The Imbalanced Effect of Politicization: How EU Politicization Favours Eurosceptic Parties

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Abstract: This article investigates how the systemic politicization of the EU is associated with support for different political parties. We argue that, while politicization involves actions by both Eurosceptic and Europhile parties, it does not benefit parties at both extremes of the continuum in the same way. To investigate these differentiated effects, we leverage data from the European Elections Study and the Chapel Hill expert survey covering two decades (1999 to 2019). The evidence shows that, when it comes to voters' preferences, politicization strongly favours Eurosceptic parties. We conclude that the systemic politicization of European issues is thus a one-street way leading to the reinforcement of the constraining dissensus on the EU.

Keywords: Politicization; Political parties, European elections; Euroscepticism: European Union

1. Introduction

Gone are the days when the EU was considered to be an un-politicized arena. Recent studies suggest that European integration, and EU policies in general, have become increasingly conflictual over the past years, both among political elites and in the media (Houde et al. 2022; Atikcan 2018; Braun, Hutter, and Kerscher 2016; C. E. De Vries and Hobolt 2012). The politicization of European integration can also be seen at the mass level, with studies showing that the European issue weighs more heavily in citizens' vote choices than used to be the case just a couple of decades ago (Beaudonnet and Gomez 2017; Belot and Ingelgom 2015; Goldberg, van Elsas, and de Vreese 2020; Le Gall 2019; De Vries et al. 2011, Carmini 2020). This pattern of increasing politicization has not happened everywhere in the EU, and so there is wide variation both within and across countries, but it seems to have impacted most member-states (Grossman, Persico, and Guinaudeau 2019; Hoeglinger 2016; Hutter, Grande, and Kriesi 2016; Hutter and Kerscher 2014).

Against this background, research on the diverse consequences of EU politicization has become critical. While the process of politicization, and its trajectory across different arenas, has attracted much attention in the literature, there are still gaps in our understanding of how it relates to support for different political parties. So, far the literature has focused on how politicization, or some aspects associated with it (e.g. issue salience), affects preferences for mainstream and protest/challenger parties. But the question of whether the systemic politicization of the EU favours Europhile as well as Eurosceptic parties has been largely overlooked. Does greater politicization within the party system increase individuals' preferences for parties with more extreme positions on the EU, whether against or in favour? Or does it only benefit those parties that challenge the *status quo* with positions that entail winding back European integration?

In this article, we tackle these questions by looking at how preferences for parties vary across different levels of systemic EU politicization (that is, the politicization of European integration among political parties). Our study contributes to the current debates in the literature in two ways. First, it provides a framework that enables us to see EU politicization as a process that has mainly benefitted one side of the spectrum. Second, it leverages two

decades of data on systemic politicization (using the Chapel Hill expert survey) and citizens' party preferences (using the European Elections Study between 1999-2019) to test the plausibility of our arguments. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first piece that investigates the association between politicization and party preferences over such a long period of time.

Drawing from social psychology and the literature on niche and challenger parties, we argue that politicization is a one-way street whose effects tend to favour Eurosceptic parties. By definition, EU politicization results from pro-EU parties engaging in a debate over European integration with those who challenge the status quo ('issue challengers'). Politicization not only entails raising the salience of EU issues; it also enables Eurosceptic parties to present their viewpoints on equal footing to other positions and gain the status of 'issue opposition'. This offers Eurosceptic parties good opportunities to boost their electoral support.

Our empirical analysis finds support for this hypothesis. We demonstrate that higher levels of EU politicization are associated with stronger support for parties that hold Eurosceptic positions. In contrast, support for parties that hold moderate or Europhile positions are not unequivocally related to differing levels of politicization.

2. Theorizing the effect of politicization on voting preferences

Scholars' views on the significance of the EU as an issue for national and European politics have changed over time. Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004), for instance, saw the EU as a 'sleeping giant' – an issue with no sizable effect on vote choice. In their view, a mix of plain disinterest by both elites and the public, alongside the lack of political platforms to express discontent about European integration, prevented the EU from becoming a more important issue in both national and European parliament elections for a long time. Nevertheless, over the past couple of decades, a growing amount of literature has shown attitudes towards integration to have become increasingly important for explaining both turnout and vote choice in both national and European parliament elections (Beaudonnet

and Gomez 2017; Belot and Ingelgom 2015; Le Gall 2019; Pellagata and Visconti 2022; De Vries 2007). Importantly, the politicization of the EU has been mostly driven by national politics. This is because, as Costa Lobo (2023) argues, the political accountability of EU institutions still happens, primarily, at the national level, with EU issues having become part of the domestic political debate in many member-states. It is, therefore, unsurprising that, while there is plenty of evidence that the EU has acquired more importance in recent times, its electoral impact tends to depend on the national political context (Hooghe and Marks 2018; Hutter and Kriesi 2019; Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2021), the strategies of political parties (De Vries and Hobolt 2012; De Vries 2010), media salience, and individual characteristics such as political sophistication and information (Hobolt and Wittrock 2011; Macquart et al 2019; De Vries et al. 2011, 20).

Studies on the politicization of the EU can be divided in two different groups: those who have focused on the electoral domain, and those who have mainly focused on the discourses of parties and other political actors. Among the former is De Vries (2007), who was the first to show evidence that the EU was becoming an important issue for voters in national elections. For her, the increasing electoral salience of the EU is explained by two inter-related factors: the actions of political entrepreneurs and increasing media attention. Opinions on the EU have been strategically used by some parties to mobilize voters (De Vries and Hobolt 2012; Grande and Hutter 2016; De Vries, Hobolt and Walter 2021). Once activated by political parties, the EU issue is then likely to trigger 'EU issue voting', meaning that individuals will begin to look at parties' positions on European integration in order to make vote choices. Using experimental evidence from six West European countries, Pannico and Costa Lobo (2023) recently found that opinions on the EU do, indeed, have a separate causal impact on party preferences in contemporary Europe. Therefore, when 'EU issue voting' is activated, it has the potential to disturb electoral equilibria formed on the basis of other issues.

A parallel stream of research has studied the politicization of the EU at the elite level, including debates on European integration, European policy and EU institutional design. Zürn and de Wilde (2012: 139) define politicization as a process by which an issue is turned

into a matter of public regulation and/or a subject of public discussion. To put it differently, it involves the "expansion of the scope of conflict [over a specific issue] within a political system" (Hutter and Grande 2014, 1002). Therefore, EU politicization entails not only the existence of a broad set of actors with dissenting views on the EU (polarization), but also more attention being paid to European integration in the public debate (salience).

Research shows that EU politicization has grown (at different paces) across much of the European Union, often prompted by the growing transfer of powers to European institutions, political and economic crises (such as the Great Recession, the Refugee crisis, Brexit), as well as elections and referendums (Börzel and Risse 2018; De Bruycker 2017; Kriesi 2016; Schmidt 2019; Statham and Trenz 2015; Turnbull-Dugarte 2020; Wilde and Zürn 2012). Once again, political parties and the media are thought to have played a prominent role in the increasing polarisation and salience of the EU issue over time (Bellamy and Kröger 2016; Braun, Hutter, and Kerscher 2016; Bressanelli, Koop, and Reh 2020; Carrieri 2020; Costa Lobo and Karremans 2018; De Bruycker 2017; Grossman, Persico, and Guinaudeau 2019; Hoeglinger 2016; Hurrelmann et al. 2020; Hutter, Grande, and Kriesi 2016; Hutter and Kerscher 2014; Risse 2014).

Although the literatures on politicization and EU issue voting have rarely talked to each other, in recent years a handful of studies have attempted to merge both lines of research by investigating the link between politicization, public opinion and election outcomes (Goldberg, van Elsas, and de Vreese 2020; Vasilopoulou and Gattermann 2020; Costa Lobo 2023). Of particular interest to this paper are van der Brug et al. (2022), and Carrieri (2020). Van der Brug et al. (2022) focus on the politicized context of the 2019 European parliament elections in terms of campaign dynamics, media salience, and electoral behavior. They argue that the EU issue has been politicized along three main sub-issues: the common currency (following the Euro zone crisis), immigration (following the Refugee crisis, and with Brexit drastically increasing the nationalist tone in public debates), and democratic backsliding (especially regarding some Central and Eastern European member-states such as Hungary and Poland). This context of increasing politicization has, in turn, strengthened EU issue voting in European parliament elections (Pellegata and Visconti

2022; Braun and Schäfer 2022). Carrieri (2020), on the other hand, focuses on how attitudes towards the EU are associated with preferences for different parties (beyond European parliament elections), and how this relationship has changed over the years. He argues that EU attitudes have been mobilized by both protest parties and mainstream parties at different times. In 2014, during the aftermath of the financial crisis, people's views on the EU were indeed more strongly associated with support for protest parties than for their mainstream counterparts. However, in 2019 EU issues played a much stronger role in explaining support for mainstream parties than protest parties. Carrieri (2020) attributes this reversal to the higher degree of EU politicization in 2019, which he says was prompted by a *Europhile backlash,* with mainstream Europhile parties acting as EU issue entrepreneurs and successfully mobilizing voters against the threat to European integration posed by growing Eurosceptic parties. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Carrieri (2020) focuses on how well people's opinions on the EU align with their preferences for mainstream versus protest parties, which is not the same as examining if politicization increases preferences for some parties rather than others. In fact, his results may simply be reflecting an ongoing realignment, with Eurosceptic voters leaving Europhile mainstream parties and Europhile voters staying with them.

Thus, on the issue of *who* benefits from EU politicization, there is not a clear answer in the literature. Drawing on Riker's (1986) argument that parties often benefit from shifting the agenda towards issues that divide their competitors' voters, De Vries and Hobolt (2020) argue that the politicization of neglected issues tends to work in favour of challenger parties.[1] This is because, by bringing up new issues that cut across the traditional left-right dimension, such as European integration, challenger parties can drive a wedge among the electorate of the more established parties, whose electoral dominance was built upon voters' positions on older dimensions of conflict. In contrast to Carrieri (2020), De Vries and Hobolt's (2020) think that mainstream parties do not usually engage in issue entrepreneurship because it is a much riskier electoral strategy for them. However, there is nothing in their argument that precludes the possibility that Eurosceptic and Europhile parties might both benefit from the politicization of the EU, as long as they are challengers.

There are reasons to think that parties at the two positional extremes of the EU issue might indeed be able to benefit from greater levels of politicization. As Wagner (2012) argues, parties that take on distinctive positions on issues are more likely to benefit from (associative) issue ownership – i.e., being the parties that first come to mind when people think about those issues (Walgrave et a. 2012). To be sure, there are other elements besides issue ownership that are also important. A successful issue entrepreneurship strategy requires focusing on issues with high yields, which are those that can potentially divide the electorate of other parties *without* dividing one's own electorate (De Sio and Weber 2019). But here, too, parties with extreme positions on the EU may have a relative advantage. EU issues have been shown to be much more central to Eurosceptic and Europhile parties than is the case for parties that take on a more moderate position on the EU, and the former are also more likely than the latter to attract voters with fairly homogeneous views on the EU (Rovny 2012).[2] Europhile and Eurosceptic parties are, therefore, clear candidates to benefit electorally from greater EU politicization. A highly politicized context will increase the pressure on those parties whose electorate shows a more diverse range of opinions on the EU, driving some of their voters in the direction of parties with less compromising views.

> *H1. Curvilinear effect*. The systemic politicization of the EU issue will increase support for parties with extreme positions on the EU (both Eurosceptic and Europhile) at the expense of parties with moderate positions on the EU.

Notwithstanding this conjecture, there are arguments to believe that the politicization of the EU might have an asymmetric effect on parties, benefiting just one side of the debate. If successful issue entrepreneurship involves disrupting existing electoral equilibria, this can only be done by parties that not only aim to increase the salience of an issue, but also present a distinctive political platform that challenges the positions of other competitors. This is consistent with De Vries and Hobolt's (2020) argument on challenger parties, which we believe is an important conceptual contribution. However, rather than focusing on the concept of challengers as parties without government experience, we suggest paying more attention to the very idea of challengers as parties that aim to disrupt the existing consensus over an issue ('issue challengers').

In the particular case of European integration, it is difficult to think of Europhile parties (at least in EU member-states) as issue challengers. Rather, it can be argued that those who want to push integration further towards a federal model are also part of the European consensus on the EU, as they do not contest the general framework of European integration. This contrasts with Eurosceptic parties, who want to wind back a process that has so far only gone forward, and can therefore present themselves as real challengers. By breaking with elite consensus, Eurosceptic parties aim to benefit from disrupting the existing electoral equilibrium and gain support among those who used to vote for other parties. So, a context of greater politicization is likely to help them to achieve their electoral goals.

Politicization requires both salience and polarization, and it reaches its highest levels when major parties with diametrically different positions on European integration engage in a public debate over this issue. This will normally happen when Europhile parties react to the emergence of Eurosceptic parties by engaging in a public confrontation over European integration. By doing so, however, Europhile parties help to raise the profile of Eurosceptic parties, granting them the opportunity to not only reach out to more voters, but also gain greater social acceptability for their defiant views. Research in social psychology has indeed established that people's behaviour is not only a function of their attitudes but also of perceived social norms, which depend on what significant others do (descriptive norms) and consider to be socially acceptable (injunctive norms) (Ajzen 1991; Cialdini 2012). Therefore, the politicization of the EU is more likely to help parties that challenge consensual views on European integration than those that do not, as it enables them to present their alternative views on an equal footing with those of other parties and gain the status of 'issue opposition' in a context where the EU acquires high salience. This is consistent with Meguid (2005), who finds that niche parties tend to be more successful when mainstream parties adopt an adversarial strategy, which entails engaging in a public discussion with niche parties over an issue on which they hold very different positions. In her view, politicizing the issue does nothing but increase the credibility of niche parties' positions, thereby giving them an electoral advantage.

H2. Linear effect. The systemic politicization of the EU issue will increase support for Eurosceptic parties, but not for Europhile parties or parties with moderate positions on the EU.

3. Data and method

Our hypotheses will be tested using four waves of the European Election Studies (ESS): 1999, 2004, 2009, 2019[3]. Other existing waves were not included because of the lack of relevant control variables.[4] Besides the ESS, we measure systemic politicization using expert survey data on political parties from the 1999-2019 *Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES)* trend dataset (Bakker et al. 2015, 2020).Most ESS and CHES studies took place in the same years. This was not the case for the 2004 and 2009 ESS, which we matched with the nearest available CHES wave (2002 and 2006, respectively). Luxemburg was not included in the CHES before 2009, and so it only enters our sample thereafter.

Our dependent variable is individuals' declared Propensity To Vote (PTV) for each party, a variable that is measured by asking respondents "*We have a number of parties in <country> each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please answer on a scale where 0 means 'not at all probable' and 10 means 'very probable'* ". Respondents are then presented with a list of all relevant parties. PTVs are a measure of latent support for political parties at the time that the survey was conducted. They tap directly into the concept of party utility (Downs 1957) and have been demonstrated to have many desirable properties (van der Eijk et al. 2006; De Vries and Tillman 2011). First of all, PTVs are strongly related to vote choice. In European countries, over 90% of voters choose the party with the highest PTV (van der Eijk, Franklin, and Marsh 1996; Van der Brug and Van der Eijk 2007; Van Der Eijk, Franklin, and Van der Brug 1999). Second, contrary to vote recall questions, PTVs are directly measured for all parties, and not just for the party chosen by respondents (if they vote at all). This solves the problem of deriving people's support for small parties, as subsamples of voters for these parties tend to be too small in analyses of vote choice, which poses statistical power issues. Third, as PTVs are not binary vote choice variables, their

analysis is not affected by problems such as the independence of irrelevant alternatives. Lastly, using PTVs enables researchers to assess the effect of country-level variables in cross-country analyses (something that standard conditional logistic regression models do not allow for) without needing to transform the dependent variable by grouping parties together (as in multilevel logistic regression models, which in comparative research forces researchers to focus on examining the vote for a specific party family versus others).

To use PTVs as our dependent variable, the dataset needs to be restructured from a format where each respondent is an observation to one where there is an observation for each respondent and party combination, with each respondent having as many PTVs as relevant parties (van der Eijk et al. 2006). If there are seven parties in the party system, respondents are asked to provide seven PTVs (one for each party). This means that, in the same way as we would do with conditional logit models, the unit of analysis in our transformed dataset (i.e., stacked dataset) is not individuals but individual-party dyads.

An important point about using a stacked dataset is that individual-specific variables (e.g., gender, religion, etc.) cannot be directly used in the model, as variables that only change between individuals cannot possibly explain the variance of PTV scores within individuals. We know, however, that certain individual characteristics are linked to preferences for different parties: for example, in Europe one might expect religious voters to prefer Christian democratic parties to other alternatives. To capture this, the literature recommends transforming individual-specific variables into 'party affinities' (i.e., variables connecting individual characteristics to specific party preferences) (Franklin and Renko 2013). Technically speaking, this is done by adopting a two-step procedure. First, PTVs for each party are separately regressed on each individual-specific variable, and the predicted utilities (*y-hats*) are then centred on their mean values and stored;[5] in a second step, those *y-hats* are introduced, instead of the raw variables, as predictors in the final models (van der Eijk et al. 2006, 441–42).[6] Thus computed, the transformed variables measure how much support each party receives above (or below) average among individuals who share the same characteristics as the respondent (e.g. women). The procedure only involves a linear transformation of the original variables, but the resulting

variable varies across both individuals and parties and is, therefore, suitable for a dataset of individual-party dyads such as ours. The only disadvantage of transforming individual-specific variables in this way is that regression coefficients derived from them only indicate whether certain individual-level characteristics are associated (and how strongly) with support for different parties, in general, without providing more specific information.However, this is only a minor problem in our case, because our hypotheses do not focus on individual-specific variables, which are only introduced in the models as controls (see Table A1 in the Online appendix for summary statistics).

To analyse the data, we use multilevel linear models with random effects by individual (to account for individual-party dyads being clustered within individuals) and country-year (to account for individuals being clustered within survey waves and countries).[7] Results do not change when we introduce country as an additional level.

Operationalization

Systemic politicization

To measure politicization, we draw on Hutter and Kriesi's index of 'systemic politicization', which could otherwise be defined as party-system politicization (Hutter and Kriesi 2019, 2021). The index is operationalized as the multiplication of salience and polarization, and therefore assumes that the highest levels of politicization are found in contexts where an issue (in this case, European integration) is not only very salient to all the major political parties, but also these hold diametrically different positions on that issue. As such, this index of 'systemic politicization' is a simplified version of Hutter and Grande's well-known index of EU politicization that focuses solely on political parties (Hutter and Grande 2014).

Therefore, the 'systemic politicization' index is the product of salience and polarization.

The salience of European integration is measured in this way:

$$\text{Salience (S)} = \sum_{j=1}^{j} \omega_j s_j$$

where j is any party with representation in the national parliament, ω_j is the vote share of party j and s_j is the importance party j gives to the EU issue.

Following Taylor and Herman (1971), polarization is measured by using the variance of the party system distribution, which is:

$$Polarization\ (P) = \sum_{J=1}^{J} \omega_j (p_j - \bar{p})^2$$

where ω_j is the vote share of party j (i.e. the number of votes received by the party divided by the total number of valid votes), p_j is the position of party j on the EU, and $\bar{p}$ is the mean position of the party system distribution[8], that is:

$$\bar{p} = \sum_{j=1}^{j} \omega_j p_j$$

Our index of systemic politicization of the European Union has been constructed using data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al. 2015, 2020) and covers the period ranging from 1989 to 2019. In this section, we provide a descriptive analysis for the whole period in order to show readers the different trajectories of EU politicization across countries and over time. However, it is important to note that survey data were not available for the whole period, so our analysis in the next section does not cover all the years that we calculated the index for.

To calculate the systemic EU politicization index, we rely on two main CHES variables: a) an indicator measuring the relative salience of European integration for each party (measured on a 0-10 scale, where 0 means European integration is never mentioned by the party and 10 means it is the most important issue for that party); and b) an indicator measuring parties' overall position on European integration (measured on a 1-7 scale,

where 1 means they are strongly opposed to European integration and 7 means they are strongly in favour).[9]

After applying the above formulae, we obtained an index of politicization that ranges from 0 to 10.17 with a mean value of 3.27. Its distribution is shown in Figure 1. The UK in 2019, with 8.99, and Italy in 2014, with 10.17, are the highest scores.

Figure 1. Distribution of systemic EU politicization scores 1989-2019
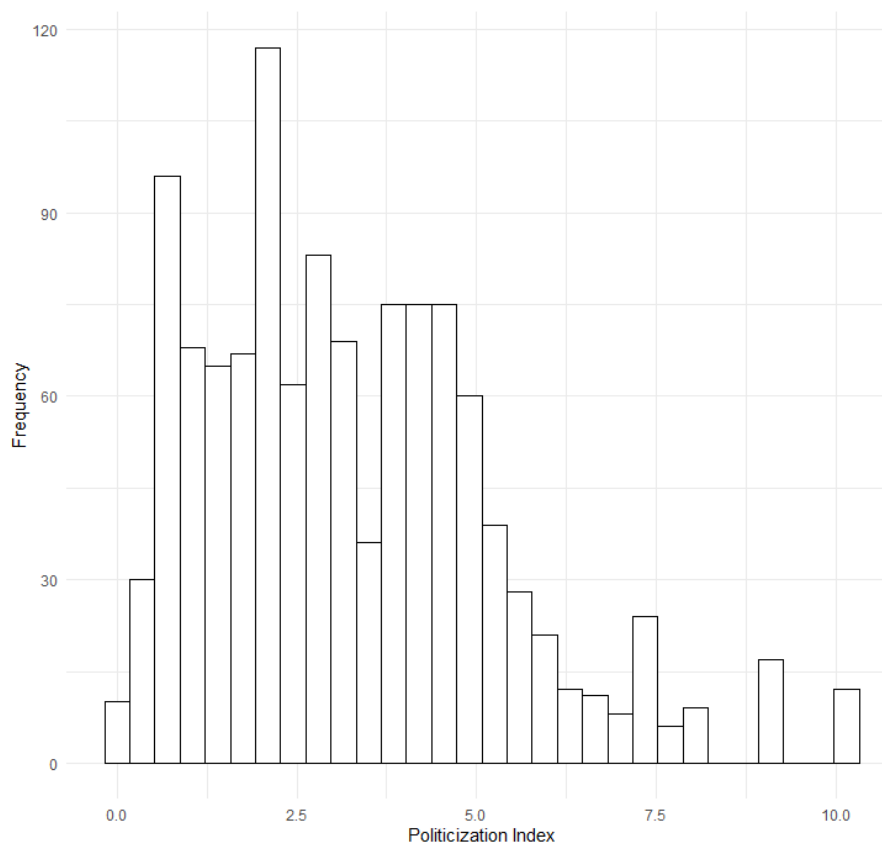
The distribution of systemic EU politicization over time is shown in Figure 2. The politicization index scores do not vary significantly across election years, as it ranges, on average, from 2.39 in 1989 to 3.91 in 2019. Both the mean and the spread of the distribution increase over the years, especially when one compares the 1990s and the 2010s, as the number of party-systems exhibiting very low levels of politicization decreases over time. The distribution of the index shows an increase in politicization after the European debt

crisis of 2009, with few countries showing low levels of politicization and some countries showing extraordinarily high levels in 2014 and 2019. This is in line with existing literature on the topic. Braun and Grande (2021), in particular, provide an explanation for the overall increase of politicization in four party systems (Austria, the UK, France and Germany): mainstream parties react to challenger parties by politicizing the European issue, especially in national elections, thereby becoming central in the spread of politicization to the entire system.

Figure 2. Systemic EU politicization 1989-2019 over time (density plots).
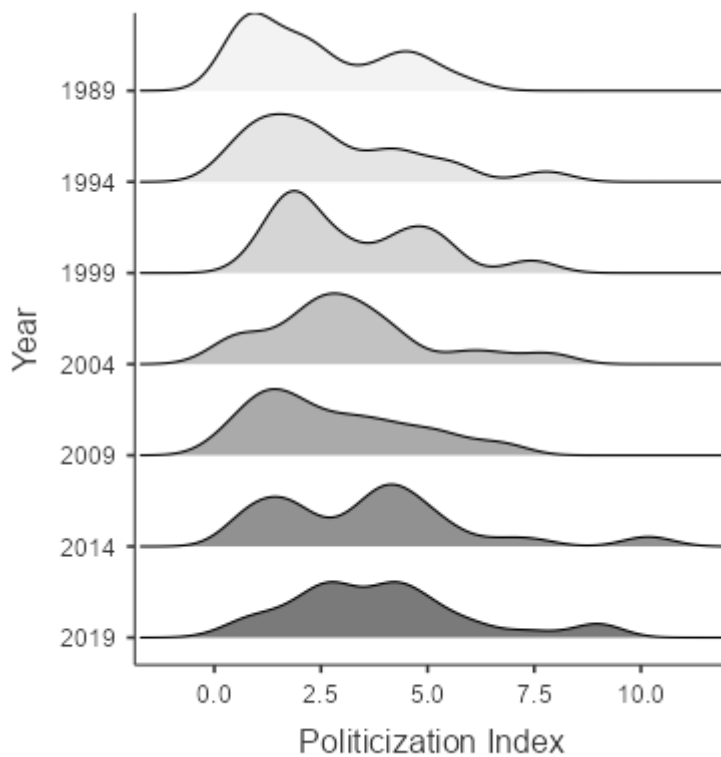
In most west European countries, politicization has been growing over time (Figure 3). This is the case in Germany, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Italy, the UK, Spain, Ireland, as well as Flanders and Wallonia (respectively, the Dutch- and French-speaking areas of Belgium, which we have split in our analyses because they have completely different party systems). This is partly in line with results from Silva, Kartalis and Costa Lobo (2022) who found an increase in politicization in bailed-out countries over the period following the

Euro crisis. Other party systems, such as France, Hungary, Estonia, Bulgaria and Lithuania, show an increase, but not necessarily a linear one. Denmark, Sweden and (interestingly) Portugal show a decreasing trend over the period. For Eastern and Central European countries, there is arguably a decrease following higher levels of politicization at the time of accession. Lastly, for several party-systems (Croatia, Malta, Luxemburg, Cyprus), we cannot assess time trends due to the lack of data spanning a sufficiently long period of time.

We see peaks in EU politicization on three occasions, depending on the country: a) around the accession years for Austria, Finland and Sweden (followed by a stabilization and a decrease); b) around 1992 at the time of the Maastricht Treaty for France specifically (but also in Denmark, right after the country's second referendum on the Maastricht Treaty); and c) in 2014, in the aftermath of the euro crisis, in most countries. Additionally, politicization peaks in the UK following the 2016 Brexit referendum, and also in France in 2019 (the 2017 presidential election was framed over the European issue).

In the literature, politicization has mainly been operationalized using media data (Hutter and Grande 2014; Hutter, Grande and Kriesi 2016; Silva, Kartalis and Costa Lobo 2022), providing in-depth over time and comparative analysis of the process but with limited geographical coverage. The results provided by our politicization index, at the party-system level, are in line with existing studies and offer a broader geographical and time coverage.

Figure 3. Systemic EU politicization 1989-2019 over time across countries (party systems for Belgium)
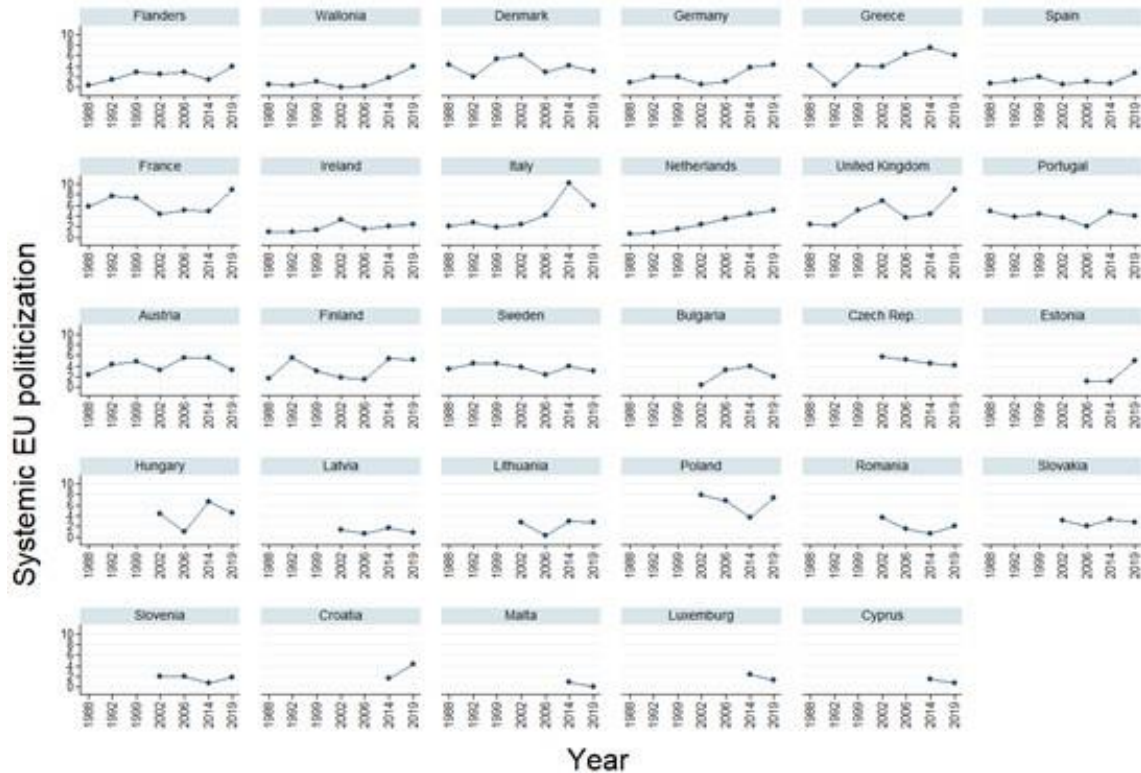
Party-level Euroscepticism and voter characteristics

Our hypotheses state that politicization will have different effects on parties depending on their own position on the EU. To identify parties' positions, we use the Chapel Hill indicator mentioned in the previous section. As a further robustness check, we also test our hypotheses using individuals' own perceptions of party positions on the EU, which is measured through responses to the following question: "*Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. Where would you place the following parties on this scale, where 0 means 'already gone too far' and 10 means 'should be pushed further'?*". This measure taps directly into how individuals perceive parties, and so it is arguably superior for testing our hypotheses than the measure provided by experts.

Alongside parties' positions on the EU, we introduce a number of controls. First, we control for the Euclidean distance between individuals' own position on European integration and the perceived position of each party on this issue. By doing so, we make sure that any

16

potential association between politicization and support for Eurosceptic/Europhile parties is not driven by voters with extreme views on the issue being more vocal about their support for parties with radical views when politicization is greater. Second, we also control for Euclidean distance between individuals' position on the ideological left-right scale and the perceived position of each party. Third, we introduce a trichotomous variable measuring whether a party was in the government (1) or in the opposition (0) before the survey was conducted. If the party was in the government for part of the year, the variable takes the value 0.5. The models include an interaction between this indicator and the index of systemic politicization to control for the possibility that EU politicization might favour opposition parties more than government parties, regardless of their position on the EU. And fourth, we also control for parties' vote share in the last general election, as voters tend to prefer larger parties for reasons that may have little to do with politicization or their position on the EU (van der Brug, van der Eijk, Franklin 2009: 57).

In addition, we control for the following individual-level characteristics: age, gender (male or female), education (age at which individuals finished formal education), religious identity (belonging to a religion or denomination or not), type of area of residence (urban, semi/rural or rural), and employment status (active, retired, homemaker and unemployed). As mentioned in the data and method section, these variables were transformed into y-hats. Thus, their coefficients only measure the association between different values of the relevant variable (e.g. being unemployed or not) and preferences for different parties. The appendix provides summary statistics for all variables.

Results

Table 1 shows the results of our multilevel models using PTVs as dependent variable (from now on we will refer to the dependent variable as party support). Model 1 is a baseline model that is provided as point of reference for other models, but it also offers valuable information. The model enables us to assess the unmoderated effect of systemic politicization and parties' positions on the EU. The positive coefficient for the latter

indicates that parties that support European integration tend to be more successful than Eurosceptic parties. This finding makes sense because the majority of mainstream parties support (different degrees of) European integration, with very few of them being strongly Eurosceptic. On the other hand, systemic politicization does not have a statistically significant effect on party support. This, too, is an interesting finding because a negative and statistically significant coefficient would have indicated that politicization erodes people's support for political parties in general, and that does not seem to be the case.

Before moving on to Model 2, it is worth commenting on the effect of some of the control variables in Model 1. First, government parties seem to enjoy lower levels of support than opposition parties even in scenarios of no politicization, highlighting the fact that governing tends to have an electoral cost (it is important to bear in mind that the models control for party size in the last election). The negative coefficient for the interaction between systemic politicization and being in government suggests that the former further decreases support for government parties, thereby benefiting opposition parties the most. We also find that voters prefer parties that are perceived to be closer to their own position on European integration and on the left-right scale, the former distance having, unsurprisingly a much stronger effect (-0.54 versus –0.03 for party-voter EU distance).. Finally, all individual-level characteristics (age, gender, employment status, education, religious identity and urbanization of the place of residence) are significantly associated with support for different parties.

Once we have described the findings in the baseline model, it is time to assess how much empirical support is found for our hypotheses in the data. Our first hypothesis (*H1 – curvilinear effect*) states that politicization will benefit parties with extreme positions on the EU, regardless of whether they are strongly against or in favour of integration. We test this hypothesis by introducing a quadratic term for parties' positions on the EU and interacting this with our systemic politicization index. As can be seen in Model 2a, none of the interaction terms is statistically significant. This suggests that, contrary to H2, politicization is not associated with greater support for parties with extreme views on the EU. Model 2b tests the same hypothesis using dummies distinguishing between Europhile,

Eurosceptic and other parties (the reference category), instead of a quadratic term. Only the interaction between the level of politicization and Eurosceptic parties is statistically significant, with a coefficient of 0,07, meaning that the higher the level of systemic politicization, the more voters express preferences for Eurosceptic parties (and not Europhile parties) confirming that H1 does not hold. This leads us to discard H1.[10]

Our second hypothesis (H2 - *linear effect*) states that systemic politicization is only positively associated with support for Eurosceptic parties. To test this hypothesis, Model 3 introduces an interaction between a party's position on European integration and systemic politicization. We remind readers that higher values on the European integration scale mean stronger support for integration. Therefore, if Eurosceptic parties benefit more than other parties from the politicization of the EU, then the coefficient for the interaction term should be negative and statistically significant. As a first step, we focus on the constituent term accounting for parties' position on the EU. The fact that this coefficient is positive and statistically significant (0,134) suggests that when the systemic politicization index is zero (there is no politicization of the EU issue), Europhile parties tend to garner more support than Eurosceptic parties. Next, let us look at the interaction term. The coefficient for the interaction between parties' positions on the EU and systemic politicization is both negative and statistically significant (-0.015). This suggests that politicization is associated with larger support for Eurosceptic parties, which is consistent with H2. Thus, the politicization of the EU may erode the electoral advantage that Europhile parties usually enjoy over Eurosceptic parties.

In order to better assess the total effect of this interaction, Figure 4 presents the average marginal effect (AME) of increasing systemic EU politicization by one unit for parties with different positions on European integration. Two things clearly stand out in Figure 4. First, politicization does not have the same effect for all parties. EU politicization is associated with greater support for Eurosceptic parties. For Europhile parties, the overall interaction effect is, if anything, slightly negative. Second, the effect of politicization on party support is only statistically significant for those parties that clearly oppose European integration (values 1 and 2 on the 1-7 EU scale). For Europhile parties, but also for parties with a

centrist position on European integration, confidence intervals overlap with zero (the line of 'no effect'), which indicates that the relationship between politicization and party support for such parties is not straightforward. All in all, results provide strong evidence in favour of H2, suggesting that it is parties with a Eurosceptic outlook that stand to benefit the most from a scenario of increased politicization of the EU issue.

Table 1. The effect of EU politicization on party support. Multilevel linear models.

	Model 1	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 3
Systemic EU politicization	0.011	0.076**	0.001	0.082***
	(0.021)	(0.029)	(0.021)	(0.023)
Party position on EU scale	0.069***	0.119*		0.134***
	(0.003)	(0.046)		(0.008)
Eurosceptic party (ref: moderate)			-0.514***	
			(0.061)	
Europhile party (ref: moderate)			0.093***	
			(0.024)	
EU politicization x Party position on EU		-0.011		-0.015***
		(0.010)		(0.002)
Party position on EU (quadratic term)		0.002		
		(0.005)		
EU politicization x Party position on EU (quadratic)		-0.000		
		(0.001)		
EU politicization x Eurosceptic			0.074***	
			(0.012)	
EU politicization x Europhile			0.006	
			(0.006)	
Government party	-0.260***	-0.303***	-0.224***	-0.303***
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.024)
EU Politicization x Government party	-0.029***	-0.019**	-0.030***	-0.019**
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Party-voter EU distance	-0.035***	-0.035***	-0.038***	-0.035***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Party-voter left-right distance	-0.546***	-0.546***	-0.549***	-0.546***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Party vote share at last election	0.049***	0.048***	0.049***	0.048***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age (yhat)	0.140***	0.140***	0.139***	0.140***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)

Education (yhat)	0.213***	0.213***	0.214***	0.213***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Employment status: homemaker (yhat)	0.077***	0.077***	0.077***	0.077***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Employment status: unemployed (yhat)	0.093***	0.093***	0.093***	0.093***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Employment status: retired (yhat)	0.091***	0.091***	0.092***	0.091***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Gender (yhat)	0.140***	0.140***	0.139***	0.140***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Urbanization (yhat)	0.172***	0.172***	0.172***	0.172***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Religion (yhat)	0.234***	0.234***	0.233***	0.234***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Constant	4.669***	4.380***	5.012***	4.352***
	(0.095)	(0.135)	(0.095)	(0.102)
Random part				
σ^2country	0.080	0.082	0.079	0.082
	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.032)
σ^2 wave-country	0.064	0.065	0.065	0.065
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
σ^2 respondent	0.723	0.723	0.727	0.723
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)
σ^2residual	6.438	6.436	6.442	6.436
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
N individuals	50,844	50,844	50,844	50,844
N wave-countries	80	80	80	80
N countries[a]	28	28	28	28

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

[a] For the purpose of the analysis, Belgium was split into Wallonia and Flanders

Figure 4. Effect of systemic EU polarization and party positions on European integration (model 3).

Party position on European integration
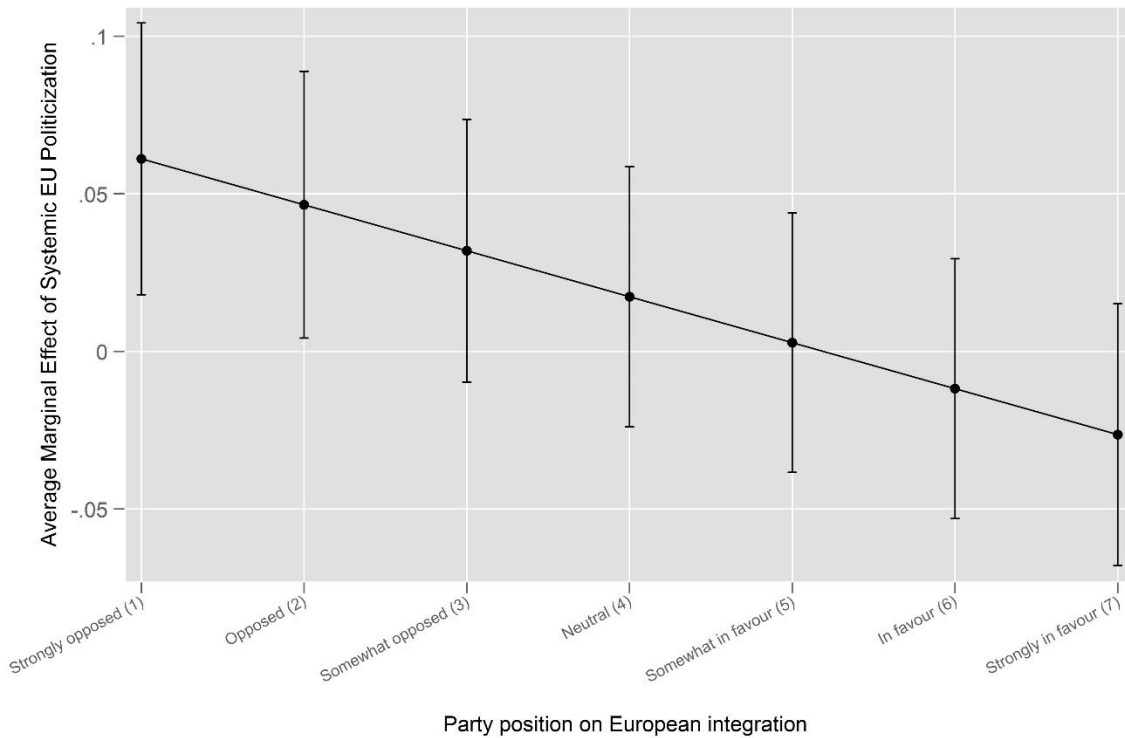
To make effect sizes comparable, a model with standardized variables is shown in the online appendix (Table A5 and Figure 2A). A one-standard deviation increase in EU politicization is associated with a 0.13 increase in the propensity to vote for the most Eurosceptic parties. This is not a small effect. The magnitude of this coefficient is similar to that of other variables included in the model (e.g. age, gender, urbanization) and is slightly greater than the standardized effect of EU distance (0.085), although much smaller than the standardized effect of left-right distance (1.36).

Robustness checks

We carried out a number of robustness checks, which can be found in the Online appendix (Tables A2 to A4). First, we used an alternative politicization index where larger parties are given the same weight as smaller parties. Second, we used respondents' perceived party positions on the EU rather than experts' placement on parties. Third, we controlled for the number of parties. Fourth, we introduced interactions between politicization and party family, party ideology and an indicator for challenger (versus dominant) party. Fifth, we

replicated our models using only data for 2019 – a year where Carrieri (2020) suggests that the tone of politicization might have been different due to *Europhile backlash*. Our conclusions remained unchanged.

Conclusion

EU politicization has been a focus of European Union studies for more than fifteen years. While our knowledge of the role played by both mainstream and challenger/protest parties in the politicization of the EU issue is relatively rich, so far the literature had not paid attention to how politicization is related to voter preferences for parties with different positions on the EU.

In this paper, we have argued that, while greater levels of politicization necessitate from the actions of both Eurosceptic and Europhile parties, it is mainly the former that stand to gain from politicized contexts. We tested for two alternative hypotheses. The first hypothesis stated that systemic politicization benefits parties with extreme positions on the issue, with both Europhiles and Euroscepticis benefiting from the louder message. The second hypothesis stated that only Eurosceptic parties can be considered as challengers of the status quo, and therefore it is only such parties that, by disrupting existing electoral equilibria, benefit from the politicization of the EU. Our results are largely consistent with the second hypothesis, suggesting that the spread of conflict over European integration in electoral campaigns normalizes the views of Eurosceptic parties and provides them with a popularity boost, which, on the whole, Europhile and moderate parties are not positively affected by.

Our findings have important consequences for electoral competition and the way in which parties address the EU issue across EU member-states. Existing studies have shown how parties (and other actors) have reacted and adjusted to European integration by gradually positioning themselves on this issue, either avoiding or seizing it, and by adapting their discourse to counterbalance authority delegation (De Wilde and Trenz 2012:14-15). Other studies have shown how mainstream parties have been forced to engage in more critical views of integration to compete in elections with strongly Eurosceptic challenger parties,

leading to an increase of politicization across political spectrum and party systems (De Vries and Hobolt 2012; 2020; Grande and Hutter 2016; Braun and Grande 2021; Gattermann et al. 2021). Our study now shows that this latter strategy is only likely to benefit Eurosceptic parties. Therefore, this politicization process turns out to be a one-way street where positions are polarized by both sides, but the marginal gains are not homogeneously distributed along the political spectrum. Strongly anti-integration positions have more to gain from the politicization of the EU than pro-integration positions, which opens the door to the severe strengthening of the 'constraining dissensus' on the EU in the coming years. To some extent, our findings are consistent with Nai et al.'s (2022) study of the 2019 European parliament election, where harsh campaigning only seems to have worked in favour of Eurosceptic parties (Nai et al. 2022).

Our study suffers from some limitations, which future research may be able to deal with. One of the most obvious limitations is the repeated cross-sectional nature of our data. Even though this has provided us with a decent amount of variation in the main independent variable (EU politicization), panel data would be required in order to test for the underlying mechanisms and to deal with some of the causality issues inherent to cross-sectional research. Moreover, although we attempted to look at whether politicization would have a different impact in a context (the 2019 European parliament election) where the main 'tone' on the EU in the media and public discourse was positive (or indeed, less negative), future research might be able to look at this question with better instruments, as and when they are developed.

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[1] De Vries and Hobolt's (2020) analysis focuses on national elections, but there is no reason why their arguments could not apply to second-order elections as well.

[2] Rovny (2012) does not specify if he looks at vote in national or European parliament elections, but presumably he focused on first-order (national) elections.

[3] We used the 1989-2004 Trend file (Marsh and Mikhaylov 2008) to which we added the 2009 and 2019 Voter study (van Egmond et al. 2013; Schmitt, Hobolt, et al. 2020).

[4] Data from the 2014 round are not included because there is no information on the distance between respondents' and parties' positions on the EU. The battery asking respondents about parties' positions on European integration was invalidated due to an error with the wording.

[5] The procedure is done for each year separately, as affinities between parties and groups of voters can change over time.

[6] In addition to centring, we have also standardized the y-hats to ease the comparison of their coefficients.

[7] As Belgium contains two distinct party systems, the analysis treats the French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking areas as two separate units.

[8] We follow the literature in assuming that greater politicization is achieved when larger parties have extreme positions on the EU and talk a lot about this issue. Alternatively, it could be thought that the highest levels of politicization can be reached if major parties engage in a discussion over the EU with an extreme competitor no matter how small this is – in other words, size matters for salience but not for polarization. We tested this by constructing an alternative index that only weights the salience component of the formula by parties' vote share. Findings remained essentially the same.

[9] For the purpose of computing the index of politicization we normalized the position variable into an 0-10 range.

[10] We do this by constructing two binary variables accounting for whether a party has a strongly Eurosceptic or a strongly Europhile profile, with moderate parties being in the reference category. We categorise parties with values lower than 2 on the 7-point Chapel Hill scale as being Eurosceptic, with those having values higher than 6 being classified as Europhile.

Online Appendix

"The Imbalanced Effect of Politicization: How EU Politicization Favours Eurosceptic Parties"

Table of Contents

Summary statistics

Table A1. Summary statistics.

	Obs (individual-party dyads)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
PTV (Propensity to vote)	274,435	4	3	1	10
Systemic EU politicization[a]	274,435	3.6	1.9	0.1	9
Systemic EU politicization – alternative index	274,435	5.6	3.6	0.1	23.8
Party position on EU scale: 1 = strongly opposed to European integration; 7 = strongly in favour of European integration.	274,435	5	1.72	1	7
Government party 0 = not in government; 0.5 = left gov't in past year; 1 = in government;	274,435	0.3	0.439	0	1
Party-voter EU distance 0 = no distance / 9 = maximum distance	274,435	5.2	2.9	1	10
Party-voter left-right distance 0 = no distance / 9 = maximum distance	274,435	5.2	2.8	1	10
Vote share of the party in the last national election	274,435	15.1	12	0.1	55
Age - continuous	274,435	48	16.52	18	101
Age (yhat)	274,435	0	1	-9.59	6.43
Education (1) – age at which the respondent left formal education: <16 years	274,435	0.1	0.3	0	1
Education (2) – age at which the respondent left formal education: 16-19 years	274,435	0.4	0.48	0	1
Education (3) – age at which the respondent left formal education: 20+	274,435	0.5	0.5	0	1
Education (4) – age at which the respondent left formal education: still studying	274,435	0.06	0.2	0	1
Education (yhat)	274,435	0	1	-8.0	20
Employment status: homemaker (dummy)	274,435	0.04	0.2	0	1
Employment status: homemaker (yhat)	274,435	0	1	-34	49.6
Employment status: unemployed (dummy)	274,435	0.06	0.2	0	1
Employment status: unemployed (yhat)	274,435	0	1	-18.4	14.4
Employment status: retired (dummy)	274,435	0.2	0.4	0	1
Employment status: retired (yhat)	274,435	0	1	-5	5
Gender - 0 = man / 1 = woman	274,435	0.48	0.5	0	1
Gender (yhat)	274,435	0	1	-7	6.4
Urbanization (location) – 3 categories : rural / mid-size / large town	274,435	2.1	0.8	1	3
Urbanization (yhat)	274,435	0	1	-10	4.7
Religion – 0 = no religion affiliation / 1 = member of religion or denomination	274,435	0.67	0.47	0	1
Religion (yhat)	274,435	0	1	-10.3	9.0

[a] Note that these statistics differ slightly from those reported in the Systemic Politicization section because our individual-level analysis excludes waves for which some of our other key variables were missing.

Robustness checks.

Alternative politicization index and alternative measure of EU position.

In the politicization index, the positions of larger parties are given more weight than those of smaller parties. The index was designed in this way because having a very small party with extreme position on the EU is less likely to lead to as much politicization as having big disparities between the major parties. As a robustness check, we used an alternative measure of politicization that gives equal weight to the positions of all parties with representation, regardless of their size (Model 3b in Table A2). Substantively, this means that the alternative index assumes that higher degrees of politicization are achieved when the EU issue becomes salient and there are parties with very extreme positions on the issue, no matter how big or small they are. Results do not change our conclusions in any substantial way.

As an additional robustness check, we replicated Model 3a using individuals' perceptions of party positions (perceived positions) rather than the values from the expert survey (Model 3c in Table A2). The model produces similar results to those in our original model.

Table A2. Robustness check (1)

	Model 3b	Model 3c
Systemic EU politicization	0.094***	
	(0.020)	
Perceived party position on EU scale	0.234***	
	(0.004)	
EU politicization x Perceived position	-0.017***	
	(0.001)	
Systemic EU politicization (alt measure)		0.044***
		(0.012)
Party position on EU scale		0.129***
		(0.006)
EU politicization (alt) x Party position on EU		-0.009***
		(0.001)

Party-voter EU distance	-0.026***	-0.035***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Party-voter left-right distance	-0.533***	-0.546***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Party vote share in the last general election	0.044***	0.049***
	(0.000)	(0.001)
Government party	-0.235***	-0.350***
	(0.024)	(0.022)
EU Polarization x Government party	-0.024***	-0.004
	(0.006)	(0.004)
Age (yhat)	0.379***	0.394***
	(0.019)	(0.019)
Education (yhat)	0.573***	0.597***
	(0.015)	(0.015)
Employment status: homemaker (yhat)	0.639***	0.644***
	(0.042)	(0.043)
Employment status: unemployed (yhat)	0.617***	0.682***
	(0.036)	(0.037)
Employment status: retired (yhat)	0.308***	0.306***
	(0.022)	(0.022)
Gender (yhat)	0.670***	0.747***
	(0.026)	(0.027)
Urbanization (yhat)	0.646***	0.674***
	(0.019)	(0.020)
Religion (yhat)	0.592***	0.606***
	(0.013)	(0.013)
Constant	3.818***	4.383***
	(0.090)	(0.092)
Random part		
σ^2country	0.062***	0.086***
	(0.026)	(0.033)
σ^2 wave-country	0.061***	0.065***
	(0.013)	(0.014)
σ^2 respondent	0.667***	0.723***
	(0.012)	(0.013)
σ^2residual	6.276***	6.434***
	(0.019)	(0.019)
N individuals	50,844	50,844
N wave-countries	80	80
N countries[a]	28	28

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

[a] For the purpose of the analysis, Belgium has been split into Wallonia and Flanders

Number of parties

Our third robustness check (Model 3d in Table A3) controls for the effective number of parliamentary parties (Casal Bertoa 2023). This control was added to account for the possibility that the propensity to vote for parties might be lower in countries where there are more parties. Results remain substantially the same after including this control.

Party family, ideology and challenger status as moderators of politicization

Next, we introduced three controls (party family, party ideology and an indicator for challenger party) and interacted them with the politicization index (Model 3e in Table A3). The purpose of these controls is checking that the effect of politicization on support for Eurosceptic parties is not explained by other party characteristics different from their position on the EU. We use the CHES classification of party family, leaving Socialist/Social Democrats (the largest category) as reference. Party ideology is measured by computing the mean value that voters assign to each party on the left-right scale. To account for possible curvilinear effects, the variable was split into three: left-wing (values lower than 4), centre (between 4 and 6), and right-wing(6 or higher). Finally, following De Vries and Hobolt's (2020) criteria, we constructed an indicator for electoral challenger, with parties being coded as challenger (1) if they have never been in government (otherwise they receive value 0). The list of challenger parties is included at the end of this Appendix (Table A5). Conclusions remain the same after adding these controls. It is worth mentioning that the interaction between politicization and the electoral challenger indicator does not produce statistically significant results.

Table A3. Robustness checks (2): additional controls.

	Model 3d number of parties	Model 3e additional interactions
Systemic EU politicization	0.083***	0.045
	(0.022)	(0.029)
Party position on EU scale	0.134***	0.151***
	(0.008)	(0.013)
EU politicization x Party position on EU	-0.015***	-0.025***
	(0.002)	(0.003)
Party-voter EU distance	-0.035***	-0.033***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Party-voter left-right distance	-0.546***	-0.544***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Party vote share at last election	0.048***	0.043***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age (yhat)		0.139***
		(0.007)
Education (yhat)		0.212***
		(0.005)
Employment status: homemaker (yhat)		0.075***
		(0.005)
Employment status: unemployed (yhat)		0.093***
		(0.005)
Employment status: retired (yhat)		0.092***
		(0.007)
Gender (yhat)		0.147***
		(0.005)
Urbanization (yhat)		0.171***
		(0.005)
Religion (yhat)		0.235***
		(0.005)
Government party	-0.303***	-0.327***
	(0.024)	(0.028)
EU Politicization x Government party	-0.019**	0.013
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Effective number of parties	0.029	
	(0.036)	
Party family (ref: Socialdem)		
Radical Right		-0.666***

	(0.067)
Conservative	-0.891***
	(0.052)
Liberal	-0.672***
	(0.043)
Christian Dem	-0.656***
	(0.055)
Radical Left	-0.317***
	(0.060)
Green	-0.229***
	(0.047)
Regionalist	-1.519***
	(0.057)
No Family	-1.341***
	(0.082)
Confessional	-2.014***
	(0.133)
Agrarian	-0.773***
	(0.080)
Radical Right * EU Politicization	0.087***
	(0.017)
Conservative * EU Politicization	0.168***
	(0.014)
Liberal * EU Politicization	0.147***
	(0.011)
Christian Dem * EU Politicization	0.091***
	(0.015)
Radical Left * EU Politicization	0.004
	(0.016)
Green * EU Politicization	0.117***
	(0.011)
Regionalist * EU Politicization	0.116***
	(0.015)
No Family * EU Politicization	0.219***
	(0.021)
Confessional * EU Politicization	0.233***
	(0.034)
Agrarian * EU Politicization	0.065***
	(0.019)
Party ideology (ref: centrist)	
Left-wing	-0.205***
	(0.039)

Right-wing		0.492***
		(0.034)
Left-wing * EU Politicization		0.095***
		(0.011)
Right-wing * EU Politicization		-0.090***
		(0.010)
Challenger party		0.160***
		(0.038)
Challenger party* EU Politicization		-0.016
		(0.009)
Constant	4.233***	4.747***
	(0.177)	(0.131)
Random part		
σ^2country	0.074	0.091
	(0.032)	(0.035)
σ^2 wave-country	0.067	0.067
	(0.015)	(0.014)
σ^2 respondent	0.723	0.717
	(0.013)	(0.013)
σ^2residual	6.436	6.346
	(0.019)	(0.020)
N individuals	50,844	50,844
N wave-countries	80	80
N countries[a]	28	28

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
[a] For the purpose of the analysis, Belgium has been split into Wallonia and Flanders

Exploring the effect of the Europhile backlash in 2019

We also replicated our models using only data for 2019 (Model 3.2019 in Table A4). Carrieri (2020) suggests that the tone of politicization might have been different in the post-Brexit 2019 election due to a *Europhile backlash*. It is, therefore, possible that Europhile parties might have benefitted from politicizing the EU issue in that context. However, we do not find evidence in support of this hypothesis. Our linear hypothesis receives support when we only focus on 2019 (see Model 3a – 2019 in Table A3). To explore this further, we replicated Model 2b, which separates between Eurosceptic, Europhile and EU-

moderate parties, using only data from 2019 (Model 2b.2019 in Table A4). In the model, the coefficient of the interaction term reaches statistical significance for Europhile parties, indicating that politicization had a slightly more positive effect on the latter than on moderate parties (the reference category). However, once the overall interaction effect is computed (Figure 1A), it becomes evident that EU politicization is only significantly associated with support for Eurosceptic parties. For Europhile and EU-moderate parties, the overall effect of politicization is statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Table A4. Robustness checks (3): 2019 wave only.

	Model 3a. 2019	Model 2b.2019
Systemic EU politicization	0.125***	0.026
	(0.030)	(0.030)
Party position on EU scale	0.098***	
	(0.011)	
Eurosceptic party (ref: moderate)		-0.407***
		(0.093)
Europhile party (ref: moderate)		0.018
		(0.038)
EU politicization x Party position on EU	-0.012***	
	(0.002)	
EU politicization x Eurosceptic		0.106***
		(0.016)
EU politicization x Europhile		0.037***
		(0.009)
Government party	-0.117**	-0.054
	(0.038)	(0.038)
EU Polarization x Government party	-0.065***	-0.070***
	(0.009)	(0.009)
Party-voter EU distance	0.048***	0.045***
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Party-voter left-right distance	-0.574***	-0.575***
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Party vote share at last election	0.042***	0.042***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age (yhat)	0.173***	0.170***
	(0.010)	(0.010)

Education (yhat)	0.202***	0.204***
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Employment status: homemaker (yhat)	0.095***	0.095***
	(0.009)	(0.009)
Employment status: unemployed (yhat)	0.106***	0.105***
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Employment status: retired (yhat)	0.084***	0.086***
	(0.010)	(0.010)
Gender (yhat)	0.123***	0.121***
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Urbanization (yhat)	0.176***	0.175***
	(0.009)	(0.009)
Religion (yhat)	0.230***	0.230***
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Constant	4.133***	4.685***
	(0.140)	(0.134)
Random part		
σ^2country	0.106***	0.115***
	(0.030)	(0.032)
σ^2 respondent	0.951*	0.954*
	(0.021)	(0.021)
σ^2residual	5.974***	5.970***
	(0.027)	(0.027)
N individuals	19,001	19,001
N countries[a]	28	28

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

[a] For the purpose of the analysis, Belgium has been split into Wallonia and Flanders

Figure 1A. Average marginal effects of systemic EU politicization for Eurosceptic, Europhile and moderate parties in 2019 (derived from Model 2-2019 in Table A3).
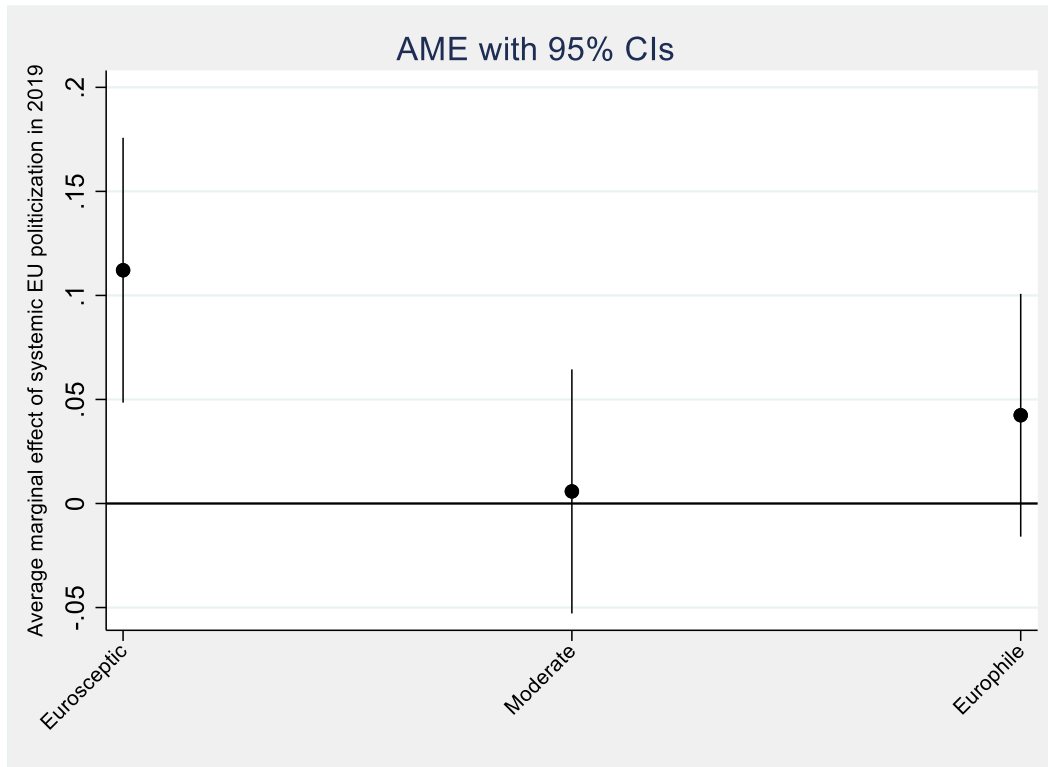
Models with standardized variables

To facilitate the comparison of the magnitude of different coefficients, the model below presents the results of replicating Model 3a after standardizing the main non-discrete variables.

To facilitate the interpretation of the interaction between EU politicization and EU party positions and EU politicization, we have not standardized the latter. This has enabled us to compute the magnitude of the effect of EU politicization across different levels of EU party positions, as in Figure 4 (see Figure 2A).

Variables are standardized at the level of aggregation at which they were measured.

Table A5. Model 3a with standardized variables.

	STANDARDIZED VARIABLES
Systemic EU politicization	0.171***
	(0.047)
Party position on EU scale	0.084***
	(0.004)
EU politicization x Party position on EU	-0.030***
	(0.003)
Government party	-0.367***
	(0.013)
EU Polarization x Government party	-0.039**
	(0.013)
Party-voter EU distance	-0.085***
	(0.005)
Party-voter left-right distance	-1.357***
	(0.005)
Party vote share at last election	0.584***
	(0.006)
Age (yhat)	0.140***
	(0.007)
Education (yhat)	0.213***
	(0.005)
Employment status: homemaker (yhat)	0.077***
	(0.005)
Employment status: unemployed (yhat)	0.093***
	(0.005)
Employment status: retired (yhat)	0.091***
	(0.007)
Gender (yhat)	0.140***
	(0.005)
Urbanization (yhat)	0.172***
	(0.005)
Religion (yhat)	0.234***
	(0.005)
Constant	3.638***
	(0.066)

|	
Random part	
σ^2country	0.082***
	(0.032)
σ^2 wave-country	0.065***
	(0.014)
σ^2 respondent	0.723***
	(0.013)
σ^2residual	6.436***
	(0.019)
N individuals	50,844
N wave-countries	80
N countries	28

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

For the purpose of the analysis, Belgium has been split into Wallonia and Flanders.

All variables have been standardized except government party and EU party position.

Figure 2A. Average marginal effect of Systemic EU Politicization (standardized coefficient).
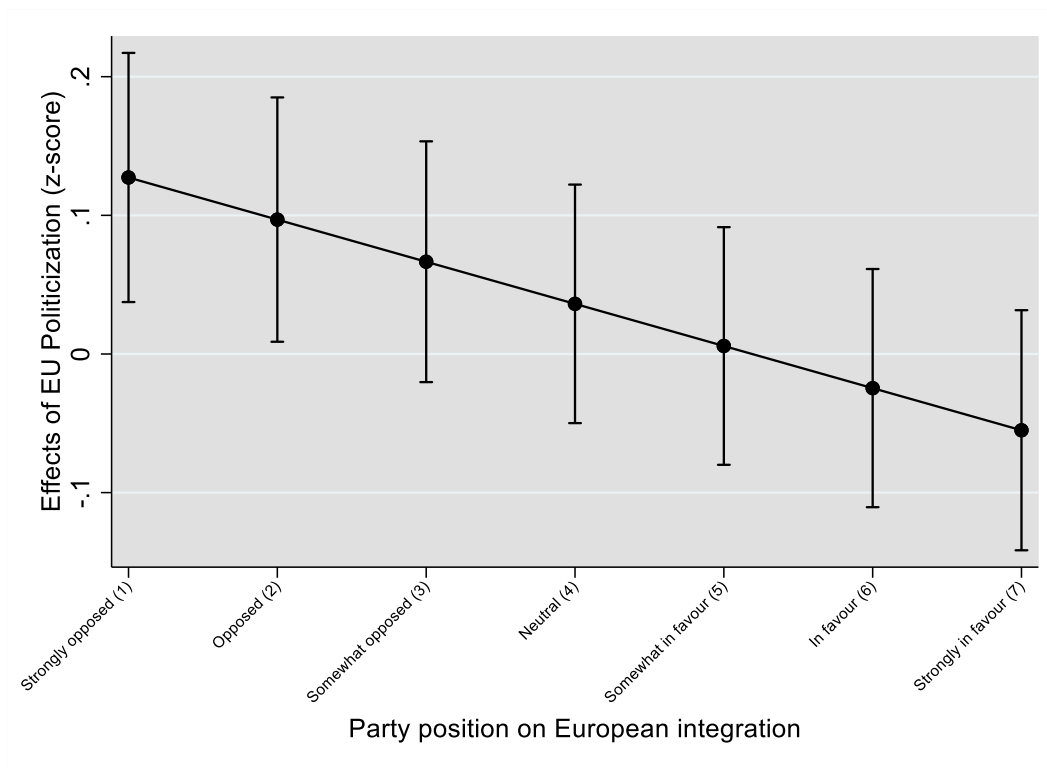
Operationalization of challenger parties

Following De Vries and Hobolt (2020), challenger parties are those who have never been in government. Parties that have provided governments with parliamentary support do not count as challenger parties unless they have had ministers in cabinet. Splits from dominant parties are classified as challenger parties. Challenger parties are classified as dominant if they merge with a dominant party.

Table A5. List of challenger parties since 1996.

Country	Party name	Year it became dominant
AUSTRIA	The Greens	2019
	Communist Party of Austria	
	The Left	
	Young Liberals	
	NEOS - The New Austria and	2019
	Hans-Peter Martins List	
BELGIUM	Ecolo	1999
	Agalev/Groen!	1999
	Workers Party of Belgium	
	List Dedecker	
	People's Party	
	National Front	
	Flemish Interest	
	National Front (Belgium)	
	New Flemish Alliance	2009
BRITAIN	Green Party	
	Liberal Democrats	2010
	British National Party (BNP)	
	Party of Wales	
	Scottish National Party	
	United Kingdom Independence	
	The Brexit Party	
BULGARIA	Democratic Bulgaria	2021
	Will	
	NAPRED	
	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	2009
	Bulgaria Without Censorship	

	Attack	2017
	Revival	
CROATIA	Sustainable Development of Croatia	
	Social Democratic Party of Croatia	2000
	Croatian Labouristi - Labour	
	Croatian Social-Liberal Party	2000
	Croatian People's Party	2000
	Croatian Party of Rights	
	Croatian Peasant Party	2000
	Party of Anticorruption, Development and Transparency	
	Human Shield	
	Croatian Democratic Assembly	
CYPRUS	EDI	
	New Horizons	
	Citizens' Alliance	2021
	Ecological and Environmental Movement /Green Party	
	Progressive Party of the Working People	2003
	Citizens' Alliance	2021
	Democratic Alignment	
	European Party	2013
	National Popular Front	
CZECH REPUBLIC		
	Green Party	2006
	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	
	National Socialists - 21st	
	ANO 2011	2014
	Freedom and Direct Democracy Tomio Okamura	
	Party of Free Citizens	
	Czech Pirate Party	2021
	Civic Conservative Party	2010
	Party of Common Sense	
	Dawn - National Coalition	
DENMARK	Democratic Renewal	2016
	Red-Green Unity List	
	Socialist People's Party	2011
	Liberal Alliance	2016
	Danish People's Party	
	Progressive Party	
	The peoples' movement against EU	
	June Movement	
	The Minority Party	
ESTONIA	Russian Party of Estonia	

	Estonian Greens	
	Estonia 200	2023
	Estonian Christian Democrats	
	Res Publica Party	2003
	People's Union of Estonia	2003
	Conservative People's Party of Estonia	2019
	Constitution Party	
FINLAND	Green Union	1996
	Liberals	
	True Finns	2016
FRANCE	National Republican Movement	
	Rally for France	
	Republican Pole of Jean-Pierre Chevenement	
	Europe Ecology - The Greens	1998
	Unbowed France / Left Party	
	Workers' Struggle	
	Communist Revolutionary League/New Anticapitalist Party	
	Generation.s	
	Independents – UDI + MoDem	2017
	The Republic Onwards!	2018
	Movement for France	
	Centrist Alliance	2013
	Arise the Republic	
	National Front	
	Hunting, Fishing, Nature, Tradition	
GERMANY	Alliance 90 / The Greens	1999
	The Left	
	Alternative for Germany	
	Republicans	
	National Democratic Party	
	Pirate Party	
GREECE	Ecologist Greens	
	Green party	
	Communist Party of Greece	
	European Realistic Disobedience Front	
	Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza/Synaspismos)	2015
	Democratic Left	2012
	Democratic Social Movement	
	The River	
	Independent Greeks	2015
	Popular Orthodox Rally	2011
	Golden Dawn	
HUNGARY	Hungarian National Alliance	

	Politics Can Be Different	
	Together 2014 - Dialogue for	
	Hungarian Communist Workers Party	
	Democratic Coalition	
	FIDESZ-KDNP Alliance	1998
	Momentum Movement	
	Center Party	
	Party of Hungarian Justice and Life	
	JOBBIK - Movement for a Better Hungary	
	Our Homeland Movement	
	Hungarian Two- tailed Dog Party	
IRELAND	Libertas	
	Green Party	2007
	Workers Party	
	Socialist Party	
	Solidarity - People Before Profit	
	Ourselves Alone	
	Left Ecology Movement	
ITALY	Left Ecology Movement	
	Italian Left	2019
	Communist Refoundation Party	2006
	Left Democrats/Democratic Party	1996
	Italian Radicals	2005
	The Daisy	2006
	More Europe (+Europa)	2006
	Popular Alliance - UDEUR (Mastella)	2006
	Christian Democratic Center / United Christian Democrats	2001
	Union of the Centre	2013
	Italian Social Movement/National Alliance	
	Social Alternative (prior to merging into PdL)	
	Five Star Movement	2018
LATVIA	Development/For !	2018
	Latvian Socialist Party	
	LSDSP (Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party)	1998
	Harmony Centre (Concord)	
	National Harmony Party	
	For Human Rights in United Latvia	
	Christian Democratic Union	
	Civic Union	2009
	New Conservative Party	2018
	Latvian Russian Union	
	Social democratic party	2001
	New Union Social Liberals	2001

	Liberal and Centre Union	2000
	Order and Justice Party	2012
	Latvian Association of Regions	2022
LUXEMBOURG	Citizens List	
	The Greens	2013
	Communist Party of Luxembourg	
	The Left	
	Pirate Party of Luxembourg	
	Alternative Democratic Reform Party	
MALTA	Democratic Alternative	
	Imperium Europa	
	National Action	
NETHERLANDS	Party for Animals	
	Green Left	
	Socialist Party	
	Christian Union	2006
	Reformed Political Party	
	Party of Freedom	
	Forum for Democracy	
	Pim Fortuyn List	
	Proud of the Netherlands	
	Libertas	
POLAND	Democratic Left Alliance	1993
	Your Movement	
	Labor Union	2001
	Spring	
	Civic Platform	2007
	Law and Justice	2005
	League of Polish Families	2006
PORTUGAL	Earth Party	
	Party for Animals and Nature	
	Left Bloc	
	Unified Democratic Coalition	
ROMANIA	Save Romania Union	2020
	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats	2000
	Romanian Democratic Convention	1996
	PLUS+ Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party	2020
	Civic Force	
	People's Movement Party	
	Conservative Party	2000
	Christian-Democratic National Peasants Party	1996
	Hungarian Democratic Alliance	1996

	People's Party - Dan Diaconescu	
SLOVAKIA	Communist Party of Slovakia	
	Democratic Union of Slovakia	
	Slovak Democratic and Christian Union - Democratic Party	2002
	Direction - Social Democracy	2006
	Electoral alliance Progressive Slovakia and TOGETHER – Civic Democracy	
	Free Forum	
	Ordinary People and Independents	2020
	We are family	2020
	People's Party Our Slovakia	
SLOVENIA	The Left	2022
	For Real	2008
	Positive Slovenia	2013
	List of Marjan Sarec	2018
	Alliance of Alenka Bratusek	2018
	New Slovene Christian People's Party	2004
	Slovenian National Party	
	Youth Party - European Greens	
SPAIN	People's Party	1996
	United Left	2020
	Podemos (We Can)	2020
	Citizens - Party of the Citizenry	
	Union, Progress and Democracy	
	Vox	
	Amaiur	
	Convergence and Union	
	Basque Nationalist Party	
	Basque Social Democracy	
	Regionalist Aragonese Party	
	Catalan Republican Left	
	Andalucist Party	
	Canarian Coalition	
	Galician Nationalist Bloc	
	Aragonese Union	
	Navarrese Peoples Union	
	Navarre Yes	
SWEDEN	Green Ecology Party	2014
	Left Party	
	Sweden Democrats	
	New Democracy	