

Alba Ferreri

**'NO MORE WAITING?'**  
**THE 'EUROPEAN SEMESTER'**  
**AS A TIME FOR BRINGING *EUROPE***  
**BACK TO PARLIAMENTARY DEBATING:**  
**AN ANALYSIS OF THE ITALIAN CASE**  
**(2011-2014)**

*working paper*

 **Centro Einaudi**

**N9 2014** ISSN 2036-1246



Laboratorio di Politica Comparata  
e Filosofia Pubblica

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Centro Einaudi • Laboratorio di Politica Comparata e Filosofia Pubblica  
*with the support of Compagnia di San Paolo*

Working Paper-LPF n. 9 • 2014

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The underlying idea is that implementing forms of “civilized” politics is desirable as well as feasible. And, as far as the Italian political system is concerned, it is also urgently needed, since the system appears to be poorly prepared to deal with the challenges emerging in many policy areas: from welfare state reform to the governance of immigration, from the selection criteria in education and in public administration to the regulation of ethically sensitive issues.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

'NO MORE WAITING?'

THE 'EUROPEAN SEMESTER' AS A TIME FOR BRINGING *EUROPE* BACK  
TO PARLIAMENTARY DEBATING: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ITALIAN CASE  
(2011-2014)

1. Introduction: relevance of the topic and main purposes	5
1.1. Case selection and scope of the analysis	7
2. Theoretical framework	10
2.1. The changing role of domestic legislatures vis-à-vis the EU integration process	10
2.2. The EU integration trajectory and domestic actors' reactions: the parties	14
3. Methodology: a brief description of <i>claims-making analysis</i>	18
3.1. Coding plenary debates on budgetary issues: the scheme	20
4. Findings and conclusions: is <i>Europe</i> back home?	21
4.1. What parliamentarians say and don't say: some preliminary considerations	21
4.2. Conclusive remarks and hints for future research	31
References	31
Appendix A – Thematic variables and frames	36
Appendix B – Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 2010. Scores relevant to this study	39
Acronyms	40

## KEYWORDS

Italian Parliament, European Semester, planning documents,  
computer-assisted content analysis

## ABSTRACT

**‘NO MORE WAITING?’  
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Regardless of the specific constitutional prerogatives of each Member State, the dominant conventional doctrine is clear: parliaments appear as the highest representative bodies of their polities, the core institutions for legitimizing political power. Yet, they still seem to be the most displaced bodies vis-à-vis the European Union (EU) integration process, to the point that most of the literature has labeled this state of affairs ‘de-parliamentarization’. In the face of this situation, other scholars have ultimately managed to distinguish ‘fighting back responses’ on behalf of the national parliaments (NPs)—pointing out the existence of a process of ‘re-parliamentarization’, especially prompted by the increasing politicization of the European issue. Starting from this theoretical backdrop, the concrete functioning of the parliamentary arena ‘in times of crisis’ would be observed. The crisis in fact has deeply affected the way in which those assemblies tend to manage EU affairs and, more generally, exercise their traditional functions. Going beyond mere normative considerations, institutional practices leading to reasonable policy choices would be sought, also trying to shed light on how different styles of parliamentary debating may lead to different decision-making patterns. In particular, plenary debates on planning documents (the ‘Economic and Financial Document’, 2011-2014) discussed within the framework of the so-called ‘European Semester’ would be analyzed, as they seem to provide a good sample for the frequently assumed ‘salience’ of the European issue—as well as for assessing the way parliamentarians actually confront and work out ‘Europe’, thus exercising the so-called ‘communicative function’. The contribution is focused on Italy, conceived as a ‘typical study case’. Data are empirically gained from a computer-assisted qualitative content analysis.

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The Euro burns.  
Where are those intellectuals, ready to defend,  
with acuity and enthusiasm,  
the unfinished project of the European Union, its conquests,  
in case of emergency?  
Answer: "the number you have dialled does not exist"  
(U. Beck, "How to Save the Euro", *La Repubblica*, 20 January 2011)

**1. INTRODUCTION: RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC AND MAIN PURPOSES**

No doubt that—ever since the mid-1990s—the role of national parliaments (NPs) within the European Union (EU) has been receiving growing academic attention, particularly as the democratic deficit issue started to stand out (Norton 1998; Auel and Raunio 2012, 2014). As a matter of fact, the prosecution of the European integration project progressively challenged the once undisputed concept of nation-state sovereignty, putting into question also the dominant conventional doctrine—which conceives legislatures as the highest representative bodies of their polities, 'symbols and shapers of national history and identity' (Maurer and Wessels 2001).

The EU influence on domestic political institutions and actors has been studied from more than a single viewpoint. When it comes to political parties and party competition, observers focusing on these issues have mainly analyzed the electoral moment—or political discourse as it manifests itself through party manifestos, while studies centered on parliaments have looked mostly at institutional adaptation—scrutinizing the development of European committees and of particular control mechanisms (Lupato 2012, 2014). However, some (Maatsch 2010, Wendler 2012) have recently noticed how parliamentary practical activity may be also validly examined when evaluating crucial policy alternatives as transcribed in selected parliamentary debates.

The relevance of the parliamentary arena in the face of EU integration is even more central after the entry into force of the Reform treaty (December 2009), which added a new avenue for national parliaments—that, at least theoretically, shall render parliaments stronger players within the multi-level system. Expanding the room of maneuver, the Lisbon Treaty creates new mechanisms for involving national parliaments in EU policy-making (Neuhold and Strelkov 2012). In addition to that, the pressures arising to the Member States from the sovereign and debt crisis—along with the so-called new European economic governance framework—have opened a tough and testing chapter not only for the parliaments' part within the EU political system, but also for the same subsistence of the EU construction. Moreover, according to Fabbrini (2013), a revival of intergovernmental procedures has emerged following the set-up of the so-called 'new' European economic governance—calling into play Member States' governments, allegedly assisted by their respective legislatures.

In this sense, the present study would focus on the so-called 'communicative function' (Auel and Raunio 2012, 2014), emphasizing the *debating role* (Wendler 2014) of the parliament. The latter may contribute to enhance the parliament's relevance in the eyes of citizens and in respect of other (national and European) institutions. In this respect, the parliamentary arena would be seen in its 'gate-keeper' capacity, mediating the attitudes and interests expressed by citizens and brought by parliamentary parties in the assembly.

Parliamentary arenas are here conceived as institutional *fora* where—recalling Wendler (2013)'s definition—strategic communicative action of rational actors takes place, in order to seek political gains in terms of mobilizing support for their position both within the *forum* itself and outside it. This is true particularly for plenary debates, which *par excellence* are those ultimately addressing also to a broader public, instead of aiming solely at decision-makers of contending political parties in an endeavor of influencing policy.

Attention will be devoted to the analysis of plenary debates discussing 'executive-made' documents, providing for the definition of domestic economic guidelines in a medium-long term perspective. Although planning documents tend to be non-legislative acts, they deserve a particularly important position. Located within the budgetary decision, the economic and financial planning documents indicate the executive's position, to be discussed by the parliamentary arena based on the equilibrium that from time to time has been previously created by partisan and societal interests often divergent in complex societies (Crescenzi 2007).

Following previous research carried out on similar textual material (de Wilde 2009, Wendler 2013), the present study would make use of *claims-making analysis* (Koopmans and Statham 2002, Della Porta and Caiani 2007) as a specific form of qualitative content analysis—applied following the roadmap designed by an original coding scheme.

The general aim of the analysis is *measuring the salience of European matters*, as well as *recording the main themes and patterns of the political discourse*—as they appear when analyzing parliamentary plenary debates on EU-related budget and financial issues.

Going beyond mere normative considerations, institutional practices leading to reasonable policy choices will be sought also trying to shed light on how different styles of parliamentary debating may lead to different patterns of behavior among the domestic actors involved, namely parliamentary parties.

The remainder of the paper would be structured as follows: next section will be dedicated to briefly indicate the case selection—as a supplement to the introductory part. Then, relevant literature on national parliaments and their role within the EU will be reviewed, underlining the importance of the mentioned 'communicative' function. The third section will instead point out the features of the research design, discussing the methods and the coding scheme applied. The final part will show some preliminary results, which in turn would pave the way to the conclusion.

### *1.1. Case selection and research background*

This research focuses on the Italian parliament—regarded as a *typical case*. According to Gerring (2004) who refers to this term, a 'typical' case shall provide insight into a broader phenomenon; it shall be capable of offering results with added value for comparative research.

Following George and Bennet (2004), the case-study approach is generally beneficial for testing hypotheses and theory development in cases where there is a high level of '*causal complexity*' (p. 19), as it is often the case when dealing with the entanglements between the EU and the national level.

Founding father but weak performer (Fabbrini and Piattoni 2004), the Italian legislature has just undergone legal updates and experienced new patterns of behavior in the handling of EU affairs (for a review, see Esposito 2013, Cavatorto 2014).

More generally, the Italian case is interesting for its controversial features: over the decades the electoral system has changed, the governments have featured different party size and ideological range, and even technical governments have been formed to overcome temporary stalemates. Recently—aside the speedy ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, sensible differences among political elites' attitudes have come into view, alongside an unprecedented politicization of the European issue (for a review, see Cavatorto 2014). Also—with the heyday of the economic crisis, the Italian government has assumed more a 'policy-taker' than a 'policy-maker' attitude towards the policy choices taken by the EU institutions to face the worsening situation. Further—even though Italy is the third largest net contribution to



the European Stability Mechanism (ESM),<sup>1</sup> it has been considered as one possible recipient of EU bailout financial aid (Di Virgilio and Radaelli 2013).

The multi-faceted nature of such a case makes a study on Italy well timed and appropriate, in that it may concern any parliamentary democracy, at least partially (Pedrazzani and Zucchini 2013). Further, it is an uncovered territory, since in-depth case studies or small-N comparative analyses oriented to assess some of the issues presented have so far left Italy aside.

In an attempt to contribute to the latter necessity, the present paper—*which constitutes a preliminary draft analysis of an ongoing, broader, research project*—would focus on a quite narrow, though crucial, time span, taking into consideration plenary debates on those planning documents whose formal contents are changed following the enactment of the so-called ‘European Semester’<sup>2</sup> (2011/2014). As it may be renowned, the latter is a yearly cycle of economic policy coordination, set up by the European Commission in order to coordinate the Member States’ efforts towards the achievement of ‘Europe 2020’<sup>3</sup> targets, translating them into national, growth-enhancing, policies. All Member States have committed to achieving the Europe 2020 objectives, and in this endeavor, they made the effort to coordinate their actions by submitting to a wide-ranging governance instrument summing up economic, financial and social purposes: the so-called European Semester.

In practical terms, it sets up a yearly cycle of economic policy coordination, reuniting the multilateral surveillance and organization of financial matters within the Eurozone following the sovereign debt crisis, and providing for a new working method for discussing economic and budgetary priorities at the same point in time.

<sup>1</sup> The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) has been established on September 27, 2012, as a permanent safeguarding measure for the Eurozone: it shall provide instant access to financial assistance programs for Member States of the Eurozone in trouble. It replaced two earlier temporary EU funding programmes: the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) and the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM). The ESM is theoretically meant to cover prospective. The EFSF and EFSM still handle money transfers and program monitoring for the previously approved bailout loans to Ireland, Portugal and Greece.

<sup>2</sup> Here understood as the decision brought by the ECOFIN deliberation dated September 7, 2010. It was specifically meant to better an *ex ante* coordination of economic and budget policies of Member States—integrating the specifications on the implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact. The latter governs fiscal discipline in the EU, with the purpose of ensuring fiscal discipline in the Union within Europe2020. More on the point available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/special-reports/european-semester?lang=en>.

<sup>3</sup> In general, Europe 2020 is built upon five ‘key targets’, to be achieved by the end of the decade, and covering areas of renown from the Lisbon Strategy, such as employment, education, research and innovation, social inclusion and poverty reduction, climate/energy. In addition to that—in order to strengthen those targets, the Commission foresaw seven ‘flagship initiatives’ on relevant, though wide-ranging, themes such as innovation, youth, the digital agenda, resource efficiency, industrial policy, skills and jobs, and the fight against poverty. Those projects are thought of as ‘frameworks’ for orientation when it comes to approach the key-targets, both at the EU and domestic levels. More on the point available at [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm).

As shown in table 1, the first half of the year entails the execution of the following phases: (1) in January the European Commission hands in the Annual Growth Review; (2) between February and March the European Council drafts the economic and budget policy guidelines at a European level and at the level of Member States; (3) mid April Member States contextually put forward the 'National reform plans', which are drafted within the new Europe Strategy 2020 and the so-called 'Stability and Convergence Programmes', which are drafted within the Growth Stability Pact, taking into account the guidelines established by the European Council; (4) at the beginning of June, on the basis of the PNR and of the PSC, the European Commission draws up some Economic Policy and budgetary recommendations for Member States; (5) within the month of June the ECOFIN Council and, for the part it is entitled to, the Employment and Social Affairs Council, approve the European Commission recommendations, even on the basis of the suggestions by the European Council given in June.

Table 1 – The European Semester: actors and process

<b>End of the year</b> ■ Annual Growth Survey: overall guidance for the EU produced by the Commission / discussed by the Council / endorsed by the Spring European Council
<b>March</b> ■ European Council policy orientations based on the Annual Growth Survey
<b>April</b> ■ Stability or Convergence Programmes & National Reform Programmes: produced by the EU Member States—except those under financial assistance programmes
<b>June</b> ■ Country-specific recommendations, including fiscal policy and macro-economic imbalances: produced by the Commission / adopted by the Council following endorsement of the European Council

During the second half of the year, Member States approve their respective financial maneuvers, taking the recommendations they received into account.

The present paper analyses the parliamentary debates devoted to the Economic and Financial Documents (DEF, *Documento di Economia e Finanza*) issued in Italy within this calendar. The latter replaced the Public Financing Decisions (*Decisione di Finanza Pubblica*, DFP) introduced by law n. 196/2009. This legal provision was able to reform national accountancy resulted from the new European procedures aimed at preventing and correcting macroeconomic imbalances—foreseeing the need for a re-organization of the budget cycle, which is now represented by law n. 39/2011, and the enactment of the DEF.

With law 39/2011 crucial modifications have been applied to the law of public finance and accounting (n. 196/2009), in order to adapt the entire process of national balance to the constraints and deadlines imposed by the European Se-

mester. The DEF has to be presented by the executive to the parliamentary Chambers by April 10 every year—twenty days before the deadline for the submission of the latter to the European Commission and the Council.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. *The changing role of domestic legislatures vis-à-vis the EU integration process*

As outlined in the introduction, it is of renown that—under the treaties establishing the original European Communities—National Parliaments were accorded no formal role. Still main actors in the national law-making processes, NPs thus found themselves playing no direct role in the new supranational law-making process. Consequently, parliamentarians faced a choice between accepting that status—and confining themselves to their work in the national arena—or seeking to change it by institutional reform and even by treaty amendment.

With specific regard to the latter choice, some scholars (Smith 1996) individuated two basic stages: the first one deals essentially with a scenario of ‘acceptance’, which spanned the period from the creation of the European Communities through to the mid-1980s; the second period is one of ‘institutional change’, dating from the mid-1980s—initiated by the challenges of the single market and—in treaty terms—the Single European Act, through to the enactment of the Treaty on the European Union in 1993.

While, prior to the Maastricht Treaty,<sup>4</sup> scholars could still claim that Member States would not delegate powers to the Union in the so-called ‘high politics’ areas, these arguments sound somewhat hollow now as the jurisdiction of the EU extends basically to all policy areas, ranging from funding cultural projects to the gradual development of common security and defense policies. In particular, three distinct characteristics developed by NPs in reaction to this ‘expansion’ at the EU-level (Smith 1996), at least during its initial stages:

- ❶ a trend towards *specialization* within European NPs is to be found in the creation of committees devoted to European affairs. The 1980s became the decade of EC Committees, especially in lower chambers;
- ❷ *greater activity*: NPs began devoting more and more time to scrutinizing documents to be submitted to the Council and/or the implementation of directives. More conspicuously, the responsibility was shouldered by the European Affairs Committees or being shared between committees;

<sup>4</sup> The Maastricht Treaty included two declarations concerning NPs: Declaration on the role of NPs in the EU and Declaration on the Conference of the Parliaments. A protocol was annexed to the Amsterdam Treaty too: Protocol on the role of national parliaments in the EU.

⑤ *attempts to integrate the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) into their activities:* the greater role of the EP in the legislative process from 1987, along with the greater volume of legislation, provided a spur to try to include MEPs more in the work of NPs. Various attempts have been made to integrate MEPs, such as invitations to committee meetings, or actual reunions between members of the NPs and the country's MEPs.

In spite of those progresses, so far the EU decision-making process remains heavily impacted by national executives, to the extent that studying the role of NPs within the EU seems even more necessary, as parliaments still are the main repositories of popular legitimacy (Wagner 2006). Related to this, most of the literature on national parliaments frames those as the main victims of integration: according to the *de-parliamentarisation* 'standard thesis', national governments—and not backbench parliamentarians—represent the Member States at the EU level. Hence, legislatures appear as always disadvantaged as compared to the executive branch (Raunio 2010).

The dividing line in the literature seems thus broadly located between those who regard NPs as 'losers' of European integration (Maurer and Wessels 2001) and those who argue that NPs have more or less successfully 'fought back' (Raunio and Hix 2000).

In general, NPs actually designed 'fighting-back' responses to the EU integration process—whose patterns reasonably varied a good deal from one Member State to another. However, the trend has been not so much a defensive adjustment to the loss of policy-making powers, but rather in most Member States an increasingly nuanced approach to incorporating and encapsulating the EU dimension, with national actors playing important and influential roles at all stages of the EU policy process. In particular, Wessels argues that the practices of national governments and administrations in preparing EU matters have been affected only to a limited degree, as continuous deficits in parliaments' ability to play the multi-level game reduce the influence of national deputies (Wessels, Maurer and Mittag 2003). Furthermore, the involvement of parliaments in the EU policy-cycle remains weak and largely reactive. Despite some constitutional changes, most NPs have remained 'weak adaptors' with regard to the European policy-cycle: some have kept or gained a routine as national performers, and their influence is mostly notable—if at all—in the final phase of implementation and control.

Other scholars (Raunio and Hix 2000) instead point out that NPs can wield considerably more influence than before: parliaments have improved their position through more effective overall scrutiny of governments, thanks to a better access to information. In fact, in some countries European integration has been a catalyst in the 're-emergence' of parliaments. Legislatures, alarmed by governmental autonomy resulting from integration, have started to invest more resources in

executive office-holders' accountability on EU-related as well as non-EU-related matters.

From Maastricht on, a number of initiatives about how further strengthen the presence of NPs in the EU policy process was launched. The 2000s saw a proper recognition—in the Nice<sup>5</sup> and Laeken<sup>6</sup> Declarations—of the NPs as crucial actors for achieving an enhanced democratic legitimacy of the Union, especially as a datum point within the long-standing debate on the democratic deficit (Rizzuto 2003).

Alongside with the key-provisions of the draft protocols on the role of national parliaments and subsidiarity adopted by the Convention on the Future of Europe,<sup>7</sup> those treaties paved the way to the formation of new opportunity venues for NPs to be closer to the EU affairs.

Since the NPs contextually started to process more EU documents, the power and functions of the European Affairs Committees (EACs) were upgraded, aiming to better coordinate parliamentary scrutiny of the EU matters. While this potentially strengthens the authorization and accountability function of parliaments, helping them to reduce information asymmetries, and thereby influence and control governments better, it is also possible that moving debates to special committees may weaken the expression of disagreements and the exercise of control.

As mentioned in the introduction, it is with the enactment of the Lisbon Treaty that national parliaments found some new and interesting tools. For instance, with the 'early-warning mechanism' (EWM),<sup>8</sup> the national legislatures are expected to act as watchdogs, and are assigned the right to monitor whether initiatives for EU laws comply with the principle of subsidiarity. Moreover, art. 12 of the Lisbon

<sup>5</sup> In Declaration no. 23 annexed to the Treaty of Nice (2001, entered into force in 2003), the Member States called for a deeper and wider debate about the future of the Union, focusing on four major areas: (1) the delimitation of powers; (2) the status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights; (3) simplification of the Treaties; (4) the role of the national parliaments. Cfr. [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/institutional\\_affairs/treaties/nice\\_treaty/nice\\_treaty\\_protocols\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/institutional_affairs/treaties/nice_treaty/nice_treaty_protocols_en.htm).

<sup>6</sup> The European Council met in Laeken in December 2001.

<sup>7</sup> This was a body established by the European Council in December 2001 as a result of the Laeken Declaration. Inspired by the Philadelphia Convention that led to the adoption of the United States federal Constitution, its purpose was to produce a draft constitution for the European Union for the Council to finalize and adopt. The Convention finished its work in July 2003 with their Draft Treaty establishing the famously rejected 'Constitution for Europe'—which eventually paved the way to the Lisbon Treaty.

<sup>8</sup> Under this mechanism a national parliament can, within eight weeks from the date of transmission of a draft legislative act, send the EU institutions (primarily the Commission) a reasoned opinion stating why it considers that the legislative initiative does not comply with the principle of subsidiarity. When doing this, the national parliament should, if appropriate, consult regional parliaments with legislative powers. Each national parliament has two votes and in bicameral systems each of the two chambers has one vote. If the reasoned opinions represent at least one third of all the votes allocated to the NPs (*'yellow card'*), the draft must be reviewed. After the review the Commission may decide to maintain, amend or withdraw the draft. This choice has been made out of legitimacy concerns, and one could actually notice that—while NPs have certainly been late adapters to integration—there is no doubt that they exercise tighter scrutiny of their governments in EU matters than before (Raunio 2010).

Treaty extended the participation rights of the NPs to 'contribute actively to the good functioning of the Union', including an obligation for the Commission to forward all the proposed legislation directly to the NPs and strengthens the possibility to object to it. Pending the ratification of the Treaty, since late 2006, Commission President Barroso introduced a mechanism for forwarding the documents to the NPs (the so-called *Barroso mechanism*). In addition, a protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality by the NPs was attached.

In light of this framework, it is thence clear how examining the NPs in the face of EU integration now means connecting the issue of EU policy-making with the wider topic of the evolution of politics within the Member States, especially as far as the evolving relationship between government and parliament is concerned.

At first glance—looking at the dedicated literature, the majority of the works has dealt with the assessment of the aforementioned new tools, as brought by the Lisbon Treaty or, more generally, by what has been denominated 'constitutional path' followed by the EU as of the failure of the Constitutional Treaty (2005). Else, academia has focused on law production, the inspiration for the latter kind of research being the well-known '80 percent' claim made by the Commission President Jacques Delors in the late 1980s about the share of legislation that would flow from Brussels.<sup>9</sup> Further, other available analyses deal with the mechanisms underlying the functioning of the electoral arena, or on institutional adaptation and supplementary control mechanisms. Connected to this, some literature had particularly concentrated on the scrutiny function (for a review, see Maurer 2013), which is actually amongst the (few) strongest means the domestic parliamentary arenas have to control the action of their governments.

In spite of this evidence, however, a barely neglected—but still no less valuable—research path to walk through is the one relating the so-called 'communicative function' of the legislatures. Other than 'control and oversight', in fact, Auel and Raunio (2012) have recently pointed to the 'communicative function' supposedly exercised by parliaments. Of course, NPs at present provide far more information on EU politics for their citizens than before, for example by publishing EU and parliamentary documents on their websites. However, 'communication should not be reduced to information and transparency' (Auel 2013, 13): access to documents, as appreciated as it is, cannot substitute communication as such.

When it comes to parliamentary debates, European matters are mostly delegated to specialized standing committees. This automatically reduces the chances to use

<sup>9</sup> *My impression by and large—and apologies to those whose pride in the keen interest taken by their national parliaments in European affairs might be offended—is that there is an unawareness in many national parliaments of the quiet revolution that is taken place, as a result of which 80% at least of economic, financial and perhaps social legislation will be flowing from the Community by 1993.* Debates of the European Parliament 15.6.1988, pp. 156-157. However, research has shown this share to be much lower, depending on the operationalization of 'EU-related' legislation (see for example Töller 2012).

a plenary for finalizing EU-related decisions: in fact, whilst the management of European affairs has gradually become somehow more ‘diffuse’ in many parliamentary assemblies, most of the EACs’ meetings (or their reports) are still not accessible to the public<sup>10</sup> (Fasone 2009, Auel 2013). As for plenary debates, attention to them has been more limited, because they were not considered overall much influential. However, if a historical perspective and a sincere interest in the communicative function of the parliamentary assembly are taken on, the study of plenary debates is also somehow more logical (de Wilde 2009). From a data accessibility viewpoint, plenary debates are transcribed literally and publically accessible either through the physical archives of parliaments or, increasingly, through digitalized archives on the Internet.

Since the present paper would actually deal with the communicative function performed by the NPs through plenary debates, it is inevitable to focus on parties as the central actors of these discussions (Auel and Raunio 2012). Next section would deal with some crucial aspects of the dedicated literature.

### *2.1. The EU integration trajectory and domestic actors’ reactions: the parties*

As Hix and Høyland (2011, 137) famously argued, ‘EU politics is party politics’, as parties provide vital links between the national and EU arenas. Nonetheless, de Wilde (2013) rightly noted how political parties continue to be important but no longer retain a monopoly on representation in Europe. This is why questions relating to who is representing whom and on what basis are thus particularly pertinent in the EU. Further, where EU decisions have supremacy over existing and future legislation in the Member States, they function as constraints: in a nutshell, EU legislation limits the policies that parties in the Member States can pursue. Therefore, they affect party competition as well (Nanou and Dorussen 2013).

It was not until the first direct elections to the European Parliament (1979) that the study of political parties and European integration entered the field of party research. The first strand of research regarding parties and European integration, in fact, entailed the formation of transnational party federations and the birth of the European parties, conceptualizing Europeanization as creation at the European level of distinct structures of governance (see for instance Cowles et al. 2001, Hix et al. 2007). Other scholars have instead considered the relation between the party delegation in the European Parliament and the national party (Raunio 2002), emphasizing the effects of the domestic party on its European delegation rather than in the effects of the EU at the domestic level.

<sup>10</sup> Some parliaments (e.g. Italy) do not even offer standing committees’ stenographic reports: only summary reports are available. Further, most EACs have the option to close parts of their meetings, an option usually used in connection with more sensitive EU matters or when the government position is debated (Auel and Raunio 2012). Thus—since they do not record accurately who says what, to whom and why, these records are unsuitable for measuring anything.

Yet, EU-driven (or 'external') stimuli are often undistinguishable from other kind of internal (political or institutional) incentives, to the extent that European dimension could righteously be subsumed in the domestic political competition, either presuming an indirect or a direct impact of the first on the latter. In fact, the process of European integration and the creation of a new, supranational and increasingly policy-loaded polity can have an effect and influence political parties. Alongside this, the development of the European sovereign debt crisis has recently contributed to increase the degree of public visibility and interest of domestic actors about EU affairs. This situation challenges the assumption about the low salience of EU affairs, or about the scarcity of information which domestic actors are offered of. In few words, the supposition that 'Europe stays out' of party and parliamentary debates appears to require a revision (Wendler 2013).

As multi-dimensional as political issues are, there is justification for reducing that space to a more manageable number (Bakker et al. 2010). Concerning the impact of the EU on national party systems, at least in pre-2004 EU Member States, the conclusion by Mair (2007) has been prominent, detailing these constraints as manifesting in three specific ways: (1) a decrease of policy space<sup>11</sup> available to competing parties; (2) a reduction of the policy instruments<sup>12</sup> available for the national governments' perusal; (3) a limited policy repertoire.<sup>13</sup> In a spirit of full disclosure, the shift of policy competencies hence appears as an incremental process, which parties accordingly respond to. *Ergo*, if policy convergence means that parties would take positions in the issue-space closer to those held by their 'rivals'—wherefore rendering the distribution of party positions more compact, then EU decision-making seems likely to limit the range of party policy positions.

To sum up, the literature has underlined the emergence of a new dimension of conflict between national parties, as connected to the EU integration path. The nature of this dimension has been interpreted in various ways, summed up as following (Hooghe et al. 2002):

■ *The regulation model.* European integration is subsumed into the left/right dimension. European politics is merged within the basic domestic competition between the left—pushing for common economic regulation across Europe, and the right—generally favoring less regulation. Party positioning on the left/right scale and European issues therefore coincide.

<sup>11</sup> As Mair (2007, 159) specifies, 'this happens when policies are harmonized across the Union, and when there is more or less forced convergence, with one size fitting all.' In other terms, policy space entails a combination of *de jure* policy sovereignty and *de facto* national policy autonomy (at a domestic level). More on the point reading Mayer 2008, see references.

<sup>12</sup> As Mair (2007, 159) specifies, 'this occurs through the delegation of decision-making from the national level to the European level.'

<sup>13</sup> As Mair (2007, 160) specifies, 'practices that involve public bodies in selection, privileging, or discrimination become more and more restricted, and hence the stock of policies available to governments, and to the parties which control those governments, is steadily curtailed.'



■ *The Hix-Lord model.* European integration and left/right contestation are independent of each other. European integration engages national sovereignty and mobilizes territorial groups, competing on where authority should reside. Left/right contestation patterns revolve around the allocation of values among functional interests. Hence, party positioning on domestic issues and party positioning on European issues are orthogonal to each other.

■ *The Hooghe-Marks model.* Left/right contestation shapes positioning only on European policies that are concerned with redistribution and regulating capitalism. *Ergo*, the center-left supports European integration in cohesion policy, social policy, unemployment policy, environmental regulation, and upgrading the European Parliament, whereas the right supports market integration but opposes European regulation. Left/right location is related to a subset of European issues.

Irrespective of the model preferred, what is here important—and broadly accepted by academia—is the fact that *EU matters*, and actually may shape national parties' positions and attitudes. From considerations such as the latter, some hypotheses follow. The first one is also the more general:

**(H1)** *if Europe matters, one could expect a prevalence, over the debates analyzed, of EU-related topics (in terms of 'salience'). More specifically, (H1a) the breakthrough of the crisis may have brought 'Europe' back to parliamentary debating, contributing to focus the debate on specific themes amenable to the current critical juncture.*

Circumstantial to this, the evolution of the debt crisis may instill parliamentary controversies about the supranational framework of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), particularly the design of institutions, the appropriateness and effectiveness of decisions taken at the European level and the general evaluation of supranational governance (Wendler 2012).

**(H2-1):** *if Europe matters, the 'European dimension' (e.g. pro/anti-Europe attitudes) should outweigh other national logics.*

Alternative to the scenario depicted by H2-1, the ensuing hypothesis is proposed:

**(H2-0):** *domestic logics still prevail over European ones, and, in particular, government/opposition dynamics will win out the plenary ground—with a parliamentary majority supporting the government's stance and an opposition assuming negative attitudes towards the executive's stances—even 'using' Europe as a means for moving their critique against the establishment.*

Since the debates analyzed deal with the country's overall economic situation, empirical research proves that the general economic position of political parties on economic and budgetary policy is a factor in their decisions as to which macro-economic measures should be adopted both in usual and in critical conditions (Alesina and Rosenthal 1995, Maatsch 2013, Schmidt 2014, Closa and Maatsch

2014). Hence, those studies suggest the possible relevance of the dividing line between those supporting Keynesian views and those who instead back up more neo-liberal stances.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, **(H3)**: *parties representing the economic 'left' are more likely to advocate Keynesian measures and anti-cyclical policies, whereas parties representing the economic 'right' tend to support neo-liberal stances and pro-cyclical policies including austerity measures.*

The hypotheses presented have to be considered as specifically referring to the Italian case, considered as a 'typical case' (Gerring 2004). Further—recalling Lijphart, this research may be also regarded as a 'hypotheses generating' case study, because it aims to produce first empirical evidences, in order to refine theories and hypotheses to be tested onto a larger N (Collier 1993).

While recognizing this, it has been said that the present analysis would primarily deal with measuring the *salience* of European matters, but also with parliamentarians' *competence-position*—hereby intended as a specification of the latter concept: it ascertains the level at which it is preferred to conceive the competence for the EU-related (salient) issue mentioned. This information is crucial since it helps to specify the basic conception the claimant has of the EU commitment. In fact, as Lord and Pollak (2013) righteously state, policy-making in the EU may be seen as a dynamic process implying a collaboration among representatives from different levels in order to produce the outcomes they desire.

A connected hypothesis linking salience and competence-position would be attached to **H1**: *if Europe matters, one could expect an increase in the salience of EU-related matters as the EU commitment mounts over time. (H1b) Accordingly, the level at which the MPs would prefer to conceive the competence for the EU-related issue shall increasingly favor the EU arena, or at least a shared competence setting would be privileged as compared to a merely domestic one.*

As for the measurement, salience here is simply understood as the level of attention devoted to European matters (either in a positive, neutral or negative way). According to saliency theory, parties compete by giving emphasis to certain issues or making a claim to 'issue ownership' and de-emphasizing others (Budge et al. 2001, 78-87). Saliency theory contrasts with the main assumption of spatial theories—which see parties competing and taking distinct positions along issue dimensions (Nanou and Dorussen 2013). Moreover, the EU pressure cannot be seen as a uniform force, affecting all the domestic systems and actor in the same

<sup>14</sup> Some scholars (Schmidt 2014) have recently recalled how the European political economy may be divided in two periods: the postwar neo-Keynesian paradigm that lasted up until the 1970s, and the neo-liberal paradigm that has predominated ever since. At the heart of this latter paradigm is neo-liberalism, with its recommendations for budgetary austerity, low inflation, and low deficits and debt. In a nutshell, the neo-Keynesian view advocates instead low private sector debt, more global regulation, and a need for expansionary state intervention.

way and with the same strength: of course, institutional, economic, cultural and other domestic elements may play a role when conceptualizing the European set of constraints and opportunities.

The ‘competence-position’ (henceforth, ‘position’) is grasped in a slightly more elaborated fashion, drawing on the seminal contribution by Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989). Thus, position is here measured by considering the *orientation*: in fact, issues are not perceived ‘*in the sharp positional fashion that the traditional theory [Downs 1957] assumes*’; on the contrary, they are perceived ‘*rather diffusely*’ (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989). Therefore, attitudes could be defined as containing two elements: *direction* and *intensity*, namely the degree of attention paid to the matter.

Next section would be usefully devoted to the clarification of the methodological choices made—detailing also the selection criteria adopted for choosing the parliamentary debates examined.

### 3. METHODOLOGY: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF *CLAIMS-MAKING ANALYSIS*

As Closa and Maatsch (2014) recently pointed out, parliaments are essentially deliberative bodies, where parliamentarians debate, in an endeavor to *convince and persuade* their interlocutors of the validity of their own arguments. In doing so, they *need to justify their actions and decisions, and discourse constitutes an essential instrument for pursuing that goal* (p. 830).

Amongst the methodological alternatives available when analyzing such written source of data, *claims-making analysis* seems the most adequate—since it combines a focus on the actors, policy positions and framing of claims—including attention for the ‘addressees’ who are called upon to enact the claim into policy and ‘object actors’ (de Wilde 2013).

Claims-making analysis is a specific form of qualitative content analysis, introduced to overcome the weaknesses of protest event data analysis by collecting data not just on the actors and forms of action, but also on the interpretations by actors involved in political conflicts (Koopmans and Statham 2002). Actually, the method combines quantitative protest event analysis (Tarrow 1989) and qualitative frame analysis (Gamson and Modigliani 1989), allowing an examination of variables relating the actor-level and those dealing with themes and frames using a single dataset.

Further, claims-making analysis specifically tries to establish the missing link between actors and contents in a discourse, by employing a distinct set of methods, particularly a classification of actors as well as frames on a one-dimensional pro/contra scale.

As de Wilde (2013) has recently affirmed, this method is promising also from the viewpoint of *representation* studies. Reference is made here to the work of Saward (2010) as the main advocate of the claims-making approach. The latter scholar conceives representation as a constitutive activity or an event (Saward 2010, 14), rather than as a mere result of an election. Furthermore, he depicts the relationships between representatives and represented as a 'three-party interchange'—the representatives, their claims offered to an audience of prospective represented, and those who are actually 'subjects' to the decisions made by the representatives (Lord and Pollak 2013).

Generally, both addressees and object actors are contained within the claim itself, as they are articulated by the *claimant*. To be clearer, the claim is the unit of analysis and measures relevant variables at that level. It consists of the expression of a political opinion by an actor (e.g. a parliamentarian) and is supposed to 'articulate political demands, decisions [...] which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors in a policy field' (Statham 2005, 12).

In textual terms, a claim may correspond to a few words, or go on through several paragraphs, as long as it is the same claimant making a single argument on a single topic.

Taking stock of recent projects based on similar textual material,<sup>15</sup> the present research proposes and adopts an original coding scheme<sup>16</sup>—designed to take into account the specificities of the EU issue salience, as it emerges looking at parliamentary debates on budgetary policy in Italy. In fact, decision rules and policy styles may change across policy areas—for example, according to the historical peculiarities characterizing different times in the country's progress (Lord and Pollak 2013).

In order to avoid the risk of having the qualitative findings from the coding process not corresponding to the quantitative findings from the subsequent analysis, the research opted—following Read and Marsh (2002) and de Wilde (2009)—for a 'hierarchical mixed methodology.' Qualitative findings serve to inform the quantitative analysis, which remains the main basis for drawing conclusions. Subsequently, qualitative findings are used to illustrate, contextualize and explain the quantitative findings.

As for the data, independent variables (for instance, institutional factors) have been just qualitatively assessed above when reviewing the existing literature, since the

<sup>15</sup> Mainly, the 'Europub' project (<http://europub.wz-berlin.de>), the RECON project (<http://www.reconproject.eu/projectweb/portalproject/Index.html>) and the ongoing Comparative Agendas Project (CAP; <http://www.policyagendas.org>).

<sup>16</sup> The codebook obtained has also served the need to have an analytic tool as suitable as possible for the combined use of softwares Atlas.ti (coding phase) and Excel/STATA (analysis phase).

present paper focuses its attention on the measurement of dependent variable, namely parliamentarians' attitudes towards the European issue.

### 3.1. *Coding plenary debates on budgetary issues: the scheme*<sup>17</sup>

Once divided the text into claims, a code is assigned to each relevant claim under three main categories, namely: 'EU salience' (Y/N, dummy-wise); 'thematic variable' (matching with the policy sector mentioned) and 'frame'. The 'skimming' dummy about salience is the main information relating H1 and, in general, is the richest variable of the codebook—the one that embraces the whole corpus through its binomial codes.

Tone is also codified: following Hurrelmann (et al. 2009), negative tones are seen as having de-legitimizing effects while positive tonalities are considered as entailing legitimizing effects.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, as Ieraci (2006, 266) states, the intensity of the preference of the speaking actor is revealed by the frequencies of the positive and negative evaluations of the various themes and policy.

Tone is fundamental for the identification and qualification of parliamentarians' attitudes—for instance, it turns out to be essential for the hypotheses postulating the existence of a continuum going from 'support' to 'opposition' (e.g. pro/anti Europe, H2; pro/anti Keynesian or neo-liberal paradigms, H3).

When the claim is salient *and* expresses proposals of policy reform, the sector mentioned is identified—choosing among the fields indicated in the codebook. For each of them, it is noted whether it manifests a preference for a level at which it is suggested to conceive the competence for the latter ('competence levels': *European; mixed; domestic*). The competence levels allow the coder to discern which of the pertaining arenas the claimant herself favors; thence, they are crucial to H1b testing.

In mathematical terms, the salience of EU-related issues' is simply calculated as the ratio of all the statements showing EU saliency by the total of claims present in each debate. Parliamentarians' competence-position, instead, is calculated as the total amount<sup>19</sup> of claims per 'thematic variable' showing the label 'European' minus the total relating to 'domestic' ones, divided by the total number of EU salient claims. Last, when the sentence coded under the 'thematic variable' category also entails reference to either the 'European' or the 'mixed' competence level, the codes of the category named 'frame' are activated.

<sup>17</sup> Due to space constraints, the description of the instrument is here circumscribed to the illustration of its main characteristics. The latest version of the codebook and related information are available upon request.

<sup>18</sup> Neutral is considered as entailing a sort of ambiguity.

<sup>19</sup> The domain of this summation is contextual to the relevant data aggregation.

Following previous researches applying frames alongside 'traditional' codes (for a review, see de Wilde 2013), this coding scheme understands 'framing' as an act performed by the claimant precisely in order to *make sense of the claim itself*. To put it simply, it provides an answer to the question: '*Which organizing idea underlies the claim and/or the wider policy-formulation process it relates to?*' Thus, it relates to the particular 'pressure' considered as a triggering element of the same EU salience: something close to a validation of the issue's saliency and suitability for a treatment at an EU-level of governance.

Earlier definitions of 'frames' have been provided by Entman (1993, 52): framing is seen as selecting *some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context*. Such a broad understanding of such a concept is findable in Gamson and Modigliani (1989, 143): the authors define the frame as a *central organizing idea or story-line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them*. [...] *The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue*. Essentially, framing is *an emphasis in salience of certain aspects of a topic* (de Vreese 2005, 53).

The analysis of frames is considered a key-contribution made by the method of claims-making analysis to the study of representation (de Wilde 2013). The code-book hereby proposed keeps this into consideration, attributing great importance to the frames included, as one may acknowledge, for instance, when dealing with H3 test.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS: IS *EUROPE* BACK HOME?

##### 4.1. *What parliamentarians say and don't say: some preliminary considerations*

As said, the present paper aims to perform a tentative assessment of some preliminary hypotheses referred to the narrow time span under scrutiny (2011-2014)—being this evaluation part of a bigger, continuing research project covering a larger period. This notwithstanding, some stimulating results may be already pointed out—even though limited to some descriptive statistics, utilized for testing the aforementioned hypotheses. Prior to the computation of those elements, some basic structural data regarding the documents analyzed shall be mentioned.

In table 2, votes are reported. As senator Morando<sup>20</sup> rightly stated, *the parliamentary resolution coming out of the dedicated parliamentary sessions is fundamental for the DEF construction, since the latter is the result of the executive's approval as integrated by the Parliament's vote*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Democratic Party, minority rapporteur for DEF 2011, statement coming from Senate's session 549, see relating note.

<sup>21</sup> The author's report of the following original statement: 'Il DEF, secondo la legge di contabilità, risulta dalla somma del DEF come approvato dal Consiglio dei Ministri e dalla risoluzione parlamentare che viene approvata dal Parlamento e che lo integra'.

Table 2 – Plenary Session's features and votes, by Chamber

Legislatures	XVI		XVII	
Cabinets	Berlusconi IV	Monti	Letta	Renzi
Years	DEF 2011	DEF 2012	DEF 2013	DEF 2014
<b>SENATE</b> Sessions (no.)	4 Plenary Sessions <sup>22</sup>	1 Plenary Session <sup>23</sup>	2 Plenary Sessions <sup>24</sup>	1 Plenary Session <sup>25</sup>
<i>Votes (Resolution)</i>				
Yes	145	170	209	156
No	117	24	58	92
Abstention	3	4	19	2
Mission	–	–	–	–
<b>Presents over total (%)</b>	84.13%	62.86%	90.79%	79.36%
<b>CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES</b> Sessions (no.)	1 Plenary Session <sup>26</sup>	1 Plenary Session <sup>27</sup>	2 Plenary Sessions <sup>28</sup>	1 Plenary Session <sup>29</sup>
<i>Votes (Resolution)</i>				
Yes	283	389	419	348
No	263	56	153	143
Abstention	1	11	17	–
Mission	29	38	9	–
<b>Presents over total (%)</b>	86.83%	72.38%	93.49%	77.94%

Moreover—voting patterns are here considered as an important supplement to the textual analysis: as Close and Maatsch (2014) remember, the thematization operated by parliamentarians during plenary debates shall be a useful proxy for establishing the justifications beyond those voting patterns. An analysis that takes into account both the elements—votes and discourses—*can provide a comprehensive account of how national legislators approached a certain issue* (p. 830).

Table 2 also displays parliamentarians' attendance, which has been quite high—with percentage values above 70% with only one exception, 2011 DEF session at the upper Chamber. Besides, the highest turnout is for the 2013 DEF—perhaps

<sup>22</sup> Sessions n. 547-548-549-550 (3/5 May 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Session n. 716 (26 April 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Sessions n. 18-19 (6/7 May 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Session n. 233 (17 April 2014).

<sup>26</sup> Session n. 469 (28 April 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Session n. 626 (26 April 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Session n. 13 (7 May 2013).

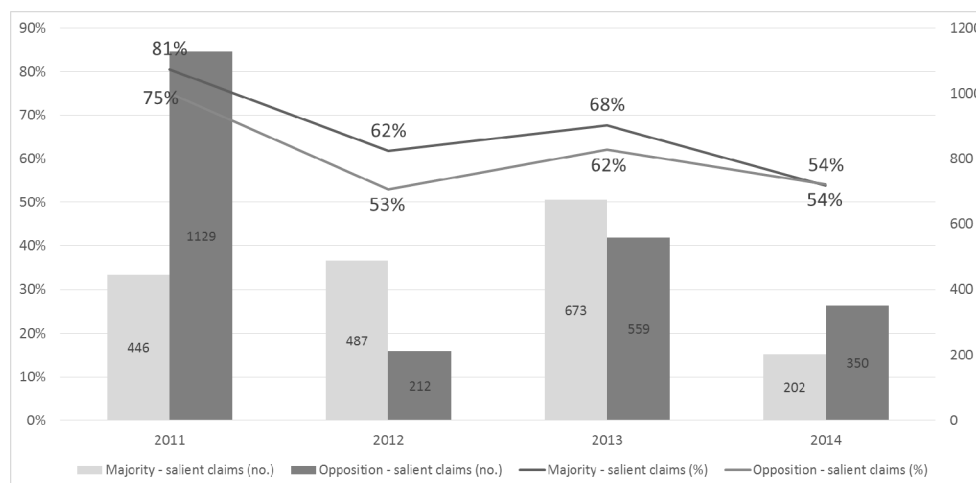
<sup>29</sup> Session n. 214 (17 April 2014).

linked to the commencement of the new legislature (XVII<sup>30</sup>), as well as to the presence of a new parliamentary party, the one referring to the *Five Star Movement* (M5S, Movimento 5 Stelle<sup>31</sup>).

As for votes, it is important to note how contested the voting act has generally been, and how consensual the pattern lately becomes—though, consensuality seems less consistent in 2014 as compared to 2011-13. This could be due to the nature of the governments ruling during 2012-13, namely the technical executive (Monti) and the *grand coalition* one (Letta).

As noticeable as it is, the number of session is overall low (1-2 session), especially at the Chamber of Deputies. Moreover, the 2013 DEF sessions are quite noteworthy not only for the turnout, but also for abstentions. To be sure, the text was quite controversial when it came for discussion at the parliament—since the outgoing technical executive led by Monti<sup>32</sup> had drafted it, but the discussion took place after the beginning of Letta's mandate. It is likely that this situation has produced much puzzlement on behalf of the parliamentarians—called to evaluate a text prepared by a government that was not accountable anymore.

Figure 1 – EU salient claims: majority and opposition (2011-2014)



<sup>30</sup> This legislature has begun on 15 March 2013—thereafter the first sessions of the parliamentary chambers. The composition of the parliament naturally mirrors the electoral results of the round held on 24-25 February 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Italian political elite has experienced a profound renovation following the rise of the movement named 'Movimento 5 Stelle' (the *Five Star Movement* led by the blogger and comedian Grillo) at the 2013 political elections which preceded the beginning of the XVII legislature. An interesting viewpoint of the political moment mentioned is readable in the book edited by Corbetta and Gualmini (2013).

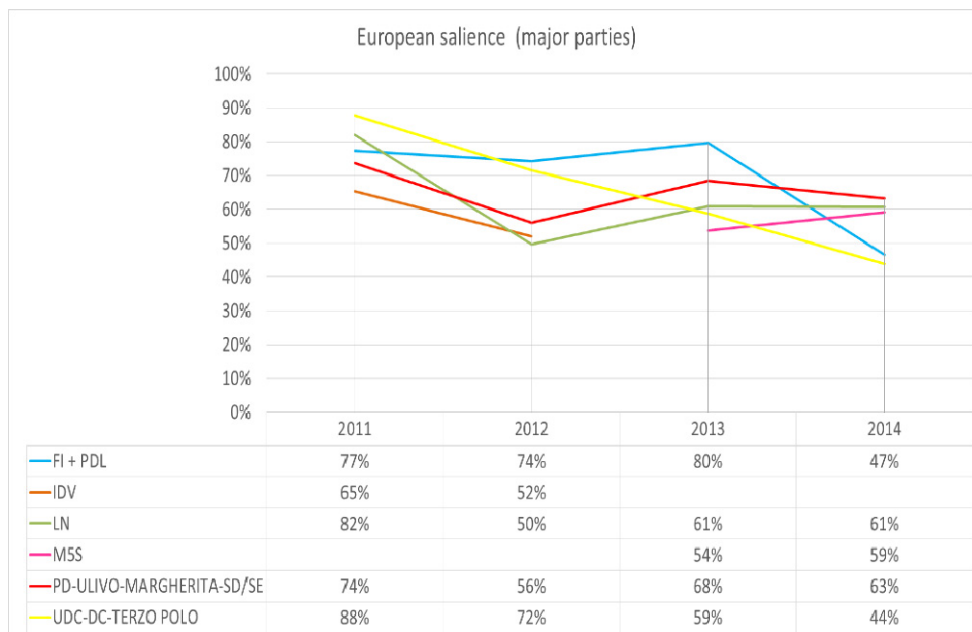
<sup>32</sup> Announced on 16 November 2011, the technical government ran the country for eighteen months until after the elections in the spring of 2013 and then was replaced by the Letta Cabinet that was formed by Enrico Letta on 28 April. The latter cabinet is composed of members of PD, PdL, *Civic Choice* (Scelta Civica, SC), the *Union of the Centre* (Unione di Centro), one member of the Italian Radicals (Radicali, Rad) and three Independents.



Figure 1 deals with the units of analysis, namely the claims, divided based on the skimming criterion, that is ‘EU saliency: present/absent’. The trends are divided per majority and opposition lines and show the percentages of salient claims over the total of claims codified.

The level of European salience seems fairly distributed between the two groups—with shared picks relating year 2011, when most of the anti-crisis measures were debated and the ‘*austerity packages*’ were at the top of Monti’s political agenda. Those years have been characterized by marked consensual patterns, as said, because of the particular features of the executives in office. Overall, it seems fair to state that the percentage of salient claims prevails and seems solid over the time span considered. The zenith of the crisis might have had a role in this upturn (H1; H1a).

Figure 2 – EU salient claims: major parties (2011-2014)



While looking at figure 2, showing percentages of salient claims per major parties, some comments follow. The center-left-sided *Democratic Party* (Partito Democratico, PD) has been characterized by a fair level of salience over the years examined. Concerning the level of competence preferred, there is a diffused predilection, on behalf of PD, for the mixed/domestic competence level. In mere numerical terms,<sup>33</sup> PD is the group that counts sensibly more EU salient claims as compared to other parliamentary parties—regardless of its position within or outside the

<sup>33</sup> The detailed table showing percentages and amount of claims per party and per year is available upon request from the author.

government. One exception to such a record has been year 2013, where the new-born *Five Star Movement* distinguishes itself for the highest number of claims stated during plenary sessions in both the chambers. As already disclosed, the coming out of M5S is unsurprising, as the party is a newborn within the parliamentary arena, therefore willing to 'show off' and be as active as a participant as possible.

Observing the liberal-conservative *People of Freedom* (Popolo della Libertà, PdL), it is primarily correct to say that the overall number of claims detected and codified is far smaller than the ones relating to the other 'big party', PD: this may be already sufficient to denote a lower level of attention for EU related issues.

In 2011 PdL still leads the governmental coalition (government Berlusconi IV<sup>34</sup>): there are picks of preference for an 'European competence level' at the lower chamber in 2011, with an average of claims counting 89% of salient claims at the lower chamber.

As of 2013, PdL broke down:<sup>35</sup> Berlusconi rebranded its party (again) as *Forward Italy* (Forza Italia, FI<sup>36</sup>), whereas the group led by Angelino Alfano originated the *New Centre Right* (NCD, Nuovo Centro Destra<sup>37</sup>). While FI located itself at the opposition in 2013-2014, NCD firstly supported Letta's cabinet, and then entered Renzi's government<sup>38</sup> with three appointed ministers.<sup>39</sup> Both the parties showed a rather high percentage of salient claims, on average 57% for NCD and 58% for FI at the lower chamber—the competence levels being mainly mixed-domestic. In the case of FI, it has to be noted a definite decrease in percentage of salient claims

<sup>34</sup> Berlusconi IV Cabinet lasted from 8 May 2008 to 16 November 2011. It was a coalition government composed mainly by two parties, PdL and LN.

<sup>35</sup> Silvio Berlusconi faced expulsion from parliament over a tax conviction. Speaking at a congress to rebrand *People of Freedom* (PdL) as Forza Italia, the name of his original political movement, Berlusconi said his impending expulsion from parliament, with the support of Letta's *Democratic Party* (PD), meant the left-right coalition created in the wake of February's deadlocked election could not continue.

<sup>36</sup> The party stems from *People of Freedom* (PdL), in that it is a successor of the Forza Italia party that has been active from 1994 to 2009, when it was merged with *National Alliance* (AN) and several minor parties to form the PdL.

<sup>37</sup> Led by Angelino Alfano, former PdL national secretary, the group initially included 30 senators and 27 lower house deputies. NCD ensured enough support in parliament for Letta, who even survived a confidence vote with the help of the PdL rebels. This notwithstanding, Berlusconi declared the break with Alfano and the other rebels was down to personal differences rather than deep policy disagreements and he considered the group as potential allies in future. In February 2014, after the fall of Letta's government, NCD joined the new coalition government led by Matteo Renzi. Cfr. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/16/us-italy-berlusconi-idUSBRE9AE15M20131116>.

<sup>38</sup> The cabinet, in office since 22 February 2014, is composed of members of PD, NCD, SC, UDC and three non-party Independents. The new government is basically supported by the same majority as the precedent. Letta used to be vice head of PD and was forced to resign from premiership after Renzi called a party meeting to oust him for ineffective pace in dealing with the economic crisis.

<sup>39</sup> Alfano himself at the Interior, Lupi at Infrastructure and Transport, and Lorenzin at Health. Those ministers survived from Letta's cabinet alongside with two PD figures, Dario Franceschini at Culture and tourism (during Letta's cabinet, he was minister of Relations with parliament and coordinator of governmental activities) and Andrea Orlando at Justice (during Letta's cabinet, he was minister of the Environment).

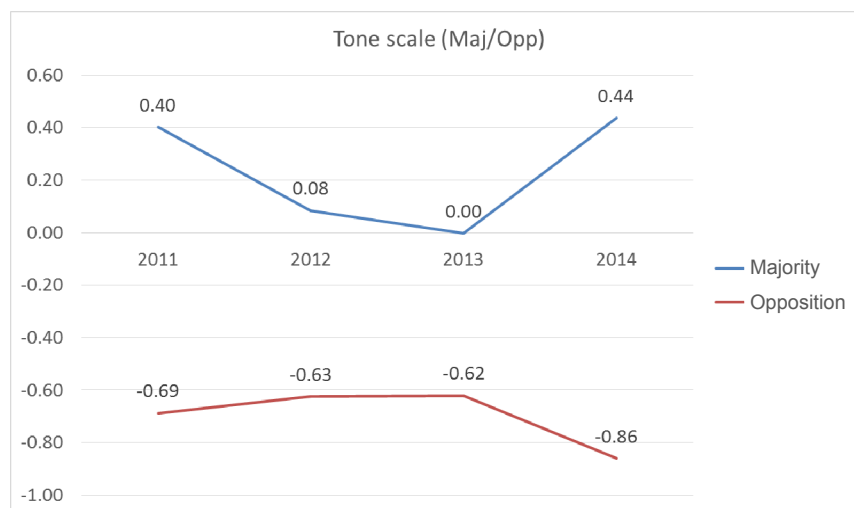
as compared to the instances where the party has been part of the government (30 percentage points fewer on average).

Concerning the right-wing populist *Northern League* (Lega Nord, LN), an interesting consideration could be done: when member of the majority (government Berlusconi IV), the mere number of EU salient claims is medium-high (level of competence preferred: mixed), with a peak in 2011 at the lower chamber (average of 93% EU salient claims)—appreciably decreasing when at the opposition during 2012-2014. This indicates a sort of ‘pragmatism’ (referring to Kopecky and Mudde 2002’s categories)—more pronounced as compared to the PdL—when shaping its attitudes towards Europe.

On the contrary, both *Union of the Centre* (Unione di Centro, UDC) and *Civic Choice* (Scelta Civica, SC)<sup>40</sup> are characterized by a good level of European salience, with peaks in terms of EU salient claims in 2011 at the lower chamber (UDC reaching an average of 92 % EU salient claims).

For what other<sup>41</sup> opposition parties are concerned, in 2013 the socialdemocratic party *Left Ecology and Freedom* (Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà, SEL) and the conservative-nationalist *Brothers of Italy* (Fratelli d’Italia, FdI) are characterized by a medium level<sup>42</sup> of EU salience (being preferably ‘domestic’ as competence level). Though, in those cases the number of claims is too low for any, even superficial, conclusion.

Figure 3 – Tone: majority and opposition (2011-2014)



<sup>40</sup> UDC and SC supported Letta’s cabinet. In the graph it is included in the group labelled ‘UDC-DC-Terzo Polo’.

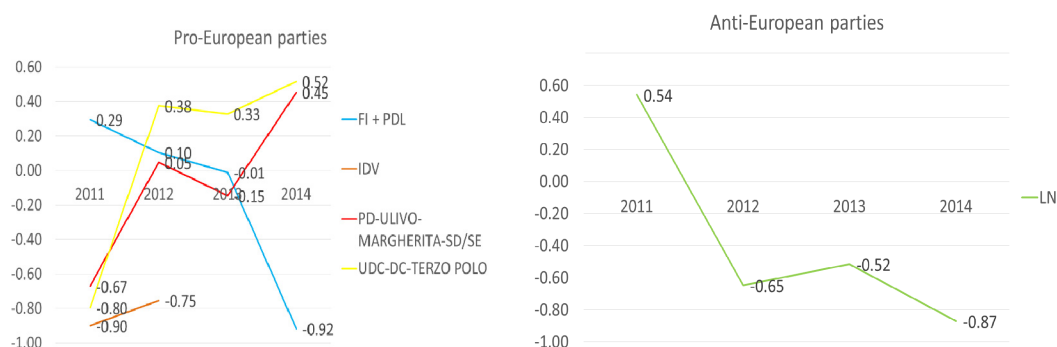
<sup>41</sup> Those parties are not displayed. Detailed tables are available upon request from the author.

<sup>42</sup> The average percentage being 69%. Though, the number of salient claims is really low. One has to consider also that these ‘smaller’ groups have less time allowance to speak at the parliament.

When looking at the tone—displayed as a scale (+1, *positive*; -1, *negative*) in figure 3, the difference between majority and opposition is undisputable, and confirms what just said about the differences concerning those formations when dealing with EU-related issues: not only the percentage of salient claims is dissimilar, but also the tone utilized changes. The latter is on average positive—thus legitimizing—in the case of majority parties, while it is generally negative—delegitimizing—when opposition parties speak.

If the parties are grouped according to the pro/anti EU integration positioning scores (figure 4) from the 2010<sup>43</sup> Chapel Hill Expert Survey (see Bakker et al. 2012),<sup>44</sup> it is clear that the trends are mostly domestic-driven rather than led by an outweighing 'European' dimension.

Figure 4 – Tone scale according to CHES EU positioning scores: pro/anti European parties (2011-2014)



Briefly discussing figure 4, the tone scale reveals what just affirmed especially for what LN is concerned (on the right side): labeled 'anti-European' according to the CHES scores, this party seems clearly influenced by its governmental position, in that tone is positively oriented when part of the government (2011) and negatively oriented when part of the opposition (2012-2014). As for the 'pro-European' parties (on the left side), same conclusions may be drawn when looking, for instance, at IDV (Italia dei Valori, *Italy of Values*), PD or PdL: their tonalities change according to the governmental status (PdL, though, stays always rather positive, but the relative trend goes down when the party is not in government). As for UDC, there is an ascending trend involving the tone dedicated to EU-related issues. This may be ascribable to the recent history of the party, progressively detached (at least from 2006-2007) from the center-right allies

<sup>43</sup> 2010 is the most recent survey year hitherto available.

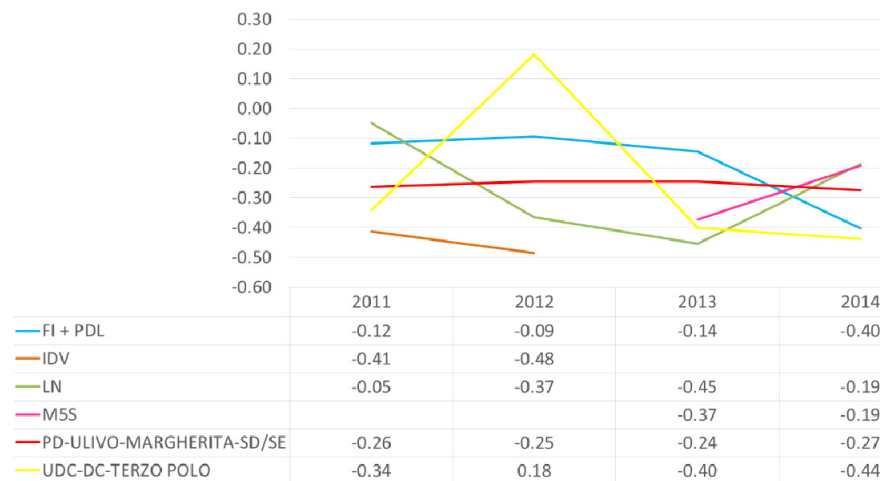
<sup>44</sup> The Chapel Hill expert surveys estimate party positioning on European integration, ideology and policy issues for national parties in a variety of European countries. The official website is <http://www.chesdata.eu/>. Relevant scores are reported in Appendix B.

founding members of the House of Freedom<sup>45</sup> (for a review see Conti 2009) and lately ever closer to SC, the party created by Monti.

In sum, it seems that domestic logics (H2-0), such as the one distinguishing majority/opposition dynamics, tends to overshadow any other ‘European’ dimension (H2-1).

Figure 5 shows the ‘position’ scale, and—as disclosed above when dealing with the salience—there is a preference for the ‘domestic’-competence level (*negative values on the ‘position’ scale*). This disconfirms the expectation put forward by H1b. Yet, this is not surprising: parliamentarians recognize and speak about EU-related issues, but they remain part of *domestic* elites. Thence, when the claim deals with European issues (*the claim is salient*), the levels at which it is suggested/preferred to handle them are likely to be mainly the ‘domestic’ or, secondarily, the ‘mixed’ ones.

Figure 5 – Major parties: position over time (2011-2014)



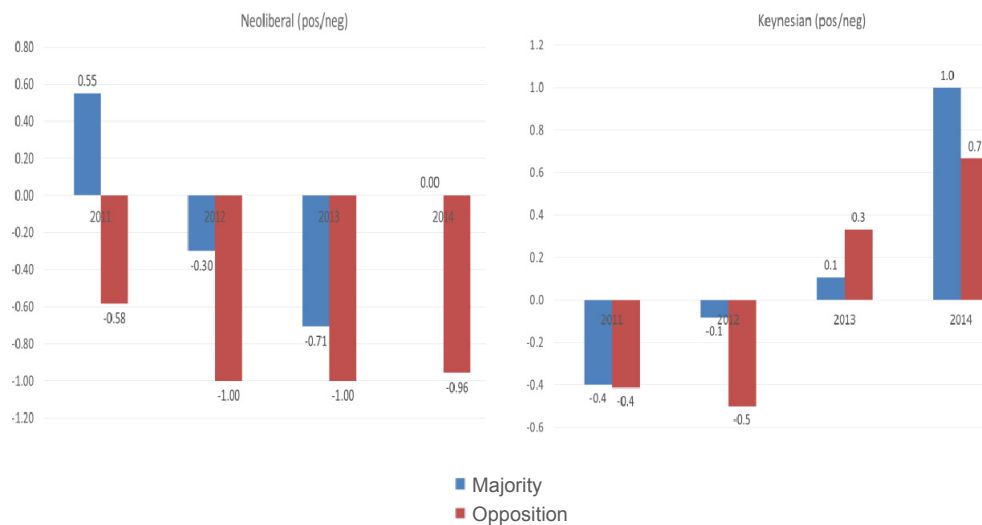
Looking at figure 5, it is clearer that there is a movement towards the ‘European’ competence level (even though with different narrative trends) which generally excludes opposition parties. For instance, IDV (at the opposition in 2011 and 2012) and the LN (at the opposition in 2012 and 2013) feature a descending tendency—closer to the ‘domestic’ level of competence. Even FI, when at the opposition in 2014, is characterized by a declining line.

Among the ‘ascending’ parties, the presence of an outlier is apparent, namely the 2012 *Union of the Centre* (Unione di Centro, UDC). As disclosed above, this centrist party is highly motivated to back the actions and the document proposed by the

<sup>45</sup> The *House of Freedoms* was a major centre-right political and electoral alliance led by Silvio Berlusconi and formed by four main parties—FI, AN (Alleanza Nazionale, *National Alliance*), LN and UDC—with different European positions.

(then in office) technical executive led by Monti. Particularly sharing the political and economic vision of the latter, the UDC has also run the 2013 national elections as part of the *With Monti for Italy* coalition, alongside *Future and Freedom for Italy* (Futuro e Libertà per l'Italia, FLI<sup>46</sup>) and the pro-Monti *Civic Choice* (Scelta Civica, SC). Furthermore—among the members of the UDC, there are *claimants* such as Rocco Buttiglione, who is renowned for his favour towards the EU integration path, as well as for his European-related appointments.<sup>47</sup>

Figure 6 – Keynesian/neo-liberal frame and tone: majority and opposition (2011-2014)



With regard to hypothesis 3, figure 6 looks at one of the 'frames' provided for by the coding scheme developed: 'Keynesian vs neo-liberal attitudes': indeed, it seemed central to enquire whether parties—when discussing budgetary issues—moved along these two strands.

On the left, the frame concerning the neo-liberal paradigm is shown adding positive (+) or negative (–) tones. The denominator is the total number of claims labeled with the 'neo-liberal' frame. Same for the 'Keynesian' frames, displayed on the right side.

The hypothesis argued that parties at the left side of the political spectrum are more likely to advocate Keynesian measures, whereas right-wing parties tend to support the neoliberal strand. When looking at graph 5, this association is not

<sup>46</sup> FLI was formed by followers of Gianfranco Fini in July 2010 as a split from *The People of Freedom* (Pdl), the major Italian centre-right party led by Silvio Berlusconi.

<sup>47</sup> Among others, he has been in office as minister for EU politics from June 2001 to April 2005 (Berlusconi II's cabinet). It is well-known the controversy behind its (unsuccessful) nomination for the European Commission (the so-called 'Buttiglione case', his own viewpoint at <http://www.secondspring.co.uk/articles/buttiglione.htm>).

clearly distinguishable, as both majority and opposition seem negatively oriented towards neoliberal stances in 2012-13. In 2014, the majority party line on the 'neoliberal' part of the graph appears as '0' (zero) since the parties apparently equally used negative and positive tones when referring to this frame.

Particularly noticeable the change entailing centre-right parties (composing the 2011 parliamentary majority, and majorly at the opposition afterwards<sup>48</sup>): from positive neoliberal tones, to (slightly) positive Keynesian tones in 2013 and 2014 (as the right side of graph 4 displays).

As a whole—from a mere qualitative stance, the analysis performed may confirm other researchers' insights on the same time span—such as those pertaining the link between the political discourse revolving around EU matters in general, and the management of the crisis within the EU in particular.<sup>49</sup>

For instance, the debate during Monti's cabinet has strongly linked the management of EU affairs with the legitimization of the technical government, with the political scenario divided between Monti's supporters defending austerity measures and the opponents criticizing the EU for imposing—by means of Monti's actions—those choices. Further, if, in 2013, the executive in office did not draft the document under discussion, the 2014 debate was complicated by the absolute majority vote requested by Renzi's cabinet. In accordance to article 6.3 of law 243/2012,<sup>50</sup> in fact, absolute majority is needed for approving a temporary deviation in the achievement of planning objectives aimed to guarantee the structural balance. This measure is designed envisaging 'exceptional circumstances'—such as a severe recession. Thus—with the European commission's *placet*, the government included in the text of the 2014 DEF (ch. 3) a report and a specific authorization—whereby it indicated the entity and length of such a deviation (the 'realignment plan' is due to end in 2016).

Eventually, all these elements underline the 'exceptional' nature of the years considered in the present paper.

<sup>48</sup> NCD, the party led by Alfano, is part of the majority during Letta and Renzi's cabinets. FI and LN are among the opposition parties.

<sup>49</sup> For instance, Pinto and Pedrazzani (2013) performed an analysis of parliamentary debates dealing with the ratification of the ESM and the so-called 'Fiscal Compact' in three countries (Italy, France and Germany). Aiming to ascertain the configuration of a common political discourse, in which political parties position themselves based on a common supranational dimension, their conclusion highlighted the prevalence of domestic logics. By the same token, Lupato (2012, 2014) analysed budget and investiture debates in Italy and Spain and empirically illustrated how government parties used 'Europe' mainly to legitimise their own policies. However, the author noted an increased salience of EU issues in Italy, but not enough to produce an articulated discourse on European issues.

<sup>50</sup> Law 243/2012 contains the detailed discipline of the balanced budget principle, previously inscribed in the Italian Constitution as part of the 'Fiscal Compact'. Differently than the constitutional provisions, the law seems to be more flexible and dynamic, providing procedural commitments for policy makers, rather than specific targets on the main financial aggregates. More on the point reading [http://www.osservatoriosullefonti.it/component/docman/doc\\_download/606-m-nardini](http://www.osservatoriosullefonti.it/component/docman/doc_download/606-m-nardini).



#### 4.2. Conclusive remarks and hints for future research

Overall, the results of this very preliminary analysis suggest the persistence of *country-specific features* when discussing planning documents placed within the new 'European economic governance framework'. Above all, the *government/opposition dynamics*, as well as *mainstream/opposition logics*, seem a characterizing feature running all over the time span analyzed.

Truth is that—with the data at hand—it is not possible to empirically assess any clear causal relationship. However, it seems anyway right to state that somehow 'Europe is back home', at least in terms of EU salience, which overall comes up quite clearly (the average total of EU salient claims codified being 64.5%), notwithstanding the competence level preferred by each single parliamentary party.

What is put forward here is the fact that—due to the recent European sovereign debt crisis—the parliamentary arena became actually involved in the management of the European economic governance. For example, the patterns of voting behavior and discussion preliminary to the approval of the resolutions accompanying the DEF testify a somewhat-renovated interest on behalf of parliamentarians, even trivially in terms of attendance to sessions. As of voting behavior, the patterns observed in this occasion confirm what scholars (Maatsch 2013) argue about the importance of the national parliament as veto-player, particularly following the outbreak of the economic crisis.

Of course, with a view to better evaluate those instances, analyses covering a broader time span (e.g. a *pre/post crisis* field of analysis) would be more informative, especially in terms of detecting the degree of *variation* in the dependent variable. In addition, the adoption of a comparative framework would be useful in order to get a larger depiction of the current trends when dealing with parties' attitudes towards EU matters.

Finally—moving rapidly back to the importance of underlining the 'communicative function' performed by domestic legislatures, the present analysis hopefully provided a cautious demonstration of how this crucial area of parliamentary competition could easily complement other works on parliamentary activity.

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**APPENDIX A****THEMATIC VARIABLES AND FRAMES**Thematic variables**7. Constitutional Affairs/Reforms**

- 71. European
- 72. Domestic
- 73. Mixed

**8. Justice and Home Affairs**

- 81. European
- 82. Domestic
- 83. Mixed

**9. Foreign and Security Policy (Defense)**

- 91. European
- 92. Domestic
- 93. Mixed

**10. Education and Cultural Policies**

- 101. European
- 102. Domestic
- 103. Mixed

**12. Health Policies**

- 121. European
- 122. Domestic
- 123. Mixed

**13. Communication Policies (media, broadcasting, etc.)**

- 131. European
- 132. Domestic
- 133. Mixed

**14. Labor, Employment and Immigration Policies**

- 141. European
- 142. Domestic
- 143. Mixed

**15. Transports and Infrastructures**

- 151. European
- 152. Domestic
- 153. Mixed

**16. Energy Policies**

- 161. European
- 162. Domestic
- 163. Mixed

**17. Tourism Policies**

- 171. European
- 172. Domestic
- 173. Mixed

**18. Environmental Policies**

- 181. European
- 182. Domestic
- 183. Mixed

**19. Sport and Leisure**

- 191. European
- 192. Domestic
- 193. Mixed

**24. Social Welfare**

- 241. European
- 242. Domestic
- 243. Mixed

**25. Community Development and Housing, Urban Policies**

- 251. European
- 252. Domestic
- 253. Mixed

**26. Production, Foreign Trade and Internal Market**

- 261. European
- 262. Domestic
- 263. Mixed

**27. General** (includes combinations of multiple topics, namely there is vagueness—but the reference to the ‘EU commitment’ is present)

- 271. European

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 272. Domestic                              | long-run economic growth. Last,            |
| 273. Mixed                                 | direct reference to the documents          |
|  | analyzed—namely, the planning              |
|  | documents—will also fall in this category) |
| <b>45. Macro-economic issues</b> (explicit | 451. European                              |
| references to the performance, structure,  | 452. Domestic                              |
| behavior, and decision-making              | 453. Mixed                                 |
| strictly dealing with macroeconomics,      |  |
| e.g. aggregated indicators such as         | <b>46. Agriculture</b>                     |
| the GDP, price indices, etc. or references | 461. European                              |
| to short-run fluctuations in national      | 462. Domestic                              |
| income, or attempts to understand          | 463. Mixed                                 |
| or evaluate the determinants of            |  |

## Frames

**28. Budget: Financing the EU and spending EU funds:** *this frame might be seen as a general outline within which the EU commitment may be discussed and developed on behalf of the claimants.*

- 280. General reference to Union finances issues/governance
- 281. EU Financial Programming and Budget (e.g. references to the multi-annual financial framework)
- 282. Responsibility for spending EU funds, in particular ‘subsidiarity’
- 283. Corruption, waste of EU funds
- 284. European economic governance framework

## **29. General identity feeling**

- 291. European identity
- 292. Shared identitarian values
- 293. Preserve national, regional or minority identities

## **30. Macro-economic principles (Keynesian vs neo-liberal policies)**

- 300. *General reference to the opposition between Keynesian and neo-liberal policies*
- 301. *Neo-liberal principle: supply creates its own demand.* Say’s law indicates that business-cycle instability is a rare and temporary occurrence, to be fixed thanks to market’s own resources (least state intervention)
- 302. *Keynesian principle.* Fiscal policy is the use of the government spending and taxing to stabilize the business cycle. The goal of fiscal policy is to counteract the problems of unemployment and inflation created by the ups and downs of business-cycle instability

## **35. Role of a specific private/public institution, country or group of countries in the making of macro-economic measures at the EU-level (e.g. anti-crisis measures)**

- 351. Balance of power and coalitions among Members States
- 352. Increased weight of Germany/‘Franco-German axis’/‘triple-A’ countries
- 353. Increased power of banks and private institutions such as rating companies

## **36. Institutional structure and relationship between EU institutions**

- 361. More intergovernmentalism
- 362. More powers to the Commission/ECB

**37. Legislative power** (e. g. powers of agenda-setting, policy and law making)

372. More powers to the domestic parliament (e.g. in favor of the *government/opposition* dialectics; more powers referred to the ascending/descending phases)

373. Enhancement direct democracy/legitimacy instruments

**38. Relationship between EU institutions and public (citizens, organizations, media, etc.)**

380. General reference to the need for more linkages between the EU and public

381. Democratic deficit/lack of transparency

**39. Excessive imbalance procedures/Infringements of EU laws/Misfit in the adaptation to the European ‘vincolo esterno’:** *this frame deals with the implementation of EU law (the aforementioned ‘descending phase’). Each Member State is responsible for the implementation of EU law (adoption of implementing measures before a specified deadline, conformity and correct application) within its own legal system. In order to better define the claimant’s attitude towards EU commitment, it seems thus fundamental to assess where the actor puts the responsibility of implementation failures.*

390. General reference to EIPs/infringement procedures, without any explicit ‘blaming’ action

391. Blaming the executive (government/opposition ‘classic’ cleavage) for the current economic situation

392. Blaming the inaction/length of decision-making processes of the parliament

393. Blaming the European Commission’s misuse of its discretionary power when determining the existence of infringements

394. Status quo maintenance (e.g. statements in line with the current executive’s choices)

**47. Centre-periphery cleavage/territorial solidarity/cohesion**

471. General reference to the gap between North and South of Italy

472. It should be maintained the ‘centralist’ principle of redistribution of resources in favor of the *Mezzogiorno*

473. Resources have to stay where they are produced (more ‘federalist’ argument)

**48. Implementation/policy outcomes:** *this frame deals with specific aspects of the implementation, conceived as the provision of institutional resources for putting the programs into effects. It is here considered as deriving from the thematization operated by parliamentarians discussing policy issues within the arena observed, namely the parliament. Parliamentarians are indeed expected not only to thematize the policies per se, but also to (critically) refer to the effects of those policies, as well as of policy processes and outcomes, including aspects such as analyzing the variety of relationships shaping policies, in primis the one with the executive. In fact, policies are seen as having substantial influence and specific effects—modifying the role of actors and changing the structure of relationships among them. This entails the terms of public debates, whose construction may be adapted based on who is taking part to those discussions (also, the resources available to specific actors may change the preferences of the latter).*

481. General reference to the implementation/lack of implementation of the provisions foreseen in the previous planning document/documents connected to the national budgetary maneuver (e.g. Financial law)

482. Pressure towards preferring changes prompted by feedbacks received from the EU arena (e.g. modification of policy goals and means in light of the economic governance framework/the EU institutions response to national conducts on macro-economic matters)

483. Reaction to changes prompted by feedbacks received from the EU arena (e.g. rigidity towards modifications prompted by the EU-level)

## APPENDIX B

### CHAPEL HILL EXPERT SURVEY, 2010. SCORES RELEVANT TO THIS STUDY

Party	Pro/anti European position
LN	2.666666746
UDC	6.333333492
PDL	4.666666508
IDV	6.142857075
PD	6.555555344

Question European Integration: 'How would you describe the general position on European integration that the party leadership took over the course of 2010?'

POSITION = overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration in YEAR.

1 = Strongly opposed; 2 = Opposed; 3 = Somewhat opposed; 4 = Neutral; 5 = Somewhat in favour; 6 = In favour; 7 = Strongly in favour.

For more detailed information see Bakker et al. (2012).



**ACRONYMS**Parties

CCD-UDC	Centro Cristiano Democratico – Unione dei Democratici Cristiani e di Centro – Democratic Christian Centre – Union of the Democratic Christians and of the Centre
DC	Democrazia Cristiana - Christian Democracy
FdI	Fratelli d'Italia – Brothers of Italy
FI	Forza Italia – Forward Italy
FLI	Futuro e Libertà per l'Italia – Future and Freedom for Italy
IDV	Italia dei Valori – Italy of Values
LN	Lega Nord – Northern League
M5S	Movimento 5 Stelle – Five Star Movement
NCD	Nuovo Centro Destra – New Centre Right
PD	Partito Democratico – Democratic Party
PdL	Popolo della Libertà – People of Freedom
SC	Scelta Civica – Civic Choice
SEL	Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà – Left Ecology and Freedom

Others

DEF	Documento di Economia e Finanza – Economic and Financial Document
DFP	Decisione di Finanza Pubblica – Public Finance Decision
EACs	European Affairs Committees
EC	European Commission
ECB	European Central Bank
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EFSF	European Financial Stability Facility
EFSM	European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism
ESM	European Stability Mechanism
EWM	Early Warning Mechanism
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
MPs	Members of the Parliament
NPs	National Parliaments
PNR	Programma Nazionale di Riforma – National Reform Programme
PS	Programma di Stabilità – Stability Programme
RER	Rapporto sulle Riforme Economiche – Report on Economic Reforms