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# Programmatic Europeanization revisited: The role of EP election proximity, EU support and Eastern European patterns



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**PROGRAMMATIC EUROPEANIZATION REVISITED:  
THE ROLE OF EP ELECTION PROXIMITY,  
EU SUPPORT AND EASTERN EUROPEAN PATTERNS**

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## ABSTRACT

Parties emphasis of European themes in their manifestos varies to a great deal between countries. However, except for few papers which present descriptive evidence as to why this happens, there is practically no literature which provides a systematic explanation of the variation in issue emphasis across countries. In this paper, we seek to address this gap in the literature and analyse the determinants of parties' emphasis of European issues by using a unique dataset containing party manifesto data. We show that the temporal proximity to a European Parliament election decreases the amount of space which parties allocate in their manifestos to EU related issues. Furthermore, consistent with previous findings in the literature, we find that Eastern European parties dedicate more space to EU issues, an effect which might be driven by the more recent EU experience of these parties. Surprisingly, we find no effect of party's voters support for the EU or the level of the absorption rates of European Structural and Investment Funds on parties' emphasis of EU themes in their manifestos.

Keywords: party manifestos, Cohesion Policy, Eastern Europe, EP Elections

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main arenas in which party Europeanization is bound to manifest itself according to the proponents of this theory is that of election manifestos. Thus, we should observe increased references in these documents to European policies and to the European Union (EU) and its institution as an additional factor in the pursuit of policies traditionally considered domestic (Ladrech, 2002, 396). But, as parties and the politicians that compose them are not motivated only by policy-seeking reasons, but also by the perspective of winning votes and office (see e.g. Muller and Strøm, 1999), the extent of programmatic Europeanization or EU issue emphasis in their manifestos is likely to be driven by several strategic and contextual considerations. In this paper we build on existing studies analysing the determinants of EU in party manifestos (Pennings, 2006; Netjes and Binnema, 2007) or as perceived by experts (Steenbergen and Scott, 2004) and we test the role played by the amount of EU support exhibited by the party's voters, the role of European Parliament (EP) election proximity, EU funds absorption rates and the possible increased EU emphasis of Eastern European parties.

Much of the existing research focuses on national party positions on European integration (see e.g. Arnold et al., 2012; Hooghe et al., 2004; Williams and Spoon, 2015), and less on the of European issues for parties in national election campaigns. Regarding parties' emphasis of European issues in election campaigns, one key element of political representation in democratic political systems comes into play:

political actors make pledges about policy issues that are important to citizens and voters. This is especially the case in election years. Prior to elections, parties are drafting manifestos to communicate their main policy messages to citizens, voters, and party supporters, and these policy documents are the basis of parties' election campaigns (see e.g. Thomson et al., 2017). Yet, even though election manifestos tend to get longer over time (Dolezal et al., 2012; Green-Pedersen, 2007, 613), the space parties can devote to specific policy issues is limited. Parties must decide on which issues they will relatively focus more in their election campaigns and which issues will only play a minor role. In national election campaigns, parties not only have to deal with domestic issues, but also with international issues. Particularly European issues gained more and more importance in election campaigns in both Western and Eastern European democracies in the last years (see e.g. Hellstrom and Blomgren, 2016; Hutter and Grande, 2014), although European integration in domestic campaigns still is moderately politicised at best (Hoeglinger, 2016, 54). Recent research descriptively shows that (sub-)national parties emphasis of European issues in their election manifestos varies to a great deal both between parties and between countries (Debus and Gross, 2017). Yet, we lack a definitive empirical answer to the question why this is the case.

The paper brings novel evidence on the determinants of European themes in national party manifestos across old and new EU member states. We show that the variables that best explain how much space parties dedicate to EU issues in their manifestos are the proximity to EP elections and whether a party is from an Eastern European member state or not. Somewhat surprisingly, the level of support for the EU expressed by the voters of a party and the level of EU funds absorption rates do not matter for the amount of space parties dedicate to the EU in their manifestos.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section, we present our theoretical considerations and hypotheses. The third section is devoted to our research design, the data we use and the methods applied. The empirical results of several ordinary least squared (OLS) regressions are presented in section four. This is followed by a brief discussion of one of the main effects and several robustness checks. The conclusion synthesizes the main findings and points to further directions of research.

## 2. NATIONAL PARTIES' ELECTION MANIFESTOS AND THE SALIENCY OF EUROPEAN ISSUES

Parties draft election manifestos for several reasons (see Daubler, 2012). First, by summarizing their positions on and emphasis of various policy issues parties provide voters with a document which might serve them to base their voting decision on. Secondly, these documents are guidelines for post-electoral bargaining on government formation and also serve intra-party purposes by signalling the main campaign positions and issues to party members and supporters. Hence, manifestos can be considered as authoritative and representative statements for the whole party (Klingemann et al., 2006, 164).

Manifestos are widely used to analyse parties' policy positions, their emphasis of specific issues and their responsiveness to voter preferences (for an overview see e.g. Adams, 2012; Budge, 2015; Fagerholm, 2016). The way in which parties respond to voter demands has been investigated in a twofold manner: position and saliency. First, parties try to adopt policy positions that are closely related

to voter preferences (see e.g. Ezrow et al., 2011; Stimson et al., 1995). Secondly, parties emphasize policy issues in their manifestos that are salient for voters (see e.g. Kluver and Sagarzazu, 2016; Spoon and Kluver, 2014; Tavits and Potter, 2015). In this contribution, we will focus on the second strategy of parties to respond to voter demands the varying degree of issue emphasis, i.e. saliency.

One core assumption of saliency theory is that parties strategically choose to manipulate the saliency of issues (Robertson, 1976; Budge and Farlie, 1983; Klingemann et al., 1994; Budge et al., 2001). Parties can own issues (Petrocik, 1996) due to parties' prior performance and history (Seeberg, 2017) or parties might promote issues that have been previously ignored (Hobolt and De Vries, 2015). We follow this line of research and argue that the emphasis put on EU issues in national party manifestos will co-vary with several contextual and political variables.

European issues undoubtedly gained importance in national election campaigns in the last decades, even though the extent to which European issues are politicized is still contested (see e.g. Eijk and Franklin, 2004; Kriesi, 2007; De Vries, 2007; Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hoeglinger, 2016; Hutter et al., 2016). On the one hand, this comes as no surprise since national elections still are mainly about domestic issues. On the other hand, this raises the question why we even would expect parties to address European issues in their national election manifestos. National politics in European countries is more and more intertwined through countries membership in the European Union. EU directives, EU national and regional transfer money as well as the EUs claim to be a global power has an impact on domestic politics and citizen everyday life. Consequently, national parties cannot ignore the European political sphere and have to address European issues in their election manifestos.

### 3. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

We begin the discussion of our theoretical considerations regarding parties' emphasis of European issues in their national election manifestos by distinguishing between contextual and political factors. Contextual factors do not vary for individual parties within a country (party system saliency of European issues, proximity to EP elections, geographical location and absorption rates of EU funds). Political factors, however, can vary both between parties competing in one country and cross-nationally.

Although European Parliament elections can still be considered second-order (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Corbett, 2014) and voters continue to use them as an opportunity to punish domestic governments, engage in protest voting, vote sincerely for small parties or experiment with new ones, it is safe to assume that the European content of these elections has increased in recent decades compared to the 1980s and 1990s (Eijk et al., 1996; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Franklin, 2006). This development is likely to lead to an increased compartmentalization of manifesto pledges when the national and the EP elections happen in close succession to each other. Thus, we first expect that parties will reduce the space assigned to addressing European issues and EU-related policy dimensions in national election manifestos when an EP election is bound to happen or has just taken place.

**Hypothesis 1** *The closer a national election is to an EP election, the less will parties emphasize European issues in their national election manifestos.*

Another expectation is that parties competing in Eastern European countries, that only recently accessed the EU would put more emphasis on the EU integration process in their manifestos than parties in countries from previous enlargement rounds. We argue that for parties from Eastern Europe, that have been part of the 2004-2007 enlargement of the European Union, European issues have a greater saliency because of the amount of bureaucratic and substantive policy priorities that needed to be decided during this period. This should be reflected in large sections of the manifesto being allocated to the formulation of the country's positions on various common European policies or sections discussing the administrative steps that are necessary to ensure the absorption and efficient usage of EU funding. Conversely, parties in older member states might have already dealt with these issues in the past, although for Irish and Greek parties the period covered also includes the severe financial crisis and Bailout Referendum, which most probably brought more focus on EU actions in the context of the domestic economic problems. For the last country not included in this category, Cyprus, the expectations would be rather mixed. On the one hand, this is a new Member State, thus the arguments mentioned above should apply as in the case of Greece, the Cypriot financial crisis of 2012-2013 might have also increased talk about the EU. On the other hand, the programmatic Europeanization of parties in Cyprus seems to have started somewhat earlier than in Eastern Europe (Katsourides, 2003). Therefore, our second hypothesis links geographical position and the length of EU membership to national parties' European issue-emphasis.

**Hypothesis 2** *Parties from Eastern European member states will put more emphasis on EU related issues than parties from other regions.*

We expect low EU emphasis from parties whose voters do not trust the European institutions, have become more critical towards European integration issues or have withdrawn their political support for a further integrated Europe due to the Euro crisis (Roth et al., 2013). Conversely, it is reasonable to believe that parties which target pro-European electorates would attempt to mobilize their vote by referring constantly to EU issues and processes in their campaigns and national elections manifestos. This leads to our third hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 3** *The more a party's voters support the EU, the more emphasis the party will put on European issues in its national election manifestos.*

We also expect that parties issue emphasis will be linked with a country's success in utilizing funds available through the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). The availability of EU funds through the EU Cohesion policy allows parties to remain vague in some of their policy proposals and relegate the financing of future projects to accessing EU money. Thus, the absorption of EU funds can become a significant electoral theme for parties. At the same time, low absorption rates of EU funds can indicate a failure to adjust to EU policy requirements or macro-economic mismanagement by previous governments. The issue of absorption and the use of EU money is especially present in the context of newer EU member states, where parties tend to either blame each other for misuse of EU money or incompetence of accessing EU funds (Haughton, 2014). Additionally, lower absorption rates might be linked to bad government capacities (Tosun, 2014) and thus might be a controversial issue for voters that will be addressed by parties. Our fourth hypothesis reads as follows.

**Hypothesis 4** *The lower the level of EU funds absorption, the more parties will emphasize European issues in their national election manifestos.*

Beyond the hypothesized effects we also control for government membership status, parties' orientations towards European integration, party positions on a cultural dimension and parties intra-party dissent over European issues. First, it is argued in the literature that opposition parties and Eurosceptic parties will emphasize European issues more because they want to signal to voters that they are different from pro-European parties and government parties, i.e. that they provide a political alternative for voters unsatisfied with the government or the consensus of mainstream parties in favor of further European integration. Secondly, we control for the effect of party ideology regarding cultural issues on European issue-emphasis. The positions of parties on the cultural axis, i.e. the political conflict between green, alternative and libertarian (GAL) views versus traditional, authoritarian and nationalist (TAN) values (see Hooghe and Marks, 2005), have been recently shown to impact national parties' degree of European issue-emphasis (Hoeglinger, 2016). Finally, previous studies demonstrate that the degree of intra-party dissent over European issues matters for national parties' emphasis of European issues (Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Pennings, 2006). Pennings (2006) has revealed that parties tend to emphasize European issues in their manifestos less if they are internally divided with respect to European integration. Thus, downplaying issues that might deepen divisions in the party membership and electorate seems the rational strategy, unless the faction of the party that is at the time in control of drafting the manifesto wants to force the exit of their rival factions who support the opposite EU integration position. Alternatively, it has also been argued that when intra-party division on EU is too large, parties cannot strategically manipulate the situation and they will have to debate these issues more extensively. Steenbergen and Scott (2004) show that in the post-Maastricht era moderate intra-party dissent decreases the salience parties assign to EU issues as perceived by experts whereas high levels of intra-party dissent tend to increase it.

#### 4. METHODS, DATA AND OPERATIONALIZATION

Previous studies on domestic parties European issue-emphasis almost exclusively focus on West European democracies (Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Pennings, 2006; Netjes and Binnema, 2007; Hoeglinger, 2016). Yet this raises the question to what extent previous empirical findings also hold in the context of newer EU member states from Eastern Europe as well as Southern European countries, with some authors arguing instinctively that their results would not apply to Eastern European parties because of the different patterns of party competition and the different logic of politicising Europe in the East (Hoeglinger, 2016, 58). Hence, we focus on national parties emphasis of European issues in four East European countries Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia and contrast the results with two Southern European countries (Cyprus and Greece) and one West European country (Ireland). Thus, we are analysing countries that most of the time were not covered in previous studies on the Europeanization of national party manifestos. A relevant feature of the sample is the variation in the number of years passed since joining the EU and correspondingly the number of European Parliament

elections that these parties had a chance to compete in. Thus, while Ireland joined the European Communities in 1973 and Greece in 1981, Cyprus, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia were part of the 2004 EU enlargement, and Romania is one of the latecomers in 2007.

#### 4.1. Dependent variable

The dependent variable is the percentage of a national party's manifesto devoted to European issues (EUPER). Manifestos have been manually coded by, first, extracting every paragraph in which EU-related issues are mentioned, and, secondly, assigning these paragraphs to seven EU-related categories: (i) general issues on Europe; (ii) general mentioning of EU funding; and five different EU funding categories, i.e. (iii) European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF); (iv) European Social Fund (ESF); (v) Cohesion Fund (CF); (vi) a combined category for agricultural funds; (vii) a combined category for fisheries funds.<sup>2</sup> Agricultural funds should matter for national parties since all countries under study receive financial aid for their agricultural sector. Agricultural funds and the regional and structural funds account for over three-quarters of EU spending (George and Bache, 2001, 303). The inclusion of a broader category comprising EU funding has been advisable because pre-tests of a variety of national manifestos clearly showed that parties sometimes mention their intention to finance specific measures by using money of more than one EU fund. Furthermore, coding manifesto references to European issues in general and to EU issues in particular is in line

Our approach has one distinctive advantage over the categorization dictionary approach of Pennings (2006) and the coding of the Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR) (see Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006; Merz et al., 2016): by coding every paragraph instead of every sentence related to European issues we are able to additionally detect implicit references to Europe. Additionally, parties do not only compete over the issue of European integration, but they can also have distinct views on Europe in general and the Euro as currency in particular.

#### 4.2. Independent and control variables

The EP election proximity indicates either the number of weeks passed from the latest European Parliament election or the number of weeks remaining until the next such election. The variable always takes the smallest value of the two measures and it was created using information from the ParlGov database (Doring and Manow, 2015). We use a dichotomous variable indicating if a party is an Eastern European party. For party voters EU support, we use a proxy based on the mean level of trust in the European Parliament of each party's voters or sympathizers. Ideally, we would have used a direct measure asking the respondents whether they think their country has benefited from EU membership (Hooghe and Marks, 2005) or how much they trust the EU, but this was not possible because the only source which includes these questions regularly, the Eurobarometers, asked extremely rarely about the respondents' partisanship. Moreover, because no single international survey data collection project had enough data points to cover the elections in each country we had to combine multiple sources. Thus, we collated data from the European Social Survey rounds 3 to 7, Eurobarometer 69.2, 71.1, 71.3, the

2 The agricultural funds category comprises the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) and the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF). Fisheries funding includes the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance (FIFG), the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

Voter Study of the European Parliament Election Study 2014 (Schmitt et al., 2015) and the Romanian Election Study 2011.<sup>3</sup> For the level of EU funds absorption, we use the cumulative percentage of total EU money stemming from the CF, EFRE and ESF, paid to each member state compared to the total available budget. The data is provided by the European Commission DG Regio and covers the 2007/13 programming period, including the extra two years when states could utilize available money under the N+2 rule (European Commission, 2017).

Our control variables are created as follows. We use a dummy variable indicating if a party campaigned as a government party (value 1) or if the party drafted its election manifesto as a non-government party (value 0). This information is based on ParlGov data (Doring and Manow, 2015). Eurosceptic party is operationalized by using parties own grouping in different political factions in the EP. Parties are coded as Eurosceptic if they belong to European United Left/Nordic Green Left (NGL/GUE), Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENL) as well as the Non-Inscrits (NI), i.e. the non-affiliated members of the European Parliament who, to a great extent, belong to radical right Eurosceptic parties (for example Jobbik in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece).<sup>4</sup> Both the degree of intra-party EU dissent and a party's ideological position on the cultural GAL-TAN axis are retrieved from the respective variables provided by country experts in the 2006, 2010 and 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (Bakker et al., 2015). We include the square of a party's internal dissent over European issues in order to capture the expected non-linear effect of intra-party dissent on European issue-emphasis (see also Steenbergen and Scott, 2004). Lastly, we calculated the systemic salience of European issue-emphasis for each party individually by using the mean European issue-emphasis of all of the parties in a country's party system, excluding the party under consideration to avoid endogeneity problems (Hoeglinger, 2016, 52, Steenbergen and Scott, 2004, 173).

## 5. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

We discuss the results in two parts. First, we start by displaying descriptive statistics of national parties European issue-emphasis. Next, we discuss whether the four hypotheses that we have developed can account for the variation of national parties European issue emphasis.

### 5.1. National parties' European issue-emphasis

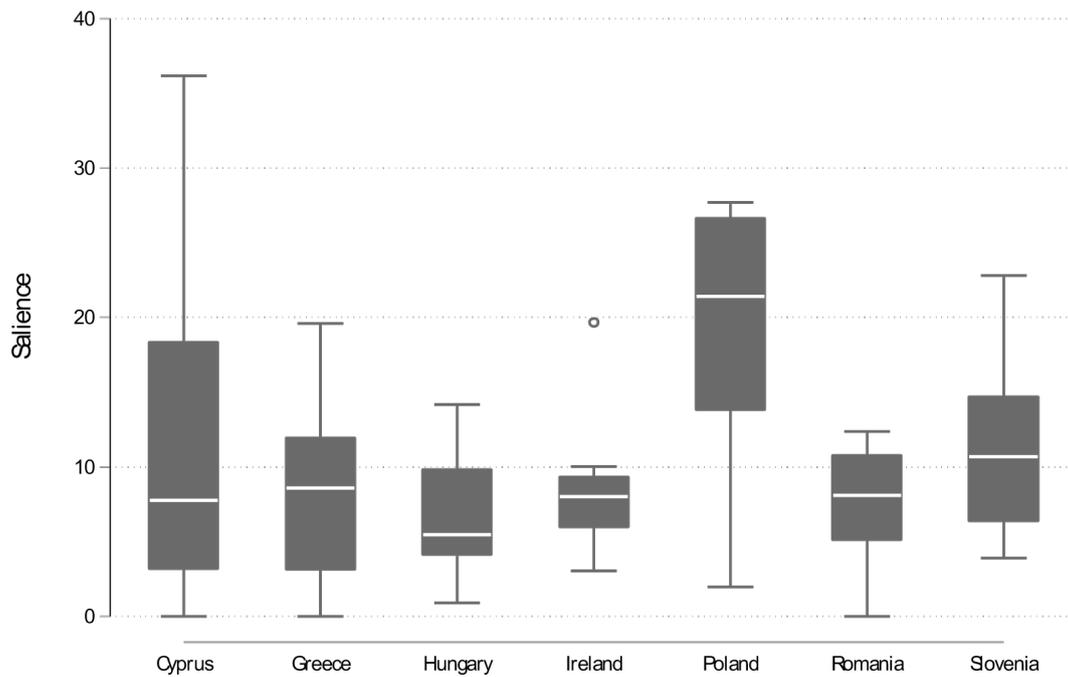
Parties in Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia differ in their emphasis of European issues in their national election manifestos (see Figure 1). Whereas country medians lie between five and eleven per cent in most countries, Poland is an outlier with a median of over 20 per cent. Yet it is observable that there is also great within-country variation with some parties emphasizing European issues much more strongly than other parties. This demonstrates that European issues are contested in domestic politics (cf. Steenbergen and Scott, 2004). This descriptive statistic additionally

<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the trust in the EP is moderately correlated with the other two measures mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> Due to the lack of data, we are not able to include the lagged value of a party's emphasis of European issues in the previous manifesto to control for the possibility that some parties might have stronger tendencies to emphasize EU issues in their manifestos (Spoon, 2012, 566).

demonstrates that the manifesto salience of European issues for national parties still is rather low. This complements the finding that Western European parties tend to devote only a small number of statements to European issues during the last two months of their national election campaigns (cf. Hoeglinger, 2016). Other policy issues are more salient for the political agenda in national elections. Hence, our data suggests that the sleeping giant of European integration issues in domestic politics has still not awakened (Eijk and Franklin, 2004; Kriesi, 2007; Green-Pedersen, 2012; De Vries, 2007; Hoeglinger, 2016).

**Figure 1: The salience of European issues in parties' national election manifestos by country**



Note: Boxplots of parties European issue-emphasis (salience) in national election manifestos. Grey boxes indicate the lower and upper quartiles of the variable "EUPER". The white line subdividing the box represents the median.

## 5.2. Explaining national parties European issue-emphasis

The results of a series of ordinary least square regressions testing the factors hypothesized to have an impact on national parties European issue-emphasis in their election manifestos are reported in Table 1. Model 1 is our baseline model, solely controlling for the systemic salience of European issue-emphasis. Models 2 and 3 separately take contextual and political factors into account.

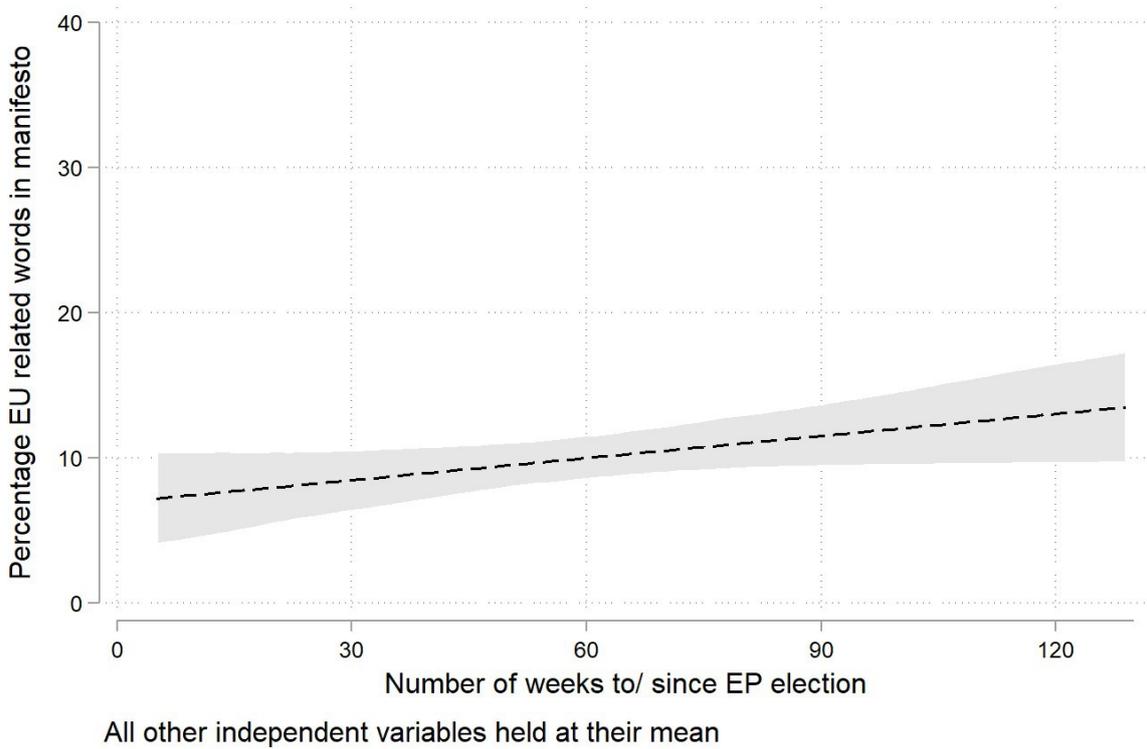
**Table 1: Explaining European issue-emphasis in national manifestos (OLS models)**

	Model 1 (Baseline)	Model 2 (Contextual factors)	Model 3 (Political factors)	Model 4 (Full model)
EP election proximity		0.05 (0.02)		0.05 (0.03)
Eastern European party		3.74* (1.60)		5.00* (1.96)
Party voters EU support		5.04 (4.75)		5.32 (5.13)
EU funds absorption		0.01 (0.03)		0.03 (0.03)
Government party			-0.31 (2.01)	0.45 (1.82)
Eurosceptic party			-0.13 (2.24)	1.72 (2.67)
Cultural GAL-TAN axis			-0.27 (0.32)	-0.32 (0.30)
Intra-party EU dissent (squared)			-0.03 (0.08)	0.02 (0.07)
Systemic Salience	0.65*** (0.16)	0.48* (0.21)	0.71*** (0.18)	0.44† (0.24)
Constant	3.70* (1.59)	-2.80 (3.40)	4.66 (3.05)	-3.63 (3.66)
<i>N</i>	94	76	69	67
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.179	0.325	0.246	0.353
adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.170	0.277	0.186	0.251

\* Significance levels: \*\*\**p* < 0.001, \*\**p* < 0.01, \**p* < 0.05, †*p* < 0.1. Cluster-adjusted robust standard errors.

Model 4 is the full model which includes all variables simultaneously. To make the interpretation of some of the main findings more straightforward we run simulations using the STATA program *Clarify* (King et al., 2000). Thus, we compute quantities of interests and plot them based on the full model in Table 1 and using a simulated dataset with 1000 observations. We chose to illustrate the predicted probability with 95% confidence intervals for one of the strongest effects in the models. Overall, the models explain between 17 and 25 per cent of the variance. The regression results illustrate first and foremost the relevance of systemic salience for individual parties emphasis of European issues. The higher the salience of European issues in the party system, the higher is the individual party’s European issue emphasis. This is in line with previous findings based on media data, manifesto data, voter data and expert survey data (see Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Netjes and Binnema, 2007; Hoeglinger, 2016).

We find support for two of our four hypotheses. First, temporal proximity to a European Parliament election decreases substantially national parties European issue-emphasis. This corroborates the theoretical considerations stated in hypothesis 1. Figure 2 below, produced with *Clarify* (King et al., 2000) based on Model 4 in Table 1, illustrates that all other things been equal, the average share of EU related words in national election manifestos is almost 7% percent lower when parties have just faced an EP election, or are facing one in a few weeks compared to the case when such an election is scheduled to happen two and a half years later. Proximity of EP elections might be an indication that parties pick ‘horses for courses’. Thus, parties might prefer to compartmentalize EU and national issues since EP elections provide an opportunity to focus more on the former. Indeed, recent literature has shown that parties dedicate more space than previously believed to EU issues (Braun et al., 2016). In this respect, the proximity to EP elections might make parties more inclined to concentrate on national issues to also avoid voter fatigue to EU related subjects.

**Figure 2: EP election proximity and EU emphasis**

Secondly, and supporting our second hypothesis, the Eastern European parties in our sample tend to include significantly more references to the EU in their national elections manifestos than the parties from older member states. The difference amounts to more than 5%. Further robustness tests showed that this effect is partially driven by the parties EU experience, as proxied by the number of EP elections they participated in. The two variables are moderately positively correlated. Nevertheless, replacing the East European party dummy with the EU election experience decreases the model fit substantively, which indicates there are also other significant features that make East European parties talk more about the EU beyond the peculiarities of the post-accession situation.

The average EU emphasis seems 5% higher for the parties whose voters tend to fully support the EU compared to those parties whose voters do not trust at all the EU and particularly the European Parliament. Nevertheless, this relationship is far from reaching any conventional levels of statistical significance and leads to the rejection of hypothesis 3. This is also the case for our fourth hypothesis. The level of EU funds absorption is unrelated to national parties European issue-emphasis. This might be due to the fact that parties prefer to maintain a general angle on economic themes related to the use of EU money. Independently of the level of the absorption rate of EU funds, parties might prefer to leave specific EU-related policy proposals outside of their manifestos since accessing these resources is not necessarily linked with the capacity of the party to do so when in government. Furthermore, specific policy proposals meant to improve or maintain absorption levels might be too complex or too specific for including them in an electoral manifesto. In this sense, the level of absorption of EU money might function as a framing or rhetorical instrument for pointing out to national or local failures in governance rather than a mechanism for introducing EU-related themes in electoral campaigns.

With regard to our control variables, none of the party-related variables makes a statistical significant difference for national parties European issue-emphasis. The Europeanization of party domestic manifestos seems to be independent of government-opposition status, ideological position and the level of intra-party dissent on EU. This corroborates previous findings of Hoeglinger (2016) who shows that, for his sample of Western European parties, being in opposition does not have an effect on European issue emphasis during campaigns. Conversely, our non-finding regarding the cultural GAL-TAN axis and national parties European issue-emphasis may be at odds with the findings in Hoeglinger (2016); however, we are mainly dealing with parties in East European countries and (Hoeglinger, 2016, 58) states that his findings do not apply to Eastern Europe, where the logic of the politicization of Europe is different as the structure of party competition is radically dissimilar to that in Western Europe. The cultural GAL-TAN axis plays a somewhat weaker role in Eastern European party systems compared to Western Europe (Rovny and Edwards, 2012) and this is supported by our analysis of parties European issue-emphasis in their national election manifestos. Furthermore, our findings regarding intra-party dissent over European issues are in line with the findings in Braun et al. (2016) who illustrate that the degree of intra-party dissent does not yield a statistical significant effect on parties European issue-emphasis when it comes to Euromanifestos.

In sum, we conclude that our findings speak well to the literature on domestic parties emphasis of European issues by showing that parties do not have large leeway in strategically changing the degree of European issue-emphasis. Rather, parties are constrained by the strategies of other parties. If other parties put European issues on the agenda in their manifestos, thus increasing the salience of European issue in the party system, individual parties have to follow suit by increasing European issue-emphasis, too. This is in line with the agenda-setting literature and seems only rational for parties because voters expect from them to talk about important issues and if all other parties highlight European issues in their manifestos, a party has to increase its emphasis on European issues even if the party did not want to talk about this issue in the first place (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010, 261).

To test the robustness of our results we also controlled for a number of other factors that were found to be relevant for some measures of EU salience (see e.g. Netjes and Binnema, 2007). Thus, in models not shown here we also controlled for the effect of the party's position towards EU integration using the continuous measure from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. This did not make a difference for the results, as was the case with the size of the party as measured by its share of votes and with a series of controls indicating the party family membership.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper set out to bring novel evidence on the determinants of national parties European issue-emphasis by specifically focusing on a comparison between old and new EU member states. We can summarize our main results as follows. First, there is variation regarding the salience of European issues in national parties election manifestos both between and within countries. Secondly, we show that the variables that best explain how much space parties dedicate to EU issues in their manifestos are the proximity to EP elections and whether a party is from an Eastern European member state or not.

Somewhat surprisingly, the level of support for the EU expressed by the voters of a party or the level of EU funds absorption rates do not matter for the amount of space parties dedicate to the EU in their manifestos. Furthermore, we corroborate previous findings on the high importance of systemic salience of European issues, i.e. the more parties in a party system talk about European issues, the more has an individual party to increase its European issue-emphasis (see Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Netjes and Binnema, 2007; Hoeglinger, 2016).

These findings suggest that political parties are constrained in their attempt to strategically change the degree of European issue-emphasis during election campaigns. Yet, and with a grain of salt, there might be an alternative explanation for the finding that political factors do not seem to matter for national parties European issue-emphasis: the relationship might not be observable by using manifesto data. Netjes and Binnema (2007) demonstrate that political variables only have significant effects on national parties emphasis of European issues if expert survey data is used (see also Braun et al., 2016, 582). Experts are able to consider parties European issue-emphasis during government and opposition periods and not only during election campaigns. Parties might highlight European issues more during the democratic life cycle of governments (Strøm et al., 2010) when they have to undertake actions, whereas they have to focus on a broader set of issues in their manifestos to address as many voters as possible. We have to leave it to future research to address this point further.

Our analysis specifically dealt with the *salience* of European issues for national parties in their election manifestos. Yet we did not investigate *how* parties talk about European issues in their manifestos. Do they discuss European issues in a positive, neutral or negative manner? This might be a fruitful route for future research because we would expect Eurosceptic parties to talk more negatively about European issues, whereas government parties i.e. parties, or more precisely, actors that shape European politics would emphasize European issues in a more positive way. Parties are politicizing European issues to a varying degree in national election campaigns (Hutter and Grande, 2014), but we still lack conclusive empirical evidence if parties strategies are already rooted in their manifestos or if they just unfold during public debates throughout election campaigns.

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