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# Tweeting about Brussels? European governance in the communications of national parties and leaders

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper, I investigate whether national political parties and leaders communicate about European governance. According to the neo-functional argument, I expect them to emphasize European affairs at the time of important European governance events and when they are involved in European decision-making processes. I use a unique longitudinal dataset of nearly 2 million tweets published over eleven years (2009–2019) by 67 political parties and their leaders in 10 western EU member states, to track whether European governance increase emphasis on EU affairs. I find that emphasis on European affairs increases at the time of European elections, referendum, European summits, major speeches of the European Commission president, and plenary sessions of the European Parliament. These results suggest that the exercise of supranational authority does indeed increase its visibility through the communications of political actors. Moreover, these findings have normative implications, as visibility is the first key requirement for the accountability of European governance.*

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## INTRODUCTION

European integration is a unique political process. Sovereign states have decided to transfer competences and binding authority in certain areas to the supranational level. Over a few decades, the group of member states and the scope of competences have considerably widened, while the powers of supranational institutions have deepened. The European Union is now an encompassing and powerful political system. According to the neo-functional approach, as the authority of the EU grows, European rules and decisions cover a wide range of areas, and have thus an increasing impact on national actors and societies, intensifying the functional pressures and incentives for actors to engage with European affairs (Schmitter 1969). The transfer of authority from member states to the EU is therefore seen as the initial reason why the EU matters gain visibility and involves more political actors (de Wilde et al. 2016; de Wilde and Zürn 2012). Moreover, this neo-functional idea that supranational authority should lead to politicization also applies to daily European governance. In other words, the exercise of authority at the supranational level should increase the engagement of political actors and the visibility of EU matters as well.

In addition to the functional pressure, there are also strong normative requirements for political actors to communicate publicly about European governance. Without visibility, European governance will remain an opaque and consensual process remote from any public democratic debate. Indeed, national parliaments, national governments and heads of governments are all involved at different stages of European decision-making processes. These political actors must be held accountable for EU governance before the national parliament and the national voters (Bergman 2000; Strøm 2000). For this purpose, they must give account for and publicly communicate about their EU-level activity, while the national parliament and opposition parties have to scrutinize these activities (Bovens 2007; Rauh and de Wilde 2018).

In this paper, I investigate whether national political parties and leaders communicate about European governance. According to the neo-functional argument, I expect them to emphasize European affairs at the time of important European governance events and when

they are involved in European decision-making processes. I use a unique longitudinal dataset of nearly 2 million tweets published over eleven years (2009–2019) by 67 political parties and their leaders in 10 western EU member states, to track whether European governance increase emphasis on EU affairs. I consider Twitter a pertinent data source to analyse the communication of political actors. Indeed, the particularities of Twitter, which is widely used by public figures and journalists, make it the ideal place to publish public statements (Parmelee 2013; Parmelee and Bichard 2011; Verweij 2012). Since Twitter allows continuous communication without any institutional constraint and almost directly with the public, the functional pressure and normative requirement to emphasize European governance when it matters are as strong as ever.

## THE FUNCTIONAL POLITICIZATION OF EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE

In the last two decades, an important debate has emerged about the politicization of European integration. Although it seems to be a particularly differentiated and multifaceted phenomenon across times, countries and settings (de Wilde et al. 2016), a widely shared view considers that “no serious student of European integration can deny that something like politicization has occurred” (Schmitter 2009:211). This impression that evolution has taken place, and that European integration is now, more than before, subject to public visibility and public contestation, is best embodied by the idea that a “constraining dissensus” has replaced the previous “permissive consensus” (Hooghe and Marks 2009). In their proposition of a postfunctionalist theory of European integration, Hooghe and Marks argue that public contestation shaped by identity politics politicize European integration and ultimately leads to a constraining dissensus hindering further integration. This pessimistic view challenges the optimism of neo-functionalism that primarily saw politicization as a logical and desirable consequence of European integration.

Indeed, influential early thinkers tried to explain the transfer of political competences from states to supranational institutions as a functional process. This neo-functionalist approach explained the integration process as a spillover dynamic where advances in one area

create functional incentives and pressures for further advances (Haas 1958). The underlying functional logic was that either the gains due to cooperation in one area incentivize actors to extend cooperation to other areas, or the need to handle unexpected side effects of integration in one area push towards further integration (Schmitter 1969). Pursuing the functional logic, neo-functionalists expected early on that integration would lead to politicization. The idea is that the functional logic also applies to the involvement of political and societal actors. Indeed, as the spillover process widens and deepens the scope of integration, more policy areas are concerned, and more national actors tend to be involved. The scope and the depth of supranational authority grows, European rules and decisions cover a wide range of areas and have thus an increasing impact on national actors and societies, intensifying the functional pressures and incentives for political and societal actors to engage with European affairs. Moreover, the integration process progressively extends to more salient or controversial domains. Hence, “politicization thus refers initially to a process whereby the controversiality of joint decision-making goes up. This in turn is likely to lead to a widening of the audience or clientele interested and active in integration” (Schmitter 1969:166).

Much more recently, scholars have tried to explain why Europe was becoming subject to salient public debates. Following the neo-functionalist idea that integration leads to politicization (Schmitter 1969), an influential approach argues that the root cause of politicization is the increased authority and scope of the European Union. The underlying idea is that the neo-functionalist argument also applies to the involvement of political and societal actors. The transfer of authority from member states to the EU is therefore seen as the initial reason why the EU matters gain visibility and is debated. Politicization is therefore defined as “growing public awareness of international institutions and increased public mobilisation of competing political preferences regarding institutions’ policies and procedures” (Zürn et al. 2012:71). And in turn, “The rising politicization of European integration is primarily a reaction to the increasing authority of the EU over time” (de Wilde and Zürn 2012: 140). This “authority transfer hypothesis” has been particularly influential in the politicization literature. Scholars have shown that major integration steps are debated in the public arena. Successive treaty revisions and new members’ accessions have triggered public and parliamentary debates,

especially when a national referendum was held on the issue (Grande and Hutter 2016; Hutter and Grande 2014; Rauh 2015; Rauh and de Wilde 2018; Statham and Trenz 2013; de Wilde 2014).

Moreover, the functional argument of the authority transfer hypothesis does not only apply to major integration steps such as treaty revisions and new members' accessions. The neo-functional idea that supranational authority should lead to politicization also applies to daily European governance. Since the supranational level has been vested with significant powers, the exercise of that authority affects and concerns numerous societal and political actors. More actors are directly involved in or indirectly impacted by European governance, and thus should turn to the European level in order to express their claims and demands, and to publicly voice their opinions on EU matters (de Wilde 2011; de Wilde and Zürn 2012). Therefore, there is an important functional pressure for political actors to communicate about European affairs and European governance.

In addition, there is also an important normative requirement for public communications about EU governance. Indeed, from a more normative perspective, authors have defended the idea that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit. They have first argued that the EU lacked politicization, whereas a democratic system requires political contestation over leadership and policy (Follesdal and Hix 2006). They also point out the lack of transparency and publicity in European decision-making mechanisms such as the trilogues, these informal inter-institutional negotiations taking place behind closed doors to reach an agreement on legislative proposals (Curtin and Leino 2017; Laloux 2020; Lord 2013). These considerations highlight the importance of public communications from political actors involved in European governance.

Indeed, national parliaments, national governments and heads of governments are all involved at different stages of European decision-making processes. These political actors must be held accountable for EU governance before the national parliament and the national voters (Bergman 2000; Strøm 2000). For this purpose, they have to give an account for and publicly

communicate about their EU-level activity, while national parliament and opposition parties must scrutinize these activities (Bovens 2007; Rauh and de Wilde 2018). Indeed, publicity allows public scrutiny and contestation over decisions and enhances the democratic accountability of the political system. Hence, it would also be a democratic deficit if political actors in the national arena were silent about EU affairs. Therefore, the democratic legitimacy of European governance requires involvement from political actors and publicity. In other words, political actors face significant functional pressures and normative requirements to communicate about European governance.

## WHEN WILL POLITICAL ACTORS COMMUNICATE ABOUT EUROPEAN AFFAIRS?

The question is now to know when these functional pressures and normative requirements are the strongest. When will political actors such as national parties and leaders emphasize European governance in their communications?

The first striking occasion when emphasis on European affairs from political parties is expected is European elections. European citizens have directly elected members of the European Parliament since 1979. Therefore, considering that European elections are the most direct route of delegation and accountability between citizens and the European Union, and that the European Parliament plays a prominent legislative role in numerous areas, there is a strong democratic requirement and a functional pressure on political parties to engage in European elections. A functional politicization of European elections from national political parties is both desirable and necessary. Yet, the “second-order” model sees European elections as less salient than national ones and expects political actors to campaign less in them, focusing debates mainly on national issues (Reif and Schmitt 1980). However, recent findings indicate that parties dedicate a substantive part of their European elections manifestos to European constitutive and policy issues, and emphasis on EU issues increases during European elections campaigns (Braun et al. 2016; Braun and Schmitt 2018; Eugster et al. 2020). Therefore, I expect

that parties' communications on Twitter increasingly discuss European matters close to European elections.

*H1: Parties' emphasis on European affairs increases as the next European election gets closer.*

Less frequent than European elections, when a referendum is held to ratify a new European treaty or on the question of EU membership, public debates about European affairs are not only likely to happen, but above all necessary. Indeed, according to the authority transfer hypothesis, the transfer of authority from member states to the EU is the root cause and driver of politicization (de Wilde and Zürn 2012; Zürn et al. 2012). Scholars have shown that major integration steps are debated in the public arena. Indeed, analysing mediatized public debates around major integration steps, Grande and Hutter (2016) show that authority transfer leads to politicization. In particular, they investigate whether major steps in the deepening or widening of European integration such as treaty reforms, enlargement to third countries and a country's own accession to the EU trigger public debates. First, they find that the question of EU membership triggers an important politicization when a country's own accession is debated. Then, they also find that within EU members, debates about treaty reforms can trigger important politicization. However, this was the case on only a few occasions, particularly when there was a national referendum on the question.

National referendums on the revisions of European treaties have indeed been important catalysts for politicization. The experiences of referendums on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 have demonstrated that questions of further authority transfer to the supranational level can lead to particularly salient and polarized debates in the public sphere (Statham and Trenz 2013). In sum, successive treaty revisions and new members' accessions have triggered public and parliamentary debates, especially when a national referendum was held on the issue (Grande and Hutter 2016; Hutter and Grande 2014; Rauh 2015; Rauh and de Wilde 2018; Statham and Trenz 2013; de Wilde 2014). Therefore, given that both membership debates and referendums trigger politicization, I expect that

parties in the United Kingdom increasingly emphasized European affairs in the campaign before the 2016 referendum.

*H2a: In the United Kingdom, parties' emphasis on European affairs increased during the campaign before the referendum on EU membership.*

Then, a national referendum on a question as crucial as treaty ratification or Union membership should trigger emphasis on European affairs in other member states as well. In the past, scholars have already documented how debates on the Constitutional Treaty in France were echoed in the British and German media, for example (Statham and Trenz 2013). Therefore, I also expect that parties in other countries emphasized European affairs at the time of the referendum in the UK.

*H2b: In other countries, parties' emphasis on European affairs increased at the time of the referendum in the UK.*

Beyond elections and referendums, emphasis on European affairs from national political actors is also expected when the authority of the EU is exercised. The neo-functionalist idea that supranational authority should lead to politicization also applies to daily European governance. Since the supranational level has been vested with significant powers, the exercise of that authority affects and concerns numerous societal and political actors. More actors are directly involved in or indirectly impacted by European governance, and thus should turn to the European level in order to express their claims and demands, and should publicly voice their opinions on EU matters (de Wilde 2011; de Wilde and Zürn 2012).

Communication from political actors is also required so that European governance becomes more visible and can be debated in public. Therefore, political parties should communicate about European affairs during moments of European governance, when decisions are taken at the EU level, when EU authority is exercised or when major political orientations of the EU are discussed. This responsiveness to EU governance and decision-making moments is indeed an important requirement for the accountability of European governance (Rauh and de Wilde 2018).



Hence, scholars have shown that members of national parliaments tend to emphasize European affairs when EU directives are adopted, close to European summits, or following the European Council agenda (Rauh and de Wilde 2018; Winzen et al. 2018). These findings tend to point towards optimism regarding EU accountability, as MPs talk about European affairs when important issues and decisions are at stake at the EU level. However, these findings only concern parliamentary speeches where institutional procedures play a predominant role in triggering or constraining the possibility of EU affairs scrutiny (Auel et al. 2015; Winzen et al. 2018). Indeed, parliaments have an institutionalized central role in the democratic accountability of supranational governance (Auel 2007; Auel and Raunio 2014; Cooper 2012; Karlas 2012; Raunio 2011; Winzen 2012). This raises thus the question of whether there is a linkage to EU decision-making moments in the communications of political actors outside of the parliamentary arena. Do political parties emphasize European affairs in their communications on Twitter when an important EU decision-making process takes place? Although there is no institutional procedure to encourage parties to talk about these matters, I still expect there to be a linkage between parties' communications on Twitter and EU decision-making moments.

*H3: Parties' emphasis on European affairs increases during important EU decision-making moments*

Finally, because they have gained seats and offices, some parties face an even stronger pressure to emphasize European affairs, as they are involved—through governments and/or elected representatives—in European governance. Hence, members of national government should communicate about executive-dominated European governance events. While scholars have warned of a possible opposition deficit in parliamentary scrutiny over European affairs (Rauh and de Wilde 2018), there is still a need for national governments to communicate publicly about their involvement in decisions at the European level. This can lead to an imbalance in the emphasis on Europe between government and opposition parties at the time of executive-dominated European governance events. On these occasions, this imbalance does not seem to be a problem since it would demonstrate that governments do indeed give a certain public visibility to these decision-making moments. Therefore, I expect parties in

government to increase even more their emphasis on European affairs during the European Council's summits, and when their country holds the EU Council presidency.

*H4a: Parties' emphasis on European affairs increases even more for parties in the national government during the European Council's summits.*

*H4b: Parties' emphasis on European affairs increases even more for parties in the national government when their country holds the rotating presidency of the EU Council.*

Then, through European elections, national parties gain seats in the European Parliament. Having elected representatives involved in the EU legislative process should trigger an emphasis on European affairs. Indeed, having elected MEPs give to political parties the possibility as well as the responsibility to communicate publicly about European affairs. Considering that European elections are the most direct route of delegation and accountability between citizens and European decision-making (Norris 1997), and that the European Parliament plays a prominent legislative role in numerous areas, there is a strong democratic requirement and functional pressure for MEPs and their parties to emphasize EU affairs. Moreover, I expect this effect to grow with the size of the party's delegation in the European Parliament. This is because having more MEPs allows them to specialize in different policy areas and take part in different committees, in turn extending the possibility and responsibility to communicate about different European issues, topics and legislative files.

*H5: Parties' emphasis on European affairs increases when they hold a larger share of seats in the European Parliament.*

## DATA AND OPERATIONALIZATION<sup>1</sup>

In order to study political parties' communications about Europe, I collected the messages they have published on Twitter. Circumventing the classical limitations of data collection on Twitter thanks to a web-scraping approach, I have collected a unique

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the data collection and analysis, see my upcoming PhD dissertation.

longitudinal dataset of nearly 2 million tweets published over eleven years (2009–2019) by 67 political parties and their leaders in 10 western EU member states.<sup>2</sup> These are Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. In each country, I selected all the parties who won at least 5% of votes in any national or European election since 2009.

Twitter is a particularly promising source to study political actors' communications. Indeed, it has become a major medium for political communications in the last decade, offering an unmediated platform for political actors to make public statements. They are constrained neither by the institutional rules of parliamentary interventions nor by the editorial and agenda choices of the media (Peteers et al. 2019). Most political leaders, organizations and parties use this social media and publish relatively frequent messages on the platform. It is arguably a "place to be" for political actors to take part in public debates and get attention. Some are much more active than others and styles vary, but most are aware that it is an important medium to get their messages out to a wider audience. There is, of course, the audience of Twitter users, but tweets have an even greater audience when they are picked up by other media. Indeed, tweets from political actors strongly attract journalists' attention (Parmelee 2013; Parmelee and Bichard 2011; Verweij 2012). Nowadays, we often see tweets from public figures being quoted in the news. As such, tweets from political leaders or parties serve as short press releases. Political actors therefore use Twitter to make public statements, to state their position or emphasize specific issues.

This large corpus of collected tweets allows a longitudinal and fine-grained analysis of emphasis on European affairs from political parties. I follow a text-as-data approach and perform automated content analysis techniques to measure issue emphasis (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). I measure emphasis as the extent to which parties refer to European affairs in their communications. I use the straightforward approach of dictionaries. The principle is that the computer assigns words, or other text units such as multi-word expressions, to a priori defined categories (the dictionary). I use two different dictionaries, the first one is the

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<sup>2</sup> Description of the dataset in the appendix.

“European dictionary,” and it matches all occurrences of “the EU,” “Europe” and “European(s)”. It is a very short dictionary with relatively vague entries. There is therefore a risk of having false positives and false negatives. However, I still consider this dictionary to be a relevant indicator of emphasis on European affairs because it suits well the style of communication on Twitter. Indeed, the brevity of tweets (with a maximum of 140 characters until November 2017 and 280 since then) forces to be concise and to go straight to the point while making sure that the topic is clear for the public audience. Tweets are more likely to include general keywords such as “Europe” rather than technical vocabulary such as the full names of institutions and procedures.

Second, I measure the share of tweets referring to EU governance using a more detailed dictionary developed by Rauh (Rauh 2015; Rauh and de Wilde 2018). This dictionary includes a much larger list of more precise entries. It covers references to the EU polity, such as “the EU,” “Lisbon treaty” or “European institutions,” the EU politics (political actors and institutions), such as “ECB,” “European Council” or “MEP,” and the EU policies, such as “CFSP,” “European directive” or “Eurozone.” The risk of false positives is therefore much lower than with the first dictionary, because here each dictionary entry is a precise reference to an element of European governance. Finally, I validate these measurements, showing that they significantly correlate<sup>3</sup>, as well as with existing indicators of party emphasis on European integration (Chapel Hill Expert Survey and Manifesto Project). In the subsequent analyses, I use the measurement from the simple first dictionary, keeping the second for robustness checks.

I run regression models to test my hypotheses. My dependent variable is computed as the number of tweets referring to European affairs (European dictionary) published by a party over one week. I study weekly variations because most of my hypotheses concern the occurrence of specific events and therefore require a fine-grained analysis. Since the dependent variable is a count variable, I use binomial negative regressions and I add the total number of tweets published by a party during the week (*Activity*) as a control variable because

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<sup>3</sup> Correlation matrix in the appendix

the number of tweets referring to Europe obviously depends on the total number of tweets published by the party during that week.

The first independent variable is the proximity of the next European election. It is computed as the number of weeks until the next election, log transformed to account for the exponential salience of the electoral campaign in the public agenda. Indeed, the effect of the proximity of the election on the public agenda increases much more between weeks  $W-5$  and  $W0$  than between weeks  $W-25$  and  $W-20$ , for example. Finally, I reverse this variable so that higher values express proximity to an election. Then, I include a binary variable for the last three months of the campaign before the referendum on EU membership in the United Kingdom and one for the week of 23 June 2016 in other countries, to test its effect abroad.

Then, I expect parties to emphasize European affairs in their tweets at the time of important European governance events. I have chosen to test the effect of four types of events, all important steps in decision-making at the European level, one for each of the major EU institutions. Moreover, I have only selected events with clearly identifiable time limits because it would be more difficult to assess the attention to processes more diluted over time, like budgetary negotiations. I therefore include binary variables for these events of European governance: the weeks when a European Council summit was held, the weeks when the president of the Commission gave an inaugural or State of the Union speech before the parliament, the semester when a country held the presidency of the European Council and the weeks when there was a plenary session of the European Parliament. Eventually, I add a binary variable for parties that are members of their national government and a variable for the share of seats that parties have in the European Parliament. I compute this last variable as the number of elected MEPs from one party divided by the total number of MEPs from this party's country.

## FINDINGS

### *Descriptive analysis*

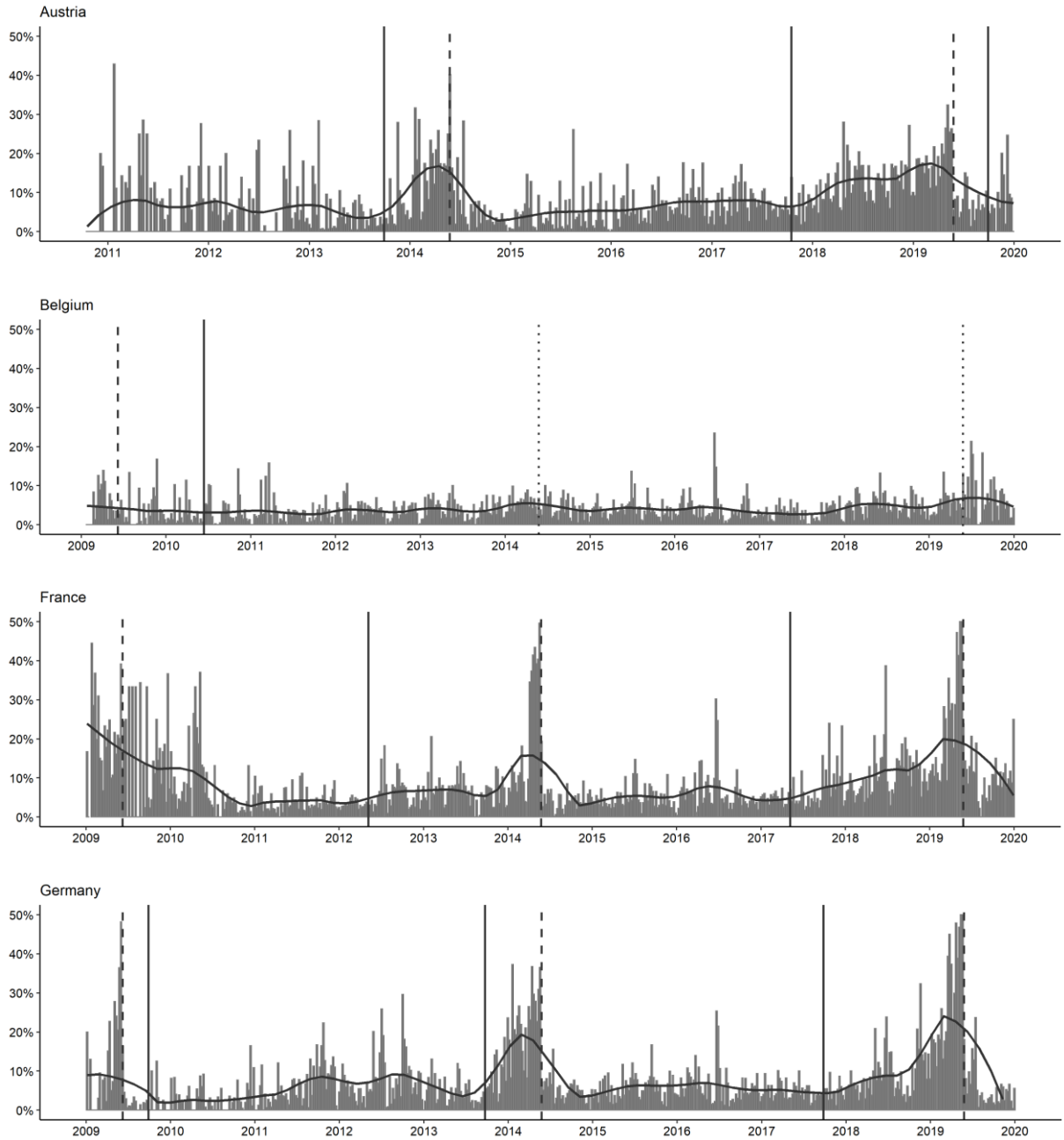
First, figure 1 displays parties' emphasis on Europe in longitudinal perspective, showing the national average weekly percentage of tweets mentioning Europe or the European Union (result of the European dictionary). It is therefore possible to make some early observations regarding when and how much parties refer to EU affairs in their tweets. I make some preliminary observations regarding the effects of European elections, as well as of the EU membership referendum in the UK both internally and abroad.

It is clear that political parties and their leaders publish a lot more messages referring to Europe during the weeks close to European elections. In nearly all cases, the share of tweets mentioning the EU or Europe clearly peaks at the time of the 2009, 2014 and 2019 EP elections. This confirms recent findings highlighting that EU election campaigns have finally become also about some EU issues (Eugster et al. 2020). Belgium is the exception here, as European elections were held simultaneously with the Belgian federal legislative elections in 2014 and 2019, their impact on emphasis seems less clear.

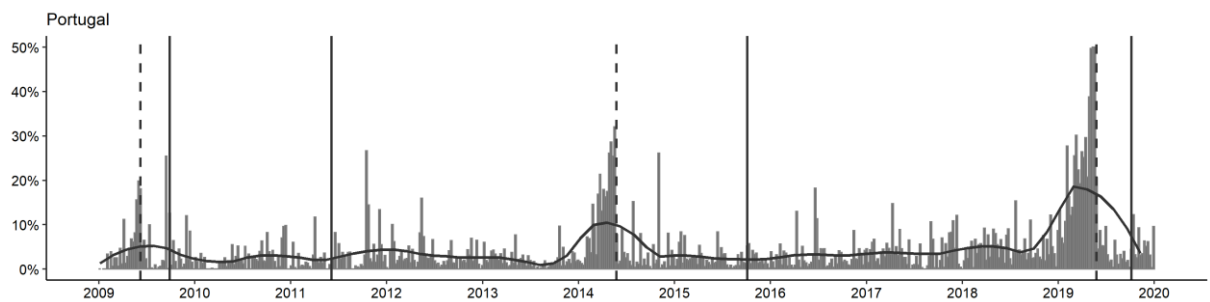
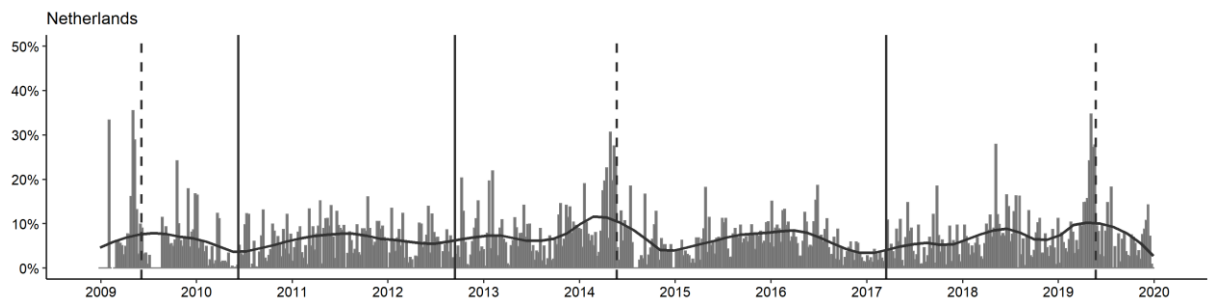
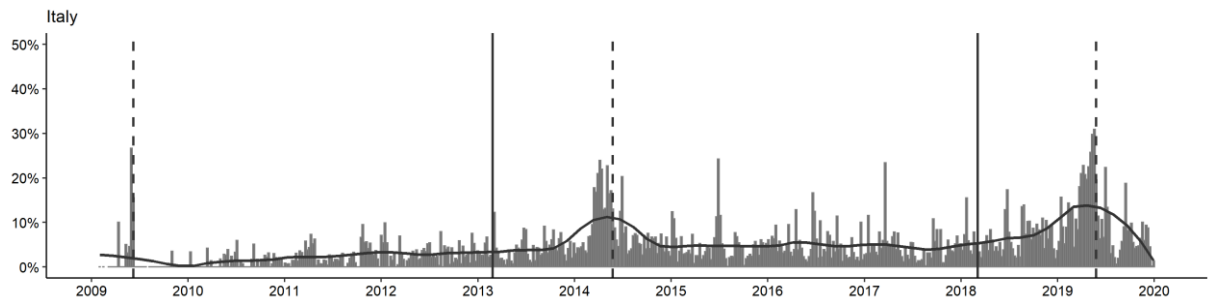
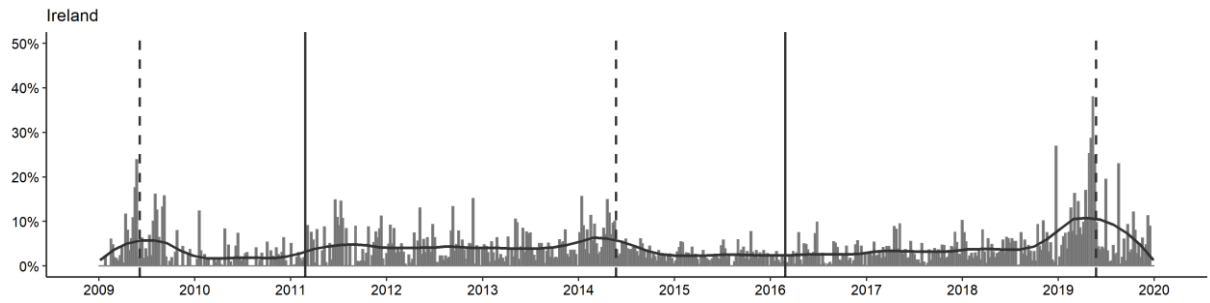
Then, the referendum on EU membership in the United Kingdom has clearly increased EU emphasis. During the campaign in the months preceding the referendum, we can see that British parties published many more EU-related tweets than usual. Moreover, it seems that we witness an effect of the referendum outside the borders of the United Kingdom. In June 2016, parties in other countries also tweeted more about European affairs. This is clearly observable in Belgium, France, Germany, and Portugal, for example.

Figure 1: Average national weekly emphasis, European dictionary results

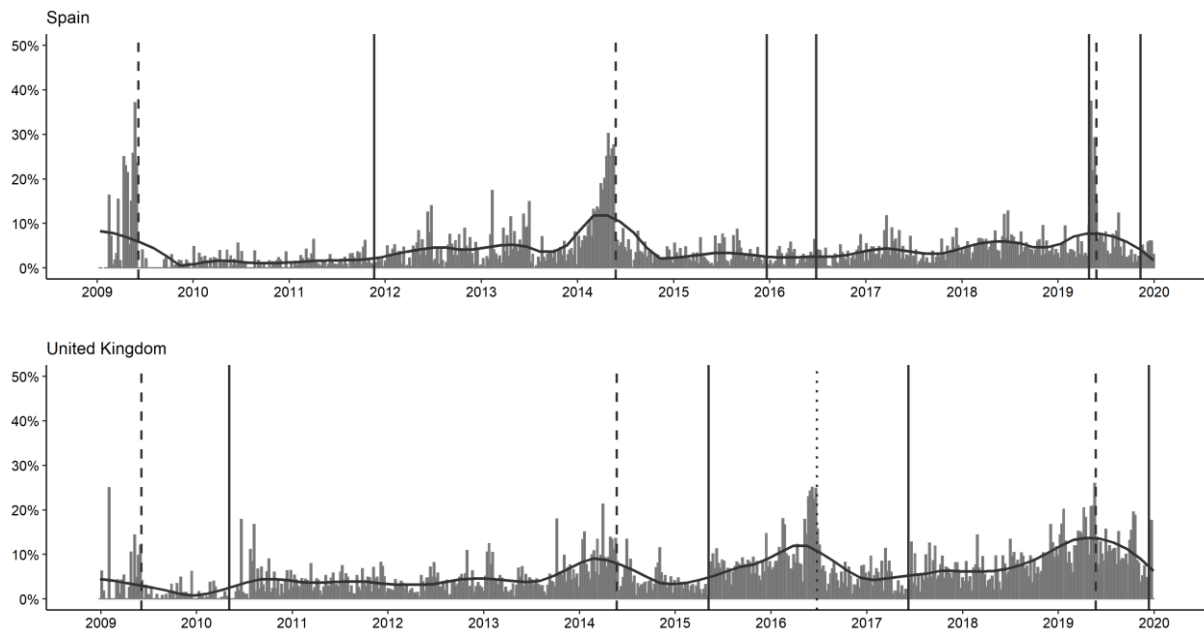
(Solid lines = National elections, Dashed lines = European elections,  
Dotted lines = simultaneous elections in BE and referendum in the UK)



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While I observe that events such as EU elections and the Brexit referendum have triggered discussions of EU topics, parties also continuously communicate about EU affairs outside of these specific times. In all 10 countries investigated, political parties published EU-related tweets almost every week for more than a decade. Moreover, there are important variations in the extent of this “daily emphasis” on European issues. According to my other hypotheses, this could be an indication that parties communicate more about Europe following the European governance agenda, for example close to EU summits or during plenary sessions of the EP.

I therefore turn to regression models to test these hypotheses. Table 1 displays the results of the binomial negative regression models. The first model tests all the hypotheses with independent variables strictly related to timing, i.e., H1, H2 and H3. Then, the second and third models test hypotheses H4a and H4b with interactions between the government variable and the timing of executive-dominated European governance events. Eventually, the fourth model tests hypothesis H5 in a separate model because it includes only a subset of the dataset, excluding the parties that did not participate in the last European election, and for which it is therefore not possible to compute the share of EP seats.

*Increased Emphasis During EU Elections and Referendum*

First, as the descriptive approach suggested, I find strong support for hypothesis H1. The number of parties' tweets referring to European affairs sharply increase as the next European election approaches. Holding other variables at their mean value (average activity = 60 tweets/week), model 1 predicts that 4.1% of tweets refer to European affairs one year before the election, while more than 10% of tweets are about Europe in the last month and even 16.6% in the last week of the campaign. In other words, this means that emphasis at the time of the election is four times higher than one year earlier. If we look at the raw data, this can even reach more than 85% of the messages, as was the case for the PS (Fra) in 2019, the CSU (Ger) in 2009, 2014, 2019 and the CDU (Ger) in 2019, the PS (Por) in 2019 and the CDS-PP (Por) in 2019, and the D66 (NI) in 2019.

Table 1: Results of binomial negative regressions

	Emphasis on European affairs			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Intercept</b>	4.712*** (0.112)	5.029*** (0.111)	4.993*** (0.112)	3.703*** (0.149)
<b>European elections</b>	2.227*** (0.063)	2.240*** (0.062)	2.239*** (0.062)	2.188*** (0.062)
<b>Referendum in the UK</b>	5.213*** (0.226)	5.183*** (0.231)	5.189*** (0.230)	4.876*** (0.179)
<b>Referendum abroad</b>	3.692*** (0.135)	3.689*** (0.129)	3.708*** (0.129)	3.602*** (0.141)
<b>European summits</b>	1.419*** (0.030)	1.350*** (0.029)	1.426*** (0.029)	1.432*** (0.032)
<b>Commission speeches</b>	1.125** (0.037)	1.125** (0.036)	1.123** (0.037)	1.121** (0.039)
<b>Council presidency</b>	1.199 (0.154)	1.211 (0.154)	1.146 (0.195)	1.164 (0.151)
<b>European Parl. plenary</b>	1.183*** (0.024)	1.184*** (0.024)	1.183*** (0.024)	1.178*** (0.025)
<b>Government</b>		0.843 (0.136)	0.861 (0.133)	
<b>Gov x European summit</b>		1.192*** (0.051)		
<b>Gov x Council presidency</b>			1.167 (0.325)	
<b>Share of EP seats</b>				3.333* (0.550)
<b>Activity</b>	1.010*** (0.001)	1.010*** (0.001)	1.010*** (0.001)	1.010*** (0.001)
<b>Observations</b>	32533	32533	32533	29896
<b>R2 Nagelkerke</b>	0.547	0.550	0.549	0.563

Binomial negative regressions. The dependent variable is the number of tweets referring to European affairs published by each party every week, measured by the European dictionary. Incidence rate ratios with, in brackets, robust clustered standard errors (at party level). P values: \*\*\* <0.001; \*\* <0.01; \* <0.05

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Conversely, some parties dedicated very few messages to EU issues in the last week before European elections (less than 2%). But these were almost exclusively Belgian parties, and this is because national elections were being held simultaneously with European elections. This may seem logical; nevertheless, it demonstrates how this simultaneity prevents discussing European issues at the time of European elections, compared to other countries.

Then, as the descriptive approach suggested, hypotheses H2a and H2b are confirmed as well. The 2016 referendum on EU membership in the United Kingdom indeed triggered emphasis on the EU both from British parties throughout the campaign and from parties in other countries at the time of the referendum. During the last three months before 23 June 2016, model 1 predicts that 17.5% of the tweets published by British parties referred to the EU or Europe, compared to 3.3% otherwise. And during the week of the referendum, it predicts that 12.4% of tweets from parties abroad referred to the same topics, compared to 3.4% otherwise.

## *Communicating European Governance*

Now I turn to the analysis of hypothesis H3. This hypothesis concerns the effect of European governance events on emphasis in tweets. As these events were much more numerous and dispersed over time than the elections and the referendum, it was impossible to get an idea with the descriptive approach. Here, with the binomial negative regression model, I find support for three out of the four events. The model predicts that the number of tweets mentioning European affairs increases during European summits, at the time of major speeches from the president of the Commission and during plenary sessions of the European Parliament. Only the rotating presidency of the Council does not seem to trigger attention to EU matters from domestic parties. These are novel findings. We already knew that European decision-making processes and events triggered attention in domestic parliaments, where institutional procedures play a predominant role in triggering or constraining the possibility of EU affairs scrutiny (Auel et al. 2015; Rauh and de Wilde 2018; Winzen et al. 2018). Now it also seems that political parties emphasize European affairs on Twitter at the time of important

European governance events. This nuance is important since, first, these are public communications from political parties and not from individual MPs inside the legislative process. Statements on Twitter from parties and their leaders are likely to have a wider resonance than most plenary speeches. In addition, Twitter allows mainly unconstrained communications. There are virtually no institutional incentives or constraints to talk about the EU in a tweet, compared to legislative speeches. Consequently, when a party or a leader tweets about European affairs during an EU summit or an EP plenary session, it is because they have chosen to give some sort of visibility to these matters.

That being said, the effects predicted by model 1 are relatively small. Holding other variables at their mean value, it predicts that 4.6% of tweets mention EU affairs during European summits, compared to 3.2% otherwise; 3.8% at the time of major speeches from the Commission's president, compared to 3.4% otherwise; and 3.8% during plenary sessions of the EP, compared to 3.2% otherwise. Hence, while they are significant, these variations remain limited. The limited scale of these effects makes it necessary to be cautious before unequivocally concluding that parties always emphasise European affairs during European governance key moments.

However, the important number of events analysed may explain these small variations. Over the 11 years studied (2009–2019), there have been 13 inaugural or State of the Union speeches from the president of the Commission, 77 European summits and 178 plenary sessions of the European Parliament. On average, they might have a limited—albeit significant—effect on emphasis, but some EU summits, EP plenaries or EC speeches might attract much more attention than others. In other words, the extent to which parties communicate about these events probably varies as some of them may be much more salient and decisive than others. For example, the five European summits during which parties on average published more tweets about European affairs were the following: (1) The informal meeting in Sibiu on 9 May 2019 (30.1% of tweets), held on “Europe Day” and two weeks before European elections, and where they discussed the EU strategic agenda for 2019–2024. (2) The Special European Council on 10 April 2019 (17.5% of tweets), where they agreed to delay Brexit

after UK PM Theresa May had asked for a further extension of the Article 50 period. (3) The European Council on 28 and 29 June 2018 (15.6% of tweets), where they mainly focused on migration issues before discussing Brexit (without the UK) and the eurozone (Euro summit). (4) The special meeting on 30 June 2019 (14.8% of tweets), where nominations for the EU's top jobs were decided, one week after the 2019 European elections. (5) The European Council on 28 and 29 June 2016 (14.7% of tweets), where they discussed Brexit without the UK, a few days after the referendum was held. Similarly, the Commission's speeches that attracted the most attention were the two inaugural speeches delivered in July 2014 and 2019. With respectively 10.6% and 9.3% of tweets, emphasis on European affairs was higher than at the time of any state of the Union speech, usually delivered in September.

### *The effect of governments' and MEPs' involvement in European governance*

Then, in models 2 and 3, I tested hypotheses H4a and H4b with interactions between the government variable and the timing of executive-dominated European governance events. I only find support for hypothesis H4a. Parties in governments are more likely to communicate about EU summits. As I have argued, this imbalance is not necessarily problematic since it demonstrates that governments do indeed give a certain public visibility to these decision-making moments.

Finally, the fourth model predicts that parties having a larger share of national MEPs are on average more likely to emphasize European affairs, as hypothesized in H5. Holding other variables at their mean value, model 4 predicts that a party having 5% of national seats in the EP publishes only 2% of tweets about European affairs, while this goes up to 3.9% of tweets for a party having 30% of national seats. This suggests that parties that have more elected representatives at the EU level dedicate a larger share of their public communications to European matters.

### *Results With the Second Measurement*

I have replicated the same analyses with my second measurement of emphasis on European affairs. I have run similar binomial negative models<sup>4</sup> with the dependent variable measured with the EU governance dictionary (Rauh 2015; Rauh and de Wilde 2018). Since this second dictionary only includes explicit references to European affairs, I expect it is particularly successful in detecting political actors' attention to European governance. Indeed, almost all findings are confirmed in this second analysis. I find that the proximity of European elections, the referendum in the UK and abroad all trigger emphasis on European affairs. I also find that parties communicate more about EU affairs during European summits, Commission speeches and EP plenaries, but not when their country holds the presidency of the Council. And government parties also communicate more about European summits. However, the positive relationship between the share of EP seats and emphasis is not confirmed here.

## CONCLUSION

The neo-functional idea that supranational authority should lead to politicization also applies to daily European governance. The exercise of authority at the supranational level should increase the engagement of political actors and the visibility of EU matters. Therefore, political elites are expected to communicate publicly about European affairs. They face significant functional pressures and normative requirements to do so. We already knew that European governance garnered attention in domestic parliaments, where institutional procedures play a predominant role in triggering or constraining the possibility of EU affairs scrutiny (Auel et al. 2015; Rauh and de Wilde 2018; Winzen et al. 2018). This raises thus the question of whether there is a linkage to European governance in the communications of political actors outside of the parliamentary arena. In particular, Twitter has become an important platform for political communications, and statements on Twitter from parties and their leaders are likely to have a wider resonance than most plenary speeches (Parmelee 2013;

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<sup>4</sup> Results in the appendix

Parmelee and Bichard 2011; Verweij 2012). Therefore, in this paper, I have investigated to what extent political parties' tweets emphasize European affairs.

Most of my findings are relatively positive concerning the functional politicization of European governance. Confirming previous works, I find that parties emphasize European affairs when the next European election gets closer and during referendum campaigns. Moreover, I find that the number of tweets mentioning European affairs increases during European summits (even stronger for government parties), at the time of major speeches from the president of the Commission and during plenary sessions of the European Parliament. I also find that parties having a larger share of MEPs are more likely to emphasize European affairs, although this is not confirmed with the second measurement. These are novel findings. Political parties emphasize European affairs on Twitter at the time of important European governance events and when they are involved, through offices or seats, in European decision-making processes.

However, these elements should be interpreted with caution. Yes, there is some emphasis on EU matters when it is required; visibility does not necessarily equal politicization (Dupuy and Van Ingelgom in Palonen et al. 2019). Politicization requires public visibility and contradictory debate. Visibility and debate are indeed the two key features making previously unpolitical matters political (Kauppi and Trenz in Palonen et al. 2019; Zürn 2016). Without them, European governance would remain an opaque and consensual process remote from any public democratic debate. Here, the fact that I find that political actors do communicate about European affairs does not mean that there is a contradictory public debate. These communications could be consensual or framed to avoid any debate, and to present decisions as necessary and without alternatives. Such a situation of non-politicization would be characterized by a perception of absence of choice because there would be no public discussion of European decisions and alternatives (Hay 2007). In fact, scholars have shown how political elites can indeed use discursive depoliticization to create the impression that there is no choice (Borriello 2017; de Wilde and Zürn 2012). When this is the case, the public visibility of



European governance does not serve the required functional politicization, but rather jeopardizes it.

Therefore, further research is necessary to investigate whether the content of political actors' communications about European governance actually discuss policy alternatives and allows a contradictory debate on European affairs. In addition, using a similar longitudinal and fine-grained approach, further research could also investigate precisely what type of European governance moments attract more attention. I have already mentioned the fact that the level of emphasis varies from one event to another. One may therefore wonder, for example, which European summits or plenary sessions of the Parliament attract more visibility than others? Does it depend on the topics discussed or the actors involved? These questions are important to understand the extent of politicization of the European decision-making process, and by extension its democratic legitimacy.

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## APPENDIX

Table A: Tweets dataset

Countries	Parties	Twitter accounts	N	
Austria	FPO	norbertghofer	3273	
	GRÜNE	Gruene_Austria	10779	
		WKogler	2385	
	NEOS	neos_eu	41012	
		matstrolz	11767	
	OVP	BMeinl	2454	
		volkspartei	7068	
		sebastiankurz	3046	
	SPO	MitterlehnerR	794	
		SPOE_at	7246	
		KernChri	970	
		rendiwagner	367	
	Belgium	CD&V	cdenv	11769
wbeke			4189	
YLeterne			346	
CDH		joachimcoens	21	
		lecdh	3624	
		prevotmaxime	72	
Ecolo		BenoitLutgen	57	
		Ecolo	5755	
		PatrickDupriez	3040	
		jmjavaux	748	
		jmnollet	443	
Groen		RajaeMaouane	100	
		Sarahrturine	64	
		groen	13491	
		MeyremAlmaci	1512	
		WouterVanBesien	204	
MR		MR_officiel	5991	
		CharlesMichel	3220	
		dreynders	2045	
NVA		OChastel	620	
		GLBouchez	96	
		de_NVA	48434	
VLD		Bart_DeWever	282	
		openvld	8000	
		RuttenGwendolyn	4894	
PS		alexanderdecroo	1276	
		eliodirupo	5906	
		PSofficiel	3406	
PTB		PaulMagneette	450	
		RaoulHedebouw	11182	
PVDA		ptbbelgique	8430	
		pvdabelgie	8598	
SPA		peter_mertens	3699	
		sp_a	13458	
		johncrombez	3234	
VB		conner_rousseau	25	
		vibelang	11233	
		tomvangrieken	3707	
		gannemans	2306	
France		EELV	EELV	9469
			CecileDufLOT	4000
			DavidCormand	2284
			emmacosse	1836
			PDurandOfficiel	338
			julienbayou	38
			JLMelenchon	25126
		LFI	FranceInsoumise	12831
	FDG		10212	
	LR	lesRepublicains	15780	
		NicolasSarkozy	6100	
		jf_cope	4269	
		laurentwauquiez	2455	
	Germany	LREM	JeanLeonetti	142
			ChJacob77	77
			EmmanuelMacron	7073
			enmarchefr	4412
MoDem			18814	
MoDem		MoDem	3992	
		bayrou	3992	
PS		partisocialiste	51407	
		jccambadelis	6076	
		faureolivier	865	
		RachidTemal	669	
		fhollande	518	
RN		MartineAubry	431	
		harlemdesir	174	
		RNational_off	30439	
		MLP_officiel	18185	
		AfD	7735	
CDU		AfD	7735	
		FraukePetry	2036	
		Joerg_Meuthen	1275	
		DrKonradAdam	16	
		Tino_Chrupalla	3	
		CDU	14431	
	akk	236		
	CSU	10492		
	Markus_Soeder	234		
	FDP	7612		
	fdp	6881		
	c_lindner	6881		
	philippproesler	229		
Grüne	Die_Gruenen	9722		
	peter_simone	8535		
Linke	cem_oezdemir	2555		
	ABaerbock	648		
	dieLinke	11399		
	katjakipping	4489		
	b_riexinger	3949		
SPD	LoetschMdB	257		
	ernst_klaus	175		
	spdde	20462		
	sigmargabriel	2398		
	MartinSchulz	443		
	AndreaNahlesSPD	208		
	ManuelaSchwesig	168		
EskenSaskia	124			
Ireland	muentefering	128		
	NowaboFM	47		
	OlafScholz	35		
	FF	20323		
	fiannafailparty	20323		
FG	MichealMartinTD	1021		
	FineGael	16165		
Greens	LeoVaradkar	1513		
	EndaKennyTD	531		
	greenparty_ie	10177		
	EamonRyan	5629		
	JohnGormley	63		
Lab	labour	19850		
	BrendanHowlin	2043		
SF	joanburton	402		
	EamonGilmore	177		
	sinnfeinireland	44211		
	GerryAdamsSF	10589		
	MaryLouMcDonald	809		
Italy	FdI	25094		
	FratelliItalia	25094		
	GiorgiaMeloni	7392		
FI	Ignazio_LaRussa	597		
	forza_italia	23589		
	berlusconi	3649		

Lega	LegaSalvini	118110	Spain	PSD	ajseguro	681	
	matteosalvinimi	31326			ppdpsd	12797	
	RobertoMaroni_	1319			passoscoelho	447	
	M5S	Mov5Stelle		17561	RuiRioPSD	239	
		beppe_grillo		12555	Cs	CiudadanosCs	93311
	luigidimaio	524		Albert_Rivera		35529	
	PD	pdnetwork		19837	Podemos	PODEMOS	65423
		pbersani		5109		PabloIglesias	10042
		matteoreenzi		2478		populares	51708
		nzingaretti		651	marianorajoy	13860	
		maumartina		565	pablocasado_	2880	
		gu_epifani		368	PSOE	PSOE	64851
		PaoloGentiloni		284		sanchezcastejon	9324
		EnricoLetta		184	_Rubalcaba_	3217	
SC		scelta_civica	8913	Vox	vox_es	13717	
		SenatoreMonti	819		Santi_ABASCAL	5892	
Netherlands	CDA	cdavandaag	32778	UK	Brexit	brexitparty_uk	1679
		MaximeVerhagen	3005			Nigel_Farage	867
		sybrandbuma	1670		blaiklockBP	43	
	D66	D66	20280		Cons	CCHQPress	27785
		APechtold	10396			Conservatives	10840
	RobJetten	283	David_Cameron			2344	
	FVD	fvdemocratie	5545		theresa_may	985	
		thierrybaudet	3472		BorisJohnson	818	
	GL	groenlinks	15786		Greens	natalieben	21282
		jesseklaver	602			TheGreenParty	15683
	PvdA	BramvanOjikGL	154		CarolineLucas	5958	
		PvdA	12236		jon_bartley	4173	
		diederiksamsom	8651		sianberry	821	
	PVV	LodewijkA	3065		Lab	labourpress	32220
		JobCohen	185			UKLabour	18416
	SP	geertwilderspvv	8043		jeremycorbyn	6973	
		SPnl	7484		Ed_Miliband	3007	
	VVD	emileroemer	1709		HarrietHarman	192	
		MarijnissenL	1160		Lib Dems	LibDems	23295
		VVD	15541			timfarron	7052
MinPres	3438	nick_clegg	1556				
Portugal	BE	EsquerdaNet	49830	SNP	vincecable	1118	
		catarina_mart	9714		joswinson	467	
	CDS-PP	_CDSPP	14454	theSNP	28264		
		CristasAssuncao	406	NicolaSturgeon	5473		
	CDU (PCP & PEV)	OsVerdes	5794	AlexSalmond	1455		
		CDUPCPPEV	2575	UKIP	UKIP	22598	
	PS	psocialista	13150		Nigel_Farage	8997	
	antonioconstapm	2622	GerardBattenUK	1572			
	richardbraine	320					

Table B: Measurements" correlation matrix

	Dictionary 1	Dictionary 2
Dictionary 2	0.664***	
Expert judgement	0.340***	0.405***
Manifesto	0.516***	0.480***

\*\*\* p < 0.001; \*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05

The emphasis measures Dict 1 and Dict 2 are aggregated at the monthly level. The entire dataset is included for the estimation of correlations between them (N=7721). To estimate the correlation with expert judgements, I only include the yearly average emphasis (for Dict1 and Dict2) in the years of CHES waves (N=180). Finally, to estimate the correlation with the emphasis in manifesto, I only include the yearly average emphasis (for Dict1 and Dict2) in the elections years (N=146).



Table C: Results of binomial negative regressions with the second dictionary

	Emphasis on European affairs			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Intercept</b>	1.655 (0.125)	1.921*** (0.132)	1.900*** (0.133)	1.278 (0.203)
<b>European elections</b>	1.743*** (0.080)	1.772*** (0.078)	1.769*** (0.077)	1.723*** (0.080)
<b>Referendum in UK</b>	6.915*** (0.274)	6.889*** (0.273)	6.896*** (0.272)	6.231*** (0.233)
<b>Referendum abroad</b>	2.744*** (0.189)	2.734*** (0.184)	2.766*** (0.181)	2.528*** (0.183)
<b>European summits</b>	1.487*** (0.040)	1.396*** (0.030)	1.510*** (0.041)	1.492*** (0.041)
<b>Commission speeches</b>	1.133** (0.041)	1.131** (0.043)	1.125** (0.043)	1.148** (0.045)
<b>Council presidency</b>	1.409 (0.223)	1.456 (0.219)	1.311 (0.278)	1.332 (0.213)
<b>European Parl. plenary</b>	1.233*** (0.030)	1.228*** (0.029)	1.227*** (0.029)	1.230*** (0.031)
<b>Government</b>		0.682 (0.213)	0.704 (0.209)	
<b>Gov x European summit</b>		1.297** (0.091)		
<b>Gov x Council presidency</b>			1.336 (0.431)	
<b>Share of EP seats</b>				3.936 (0.888)
<b>Activity</b>	1.010*** (0.001)	1.010*** (0.001)	1.010*** (0.001)	1.010*** (0.001)
<b>Observations</b>	32533	32533	32533	29896
<b>R2 Nagelkerke</b>	0.384	0.394	0.394	0.403

Binomial negative regressions. The dependent variable is the number of tweets referring to European affairs published by each party every week, measured by the second dictionary (Rauh 2015). Incidence rate ratios with, in brackets, robust clustered standard errors (at party level). P values: \*\*\* <0.001; \*\* <0.01; \* <0.05