A Giant Fast Asleep?

Party Incentives and Politicization of European Integration

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Hooghe and Marks (2009) have recently presented a new research agenda for the study of European integration focusing on the question of politicization, i.e. the role the issue plays in electoral politics across Europe. The overall aim of this paper is to respond to this new research agenda. Its theoretical argument is that the explanation for politicization or the lack of it should be found in the incentives the issue offers for mainstream political parties. This is in contrast to the existing literature which has focused on EU-sceptical extreme left or right-wing parties. The paper uses the Danish case as a crucial case study to show the limitations of the existing literature and the need to focus on the incentive of mainstream political parties. Empirically, the paper argues that expectations about politicization of European integration as just around the corner are misplaced. The giant is fast a sleep because those who could wake it up generally have no incentive to do so and those who have an incentive cannot.
Introduction

Hooghe and Marks (2009) have recently presented a new research agenda for the study of European integration\(^1\) focusing on the question of politicization, i.e. the role the issue plays in electoral politics across Europe. Moving this question to the top of the agenda of European integration research highlights the fact that our understanding of politicization – or lack of it – remains surprisingly limited (cf. Kriesi, 2009). Hooghe and Marks (2009) outline a theoretical framework for approaching the question of politicization, which a few other studies have approached empirically (cf. De Vries, 2007; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Kriesi, 2007).

The aim of this paper is to respond to this call for greater focus on politicization within European integration research. Its theoretical argument, which is developed on the basis of theories of party issue competition (cf. Green-Pedersen & Mortensen 2010), combined with insights from agenda-setting theory (Baumgartner et al. 2006), is that the explanation for politicization or the lack of it should be found in the incentives an issue offers for mainstream political parties (cf. Meguid, 2005). This is in contrast to the existing literature which has focused on EU-sceptical extreme left or right-wing parties (cf. Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Kriesi et al., 2008; De Vries and Edwards, 2009; De Vries, 2007; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008). Mainstream parties find European integration an unattractive issue for two reasons: First, party positions on the issue deviate from the left-right dimension, which is the basic structure of party competition in Europe. This makes the coalition building impact of politicization uncertain. Second, voting behaviour with regard to European integration depends crucially on how the issue is framed and this makes the electoral potential of EU scepticism unpredictable for mainstream parties. It becomes very difficult to judge in advance whether a mainstream party taking an EU-sceptical position would in fact have the electoral majority on its side. It will dependent on how the issue is framed.

\(^1\) EU and European integration are used synonymously throughout the paper.
The paper also differs from the existing literature in terms of research strategy. The question of politicization has typically been approached by studying electoral politics around European integration in a comparative perspective (De Vries, 2007; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Kriesi, 2007). Instead, this paper studies politicization of European integration drawing on one country, namely Denmark, but including the entire political agenda not just the issue of European integration. This strategy has two advantages. First, Denmark can be seen as a “crucial case” (Gerring, 2007) for the existing literature on politicization of European integration. The factors that the literature presents as conducive for politicization such as EU-sceptical extreme parties and referendums are all clearly present in the Danish case, but, as will be argued below, without these factors leading to politicization of European integration. Second, the drawback of a cross-national comparative strategy is that it offers limited variation to be studied. As argued by Van der Eijk and Franklin (2007), the issue of European integration is a “sleeping giant”. European integration has rarely been politicized. Therefore, studying the issue cross-nationally provides limited understanding of the factors that could lead to politicization thus making it hard to explain why it does not come about. However, the Danish case makes it possible to compare European integration with other issues, particularly the environment and immigration, which have become politicized.

**European integration – a giant fast asleep?**

In their outline of a new research agenda for European integration studies, Hooghe and Marks (2009) focus on the question of politicization, which refers to the role of European integration in electoral politics in Europe. More precisely, politicization can be defined as a matter of saliency, i.e. that the issue is high on the agenda of political parties as well as the electorate.

The background of this focus is an argument that increasing politicization since the Maastricht process in the early 1990s has made public preferences increasingly important for the development
of the European Union. The question of politicization has been on its way in the European integration literature before (e.g. Marks and Steenbergen, 2004; Van der Brug and Van der Eijk, 2007; Bartolini, 2005: 309-62), but existing studies offer diverse perspectives on politicization of European integration:

Some studies analyze variation in party attention to European integration, mainly in relation to election campaigns (Kriesi, 2007; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004) focusing on factors like the role of the EU-sceptical parties at the extreme left or right, and internal party disagreement (cf. Hooghe and Marks, 2009: 18-21). This is in line with other studies focusing on EU scepticism among political parties as an “opposition” party phenomenon (Sitter, 2001), and internal party conflicts on the issue (Aylott, 2002). Other studies focus on explaining salience of the issue at the electoral level focusing again on the role of party polarization due to EU-sceptical extreme parties (De Vries, 2007; De Vries and Edwards, 2009), or the “spill over” effect from referendums (De Vries, 2009; cf. also Hooghe and Marks, 2009: 20).

The diverse character of the existing literature implies a need to choose an analytical starting point for developing the understanding of politicization. Should one focus on parties or voters? On national elections or referendums? This paper focuses on party behaviour with regard to European integration or more precisely the attention political parties pay or do not pay to the issue. The premises for this choice, which will be substantiated in the empirical parts, is that it also provides a fruitful starting point for understanding the role the issue plays for the electorate and the role of referendums.

Further, the literature is highly influenced by the “sleeping giant” metaphor launched by Van der Eijk and Franklin (2007) (cf. Kriesi, 2009; Börzel and Risse, 2009): The issue of integration is thus characterized by on the one hand a pro-EU consensus at the elite level including most political parties that form governments, and on the other hand a widespread EU scepticism among the
European public, highly visible in the recent referendums outcomes. This situation raises the question of why the issue is not politicized by political parties challenging the pro-EU consensus?

The theoretical implication of this question is that we need a theoretical model that can explain which issues political parties pay attention to. What are the issues that become central to party competition? Hooghe and Marks (2009) present their considerations, which focus on the role of electoral incentives, internal party disagreements, and the role of “niche” parties focusing on a particular issue like the EU, as a general model of issue politicization. This is in line with Kriesi (2007), who draws on a more general study (Kriesi et al., 2008) that focuses on how extreme parties introduce a new globalization cleavage including the issue of European integration. However, as Kriesi (2007) acknowledges, this theory has problems explaining the issue of European integration. As implied in the sleeping giant logic, the issue offers considerable electoral potential for extreme parties focusing on European integration. Still, substantial party attention to the issue is the exception. Therefore, the following offers a different theoretical perspective.

**Party attention to European Integration**

To build an alternative theoretical framework for understanding which issues political parties focus on, i.e. party issue competition, it is worth drawing on a number of insights from agenda setting literature (Baumgartner et al. 2006) since party issue competition can be seen as agenda-setting process:

First, an agenda is a “hierarchy of issues”, which implies that some are issues are more important than others, and that an agenda-setting process must be seen as a competition for attention among different issues (Dearing and Rogers 1996, 1-5). Agenda setting processes are also “systemic” in the sense that agendas are influenced by actors, but at the same time influence the issues actors address. Once issues are on the agenda, actors need to address them. The core of
agenda setting is thus the reciprocal relationship between an agenda and the relative issue emphasis of the actors related to it.

Second, agenda setting processes are not just about attention, but also about which consideration on an issue should dominate attention. Framing is thus an important aspect of agenda setting processes. Further, how an issue is framed is something that actors try to influence and some actors are more influential than others, but like agenda setting processes in general, no single actor can control the framing of an issue, among other things because it will be affected by real world events (cf. Baumgartner et al., 2008).

Third, issue characteristics matter. Soroka (2002) has outlined a typology centred around the flow of information on different issues and their effects on the agenda setting process. Some issues like unemployment are prominent in the sense that the population receives information on them on a personal basis. On such issues, public attention is driving the agenda setting process. Other issues like the environment are sensational. People have limited personal information on them, but experience them through sensational stories in the media. On such issues, the media drives agenda setting processes. Finally, government issues are issues like government organisation where the public has limited personal experience and which rarely produce sensational media stories. On these issues, the agenda setting process will be driven by governments or other political actors.

Fourth, agenda-setting processes are always triggered by specific events or what Kingdon (1995, 184-190) labels “policy windows”. These may be unpredictable like earthquakes, but may also be predictable like the publication of a commission report. The implication of this is that a theory explaining party issue competition must focus on necessary conditions, i.e. what issues parties have an incentive to focus on. However, to explain why parties at a particular time focus on certain issues one also needs sufficient conditions in the form of events which provide the content party attention.
These insights from agenda-setting literature provide a number of lessons for studying politicization of European integration. First, the question of politicization of European integration must be seen as a relative one. How is the issue placed in the hierarchy of issues constituting the agenda of political parties and the electorate? Second, the framing of the issue is important for understanding politicization. As will be shown below, European integration can be framed in a number of ways that no actor controls. Third, the issue characteristics of European integration must be taken into account. European integration is a government issue. The public rarely has personal experience with the issue, which also does not generate sensational media stories as issues like crime or the environment. Attention, also in the media, is driven by government actions like treaty negotiations or EU summits (Boomgarden et al. 2009). The issue characteristic thus supports approaching the question of politicization by studying political parties not the electorate. The public is not driving the agenda-setting process on a government issue like European integration. Fourth, the question of politicization must be related to necessary conditions for politicization. Sufficient condition must also include actual events. However, European integration offers a continuous stream of such events through for instance the continuing treaty and enlargement debates.

To build a theory of issue politicization at the party level, the literature on issue competition is of obvious relevance. Budge and Farlie (1983) argue that political parties compete by attempting to draw attention to issues they find advantageous rather than by assuming different positions on pre-determined issues. Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010) have developed a model of party issue competition, which also draw on agenda-setting literature. At any given point in time a party system agenda exists in the sense that a hierarchy of issues exists, which the parties must pay attention to while at the same time competing with one another about the future content of this hierarchy. Thus, the core of politicization according to the issue competition perspective is for parties to politicize
advantageous issues because politicization will “force” opponents to pay attention to issues that the opponent would rather avoid.

The question then becomes which factors at the party level affect this hierarchy of issues? Following Meguid (2005), mainstream political parties like Social Democrats and Conservatives, which constitute the government alternatives are the central actors at the party level. “Niche parties” like Green parties focusing on particular issues are dependent on the issue strategies of the mainstream parties for electoral success. This raises the question of which issues the mainstream parties find it advantageous to focus on?

Party systems have a structure which organizes party competition and the left-right dimension with its origin in the economic class cleavage continues to the dominant organizational principle (Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009), though its ideological content has become less coherent (Mair 2008, 228-230). An issue like the environment has thus increasingly been integrated into the left-right structure (Dalton, 2009). Further, competition is typically organized in a bloc manner: a bloc of government parties involving at least one mainstream party faces a bloc of opposition parties also including at least one mainstream party and wanting a government with a different color. Thus, the question of which issues mainstream parties find advantageous should be seen in light of this competitive structure (Bale, 2003). Two factors are central for which issues mainstream parties focus on. These two factors can be labelled the coalition factor and the electoral factor:

First, the coalition factors implies the issue needs to fit the overall left-right structure of party competition. If party position on an issue deviates significantly from this structure – or there are no clear party positions – the consequences of politicization in terms competition for government power become unclear. For parties wanting government power, the question of whether or not attention to this issue is beneficial for my bloc becomes hard to answer as the bloc organization builds on the left-right dimension.
This is exactly the case with European integration. Marks and Wilson (2000) thus argue that political parties across Western Europe have generally taken positions on the EU in a similar pattern, which is shaped by the two-dimensional development of the European Union; the economic integration dimension and the political dimension. The first dimension generated mainly left-wing opposition towards European integration, most pronounced in social democratic dominated countries in Northern Europe, whereas the political integration dimension mainly has generated right-wing opposition. The interplay of these two dimensions, where the political integration dimension has become increasingly important in the 1990s, has generated a pattern of party positions with anti-EU parties at the extreme left and right, and pro-EU parties in the centre (cf. Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009; Hooghe et al., 2002; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2007: 197-203).

The result is that party positions deviate considerably from the left-right dimension structuring West European party systems. As shown by Van der Brug and Van Spanje (2009) it is the only major issue where party positions in Western Europe deviate significantly from the left-right dimension. Thus if for instance a Social Democratic party breaks the EU consensus by moving towards an EU sceptical position, the coalition implications are unclear because of the “strange bedfellow” problem that arises. The Social Democrats would now join position with the extreme right and the coalition implications will become unclear as they will depend on the extent to which politicization of European integration benefits the extreme right or the Social Democrats and the other left-wing parties.

The coalition factor also implies that the existence of positional disagreement among the mainstream parties is a necessary condition for politicization. This is also found in Riker’s (1996) principles of dominance and dispersion: drawing attention to an issue where all parties agree is not attractive even though voters might find it important, and parties will move attention away from such issues (dispersion principle). For a political party, it is much more advantageous to draw
attention to an issue where it has the electorate on its side and where there is a conflict with other parties (dominance principle). Thus for European integration to become politicized, one side of the competition between mainstream parties for government power needs to brake the pro-EU consensus.

Second, the electoral factor implies that an issue needs to be electorally advantageous for the mainstream party breaking the pro-EU consensus - or it needs to have the electorate on its side according to Riker. It is important that this electoral incentive for mainstream parties relates to the electoral majority, not just votes. For “niche” parties like Green parties attempting to politicize the environment is always attractive because it makes it easier to capture pro-environmental voters. Whether it is an electoral majority is less important. However, if a mainstream party cannot be sure to have the majority on its side on an issue it will not attempt to politicize it but will focus on other issues where it has the electoral majority on its side. This is exactly the case with regard to European integration.

The sleeping giant logic points to the electoral incentives found in the widespread EU scepticism, which offers room for political entrepreneurs who could gain votes from it (cf. Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009: 18-21). However, the question is if EU-sceptical position is also the majority position? The two dimensions which have shaped party position have also structured public attitudes in the sense that EU scepticism has grown as the political integration dimension became increasingly important during the 1990s. As argued by Hooghe and Marks (2009: 9-14), the public increasingly sees the EU as a matter of identity and not just an issue of economic integration. However, even if the increasing focus on identity has pushed public opinion in a more EU-sceptical direction in the 1990s (cf. Hobolt, 2009: 26), actual electoral behaviour based on these attitudes very much depends on the exact perspective from which voters approach the issue, i.e. framing.
Any issue can of course be framed in different ways, but the nature of the European integration issue makes the framing question particular relevant. Should the EU be framed as a question of the role of EU in limiting climate change? As a question of Turkish entrance into the European Union? As a question of the “democratic deficit” and the structure of European institutions? As Hooghe and Marks (2009: 13) put it: “Hence, public opinion on Europe is particularly susceptible to construction: i.e. priming (making a consideration salient), framing (connecting a particular consideration to a political object) and cueing (installing a bias)”. This view is further supported by a comprehensive study of referendums on European integration: Yes or No is very much dependent on the way the issue is framed in the public debate, including how the electorate perceives the consequences of a No (Hobolt, 2009). This does not imply that public opinion on the EU is superficial, rather the opposite; the complex way in which the EU has developed in terms of both economic and political integration is reproduced in public opinion.

For mainstream parties, the implication is considerable uncertainty about the electoral consequences of politicization. If the issue was to become central to electoral choice, it would not be clear whether it would actually benefit a mainstream party with an EU-sceptical position. It depends on how the issue is framed. As the agenda setting perspective has shown, this is something that parties can influence, but it is not something they control, especially when the issue is subject to electoral contestation among mainstream parties.

Summing up, party issue competition is a struggle about placing issues on the party system agenda, implying that also parties which would rather see the issue disappear are forced to pay attention to it. The central question is if the issue is attractive to focus on for mainstream parties. This will depend on two characteristics namely whether the issue fits the left-right line of conflict, the coalition criteria, and whether a mainstream party has the electoral majority on its side, the electoral criteria. If these necessary conditions are fulfilled, these parties will try to use events like
EU treaty negotiations to politicize the issue. However, if the necessary conditions are not fulfilled, the issue will be ignored and will not become politicized.

This theoretical framework would lead to a general prediction of European integration not being politicized as the mainstream parties have neither coalition nor electoral incentives to try to politicize it. This is why the issue has a status of a “sleeping giant” (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2007). The prediction from the existing literature discussed above is quite different. Here political entrepreneurs like radical right wing parties should be able to politicize it based on its electoral potential for such parties. “Spill-over” from referendums (De Vries 2009) would be an additional mechanism for politicization.

Politicization of European integration in Denmark

In the following, electoral politics around European integration in Denmark will be analysed following the logic of what Gerring (2007) indentifies as a “crucial case study”. The Danish case can be considered “crucial” for existing literature because it has all the factors conducive to politicization. First, Denmark has had six referendums on European integration, five during the past 25 years. Second, Denmark has very successful extreme parties, which should be bale to act as entrepreneurs on issue of European Integration. Especially, the EU-sceptic Danish Peoples Party has over the last decade become a central actors in the Danish party system with around 13% of the vote. Third, the Danes are among the more EU-sceptical populations (Hobolt, 2009: 28). Thus if politicization should happen anywhere according to the existing literature, it should be in Denmark. Further, Denmark has also over the past 25 years witnessed a proliferation of the party political

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2 In relation to Gerring’s (2007) discussion of “crucial case studies” the following is an example of a “dis-confirmative” crucial case study with the aim of falsifying a given theory. The exiting literature on politicization of European integration, including the theory of Hooghe and Marks (2009) does probably not fully meet the criteria set up by Gerring (2007) for such a study in terms of a formal structure of the theory leading to a series of precise prediction. However, the literature does point to a number of easily identifiable factors which should lead to politicization. This makes it possible to use the Danish case for the purpose of what Gerring (2007) labels a “path-way analysis” focusing on understanding causal mechanisms, in this case related to party competition around European integration.
agenda involving politicization of issues like the environment and immigration. Thus the development of party attention to European integration can be compared with issues which have become politicized (Green-Pedersen 2006), and which can also be used to show how the factors outlined above can cause politicization.

As the first step, in analysing the Danish case, it is obvious to focus on the dependent variable, namely politicization of European integration. As argued above, the concept refers to saliency, i.e. how important is the issue on both the party system agenda and voter’s agenda. Politicization thus refers to an issue having a prominent position on both agendas. This immediately raises a half empty half full discussion about how to define prominent. As outlined above, agenda-setting literature approaches this question by comparing across issues (Dearing & Rogers 1996, 1-5). Thus, politicization refers to for instance the top three issues on both the party system agenda and voters’ agenda.

Figure 1 thus shows the development of five central issues on the party political agenda in Denmark measured via the length of parliamentary debates.\(^3\) Compared to the other issues, the EU has remained a minor issue receiving less than 5% of the party attention. The peak years in party attention to the EU in the Danish parliament are 1985, 1991, 1996 which all reflect party attention in parliament in connection with the European integration treaties. However, except in connection with treaty negotiations, party attention in parliament is much more limited than attention to the economy, which has had a high position on the party political agenda throughout the period, but

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\(^3\) Debates in the Danish parliament can relate to bills, interpellations, resolutions and governmental policy accounts. The length of debates has been recorded by counting columns in the records of the Danish parliament (Green-Pedersen 2005). The advantage of this measure of the party political agenda is that long debates cannot be generated by individual parties or members, but require a cross-party view of the issue as important. The issue content of the debates was coded using a modified version of the policy agenda coding scheme originally developed by Baumgartner and Jones in a US context (Green-Pedersen 2005).
also to issues like immigration, the environment and health, which have seen a politicization in the period (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Green-Pedersen & Wolfe 2009).

Figure 1 about here

The same picture emerges at the level of the electorate. Figure 2 thus shows the development of different issues on the voters’ agenda at national elections since the 1981 election.⁴ In the beginning of the period, the electorate’s agenda was dominated by the economy, which has lost salience and left room for other issues like immigration, the environment, and health. The EU has, however, remained a marginal issue on the electorate’s agenda. It received the highest attention in 1998 with 3.9% of the agenda, but otherwise takes up less than 2% of the electorate’s agenda alongside issues like defence, business or transportation, which normally play very minor role in Danish elections.

Politicization can of course be defined otherwise. De Vries (2007, 374) thus argues for a politicization of European integration in Denmark at the level of the electorate. This is based on the increases in the 1990s shown in the figure 2, however, without any cross-issue comparison. The different conclusion compared to this study is thus due to a lack of comparison with other issues but also a different threshold for declaring an issue politicized. With a low threshold, European integration can be considered politicized in Denmark. However, this implies that many issues are politicized and the question of politicization becomes increasingly uninteresting since issues that are not politicized become rare. In regard to European integration, “the sleeping giant” metaphor would seem to imply more than just the issue being one among a series of issues being of importance to

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⁴ Voters were asked an open MIP question. Having provided an answer, respondents were then probed: “Can you mention more important problems?” Up to three additional problems were recorded. Voters’ agenda was calculated by taking the total number of answers mentioning a particular issue as percentage of total number of answers. Data for the Danish national election surveys is from the Danish data archive, www.dda.dk.
political parties and the electorate. If politicization is to refer to central issues for electoral politics, then figure 1 and 2 do not provide much support for European integration being politicized in Denmark.

Figure 1 around here

**European Integration and party competition in Denmark**

The theoretical framework presented above would argue that this lack of politicization is due to a lack of coalition and electoral incentives for mainstream parties. Whether this is in fact true for Denmark requires a detailed analysis of Danish party politics and public attitudes toward European integration.

Danish party politics has generally been dominated by the left-right dimension whether seen from the perspective of voting behaviour in parliament (Hansen 2008) or government formation (Skjæveland, 2003). Similar to the general European pattern, the major mainstream parties, which have also by and large been the parties in governments, the Social Democrats, the Conservatives, and the Liberals (Venstre) have been pro-European integration. During the 1970s and 1980s, opposition towards European integration came from the parties to the left of the Social Democrats reaching into the party itself. In the 1990s, left-wing opposition has been very clear from the extreme left Unity List, whereas the Socialist People’s Party is an example of “soft EU scepticism” (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008) with more varied opposition (Pedersen, 1996). From the early 1990s EU opposition also developed within extreme right-wing parties starting with the Progress Party and much more pronounced with the Danish People’s Party established in 1995 (cf. Buch and Hansen, 2002). Thus party positions have the same structure generally found in Europe with opposition towards the EU at the extremes of the political spectrum. As a consequence, a
mainstream party breaking the pro-EU consensus will face a “strange bedfellow” in the form of an extreme party from the other side of the political spectrum. A mainstream party would therefore find it difficult to judge the coalition implications with regard to bloc competition for government power which is exactly based on the left-right dimension.

Public attitudes in Denmark towards European integration are torn between the two dimensions of economic integration and political integration discussed above (cf. Siune et al., 1994: 124-36; Hobolt, 2009: 165-6). This has been highly visible in relation the six referendums Denmark have seen. Denmark entered the European Union (the European Community) through a referendum in 1972, followed by one on the Single European Act in 1986, one on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, a follow-up referendum on the Danish Edinburgh agreement in 1993, one on the Amsterdam Treaty in 1998, and one on introducing the Euro in 2000. The latter and the one on the Maastricht Treaty resulted in No majorities whereas the other four resulted in Yes majorities.

All six referendums have been focused on the very issue of European integration. There is little evidence of these referendums being “second order” i.e. a vote of confidence on the incumbent government. The explanation for the different referendums’ outcomes should be found in the two-dimensionality of public attitudes towards European integration (Svensson, 2002; Hobolt, 2009). Thus, referendums dominated by the economic integration aspect, which implies a focus on economic gains from membership, resulted in a Yes, especially in the 1972 and 1986 referendums. In referendums with focus on the political integration aspects, the outcome was a No, i.e. in 1992 and 2000 (Svensson 2002).

The 2000 Euro referendum is particularly instructive. The fact that the referendum was on the Euro and thus related to economic integration did not prevent the national debate from revolving around national identity issues as well. Although most of the political elite including the mainstream parties focused on the economic gains from joining the Euro, the No side was
successful in turning the debate into a broader question about European integration and this swung the majority towards No (De Vreese and Semetko, 2004). In sum, the shifts between Yes and No majorities have depended on whether the issue was framed as securing the gains of economic integration or as loss of national identity and self-determination. Further, as the Euro example shows, political parties, even when the mainstream parties are united, do not control the framing of the issue.

In sum, the issue of European integration fulfils neither the coalition criteria nor the electoral criteria, and should not expect the issue to have played a significant role on the party system agenda. The extreme parties in the current Danish party system, the Unity list and the Danish People’s Party, have an electoral interest in the issue, and can be expected to focus on it. However, for the mainstream parties the issue fulfils neither the coalition nor the electoral criteria and they will ignore the issues and block its politicization. This pattern of party attention can be demonstrated empirically. Table 1 shows the share of party attention to European integration in the mainstream parties’ election programmes as well as the EU-sceptical extreme left-wing and right-wing parties. The latter parties focus constantly on the issue, while it is more or less ignored by the pro-EU mainstream parties during election campaigns, except in the 1990 election.

Table 1 around here

The analysis of the Danish case so far is counterfactual in character. It is premised upon the assumption that if the coalition and electoral criteria were fulfilled, the mainstream parties would

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5 The election programmes are identical to those collected under the party manifesto project, but have been re-coded using the same coding scheme as used for parliamentary debates, see footnote 3. Sentences have also been used as coding unit instead of quasi-sentences as in the original party manifesto coding (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen 2009).

6 The strong focus on the EU in the Liberals’ 1990 programme does not correspond well with other descriptions of this election (cf. Bille et al., 1992) and is probably an effect of the particular document selected as party manifesto.
use events like EU-treaties to achieve politicization. This assumption can, however, be supported empirically. First it is worth looking at the only break with the EU-positive consensus of the mainstream parties, namely the Social Democratic No position on the Single European Act in 1986. This No resulted in a parliamentary majority against the Act, and the Conservative Prime Minister reacted by putting the issue to a referendum (Worre, 1988). The context of the Social Democratic No was a parliamentary situation in Danish politics where the right-wing minority government relied on parliamentary support from a small centre party, the Social Liberals, on economic matters. However, on non-economic issues like foreign policy and the environment, the government did not have the support of the Social Liberals, and an “alternative majority” of the left-wing bloc and the Social Liberals ruled on these issues (Damgaard & Svensson, 1989).

Since EU scepticism on the extreme right did not exist at that time, the Social Democrats could use the Single European Act as an agenda-setting event to activate the alternative majority and pushed the issue into the left-right conflict in Danish party competition. It was the left-wing alternative majority including the Social Liberals against the other bourgeois parties. In terms of electoral incentives, the break seemed attractive as opinion polls in the period had shown a majority against Danish EC membership (Worre, 1988: 363). However, the Single European Act campaign was framed on the economic gains and losses, which caused a relatively clear Yes with 56.2%, and the Social Democrats ended up on the wrong side of the electoral majority. The example thus shows how the issue could be integrated into the left-right dimension and fulfilled the coalition criteria, but turned out not to fulfil the electoral criteria as the Social Democrats did not have the electorate on its side. This in combination with the end of the Cold War caused the Social Democrats to return to the pro EU consensus (Haahr, 1993).

It is also worth comparing the development of the European integration issue with two issues which, as shown by the data above, have become politicized in Denmark, namely the environment
and immigration because this shows how the coalition and electoral factors may lead to politicization. The politicization of the environmental issue was generated by the Social Democratic opposition in the mid 1980s. The party had a strong green profile and clearly had the electorate on its side on the issue (Goul Andersen, 1990). It could further use the alternative majority situation to generate party attention to the issue. The environment was thus integrated into the left-right conflict in Danish politics as a left-wing issue in the sense that the political attention benefited the left-wing bloc electorally (Green-Pedersen & Wolfe 2009). Immigration is in many ways the mirror case of the environment. It was politicized by the right-wing opposition, especially the Liberals, during the 1990s. Party positions on the issue generally follow the left-right structure and the opposition also could benefit from issue ownership as well as internal disagreement within the Social Democratic/Social Liberal government.\textsuperscript{7} Politicization of the issue was thus a major reason for the electoral victory of the right-wing bloc in 2001, which implied a right-wing government (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008). The two issues thus show how new issues, if they fit the criteria which make them attractive for mainstream parties to politicize them, can become politicized. However, the issue of European integration has never met both these two criteria.

As argued above, the Danish case was selected because it could be seen as a “crucial case” for the existing literature (cf. Gerring 2007) in the sense that one should expect European integration to be politicized in Denmark if the existence of EU-sceptical extreme parties and referendums lead to politicization. These two factors therefore deserve some further discussion. Table 1 shows that extreme parties have taken up the issue of European integration. In recent years, this has especially been done by the Danish People’s Party, which has otherwise been politically highly successful establishing itself in the party system with about 13% of the vote. They have just not been unable to

\textsuperscript{7} The only difference between left-right positions and positions on immigration was that the Social Liberals was more to the left than the Social Democrats, which caused internal disagreements in the government when the Social Democrats wanted to move to the right on the issue to avoid politicization.
politicize European integration, which would have forced the mainstream parties to address the issue. Further, at the 1998 election a new EU-sceptical party, Democratic Renewal, ran, but only received 0.3% of the vote. Thus, incentives for entrepreneur parties do not generate politicization. As long as the mainstream parties ignore the issue, it only enters the party agenda when parliamentary debate on treaties is needed and it does not enter the voters’ agenda at election time.

With regard to referendums, it is worth recognizing that they have had a high average turnout of 83.2%, which approaches the turnout at national elections. The highest turnouts were 90% in 1972 and 88% in 2000 (cf. Hobolt, 2009: 9). The lowest turnout was 75% in the 1986 referendum. The average for the nine national elections during the last 25 years is 85.8%. However, this does not lead to politicization. In other words, mainstream parties are capable of maintaining a clear separation between referendums and national elections.

The very high turnout rates also support focusing on the party level when analysing politicization and seeing the issue as a “government” issue from an agenda-setting perspective. A competing explanation to the focus on party competition would thus be that the non-politicization of the issue is due to a lack of interest with the electorate. The issue is simply to distant and complex for politicization at the level of the electorate to be realistic, even if the issue was to be politicized at the party level. However, the referendums show that once political elites including political parties focus on the issue, public attention in the form of referendum participation follows. This view is further supported by Togeby’s study (2004) of voters’ agenda, which is based on surveys with a four month interval in the period 1999-2002. The study shows that the EU plays a marginal role in between elections on the voters’ agenda with one exception: In the month leading up to the Euro referendum, the issue received similar levels of attention from the electorate as health and

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8 Data on turnout at national elections is taken from the homepage of the Danish parliament [www.ft.dk](http://www.ft.dk).
immigration (Togeby, 2004: 40-49). In other words, European integration can attract the attention of the electorate, but it requires political party attention as during referendums campaigns.

**Conclusion**

Hooghe and Marks (2009) have pushed the question of politicization to the forefront of European integration research. The theoretical argument of this paper is that to understand issue politicization with regard to European integration, we need to focus on the incentives for issue politicization facing mainstream parties, and not focus on EU-sceptical extreme parties as the literature has typically done. The latter parties have a strong electoral incentive to politicize European integration, but they cannot do so if the mainstream parties ignore the issue. Further, the argument of the paper is that such incentives for politicization will depend on two factors, namely the extent to which the issue offers a clear electorally winning position and the extent to which the issue can be integrated into the left-right structure of party competition.

In the Danish and most other case these factors offer mainstream parties no incentive to break their pro-EU consensus which blocks politicization. However, the factors pointed to are of course variables implying that one could also expect cross-national variation in politicization of European integration. The degree of public scepticism towards European integration obviously varies (cf. Hobolt 2009, 28), and the more sceptical population, the more likely is politicization. It will make it more certain for the mainstream parties that they will have the electorate on its side if they break the pro-EU consensus.

Coalition factors also vary. In a two-party system like the UK, they are completely absent which implies that the strategies of the mainstream parties will be based on the electoral factor only. The same is more or less the case for Switzerland where government formation is based on the “magical formula”, and where coalition formation therefore has a different character. Switzerland
and the UK could thus be most considered most likely cases of politicization of European integration from the perspective of the framework presented in this paper. Interestingly these also the two examples of politicization of European integration presented by Kriesi (2007). In the Swiss case politicization has been driven by the Swiss People’s Party (op. cit.) In the British case, the Conservatives politicized the issue at the 1997 and 2001 British elections, but only with positive electoral outcome in 2001 (Evans 1998 & 2002).

Two additional factors may also support the pro-EU consensus among the mainstream parties. First, as European integration has developed, right-wing opposition towards European integration has become increasingly important and this would imply that a move towards an EU-sceptical position is most likely from right-wing mainstream parties. However, these are also the parties, as in Denmark, which have traditionally been most pro-European integration, and moving towards an EU-sceptical position could thus easily result in internal party conflicts and an unclear party position. This was exactly what happened to the British Conservatives in 1997 and this was why the issue was not electorally rewarding for the party (Evans, 1998). Second, there is an opposition element in EU scepticism (cf. Sitter, 2000) in the sense that once in government and involved in for instance treaty negotiation, it can be hard to sustain an EU-sceptical position. Given that most mainstream parties have a realistic expectation of gaining government power within a reasonable future which may also limit their interest in politicization. However, the example of the British Conservatives shows that mainstream parties can nevertheless become EU-sceptic.

The final question is then what the implications are for the question of public influence on the development of European integration, the question which lies behind Hooghe and Marks’ (2009) focus on politicization. One of the striking elements in the Danish case is the extent to which referendums and national elections are kept separate. The implication is that referendums are the main mechanism through which public attitudes towards European integration will affect the
development of the European Union. The Danish case shows that this mechanism is not ineffective, the Danish op-outs on especially the Euro being the clearest example. However, referendums are also very much controlled by the pro-European elites, which thus have considerable control over when and how public attitudes are allowed to matter for European integration.


Green-Pedersen, Christoffer and Mortensen, Peter. B. (2009). *Coding of party manifestos and PMs speeches in Denmark.* Aarhus: Department of Political Science, University of Aarhus.

Green-Pedersen, Christoffer and Peter B. Mortensen (2010) “Who sets the agenda and who responds to it in the Danish Parliament?” *European Journal of Political Research*


Figure 1:
The development of selected issue on the party political agenda in Denmark 1981-2006
Figure 2: The development of selected issues on voter’s agenda at Danish national elections 1981-2005
Table 1
Percentage of total sentences in election manifestos about the EU of the three major mainstream parties and the extreme parties in Denmark, 1981-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Social Democrats</th>
<th>Conservatives</th>
<th>Liberals</th>
<th>Unity List</th>
<th>Danish People’s Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>24.4</td>
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