Contesting Membership in European discourses: Politicization and Patterns of Change in Support for Accession in the EU Parliament

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INTRODUCTION: MEMBERSHIP DISCOURSES IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, FROM INCLUSION TO EXCLUSION

With the European Union experiencing its first withdrawal process, persistent controversies about Turkey's accession and rising tension with Russia over territorial issues in Europe's far East, regional integration is at the heart of growing contention across Europe. Increased contestation about the level and scope of European expansion are building enlargement issues into a political plebiscite on what it means to be European, and where should EU's limits lie. As shown by Brexit, membership issues are becoming increasingly divisive and politicized at the domestic level, along with the rise of exclusive and nationalistic discourses (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016). Conversely, at the supranational level, the Council and the Commission continue to strongly endorse territorial inclusion, defining enlargement as a "key policy of the European Union" (Council, 10374/18), based on "fair and rigorous conditionality" (Commission, 2018). At the intersection of this seemingly growing gap between inclusion by principle at the EU level, and rising exclusion narratives within the member states, lies the European parliament (EP).

As a European institution, the EP has been instrumental in upholding the EU's interest, which has traditionally meant wide-ranging support for further integration in general and enlargement in particular (Hix et als, 2006:495). But as an elected institution, its composition and orientation also depend on European citizen's votes. And as the past two European elections have seen a growing number of Eurosceptic voices joining the EP's ranks, disparaging positions towards European integration are gaining momentum (Hobolt, 2014).

In light of these contextual and institutional changes, this paper seeks to explore whether the European parliament is growing more politicized, that is to say more partisan, less supportive and more divided over accession issues. It also aims to evaluate the impact of the rise of Euroscepticism on the EP's position on enlargement and regional integration. The European Parliament is often portrayed as a stronghold for integrationist support and a defender of European expansion (Brak, 2012), and up until recently, securing EP's support for further integration was seen as little more than a formality. And even if some resistance to enlargement has crossed time and party lines, its effect remained limited by three factors.

First, no meaningful cleavage can explain support and opposition to membership by MEPs. In recent history, opposition to membership has not been the default position of any one group in parliament. While pro-European actors may oppose membership over concerns that it could dilute the EU or prevent further deepening, Eurosceptic actors may support it for the same reason (Leconte, 2010:6). Ideologically diverse and scattered across the political spectrum, opposition to accession has proven challenging to generalize. Second, despite their endurance, the relatively low number of anti-membership actors has prevented the possibility of strong influence over political decision (Brack, 2017). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there has never been a sufficient number of MEPs opposing membership to form a majority alliance strong enough to challenge the outcome. Because opposition was spread out and in the minority, support for membership systematically dominated the conversation, and conflict over membership remained marginal (de Wilde, 2007). Finally, opposition in parliament has stayed largely invisible as an effect of institutional structure. Because the EP's decisions on membership are sanctioned by a simple majority vote, any opposition unable to challenge the majority is doomed to stay unaccounted for. Overall scattered, marginal and in the minority, opposition to membership seemed more on "the wrong side of history" (Katz, 2008: 152) than an actual threat to expansion policies.

This latter point is crucial as decisions about membership in the EP are structurally constrained by the parliament's limited possibility to provide legislative input. In 1986, the Single European Act introduced the Cooperation procedure, forerunner of today's Ordinary legislative procedure which vastly enhanced the legislative weight of the EP. Over the next 30 years, as part of this process, the EP's role

was progressively extended to co-legislator with the Council for most of EU's policy areas. As of the Lisbon Treaty (2009), only a handful of European policies remain outside the Ordinary legislative procedure, among which the accession process, which is determined by the *consent* procedure. By the consent procedure, the role of the parliament is limited to give assent to a Council decision, without the possibility to amend it, effectively by-passing the deliberative process. These strategies were implemented by the EU to depoliticize the enlargement process by reducing it to a technical process monitored by the commission and sanctioned by the Council.

But in its attempt to depoliticize membership issues by keeping the EP mostly outside the decision-making process, the Council has in fact foregone its negotiation channel to stem escalating discontent arising from a growing number of MEPs. Consequentially, MEPs *policy* concerns about a country's membership, which cannot be addressed by legislative means, exponentially manifest in EP's debates by opposition to *polity*, since it is literally all it can oppose. And paradoxically, by focussing almost exclusively on the fulfilment of technical criteria as a measure for accession, the Council fostered the instrumentalisation of its own conditionality *against* membership: a country cannot joint until it fulfils the conditions, thus enhancing the possibility to oppose membership without rejecting it by principle. In effect, this contributed to generate a space for controversiality about membership in parliament. This is especially relevant in the context of the recent election of a record number of Eurosceptic MEPs. The strengthening of the anti-European faction in the EP, putting at stake the majority support for membership, could initiate politicization.

Until now, politicization of European integration has been analysed essentially as a domestic phenomenon. Authors have defined politicization as the manifestation of increased political contentiousness towards the European political integration (de Wilde, 2011), triggered by rising authority of the EU over a growing number of common political and economic areas (de Wilde and Zürn, 2012), i.e. the increasing "Europeanization" of domestic politics (Börzel and Risse, 2008). Originating in a "nationalist reaction to perceived loss of community and national sovereignty" (Hooghe and Marks, 2006), politicization is shaped by the degree to which national identities are seen as inclusive or exclusive of other territorial identities, such as a European identity. Politicization can be found at the institutional level, where decisions become more determined by partisan politics (Hutter and Grande, 2014; Hoeglinger, 2016), the issue level, where an increase in salience and diversity of opinions on societal topics is observed (Statham and Trenz, 2012), or the decision-making level, in which political influence increases at the expense of bureaucracy (de Wilde, 2011; Christiansen, 1997).

In this contribution, we ask whether membership issues are growing increasingly politicized at the supranational level, in the EP deliberative process. Higher politicization would indicate reinforcement of partisan alignment of MEPs, as well as a general shift from the "integration bias" of the EUP.

Additionally, we seek to explain levels of support and polarization across parties and issues. Finally, we assess whether opposition discourses increasingly rely on exclusionary identity arguments to reject membership. This would suggest the progress of an essentialist discourse about European identity, breaking with the traditional inclusive quality of Europeanity.

By tracing individual MEPs positions about membership across issues for the last fifteen years, we do find both a rise in opposition and polarization of actors, which supports a politicization model. We also find the rise of opposition to be strongly associated with attitude towards the EU. Also in line with the politicization argument, geographical patterns of support show strong Eurosceptic cleavage, even after controlling for proximity and compliance, challenging the meritocratic notion that a country's membership depends primarily on the fulfilment of accession criteria. Finally, we find that exclusionary identity arguments are more likely to be used to reject a country´s membership, giving traction to the notion that politicization is effectively shaped by the mobilization of exclusive identities (Hooghe and Marks, 2006, 215).

RISING OPPOSITION TO EU MEMBERSHIP

Since the first European elections, the composition of the European parliament has been largely dominated by pro-European members with pro-integrationist positions. Far from being absent from parliament, opposition to deepening or widening the EU has failed to exert actual influence on policies and decision-making due to its scattered and *ad hoc* nature. But things have started to change. In terms of sheer numbers, Hobolt and de Vries (2016) note that, following widespread politicization of EU-integration issues, European elections recently shifted from second to first-order, putting integration issues as the forefront of the political debate. Increased competition over integration issues also led to a record high number of Eurosceptic members elected in parliament, disputing the pro-European dominance of the EP (Hobolt, 2014). At the individual level, Brack (2012; 2018) shows an expansion in strategic influence gained by Eurosceptic members in EP when they set aside their anti-system positions and work within institutional boundaries, which in turn serves to normalize and enhance their role as regular opposition in the EP. Altogether, dissent in parliament is more salient, more diverse and more in line with the current political landscape.

Additionally, notably because of the economic crisis and the prominent role played by the EU in dealing with its consequences, EU issues have been on the rise in national settings (Corbett, 2014). This contributed to the development of broader European policy positions by national parties looking to position themselves more clearly in the European political and electoral realm. And since both the composition and orientation of the EP is dependent on European citizen's vote, the EP should be

directly affected by changes in the domestic position and public interest about EU integration and enlargement issues. Taking into account the growing interdependence between national and European politics, the wide electoral gains from Eurosceptic candidates at the EP elections and the evolution of the perception of membership issues at the domestic level, we expect the debates in the European to evolve in a way that would emulate these political changes. As a general variation in position about membership in European parliament, we contend that:

(H1)   *Opposition and polarization towards membership issues in the European Parliament have increased through time.*

DRIVERS OF OPPOSITION IN THE EP

But is growing opposition towards further membership in the EP an effect of politicization, or an indication of poor performance of candidate countries on the conditionality scale? Taking into account the politicization of European issues at the national level, as well as the recent emergence of a significant pro/anti-European cleavage in the EP (Hix et al., 2018), we argue that rising opposition towards membership in the EP is consistent with the politicization of membership issues rather than a consequence of candidate countries compliance. In order to demonstrate this, we test both propositions.

Anchored in the European context, politicization refers to the manifestations of increased political contentiousness towards the European political integration, based on partisanship. As defined by the interaction between growing opposition to, and polarization over membership issues, politicization is assumed to be driven by a combination of structural and behavioural factors. Studies show that in the domestic setting, EU integration controversies are driven by Eurosceptic parties (Kriesi, 2016), fragmentation of mainstream parties on EU issues (Hutter and Grande, 2014) and supported by an increasing mobilization of exclusive identities and cultural frames in the debates. De Wilde and Zürn (2012; 2016) report politicization as an effect of increased authority of the EU over time: as EU institutions become more influential, they trigger both stronger support on one side, and "counter reactions to the EU policies and polity" on the other, which can lead to greater levels of polarization about the issue and constraining the extent of integration, especially when membership issues are at play (Hutter and Grande, 2014). Nationally, politicization is understood as a reaction to deeper and wider European integration. As we don't yet have information about politicization processes at the supranational level, or whether theses mechanisms really are at play in EU decision-making process, we settled on examining two alternative, or possibly complementary, drivers of opposition which take

up the analysis at the national level: political affiliations of actors on one side, and candidate country's merits on the other.

First, in line with the politicization hypothesis, we test whether increased Euroscepticism in the European parliament drives opposition to further enlargement. Studies find that the politicization of European issues at the national level has had significant effect on the composition of the European Parliament as a result of the 2014 election (Hobolt and de Vries, 2016). As far-right parties clearly position themselves on the Eurosceptic side of the political spectrum, the sanction came swift and clear for mainstream parties who lost 13% of their seats to the emerging vocal principled opposition to European integration. This turn towards far right Euroscepticism forced all parties to more clearly position themselves on the pro/anti-European scale (Hix et al., 2018), which itself created the conditions to spark the polarization of positions over European integration. In the current mandate, 30% of elected members of EU parliament are considered Eurosceptics (either from the right or the left), a net increase of 10% from the last parliamentary elections in 2009, where they stood at less than 20% (Treib, 2014). Although not yet in the majority and thus still holding little power over political outcome which necessitate a majority, Eurosceptic MEPs' growing influence in debates can no longer be ignored, as they now control a third of speaking time.

Eurosceptic MEPs are more critical of European integration and they recently gained enough seats in parliament to create a force along which EU detractors can align systematically or to promote specific agenda items. This leads us to frame our drivers' hypothesis as follow:

(H2)   Opposition to new membership is driven by Eurosceptic actors attitudes

But opposition to EU membership does not have to rest solely on political affiliation. For instance, MEPs who oppose the deepening of the European integration could still support the membership of a country who shows less interest in political union, and more in economic association. And when it comes to membership, one major factor for integration is the fulfilment of Copenhagen criteria, which requires that a country has the institutions to preserve democratic governance and human rights, a functioning market and accept the obligations and intent of the EU. Compliance with these criteria is measured on a yearly basis, and variations of a country's score would be a sensible tool to decide on one's support for membership. As a second potential driver of opposition, we content that a candidate country's level of compliance with EU's accession criteria impacts support for its membership. Furthermore, according to this merit-based approach, countries that display high quality of government should enjoy a higher level of support in parliamentary discourse. Indeed, in a meritocratic setting, it would be harder to argue against the membership of a country that is perceived as "well

governed" compared to others. In accordance to the aforementioned, we formulate the following hypotheses:

(H3a)   Higher levels of compliance are more likely to be associated with positive positions on membership

(H3b) Higher levels of quality of government are more likely to be associated with positive positions on membership

PATTERNS OF OPPOSITION

We also seek to unveil general patterns of support and opposition at the level of positions and the framing – how actors argumentatively support their position. If opposition is growing because a candidate country fails to meet the criteria, we would not observe significant differences between discourses of Eurosceptic and pro-European MEPs, as variations in positions would be an effect of compliance levels. On the contrary, differences are expected both in position and framing in the case of politicization, where partisan position towards the principle of membership is more relevant than a candidate country's performance in one's decision to support or reject accession.

When it comes to arguments supporting one's position, we look at how actors frame their positions about membership. To 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" (Entman, 1993). In a merit-based process, framing, or arguments over one's position, should relate to the level of compliance of a country with EU's conditionality, both in terms of procedures (fulfilment of conditions) or norms (respect for democracy, rule of law, human rights…). On the other hand, politicization contends that conflict over membership issues are shaped by the emergence of a clear exclusive position over European identity. When it comes to issue politicization, the role of identity and cultural arguments is pivotal in structuring support and opposition (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Hutter and Grande, 2014).

With regards to membership issues, to be recognized as "European" in the discourse is a condition *sine qua non* to join the EU, and the definition of who is "European" has traditionally been inclusive, thus enabling further enlargement (Bélanger, 2015). Conversely the mobilisation of essentialist, exclusive identity arguments against a country's membership creates a pattern of exclusion in the discourse. If a country's "European quality" is not recognized, it lies outside the space of Europeanity and is discursively excluded from membership for being "non-European". To show politicization, the partisan dimension has to be the divisive line between factions. At the domestic level, exclusive identity discourse is put forward and normalized by a growing number of far-right MEPs, and legitimized by its

resonance with nationalistic discourses, we would thus expect the same in the case of deliberations at the European Parliament.

(H4) Argument about identity, framed in an exclusionary context, are associated with opposition to membership.

DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

To assess incremental changes in support for membership in EU parliament, we created an extensive and original database of statements extracted from every debate about membership in the EP between 2004 and 2017. We collected and coded data from a total of 247 debates which took place in the European parliament over a period of 14 years between May 2004 and December 2017. We first identified relevant documents in the EP's public online database before coding each instance where an actor stated a position about a country's membership to any European organization (primarily the EU, but also NATO, the Council of Europe, Schengen, Customs Union, etc.). We use political claim analysis (PCA) for our data collection which combines actor and content oriented approaches to discourse analysis, to trace "shifting alliances and oppositions between actors that evolve in the dynamic process of a political conflict" (Koopmans and Statham, 1999: 6).

For this type of method, the unit of analysis is the statement. A statement is an actor's position about a country's membership to a European organization. For each statement, two main components are coded: context and claim. Context refers to the actor's characteristics (name, party affiliation, country of origin) and institutional setting of claim making (type of debate, date). A claim refers to a *position* (supports, conditional or opposes) about a *country's membership* in the EU (or other organizations), sustained by any number of *arguments*. In the EP over the whole period, a total of 6115 statements were identified and coded, including 19 246 different keywords as supportive arguments.

This research is empirically grounded: arguments are first identified directly from the discourse and later aggregated in wider recurrent frames. Since we do not use pre-defined categories, we first code keywords in natural language before aggregating them in wider categories. For this study, we are interested by the specific variation in the use of cultural and identity frames so we perform multiple levels of aggregation of arguments, first into 69 categories and then 10, to finally cluster the keywords into 5 general frames at the highest level of abstraction:

Table 1: Frames aggregation

Frame	Definition	Sub-frames

Procedural	Rules and conditions for membership	Criteria, Conditions
Normative	With regards to European order, European values and principles	Principles, Rule of Law
Identity	Relates to the concept of being or not being European	Culture, History
Strategic	Relates to EU security, stability, role as a regional power, relations with its neighbours, power struggles and geopolitics/geostrategic issues	Geopolitics, Security
Utilitarian	Conveys arguments about costs/benefits of enlargement for the EU, for candidate and future candidate countries and the region	Economy, Interests

In addition, we also measure the "hardness" of frames for each statement. "Hard" frame are ones that refer to essentialist qualities of a candidate or context such as culture, religion, identity, geography or sovereignty. "Soft" frames, by opposition, refer to transitional qualities of a candidate or context, such as criteria, economy, reforms and capacity. We attribute 0 to each soft frames, and 1 to each hard frames and average them at the statement level, getting a continuous variable between 0 and 1, where 1 is the hardest possible frame.

Despite steady participation in EP's debates of actors from the European commission (9%) and the European Council (6%), we focus on MEPs contributions (85% of total statements), observed at the party level. Because speaking time depends on political affiliation, political parties are central to the course of the debate and discursive production. Debates in the European Parliament are organized according to a strict procedure: after a declaration from the commission, the council and sometimes the rapporteurs of several committees, a first fraction of speaking time is divided equally between political groups. The remainder of the debate time is proportionally and alternately allocated to political groups. These structural rules insure that all political groups are represented at the level of their percentage of seats of the parliament. Because each political group is given a first round of statement by a representatives, smaller groups get a chance to actively participate in every steps the debate.

For this analysis, in addition to choosing to use only MEPs statements, we also make a selection with regards to the issue at stake. The most central issues in debates about accession are EU membership and EU candidacy, which also represent the two steps of enlargement, so we extract those. For the purpose of this study, we thus use a sample of 3437 statements including a total of 10 502 arguments from 577 individual actors belonging to 11 different political groups and concerning the accession process of 33 countries or groups of countries over a period of 14 years.

From the analysis of this data, we first seek to assess politicization by measuring whether debates about membership are growing more polarized through time, and if general opposition to membership is gaining traction in the EP. We then investigate potential drivers for opposition as internal factors, such as level of Euroscepticism and characteristics of the speaker, or external factors, such as compliance with conditions and principles and quality of government. Third, we look at whether or not political support for membership is effected by specific frames, as described above. Our variables of interest are defined and measured as follow.

1. POLITICIZATION

Since we are looking into changes at the institutional level, we use a wide definition of politicization, which we understand as increased political contentiousness towards accession to the EU. In domestic setting or for studies analysing media discourses, politicization is generally measured along three dimensions: salience, polarization and mobilization (de Wilde et al. 2016). For the purpose of this study, we use both position (the level of support for the issue) and polarization (the degree of divergence of positions on the issue) as a measure for politicization. Salience is not an issue in the EP because the EP as an institution debates EU enlargement regularly: the number of debates about third countries and EU membership is fixed and planned in advance, coordinated with country-cases reports. So salience is not expected to vary significantly or to influence the outcome. Mobilization is an important component of politicization as it measures the degree to which the issue is taken up by non-elite actors and thus assess its popularity and resonance. But it cannot be measured in the EP because the only actor represented are MEPs, which means it cannot reflect broader societal mobilization. As we look at issue politicization within the EU parliament as a by-product of domestic politicization, we assume domestic mobilization at an earlier stage in the process.

1.1 Position

Actors can position themselves in support for membership, against membership or offer conditional support for membership. Many positive statement are very straightforward: "we are in favour of the enlargement of the European Union to include all the Balkan countries" (Nikolaos Chountis, April 6th 2011, 245). But because it's open discourse, others are less direct: "Tomorrow when we have the opportunity to vote for the accession of Croatia to the European Union, it will be an expression and a manifestation of ideas and of the strength of European cooperation." (Gunnar Hökmark, November 30th, 2011, 475).

Negative positions oppose membership and can be expressed as follow: "For far too long, we have dishonestly dangled the prospect of EU membership in front of Turkey. You and I know there are so many reasons why it may not happen in our lifetimes: prejudice against a predominantly non-Christian nation, whose land mass is mostly in Asia; fears over Turkey's future voting weight in the European Parliament and Council; concerns over borders with Iran, Syria and Iraq as the EU seeks to extend its Common Security and Defence Policy" (Syed Kamall, November 22, 2016, 270). Or more directly: "today we are rushing through, at undue speed, an Association Agreement with the Ukraine, and as we speak there are NATO soldiers engaged in military exercises in the Ukraine. Have we taken leave of our senses? Do we actually want to have a war with Putin?" (Nigel Farage, September 16th, 2014, 339). Finally, conditional positions describe a situation that must exist before membership is possible or permitted.: "provided that Turkey complies fully with all the Copenhagen criteria (…), it can and should accede to the EU" (Adamos Adamou, May 21 2008, 428).

We define a decrease in pro-membership positioning by a relative decline of positive positions in MEPs statements during debates. We measure general position by averaging the three types of statements by year. Scores are calculated on a scale from 0 (maximum opposition) to 1 (maximum support) where 0.5 represent conditional support.

1.2 Polarization

Polarization of support is measured by assessing the EP cohesion on the issue-position using the Hix-Noury-Roland agreement index as follows:

$$AI_i = \frac{\max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\} - \frac{1}{2}[(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\}]}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

where Y represents the number of supportive positions, N the number of conditional positions, and A the number of opposing positions (Hix et al. 2005). On a scale from 0 to 1, the lower points signal highly polarized opinions within the parliament, and scores close to 1 shows high levels of cohesion on the issue (either on the support, conditional or oppose side). The main advantage of this index over other indexes used to measure cohesion (e.g. Rice's index of "voting likeliness") it that it takes into account the possibility of three different options rather than only two (for and against). This agreement index was designed to take into account the "abstention" vote in the EU parliament. We use it to include the "conditional" option of discourse. Party cohesion in EP votes is very high and often reaches over 0.80 points (Hix et al. 2005). This is not what we expect to find in the discourse. Because they are non-binding, positions in debates have the potential of being much more diverse than positions in votes. If

abstention to vote is rarely over 5%, conditional positions can reach over 50% so we expect much higher levels of polarization.

2. INDEPENDENT VARIABLE 1: EUROSCEPTICISM

As an internal driver for variation in position, we look into variations in levels of Euroscepticism in parliament. We measure Euroscepticism at the party level by aggregating every MEP's individual score in the Chapel Hill survey based on their national party of affiliation, for the three successive time periods (see Polk et al, 2014; Bakker et al, 2016). One of the questions of the Chapel Hill survey refers to the position of the party about European integration on a scale of 1 (strongly against) to 7 (strongly in favour). This means the lowest the score, the more a party is considered Eurosceptic. To improve interpretability of our analysis we inverse this scale so that higher scores are indicative of higher levels of Euroscepticism. We compiled these scores for each MEPs for the three time periods (2219 individual scores) and aggregated them at the party level. To check for consistency, we performed the same analysis for the other two political dimensions of conflict: right-left and gal-tan. For the analyses performed here, we use Euroscepticism at the party level, but changes at the individual level can also be observed with this data.

3. INDEPENDENT VARIABLE 2: COMPLIANCE

As an external driver for change in position, we investigate candidate countries level of compliance with EU conditionality (Copenhagen criteria) and fundamental principles as reflected in general quality of government (democracy, human rights, rule of law). Membership to the EU presupposes the fulfilment of a number of formal criteria and principles and the level of a country (non) compliance with these conditions could impact MEPs position about this country's membership. To measure compliance with EU's principles, we use the country's score on the Worldwide Governance Index, which reports aggregated governance indicators over six dimensions[2]. To measure compliance with the Copenhagen criteria, we use a dataset on compliance by Böhmelt and Freyburg (2013) (see also Solveig and Wunch, 2019), that estimates a country's degree of compliance with EU standards from findings in the Commission's annual country's progress reports. These reports act as cue for MEPs to get insight on each country's degree of compliance with EU standards and principles.

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[2] Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, Control of Corruption (http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home)

To determine whether membership issues have become politicized in the EP through time, we first measure variations in position and polarization through time. The parliament's position on membership issue is calculated on a yearly basis by averaging all positions (on a scale from 0 to 1 where 1 represents the highest support). The issue polarization, which represents the degree to which the parliament is divided on the question of membership, is obtained by calculating the agreement index of the parliament by year, on a scale of 0 to 1 where 1 represents the highest possible agreement level, which is to say the lowest polarization. A combination of rising opposition and high polarization would indicate issue politicization.

We then move on to explain the drivers behind the shift of positions in the European Parliament. There is established literature on the causes of EU integration controversies at the domestic level; however, very little is known about the determinants of the same phenomena on the supranational level. Even though some similarities may exist between the two, this assumption needs to be tested to confirm our stand on national politics can also be applied to the European level. We use multilevel regression analysis to further examine our hypotheses on factors that determine position on enlargement in the european parliament. To do so, we aggregate the data on the speaker-candidate country level for each parliamentary period. Bringing the data from the statement to the speaker level we are dealing with the uneven distribution of statements between speakers, caused by the fact that some MEPs are much more active and repetitive than others. This enables us to estimate linear models with random effects for origin of the speaker and issue country, without them becoming too complex to converge. In doing so, we lose some observations to the aggregation process, however, we hold that the overall discourse during each parliamentary period is still accurately represented.

Our estimation strategy is based on 6 linear models[3] that progressively include additional variables, corresponding to our main hypothesis and theoretical considerations, as indicated above. The first model includes only our main independent variable and the intercept. The second, third and fourth models include some factors other than attitude towards the EU that might influence the speaker´s position. Due to data availability issues for the "Compliance" and "WGI score" variables, our sample is constrained for the third and fourth models. The fifth and sixth models address the effect of Identity frames as well as the interaction between Identity arguments in an exclusionary (hard frame) context.

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[3] As mentioned above, models 2 through 6 include random effects for the referenced candidate country and the speaker´s origin. Different specifications that control for political affiliation (e.g. on the national level) do not seem to alter our main findings substantively.

When it comes to the corpus of statements, membership to the EU is the most discussed topic for 74% of the observations, EU candidacy representing the remaining 26%. In terms of actors, the distribution of statements by party corresponds closely to the share of seats by party in parliament with a slight advantage on smaller parties, which are often on the either far sides of the political scale (see annex 1). 577 different actors take then floor over the period: the median individual intervention is 14, the mode is 2. One actor speaks over 100 times (Charles Tannock, UK, EPP), the second in line is Elmar Brock (Germany, EPP) with 60 interventions. 411 actors speak 5 times or less, among which 175 speak only once. The share of overall statements by year varies from 4% (2014) to 13% (2006) and the most discussed country is Turkey (also the only case getting on average less than 50% support), followed by Macedonia and Serbia.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for most debated candidate countries

	Total	Turkey	Macedonia	Serbia	Croatia	Montenegro
Share of Statements	1.0	.27	.09	.08	.06	.04
EP Position	.65	.43	.68	.74	.81	.73
Agreement Index	.21	.20	.35	.48	.58	.63

Finally, in terms of frames, out of the 10 500 keywords, arguments are distributed as follow:

Table 3. Distribution of frames

Normative	Strategic	Identity	Procedural	Utilitarian
.33	.27	.18	.15	.06

Unsurprisingly, normative frames are most common as they refer to the core principles of European integration. Maybe more unexpected is the small share of utilitarian statements, challenging the importance of economic and interest-based considerations. Representing almost 20% of overall arguments, identity is also a wide-used frame in membership debates, which confirm its analytical relevance.

When it comes to the distribution of positions through time, as a broad trend, support for membership in the European parliament has decreased over the period, losing about 12% of overall support, and up to 25% from the 2014 to 2017 period alone, which also corresponds to the 8th session of the European parliament. Despite this loss, position about membership remains positive for most of the period, only crossing the 50% line in 2016. On average, polarization is also on the rise, with the general agreement index going from .25 on average in the 6th session of parliament (2004-09), to .06 on

average in the 8th (2014-17), very close to maximum polarization (.00), which would imply perfect distribution of positions across the three possibilities (support, conditional and opposition). Support is the most popular position overall (.48) and for 11 of the 14 years studied. Conditional comes second with an average of .35 of statements and is the leading position in 2004 and 2016. Finally, opposition represents on average .17 of statements, and it's the most popular position in the last year of the dataset, 2017.

Figure 1: Evolution of support and polarization of positions about membership in the EP

Average yearly position and agreement index
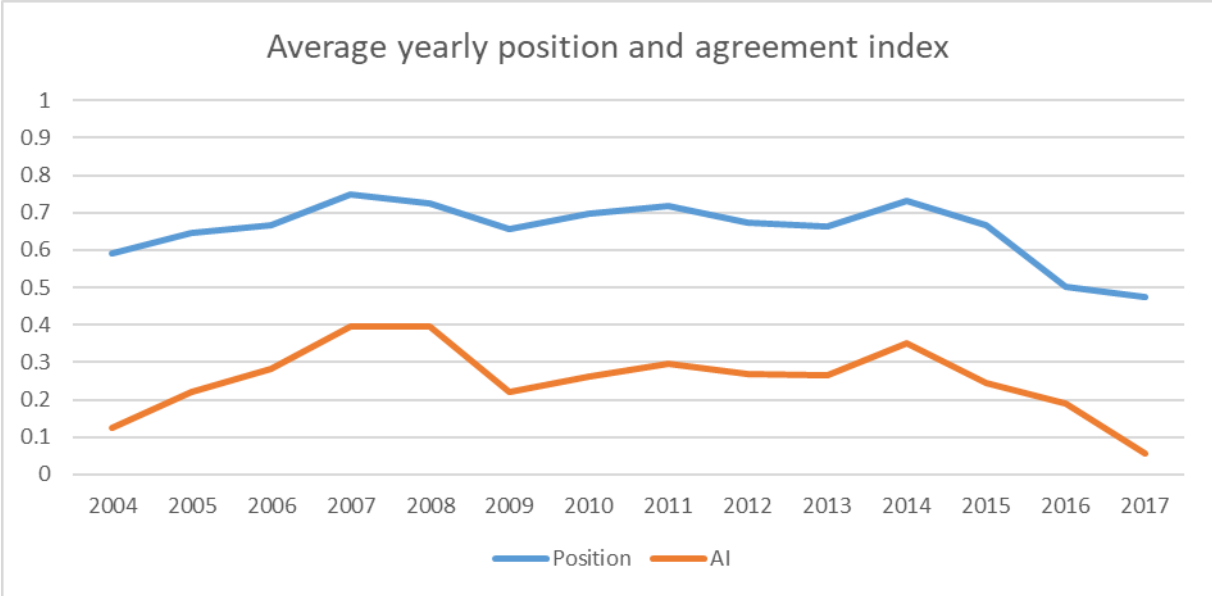
As expected from what has been observed at the national level, positions about membership in the EP are less supportive at the end of period than at the beginning. But negative development is not evenly distributed across the period as positions only systematically decrease from 2014, the last session of the EP. When it comes to the agreement index, it first goes up considerably, and more polarization only occurs in the last EP. Moreover, and even though pro-European MEPs largely dominate the political landscape over the whole period, the average position drops below the majority threshold for two consecutive years at the end of the period, indicating significant changes in the overall position of the parliament on the issue as well as an important drop in support. At the same time, this does not indicate that all positive positions have turned to negative since higher levels of polarization actually show a more even distribution of positions across the three different options, which shows a transfer from positive to both conditional and negative positions.

Results: analysis of drivers and patterns

Turning to the results of our regressions, it is first worth noting that the effect of our main independent variable, opposition towards the EU, is statistically significant and consistent across all models. This allows us to exclude the null hypothesis of no effect, and reinforces our confidence that opposition to membership in parliamentary discourse is largely driven by Eurosceptic actors (H2). The pro/anti-European cleavage is the most salient to explain position on membership issues in the EP, which is consistent with expectations in the literature about the rise of pro/anti-integration as the main political cleavage trumping both the right/left and the gal/tan divisions.

Our independent variables regarding procedural compliance ("Compliance") and quality of government ("WGI score") have very small effects, that are far from statistical significance at conventional levels. Therefore, we cannot reject the null hypothesis and find no evidence to support hypotheses H3a and H3b. This could have important theoretical implications, as it seems that meritocratic indicators are unable to predict support for enlargement, at least in terms of political discourse in the European Parliament.

In terms of frames used, we find no evidence that Identity related ones are used to oppose membership in themselves. On the contrary, it appears that arguments about identity are generally associated with support for membership. However, we do find that when identity arguments are framed in an exclusivist manner, that is to say within a "hard" argument, there is a negative association with support that is highly significant. This is consistent with our last hypothesis and expectations that the politicization process brings higher levels of exclusionary identity arguments, even in the European context where identity has generally been constructed as inclusive.

Beyond our main hypotheses, other effects can also be observed. More specifically, we find that representatives of the older member states (pre 2004) are more hesitant towards further enlargement. This makes intuitive sense to us, as it is consistent with established literature on enlargement fatigue, as well as the fact that most of the Eurosceptic political movements that are relevant today originate from older member states. It is also an established pattern that countries at the external borders of the EU are more likely to favour enlargement to neighbouring countries.

Results

		Membership Position				
	1st	**2nd**	**3rd**	**4th**	**5th**	**6th**
Euroscepticism	−0.121***	−0.083***	−0.080***	−0.080***	−0.081***	−0.076***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Before 2004		−0.101***	−0.118***	−0.124***	−0.105***	−0.124***
		(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.035)
Compliance			−0.072	−0.069		−0.065
			(0.045)	(0.049)		(0.049)
WGI Score				−0.017		−0.021
				(0.060)		(0.059)
Identity					0.048***	0.036*
					(0.014)	(0.021)
Identity*Hard (Exclusive)						−0.094**
						(0.040)
Hard (Exclusive)					−0.033**	−0.006
					(0.017)	(0.029)
Constant	0.060**	0.344***	0.475***	0.475***	0.334***	0.472***
	(0.025)	(0.044)	(0.089)	(0.096)	(0.045)	(0.097)
Random effects	*No*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*	*Yes*
N	1902	1902	1235	1216	1881	1202
AIC		885.014	569.851	562.128	865.914	547.125
BIC		918.318	605.683	602.955	910.230	603.134

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .1$

In this paper, we addressed the question of whether the European parliament was growing more politicized, that is to say more partisan, less supportive and more divided over accession issues. We investigated the issue by analysing deliberations about membership in the European Parliament between 2004 and 2017. To summarize our main findings, we find evidence that enlargement issues have become increasingly politicized over the timeframe of our study, and that eurosceptic actors have played a fundamental role in this process. This is in line with other findings at the national level which show rising politicization of European issues in the last decades, linked to higher levels of opposition to European integration. It also confirms the shift in cleavages in parliament where the "U shaped" Eurosceptic divide is more salient to explain variation in position than the traditional economic left/right or social gal/tan division, which has also been recently observed in the EP voting outcomes. These results could be further explored by including more information about the framing of statements, as well as additional characterising for the speakers, with the purpose of explaining the causal mechanism in greater detail.

Moreover, we have presented evidence of a possible swift in parliamentary discourse on the EU level, as we find that meritocratic factors, such as compliance with the enlargement process and quality of government, are not significant predictors. This finding is particularly surprising, given that a similar pattern is not observed in national parliaments, and has important theoretical implications. Even though this finding is consistent under different model specifications, additional analysis should investigate it further, because our empirical models are constrained by missing variables in the proxies we use. Another explanation for this result could relate to the type of speakers included in the analysis. As mentioned above, the subset of the data used for this analysis excludes all non-MEP statements, meaning that actors from other EU institutions are not represented in our population. In most cases, the political affiliation of these actors can still be traced to parties on the European and national levels, however, because most of them speak on behalf of the EU executive, their discourse and individual characteristics are substantially different from the general population (for example: there are hardly any eurosceptic actors and their positions are almost never negative). Consequently, another direction for further research would be to investigate the differences between distinct types of speakers in the European parliament.

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Appendix 1: Distribution of statements by party

Session	Party	Frequency	Share	Seat Share	Difference	EU_Pos
600	1001	457	0.317582	0.36612	-4.85%	5.439881
600	1002	349	0.24253	0.273224	-3.07%	6.059538
600	1003	186	0.129256	0.120219	0.90%	6.063279
600	1004	93	0.064628	0.036885	2.77%	4.724
600	1005	96	0.066713	0.057377	0.93%	5.340858
600	1006	77	0.053509	0.056011	-0.25%	2.835259
600	1007	96	0.066713	0.050546	1.62%	2.088723
600	1008	85	0.059069	0.039617	1.95%	2.520158
700	1001	369	0.328	0.360054	-3.21%	5.658895
700	1002	242	0.215111	0.25	-3.49%	6.113756
700	1003	101	0.089778	0.11413	-2.44%	6.031401
700	1005	63	0.056	0.074728	-1.87%	5.61302
700	1006	53	0.047111	0.047554	-0.04%	3.128299
700	1008	75	0.066667	0.036685	3.00%	2.017847
700	1010	137	0.121778	0.07337	4.84%	3.261287
700	1011	85	0.075556	0.043478	3.21%	2.136511
800	1001	262	0.300459	0.292	0.85%	5.798275
800	1002	179	0.205275	0.252	-4.67%	6.118533
800	1003	98	0.112385	0.090667	2.17%	6.020455
800	1005	49	0.056193	0.069333	-1.31%	5.717203
800	1006	39	0.044725	0.068	-2.33%	4.619648
800	1008	42	0.048165	0.028	2.02%	1.277259
800	1010	105	0.120413	0.097333	2.31%	3.523664
800	1011	61	0.069954	0.057333	1.26%	1.425385
800	1012	37	0.042431	0.046667	-0.42%	1.330454