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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### AWAKENING THE SLEEPING GIANT? The euro crisis and EU issue voting in Germany

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the alterations in the forms of electoral contestation that occurred in Germany due to the Euro Crisis. The Great Recession has probably set in motion new windows of opportunity to awake the *Sleeping Giant* of European integration. Indeed, by increasing their entrepreneurial efforts on the EU issues, the German parties may have rendered this conflict more contentious, changing electoral behavior. To understand the nexus between the Euro Crisis and European integration politicization, this article analyzes the variations of the EU issue entrepreneurship achieved by the German parties between 2010 and 2014. Moreover, this work presents voting models, testing the fluctuations in the levels of EU issue voting. This two-step empirical research seeks to identify whether the Euro Crisis generated new entrepreneurial strategies, realigning the voters along the Pro-/Anti-European issue dimension in Germany.

**KEYWORDS:** Politicization, Voting Behavior, Party Strategies, EU Issues, European integration

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## 1. Introduction

During the Euro Crisis (2008-2014), Germany took the political lead within the Eurozone, being committed to pursuing the mechanisms for preventing new crises. In fact, the German government dominated the hard bargaining within the intergovernmental channels, which resulted in the signing of the so-called *Fiscal Compact* (Fabbrini 2013; Laffan 2014). While the German economy suffered less acutely from the recession than other countries (Rohrschneider and Schmitt-Beck 2017), the country was fully involved in the approval of the rescue packages for the debtor states (Schmitt-Beck 2017). By endorsing bailout measures for the insolvent countries, the government played a fundamental role in handling the crisis. Under the aegis of Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Bundestag approved rescue packages, conditioned to strict austerity measures for the debtors. Therefore, the debate on the crisis management may have peaked the domestic agenda, perhaps providing new incentives for politicizing the European integration conflict (Kriesi and Grande 2016). This debate had probably revolved around the question of the inter-state solidarity related to the rescue packages, triggering some radical ordo-liberal criticism (Grimm 2015).

The work aims at shedding light on whether the Euro Crisis had actually been a catalyst, creating the necessary conditions to awake the Sleeping Giant of a new conflict (Ejik, van der and Franklin 2007) and, thus, intensifying the impact of EU issues on German elections. Consequently, a research question arises: *How much has the Euro Crisis boosted a politicization of European integration in Germany, reshaping the party supply and the electoral preferences in the domestic elections?*

The Euro Crisis may have catalyzed a new source of electoral contestation in Germany, pitching the Pro-European parties against the Anti-European parties. Indeed, the government crisis management could have dampened the widespread consensus towards European integration, arousing latent Eurosceptic sentiments. A radical right formation, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), became an important party actor, probably channeling a growing opposition towards the EU. Although the literature on Germany has been extensive, it has constantly ignored the impact of EU issues on domestic elections (Hutter *et al.* 2016; Hoeglinger 2016). To analyze the politicization of the European integration conflict in Germany, this article aims at filling a space left vacated by previous overviews, linking party strategies with the voting preferences. In doing so, this work relies on a party-based notion of conflict politicization, assuming that the party elites play a fundamental role in activating new forms of electoral contestation.

This article is organized into three parts. The first section is a literature background, introducing the theoretical definitions and hypotheses. The second section deals with

the first empirical step, analyzing party entrepreneurial efforts on EU issues. Finally, the third section outlines the models of electoral preferences, assessing the increase/decrease of EU issue voting.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

### *2.1 The Pro-/Anti-European Dimension of Competition*

According to Anthony Downs (1957), the Left-Right dimension of political competition synthesized the major conflicting issues. In his view, political space was one-dimensional, determining partisan alignments and constituting the main source of political information and communication. To challenge this one-dimensional view of the policy space, the article will analyse the voter/party positions on a Pro-/Anti-EU dimension, formulating a mathematical representation in Downsean terms.

European integration is a multifaceted issue (Hutter *et al.* 2016), compounded by *constitutive issues*, *policy issues* and *general orientations towards European integration* (Bartolini 2005). However, Steenburgen and Marks (2004, 5-6) advanced the hypothesis of the establishment of a single general dimension, summing up the EU issues and varying from *less integration* (defending national sovereignty) to *more integration* (promoting supranational governance). By using a confirmatory factor analysis, Gabel and Anderson (2004) have found evidence that the EU policy space is fundamentally one-dimensional, loading a wide array of EU domains (single currency, defense, foreign affairs, trade policies, etc.). Van der Eijk and Franklin (2007) have contended that European integration constitutes a sort of *Sleeping Giant*, which, if awakened, has the potential to influence voting behavior. By formulating this hypothesis, they have measured the voters' orientations towards European integration along a single Pro-/Anti-EU dimension, showing well-defined and structured public attitudes within the electorates.

Similarly, this article refers to a single dimension, ranging from strong opposition to strong support of European integration. This range in positions on European integration is in line with this article's goals. Thus, the party and voter set of opinions on the EU integration policies are mathematically represented on a dimension, where "*actors located at one of the dimensions desire relatively 'less' European integration, and actors at the other end desire more*" (Ray 2007, 13).

The capacity of this dimension to constitute an orthogonal source of contestation remains a contentious question in the scholarly debate (Hix and Lord 1997; Hooghe and Marks 1999; Marks and Steenburgen 2004; Bakker *et al* 2012; Otjes and Katsanidou 2017). However, this work does not advance a hypothesis concerning a fully-fledged establishment of this issue dimension in Germany. Indeed, this empirical step would require an investigation on the potential interactions and correlations between the different dimensionalities of political contestation. Nevertheless, this work overrides this controversy, rather employing the politicization concept to assess the conflict transformations. The references on a set of voter/party preferences on the Pro-/Anti-EU issues are maintained as the theoretical background. Therefore, the objective is narrowed down by observing EU issue entrepreneurship and EU issue voting fluctuations as the determinants of a conflict politicization.

## 2.2 A Party-based Notion of Conflict Politicization

Hooghe and Marks (2009) have drawn up a politicization model based on the strategic interactions among parties. Without disregarding the institutional incentives and the public opinion trends, they have developed a concept, “*assuming that how an issue relates to major conflicts in a society, and whether it is politicized or not, are determined by political parties seeking votes and avoiding internal conflict, while constrained by their ideology*” (Hooghe and Marks 2009, 21). This contribution has appeared to be consistent with Sartori’s path-breaking work (1968), which regards the parties as the party system operators, channelling, deflecting, activating or reinforcing the conflict-lines within the polities. Grande and Hutter (2014) have also pointed out the efforts pursued by the political parties for activating new divides, though they have broadened the politicization notion by including societal actors.

This work defines on a conflict politicization as a *process of transformation of a previous non-controversial issue into an object of political conflict, mobilized by the parties, becoming a notable determinant for the voters at the elections.*

Therefore, the EU issues may enter the core of the political debate through the political parties’ strategic efforts. Parties have historically had at their disposal two main tactical devices – *Altering Issue Position* and *Altering Issue Saliency* (Meguid 2008). The *Altering Issue Position* stems from the Downsian spatial theory (1957), where parties in order to attract the votes would achieve positional shifts. However, party positions tend to be resilient over time, bound by their long-lasting reputation, which has been considered particularly inflexible on the Pro-/Anti-EU issues (Hooghe and Marks 2018).

Conversely, the *Altering Issue Saliency* revolves around parties' selective emphases on the different set of existing issues, compounding the policy space. Parties draw attention to those issues yielding advantages, while they try to deflect those regarded as detrimental to their electoral support (Budge and Farlie 1983).

This article argues that these strategic tools may act together to politicize European integration. Indeed, parties transform the electoral supply by jointly adjusting their issue position and issue saliency, which should not be necessarily analyzed as two separated techniques. Although the party manoeuvring in the policy space has been considered as residual, it stands out as a remarkable strategic device. Moreover, if a party polarizes its position on a certain issue, it will attempt to enhance its ascribed saliency. Conversely, if a party moderates its position on an issue, it will probably dismiss the issue from the political agenda. Therefore, the article observes the linkage between party manipulations on policy position and issue saliency to shed light on the politicization of the European integration conflict.

To measure the level of politicization in Germany, the saliency and positional yardsticks are combined into one single formula  $-(P_{eu} - MP_{eu}) * SP_{eu}$ ; the EU issue entrepreneurship (Hobolt and De Vries 2012).  $MP_{eu}$  is the mean party position in a national system, where  $P_{eu}$  is a single party's EU position and  $SP_{eu}$  is the emphasis attached by that party to the issue.

Hobolt and De Vries (2015, 1168) defined an issue entrepreneur as a party actor, highlighting an ignored issue and assuming a position, which deviates from the average position in the party system. These two scholars have found that challenger parties, those occupying peripheral positions in the party systems and not holding cabinet positions, were more likely to act as EU issue entrepreneurs (De Vries and Hobolt 2012). Nonetheless, this work does not advance a twofold hypothesis on the different party types – challenger versus mainstream – but it posits a systemic growth of EU issue entrepreneurship in Germany. It is worth noting that the Alternative for Germany (AfD), has probably seized on strategic incentives arising from the Euro Crisis. However, the hypothesis is that the mainstream parties have not adopted accommodative or dismissive strategies on EU issues, but have been likely to collide on European integration. Therefore, the first hypothesis arises: *Since the outbreak of the Euro Crisis, the German parties have been more likely to increase their EU issue entrepreneurship, thus, transforming previously neglected issues into a source of political debate (H1).*

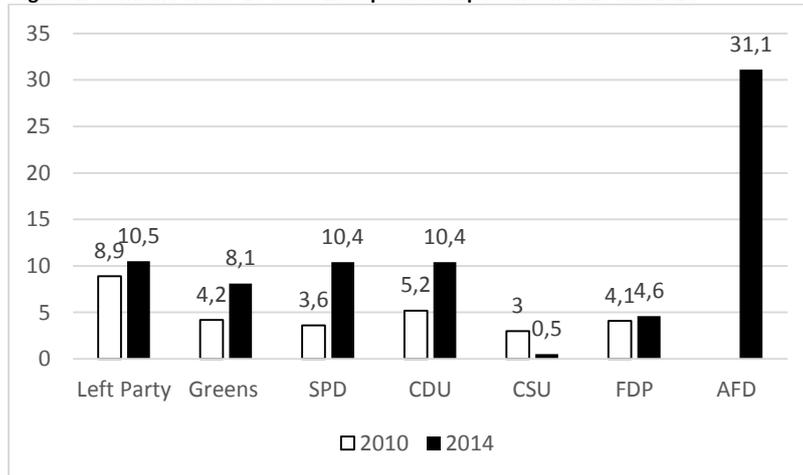
Nevertheless, the politicization of the European integration conflict cannot be based solely on party supply fluctuations, captured by the EU issue entrepreneurship. In fact, for a fully-fledged politicized conflict is necessary to find an interplay between party strategies and voter responses. Party strategies should spur voter reactions to set in

motion a conflict politicization, which will subsequently realign the electorate. This work seeks to test the transformative effects of the Eurozone crisis. Previous studies have demonstrated only some scattered and qualified effects of the EU issues on voting patterns in Germany (De Vries 2007; De Vries 2010). Though the post-crisis literature has underlined the EU issues' growing saliency in the German political debate (Kriesi and Grande 2016; Reher 2017), it has not empirically ascertained Pro-/Anti-EU outcomes as drivers of electoral preferences. To understand this potential phenomenon, this work deploys the EU issue voting notion, which is "*the process whereby individual preferences over European integration directly influence the voting choices in national elections*" (De Vries 2010, 92). Relying on the Downsian proximity theory (1957), the core objectives is to measure whether, since the onset of the Euro Crisis, the voters have been more likely to reduce their ideological distance from parties on the Pro-/Anti-EU issues. Thus, the second hypothesis arises: *Since the outbreak of the Euro Crisis, the German parties have increased their electoral preferences on the EU issues, which have become prominent electoral drivers (H2).*

### **3 Party Strategies on European Integration: EU Issue Entrepreneurship Fluctuations between 2010 and 2014**

The following paragraphs examine the EU issue entrepreneurship variations between 2010 and 2014, relying on the data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker *et al.* 2015). This dataset measures party positioning, using questionnaires submitted to party experts. The respondents were asked to assess the party position on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly opposed) to 7 (strongly in favour), summarizing the orientation of the party leadership towards European integration in general. The CHES relies on the experts' evaluations, which are not linked to a specific electoral campaign, exploiting a wide array of communication sources. The expert data stands out for its flexibility, including sources that do not appear in the party manifestos (Marks *et al.* 2007, 26). The aim is to observe the party entrepreneurial efforts on EU issues from 2010 to 2014, providing a snapshot of the German party debate. When a party increases its EU issue entrepreneurship score by at least one unit (Index: 2010), it will spark an Entrepreneurship Increase strategy, aiming at politicizing the EU issues. On the contrary, when a party decreases its score by at least one unit, it will achieve an Entrepreneurship Decrease Strategy, seeking to depoliticize EU issues.

Figure 1. German Parties' EU Issue Entrepreneurship between 2010 and 2014



Source: CHES.

This work carries out an EU issue entrepreneurship analysis of 7 parties in Germany - CDU, CSU, SPD, FDP, Alliance 90/the Greens, AfD and the Left. The Cristian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), led by the Chancellor Angela Merkel, has held the reins of power during the period under study, leading the country through the Eurozone crisis. During this span of time, the CDU has always been allied with its sister party, the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) and, until 2013, with the Free Democratic Party of Germany (FDP). After the 2013 general elections, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) replaced the FDP as the junior government partner, entering into coalition with the CDU and CSU. Since the foundation of the Bonn Republic (1949), these four parties have been the backbone of the German party system, remaining core actors after the Reunification (1990). In 1993, a new ecologist-libertarian party, Alliance 90/the Greens, was founded, resulting from the merger of the West Germany "Greens" and the East Germany "Alliance 90", rapidly becoming a relevant party actor and holding governmental positions within the Schroeder chancellorship (1998-2005). Furthermore, a radical left party emerged after the Reunification, the Left Party (LINKE), which was also a result of a merger, significantly capitalizing on electoral support in the Eastern Landers. Finally, in the aftermath of the Euro Crisis, a radical right formation, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), has profiled itself as a significant actor, winning 7.1% of votes in the 2014 EP elections.

In Figure 1, EU issue entrepreneurship levels are reported for the 7 parties between 2010 and 2014, observing the changes in party strategic efforts. This article examines the variations in party positioning and EU issue entrepreneurship between 2010 and 2014.

**The Left Party.** The Left party has repeatedly criticized European integration, turning out to be a Soft Eurosceptic party (Lees 2008), but never articulating a Euroreject position. Nonetheless, this party opened a breach in the broad Pro-European consensus, spreading some Eurosceptic political hints in Germany. The Left “*underlines that the European policies are wrong in dismantling the social security systems and leading to mass unemployment*” (Wagemann 2014, 51). Thus, the party has substantially opposed general integration by highlighting its liberal bias and democratic deficit (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2017).

In 2010, the party opposed the EU integration (3.3), being the sole Anti-European party in Germany. Therefore, the Left adopted an Anti-European identity, outlining a plain Eurosceptic supply (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2017). It is worth noting that this party was the major EU issue entrepreneur in 2010, standing out among the German parties. However, the Euro Crisis probably opened up further windows of opportunity for the Left to politicize the European integration conflict. Indeed, the emphasis on EU issues has progressively grown (5.6), taking up more space in the party platform and, thus, resulting in a strategy of entrepreneurial increase (+1.6). The Left Party mainly advocated for a stronger version of inter-state economic cooperation within the EU by backing a softening of the severe economic conditions imposed on the insolvent states. The party probably framed its Eurosceptic arguments by stressing the economic insecurities inherent to integration, reinforcing its ownership of equality issues. Thus, its Anti-European discourse followed the typical trajectory of Radical Left parties (De Vries and Edwards 2009).

**CDU:** The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) has always fully supported European integration, typifying the Christian Democratic tradition (Marks and Wilson 2000). In fact, this party has not dealt with the nationalist dilemmas of the European Conservatives nor has it contended with the economic inconsistencies of the Social Democrats. The CDU has rejected a nationalist ideology, embracing more cosmopolitan views, while it has recognized the market liberal economy as the fundamental channel for German economic development. The CDU political elite expected to take advantage of the establishment of the European free exchange area, subsequently dominated by German exports (Lees 2008; Bulmer and Paterson 2013). Thus, the German economic interests

were assumed to be linked to the process of European integration, achieved under the core aegis of the French-German political partnership (Paterson 2011). During Helmut Kohl's Chancellorship (1982-1998), as the CDU was aware that German unification would have been conditioned by further integration steps, the party was willing to lead the negotiations to ratify the Maastricht Treaty (Baun 2014). Consequently, the CDU's unalterable Pro-European reputation has appeared to be embedded in state-building, a preponderance of *ordo-liberal* principles and a deepening economic integration.

In 2010, under the leadership of Angela Merkel, the CDU clearly turned out to be the strongest Pro-European actor within the German party system. The first empirical round (2010) shows this trend, where this party adopted a very discernible Europhile position (6), being the strongest Pro-European entrepreneur in Germany (5.2), staking out positive references on the EU issues. During the Euro Crisis, the governing CDU faced many political dilemmas, especially those related to bailout packages for the debtor countries. Since the contagion effect became unavoidable, spreading to Portugal, Ireland, and eventually Italy and Spain, Merkel was fully engaged in preventing the Eurozone from falling apart (Bulmer 2014). The CDU mostly framed its Pro-European political discourse in utilitarian terms by highlighting the inherent assets related to the single currency, ensuring economic stability (Howarth and Rommerskirchen 2013; Grimm 2015). In doing so, the CDU was largely able to manipulate the Euro Crisis debate, impelling other parties to vote in favour of the rescue packages. Moreover, the CDU Chancellor manoeuvred broad negotiations within the intergovernmental channels to establish a new set of rules (Fabbrini 2013), which reached a climax in the Fiscal Compact Treaty. Angela Merkel clearly led a coalition of creditor states to create a more fiscally coordinated Eurozone. The Chancellor actually framed her Pro-European support by resorting to *ordo-liberal* principles and the Stability Culture (Howarth and Rommerskirchen 2013). Thus, the party provided voters with considerable Euro-Pragmatic shortcuts, justifying further integration steps by claiming national interests.

Despite the rise of the AfD, the CDU did not collude on Euroscepticism, maintaining its Pro-European reputation (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2017). While many European centre-of-right parties tried to dampen the electoral consolidation of extreme parties by embracing a qualified Euroscepticism, the CDU had a different policy strategy. Indeed, altering its credibility as a Europhile actor would have been a challenging political operation for the CDU, given its allegiance to the European project. On the contrary, the CDU level of EU issue entrepreneurship has intensified over time, revealing a noteworthy increase (+5.2). Although this entrepreneurship growth has been largely due to the polarizing effect introduced by the emergence of the AfD, the CDU has not avoided tackling the EU issues during the post-crisis period.

**CSU.** Although the CDU has never hosted within its ranks notable Anti-European party wings, its sister party, the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), has more recurrently expressed some criticism towards integration (Arzheimer 2015). According to Lees (2008), since the unification, the CSU has developed an anti-interventionist stand, contesting the European institutions' excessive interference in national affairs. In doing so, the CSU has never radically changed its Pro-European identity, being in favour of general integration, but it has advocated for the principle of subsidiarity at the EU level (Wagemann 2014). This party has opposed the Federalist bias of the European project, to safeguard its manoeuvring room in the German statehood organization (Wimmell and Edwards 2011). In 2010, the CSU displayed Pro-European attitudes but it achieved a modest entrepreneurship index (3). Subsequently (2014), the party further toned down the EU issues, being the only party that adopted an Entrepreneurship Decrease strategy in Germany. CSU's moderate Pro-European position was conducive to partially colluding with the AfD. The CSU apparently reacted by undertaking a more dismissive strategy towards the Anti-European cues raised by the AfD (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2017). Nonetheless, the party has ended up by decreasing its entrepreneurship (-2.5), exhibiting a very opaque position on general integration in its programme to eliminate this source of political contestation.

**SPD.** The Socialist Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) has historically had a complex and troubled relation with the European integration project. Indeed, the acceptance of integration would have meant the relinquishing of the Social Market Economy, which was the cornerstone of the SPD economic program (Paterson 2011). This party had actually endorsed state interventionism, welfare policies and redistributive measures, which were jeopardized by the neo-liberal bias of the European project (Marks and Wilson 2000). Nonetheless, the party positions on European integration underwent a marked shift under the leaderships of Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt. By refurbishing the SPD platform, Brandt and Schmidt developed a more favourable stance on European integration. During the 1990s, Schröder framed a Euro-Pragmatist narrative, whereby further integration was conditioned by compliance with German domestic interests (Sloam 2003). However, the SPD maintained its Pro-European attitude, gradually relinquishing a Social Europe project (Wimmel and Edwards 2011).

The 2010 empirical round was characterized by a widespread Mainstream party cooperation on EU issues, which had been uncontested by the SPD. In the first empirical round (2010), its EU issue saliency was quite important (6.9), combined with a substantial Pro-European position (5.9). However, this collusion strategy resulted in a very lim-

ited EU issue entrepreneurship (3.6), where the party did not strongly distinguish itself on the terrain of European integration policies.

According to Wimmel and Edwards (2011), the SPD have progressively resumed an outright appeal for a Social Europe. The outbreak of the Euro Crisis limited this party's manoeuvring room, suffering from the dominance of ordo-liberal principles inherent to the Stability Culture (Howarth and Rommerskirchen 2013). Angela Merkel owned the latter set of issues, steering the whole debate on the management of the Euro Crisis and marginalizing the SPD. In fact, when the debate revolved around the bailout packages for the debtor countries, the party ended up approving these rescue measures. Nonetheless, the party took a distinctive stance on this set of issues. Angela Merkel successfully justified these rescue packages as beneficial for national interests, while the SPD advocated for the mitigation of the austerity conditions for the debtors (Schmidt 2014; Schmitt-Beck 2017). Moreover, "*SPD leader, Sigmar Gabriel, called for the introduction of Eurobonds and far-reaching European reforms to effectively tackle the instability of financial markets arising from the insolvency risk of individual states*" (Grimm 2015, 267). When EU issues peaked to a systemic saliency in Germany, the Social Democrats emphasized a well-defined stand for a Social Europe (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2017). Indeed, the 2014 empirical round reflected the SPD entrepreneurship growth, which markedly increased (+6.8) compared to 2010. SPD achieved this by repositioning on many European social issues and by sustaining a stronger intra-state solidarity, consequently, dismissing the previous Euro-Pragmatist orientation. Moreover, it took on a more idealistic stance, becoming a supporter of Euro-Federalism. Therefore, the Social Democrats appeared to collide ideologically with the new Eurosceptic actor, the AfD, but it also contested the intergovernmental and neo-liberal policies undertaken by other Europhile parties.

**Alliance 90/the Greens.** Since the 1990s, the German Greens have gradually adjusted their positions on Pro-/Anti-European issues, becoming one of most consistent Europhile actors. The Pro-European leap emerged while they were junior partners in the Schröder cabinets. During that period, the party manifesto laid down many positive references to the general European integration. "*In terms of the benefits the Greens saw the EU as the platform from which the party's long-standing ideological objectives – international peace and cooperation, social justice, environmental protection and development, and the protection of the 'European social model' – could be achieved.*" (Lees 2008, 23-24).

Though the Greens have generally been strong supporters of general European integration, they have recurrently criticized its embodiment, stressing its lack of democrat-

ic accountability and the deficiencies of its social dimensions (Wimmel and Edwards 2011). Their petition for a stronger Social Europe was linked to the outbreak of the Eurozone crisis, contesting Angela Merkel's bailout policies. The Greens urged for more European redistribution to soften the burden of the insolvent countries (Grimm 2015; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2017). Though their Pro-EU positions have remained stable (6.2), the Greens have improved their entrepreneurship on the European integration conflict (+3.9), by underlining European Social issues. They have presented a Pro-European discourse, antithetical to the Euroscepticism introduced by the AfD, but also incompatible with the intergovernmental and Pro-Austerity cues adopted by the centre-right parties.

**FDP.** In spite of their early opposition to the first integration steps (Paterson 2011), the Free Democratic Party of Germany (FDP) subsequently adopted a Pro-European position, standing for the market-deepening processes and the free circulation of people and goods. Indeed, the FDP predominantly employed pragmatist and utilitarian arguments (Lees 2008), marking their distance from many other European Liberal parties (Marks and Wilson 2000). The German Liberals' main EU goal was to strengthen the Common Market, which could have resulted in valuable profits for German exports. It is worth noting that the party was significantly Pro-European in 2010 (6), though it did not achieve a remarkable level of entrepreneurship (4.1).

The Euro Crisis prompted internal divisions and ideological inconsistencies within the FDP. The Liberals approved the rescue packages for the insolvent states, warranting this choice with its strict austerity conditions (Grimm 2015). However, these bailout measures created divisions in this party, which led to the resignation of the party leader, Guido Westerwelle in 2011 (Huber 2017). By consistently leaning to the right of the ideological continuum (Arzheimer 2015), the voters expected this party to assume more conservative (or radical ordo-liberal) stances on EU policies. On the contrary, the party remained Pro-European, not resorting to channelling the anxieties related to the bailout policies. Although the party did not alter its position on EU issues, their entrepreneurial efforts languished, remaining stagnant in 2014. Hence, the FDP undertook a blurred strategy on EU issues in a context of growing politicization of the European integration conflict, whereas most political parties increased their entrepreneurship.

**AfD.** The rise of a Radical Right party was a landmark, epitomizing the resurgence of a nationalist ideology in Germany, which had vanished for decades. In the introduction, this work highlighted the hegemonic role played by the German government during the recession (Bulmer 2014), supporting the rescue packages for the insolvent countries

(Schmitt-Beck 2017). Angela Merkel steered these processes, claiming the absence of valuable alternatives and compelling other Mainstream parties to endorse these fiscal transfers (Reher 2017). The debate on the rescue packages seemed to have unleashed criticism towards the current embodiment of the Eurozone (Grimm 2015). Consequently, new incentives emerged to politicize Euroscepticism, which have been exploited by the AfD (Franzmann 2016).

Indeed, the Euro crisis weakened the permissive consensus on the general integration, magnifying a growing dissatisfaction with how the EU works. This latent Anti-Europeanism has been entrenched in the most radical interpretations of the ordoliberal principles, questioning the existence of the EMU. In April 2013, a group of intellectuals and journalists founded the AfD, which rapidly gained a sizeable organizational strength, establishing regional branches in all the German *landers* (Berbair, Lewandowsky and Siri 2015). Since its foundation, the AfD has contested the rescue packages, revitalizing strong ordoliberal criticism towards European integration (Grimm 2015; Franzmann 2016). The party rallied the voters around the eradication of the single currency in Germany (Reher 2017), which dominated the 2014 AfD policy agenda.

The 2014 empirical test shows that the AfD actually championed the European integration conflict in Germany, indisputably taking over the ownership of Anti-Europeanism. The saliency ascribed to the EU issues (9.5 out of 10) and its Anti-European stance (1.6 over 7) have been quite extreme and, consequently, the AfD met the criteria for *Single-issue Eurosceptic party* (Taggart 1998), reaching the highest score (31.4) of entrepreneurship among German parties. Though other parties increased their entrepreneurial efforts, it is clear that during the early stages of its political life, the AfD strongly prioritized European integration, boosting its politicization by injecting Eurosceptic cues. The AfD core program objective was the demand to withdraw from the common currency and reintroduce the German mark (Arzheimer 2015; Grimm 2015; Reher 2017). This party mobilized Anti-European sentiments in Germany by cueing those voters on anti-currency concerns. Consequently, AfD's agency may have been crucial in awakening the *Sleeping Giant* of the European integration conflict.

This article has showed that the AfD introduced a major polarization to break a Europhile consensus, producing a mobilization of Anti-European values among voters. Nevertheless, many Mainstream parties did not respond by decreasing their entrepreneurship, thus, clashing with this challenger. Most German parties were actually committed to tackling the EU issues, thus fuelling the politicization of the European integration conflict. H1 is substantially supported: *Since the outbreak of the Euro Crisis, most German parties have been more likely to increase their EU issue entrepreneurship, thus, transforming previously neglected issues into a source of political debate (H1)*. Conse-

quently, this open confrontation between Pro-European and Anti-European parties may have established a new ideological divide, conditioning voting preferences.

*Table 1 - Party Position, Ascribed Saliency and Strategies on EU Issues between 2010 and 2014 in Germany*

Party	2010		2014		Strategy
	Position	Saliency	Position	Saliency	Entrepreneurship Increase/Decrease (Index:2010)
Left	3.3	4.3	3.0	5.6	Entrepreneurship Increase (+1.6)
Greens	6	6.5	6.2	6.1	Entrepreneurship Increase (+3.9)
SPD	5.9	6.8	6.4	6.9	Entrepreneurship Increase (+6.8)
CDU	6	8	6.4	6.9	Entrepreneurship Increase (+5.2)
CSU	4.9	7.2	4.8	6.6	Entrepreneurship Decrease (-2.5)
FDP	6	6.3	5.7	5.5	Entrepreneurship Stability (+0.5)
AfD	N. A.	N. A.	1.6	9.5	N. A.

Source: CHES

#### 4. EU Issue Voting in Germany (2009-2014)

The second section observed the transformations in German party entrepreneurial efforts. Another clear-cut hypothesis is advanced (H2), where the Euro Crisis may have triggered changing party preferences, prompting the increase in EU issue voting. According to Van der Eijk and Franklin (2007), the lack of a party entrepreneurship has significantly hampered the awakening of the sleeping giant. They have explored public opinion polls on the citizen orientations towards a Pro-/Anti-EU dimension, observing the increasing electorate polarization on EU issues. However, they have also found that parties did not offer an electoral vehicle to voters, without significantly distinguishing themselves on Pro-/Anti-EU positions. This article has provided some evidence on the increase in a political entrepreneurship in Germany through the efforts of Pro-European and Anti-European actors. Therefore, the expectation is that the degree of EU issue voting has risen, becoming crucial in explaining electoral behaviour. Van der Eijk and Franklin (2007, 191) have mainly tried to measure a general Pro-/Anti-EU on a ten-point scale, relying on the European Election Studies (EES) questionnaire, which asked the respondents whether European unification has gone too further or should be

pushed forward. They were constructing a ten-point scale, corresponding to the Left-Right one. This article adopts the same gauge to verify the voter/party congruence on the Pro-/Anti-EU issues, resorting to linear regression models to investigate the impact of EU issues on voting preferences.

The models rely on Downs' (1957) *minimum distance* theory, based on the assumption - *voters are likely to choose a party that is closest to their issue preferences on the policy space to maximize their electoral utility*. The voter proximity to parties, along the Pro-Anti-European issue dimension, is expected to become a concurrent explanation in determining party preferences. To confirm this expectation, voting models are created, identifying the following variables:

- *Propensity of Voting* - The dependent variable is the voting propensity for each party included in the previous paragraph. The concept of *Propensity of voting* stems from Downs' (1957) notion of *party utility* - a system of individual voters' preferences, depending on the benefits expected by choosing a given party. The latter notion was revisited by Brug, van der, Eijk, van der, and Franklin (2007), who reversed its mere utilitarian connotation by identifying another analytical tool - the propensity to support a party (also labelled as 'party/electoral preference'). These authors also argued that voting choice, which has often been operationalized as a dichotomous variable between the governing and opposition parties, may overshadow the real explanation behind voter preferences. Consequently, voting propensity appears to be more thorough in accounting for party electoral strengths, thus, becoming our dependent variable.

- *Left-Right and Pro-/Anti-European Proximity* - This model assesses whether the voters are more or less likely to vote for a party, which is closest to their policy positions on the two issue dimensions under study. By advancing this empirical test, the assumption revolves around the rationality of voting behaviour, where voters increase their electoral preferences by ideologically approximating a given party (Downs 1957, Van der Eijk and Niemöller 1983). Thus, the two independent variables identified here are the Left-Right and the Pro-/Anti-European proximity, which are the concurrent explanations under investigation. If a voter increases their electoral preference for a party by consistently reducing their ideological distance from it, there should emerge a negative coefficient in the regression tables.

-*Control Variables* - The models include other variables to achieve an empirical control: *Party Closeness, Gender, Age, Education Years, Unemployment Status, Religiosity* and *Trade Union Membership*<sup>1</sup>. *Party Closeness* takes into account the effects of partisanship on voting preferences, predicting that those who feel closer to a given party

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<sup>1</sup> The variable operationalization is explained in the appendix.

will be more likely to vote for that party. Furthermore, two cleavage variables are considered: *Trade Union Membership* and *Religiosity*. The Trade Union affiliation controls for the resiliency of the class-cleavage, forecasting that those belonging to these associations will be more prone to vote for the left-oriented parties (SPD, the Left and, to some extent the Greens) and less motivated to support right-oriented parties (CDU and FDP). On the contrary, Religiosity controls for the survival of the religious/secular divide, expecting that the more religious voters would support these parties arising from a denominational background - CDU-CSU- while the more secularized ones would sustain parties stemming from the Socialist/Green/Liberal tradition – the Left, Greens, SPD and FDP. *Unemployment Status* seeks to achieve an empirical control for the economic consequences related to the Euro Crisis, predicting that the unemployed may have a major voting propensity for the Protest parties (the Left and AfD). To test our hypothesis, two regression tables are used (2.1; 2.2) for 2009 and 2014, empirically investigating the varying European integration impact on electoral preferences.

#### 4.1. 2009' Electoral Preferences

The 2009 electoral round showed a substantial impact of the European integration proximity on the party preferences, affecting three Pro-European formations – the CDU, SPD and Greens. This election revealed an interesting trend for the Social Democrats, where the voters' attitude on the Pro-\-Anti-European dimension outweighed the impact of the Left-Right dimension as a voting determinant. Thus, the EU issues were an electoral asset for the SPD, where many Pro-European voters rewarded the party, appreciating its Europhile stands. As well, the Greens electorally benefitted from European integration by adopting a discernible Pro-European stance. This party actually increased its voting preferences by employing Europhile arguments, steering the voters along this political divide.

The CDU maximized its electoral preferences along this issue dimension by attaching high saliency to these issues. The party proximity from voters on EU issues was a significant determinant, but not exceptional, being exceeded by other variables. In fact, the CDU mainly gained electoral benefits from its proximity to voters on the Left-Right conflict and the party-identifiers. This party also drew its support from church-goer voters, reflecting a resiliency of the secular-religious cleavage, while trade union members had a lower voting propensity for the CDU. This pattern mirrored the effects of cleavage-based voting in aligning the electoral preferences for or against the CDU.

Table 2 - Multivariate Regression Model of Electoral Preferences in Germany (2009)

2009	Left	CDU	CSU	SPD	Greens	FDP
	Coeff. (Se)	Coeff. (Se)	Coeff. (Se)	Coeff. (Se)	Coeff. (Se)	Coeff. (Se)
Women	0.0921 (0.154)	0.257 (0.219)	0.069 (0.570)	0.497** (0.189)	0.628** (0.194)	0.088 (0.200)
Age	-0.169 (0.092)	-0.148 (0.130)	-1.111** (0.366)	-0.455*** (0.114)	-0.199 (0.116)	0.228 (0.120)
Education	0.182 (0.109)	-0.011 (0.154)	-0.588 (0.423)	-0.107 (0.134)	0.260 (0.138)	0.151 (0.142)
Church Attendance	0.200*** (0.057)	-0.299*** (0.082)	-0.344 (0.204)	0.134 (0.069)	0.076 (0.071)	-0.204** (0.073)
Trade Union Membership	0.583*** (0.174)	-0.845*** (0.250)	-0.823 (0.666)	0.208 (0.216)	0.092 (0.221)	-0.626** (0.230)
Unemployment	-0.749 (0.635)	-0.726 (0.634)	-2.246 (1.587)	0.590 (0.548)	0.030 (0.562)	-0.141 (0.581)
Party Closeness	4.127*** (0.278)	4.135*** (0.277)	3.773*** (0.650)	4.583*** (0.269)	4.304*** (0.402)	-5.600*** (0.649)
Left-Right Distance	-3.772*** (0.398)	-6.141*** (0.725)	-6.674*** (1.865)	-1.821** (0.594)	-3.874*** (0.611)	-5.600*** (0.649)
European Integration Dis- tance	0.263 (0.423)	-0.849* (0.426)	-1.952 (1.644)	-2.249*** (0.380)	-2.848*** (0.384)	-0.448 (0.394)
Constant	1.899*** (0.568)	8.135*** (0.749)	13.75*** (1.978)	6.387*** (0.657)	5.166*** (0.673)	5.954*** (0.673)
N	889	763	125	888	889	885
R <sup>2</sup>	0.370	0.359	0.404	0.315	0.264	0.222

Note: \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

Source: EES 2009.

Both the CSU and FDP were not able to exploit the EU issues, which had not been a source of their electoral support. The Pro-/Anti-EU proximity coefficient was not statistically significant for the CSU<sup>2</sup>, demonstrating its weakness as a voting determinant. Meanwhile, the FDP gained its preferences from the traditional voting explanations (Left-Right proximity and Party Closeness), also relying on cleavage factors, where surprisingly religious rewarded the party.

The Left party developed a Soft Eurosceptic position, emphasizing EU neo-liberal bias. In doing so, the party distanced itself from the Mainstream Pro-European actors, being the unique Eurosceptic subject in 2009. Nevertheless, this actor did not electorally benefit from the Pro-/Anti-European proximity. Unsurprisingly, this party took ad-

<sup>2</sup> Since the CSU electorally operates only in Bavaria, the other German cases have been omitted from the model, only using the Bavarian.

vantage of the secular\religious divide, obtaining more preferences from the secular voters, also receiving trade union member support.

From the 2009 electoral observations, there emerges a solid support for the European Union, where the German voters did not express any substantial Euroscepticism in elections. The lack of a Radical Right Eurosceptic entrepreneur may also have conditioned the weak contentiousness of the general integration policies, not providing the voters with a strong Anti-European electoral outlet.

#### *4.2. 2014 Electoral Preferences*

This article hypothesizes that the Euro Crisis established the pre-conditions to boosting the politicization European integration, spreading Anti-European sentiments among the German voters. Indeed, the 2014 electoral round was characterized by the presence of a new actor, the AfD, which may have channelled these attitudes (Reher 2017). The AfD filled the Right Radical policy space, left vacated by German parties for decades. This party apparently stemmed from popular discontent for the EU, exacerbated by the fiscal transfers towards the debtor countries. Therefore, this work posit that the Euro Crisis laid the foundations for the spread of EU issue voting, weakening the Left-Right dimension in Germany.

The AfD actually increased its voting preferences, maximizing its positional proximity to voters on EU issues. This predictor overrode the strength of the Left-Right ideology in the AfD electoral equation. The AfD has benefitted from a further political division in Germany, moving beyond the traditional conflicts. This actor probably intensified the European integration politicization by adopting an extreme Eurosceptic position. However, other determinants have played an important role in affecting AfD electoral support, such as Party Closeness, which turns out to be a statistically significant coefficient. Thus, the AfD was able to shape a favourable set of positive predispositions for its own direct benefit, establishing a new source of political affiliation in Germany.

On the contrary, the other Eurosceptic formation, the Left party, did not maximize its voting support on this conflict. Left-Right commitments probably dominated its program, exclusively influencing the propensity to vote for this party. Although the Left rallied voters on an outright Anti-Austerity platform, it was unable to link the latter issues to the European integration conflict. The German radical left gained a positive reputation on inequality issues, seizing on the negative consequences of the austerity

policies. Nonetheless, the Left party did not benefit from Eurosceptic issues, which were solely exploited by the AfD.

However, many Mainstream parties reaped significant electoral payoffs from the Pro-/Anti-European dimension of contestation. The 2014 elections ushered in a new era for the CDU, boosting its Pro-/Anti-EU proximity coefficient, which increased its explanatory power. This electoral trend has been probably due its entrepreneurial efforts, with the party being more committed to priming EU issues. The governing CDU had to cope with bailout measures and new intergovernmental treaties, taking central stage in the integration processes. By cueing the voters on Euro-Pragmatist shortcuts, the Pro-/Anti-European proximity became a more important determinant of the CDU electoral support, boosting its impact.

The CSU also exploited its proximity to voters along the Pro-/Anti-European ideological divide, increasingly swaying the party preferences. While this coefficient was not a determinant in 2009, it became a notable factor in bolstering the probability of voting for the CSU in 2014. This finding is quite surprising, because the party actually decreased its entrepreneurial strengths, however being successful improving its voting preferences on EU issues. The CSU was one of the strongest austerity crusaders, expressing reservations on bailout packages, cueing voters on a moderate support for integration and, consequently, reaping electoral benefits. Conversely, the EU issues operated as a wedge for the FDP, which did not manage to benefit from this conflict. The voters probably expected the party to adopt more radical (ordo-liberal) stances and did not reward its blurred strategy on European integration.

This electoral round took place during a period of SPD strategic refurbishment. Indeed, this party endorsed social measures and market regulation, increasing its degree of EU issue entrepreneurship. The coefficient demonstrates the failure of the Social Democrats in steering the European agenda, revealing the declining impact of its Pro-/Anti-European proximity to voters as its voting determinant. The latter variable lost much of its explanatory power compared to previous elections and the SPD succeeded less in electorally maximizing its Pro-European values. The issue framing adopted by the SPD was an electoral liability rather than an asset, reducing its capability to gain from this conflict. Instead, Angela Merkel used a different discourse, attracting more support for her European policies. Therefore, the CDU managed to increase its voting preferences on Pro-/Anti-EU issues, depriving the SPD of its Pro-European constituents, being dissatisfied with the party commitments.

Table 3 - Multivariate Regression Model of Electoral Preferences in Germany (2014)

2014	<i>AfD</i>	<i>Left</i>	<i>CDU</i>	<i>CSU</i>	<i>SPD</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>FDP</i>
	Coeff. (Se)						
Women	-0.146 (0.145)	-0.008 (0.139)	0.501 (0.391)	0.501 (0.391)	0.256 (0.148)	0.368* (0.149)	0.050 (0.124)
Age	-0.084 (0.085)	-0.040 (0.081)	0.030 (0.098)	-0.352 (0.220)	-0.025 (0.087)	-0.290*** (0.088)	0.018 (0.073)
Education	0.214* (0.100)	0.212* (0.097)	0.135 (0.117)	0.157 (0.255)	0.253* (0.103)	0.591*** (0.105)	0.259** (0.088)
Church Attendance	-0.001 (0.038)	0.218*** (0.036)	-0.123** (0.044)	-0.217* (0.103)	0.059 (0.038)	0.029 (0.038)	-0.106** (0.033)
Trade Union Membership	0.0426 (0.195)	0.286 (0.188)	0.038 (0.225)	-0.631 (0.531)	0.161 (0.201)	0.434* (0.201)	-0.013 (0.168)
Unemployment	0.529 (0.316)	0.632* (0.301)	-0.130 (0.355)	-2.086* (0.862)	-0.262 (0.320)	0.149 (0.325)	-0.161 (0.269)
Party Closeness	7.076*** (0.505)	5.679*** (0.272)	5.423*** (0.199)	3.651*** (0.455)	4.755*** (0.185)	5.417*** (0.299)	5.836*** (0.564)
Left-Right Distance	-1.791*** (0.383)	-5.384*** (0.397)	-4.919*** (0.586)	-7.761*** (1.378)	-3.837*** (0.563)	-3.741*** (0.550)	-2.667*** (0.411)
European Integration Distance	-2.206*** (0.287)	-0.535 (0.379)	-0.861** (0.321)	-2.077* (1.019)	-1.181*** (0.284)	-1.485*** (0.298)	-0.442 (0.271)
Constant	3.152*** (0.496)	2.587*** (0.508)	5.119*** (0.580)	8.805*** (1.291)	4.478*** (0.513)	3.627*** (0.519)	2.365*** (0.421)
N	1141	1240	1071	162	1236	1234	1227
R <sup>2</sup>	0.234	0.466	0.527	0.584	0.422	0.338	0.139

Note: \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

Source: EES 2014.

The other centre-of-left party, the Greens, also experienced a deterioration in EU issues as a voting determinant. Its increasing petition for a social Europe probably resulted in being a weaker electoral tool, the voters seeing the CDU Europhile framing as more appealing. Though this variable lost a great share of its explanatory power, the Greens still relied on the European integration proximity to maximize their electoral support. Moreover, the party support gained a more pronounced socio-demographic profile, where the younger, the educated and women became more likely to vote for the Greens.

A watershed in the degree of EU issue voting actually took place between 2009 and 2014, as a result of the political entrepreneurship achieved by many parties, both Pro-

European (CDU, SPD and the Greens) and Anti-European (AfD and the Left Party). It is worth noting that the Pro-European parties may have created a further divide, which cut across the Europhile camp, pitching the centre-of-right parties against the centre-of-left parties. On the one hand, a Pro-Austerity camp, composed of CDU, CSU and FDP, advocated for the intergovernmental embodiment of the EU, conditioning the rescue packages to strict austerity measures for debtor countries. On the other hand, another pool of parties, such as the SPD and the Greens, were more in favour of Euro-Federalism, endorsing an inter-state solidarity to soften the fiscal burdens of the insolvent countries. Nonetheless, the AfD was the pivotal agent in politicizing Euroscepticism, exacerbating the divisions between Pro-European and Anti-European parties/voters.

2014 demonstrated that EU issue voting was more evenly distributed across the entire German party system compared to 2009, shedding light on the transformative effects sparked off by the Euro Crisis. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) is substantiated by the empirical analysis and the following statement is formulated: *Since the outbreak of the Euro Crisis, the German parties have substantially increased their electoral preferences on the EU issues, which have become prominent electoral drivers (H2).*

## 5. Concluding Remarks

This work argues that the German parties successfully politicized a previously neglected conflict, transforming it into a source of political contestation, which notably influenced the electoral preferences in national elections. Indeed, many parties actually seized on the opportunity to set underway a new ideological division, awakening the *Sleeping Giant* of European integration. It is worth noting that the AfD played a key entrepreneurial role in polarizing EU issues and, therefore, breaking a Pro-EU consensus among German parties. Thus, the *Giant* kicked and yelled to find a way out of his cave and the AfD took him by the hand, leading him out. Nonetheless, the Mainstream parties reacted to this move by conveying clear-cut Pro-European messages, without attempting to bring the *Giant* down and, consequently, contributing to the politicization of this conflict. Indeed, EU issues were emphasized by parties located across the entire Left-Right dimension, without exclusively being concentrated on its extreme fringes. Therefore, the Pro-\-Anti-European issue dimension became more politicized, with Europhile parties set against Eurosceptic parties.

The third part of the article confirms the increase in EU issue voting. In fact, since the outbreak of the Euro Crisis, voting preferences significantly revolved around a scale of

values, varying from Pro-European to Anti-European. The 2014 electoral round epitomized this pattern, proving the crisis transformative power, where chief political actors were electorally influenced by the European integration conflict. The increasing effects of EU issue voting affected the CDU and the CSU, which maximized their preferences along this issue dimension. Although the SPD and Greens saw a weakening impact of the Pro-/Anti-European conflict dimension, they maintained statistically significant coefficients by minimizing their distance from voters on EU issues. The AfD probably made a major attempt in reshaping the electoral supply for this conflict, prioritising a Eurosceptic political discourse and gaining electoral benefits from these cues. However, other Mainstream parties were able to manipulate the political agenda, converting a previously uncontroversial issue into a subject of contestation.

This trend strengthened the Pro-/Anti-European dimension as a fount of electoral conflict, bringing EU issues to the forefront of the electoral arena. Only a minority of German parties were electorally influenced by the significant effects of EU issues in 2009, while party electoral performances were more strongly conditioned by the European integration conflict in 2014. The voters may have reacted to new information shortcuts, adjusting their party preferences due to the parties' tactical efforts. Consequently, a politicization on European integration probably took place in Germany, coexisting with, but not overriding, the Left-Right ideological divide.

Moreover, there are two sets of conflict regarding European integration. This article has already maintained the rise of a political controversy with the Pro-European opposing the Anti-European parties. Nevertheless, another sub-conflict has occurred, which cuts across the Pro-European camp. This group of parties was divided between the supporters of intergovernmental EU and bailout packages (CDU and CSU), conditioned by austerity measures, and those advocating for European Federalism and debt-sharing policies, claiming the need for a Social Europe (SPD and the Greens). The last electoral round magnified this pattern, whereby the victory of the right-wing camp of Pro-European parties was unquestionable, gaining the largest consensus in Germany. Meanwhile, the other Europhile actors were less able to drive the preferences of the Pro-European voters, thus, resulting defeated. Thus, the Pro-/Anti-European conflict did not exclusively involve a Eurosceptic-Europhile divide, but also brought into play another type of contestation among the Pro-European actors.

In conclusion, many parties undertook major tactical efforts to initiate a new issue dimension, which increasingly conditioned electoral preferences. *Therefore, the European integration was transformed into an object of political contestation by means of the entrepreneurial efforts of the political parties, becoming a notable driving force for the voter preferences in Germany.*

It is worth noting that the politicization of this conflict is not simply the result of a division between Pro-European and Anti-European actors. Indeed, the increase in EU issue voting was also explained by the ideological divisions among the Mainstream parties. Many broad disagreements occurred over the current embodiment of European integration, which has remained a contested matter among the Pro-European actors. In a nutshell, the Giant probably freely walked through the German streets, the CDU, CSU, SPD and the Greens embodying his legs and arms, and the AfD his backbone.

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