

**THE RELEVANCE OF LEFT AND RIGHT IN EU AFFAIRS:
A CASE STUDY OF GERMAN PARLIAMENT DEBATES ON THE GREEK CRISIS**

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1 INTRODUCTION

European integration has further added to the complexity of political contestation and party competition at the domestic level. The objectives of this paper are to discuss (a) how contestation on European Union (EU) issues is structured, (b) what the relationship between the EU dimension and the left/right dimension of political competition is, and (c) to what extent and how left/right politics feature in German parliament debates on the Greek sovereign debt crisis. I use protocols of plenary debates in the German Bundestag from spring 2010 and employ a mixed-methods approach of content analysis combining claims analysis with discourse network analysis. Given the economic and fiscal nature of these debates and the established cross-partisan pro-European consensus, we observe more substantial disagreement on the left/right dimension than the pro-/anti-EU dimension. The most prominent left/right disputes revolved around financial regulation, the causes of the crisis and growth versus austerity. In conclusion, I argue that the left/right dimension plays an important role in structuring and facilitating domestic political debate in EU affairs, allowing MPs to transfer some of their domestic policy preferences to EU politics.

As highlighted by the *European Union Politics* special issue “The Politics of Dimensionality” of June 2012, the European debt crisis has reinforced the scholarly interest in the complexity and dimensionality of political contestation and partisan competition in EU member states. While the ongoing discussion on how to adequately measure party positioning on EU issues is interesting in itself, we need to bear in mind the substantial implications for

representation and the functioning and dynamics of party systems. Empirical research, whether using surveys of experts, politicians or citizens, has commonly shown that parties are internally more divided over EU issues than traditional left/right issues and that anti-EU sentiments are generally found at the extreme ends of the left/right spectrum. Although voters display “greater dispersion of attitudes regarding Europe as compared to left/right attitudes” (Van der Eijk & Franklin 2004, p. 39), particularly large, mainstream (i.e. moderate in left/right terms) parties have been averse to compete on the EU dimension primarily due to office seeking ambitions and party cohesion needs (Steenbergen & Scott 2004; Van der Eijk & Franklin 2004; Mattila & Raunio 2012). Mikko Mattila and Tapio Raunio (2012) show that low levels of opinion congruence between parties and the electorate result primarily from the fact that party elites are more pro-European than their voters.

2 MULTIDIMENSIONAL CLEAVAGE STRUCTURES

In their seminal work on political cleavages and party systems, Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967) argue that critical junctures in European national histories created social cleavages that in turn manifested themselves in the party systems, and the European party systems and cleavage structures are remarkably constant since the end of the First World War. Although few scholars today would agree that party cleavages have ‘frozen’, the continuity and prominence of the left/right continuum as a central dimension of organising political conflict in contemporary Western Europe underpins Lipset and Rokkan’s argument. With the increasing politicisation of EU issues, that is, a rise in the controversiality over European integration matters – or what Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2009) describe as a shift in public opinion from ‘permissive elite consensus’ to ‘constraining dissensus’, scholars began to study the potential European dimension of political contestation and its (inter-)relationship with the traditional left/right dimension. Marco R. Steenbergen and Gary Marks (2004) have identified four distinctive model of how the EU dimension relates to the left/right axis, which remains a contested question:

- 1) *International relations model*: EU issues are contested along a single dimension ranging from the defence of national sovereignty (i.e. less integration) to the promotion of supranational governance (i.e. more integration), and the anti-/pro-integration dimension is autonomous from the left/right divide that frames domestic politics. (This view is shared by realists, liberal intergovernmentalists and neofunctionalists.)

- 2) *Hix-Lord model*: The left/right dimension and the independence/integration dimension co-exist orthogonally, and therefore political actors face conflicting pressures. (Hix & Lord 1997; Hix 1999)
- 3) *Regulation model*: EU politics has been subsumed into the left/right continuum, where the political left favours economic regulation at the European level, whereas the right advocates less EU regulation. (Tsebelis & Garrett 1996; 2000)
- 4) *Hooghe-Marks model*: The EU political space is two-dimensional, where both the left/right dimension (ranging from social democracy to market liberalism) and the European integration dimension (ranging from nationalism to supranationalism) structure policy positions. The main opposing camps are the centre-left, which supports regulated capitalism at the European level, and the right, whose neoliberal project aims to realise European-wide markets with minimal supranational regulation. (Hooghe & Marks 1999; 2001)

I think it is worth looking more closely at those approaches that attempt to organise the complexity of political conflict by exploring multidimensionality. Hooghe, Marks and others (Hooghe, Marks & Wilson 2002; Marks et al. 2006) contend that the effect of the conventional left/right on European integration support is limited to policies of market regulation (see the *Hooghe-Marks model* above) and that a new politics dimension accounts most accurately for variation in party positioning on EU issues. This dimension captures a number of non-economic issues, such as the environment, lifestyle and community culture, and the two poles are green-alternative-libertarian (GAL) and traditional-authoritarian-nationalist (TAN). In Western Europe Leftist parties lean to the GAL side and parties on the right are inclined to support TAN values, which means that particularly conservative parties tend to be conflicted between market liberalism, on the one hand, and nationalism, on the other hand (Marks et al. 2006).

Similarly, Ryan Bakker, Seth Jolly and Jonathan Polk (2012) made a compelling case for the presence of three distinct dimensions of political cleavages in most member states. They distinguish between the economic left/right dimensions, the social left/right dimension¹ and the pro-/anti-European integration dimension. Despite the fact that the number of parties represented in the parliament is relatively small, they found that the political space in Germany is fairly complex by comparison, as the three dimensions are quite distinct from each other. Germany has only a small positive correlation between the economic left/right and the social left/right, mainly

¹ Conceptually, Bakker, Jolly and Polk equate social left/right with what other scholars have called new politics, GAL/TAN or left-libertarian/right-authoritarian.

because of the Greens and the Liberals². As is also the case in the other founding member states, there is nearly no correlation between the economic left/right and the EU dimension in Germany.

When speaking about the economic left and right in the case of Germany, we need to bear in mind that this ideological space is often associated with ordoliberalism rather than with neoliberalism. The ordoliberal tradition dates back to the 1930s and 1940s, and ever since the German *Wirtschaftswunder* ('economic miracle') in the 1950s it has been highly influential in Germany, particularly so on the centre-right. While ordoliberalism and neoliberalism are both anti-Keynesian, ordoliberalism is generally considered to be more moderate than Anglo-Saxon neoliberalism, as it creates the theoretical foundation for the 'social market economy' and assigns a vital role to the state, which sets a rigid framework for competition and price stability and provides a social safety net. As the eurozone crisis progressed, a debate has emerged among political commentators as to what extent ordoliberal thought shapes the German government's response to the crisis (see e.g. Dullien & Guérot 2012; Kundnani 2012; Jacoby 2014). In this study, however, I seek to examine differences of opinion at the domestic level that can be attributed to left/right politics.

3 CASE, DATA AND METHODS

This study is based on a single-case design, where great emphasis is placed upon contextuality and 'thick analysis'. The findings have significant intrinsic value, not least because Germany is the largest EU member state and guarantor in the European Stability Mechanism and its temporary predecessors. The principal unit of analysis is the plenary assembly of Germany's national legislature, the Bundestag. In the 17th legislative period (October 2009–September 2013), six political parties were represented in the Bundestag. Although the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU), which is the CDU's Bavarian sister party, form a joint parliamentary party group, I look at the CSU separately. Since I am particularly interested in interparliamentary and legislative–executive relationships, special emphasis is placed on the majority–opposition dimension. The second Merkel cabinet was a coalition of the CDU, the CSU and the Free Democratic Party (FDP, also commonly referred to as the 'Liberals'), holding 332 of 622 seats in the Bundestag. The Social Democratic Party of Germany

² According to expert placements, the Greens are fairly centrist on the economic left/right axis, while being at the left extreme on the social dimension. The Free Democratic Party, generally known as the 'Liberals', is on the far economic right but can be considered leftist with regards to non-economic issues.

(SPD) was the largest opposition party with 146 seats, followed by the Left Party (76 seats) and the Alliance 90/The Greens (68 seats).

The time period of analysis is two months, namely March to May 2010, and hence the analytical evidence amounts to a snapshot of the state of affairs in spring 2010 against the background of longer-term trends. The empirical material comprises three plenary debates³, that is, 30 speeches, four short interventions and one question⁴, amounting to five hours of discussion. The central topics of debate were: (1) the unfolding of the eurozone crisis in Greece, Spain and Portugal, (2) the bilateral loans for Greece, agreed upon by the euro area member states and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on 2 May 2010, (3) the establishment of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM), and (4) the ‘Currency Union Financial Stability Act’⁵ and ‘Euro Stabilisation Mechanism Act’⁶, which set out the national framework for Germany’s guarantee commitments to Greece and the EFSF. All three debates opened with policy statements by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel, and hence there was the element of direct interaction between legislative and executive actors. Two of the debates were scheduled in the run up to decisive EU-level meetings of heads of state or government. I decided to focus on the beginning of the eurozone crisis, and the main criterion for selecting plenary debates in general and these three debates in particular was public visibility. Plenary sessions in which members of the federal government (especially the Chancellor) participate attract great media interest.

I apply a mixed-method approach of content analysis. Firstly, I conduct a qualitative analysis of claims making by building an elaborate coding frame through detailed categorisation of claims, enabling me to assess the nature and extent of polarisation along the policy–polity–politics dimension. Secondly, I employ discourse network analysis (DNA) on a sub-set of codes relevant to left/right politics, namely claims related to the diagnosis of the crisis, the economic order and financial regulation. The method of DNA, which was developed by Philip Leifeld (Leifeld & Haunss 2010; 2012), combines qualitative content analysis and network analysis.

³ These debates took place on 25 March, 5 May and 19 May 2010.

⁴ Questions and interventions are an effective way to engage directly with speakers from other party groups and to get a turn to speak without using up the speaking time allocated to one’s own group.

⁵ This is the short name for the ‘Act on Giving Guarantees to Maintain the Hellenic Republic’s Ability to Pay which is Required for Financial Stability in the Monetary Union’, which was adopted by the Bundestag on 7 May 2010.

⁶ This act, whose official name is ‘Act on the Assumption of Guarantees in Connection with a European Stabilisation Mechanism’, passed the Bundestag and Bundesrat on 21 May 2010.

Given my actor-centred perspective, it has a lot to offer by adding another dimension to claims analysis by establishing links between actors and the contents of policy discourses. With the help of the DNA tool and the Visone programme, I explore and visualise networks of actors, networks of ideas and the relationships between them. (In my future work, I will extend the time frame of analysis in order to investigate shifts in these networks over time.)

4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Generally, the 17th legislative period has seen an increase in parliamentary mobilisation around EU issues, apparent in the amount and regularity of EU-centred plenary debates and government policy statements⁷. The sample of speakers of the selected debates is relatively small, but the profiles of the 17 speakers reveal that it was both policy experts and senior members of each party group who were most involved. The speakers tend to be MPs with experience, measured in years of membership in the Bundestag. The overall difference between the speakers (10.82 years) and all MPs (6.87 years) is four years, that is, one legislative term. They also occupied key roles in the party groups (such as chair, deputy chair and party spokesperson on EU or budgetary affairs) and competent committees (Budget Committee, Finance Committee and European Affairs Committee). The speaker profiles testify to the significance that has been attached to these plenary debates.

The overall frequency distribution of claims across the policy–polity–politics dimension⁸ (see *Table 1* in the Appendix) reveals some interesting differences between actors, which cannot be reduced to parliamentary roles only. While it shows similarities between the Chancellor and the CDU as well as between the SPD and the Greens, which the content analysis confirmed, the Left Party differs from the other opposition groups on many accounts. Most notably, claims making by the Left Party’s speakers is highly ‘policy’-centred (63.8 percent of their claims), and the party transfers its domestic agenda to EU issues (as seen e.g. with its leftist pro-growth and pro-regulation policies). In contrast, the Social Democrats and the Greens have the lowest shares in the ‘policy’ category (27.1 and 23.1 percent respectively). Instead, they are very focused on

⁷ Between October 2009 and September 2013, the federal government delivered 39 policy statements in total in the parliament arena and 20 of those were related to EU and/or crisis matters, 19 by Chancellor Angela Merkel and one by Wolfgang Schäuble, the Federal Minister of Finance. If we look only at the Chancellor’s statements, the figures are even more telling: 19 of a total of 26 statements concerned (at least partially) the eurozone crisis, of which 15 were directly linked to meetings of the European Council or euro area leaders, more often scheduled ahead than after the meeting.

⁸ Political contestation can occur regarding the content of a decision (policy), the decision-making process (politics) and the normative framework and/or institutional order (polity).

‘politics’ (54.9 percent for the SPD and 46.2 percent for the Greens), heavily criticising the government and Chancellor Merkel personally for poor crisis management and disregard for the parliament. In fact, there are only few substantial divergences on policy issues between the SPD, the Chancellor and the CDU – initially, the financial transaction tax was one of them (see below). This may explain why the SPD as the largest opposition group concentrated on ‘politics’. The example of the CSU, however, shows the limitations of quantitative representations of claims making. The CSU corresponds with its sister party, thus also with the Chancellor, in terms of ideas and concerns, but when examining the claims more closely, I discover clear differences in rhetoric, meaning that the CSU tends to phrase the same ideas (e.g. national competitiveness or conditionality of aid) in more populist terms.

With regards to the pro-/anti-EU dimension, the analysis confirmed that the German Bundestag is characterised by a crossparty pro-European consensus. All parliamentary actors stated their support for the EU and the common currency, albeit some more strongly than others. In sum, these statements testify to a national narrative of European integration, in which the integration process is very closely entwined with the history of Germany, in particular with the post-Second World War rehabilitation and the country’s reunification, as demonstrated also by references to the ‘legacies’ of Konrad Adenauer and Helmut Kohl. In addition, the euro is presented as a success story to which Germany has contributed by playing a key role in the establishment of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). More generally, Germany is portrayed as a driving force of integration. Germany’s role in managing the euro crisis and in the EU today has, however, been an important subject of debate. According to the Social Democrats and the Greens, the government’s lack of ‘solidarity’ and poor crisis management has contributed to a loss of reputation and trust by its European partners and the isolation of Germany within the EU community, placing the largest member state “in the position of a child that stubbornly sits in the corner and persistently has to be convinced to play” (Jürgen Trittin, Greens, 19 May 2010). Another important point of contestation between the majority and opposition on the EU dimension were economic imbalances within the EMU and how Germany’s trade surplus affects other member states. I will show below how this issue has also been discussed in left/right terms.

In the following sections, I discuss polarisation on the left/right dimension. *Figures 1.1* and *1.2* (see Appendix) show solid agreement among the coalition groups and political conflict along the majority–opposition divide, most apparent between the Liberals, on the one hand, and the Left Party and Social Democrats, on the other hand. There has been a lot of discussion about

regulation policies such as the financial transaction tax, and I also look at how different parties depict, envisage and/or problematise the economic order. Furthermore, we see divergence of opinion on the causes of the crisis and thus also on adequate policy responses. Here, the dispute over growth versus austerity, mainly between the governing majority and the Left Party, stood out most prominently.

4.1 The Economic Order and Financial Regulation

The economic order has been the most salient ‘polity’⁹ in claims making by the Left Party and the Liberals, representing opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. The FDP ardently reaffirmed its commitment to the social market economy and the principle of competition. In accordance with the party’s pro-market outlook, the problems diagnosed by the FDP speakers with regard to the financial markets were merely ‘excesses’ and ‘misuse’ (of e.g. certain forms of investment), which could be ‘eliminated’ by regulation. However, in comparison to the other parties, the Liberals kept their calls for financial regulation fairly vague. According to the Liberals, the overarching goal should be to diffuse the ‘ethics of responsibility’ centred on the principle of liability, which they claim is the norm in German micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, to the entire economic and financial sphere¹⁰. *Figure 2* (see Appendix) illustrates that various speakers have mentioned interdependence when describing the present economy, although with different intentions. The Chancellor and the parliament majority presented interdependence as a severe challenge because of the danger of chain reaction:

We are presently experiencing painfully that mistakes in economic policy making of individual states can lead to considerable repercussions overall. [...] If a member of the currency union became insolvent in the current situation, it would entail serious risks for all of us in Europe, also for Germany as Europe’s largest economy. (Angela Merkel, CDU, 25 March 2010)

⁹ For the purpose of this study, ‘polity’ has been interpreted liberally as the structural, formal and institutional features of the political. Overall, the ‘EU and euro’ (33.5 percent), the ‘economy’ (20.2 percent) and the ‘crisis’ (19.1 percent) have been the most frequently discussed ‘polities’, followed by ‘European integration’ (11.7 percent), ‘Germany in the EU’ (8.6 percent), the ‘international order’ (6.2 percent) and ‘Germany’ (0.8 percent).

¹⁰ Birgit Homburger, FDP, 19 May 2010: “We need new ethics of responsibility in the economy and also at the financial markets. What is normal in many family businesses [and] medium-sized companies, namely that you are of course liable for decisions you take, also with your own property, is an ethical foundation of the social market economy. We want to implement and impose the validity of this principle at the financial markets and for limited companies. It must be arranged in such a way that enterprises and their managers are liable for the consequences of their decisions. This is the only way to ensure responsible actions. Liability and risk must be linked, responsibility must be strengthened. We want that the image of the respectable businessman becomes valid again, also in the economic sector and at the financial markets.”

Correspondingly, the aid measures were described as a ‘firewall’ to protect the savings and jobs of German citizens. The opposition, on the other hand, alluded to interdependence when discussing, for instance, the role of foreign (including German) banks in Greece and the notion that Germany’s export economy is dependent on domestic demand in the crisis-hit countries.

On the opposition side, speakers from the Left Party and SPD placed a strong emphasis on political capacity, the state’s capability to shape and control the economic and fiscal spheres and re-establish the ‘primacy of politics’ in response to the dominance of the financial markets. In this context, concerns were raised about the democratic implications of the euro crisis, which is regarded also as a crisis of political trust, here interpreted as confidence in politics and politicians:

At stake is the confidence of the people in the capacity of politics as such. It is also a question of the foundation of our democracy. [...] You feel as much as we do that behind all the unease we encounter is a deep, serious worry [...] that politics will never ever bring the international financial markets under control, that anonymous hedge funds [...] can play Monopoly not only with banks but also with states [...]. Many people doubt whether [...] politics can resist the power of the financial sector. The crux of the problem is the apparent impotence of politics vis-à-vis the financial markets. (Frank-Walter Steinmeier, SPD, 5 May 2010)

For the opposition parties, stricter financial regulation and especially the introduction of a financial transaction tax are important steps towards restoring the ‘primacy of politics’ (see *Figure 3* in the Appendix for a network view of financial regulation claims). The financial transaction tax was one of the most widely discussed ‘policy’ issues. (The coding frequencies show that the visibility of this issue has increased within the time frame of observation, but inquiry into the claims reveals that the divergence of views has in fact decreased, since the official position by the government turned in favour of the tax. Thus, issue salience is not necessarily correlated with polarisation.) The SPD identified that the coalition is internally divided on this policy issue, and therefore criticised the government for failing to formulate a unified position and for being indecisive, and Chancellor Angela Merkel was attacked for failing to demonstrate leadership.¹¹

¹¹ In fact, the Social Democrats made the government position on this particular policy issue a condition for their approval of the proposed acts. Despite some change in the government’s standpoint, the Social Democratic MPs abstained in the vote of 21 May 2010 on the Euro Stabilisation Mechanism Bill, just as they did in the earlier vote of 7 May 2010 on the Currency Union Financial Stability Bill.

The official position of the government took an evident turn between the second debate (5 May 2010) and the third debate (19 May 2010). Initially, Merkel distanced herself from the position taken by her previous government, the so-called ‘grand coalition’ with the Social Democrats (2005–2009). In order to underpin her critical stance on the tax, Merkel argued that the bank levy, which was already adopted at the time, is a superior alternative, making reference to recommendations by the IMF¹². The opposition continuously questioned the effectiveness of the bank levy. On 19 May 2010, however, Merkel announced that the government would lobby for the tax on the European as well as global stage:

I have received the mandate by the coalition groups, which say: we need taxation on financial markets either through a financial market transaction tax or a financial activity tax. We will promote such taxation on financial markets at the European and international level. [...] We know that the discussion about the financial market transaction tax is no longer just about the technical details of the tax. For the people it is rather a question of how to achieve justice with regard to those who made big profits during the market excesses. When people fear losing their jobs, when they worry about the stability of the currency, and when they of course have to bear austerity measures, they wonder what we must do to achieve at least a little justice in burden sharing. [...] That is why I and the entire Federal Government will seek to ensure that we will present a common European position on the taxation of financial markets at the G20 meeting. [...] If we do not reach an agreement on an international tax – not due to Germany – then we will have this discussion in Europe: How can we design the contribution by the financial industry in such a way that the people will sense this piece of justice?

The quotation above also brings to the fore that the executive has adopted a discourse along the lines of the opposition, meaning a discourse that revolves around justice for (ordinary) citizens through fair burden sharing. From then on the tax was regarded as a measure that complements the much praised bank levy, while before these two measures had been presented as explicit alternatives. The same shift is apparent from speeches by members of the CDU and CSU groups. Interestingly enough though, the junior partner in the coalition government has not backed down from its original position. In line with its general economic-liberal outlook, the FDP continued to strongly oppose the introduction of a financial transaction tax, thereby publicly deviating from the government line. The Liberals’ criticism of the tax has generally been levelled against the

¹² Angela Merkel, CDU, 5 May 2010: “At the G20 summit in Pittsburgh, the former Minister of Finance and I sought to ensure that an international financial transaction tax will become reality. Then there was a G20 decision to invite proposals from the [IMF] on how to involve banks in fulfilling their responsibility. [...] The [IMF] supports that we charge a bank levy, as Germany intends to do. The [IMF] dismisses the idea of an international financial transaction tax. The [IMF] points out that an international financial transaction tax would also hit the real economy and recommends a taxation of the profits and salaries of banks instead. I think we are well advised to pay great attention to the IMF’s recommendations. I also ask the opposition to take a good look at these proposals.”

SPD. They attacked the largest opposition party for creating the impression that the financial transaction tax is an “egg-laying wool-milk-sow”¹³, a figurative German expression for an all-in-one device that can solve all problems.

On the side of the opposition, the issue of the financial transaction tax is also a good example of how the Left Party purposefully differentiated itself from the other two opposition parties. The Left tried to take ownership of this policy issue by reminding the public that the Tobin tax has been a long-standing issue on its agenda. At the same time, the following quotation serves as an illustration of the Left speakers’ tendency to criticise the actions (and non-actions) of the red–green coalition government (1998–2005) in order to set the Left Party apart from the other parties of the political (centre-)left:

We have said that we need the Tobin tax, a so-called transfer tax. Mr. Steinmeier [chair of SPD group], now you also talk about the tax, but when you were governing with the Greens, you did not introduce it. [...] It is nice that now you call for the primacy of politics, which you together with the Greens have cut in Germany. Let us strive together to restore this primacy of politics! (Gregor Gysi, Left, 5 May 2010)

As mentioned above, the Left Party was the most active on the ‘policy’ dimension. On the basis of their fundamental critique of the neoliberal economic order, the Left speakers called for far-reaching regulation policies, beyond the financial transaction tax. In their opinion, naked short selling, hedge funds, credit default swaps and structured investment vehicles should be banned or at least become subject to much more stringent regulation. The “creation of a state-run European rating agency, which pushes aside the corruptible private ones” (Gregor Gysi, Left, 5 May 2010) was regarded as important as well.

4.2 The Crisis and Beginnings of the Growth versus Austerity Dispute

The discussion on the causes of the crisis reflects considerable polarisation along the government majority–opposition divide (see *Figure 4* in the Appendix). In line with the ordoliberal preference for rule-based governance, Merkel and the CDU/CSU identified EU-level mistakes from the past: omissions at the time of euro adoption, flaws in the eurozone admission procedure and shortcomings of the Stability and Growth Pact. Nonetheless, it was a clear case for them no that

¹³ Birgit Homburger, FDP, 19 May 2010: “The only thing I heard from you [the SPD] concerning the solution to the problems is that we supposedly need such a tax; that is an egg-laying wool-milk-sow. If this tax was introduced, everything would be all right. That is of course not the case. [...] This is proof of how impoverished the SPD presents itself. You have decayed into a single-issue party.”

extensive national debt incurred by ‘living beyond one’s own means’¹⁴ was the prime cause. The CSU highlighted Greece’s lack of competitiveness as one of the causes for the Greek crisis. So did the Chancellor and the CDU, but the CSU framed the problem of poor economic performance in more populist terms:

The fact is that every state, every national economy is only as prosperous as its people allow with hard work, ambition, discipline and capability. That is the truth, and the Greeks now have to learn this, irrespective of whether dollar, euro or gold will be paid. [...] The currency reflects the reduced capacity of the national economy. (Hans-Peter Friedrich, CSU, 5 May 2010)

The opposition parties, especially so the SPD and Left Party, rejected the reasoning by the Chancellor and the coalition parties on ‘living beyond one’s means’ as a major cause for the crisis, alleging them of cynicism and a lacking sense of social reality. Here, the SPD spoke on behalf of workers, its traditional electoral base, by shifting the argument to the domestic context: “You surely do not mean to say that the watchman who stands in front of Ms. Merkel’s door every morning, earning 1,200 euro per month, has lived beyond his means. The same applies to the sales assistant in the bakery or butcher’s where we shop [...]” (Frank-Walter Steinmeier, SPD, 19 May 2010) Similarly, the Left Party questioned the coalition’s narrative: “Who is living beyond their means? It is not the workers, seniors, families and unemployed. [...] It is the speculators, the bankers and the Federal Government, those who take no interest in these people.” (Gesine Löttsch, Left, 19 May 2010) This is one of several instances where the Left Party portrayed itself as the genuine representative of the ‘ordinary people’.

Generally, the opposition demonstrated some degree of solidarity with the crisis-afflicted countries, while the government coalition defended its firm stance on conditionality. This became apparent in the discussion over whether speculation is an actual cause of the crisis, a position more likely to be found among the opposition parties, or whether – as the Chancellor and coalition parties argue – speculation is merely a symptom or ‘accelerant’ of the crisis. It was even more prominent when the Left Party and the Greens discussed economic imbalances within the EMU, drawing attention to the German trade surplus, which has led to national debts in other EU countries. The following statement is an example of that, and it also shows how the Left links EU issues to its domestic agenda, in this case incomes policy:

¹⁴ Angela Merkel, Government, 19 May 2010: “Too many less competitive members of the eurozone have lived beyond their means and therefore fell into the debt trap.”

We as the Federal Republic of Germany are largely responsible for the real problems. [...] [W]e sell much more than we import. That means of course that the countries that buy from us will run out of money at some point, unless they can simultaneously sell their goods and services to us. [...] The whole thing would have only worked if our wages had kept up with the economic development, and if due to this fact we had bought more, for example, Greek wine, Spanish olives or Portuguese sardines, that is, if we had actually contributed to the promotion of imports with our purchasing power. We were not able to do so. Your policy of wage reduction is one reason for this. [...] The German workers, seniors, students and also the unemployed have financed what has ended up at the exporters [...]. That is, among other things, the cause for the imbalances in Europe. (Klaus Ernst, Left, 19 May 2010)

In order to reduce economic imbalances, a European economic government is considered necessary, but Germany has to do its part as well by enhancing domestic demand, that is, by increasing purchasing power.

While recently, there has been lots of talk about austerity and growth, also in the Bundestag arena, in spring 2010 the growth versus austerity dispute featured only in claims making by the speakers representing the Left Party. It is another policy area where the Left transferred its national political agenda to EU debates. The key message was that cutback measures undermine domestic demand and slow down economic growth. Therefore, it was claimed to be “economic madness” that “[t]he same neoliberal remedy [of austerity] that is driving Greece further into the crisis has been prescribed to Spain and Portugal” (Gesine Löttsch, Left, 19 May 2010). Correspondingly, the Left Party called for policies to stimulate the eurozone:

These cutback measures allegedly reassure the markets and create trust among the investors. But how [...] shall these measures create growth? [...] In order to prevent state bankruptcies, we do not need draconic austerity plans, but, as the Left Party has already demanded for many years, we need a European stimulus programme, to which every state commits at least 2 percent of its annual gross national product so as to curb the economic decline. (Gesine Löttsch, Left, 19 May 2010)

According to the Left Party, the wider significance of these questions lies in the endangerment of social peace:

The real threat is that everything Europe has achieved after the Second World War is to be renounced for the rescue of the euro. Those who take out the breath of families and seniors with draconic cost-cutting plans do not only jeopardise the economic recovery but also the social peace in Europe. We as a pro-European party say: we want a peaceful, just and social Europe. (Gesine Löttsch, Left, 19 May 2010)

5 CONCLUSION

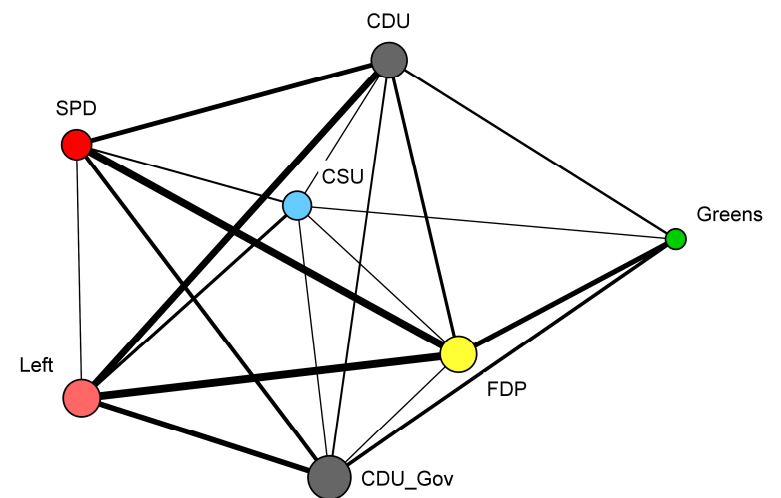
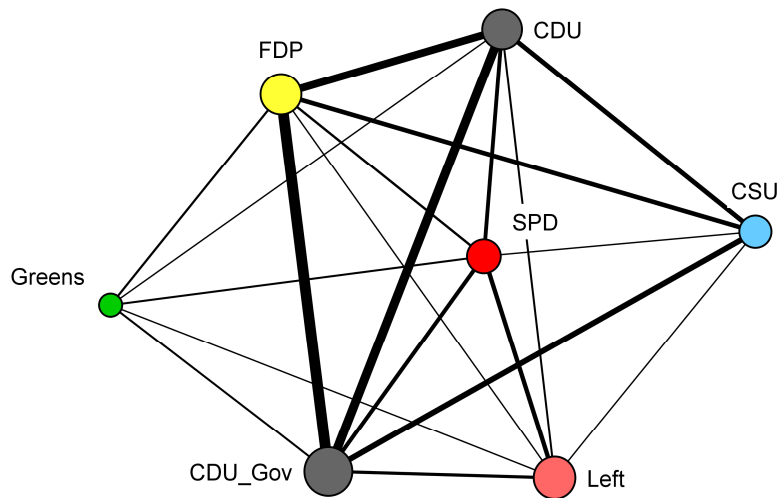
This study provides a concise review of different approaches to political cleavage structures in EU member states and finds supporting evidence for complexity, that is, multidimensionality. Debates on the Greek crisis in the plenary assembly of the German Bundestag from spring 2010 show significant polarisation on the economic left/right dimension. There was lots of discussion about regulation policies (e.g. the financial transaction tax) and the problems and prospects of the economic order. Here, a clear dividing line became visible between the Left Party's neoliberal critique and the Liberals' pro-market commitment. The causes of the crisis have been contested along the majority–opposition divide, and some of these arguments are also relevant in left/right terms. The Chancellor and the CDU/CSU speakers stressed the responsibility of Greece, Spain and Portugal for 'living beyond their means' and therefore incurring fiscal debt, whereas the opposition challenged the 'living beyond one's means' rationale, alleging the government of a lacking sense of social reality. The Left Party and the Greens argued that Germany's trade surplus is one reason for the economic imbalances within the EU, making Germany partly responsible for the debts in other member states. Moreover, the government's austerity approach was disputed by the Left Party's pro-growth discourse.

In conclusion, I suggest that political parties are eager to communicate their ideological differences on the left/right dimension also in EU-centred parliamentary debates, as it presents an effective strategy for 'translating' some of their domestic policy positions into EU politics. Given the relatively solid pro-European consensus among the parties represented in the Bundestag and the fact that there was not much disagreement about the Greek aid package at that time, we in fact observe more contestation with regard to economic left/right issues than on the pro-/anti-EU dimension.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Frequency distribution of ‘policy’, ‘polity’ and ‘politics’ by actors

	Government		CDU		CSU		SPD		FDP		Left		Greens		Total
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
Policy	54	39.4	71	49.7	39	46.4	36	27.1	53	46.1	51	63.8	18	23.1	322 (41.8%)
Polity	72	52.6	46	32.2	34	40.5	24	18.0	39	33.9	18	22.5	24	30.8	257 (33.4%)
Politics	11	8.0	26	18.2	11	13.1	73	54.9	23	20.0	11	13.8	36	46.2	191 (24.8%)
Total	137 (17.8%)		143 (18.6%)		84 (10.9%)		133 (17.3%)		115 (14.9%)		80 (10.4%)		78 (10.1%)		770 (100.0%)



Co-occurrence network (Figure 1.1 on the left) and conflict network (Figure 1.2 on the right) for left/right issues, where the node size represents the frequency of claims and the link width indicates the edge weight, i.e. number of common/conflicting claims.

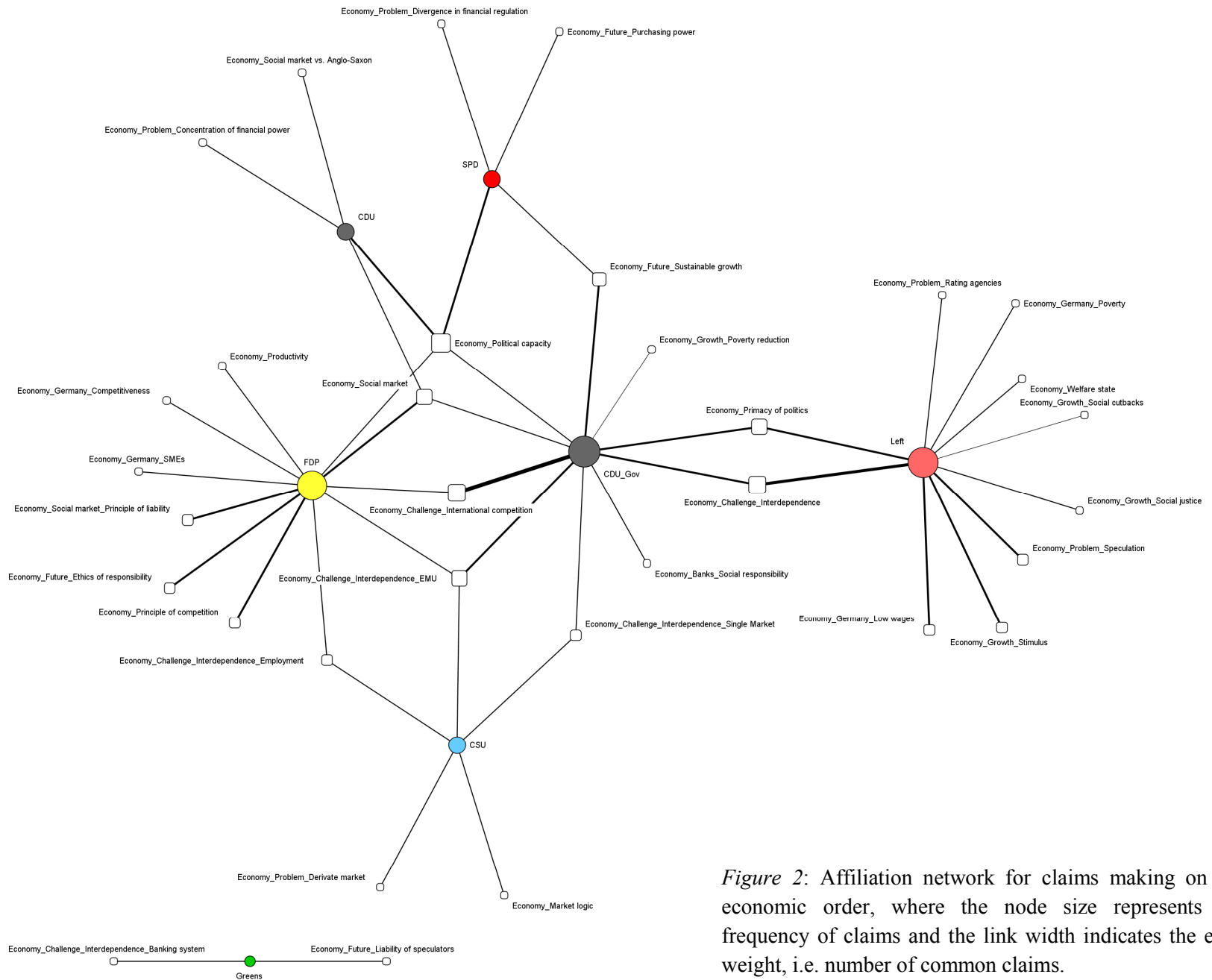


Figure 2: Affiliation network for claims making on the economic order, where the node size represents the frequency of claims and the link width indicates the edge weight, i.e. number of common claims.

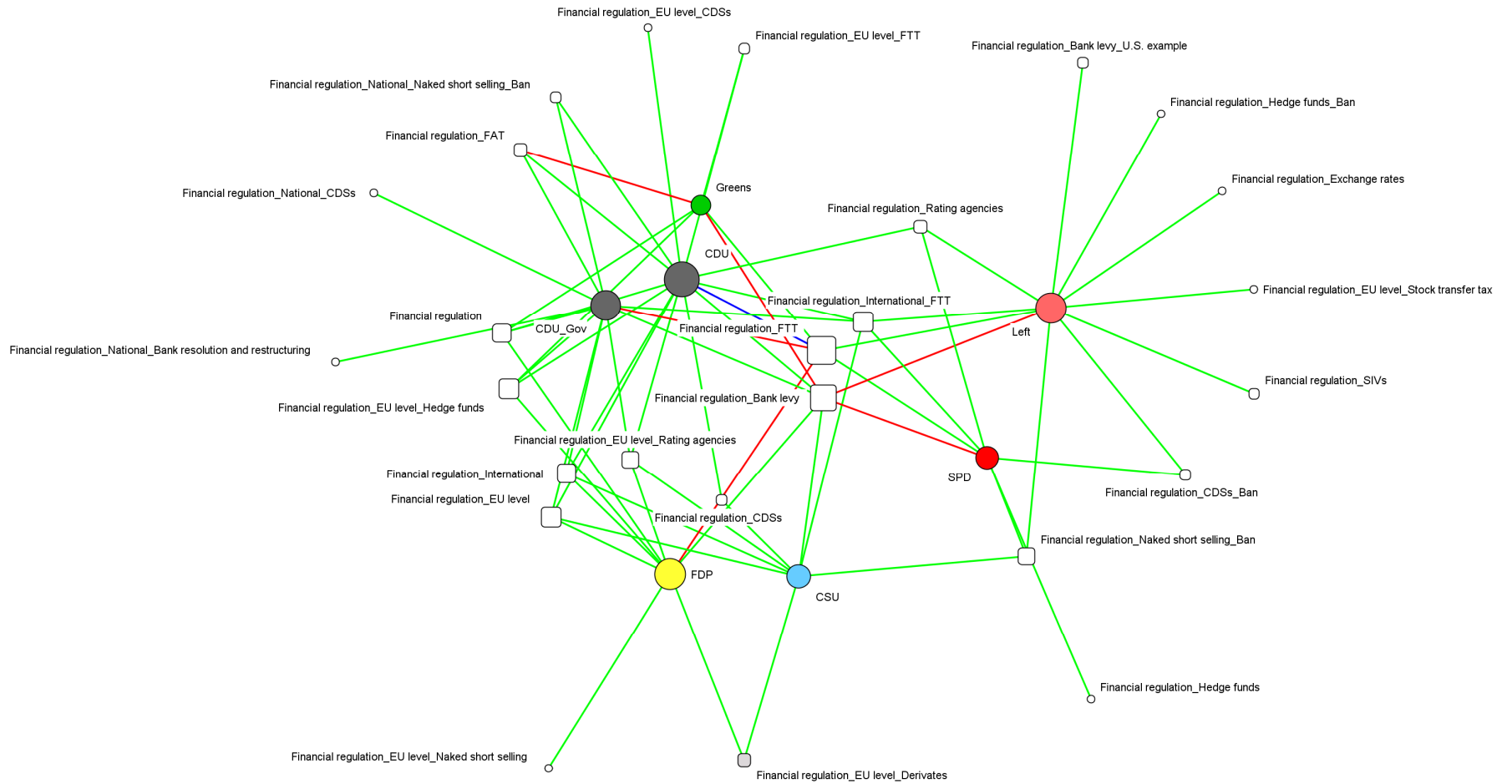


Figure 3: Affiliation network for claims making on financial regulation, where the node size represents the frequency of claims and the link colour indicates the edge value, i.e. agreement (green), disagreement (red) or both (blue).

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