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The Politification and Politicisation of the EU

In this article, we suggest a novel conceptual framework for understanding and analysing EU politicisation. Recently politicisation has become a central topic in studies on the EU (see, e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2009, de Wilde 2011, de Wilde and Zürn 2012, Green-Pedersen 2012, Hutter and Grande 2014; Statham and Trez 2013 and 2014, as well as the contributions in the special issue of *West European Politics* vol. 39, issue 1, 2016). For these studies on EU politicisation the relevant context is the post-Maastricht era, i.e., the last 20 years. According to current politicisation research during this time an increasing citizens' dissatisfaction towards EU integration developed, which built a fertile ground for 'politicisation'.

Characteristic of the current research on EU politicisation is a curious autonomisation of the expression 'politicisation'. The concepts of politicisation and politics are either taken for granted without defining them properly, or they are given narrow definitions. As we will show, such a view clearly is too limiting if one considers both the history of the concepts and the practices of European integration. Contrary to such a narrow perspective on EU politicisation, our core argument is that understanding politicisation and related concepts requires taking a closer look at its relationship to 'politics' or 'political'. The interpretation of what is considered as politicisation crucially depends on the interpretation of what is politics/political.

We base our argument on the theoretical and methodological perspective of conceptual history that maintains that key concepts such as politicisation cannot be used without contributing to the controversies around them and to the different interpretations that are possible. Key concepts are thus always imminently controversial and contingent in their usage and normative colour or tone. In other words: there never is one single understanding of a concept, but always a variety of possible understandings. In particular when concepts aim at grasping complex phenomena or are subject to several interpretations, as it is the case with politics and politicisation, scholars should reflect on their own interpretations, as well as on those of the actors using these concepts and their academic interpreters.

Against this background, we argue that European integration has been from the beginning linked to politicisation, but in an unusual way. Politicisation is thus not something new to EU integration but rather it is constitutive of it. The initial politicising momentum of integration consisted in opening up a new dimension of politics, namely the possibility of Europeanisation and the denaturalisation of the nation state as a given and self-evident unit of politics (see Kauppi 2005, 2010). The first novelty of this initial politicizing momentum represents a radical break from a former dichotomy of doing politics either at the 'European' level or at the state level. It tears down the closed shop character of 'national' politics as well as the traditional divide between foreign and domestic politics. While EU integration thus has been political from the beginning, after the defeat of the European Political Community in 1954 politicians, ministers, officials, and academics (through theories like neofunctionalism) have presented it as being fundamentally non-political, for political reasons. This is a second novelty of the process.

From our perspective, and this is our second point, the understanding of politicisation in most of the current EU studies offers a too narrow view of the concept of politics. The

discussions in political theory and intellectual history, in constitutional and international law as well as in the non-disciplinary and partly non-academic writings on the conceptual horizon of politics are largely absent. Another aim in this article is to get beyond this kind of ‘mythology of parochialism’ (Skinner 1969) of dealing with politics in EU studies. The recent research that is the starting point of this article is just one example of such parochialism in EU studies. In this essay we use one example of this research as a ‘representative anecdote’ in the sense of Kenneth Burke (1945).

In our analysis we shall use both historical studies of the concept and historically relevant linguistic nuances to spell out the various possible aspects of the concept ‘politicisation’. The possibility of engaging in creative political action beyond the nation-state in the European context will be described by distinguishing between three terms that refer to different facets of the concept: ‘politisation’ as a passive form and precondition of politicisation, ‘politicisation’ as rendering something political, and ‘politification’ as politicisation through depoliticisation (for a slightly different understanding of the concept see Duclos 1962).

In the following, we will first explain the conceptual cluster around politicization, politisation and politification. We will then continue with a reading of some texts that summarize the main assumptions of the recent EU politicisation literature, and discuss the main conceptual weaknesses of these studies. The limitations of what we term a field approach to politics and politicisation provides the point of departure for rethinking the concept of politics and its relationship to politicisation in terms that avoid spatial and functional metaphors. From our perspective, current accounts of politicisation are insufficient for capturing the power dynamics involved in European integration. We aim at an understanding of EU politicisation that is at once more historical and based on an actor-oriented perspective on the political. Finally, we will develop our alternative conception of EU politicisation and illustrate it with concrete examples.

Politics, Politisation, Politicisation and Politification

In European political science some scholars, largely forgotten today, have attempted to theorize the politicisation of European politics. French political scientist Pierre Duclos devised at the beginning of the 1960s the concept of ‘politification’ to describe the political dynamics of European integration (Duclos 1962; Sidjanski 2003, 538; Meynaud and Sidjanski 1965). By politification he meant the transfer of power from the national to the supranational level, a level that would be equipped with considerable executive power. He considered that a society is ‘politified’ to the extent that it has ‘a special organization capable of maintaining, failing the approval, consent or agreement of the group, the group’s cohesion, survival, and adaptation’ (Duclos 1962).

This transfer to ‘a special organization’ could be sudden, Duclos had in mind the constitution of the US, or gradual like in the case of European integration. Politification would mean that political procedures would replace the normal diplomatic procedures reigning in international politics. In Duclos’s mind politification is a broad development that has to do with procedure or the rules of the political game, the substitution of a diplomatic procedure with a political procedure that could include parliamentary and democratic procedures, although he did not specify this. It involves a collective conversion, a transformation in the guiding values of groups and individuals. It requires in the words of Swiss political scientist Dusan Sidjanski ‘the attractive diffusion of a certain number of concepts and ethical principles that will reinforce the innermost convictions (of Europeans) relative to a unified Europe’ (Sidjanski 2003).

From today's perspective this global triumph of political procedure has failed and led to the politics of depoliticisation (Bourdieu 1998). Political decisions are presented as not being political, there being no alternatives. Furthermore, while professional politicians in the EU perceive European integration as a political process, in the sense that political positions in the Commission and the Parliament are integrated into their career paths, European citizens have weak knowledge of European politics, and are on the whole not very interested in European Parliament elections for instance. In fact, one could even say that the opposite to what Duclos imagined has happened. To European citizens the politicisation of European integration has in reality been a process of depoliticisation, in a double sense that it has been presented as being nonpolitical and they have been kept at an arms length from it. This depoliticisation and lack of public debate about alternatives combined to supranational 'policies without politics' have contributed to increasing political opacity and a generalization of doubt, distrust and political disenchantment.

It is clear that how one understands politicisation depends on the broader understanding of the concept of politics. Roughly speaking, we can distinguish in both everyday and academic usage two different types of concepts: politics as a sphere or a field, and politics as an activity. In the former sense politics refers to a more or less stable order, and politicisation to the extension of the borders of this order, for example in the relationship to other sphere concepts, such as culture, law, economy or religion. The notion of sphere also relates to a spatial delimitation: politics is like an area, a field, a space into which one can enter or leave, and correspondingly, a matter can be pushed into this field or taken out of it. Within this conceptual horizon 'politicisation' is frequently used as an undue mixing of politics to phenomena outside the political sphere, but it can also be understood as a legitimate extension of the political sphere (see e.g. Maier ed. 1987). Such views have been both conceptually possible and historically relevant, for example in interpretations of 'the personal is political' as extending politics from the public to the private sphere. US feminists coined the slogan in the 1960s, and for example Mona Steffen blamed her male fellows in the German student movement for not doing enough for the 'politicization of private life' (quoted from *Studentenbewegung* 1967-1969, 221-222).

If we, in contrast, understand politics as an activity, it is then something contingent – it is always possible to act otherwise, even if the results of the alternatives may be the same. Politics in this understanding has no boundaries, but virtually everything and everyone can be part of politics at all times. Politics relates to what actors do, then, and not to the field in which they act.

Within this horizon we can define 'politicisation' as an active use of contingency, of rendering something contested or controversial. These views may be evaluated either pejoratively or appreciatively. But here we can also detect a different relationship between politics and politicisation than in the sphere concept of politics. For the activity concept treating something as contingent or as controversial is not an extension of the margins of the activity of politics itself, but rather *constitutive of politics*. It refers to a marking or an opening up of a phenomenon as contingent, a horizon for playing or debating that then consists in using or not-using this horizon in one way or another. In this sense politicisation constitutes politics, not vice versa, and all politics is a result of politicising moves. (see Palonen 2003)

For example in parliamentary debates we can furthermore notice that politicisation refers to two different types of phenomena: a 'passive' form of a process of 'being politicised', as an unintended result of some activities, and an 'active' form of a demand 'to politicise' something and a successful action to realize this politicisation. This semantics is fairly similar in English, French and German, although for the passive form it would be possible in German to speak of *Verpolitisierung* and reserve *Politisierung* to the active concept (even if historically there hardly is such a linguistic separation). In Finnish this distinction is clear in the Finnish terms *politisoida*

for the active form and *politisoitua* for the passive verb (see the quotes and discussion in Palonen 2001, 134-136).

In order to clarify these nuances, we propose to use the English verb *politicise* for the active form and *politise* for the passive form. In this sense *politisisation* is conceptualised as a form of ‘pre-politicisation’, as a precondition for the politicisation of issues by political actors, such as social groups, an opening up of opportunities that can be seized to further political issues. Politisation refers to issues being ‘in the air of the times’, discussed in public but not yet commonly recognised as being political, that is not yet politicised. *Politicisation* alludes to claims that a political aspect can be identified in phenomena or situations, which were previously not marked as political. Politification for its part refers to an asymmetry in which certain actors politicise issues, in this case EU integration, while presenting them as not being politicized. This is a rather common political strategy for government and administration initiating ‘reforms’, which seek thereby to strengthen their own margin of operation (see Flinders and Woods 2015).

The pejorative and appreciative uses of politicisation have to be separated from one another. It has been much more common, even in parliamentary debates, to blame others for having ‘politicized’ something, either intentionally or unwittingly, than to use the term for one’s own activity (see Palonen 1985 and 1989). It would also be easy to assume that the passive form of politisation as an unintended by product of actions and processes would be judged as something deplorable. In a formal sense this by no means is necessary. One can well understand politisation that has occurred as a *Chance* in Max Weber’s sense, as a precondition for future action that could and perhaps should be used as an opportunity rather than repressed, denied or ignored. Weber inverted the Bismarckian slogan of politics as the ‘art of the possible’ to ‘art of the impossible’, *Kunst des Unmöglichen* in the sense of setting goals that transcend the limits of what is considered as possible (Weber 1917, 514).

Accounts on EU politicisation

The view that politics is, following a spatial metaphor, a sphere or field, clearly has influenced most of the current accounts on EU politicization. Moreover, these accounts elaborate a rather narrow view on politics and politicization, limiting it to institutions, parties, and the media.

An article written by Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks (2009) stands as a prototype for this current account on EU politicisation. Hooghe and Marks describe politicisation as a key mechanism that has changed public support for integration from ‘permissive consensus’ to ‘constraining dissensus’. They further argue that this change endangers the integration process, because parties and governments now tend to take into account their citizens’ preferences and hence also their EU-critical attitudes. Hooghe and Marks depict a functional model of the related processes in which ‘public opinion’ appears as one intervening variable that influences the ways parties and politicians position themselves with regard to the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2009, 9).

A growing number of other contributions on EU politicisation have been recently published (see, e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2009, de Wilde 2011, de Wilde and Zürn 2012, Green-Pedersen 2012, Hutter and Grande 2014; Statham and Trenz 2013 and 2014, and the contributions in the special issue of *West European Politics* vol. 39, issue 1, 2016). Most of them adhere to a sphere concept of politics and follow the interpretation of politicisation sketched above. De Wilde (2011) confirms that the current perspective on politicisation focuses on (cf. de Wilde 2011) three aspects: 1) Political parties and parliaments, 2) EU institutions and 3) Mass media and the way they report on the EU.

The general story behind the politicisation account as it is discussed in most of the recent contributions is the following one. Since the beginning, European integration has been an elite project. Led by governments and EU elites, citizens largely supported integration through what Lindberg and Scheingold have coined a 'permissive consensus' (1970). The expression assumes that citizens did not ask too many questions and took their governments integration policies for granted, supporting them and EU membership in general. This account of European integration illustrates one of our main points: *politicisation* has been the prototypical modality of legitimisation of European integration.

The standard account on politicisation further maintains that after the debates and referendums on the Maastricht Treaty citizens no longer wanted to follow and support the elite project unquestionably. This is what Hooghe and Marks term 'constraining dissensus'. But Hooghe and Marks define 'dissensus' in this context in a one-sided and pejorative way. It refers to a deviation from a norm that was widely shared among ministers, administrators, ideologists and scholars, and does not include the possibility of opening up a fair, parliamentary-style debate on EU politics.

As a consequence of the developing 'constraining dissensus', citizens' tacit support for the integration process declined, and this decline was directly mirrored in empirical indicators like the Eurobarometer data that measure EU identification and support. In recent years we have witnessed a growing citizen dissatisfaction with and contestation of EU integration. Citizens, as according to the 'constraining dissensus' thesis, no longer understand EU integration, and they mentally decouple from the EU. Consequently, citizens do not only ask for new justifications for integration, but also provoke political conflict about it. Eurosceptic parties gain in support, decisions in integration policy are made public and contested, political parties position themselves more publicly with regard to integration, and last not least, even EU institutions become internally politicised because the new cleavages are carried into what formerly was the realm of experts. In that sense, integration altogether becomes politicised.

In consequence to this account on politicisation, 'elites' have to deal with the growing dissatisfaction, which complicates their work. Politicisation represents a danger for integration, as it limits the room of government manoeuvre. Politicisation is thus something that citizens want and EU actors as well as governments try to block. Possible consequences of politicisation that are discussed, finally, are differentiated integration, a breakdown of EU, or the enhancement of EU democratisation.

This perspective on EU politicisation that is adopted in most current accounts is seriously limited. It not only focuses on a small part of what politics can relate to (parties, parliaments, institutions, media), but it is also unidirectional. Politicisation relates to top-down processes: from parties to citizens, parties to institutions, institutions to the media, the media to citizens. When political parties *react* to citizen's preferences, the focus is on parties and how they position themselves. Institutions *get politicised* because their members no longer follow simply technocratic agendas, but agendas that are more oriented towards party-political cleavages. While the media increasingly report on the EU because there is more interest in the EU, the focus is still on what the media *publish*, not on how citizens receive it. With regard to a bottom-up perspective on politicisation, these authors do not even discuss opinion polls (Hooghe and Marks are a notable exception here).

But there are some contributions that develop a more open approach. Statham and Trezn (2013 and 2014) develop a perspective on politicisation that is more optimistic, more horizontal, and linked to democratisation. They underline the possibility of a bottom-up dynamic that is linked to democratisation in these words:

Our thesis is that an emerging European public sphere has a self-constituting dynamic that couples the unfolding of transnational spaces of political communication with the democratisation of the EU's institutional system. The normative viewpoint is that public spheres can democratise institutions: the more political actors debate decision-making over European integration, the more this constitutes a Europeanized space of communication, and the better the chances are for supplying the important sources of critical feedback that enhance the democratic legitimacy of executive decisions. (Trenz and Statham 2013, 5)

In their account, politicisation can create new public spaces and enhance public debate. These might lead, with the inclusion of civil society actors, to more transparent policy debates and decisions. The authors see public discourses and transparency as important means to legitimise EU institutions and their decision-making (cf. Trenz and Statham 2013, 5).

Politics in the garden of concepts

To further illustrate how conceptual controversies around politics can be analysed, we have chosen to focus on one contribution to the politicisation debate that has the merit of making explicit the underlying conception of politics. In 'Opening up Europe: Next Steps in Politicisation Research' (2016) that closes the special issue on politicisation in *West European Politics*, Michael Zürn presents this programmatic declaration:

Politicisation, in general terms, means the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the field or sphere of politics – making previously unpolitical matters political. Functional differentiation is a necessary prerequisite for such a notion of politicisation. There has to be a differentiation of spheres or function systems in the first place, before it can be moved from one to the other. But how is the sphere of politics – the political, so to say – to be separated from other function systems? (Zürn 2016, 167)

Unlike most other interventions in the EU politicisation debate, Zürn gives us a clear indication of both what kind of entity 'politics' is for him and that politicisation means 'making unpolitical matters political'. With these definitions he commits to a certain view of politics and the political that, although widely assumed in the contemporary public and academic debate, is not historically obvious.

Zürn's strongest commitment lies in claiming that politics is a 'field or sphere' type of concept. With the agricultural connotation of 'field' and the geometric figure of 'sphere' Zürn assumes that politics is an entity that has a special place of its own within a garden of concepts. More specifically, he justifies this with the conventional sociological scheme of speaking of 'functional differentiation'. Zürn makes the additional claim that politics is one specific 'function' or bundle of functions that gives to it its specific place within the conceptual garden. In a footnote to an earlier article Zürn clarified his intellectual debts:

Note that, by defining what is political in this way, we not only take into account the systems-theoretical view of politics (cf. e.g. Easton 1965; Parsons 1967; Luhmann 1984) in a narrow sense – that is, as collectively binding decisions – but we also include discourse-theoretical approaches, which focus on public deliberations about the common good (cf. for instance Habermas 1992; Greven 1999; Ruggie 2004). (Zürn, Binder and Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012, 73)

From our point of view the system theoretical approach as understood by Zürn and his co-authors is based on the idea of politics as a distinct sphere, although they interpret it less strictly than the post-war political science (see Easton 1953). The label discourse-theoretical is misleading as the concept of discourse has numerous uses in contemporary scholarship. And to include Michael Greven's explicitly contingency-oriented and action-theoretical views on politics (see e.g. 1999, 2000) to the sphere concept is a misreading.

Without entering deeper into Zürn's spatial or functional metaphors, we can observe that 'politicisation' is for him an act of 'transporting' something, another spatial metaphor, which makes the boundaries between the field fluid or historically variable. In other words, politicisation marks the extension of the field of politics in the garden of concepts by transporting the boundaries to fields that were previously outside the old or perhaps 'proper' sphere of politics.

This view presupposes that 'politics' conceptually precedes 'politicisation'. In other words, 'politics' is not a product of an original politicisation of a phenomenon, but politicisation is limited to the borders of politics, to the 'margins' of the phenomenon of politics that is itself not touched by it, presupposing a conceptual realism. 'Politics' is assumed to be already there, as something if not in the 'nature of the things' at least as something that enables the interpretation of reality in the terms of functional differentiation. Or, to avoid such strong essentialistic connotations, agents have interpreted human reality in terms of functional differentiation and have accordingly constructed the sphere of politics. This is not necessarily to say that the construction of politics is only a product of sociologists who use the language of functional differentiation. Rather this language articulates human practices in corresponding spatial or gardening metaphors, which can be traced back for example to the thinking habits of *more geometrico* (see Palonen 2006, 54-61).

If we take the idea of functional differentiation between fields literally, politicisation would mean conquering a piece of field for politics at the cost of other fields. Furthermore, Zürn's formulation, especially the word 'making' gives a strong indication that politicisation is an 'either or' matter. A phenomenon is political or not, *tertium non datur*. In the logic of differentiation between the spheres, phenomena are either political or not and when they are political, they cannot be simultaneously something else. They cannot be political to some degree, or in some respect, or to some agents and not others.

Politics is the result of politicisations

Instead of the spatial, field or sphere concept of politics, we regard politics as an activity. 'Politics' or 'political' must first be marked as such, and this activity of marking is what we call politicisation. In contrast to the approaches sketched above, for us politicisation does not concern the margins of the political but rather it refers to an *action* that constitutes something as political by a speech act of marking or naming. This view is based on the nominalistic view of concepts, inspired by the work of among others Max Weber and Ludwig Wittgenstein (see e.g. Skinner 1988). It allows us to understand that what is political is in itself a historical phenomenon and that politicisation is the action or the process responsible for all the historical forms of politics. As such it can appear in different forms.

To identify what can be understood as politicising or the marking of a phenomenon as political, we need a minimal criterion for the activity of politicisation. This criterion can be connected to the very concept of action or activity, namely to its *contingent* character: we can only speak of action when it could have been different, when the persons could have acted otherwise. Politicisation in this sense is thus intelligible as an action of marking something as

contingent, as something that is open to alternative forms of action, to politics, to making something ‘playable’, involving time and space. Connecting politics with contingency is an important *topos* in the history of the concept, visible in the works of such authors as Max Weber (1919), Karl Mannheim (1929), George Catlin (1929), Hannah Arendt (1958), Bertrand de Jouvenel (1963) or Michael Oakeshott (1975) (see Palonen 1998, 2006).

Politicisation is thus a claim or an experience to understand a phenomenon in the plural world of human beings as contingent, as a subject matter for politics. This, then, refers to the next and more specific level of contingency (and of politics), to the possibility of *controversy* between the acting persons or groups. What is regarded as controversial, must always be contingent, but not vice versa.

In this view politicisation is not exclusive: a phenomenon can be at the same time political and something else, for example a cultural, legal or technical phenomenon – but it is the political *aspect* that is interesting for a political scientist. Politicisation, understood in this manner, only renders or claims to make the political aspect of a phenomenon visible or present in the situation. To use Weber’s terminology (Weber 1919, 1922), academic research is a struggle for power between scholars and they might use different power shares (*Machtanteile*) in this struggle – proposing a new perspective on a phenomenon marks always a politicisation through a marking of a new type of power share. Politicisation refers to different perceptions of the political that different agents have.

Politicisation can be either a claim or an experience. The passive form of *politisation*, either as an improper activity of political adversaries or as the unintended result of some processes of change, has been the most common dimension in the meaning of the concept.

So far we have spoken only of the politicisation of ‘phenomena’. In the history of the concept, however, an important layer of meaning has concerned the politicisation of *persons or groups*, the politicisation for instance of women, youth or the intellectuals for instance. Jean-Paul Sartre spoke (1964) of the political as a ‘dimension of the person’, in a non-exclusive sense. Again, this process can be either passive or active, and it can be evaluated in negative, neutral or appreciative terms.

These are elementary aspects of the grammar of politicisation within the horizon of the activity concept of politics operating with the contingent and the controversial. They provide the starting point for a more nuanced approach to politicisation in the EU. For the moment we shall discard the term ‘depoliticisation’, with the remark that it is not symmetrical to politicisation. What has once been marked and named as political cannot simply be forgotten or neglected, as it refers to an experience that has taken place. Of course some politicisations might fade away in the face with others, but nevertheless they do not mark depoliticisations of the phenomena in question (see Steinmetz 2013).

As politicisation/politisation is always relative to some actors, the concept of politification refers to an asymmetrical process whereby some actors see actions as politicised while others see the same actions as being depoliticised, opening up a dynamic for further politisation/politicisation.

Aspects of politisation/politicisation/politification in the EU

EU integration has always been eminently political, and has been closely related to politicisation. The foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), European Economic community (EEC) and the Euratom in the 1950s can be regarded as a remarkable politicisation in the sense of opening up European politics to the practices of denationalisation

and creating modestly supra-national European institutions, following the example given by international organisations like the predecessor of the OECD, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) that was created to manage the Marshall Plan. As a new type of polity amidst nation states and international organisations, 'innovating ideologists' (in the sense of Skinner 1974) such as Jean Monnet and Walter Hallstein viewed the EEC/EC as a fragile construction, without strong institutions. They saw the development of supranational institutions, procedures and practices behind closed doors as necessary to make them appear as a *fait accompli*.

The course of integration has been political also in the sense that it has been marked by contingencies and manifold political struggles. The conflicts, first, concern the direction and the course of integration itself. Federalists and Unionists in the beginning of integration disputed on the question of 'what kind of Union do we want?' The Unionist movement, led by figures such as Adenauer, De Gaulle and Churchill, aimed at safeguarding the nation states. Part of the leading Unionist ideologists of European integration tacitly assumed that integration was possible only if the democratisation and parliamentarisation of politics, could be kept out of the process. On the other hand, the Federalist movements fought for a supranational and democratic European federation. The Congress of the Hague in 1949 marked the Unionist victory, and this was a major political decision that opened the way to the politicisation of EU integration (Wiesner 2014b).

But the direction of integration was debated once more in the conflict over the European Political Community (EPC) and the European Defense Community (EDC) in 1954 marked another key conflict. Had the Treaty that was already completely done been ratified and not declined by the French National Assembly, the integrating Europe would have had a Constitution and a full-fledged parliament already in the mid-1950s.

Further conflicts occurred throughout integration between defenders of a free market liberalism (for instance most British governments) and state *dirigisme* (French governments), between proponents of parliamentary democracy (Members of the European Parliament, Federalists, or most German governments) and their opponents.

Depending on the respective interests, second, different coalitions emerged across all levels, e.g. the European Parliament and the European Commission are allies when it comes to defending supranationalism (head candidates), Germany and France supported more powers for the European Parliament while Great Britain did not, German, British, and Eastern European ministers support free market economy while the French do not always agree etc.

Actors also change their interests over time: while the Commission at first was slow to accept parliamentarisation and democratisation, and in particular Jean Monnet was in opposition to a powerful European Parliament (see Gehler 2014, 316), in recent years the Commission and the European Parliament became allies when the question was to name and elect head candidates for the commission presidency (Wiesner 2016a). Until today the EU has been marked by such power struggles and conflicts on all levels, for example between member states (Great Britain against France on the course of integration, Eastern countries against Merkel-Germany in the refugee crisis, North against South in the sovereign debt crisis, etc.).

But there are also conflicts between EU institutions (the European Parliament against the Commission and the Council) and within EU institutions (discussed e.g. in terms of a 'politicization' of the EU Commission), and last not least, numerous conflicts within member states have emerged (e.g. eurosceptics against pro-integrationists etc.; the general account on EU politicisation elaborated by scholars presented above has thematised the latter two conflicts).

This complex setting of interests, agents and conflicts across the EU also becomes visible in the EU's institutional system. While the Troika, the Directorate General Competition or the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU, formerly ECJ), for instance, tend to defend the principles of free market economy ([cases at hand are Ruffert and Laval, see in detail Wiesner 2012](#)), the Council stands for intergovernmentalism and the European Parliament for supranationalism (Tömmel 2016, Wiesner 2016b).

What does all this mean with regard to a conceptualisation of EU politicisation?

The EU multilevel regime is hence composed of different arenas, relationships and directions of political struggles, as well as different historical layers and modalities of politicisation – and they have been reality since the beginning of integration. But for many decades, as it is discussed fittingly in the accounts on politicisation sketched above, integration nevertheless proceeded silently and as something taken for granted. The muddling-through from one crisis to another was regarded, like the diplomatic negotiations between great powers during the Cold War, as being something normal. Citizens did not protest, partly because they were not even informed about what was going on, partly because they generally supported EU integration.

What the new level of integration after Maastricht made evident was that the EU had become a deeply integrated political entity. In legal terms it had been moved from the sphere of international law to that of constitutional law (see Clinchamps 2006). It also intervened more and more into citizen's daily life, for instance by liberalising public services. And slowly, citizens became more attentive to both integration and its criticism. One effect in the academic debates is that Maastricht also marked the start of the debate on the EU's democratic deficit.

In the crises since 2008, the limits of a narrowly market-economy-centered integration became apparent, which triggered citizen's dissatisfaction some more. The member state's leaders as well as the EU politicians and officials today often seem to be headless, which enhances citizen dissatisfaction and contestation still more, and also creates the need to legitimise EU politics anew and more publicly. At the same time, the crises as well as the dissatisfaction build a fertile ground for EU-critical parties and movements. As a consequence, several of the struggles sketched above that beforehand were not obvious to a broad public, and several of the decisions that formerly were tacitly negotiated and accepted behind closed doors, today are publicly discussed and criticised, i.e. *politicised*.

One important effect of this development is that citizens and their dissatisfaction are today 'hard facts' of integration. Citizens do not only vote for EU-critical parties in the European Parliament. They also have the possibility to hinder integration, even block it. The 'No' votes in the French and Dutch referenda blocked the Constitutional Treaty for some years (Wiesner 2014b), and when it was finally ratified (once again by heads of states and governments except for a referendum in Ireland) it had been stripped of all constitutional symbols (Lietzmann 2014).

To sum up, today, European integration itself is a widely discussed issue and citizens' ballots have at least a certain effect on the course of integration. But, and this is another core point of our argument, this development does not describe phenomena that are altogether so new or extraordinary: European integration now is becoming a subject of party-political cleavages – so what? Issues such as social policy, tax policy, abortion, education, marriage laws etc. have been discussed that way for decades, they have been related to and/or creating party political cleavages, and they have resulted in protest and contestation. Ever since the development of representative democracy it has been the case that the objects of political discussions and law making have been changing (see for example the works of Pierre Rosanvallon 2008, 2010, 2015 or Richard Bellamy 2007).

Issues that once were deeply controversial (such as women's rights or homosexuality) no

longer are in many Western countries, and in exchange new conflicts and cleavages have been developing. It is also not a new phenomenon that institutions evolve, from being more and less technocratic and expert-oriented; and neither is it new that media react and transmit discussions, debates and reactions to new accounts of what is politically significant. The development described by the current 'politicisation' accounts could simply be termed a regularisation. European integration has become a 'normal' issue of political life and decision making in representative democracies.

The conditions of financial help for Greece are a prime example: the first memoranda of understanding had been negotiated from 2010 onwards between the Troika Institutions and the Greek governments without any public discussion and behind closed doors. The 2015 negotiations became quite public: for the first time, the Commission made its proposals public by putting them on its website, there were debates in the European Parliament even if it did not have a formal role in the policies of financial aid, and there was a large mediated debate on the issue. The main reason behind this public and politicised conflict was the strategic interest of the new Greek Syriza government, who *wanted* its conflict with the Troika and the Eurogroup to become public, and to draw it out into the open, as EU-wide as possible, public space – and it is hence debated and controversial just as issues such as education and social policy.

Politicisation, then, refers to the activities and actions of naming questions and topics on all the levels sketched, all the actors named, and in all the possible arenas, as political. In Skinnerian terms (1998) European integration has offered and still offers to the citizens new possibilities to dispense with many dependencies that are based on old arbitrary powers connected to the naturalization of the nation state. This 'revolution' requires coping with new political languages, institutions, and practices, evaluating critically the existing forms and practices of the EU, and seeing them as a chance to initiate something new. Politicization is a necessary step in this process whose institutional objectives could be the democratisation and parliamentarisation of the EU.

In conclusion

Reinhart Koselleck used *Politisierung* in the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* as a programmatic analytical category that serves one of his main 'hypotheses' to analyse conceptual changes, in particular during the *Sattelzeit* period (1770-1850). This use was intended to be independent of the historical uses of politicisation (Koselleck 1972). In retrospect what Koselleck regards as *Politisierung* appears as typical of the first post-war decades, when 'politics' was identified with 'party politics'. His category of 'politicisation' refers mainly to the inter-partisan character of struggles and the 'partisanisation' (*Verparteilichung*) of issues, sometimes to their 'polemicisation' (see the discussion in Palonen 2012).

Although the studies analysed in this article have added to the discussion on politicisation system and communication theoretical perspectives that take into account shifts in the mainstream of everyday and academic jargon, their use of politicisation resembles Koselleck's categorical claims. But at the same time they lose the temporal dimension of Koselleck's category of *Politisierung*. From our perspective, the term 'politicisation' means more than an increased party-dependence or the polarisation of conflicts on EU policies. It cannot be reduced to a process that transports non-political issues into a presumed pre-established political field. Politicisation cannot be isolated to a phase of EU integration. This apolitical and atemporal conceptualisation of politicisation is unable to take into account either the profoundly political character of the EU polity or the opportunities presented to politicisation, which we have sketched using the terms politisation as the precondition for politicisation and politification as

a form of politicisation/depoliticisation. The latter has been the dominant modality of European integration since the 1950s.

Our view on politicisation is considerably broader and more dynamic than what is currently discussed in the scholarly literature. It is not limited to top-down politicisation, but includes bottom-up and sideway developments. It does not engage only government institutions, parliaments, parties and the media as the classical channels of representative democracy. It crucially involves political contestation and protest, citizen and NGO activity, and in a general sense the development of political awareness, the marking of issues as political, and the opening up of new political opportunities and arenas through creative political action. It also engages ideas and proposals connected to democratisation and parliamentarisation for the further expansion of the EU's agenda. Politicisation thus creates times, spaces and issues for political action as well as alternative power resources. It aims to transform so far uncontested assumptions, identities and principles into objects of political controversies.

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