentative structure of statements used by parliamentary speakers in their depiction of European governance and resulting conflicts at the level of domestic politics. By taking this approach, the project is therefore not interested in assessing the actual effect or ‘misfit’ of given European decisions in relation to domestic politics, but aims at a systematic analysis of *what kinds of argument political actors use* to construct adaptational changes prompted by Europeanization. As discussed above, six kinds of argument are distinguished – namely, justifications based on the pragmatic utility of decisions in relation to political, legal and economic resources, and justifications based on the normative desirability of decisions in relation to the ethical values, cultural identity, or standards of legitimacy of a social group or society as a whole.

From this point of departure, the overall aim of the theoretical approach is to arrive at explanations how and why speakers in the parliamentary arena take sides in the different types of argumentative conflict outlined here. To construct these explanations, the approach followed here considers an important argument made through the ‘Goodness of Fit’-model – namely, that the emergence of adaptational pressures as the independent variable is a necessary, but not a sufficient factor to explain the outcomes of Europeanization, suggesting institutional and actor-related factors as intervening variables (Börzel 2005: 60). To consider these factors, both the institutional context of the parliamentary arena and party political factors as an actor-related variable are considered to arrive at assumptions how the various types of argumentative conflict outlined above can be related to the dependent variable – namely, the emergence of different patterns of polarization between parliamentary parties.

First, considering institutional factors as intervening factor, national parliaments establish a setting of formal and informal rules and norms that structure the way in which speakers propose arguments in public debates. In this context, a consideration of obvious relevance is that through

the institutionalized role of parliament as a legitimizing body and scrutinizing check on the executive, proceedings are mostly based on the interaction between the government and parliamentarians. Within parliamentary systems where the incumbency of heads of government and ministers relies on the political support of the majority groups, however, it can be assumed that the institutional antagonism between the executive and legislative branches of government is transformed into the interaction between two groups: On the one hand, the government majority – namely, representatives of the executive and majority groups – can be expected to seek to enact its legislative agenda and promote a positive discourse on government policy. On the other, the parliamentary opposition acts to fulfill its institutionally prescribed task of parliamentary scrutiny and control, but also follows party political incentives to communicate criticism of government action and to promote its competing political agenda towards the political public. The fact that all national parliaments in Europe now have specific rules governing the legislative and scrutinizing role of legislatures in the context of EU governance (that are sometimes even backed up by constitutional provisions) suggests that the antagonism between government majority and opposition as the default mode of parliamentary politics can also be expected to emerge in debates on European affairs (cp. also Auel 2007). Whereas members of the government majority have a clear and strong strategic interest to defend and legitimize the decisions taken by ‘their’ domestic government in the context of the EU, it is the most obvious strategic interest of members of the opposition to seek criticism and scrutiny of such decisions. From this perspective, parliamentary discourse about European integration develops mainly through the communication of elite discourses by representatives of incumbent governments towards domestic publics, and through their interaction with political actors of the political opposition, as described mainly in the model of discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2006, 2007, 2012).

This basic assumption, however, needs to be refined in two ways. First, it appears relevant to consider the fact that national parliamentary scrutiny is enacted towards domestic executives (and not towards supranational EU institutions). Therefore, we need to introduce a differentiation between controversies dealing with decisions at the supranational level of the EU, and decisions taken by national governments in relation to European governance: While the argument of an interaction between the government and opposition is highly plausible in relation to national EU policy – for example, the stance taken by a domestic government towards the negotiation of a new European directive – it applies in a more indirect and conditional way to purely supranational questions of decision-making – such as the content of said directive, or institutional questions concerning the EU such as the powers of the European Parliament. The political antagonism between speakers of the government majority and opposition can therefore be expected to be more clearly pronounced in thematic fields with a strong degree of involvement by the national government (such as the position of a national government in the negotiation of the EU budget) than in discussions of more clearly supranational issues (such as the legislative

working programme of the European Commission; for a more detailed discussion and empirical evidence of these assumptions, cp. Wendler 2011, 2012b).

Beyond these thematic differentiations, it is important to consider that the interaction of speakers in the mode of government/opposition politics is mostly the result of institutionally prescribed rules, as parliamentary rules concerning speaking time, veto options and executive scrutiny establish and regulate incentives for parliamentarians to act in a supportive or critical way towards policies and decisions by the incumbent government. The stringency of these rules, however, also has an influence to what degree dissenting members of parliamentary groups or the government majority as a whole have the opportunity to voice criticism of the party or government line. The emergence of disagreement within and across party groups that is caused by the articulation of contrasting views by rebellious backbenchers – causing a ‘non-party mode’ of polarization between groups of individual speakers – is therefore affected by parliamentary rules of procedure. In a comparative perspective, the control of the parliamentary agenda and the assignment of speaking time in the plenary are therefore important factors influencing whether dissenting views from the parliamentary backbench are heard or submerged by the discourse of party leaders and members of government. Moreover, parliamentary rules of procedure affect the ability of opposition groups to set topics on the parliamentary agenda, thereby influencing the formats of debate and the balance of speaking time between government majority and opposition speakers. To summarize, therefore, parliaments as the institutional setting of debates are assumed to influence the interaction of speakers mainly in two ways: first, by setting up rules for the interaction of the legislative and executive branch of government in European affairs in relation to the topic in question, and secondly, by setting up internal rules of procedure that influence the agenda-setting of debates and access to speaking time on the floor of the plenary.

Second, considering actor-related variables, the affiliation of speakers to parliamentary party groups with competing ideological positions needs to be taken into account to link justification to political polarization – at least if we assume that exceptional cases notwithstanding, parliamentary speakers will argue in line with the ideological profile of their respective political party. Reflecting the literature on the competition of political parties in the context of EU governance, it can be assumed that two main dimensions of ideological disagreement will emerge in debates about European decision-making: controversies in a left/right dimension between proponents of “neo-liberalism” and “regulated capitalism” on the one hand, and debates emerging between proponents of the principles of supranational integration and national sovereignty that are closely related to culturally defined disagreements between authoritarian-traditional and alternative-libertarian positions, on the other (Hooghe/Marks 2008, Hooghe et al. 2004, Statham et al. 2010, Statham/Trenz 2012, Hix et al. 2007: 161-181, Hix 2009: 110-136, Crespy/Gajewska 2010). While the left/right and integration/sovereignty dimension are assumed to develop as orthogonal modes of political conflict, they are expected to emerge in combination with each other in given

thematic debates (thus raising as an issue in contentious discussions both ‘how much Europe’ and ‘what Europe’ is desired concerning the balance between the principles of market freedom and state interventionism). This factor is arguably important for the explanation of comparative variation between cases: To what degree and in what combination both dimensions emerge in debates will depend partly on the constellation of parties in the parliamentary setting and the degree of their polarization within both party political dimensions.

In this context, it also matters in how far ideological differences between parties in the left/right and integration/sovereignty dimension coincide with the institutional antagonism between government majority and opposition parties – a scenario that is found in many but not all empirical cases. A contrasting example of ideologically heterogeneous majority and opposition camps is found in the cases of ‘Grand Coalition’ governments composed of both mainstream parties and opposition parties with very different positions within the left/right spectrum, as can be found in the cases of Austria and Germany. Taking this into account, it can be assumed that in cases of a coincidence of institutional and ideological antagonisms, the ideological polarization between parties is supported and emerges more clearly than in cases of ideologically heterogeneous government and opposition blocs.

Another source of variation considered in this study is the thematic orientation of a given debate. In this context, it is assumed that policy-specific topics can be expected to resonate more strongly with the competition between issue-specific party positions within the left/right dimension than discussions about constitutional questions of European governance (ie., those concerning the institutional shape and competences of the political system of the EU and the adaptation of national political systems to it). By contrast, in debates about the competences and institutional structure of the EU polity and the democratic legitimization of EU governance in the nation state, it appears plausible to expect a stronger presence of pro-/anti-EU forms of polarization than in debates on very policy-specific issues (for a more detailed discussion and empirical analysis, see Wendler 2011). Summing up this discussion of party political or actor-related factors, the approach therefore considers mainly two factors – the structure of party competition in terms of the ideological stances of parliamentary parties, and the respective constellation of parties within the government/opposition divide – to explain comparative variation in the polarization of parties in a comparison of thematic debates and different Member State parliaments (for a detailed discussion dealing with debates on the resolution of the European Debt Crisis, see Wendler 2012d).

Combining these factors, it is assumed that depending on three factors – the discursive construction of conflicts related to Europeanization, the institutional setting and party political factors in the parliamentary arena – the political polarization of speakers can take four different forms, as mentioned above: First, a mode of polarization between the government majority and

opposition is assumed as a baseline pattern of contestation that is, second, complemented by a polarization between ideological positions of political parties within the left/right dimension and, third, a mode of conflict between parties within the integration/sovereignty dimension that relates to the endorsement or rejection of supranational integration. Finally, a fourth form of polarization emerges when the previous scenarios of contestation between relatively coherent party groups is replaced by a more cross-cutting polarization between groups of speakers across and within political groups, described as a non-party mode of polarization.

A possible criticism of this conceptualization of the dependent variable might be that the four kinds of polarization outlined here are not mutually exclusive but can occur in combination with each other in a given parliamentary debate. However, this criticism misses the intention to explore how various types of polarization are related to discursive, actor-related and institutional factors: Rather than encountering cases of one pure type of polarization, the project is interested in how variation in the three above-mentioned variables influences the occurrence of the various types of polarization in a broad comparison of cases, thus allowing the evaluation of probabilistic assumptions about the relation between factors. Relating the theoretical model to the comparative evaluation of empirical cases, the framework outlined here is used to test two different sets of assumptions: First, it is used to test hypotheses about generalizable links between types of discourse and polarization across a variety of cases, and second, to investigate comparative differences in the structure and intensity of contention and polarization in relation to case-specific party political and institutional context factors. These two aspects are explained in turn.

Hypothesizing commonalities between cases: Links between discourse and political polarization

A first group of hypotheses relates to the overall assumption that across a variety of cases and observations, broadly generalizable links exist between different types of argumentative justification (and conflict) and the various types of political polarization outlined above. Taking up the discourse theoretical differentiation of three kinds of justification discussed above, these links are hypothesized in the following way (for a more detailed discussion, cp. Wendler 2013a): Concerning the pragmatic dimension of debate, it is expected that speakers primarily take positions along the divide between the government majority and parliamentary opposition. The main argument for this assumption is that the ideological conviction of speakers or whole party groups matters least at this level of discourse, as arguments are confined to questions of goal attainment and problem-solving and do not engage with the contestation of underlying normative goals and principles of political action. Given the strong institutional incentives for members of the government and opposition camps to take antagonistic positions in parliamentary debate, speakers of both sides are able to adjust pragmatic arguments relatively

easily to these incentives, and therefore relatively likely to argue in opposite directions independently of the ideological heterogeneity of both the government majority and parliamentary opposition. Therefore, it is assumed that the identification of pragmatic discourses can help to single out a dimension of debates that are disputed between government and opposition but appear as ideologically neutral problem-solving debates where party political stances do not play a great role to distinguish between speakers of both sides (and, consequently, their adherence to the government and opposition camp is a better predictor of positions taken). As argued above, this link is expected to be particularly strong in cases of thematic debates that are strongly related to decision-making processes at the level of domestic institutions and actors, and that take place in the context of a relatively strict control of party leaderships to control access to the debate.

The ethical-political dimension of debates, by contrast, is expected to lend a much greater degree of visibility to ideologically defined forms of party political polarization. The main argument for this assumption is that while speakers in the debate potentially use normative arguments strategically, they expect to achieve the greatest degree of credibility towards the public when they propose ethical arguments that resonate with the respective ideological profile of their political party. Moreover, ethical arguments are proposed in the form of principled statements on behalf of a particular social group or constituency and by reference to values and norms that are not proposed as universally binding but contrasted with other, competing norms and values. Therefore, this form of argumentation appears to capture well the goal of parliamentary speakers to propose the political goals of their particular party in contrast to competing values and interests. How values like individual liberty and state authority, or market freedom and social equality are balanced is up to individual, or at least particularistic group-specific ethical judgments, and therefore resonates most strongly with ideological modes of polarization between political parties. As discussed above, the polarization of debate is expected to evolve both within the left/right dimension, depending both on the thematic content of debates (in a comparison of policy-specific and constitutional topics) and party political constellations (the structure of polarization between parties and their constellation along the government/opposition divide).

Finally, disagreements at the moral level of argumentation are expected to present themselves in country-specific patterns. Moreover, it is expected that this level of debates is the most likely among the three types of justification to go beyond established patterns of domestic parliamentary party politics and to include new or atypical forms of polarization. The main argument for this assumption is that the main point of reference for moral types of argument – namely, conceptions of legitimacy that are claimed to have universal value for a society across differences between social groups – differs considerably between various national contexts. In the political discourse of different EU Member States, we are therefore likely to find references to different conceptions of legitimacy that are based in different ways on principles of constitutional,

popular, and parliamentary sovereignty. In turn, moral arguments are less easily adapted to the government/opposition or left/right divide, as speakers are required to base their claims on normative principles that can be presented as acceptable across actors with different political roles and party political goals. In this context, a more likely scenario is that normative principles that are proposed and defended by speakers of the mainstream parties are challenged by more ideologically radical fringe parties questioning the political consensus of the moderate parties, or by mavericks within the political groups who speak against the majority opinion of their own parliamentary group (for empirical examples of this type of polarization in parliamentary debate, see Wendler 2011, 2012a). Patterns such as the “Inverted U” type of polarization, frequently associated with the sovereignty/integration dimension, and the emergence of debates in the non-party mode are therefore expected as most likely within the moral dimension of discourse in a comparison between the three different types of justification outlined above.

Hypothesizing comparative differences: Party politics, parliaments and public discourse

Building on the first group of hypotheses, the project also uses the considerable degree of variation between the party political and institutional context of debate in the four parliaments to hypothesize on comparative differences between the cases (to be outlined here only in very general terms due to restrictions of space; a more detailed discussion is presented in Wendler 2012d and 2013c). These differences, however, are expected to play out mostly with regard to the relative intensity of different kinds of contestation and polarization, not the links between them as hypothesized above. First, the party political constellation in a given parliamentary setting will arguably have an influence on how strongly different types of polarization are activated. For example, the presence of Eurosceptic parties such as the Freedom Party and Future Alliance Austria (FPÖ/BZÖ), or the existence of clear position differences towards the EU between the two mainstream parties such as in the British case are expected to strengthen polarization within the integration/sovereignty dimension of debates, particularly within debates dealing with the legitimacy of EU governance. Second, the institutional rights and rules of procedure of national parliaments also influence the degree to which some of the patterns of polarization discussed above are likely to be activated. As another example, strong formal rules of oversight and a high degree of involvement by the domestic executive in the conduct of European governance as a ‘policy shaper’ (cp. Börzel 2002) are likely to increase the intensity of debates on the role of the domestic government in EU affairs (cp. Wendler 2012d in particular for an elaboration of this argument).

Summing up, the theoretical model of differential Europeanization established by the ‘Goodness of Fit’-framework is chosen as the baseline framework for the present study because it presents a conflict-oriented model of theorizing the links between decisions at the EU level and domestic

responses by looking at the interaction of topical, actor-related and institutional factors. Borrowing from discourse theory, the framework is adapted to link normative and resource-based conflicts of justification (independent variable) to different types of political polarization (dependent variable), taking into account both the institutional variation between various legislatures (parliamentary rights and rules of procedure) and party political factors (ideological stances of parliamentary parties) as intervening factors. Using this model aims both at the explanation of commonalities between cases – namely, generalizable links between justification and polarization – and case-specific differences with regard to the intensity to which specific types of political conflict are expected to occur in empirical cases. The application of this theoretical framework to an empirical research design and existing empirical results are discussed in the remainder of this paper.

3. Cases, data and method

As discussed above, the project is interested in comparisons not just between the debates of different national parliaments as a whole, but also between various topics related to European integration (as detailed in the above discussion of likely differences between debates relating to domestic or supranational actors and institutions, and between debates dealing with constitutional or policy-specific topics). In order to make these differences accessible to empirical scrutiny, the project defines thematic segments of debates on European integration in a specific country as a case¹. For each country, the project considers five thematic subsegments of debate – namely, general statements about European integration, debates on the revision of the EU Treaties, statements about the democratic legitimacy of governance in the European Union, the management of the Eurozone crisis and European Foreign Policy. Applying these to four national parliaments, overall 20 cases of thematic debate are considered for the present project.

Methodologically, the project builds on elements of the claims-making approach that has previously been applied mostly to the assessment of media coverage of public policies in newspapers (cp. Koopmans/Statham 2010: 53-59). The unit of analysis for the empirical approach of the present project therefore are evaluative claims – namely, statements made by speakers of parliamentary parties that express the support or criticism of an identifiable thematic object in relation to European governance and that are supported by an identifiable argument. The latter aspect appears as a necessary condition for the realization of the research design, as a reason for

¹ For the current project, therefore, a case is a collection of references by speakers of all political parties to a specific topic across several sessions of parliament, but within one of the four national parliaments analyzed. For example, one case considered for the present project is the debate on the revision of the EU Treaties in France, or the debate on the Eurozone crisis in Austria.

the endorsement or rejection of a policy or institution must be identifiable to distinguish resource- and norms-based arguments.

Empirically, the identification and collection of evaluative claims proceeds through the computer-based manual coding of debate transcripts, using Atlas.ti software for qualitative content analysis and a closed codebook of thematic variables that was developed by the author for the present research project (for details, cp. Wendler 2011, 2012b). The codebook is designed to cover the five thematic segments of debate enumerated above (with an additional distinction between references to domestic and supranational actors and institutions within these thematic fields). In addition, it also covers an additional set of thematic fields that are not analyzed in depth but used as additional data to map the relative salience and contestation of different thematic fields of debate. During the fieldwork, evaluative claims are marked and assigned to the variable from the codebook that fits its thematic content; the party political affiliation of the respective speaker, as well as the time and overall topic are recorded through the coding log of the software and through the use of different files (or ‘hermeneutic units’, in the terms of Atlas.ti) for each parliamentary party considered in the analysis².

The evaluation of data proceeds through a mixed-method design. First, some quantitative approaches are used to map and assess the thematic content of debates – particularly the relative intensity of different thematic debates as measured through the number of subject-related claims, the relative presence of political parties as measured through their relative amount of claims in the debate, levels of contestation as measured through the relative frequency of positive and negative claims, and party positions towards various topics and in relation towards each other. The main part of the empirical analysis, however, uses a qualitative approach that proceeds by reviewing the actual content of statements and aggregating them to key (resource- or norms-based) arguments and conflicts of justification. In addition to the quantitative mapping of party positions, the issue of party polarization is also discussed through a qualitative approach by relating key claims and arguments of parties to each other and discussing the main points of disagreement. Through this mixed-method approach, the project seeks to make use of the efficiency of quantitative methods for mapping and description, but also relies on a qualitative component in order to gain insights into the actual content and argumentative substance of controversies.

² The empirical analysis considers all parliamentary parties of a considerable size in the four national parliaments, leaving out only independent Members of Parliament and very small party groups such as the DUP or Plaid Cymru in the House of Commons. In the case of the German Bundestag, the Christian Democrat sister parties CDU and CSU are considered separately because of their relatively pronounced differences in relation to European affairs.

4. Empirical Findings: Plenary Debates about European integration in four domestic parliaments

The subsequent part summarizes some of the main empirical findings of the ongoing research project. This review proceeds in three steps: First, the overall evolution of parliamentary debate about European integration is discussed to clarify the empirical object of the current research project, before some insights are given into its two main elements of analysis – namely, the argumentative content of debates and their party political contestation.

4.1 Communication: The emerging role of parliaments in debating about European integration

As stated at the outset, any research dealing with the communicating function of parliaments in the context of European integration deals with an existing literature that is sceptical about the willingness of parliamentarians to engage in public debates about European governance. Empirical assessments characterize EU topics as a still relatively secondary issue of parliamentary debates at the level of formal plenary debates (albeit with some variation between legislatures). Moreover, theory-oriented contributions refer to the low salience of EU affairs, intra-party disagreement and the large divide between elite and public attitudes towards supranational integration as explanations for the non-emergence of European debate (Raunio 2011: 314-19). However, on a theoretical level we should consider not just negative constraints but also some positive incentives for parliamentary actors to engage in debate on the EU, which can be identified on three levels: First, there have been many EU-related decisions requiring authorization or ratification in national parliaments in recent years (such as revisions to the EU Treaty, decisions concerning the crisis management and institutional reform of the Eurozone, and EU enlargement). In combination with reinforced rules of scrutiny and oversight of national parliaments, these require legislatures to hold debates on European issues and require executives to communicate on their decision-making at the EU level. Second, the relatively more critical attitude of the larger public towards the EU in comparison to political elites does not have to work as a constraint on the emergence of debates. Considering the political motives of different parliamentary groups, it also works as an incentive, particularly for Eurosceptic parties discovering EU politics as an attractive topic to mobilize their potential clientele against ongoing European policy-making. As a consequence and also in response to an increased presence of Eurosceptic speakers in public debates of Member States, leaders of mainstream parties understand that a more comprehensive communication about decision-making in the EU is needed to meet the concerns of an increasingly critical public. Third, while a lack of political salience appeared as a convincing argument in the years preceding the Constitutional Treaty, doubts are in order about the plausibility of this argument in the current stage, where the stabilization and institutional reform of the Eurozone is arguably one of the main topics of public

debate across European countries (and beyond). In this sense, it appears that both institutional and party political factors, but also the public sphere no longer just work as constraints on the emergence of European debate, as captured by the literature on a 'politicization' of European integration in the public sphere (Statham/Trenz 2013: 4-8). Against this background, it therefore appears worthwhile to ask to what extent national parliaments have taken up European integration as a topic for plenary debates.

Intensity of debate: Domestic legislatures finally waking up to the issue of European integration?

Measuring the exact amount of plenary time devoted to European integration is no easy affair, mainly due to the fuzzy boundaries between domestic, EU and international affairs in everyday political debate and policy-making. Apart from debates explicitly dedicated to the EU, references to European affairs are frequently made during legislative debates, parliamentary question time or other formats of plenary debate (such as debate on petitions or inquiries). Assessing the political relevance of European issues for parliamentary procedure is equally tricky, as the time dedicated to EU matters is not necessarily a reliable indicator of how seriously these subjects are taken, and how much resonance they gain in the public sphere of EU member states. A review of European debates in the four parliaments considered here, however, shows that aside from how these methodological questions are answered, a substantial number of plenary debates now takes place about all major topics of European integration. Moreover, these debates engage not just party spokespersons and committee members specialized in EU affairs, but the most senior members of government and leaders of parliamentary party groups in all of the four countries compared. In this context, three types of debate can be distinguished (for more details about the following, cp. Wendler 2013c).

First, the most common format of EU debate across the four cases are longer declarations by the head of government or senior minister followed by a debate of about one to three hours. These debates mainly deal with a forthcoming or very recent meeting of the European Council or Eurozone group and are now a very regular type of debate particularly in the German Bundestag (with about 4-5 Regierungserklärungen per year) and the House of Commons (with about the same frequency of Prime Minister's statements per year). Even if the absolute amount of time spent in these debates is not very high, it should be stressed again that these sessions are usually well-attended and attract a relatively great degree of attention from the public through the speech of the respective head of government and debate contributions from the leaders of parliamentary groups. Another argument that these debates should be taken seriously as empirical material for the assessment of political contention about the EU is that these debates are practically the only instance where a direct interaction between the most senior representatives of the political class about European issues takes place in front of the wider

public. Second, national parliaments are required to debate EU topics as they deal with European legislation, the ratification of European decisions and discussions of EU business not directly related to a specific legislative text, such as debates about working programmes of the European Commission or longer-term political agendas of the EU. Leaving quantification to other projects deeper involved in this question, an important point to be made here is that these debates differ from the first type in that they deal more directly with supranational decisions and institutions rather than with the communication of senior government representatives about national approaches to EU policy-making. Third, another type of debate that is observed particularly often in the Austrian Nationalrat emerges through discussion of issues brought to the agenda by the parliamentary opposition. Debates of this kind involve sessions dealing with petitions and inquiries ('Dringliche Anfragen'), issues brought up during question time, and debates on topics of current relevance that are usually sought by the parliamentary opposition groups (such as 'Aktuelle Stunden' in the Bundestag). As this review shows, three dynamics can be identified as drivers of parliamentary debate on European affairs: First, initiatives by the executive to engage in public communication about European affairs, second, decisions originating from the supranational level requiring parliamentary treatment and approval (including both policy-specific and constitutional decisions), and third, attempts by parliamentary groups and particularly the opposition to mobilize criticism through questions, petitions, and inquiries.

Formats and styles of debate: Different roads to debating Europe in parliament

Given the differences between the institutional positions of and party political constellations within the four national parliaments compared, it is unsurprising (and a positive source of variation for this project) that the style of communication between these legislatures differs considerably (for a more detailed discussion, cp. Wendler 2013c). Considering the relative frequency of the three types of debate mentioned above, and considering data from the claims analysis that was evaluated with regard to speaking time of parliamentary groups, these differences can be characterized as follows: First, and unsurprisingly, the French Assemblée Nationale emerges as the chamber with the strongest emphasis on communication by the government and supporting parliamentary groups and little room for opposition groups to seek debate or contestation. Second, the Austrian Nationalrat appears as the extreme opposite of the French case, with debates that include relatively few declarations of government but frequent discussions of petitions of the Eurosceptic opposition parties FPÖ and BZÖ (the Freedom Party and Future Alliance Austria). In these debates, speakers of the populist right parties appear to seek every opportunity to challenge both the country's involvement in the EU and Eurozone, and the decision by the Austrian government to ratify EU decisions through the parliamentary route without a referendum. The German Bundestag combines debates on government policy with frequent thematic debates on EU issues such as the working programme of the European

Commission and occasional inquiries of parliamentarians about EU matters. These debates are organized in a strictly proportional sharing of speaking time for parliamentary groups, and speaking time is almost exclusively limited to government members, party group leaders and committee spokespersons. Given the relatively low degree of party polarization on EU matters between the political parties, the Bundestag therefore appears as an active but cooperative communicator of European governance to the German public. This contrasts with the case of the British House of Commons, where a similar mix of debate formats exists that, however, allows access to the plenary floor for backbenchers to a far greater degree than in the German case, and which gives rise to a much more aggressive and polarized exchange of quick statements and answers. What becomes visible in the British case, therefore, are considerable position differences between Conservatives and the Labour Party. Moreover, however, the House of Commons also exposes internal disagreement within party groups and the front- and backbench to a far greater degree than the other three cases.

To summarize, the point to be made here is that quantifiable differences in the frequency and length of debates aside, it is particularly the format and argumentative style of debates that varies very strongly between the four parliaments compared. In this sense, differences emerge less clearly than expected within the institutional distinction between arena and transformative legislatures, but appear to result mostly from differences in the party political setting of debate. In this sense, national parliaments have started to play different roles as their communicative function develops in relation to European governance: Depending on the constellation of parties, parliaments have become arenas for the communication of government policy and legislative debate in some cases, and a platform for the mobilization of Eurosceptic protest by individual backbenchers or whole party groups in others. This comparative insight can tell us something about the role of legislatures in relation to the emergence of political party competition on Europe – namely, how competing parties use the parliamentary arena to promote their own discourses about European integration.

4.2 Justification: Arguments and thematic layers of debates on European integration

Concerning the assessment of the content of parliamentary debates, quantitative methods were used to assess the relative strength of different topics and types of argument and their degree of contention, as measured through the relative frequency of different types of claims and the balance of positive and critical arguments. A qualitative approach is used, however, to gain insights into the actual argumentative substance of controversies: Evaluative claims from parliamentary debates were reviewed and categorized into the various types of resource- and norms-based conflict outlined at the outset. The subsequent section gives an overview of some of the main findings (for a more in-depth discussion, cp. Wendler 2012a and 2012c concerning

debates about EU Treaty Revision and Wendler 2012d and 2013b for debates about the resolution of the European Debt Crisis).

Problem-solving debates: The pragmatic dimension of discourse

Argumentative conflicts that were coded and categorized as debates within the pragmatic dimension – namely, as evolving in relation to assumed effects of European decisions on legal, economic or political resources of actors – can broadly be summarized in three groups. First, a large number of arguments relates to the effectiveness of decision-making through institutions of the European Union and how well established political goals are achieved through existing institutions and decision-making procedures. This aspect is (unsurprisingly) prominent in debates about the revision of the EU Treaties, but also plays a role in debates about the management of the Eurozone crisis and the reform of institutions of Economic and Monetary Union. A second aspect emerging frequently in debates are questions concerning the coherence, effectiveness and success of negotiations and decisions by the domestic government in the context of EU governance. In this context, governments are discussed in their role as defenders of national interests in the course of EU Treaty Reform and European budget negotiations, but also as crisis managers and representatives of national economic interests during the Eurozone crisis. Finally, a third main aspect of resource-based debates are discussions about the relative economic and political benefits of membership in the European Union, the Single Market, and the Eurozone. Three main resource-based conflicts of justification – related to EU membership, institutional reform and government leadership in European governance – therefore emerge as the main focal point of debates from the present state of analysis.

Two additional findings should be added to these preliminary observations. First, an important finding is that debates on European governance are multi-faceted and consist of different thematic layers that relate to different actors, institutional levels and objects of contestation. In this sense, it is both the supranational framework of institutions and policies, and the political decision-making and success of domestic governments that become objects of debate. Parliamentary debate about European integration therefore appears as a level of public discussion that does not stay confined to a single framework of decision-making. By contrast, this study shows that parliamentarians are prepared to address supranational and domestic decision-making processes as linked and in relation to each other. This is potentially a very important addition to debates on European integration in the public spheres of EU Member States. Second, an important finding for the present research project is that resource-based arguments are not a very salient and a relatively uncontentious aspect of debates about European integration. Whereas the effectiveness of institutions and decision-making arises frequently as a topic of debate, it does not give rise to very strong disagreements, but is actually assessed relatively consensually between speakers of the debate (both with regard to present deficits and improvements achieved through

Treaty Reform and institutional change of the Eurozone). Moreover, the economic and political benefits of European integration are not as salient in debates as expected – in fact, speakers mostly refer to the normative content of decisions than to actual goal attainment, as discussed in more detail in the next section. The success and clarity of government action in the EU holds a middle ground as a relatively frequent and obviously contentious object of debate, corresponding to the classical task of parliaments (and practically, of parliamentary oppositions) of holding domestic executives to account. This aspect is clearly and strongly polarized between the government and opposition camps in all cases.

Directional debates: Ethical justifications for political aims of European integration

The empirical review of evaluative claims shows that a large part of controversies relates to the justification and contestation of normative goals and principles of European governance. Compared to the previously reviewed debates on resource-related questions, references to normative principles are relatively more frequent and also more strongly contested in the plenary debates reviewed for this study. Within this segment of debates, a variegated spectrum of quite different questions are discussed that are hard to subsume under one single category. The subsequent review therefore makes use of the discourse theoretical distinction between ethical-political statements about principles and values, and moral claims referring to the legitimacy and justice of institutional arrangements.

In this sense, ethical-political claims can be summarized in three groups. First, principled statements about social values such as solidarity, social cohesion and equality are found throughout the different thematic subsections of debates, referring primarily to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and social values enshrined in the European Treaties. However, they are also frequent in statements considering the effect of Eurozone crisis management and institutional innovations such as the Fiscal Pact or European Stability Mechanism in relation to questions of social solidarity. Second, principles of economic governance are an important point of reference for speakers in many debates, resulting in disputes about the correct balance between the core principles of “stability” and “solidarity” in debates about the Eurozone crisis and references to market freedom and regulation as points of reference for the revision of the EU Treaties. These references constitute a sizable portion of evaluative claims and were generally observed more frequently than statements discussing the allocation of competences between the domestic and supranational level. In this sense, it therefore appears justified to understand a considerable part of normative disputes as “directional debates” discussing the principal aims and goals of European governance, but not actually contesting the existence or present scope of supranational competences. This important part of controversies, in other words, revolves around the question “what kind of Europe” should be put in place, not “how much Europe” there should be. Finally, a

third group of ethical claims extends the assessment of normative principles by relating and linking them to concepts and symbols of collective identity of social communities, such as statements establishing (or denying) a link between the Single Market order to the concept of the social market economy in Germany, insisting on a tension between European Foreign Policy and Austrian neutrality, by relating the Charter of Fundamental Rights to a heritage of French or European civilizational values, or rejecting it on the grounds of Common Law traditions. In the overall assessment, however, statements proposing a concept of collective identity as the argumentative reason for the endorsement or rejection of European policies or institutions were relatively rare. Nevertheless, the existing findings suggest that parliamentary speakers engage in strongly value-based debates, by justifying, assessing and contesting both constitutional and policy-specific elements of European governance through references to principled values to which they subscribe as relevant a priori, independently of actual gains of resources or the instrumental solution of problems. Debates on European governance are therefore clearly not confined to technocratic questions, but relate to normative key terms of political discourse that are also found at the domestic level, particularly through reference to social and economic principles.

Legitimacy debates: The moral dimension of discourse

Another important aspect of norms-based debates evolves within the moral dimension of discourse. The empirical review shows that arguments that refer to general principles of justice and legitimacy are a frequently used, and generally strongly contested element of debates that indicates what sort of legitimacy principles can successfully be defended or contested in various national contexts of debate. This category of arguments can be roughly summarized in three groups of claims: First, the legitimacy gained for the European Union from the involvement of parliaments – both at the supranational level of the EP and through domestic legislatures – is an important and somewhat obvious point of reference in debates, particularly in debates on EU Treaty revision but also the management of the Eurozone crisis. An interesting finding is that the assessment of parliamentary legitimization is equally prominent but contested in very different intensities in a comparison of debates in the four legislatures. Second, the legitimacy of ratification procedures in the course of EU Treaty revision and changes in the governance of the Eurozone such as the ESM are an important focal point of debates, although this topic gives rise to very different patterns of contestation in the four cases analyzed. Finally, the assessment of institutional arrangements in relation to normative standards of justice is an important point of reference not just for controversies about EU Treaty revision, but also an important element of debates on the Eurozone crisis. In this sense, the defence of austerity programs and the case for a “Stability Union” by speakers of the government majority in the German Bundestag is striking by not primarily referring to economic gains or political interests. Most speakers make the case that the current management of the Eurozone crisis is normatively justified by establishing a set of rights and obligations between all members of the currency union and therefore establishing a

just and morally appropriate set of mutual relationship between Member States. This contrasts with many references to the lack of justice in current austerity programs expressed by other speakers, qualifying controversies about the management of the Eurozone as essentially focused on normative arguments and conflicts.

While this overview cannot engage in the detailed description of the thematic contents of the debates analysed so far, the main result is that norms play a central role in the argumentative structure of debates: Whereas resource-based arguments about the effectiveness of negotiation strategies, institutions and decision-making and about the actual benefits of European integration play a role in parliamentary debates, they appear less prominent and contested than argumentative conflicts concerning the normative goals and principles of European governance. In this sense, particularly ‘directional debates’ concerned with the key goals of social regulation, economic management and external action, and ‘legitimacy debates’ related to the institutional construction and procedural legitimization of the European Union give rise to prominent and contentious debate. This observation gives support to the view that at least at the level of public discourse between political elites, the European Union has gone beyond the stage of a regime for the functional cooperation of states based on output-legitimacy (Majone 1998, Moravcsik 2002). In the light of the debates analyzed here, the European Union assumes the quality of a supranational polity that requires democratic legitimacy and public deliberation about its principal social and economic goals.

4.3 Contestation: Patterns of political polarization in debates about European governance

Just like the discursive dimension, the contestation aspect of debates is assessed through a mixed-method approach that makes use both of a statistical evaluation of party positions, and the more in-depth qualitative review of disagreements within different modes of polarization. Taking up the four main forms of polarization discussed at the outset, the subsequent section gives an overview of some of the main findings (for more details, see Wendler 2012b, 2012d, and 2013b).

The default mode: Government vs. Opposition and Left/Right politics

From a general point of view, the antagonism between the government majority and parliamentary opposition is a plausible, but relatively rough model for the overall description of polarization in European debates: While government parties generally express positive views about European governance, opposition parties generally seek to criticize it. An additional observation, however, is that this kind of polarization occurs in a much stronger and clearer form in debates about domestic actors and institutions in relation to European governance than supranational institutions and policies (cp. Wendler 2011, 2012b). Here, this pattern of

polarization appears more conditional on the subject and is in some cases replaced by more variegated patterns, particularly when government and opposition parties agree on steps towards the reform of the European Treaties. Clear and unsurprising cases of government/opposition politics, however, turn up whenever the consistency, clarity and effectiveness of British, German, French or Austrian government policy is debated. Concerning the hypotheses, it therefore turns out that not all, but a significant part of controversies within the pragmatic dimension are contested through this type of polarization. Beyond these broad patterns, particularly the review of controversies within the ethical dimension of debates proves useful to differentiate ideological stances of parties in the debate. In this context, the above discussion of key arguments and conflicts should already have made clear that important parts of these controversies evolve along thematic lines that resonate strongly with party stances along the left/right spectrum, particularly its economic dimension between the principles of market freedom and state regulation. However, the enshrinement of individual rights and cultural values also emerge as an additional type of polarization between culturally libertarian and more traditionalist parties.

Supranationalism vs. national sovereignty: a new cleavage?

Compared to the previously discussed two modes of conflict, only relatively few cases are observed where established patterns of political polarization are transformed into new types of contestation within a sovereignty/integration dimension. However, an important observation is arguments within the moral dimension of justification – particularly those concerned with the legitimacy of institutional arrangements in the European Union – are not adapted to the left/right dimension but polarized in very different forms in the countries compared. The most plausible pattern for the interpretation of polarization at this level, however, is an “Inverted U” model where ideologically radical parties from both sides of the political spectrum question the overall justice and legitimacy of EU institutions that are defended by the mainstream. Finally, the emergence of a non-party mode of polarization – where individual groups of speakers across and within party groups argue against each other – is the rarest of the four modes of conflict reviewed here and occurs almost exclusively in debates of the British House of Commons. By contrast, in practically all other cases parliamentary groups appear very successful in either confining the allocation of speaking time to leaders of the party group, or managing to hide internal disagreements.

Summing up, it appears from the present state of analysis that most conflicts arising from the process of Europeanization are politically ‘domesticated’ in the sense that they are translated into established patterns of political polarization at the level of domestic parliamentary debate. Particularly two modes of conflict – namely, the interaction between the government majority and parliamentary opposition, and the polarization of parties within the left/right dimension – are most prevalent. In contrast, the emergence of party polarization within a distinct

integration/sovereignty dimension only arises in specific cases and dependent on specific national context conditions, and the non-party mode is only rarely observed. This observation challenges assumptions about the transformative effect of European integration on party competition at the domestic level, at least for the parliamentary arena where arguably strong institutional and party political incentives exist to adapt questions of supranational governance to established patterns of domestic political contestation. Moreover, this observation can also be seen as positive news for the perspective of an increased public debate about European governance, and its subsequent democratization: As parliaments engage in at least some degree of public debate about institutions and policies of the European Union, speakers within the parliamentary arena take up modes of political conflict that are mostly familiar from domestic party politics, and therefore likely to be understood and correctly interpreted by voters observing such debates.

5. Conclusions

The research project summarized in this paper suggests three findings for the forthcoming research debate about the Europeanization of national parliaments. First, the most basic finding is that there are now a considerable number of plenary debates of national parliaments about the issue of European integration with significant disagreement between involved speakers. This opens up a whole range of insights about the stances of political parties with regard to supranational decision-making at the level of the EU and exposing their disagreements and competition on this issue through direct argumentative exchanges in the parliamentary arena. This aspect of the Europeanization of national parliaments has only begun to be recognized in the most recent contributions to the relevant literature.

Second, concerning the content of debates, the study gives substance to the assumption that contentious debates about European integration do not just relate to the acceptance or rejection of supranational institutions and decision-making, but evolve through different thematic layers that relate mainly to three issues: the consistency and effectiveness of action by domestic executives in European decision-making, the substantive goals and principles of EU governance, and the legitimacy and problem-solving capacity of supranational institutions and their legitimization at the domestic level. Although observable patterns of political polarization between parliamentary parties differ across these thematic layers, an overall finding is that a great part of political conflict is ‘domesticated’ within debates – ie., translated into established modes of polarization between the government majorities and opposition parties, and between parties within the left/right spectrum. This is an important addition to the literature on party politics in the EU, and a relevant argument for normative debates about the democratization of EU governance through increased party competition and parliamentary debate.

Finally, the existing results suggest that the modes of polarization between parliamentary parties vary significantly in a comparison of thematic segments of debates, and in relation to the discursive, actor-related and institutional variables considered in this study. Through the review of case studies, it was shown that the most important factor for the emergence of different types of polarization is the discursive construction of adaptational changes for the domestic polity through European integration – or, more precisely, the institutional level of reference (domestic/supranational) and discourse type (pragmatic/ethical/moral) that is chosen to present or contest argumentative justifications for European integration. In this sense, pragmatic problem-solving debates are broadly linked to debates in the government/opposition mode, whereas conflicts at the ethical level of discourse are generally indicative of more ideological party political disputes in the left/right dimension. Disputes at the moral level of discourse that concern the legitimacy and justice of institutional arrangements and decisions represent a special case. They emerge through more atypical, country-specific patterns of polarization within the pro-/anti-EU dimension and non-party mode. Whereas these links between the dimensions of argumentative justification and polarization can be shown across cases, comparative differences emerge with regard to the intensity to which these are activated. Here, both party political factors (particularly the strength and constellation of ideological differences between parties of the government and opposition camp) and institutional variables (particularly the management of parliamentary procedure and the constitutional position of parliament within the domestic polity) can be shown to influence the way to which different modes of polarization are activated within parliamentary discourse. Parliamentary debate about European integration, therefore, ultimately presents itself as another case of differential Europeanization: Across cases, a shared set of challenges and opportunities for debate is created through developments of the EU polity that, however, result in different scenarios of political conflict depending on the case-specific constellation of political actors, discursive strategies, and institutionally prescribed rules of interaction.

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