The party politics of the Euro crisis in the German Bundestag: frames, positions and salience

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ABSTRACT
The Euro crisis has a strong impact on European Union (EU) politics and the EU polity. Crisis-related issues were debated across Europe and governments and EU institutions introduced several institutional instruments which are meant to make EU economic governance more effective. This paper investigates the scope, timing and divisiveness of political contestation, i.e. politicisation, in the German Bundestag and the frames on which political parties relied in their debates on crisis-induced institutional innovations in the German Bundestag. To account for these patterns, the paper relies on institutional theories and theories of party competition. Empirically, it draws on written protocols of debates and parliamentary questions in the Bundestag. A case study of Germany and the Bundestag does not lend itself to broad generalisations. Yet, as argued in the article, it is an unlikely case for politicisation and a politically important case.

KEYWORDS
Politicisation; political parties; framing; parliament; Germany; European Union

The so-called Euro crisis marks a crucial moment in the history of European integration. It has raised public awareness of the economic, financial and political interconnectedness of members of the Eurozone and the European Union and asked for relatively prompt responses by EU institutions and governments. The responses came in two forms. First, as potentially large monetary transfers in the form of credits to countries most heavily hit by the crisis. And, second, in the form of institutional innovations in the EU’s system of economic and fiscal governance that aim at a more effective cooperation between member states in these policy areas and which at the same time have the potential to considerably restrict member states’ leeway in fiscal and economic policy-making. This paper investigates the extent to which the adoption of Euro crisis measures in Germany was politicised, i.e. publicly contested, by political parties in the Bundestag. A specific focus of the paper lies on the content of this contestation and the ways in which different political parties did frame the Euro crisis and the measures taken to address it.
There are various indications that the crisis and the various measures taken at the EU level and in member states to overcome it did have an effect on the political situation in the European Union: European citizens’ trust in the EU fell from 47 per cent in 2009 to 31 per cent in spring 2012 and since then has not increased (European Commission 2014: 9). Moreover, in a poll conducted in January 2012 about 60 per cent of Germans expressed their opposition to German bailout payments to indebted EU countries (Bechtel et al. 2014: 841). The crisis thus seems to have added to the ‘constraining dissensus’ that, according to Hooghe and Marks (2009), has left its marks on the EU treaty bargains since the negotiations on the Maastricht Treaty at the beginning of the 1990s. The fact that EU-critical populist and radical parties across Europe have made relatively large gains in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament can, at least to some extent, be attributed to these parties’ success in mobilising the latent EU scepticism of citizens to their own advantage.

This paper assesses the politicisation of the Euro crisis in Germany by investigating the extent to which political parties in the German Bundestag debated crucial measures which were adopted to address some of the causes that were perceived to have led to the crisis (see Figure 1). In line with the conceptualisation of politicisation in De Wilde et al. (2015), the paper will take into account the broader public resonance of these debates by investigating their coverage in two German newspapers and the main TV evening news (for similar conceptualisations see also De Wilde and Zürn 2012; Green-Pedersen 2012; Hooghe and Marks 2009). All crisis instruments considered here aim at a more effective coordination of macro-economic and fiscal policy-making between the member states and the members of the Eurozone in particular. The so-called ‘Six-pack’ is a package of six EU laws which made crucial changes to the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) that defines limits for governments’ budget deficits and countries’ overall public debt. Moreover, it introduced macroeconomic surveillance instruments and the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) which aim at preventing enduring trade imbalances between member states. Perhaps the most important institutional innovation introduced with the Six-pack legislation is the reversed qualified majority rule to put into effect sanctions for breaches of the SGP and the MIP, which are now applied automatically unless a qualified majority in the Council votes against the sanction’s application.

The European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) is a private law organisation based on an intergovernmental agreement between member states. It was meant to stabilise the fiscal situation in the Eurozone by providing governments with credit. Its original lending capacity (May 2010) was €440 billion, which was later (September 2011) extended to €780 billion (Figure 1). The intergovernmental European Stability Mechanism (ESM) replaced the EFSF in 2012 and has a maximum lending capacity of about €500 billion. Lending might potentially lead to large-scale financial redistribution between member states and the conditionality of these credits force lending governments to
enact wide-ranging changes in fiscal and economic policies. Finally, in March 2012 all EU governments, except the British and the Czech, agreed on The Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG). The TSCG also aims at restricting countries’ public deficits by prescribing the implementation of national measures, preferably of a constitutional character, to restrict and correct public deficits. Moreover, it provides for a greater coordination of member states’ economic policy-making. The TSCG thus complements the SGP and MIP and, just like these, has the potential to limit governments’ political discretion in fiscal and economic policy-making.

Germany is an important case to study politicisation during the Euro crisis due to the country’s current economic and financial weight and its strong political influence on the political dynamics and the course taken by the EU during the Euro crisis (De Grauwe 2013; Hall 2012). The extent to which and the way in which the Euro crisis is politicised in this country will, as a consequence, have a considerable impact on the content of the measures taken and the timing of their adoption. In addition, one could argue that, compared to other EU member states, German political parties and the German populace are relatively EU-friendly and populist and radical right parties have not played a role in the Bundestag during the period investigated here. Germany can thus be considered an unlikely case for the politicisation of the Euro crisis; politicisation might be considerably higher in countries where the party political and societal conditions provided a more fertile ground for politicisation.

In the next section, I will specify the theoretical framework that guides the empirical investigation. The theoretical section will be followed by a discussion of the empirical strategy applied in this paper and the data used for the analysis. Section four presents the empirical results and will be followed by a conclusion which relates the findings of this paper to the broader literature on the politicisation of the EU.

The politicisation of the Euro crisis in the Bundestag – drivers, frames and scope

Parliaments are a specific institutional venue for politicisation. While contestation also takes place in other settings, national parliaments are particularly well-suited to study political parties’ efforts to politicise EU politics as they play an important role for parties when it comes to debating EU politics (Auel and Raunio 2014a; De Wilde 2014). National parliaments’ institutional powers in EU politics have increased over time. However, they possess only few binding decision-making powers (Raunio 2009; Winzen 2012). Debates and political contestation in parliament therefore are the primary domestic political means for political parties to influence governments’ actions at the EU level and to hold them to account for EU-related actions (Auel and Raunio 2014a). The relevance of parliaments as settings for politicisation more generally is reflected in the
fact that those active in parliaments – political parties and government representatives – dominate public debates on EU politics as reported in newspapers (Koopmans 2007: 195). This paper’s investigation of the level of politicisation of Euro crisis measures in the Bundestag therefore provides more general insights into the political conflicts resulting from the Euro crisis in Germany.

It complements studies that have recently been published on parliamentary debates of the Euro crisis. In a comparative study of parliamentary debates on the EFSF which took place between July and October 2011 in eight EU member states, including Germany, Maatsch (2014) investigates the conditions that led political parties to speak out in favour of what she calls Keynesian or neo-liberal policies. She finds, amongst others, that political parties in lending states, irrespective of their ideological leaning, tended towards neo-liberal and those in creditor states towards Keynesian policies (Maatsch 2014: 112). Moreover, in a discourse theoretic study of six parliamentary debates that took place between March 2010 and November 2011 in the German Bundestag, Wendler (2014) investigates how political party representatives justify their party’s stances and behaviour during the Euro crisis along a pragmatic, an ethical and a moral dimension. He concludes that the statements by MPs are ‘articulated to a very large extent in principled normative – and mostly not in purely pragmatic – terms’ (Wendler 2014: 456; for a broadly similar argument see also Puntscher et al. 2013: 573).

While complementing them, this paper deviates from existing studies on parliamentary debates on the Euro crisis in a number of ways. Unlike Maatsch, this paper does not focus exclusively on the economic dimension, but takes into account all dimensions – economic, cultural and institutional – that have been shown to be constitutive for the political space constituted by conflicts in EU politics (Hooghe et al. 2002). Moreover, the paper adds a policy-centred analysis to the debate on politicisation. In addition, the framing analysis allows analysing political parties’ motives (not) to politicise different aspects of the crisis measures and thus links the discussion on politicisation directly to the broader literature on partisan dynamics in EU politics (Helbling et al. 2010; Hooghe et al. 2002). Finally, while research on parliamentary debates in EU politics points to the important role national parliaments play in creating a domestic political public for EU politics (Auel and Raunio 2014a; Maatsch 2014; Wendler 2014), it is hardly investigated whether or not parliaments are successful in this (for an exception see De Wilde 2014). By empirically investigating media reporting on parliamentary debates, this paper contributes to filling this void.

Politicisation in this paper refers to a process in which political parties deliberately increase the level of contestation in debates and decision-making processes on EU issues. The increase in the level of contestation not only refers to the divisiveness of an issue between a number of political actors but also to the spatial dimension of a conflict. To be considered politicised, conflicts need to travel beyond a restricted arena and reach a broader public (for similar
conceptualisations, see De Wilde and Zürn 2012; De Wilde et al. 2015; Hutter and Grande 2014). Media plays a fundamentally important role in drawing a broader public’s attention to EU politics (Schuck et al. 2011; Statham and Trenz 2015). Moreover, increases in the ‘scope of conflict’ (Schattschneider 1960) resulting from media attention are politically important, because they affect the power over decisions by asking decision-takers to better account for their decisions vis-à-vis citizens (De Vries et al. 2011: 23–5; Koopmans 2007: 183–4; Schuck et al. 2011) and to take into account a more diverse set of actors and interests (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 18–19; Schattschneider 1960: 16; Smith 2000). To analyse the scope of conflict of debates on Euro crisis measures in the Bundestag, this paper empirically analyses the coverage of these debates by TV news and newspaper reports (Figure 1). In line with recent empirical findings which found that conflict attracts media attention (Schuck et al. 2011; Van der Pas and Vliegenhart 2014), I expect media reporting to largely follow parliamentary debates. However, the link between levels of contestation in parliament and media’s attention to it will not be theorised in this paper.

Instead, the paper analytically focuses on two core aspects of contestation on the Euro crisis measures in the German parliament: first, the general political importance which political parties attributed to the Euro crisis measures in the Bundestag by debating them in the plenary (parliamentary salience), and, second, the ways in which parties framed the EU’s policy reactions to the crisis during these debates (framing). I will turn to the aspect of parliamentary salience first. In her study of national parliaments’ plenary agendas (2010–2012), Auel and Höing (2014: 1189) show that the Euro crisis was a salient issue, as parties focused a significant share of EU-related debates on it. However, given political parties’ limited resources and attention they have to pick carefully the issues which they address in parliamentary discussions. Since national parliaments only have limited binding powers in EU policy-making, the institutional and legal quality of measures should provide important incentives to engage with EU policies. I expect national parliamentarians to focus on those measures for which they can expect their parliamentary engagement to have an effect on the content of the respective policy. With regard to the Euro crisis measures investigated here, parliamentarians can expect such influence and therefore have an incentive to engage with, in particular, intergovernmental policies (EFSF, ESM, TSCG), as these need to be adopted by national parliaments to enter into force:

**Hypothesis 1 (policy instrument): intergovernmental measures are more heavily debated than supranational crisis measures by parties in parliament.**

Moreover, by framing policies in a particular way, political parties define problems, diagnose and evaluate their causes and prescribe remedies in ways which allow them to claim competence and increase a party’s influence on political debates and decisions. The framing of issues also allows parties to strengthen their general programmatic and ideological profile and thus win support from
voters and interest groups (Chong and Druckman 2007: 106; Helbling et al. 2010). As Entman (1993: 52) put it, ‘[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient …., in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.’ Three aspects of parties’ framing efforts will be considered here: the content of parties’ frames (frame content), the relative importance which they attribute to different issues, reflected in the frequency of their reference to these (frame salience), and parties’ negative and/or positive stance on the respective frame (framing position).

Three broad frame contents will be considered in this article: frames referring to economic and cultural aspects and those referring to institutional aspects of the crisis and of the political reactions to it (see Table 1). The economic dimension here refers to issues such as how state actors should organise economic growth, employment and fiscal stability as well as the extent to which the EU should institutionalise instruments to engage in redistribution between member states (Table 1; Closa and Maatsch 2014; De Grauwe 2013; Hall 2012; Wimmel 2012). The cultural dimension, on the other hand, refers to frames that relate to a national or European community and identity (Hooghe and Marks 2009), the positively or negatively evaluated consequences of national de-bordering (Bartolini 2005) that might go hand in hand with increased (fears of) migration and multiculturalism (Kriesi et al. 2012), the activation of regional and cultural stereotypes of specific politico-economic behaviour of ‘the South’ and ‘the North’ (De Grauwe 2013; Hall 2012), warnings or calls for restrictions in member states’ sovereignty and calls for or against solidarity with citizens in other countries during the economically hard times of the crisis (Bechtel et al. 2014). Finally, I will consider institutional frames which deal with support for or opposition to the (de-)centralisation of competencies and resources (Isebelis and Garrett 2000) effected by the Euro crisis measures investigated here. Moreover, the institutional dimension includes functional

| Generic frames | Issue subcategories |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Economic       | Growth              |
|                | Employment          |
|                | Fiscal stability    |
|                | Currency union      |
|                | EU redistribution   |
| Cultural       | Germany, national identity |
|                | Europe, European identity |
|                | National stereotypes (other member states) |
|                | Migration           |
|                | Sovereignty         |
|                | Solidarity          |
| Institutional  | EU centralisation/integration |
|                | Effectiveness of instruments |
|                | Democratic control/accountability |
frames addressing the crisis instruments’ (in-)effectiveness in addressing the perceived problems and normative arguments on the instruments’ effects on democratic accountability and control.

All three dimensions – the economic, the cultural and the institutional – have been shown to be constitutive for the ideological space in which political parties’ contestation on EU integration and EU policies takes place (Helbling et al. 2010; Hooghe et al. 2002; Kriesi et al. 2012). The politicisation and framing analysis in this paper therefore directly speaks to the broader literature on party politics in the EU. To arrive at expectations on parties’ framing behaviour in their discussions of the crisis measures in the Bundestag, I assume that political parties frame issues and take positions in line with their more general ideological and programmatic positions.

The first hypothesis dealing with the parties’ framing efforts relates political parties’ governing or opposition status to the positions they take with their frames. Since governing parties directly participated in the development of the political responses to the Euro crisis in the (European) Council, they can be blamed for the content and the consequences of these policies (Closa and Maatsch 2014). Given the decline in citizens’ approval of the EU during the crisis and German citizens’ scepticism regarding redistribution in the Eurozone (Bechtel et al. 2014: 841), opposition parties can try to win electoral support by criticising the political responses to the crisis. However, since centrist parties generally take pro-EU positions, I expect non-centrist opposition parties to be particularly critical of the crisis measures:

**Hypothesis 2** (status\*position): the more an opposition party moves from the ideological centre, the more critical are its statements on the crisis instruments.1

Governing and (pro-EU) centrist parties that are in opposition can, however, try to limit the potential for criticism by steering the debate towards contents which form a less fertile ground for criticism of the EU and the Euro crisis measures. They can try to do so by refraining from talking about the more contentious economic and cultural issues and frame the crisis instruments during plenary debates mostly in functional and technical terms and by focusing their statements on the instruments’ contribution to solving the crisis. If they follow this strategy, we would observe an increase in the salience of technical or functional institutional frame contents and a positive position on these by governing and pro-EU centrist parties:

**Hypothesis 3** (functionalist framing by governing and centrist parties): governing and centrist parties emphasise (functional) institutional aspects of the crisis measures.

Finally, differences in their framing of the crisis should be expected for different parties on the left. Socialist and communist parties have been shown to be critical of the EU since they see it as a neo-liberal project which decisively contributes to the dismantling of welfare states (Helbling et al. 2010; Hooghe
As a radical left party in the Bundestag, Die Linke is, in line with this general argument, expected to focus on increasing the salience of negative economic frames by criticising governments and the EU for misguided and counterproductive economic and fiscal policies. Green parties, on the other hand, might also be opposed to the EU’s economic policies. At the same time, however, green parties in Western Europe support the (multi-)cultural aspects of integration and are therefore expected to frame the crisis as an opportunity to show solidarity with citizens in other member states (Helbling et al. 2010: 502; Kriesi et al. 2012: 99–100):

Hypothesis 4 (left party division in framing strategy): left parties will be divided in their framing strategies. While green parties will focus on positive cultural frames, the radical (socialist) left will focus on negative economic frames.

Data and empirical strategy

The data on parliamentary discussions resulting from planned plenary debates, parliamentary questions, policy statements by the government (‘Regierungserklärung’) (Figure 1) in the Bundestag was obtained from the parliament’s online information system (DIP). To identify discussions on the economic governance instruments introduced during the crisis (EFSF, Six-pack, ESM, Fiscal Treaty), I did a keyword search using the full titles of these measures as well as their acronyms. This search led to the identification of about 200 parliamentary protocols of which only those were considered for empirical analysis (Figure 1) which contained a discussion, i.e. an exchange of arguments and positions between political parties in parliament (N = 53) (see online Appendix for more information).

Data on the extent to which German citizens did take notice of the debates is not available. Instead of empirically assessing the public recognition of these debates directly, this paper relies on a short cut by empirically operationalising the broader public attention received by the parliamentary discussions through their coverage in newspapers and TV news. Newspapers and TV news are constitutive elements of the public space and important sources for citizens to inform themselves about EU politics (Koopmans 2007; Schuck et al. 2011). In this paper two newspapers with a national reach (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)) and the Tagesschau, the main evening news on German public television (ARD), were selected as empirical sources. To be included in the analyses (Figure 1), the media reports needed to refer to the respective instruments and political parties’ arguments in the respective parliamentary debates (see online Appendix).

The frames were identified and hand-coded in a content analysis of the protocols of four discussions in the Bundestag’s plenary (see Figure 1, Debate 1–4). The four debates were chosen because they are relatively long
Figure 1. Parliamentary discussions of Euro crisis measures and their newspaper and TV coverage.
Note: Information on parliamentary discussions were taken from the Bundestag’s Online Information System (DIP).
and thus contain sufficient information to be analysed. Moreover, the debates were taking place close to or when specific decisions on the adoption or the application of the respective instrument were actually taken. Our coding of the statements of party representatives aims at identifying arguments – treated as *frames* in this paper – which relate to a specific aspect of the four crisis instruments. Depending on the speaker’s rhetoric, an argument could be made in one or more grammatical sentences (see online Appendix). Finally, actors’ positions on the respective aspect were captured by a trichotomous ordinal measure (positive = 1, neutral = 0, negative = −1).

The empirical analysis in this paper pursues descriptive and explanatory goals. The patterns mapped in Figure 1 and political parties’ frames and their positions provide information on core aspects of the politicisation perspective taken in this paper. The analytical leverage for causal inferences is taken both from temporal sequences (parliamentary debates -> media reports) as well as the co-occurrence of events (policy instruments -> extent of debates; a party’s ideology -> frames and positions).

The politicisation of the Euro crisis in the *Bundestag*: frames, conflict and salience?

The potential political, fiscal and financial impact of the four crisis measures on the EU’s member states investigated here should provide political parties with political opportunities and with incentives to politicise the political reactions to the crisis. Before I turn to the investigation of the content of some of these debates, I will discuss the extent to which parliamentarians and the media dealt with individual measures and the – macro – picture of politicisation emerging from this. As Figure 1 shows, the economic governance instruments introduced during the Euro crisis have been extensively discussed in the German *Bundestag*. Debates on the Euro crisis measures started with the adoption of the EFSF in May 2010 and the frequency of parliamentary discussions on the four measures considerable increased over time (Figure 1). However, parliamentary salience varies considerably between the measures. Most discussions were taking place between summer 2011 and summer 2012 when the decisions on the ESM and the TSCG were taken at the EU level and when the EFSF lending capacities were increased. Moreover, the extent to which German political parties have engaged with the four crisis measures varies considerably: while the intergovernmental EFSF (18 times), the ESM (17 times) and the TSCG (14 times) were discussed almost 50 times in the *Bundestag*, the supranational Six-pack, which consists of six EU legislative acts that were submitted by the Commission to the legislators in September 2010 and adopted by the Council and European Parliament in October 2011, received only scant attention and was debated only four times. The pattern of parliamentary discussion and the parliamentary salience it indicates supports the *institutional hypothesis* (*Hypothesis 1*), according to which
national political parties focus their political attention on those crisis policies which need to be adopted by national parliaments to become effective and on whose content parliamentary parties consequently can expect to have at least some influence.

From the politicisation perspective taken in this article, parliamentary debates need to reach the broader public to fully develop their political potential. The greater ‘scope of conflict’ resulting from the increased public visibility of a political confrontation increases the likelihood that parliamentary parties can influence policies as it forces the government to better explain its actions and the positions it took, both in Brussels and ‘at home’, when the EFSF, the Six-pack, the ESM and the TSCG were formulated and decided upon (Schattschneider 1960: 16). Figure 1 shows that political parties in the Bundestag were largely successful in their attempts to politicise the Euro crisis: the newspapers (FAZ and SZ) and the evening news (Tagesschau) closely followed the institutional and legal specificities, the political content and the dynamics of the parliamentary debates. Political parties’ success in reaching the broader public with their parliamentary debates can be illustrated by the high (Pearson) correlation between the number of parliamentary debates and the extent of the newspaper and TV coverage, which is 0.86 ($p = 0.000$) and 0.84 ($p = 0.000$) respectively.

Only the newspaper coverage in May 2010 and June 2012 deviates considerably from this general pattern, as reports strongly exceed the debating activities in the Bundestag (Figure 1). The reports’ content indicates that newspapers’ heightened attention in these two months was triggered by a number of factors. In both periods newspapers reported quite extensively and in considerable detail on the technical and institutional specificities of the EFSF and the ESM, which were adopted in the two respective months (Figure 1). Moreover, the newspapers were extensively covering intra-party conflicts in the governing parties (CDU, FDP) and the tension this created within the parliamentary party and between the deviating minority of parliamentarians and the government. Finally, the newspapers reported on the content of the debates between the different parties and the SPD’s and the Green’s attempt to exchange their support of the ESM with the government’s pledge to campaign for a financial transaction tax.

One could argue that the causal relationship does not run from political parties’ strategically motivated debating activities to media reporting but is perhaps more complex and reciprocal. This is very plausible, since a rise in media attention on a political topic will increase parties’ incentives to deal with it in order to sharpen their political profile. Yet it is impossible here to empirically assess the relative extent to which parties’ programmatically and ideologically motivated considerations on the one hand and the incentives created by the media context on the other contribute to debates on Euro crisis measures in the Bundestag. The fact that the reports refer to the policy and party-political specificities of the parliamentary discussions does, however, allow the conclusion
that parties’ political mobilisation efforts in parliament did have a causal effect on public visibility of the Euro crisis measures in Germany.

Finally, the data used and the analyses conducted in this paper do not lend themselves to a direct assessment of the effect that party politicisation of the Euro crisis measures had on the German government’s behaviour and the positions it took during the negotiations in the (European) Council. However, at least for the early phase of the crisis and the adoption of the EFSF and the Six-pack, the patterns depicted in Figure 1 suggest that domestic party politicisation had a strongly limited effect on the German government’s political leeway as there were either no discussions during the drafting of the proposals (Six-pack) or the discussions took place when the basic features of the measures were already decided (EFSF).

After having discussed the extent to which German political parties in the Bundestag debated the political measures taken during the Euro crisis, I now turn to the ways in which the parties contested the measures and the German government’s actions. It has been argued above that the institutional – governing or opposition – status of a party has an effect on the framing positions which political parties take in the parliamentary discussions (Hypothesis 2), as opposition parties might try to politically benefit from the unpopularity of the crisis measures by criticising them and the government’s crisis-related behaviour. However, while the three opposition parties – Die Linke, B90/Die Grünen, SPD – indeed took a more critical stance than the two governing parties – CDU and FDP – the positional analysis also shows that it was only the socialist party Die Linke which voiced strong criticism and almost exclusively took negative positions in the debates (Table 2). The statements of the Greens were balanced and representatives of the Social Democrats took, on average, a slightly positive position. The Euro crisis thus did not lead to a destabilisation of the pro-EU consensus among the majority of German political parties (for a similar assessment, see Wimmel 2012; Wendler 2014). The largest opposition party, the Social Democrats, was stuck in a strategic dilemma during the formulation and adoption of the four Euro measures investigated here: while they had serious doubts about at least parts of the measures, they at the same time did not want to leave the pro-EU consensus of the EU’s centrist parties (Marks and Wilson 2000). Their fear that strong criticism of the measures might have been mistaken as a criticism of European integration more generally, led them to refrain from voicing strong criticism and to take an overall positive tone in the Bundestag discussion investigated here.

The analysis of the content of parties’ contestation reveals that political parties in Germany used all frames that were considered in this paper – economic, cultural, institutional (Table 1) – in their discussions in the Bundestag. German parties attached most salience to economic and institutional frames: 40 per cent of all frame contents identified in the parliamentary discussions on the EFSF, the Six-pack, the ESM and the TSCG belong to these dimensions respectively.
Table 2. Party political frames in the discussion of four Euro crisis measures (EFSF, Six-pack, ESM, TSCG) in the German Bundestag.

|                   | Die Linke | B90/Die Grünen | SPD | CDU/CSU | FDP | Total |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------|-----|---------|-----|-------|
|                   | –         | 0              | +   | –       | 0   | +     |
| Economic          | 12        | 2              | 2   | 2       | 5   | 7     | 8    | 11   | 2     | 4     | 9     | 4     | –     | 22   | 27   | 13   | 87   |
| % of all frames/party | 44       | 26             | 31  | 46      | 46  | 40    |
| Culture           | 3         | –              | –   | 1       | 6   | 6     | 3    | 2    | 16    | 1     | 1     | 15    | –     | –     | 8    | 8    | 9    | 45   |
| % of all frames/party | 9        | 38             | 25  | 15      | 14  | 19    |
| Institutional     | 15        | –              | –   | 9       | 1   | 2     | 17   | 9    | 11    | 8     | 3     | 32    | 5     | 7     | 11   | 54   | 20   | 56   |
| % of all frames/party | 47       | 35             | 44  | 38      | 40  | 41    |
| Position          | –0.9      | 0.03           | 0.1 | 0.8     | 0.6 | 0.3   |
| Overall N         | 32        | 34             | 84  | 112     | 57  | 319   |

Note: Information on frames and positions in absolute numbers. The position of each party was calculated by the taking the average of all positions (– = −1; 0 = 0; + = 1) across all categories (see Helbling et al. 2010). The positions can vary between −1 (strongly negative) and +1 (strongly positive) with 0 indicating a neutral position or a position in which positive and negative arguments were balanced.
With a share of 19 per cent, cultural frames were considerably less salient in parties’ disputes over the rights and wrongs of financial aid and economic governance in the Eurozone (Table 2).

If parties relied on economic frames, they attributed most salience to ‘growth’ and ‘fiscal stability’ frames (see Table 1). These two make up 24 and 39 per cent of all economic frames, respectively. With a share of about 76 per cent, both parties took mostly positive framing positions on these aspects during plenary debates in the Bundestag. In addition, parties in general spoke out in favour of the ‘currency union’ (95 per cent positive framing positions), while they framed redistribution organised at the EU level mostly negatively (63 per cent negative framing positions). Moreover, with a respective share of 15 and 13 per cent of all economic frames, these aspects were given limited salience by party representatives. Importantly, however, parties targeted different aspects of ‘EU redistribution’ with their negative framing: Die Linke was not speaking out against redistribution in general but criticised that the money is used to bail out banks instead of financially supporting citizens in the countries struck by the crisis. And while representatives of the governing CDU and FDP were generally opposed to redistribution across member states, the SPD took a positive position on the issue and was asking for redistribution to help citizens in crisis countries.

Of all institutional frames, 49 per cent dealt with questions of ‘democratic control and accountability’ and another 33 per cent with functional issues such as the ‘effectiveness of instruments’. The debate on the effectiveness of the instruments was strongly polarised with the opposition’s – Die Linke, B90/Die Grünen, SPD – negative assessments on the one hand and the positive assessments of the governing CDU and FDP on the other. An opposition–government dynamic also characterised the use of frames related to democratic control and accountability: More than 40 per cent of the positions taken on this frame were negative and it was primarily the opposition which highlighted these aspects in the debates on the crisis measures. In addition, the institutional centralisation at the EU level resulting from the measures played a minor role during the debates. If parties brought it up they were to a very large extent assessing it positively. Finally, if political parties used cultural frames during their discussions in the Bundestag they were most often (45 per cent) referring to a ‘European identity’ and, with about one-third of the cultural frames, to ‘solidarity’ with citizens in other member states. The positions taken on both frames were mostly positive (78 per cent). While the opposition parties drew most heavily on solidarity frames, government parties were responsible for one-third of positive frames related to solidarity and European identity and they used these to justify their actions and the crisis measures.

The expectation that the governing and other centrist parties try to frame the crisis discussions mostly in functional–institutional terms to increase the technical, i.e. effectiveness-related, aspects during the debate and shift the focus away
from the politically more contested economic and cultural (Hypothesis 3) must be rejected. While institutional frames played an important role in governing parties’ contribution to the Bundestag discussions, economic aspects were more often addressed by both the CDU and the FDP. In addition, when employing institutional frames, both parties dealt quite extensively with issues of democratic control and accountability, i.e. the non-technical–institutional aspects of the Euro crisis measures. The CDU referred mostly in a positive way to democratic control in its discussion of the Euro crisis measures, as this example shows: ‘I pledge in favour of explicitly providing for the formal involvement of the German Bundestag if we found the ESM, if we activate the ESM’ (CDU; Debate 1, Figure 1; own translation).

The Social Democrats, the largest and at the same time centrist opposition party, also strongly relied on democratic control frames (two-thirds of its institutional frames). Unlike the CDU, however, the SPD used these to criticise the government: ‘The question, however, is: how do you inform this parliament for one year about all things that are related to the Euro and to the budgetary crisis? You inform us bit by bit’ (SPD; Debate 1, Figure 1; own translation). Actually, more than 50 per cent of all negative frames employed by the Social Democrats dealt with democratic control. Relying in its critique strongly on this frame allowed the SPD to stay, in line with its general ideological positioning (Bakker et al. 2015) and as argued above, within centrist parties’ broad consensus on the policy substance of the Euro crisis measures without, at the same time, refraining from criticising the government parties for their actions during the Euro crisis.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 expects non-centrist leftist parties to attribute different levels of salience to different frame contents and to differ in their positioning on the respective frames. Radical left parties oppose the EU’s current (economic) policies as they consider them a threat to welfare state provision (Marks and Wilson 2000), while green parties’ support for integration is strongly related to their post-material and multicultural political agenda (Helbling et al. 2010). The parties are therefore expected to frame the crisis in fundamentally different ways. These expectations are not confirmed. Die Linke worked towards increasing the salience of the economic dimension by heavily relying on (negative) economic frames (44 per cent of all its frames) and B90/Die Grünen put strong emphasis on two cultural aspects (Table 2): ‘European identity’ and ‘solidarity’. At the same time, however, both parties voiced considerable concerns on institutional aspects and strongly criticised the lack of ‘democratic control’ and raised doubts about the ‘effectiveness’ of the instruments.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has empirically investigated the extent to and the ways in which political parties in the German Bundestag discussed important measures that were
intended to address fundamental flaws in the fiscal and economic governance architecture of the Eurozone. It has been argued that institutional – H1 and H2 – as well as party-ideological – H3 and H4 – incentives have a systematic effect on the extent to which political parties discuss the EFSF, the Six-pack, the ESM and the TSCG in the parliament and on how, as regards content, parties frame the measures as well as on the positions they take during these discussions. The institutional arguments have been broadly confirmed and do account for the parliamentary salience reflected in the variation in parliamentarians’ debating activity (Figure 1, Table 2). The empirical analysis of the micro-patterns of political parties’ framing efforts in the debates, on the other hand, did not provide support for H3 (focus on functional frames by governing and centrist parties) or for H4. While, regarding H3, the governing parties relied on efficiency frames during the parliamentary debates on the crisis measures (about one-tenth of all frames of both parties), they also engaged heavily with economic aspects. Both governing parties and the liberal FDP in particular stressed the importance of fiscal stability for debtor states. This is in line with Maatsch’s (2014) finding of pro-austerity positions of parties in creditor states. At the same time, and in contradiction to her structural reasoning on country-wide positions, opposition parties were negatively assessing what they considered too narrow a focus on fiscal stability and saving and were speaking out in favour of spending measures to stimulate growth in crisis countries.

The data used in this paper does not lend itself to statements on the salience of the Euro crisis relative to other political issues debated in the parliament. Rauh (2015: 128) shows that there has been an increase in the absolute number of EU references in the Bundestag’s plenary debates during the last two decades. This is in line with the findings of Auel and Raunio (2014b: 22), who at the same time, however, find that the plenary time spent on debating EU issues in the Bundestag averages around 4 per cent per year over the last 10 years. From the politicisation perspective taken in this special issue, however, the more relevant question is whether and to which extent parties managed to reach a broader public when debating the Euro crisis. An increase in the scope of conflict following from the visibility of conflicts forces the government to better account for its contribution to management of the crisis and might lead to political dynamics which shift the content of the debate as well as the power in actual decision-making.

The macro-patterns of parliamentary contestation presented in this paper (Figure 1) show that the parties in the Bundestag successfully managed to politicise the redistributive and regulatory measures adopted during the Euro crisis to improve the fiscal and economic governance in the Eurozone: major German newspapers as well as the main evening news reported extensively and in considerable detail on almost all parliamentary debates. This holds true, although the level of conflict between the parties during the parliamentary debates was modest. In contrast to recent work on the politicisation of EU politics (Hooghe
and Marks 2009; Kriesi et al. 2012), however, the paper empirically demonstrates the relevance of the economic and the institutional dimension in the politicisation of the Euro crisis by German political parties in the Bundestag (see Table 2). Reducing the politicisation of EU politics to cultural issues, such as questions of identity, and to the mobilisation of right-wing populist and radical parties thus gives us an incomplete picture of politicisation.

At the same time, the fact that the ‘Six-pack’, which was adopted in the supranational decision-making mode by EU institutions at the EU level, hardly received any political attention during the parliamentary debates investigated in this paper, can be interpreted as the limited potential for politicisation of ‘routine’ EU (legislative) politics. If these six legislative measures with their potential to significantly circumscribe member state governments’ and parliaments’ leeway in economic and fiscal policy-making were hardly debated in the Bundestag, it seems very unlikely that everyday decision-making and legislative politics more generally will be politicised any time soon and that EU policy-making will move beyond specialised committees, expert groups and collective action of special interest groups. If, however, the argument on institutional instruments (H2) is correct, greater and binding co-decision rights of national parliaments might lead to greater and public contestation of everyday politics in the EU and thereby increase the potential for democratic control of EU decision-makers.

To conclude, this paper demonstrates that complementing a macro-perspective on parliamentary debating activity and a micro-perspective on partisan framing and contestation provides a useful analytical angle to study the domestic politicisation of EU issues. The work presented in this paper could be extended in various ways. It would, amongst others, be interesting to further investigate the relationship between parliamentary contestation and media reporting as well as the effects which the timing of politicisation has on the dynamics of decision-formulation and decision-taking. Moreover, to learn more about the effect of parties’ ideology, programmatic and electoral incentives on the one hand and their framing strategies on the other, a comparison of EU issues and non-EU issues would be needed. If, as some have argued (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kriesi et al. 2012), EU integration leads to an increasing importance of cultural and identity conflicts, we should observe the discursive strategies of parties to differ remarkably between EU and non-EU issues.

**Note**

1. Party positions from Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 2010 (Bakker et al. 2015): *Position on integration*: 1 = strongly opposed – 7 = strongly in favour/position on economic left–right: 0 = extreme left – 10 = extreme right/position on gal-tan: 0 = extreme left – 10 extreme right. CSU: 4.8/6.5/7.8; CDU: 6.7/5.7/6.3; FDP: 6.7/7.3/3; SPD: 6.2/4.1/3.6; B90/Die Grünen: 5.7/3.5/1.2; Die Linke: 3.2/1/3.3.
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