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1. **Introduction: main purposes and relevance of the topic**

Following the outbreak of the economic and financial crisis, academia has increased its level of attention towards the politicization of European Union (EU)-related issues, with specific attention to the so-called ‘democratic deficit’ and the prosecution of the European integration trajectory (de Wilde and Zürn 2012). As it may be clear, this burgeoning scholarly production relates also the role of National Parliaments (NPs) within the EU. In fact, the influence of the European authority over domestic political institutions and actors seem to have reached a significant point, particularly after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, as well as with the quasi-contextual enactment of the so-called ‘new’ European economic governance. Further – following Fabbrini (2013), a revival of inter-governmental procedures connected to this novel framework has emerged – calling into play the member states’ executives, supposedly assisted by their respective legislatures, as bodies apt to handle the *intermestic*² character of the crisis. To some observers, the new involvement of national parliaments in EU politics is actually more justified by the intergovernmental nature of the interventions aimed to solve the euro-crisis (Riekmann and Wydra 2013). Still, it seems safe to say that the sovereign debt emergency in Europe somehow forced the issue of European integration onto the domestic political agenda (Wendler 2013).

As the studies on the politicization of ‘Europe’ took different forms and addressed various significant matters, a way to delve deeper into this frequently – at times anecdotal – assumed phenomenon is to look at selected parliamentary debates, with a particular view to understand the patterns of behaviour assumed by domestic actors while discussing European subjects within the parliament. In these terms, the present paper would focus on this institution – conceived in its capacity of ‘mediator’ between society and governance.

Following recent works (Auel and Raunio 2012, 2014; Wendler 2014), the present paper shall address the question dealing with whether political issues concerning the handling of European affairs – especially those lately entailing the economic governance – may actually transform domestic political competition, by means of introducing new lines of conflict, or even fostering a change in the institutional background of the debate.

The empirical analysis performed in this piece will depart from previous definitions (Wendler 2013) considering parliaments as institutional arenas meant to host communicative actions executed by rational actors seeking political gains either in terms of support for their claim or for their own parliamentary group/party. Plenary debates would be examined, since they shall promote public debate, articulated and bestowed interests through their elected representatives, instead of aiming solely at decision-makers of contending political parties in an endeavor of influencing policy.

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² An *intermestic* domain is one that concerns itself with both international and domestic affairs simultaneously
Starting from this backdrop, there are two main goals which this paper shall pursue: (1) mapping parliamentary parties’ attitudes vis-à-vis the European economic governance; (2) enquiring whether the greater need for technical information and planning documents – two factors deriving from the crisis, which clearly tend to justify the intervention of governments (Griglio and Lupo 2012) – have impacted the way the debate is carried out (e.g. main themes, justification and argumentative styles).

As for case selection, this research focuses on the Italian parliament – regarded as a typical case (Gerring 2004): in fact, it is believed that the results of this study may also have value for comparative research. Founding father but weak performer (Fabbri and Piattino 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).

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 take 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)\(^3\), 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 – as Pedrazzani and Zucchini (2013) say – any parliamentary democracy, at least partially. 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.

Trying to contribute to fill the mentioned gap, the present work – which may be regarded as a preliminary and tentative draft composing an ongoing, broader, research project\(^4\) – will take into consideration plenary debates on the planning documents, whose formal setting was changed after the enactment of the so-called ‘European Semester’\(^5\). A time span retracing the occurrence of the financial crisis (2008/2014) is considered. The Semester reunites the multilateral surveillance and organization of financial matters within the Eurozone following the sovereign debt crisis, by providing for a new working method for yearly discussing economic and budgetary priorities at the same point in time.

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\(^3\) The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) has been established on 27th September 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.

\(^4\) Being the product of the entire research the author’s PhD final dissertation. It covers a wider time span – from the Lisbon strategy (2000) to the enactment of Europe 2020 (2010-2014). More info on the point available from the author upon request.

\(^5\) Here understood as the decision brought by the ECOFIN deliberation dated 7 September 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
The present paper would thus focus on the analysis of the parliamentary debates devoted to the planning documents whose formal content has been modified after the introduction of this calendar.

While most of the recent studies focused on parliamentary debates on major, ‘history-making’, decisions, such as treaty reforms (Cavatorto 2012; Maatsch 2012) or anti-crisis measures (Wendler 2013; 2014; Closa and Maatsch 2014), here debates on ‘traditional’ planning documents concerning budgetary decisions are analyzed. At this point, it seems more significant to carry out an analysis of debates that more closely represent the ordinary domestic policy-making, as compared to examining ‘one-shot’, imperative, decisions whose EU-related nature is not only obvious and undeniable, but also ‘forced’ by the exceptional circumstances, as it is in the case of the anti-crisis measures, where this necessity was even acknowledged by an ‘approving opposition’ (Riekmann and Wydra 2013; Auel 2013). Moreover, recent literature (Maatsch 2010) suggests that ‘Europe’ is indeed a rare subject to be discussed outside of debates on Treaty changes, or else on sessions of the European Council (Van den Steeg 2010; Auel 2013).

This notwithstanding – if EU politics is (increasingly intertwined with) domestic politics, then debates on documents planning the economic position of a country in a medium-long term perspective should mirror this fact – or, at least, they should give evidence of the increased importance over time. Although planning documents are non-legislative acts, they deserve a particularly important position, a key-role in the definition and account of the Italian economic guidelines. More than that, the 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). Further – since the act is non-legislative, parliamentarians’ behavior is even more interesting: in fact, the discussion is likely to become a sort of ‘performance test’ for the government. In other terms, the parliament might take the chance to evaluate, or even criticize, the executive’s plans knowing that the outcome will not be of legislative kind in any case (a sort of ‘second-order’ situation).

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 an original coding scheme designed for the purposes of the analysis at issue.

At this point, the general question is grasped as dealing with measuring the salience of European matters, as well as with 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.
The remainder of the paper would be articulated as follows: next section would shortly make reference to the evolution of budgetary instruments and planning documents in Italy – as a complement to the introductory part. Subsequently, some relevant strands of the literature will be reviewed. The third section would instead point out the features of the research design, describing both the data and the methodology applied. The final part would deal with the illustration of preliminary results, which in turn would pave the way to a few concluding words.

1.1 Reforming budgetary instruments: planning documents in Italy. A brief overview

In Italy, the Economic and Financial Planning Document (Documento di Programmazione Economico-Finanziaria - DPEF6) was firstly introduced at the end of the 1980s (with law 362/19887) and significantly changed later at the end of the 1990s (with law 208/1999). Contents were streamlined and the deadline for its submission8 to the national parliament was postponed.

Alongside the DPEF, two additional documents envisaged by European rules added to the existing planning ‘production’9: the Stability Programme (Programma di Stabilità, PS), introduced following the Italian adherence to the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), and the Report on Economic Reforms (Rapporto sulle Riforme Economiche, RER) – which, since 2005, is drawn up as part of the ‘National Reform Program’ (Programma Nazionale di Riforma, PNR10) relating the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy.

In 2009, national accountancy was reformed after a parliamentary passage lasted less than one year: law 196/2009 was enacted for revising the rules governing accounting and public finance and for establishing new procedures governing the drafting of budgetary documents. The parliament thereby adopted a number of members’ bills as bases for the new law, changing the structure, timing of presentation and adoption of budget documents. The budget session was restricted to a period of just over two months, from October 15 through December 31. As the parliamentary staff remarks (ECPRD 2012), this aimed to introduce a more dynamic model, apt to give the parliament the possibility to make clear and transparent choices concerning the allocation of budgetary resources – guaranteeing also the accountability of government departments for the implementation of sectorial policies.

The annual and multi-annual budget was divided into missions and programmes, and the parliamentary voting unit selected was the programme. At one go, the structure of the stability law – the one previously called ‘finance law’ – was altered: its contents were scaled down, but its nature as a legislative instrument linked to the budget law, which has the nature of a formal Act of Parliament, was retained. Quoting a dedicated report of the parliamentary staff (ECPRD 2012: 2), ‘the finance law had become extremely cumbersome, especially in the past decade’, principally due to the possibility – on behalf of the executive – to make the parliamentary passage hastier by calling for a confidence vote on the bill.

6 For mere reasons of euphony, the Italian acronyms are preferred to the English ones
7 Which modified law 468/1978 – the one introducing the ‘Financial Law’ (Legge Finanziaria), which was the normative instrument apt to render budgetary policies somehow more systematic.
8 From May 15 to June 30. More information about this timely evolution available reading Crescenzi (2007), please see references.
10 The National Reform Programme is presented in parallel with its Stability/Convergence Programme, which sets out the country’s budgetary plans for the coming three or four years. More information available at http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-your-country/italia/national-reform-programme/index_en.htm
Another important measure introduced by law 196 was the shorter time available to Parliament for budget consideration, which was intended to last about two weeks. This deadline provided a scarce room for parliamentary decision-making discretion – rendering the work of one of the two Chambers theoretically redundant.

By some means ‘outdated’ at this point, the DPEF was substituted by the so-called Public Finance Decision (Decisione di Finanza Pubblica, DFP). The DFP as such, however, had a life shorter than its own plan, since it was based on a three-year period (2011-2013) but was only drafted and approved in 2010. In fact, the contextual launch of ‘Europe 2020’[1] at the EU-level and the introduction of the ‘European Semester’ called for an amendment of its reference law.

In order to adapt the entire process of national balance to the constraints and deadlines incorporated by the ‘European Semester’, law 39/2011 intervened to modify law 196/2009. With this new provision, reviewing the structure and deadlines for submitting planning documents, the Economic and Financial Document (Documento di Economia e Finanza, DEF) was designed to supersede the DFP. The deadline for the presentation to the parliamentary chambers was also anticipated to April 10 – twenty days before the deadline for the submission of the latter to the European Commission and the Council.

2. Theoretical framework: national parliaments and parties in the EU

2.1 Debating Europe: domestic legislatures in the EU and the importance of the communicative function

It is of renown that domestic legislatures have been playing a ‘marginal’ role at the beginning of the European integration path. Still main actors in the national law-making processes, NPs thus found themselves playing no direct role in the new supranational law-making process. This situation has been famously labeled as ‘de-parliamentarization’: national governments – and not backbench parliamentarians – represent the Member States at the EU level (Raunio 2010). Hence, parliaments were seen as the main losers of the European game (Maurer and Wessels 2001); more generally – with reference also to the initial position occupied by the European Parliament vis-à-vis the other EU institutions, scholars recognized the overall feebleness of the assemblies at the European level, supporting the argument of the ‘democratic deficit’ (Moravksik 2002). In particular, the weakness of legislatures has contributed to convey two main problems: first, the so-called ‘technocratic drift’ derived by the augmented importance of the Commission and other non-elected bodies at the EU-level; second, the state of abandon and distance lamented by the citizens in the face of the EU construction.

In response to such a situation, national parliaments attempted to get rid of this secluded status by pursuing a change – which in some countries has been a facilitator for the ‘re-emergence’ of parliaments (‘re-

[1] 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
parliamentarization’ thesis; Raunio and Hix 2000). Legislatures, alarmed by the 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. After the augmented room of maneuver gained with the Lisbon treaty, some observers even thought of the NPs as ‘bricks’ constituting a sort of ‘third chamber’ in the EU legislature (Cooper 2011), whose democratic legitimacy would eventually rub off on the EU.

Although the latter assertion may sound too optimistic, it is instead apparent how this evolving setting has been seriously jeopardized from the very premises of the financial crisis in 2008 to the topical implementation of the so-called ‘new’ European economic governance framework on behalf of the EU and its member states’ governments. Concerns have been voiced by scholars envisaging a possible extension of the democratic deficit of the EU – to a point of ‘democratic default’ (Majone 2012).

While most of the literature – up to now – has examined formal valuations of those mechanisms, tackling the NPs’ legal responses to such a situation, the emphasis here is instead on the aforementioned ‘communicative function’. One simple assumption lies behind this choice: a more dynamic debating role (Wendler 2014) of the parliament may lead to an enhancement of the parliament’s relevance in the eyes of citizens and in respect of other (national and European) institutions – therefore at least contributing to stop the expansion of the deficit.

To date, studies pertaining the communicative function (Auel and Raunio 2012; 2014; Auel and Tacea 2013) reveal that an active politicisation of EU issues through national parliaments has been very uncommon – especially for what debates not directly related to the management of the economic crisis are concerned. As Auel (2013: 14) affirms when looking at the relevant production on the topic, the crisis as led to an increase in the salience of European matters within the plenary, but this is still not applicable to ‘day-to-day’ decisions.

Concerning the Italian parliament, several scholars analysing the legislative process painted bleak pictures of the role of parliament and parliamentarians. For instance, Giuliani (2008) employed the concept of ‘auto-marginalization’ because of the lack of interest and capability of the members of parliament, whereas Borghetto (et al. 2012) concluded – overlooking the impact of European integration on the Italian law making over a 20-year period (1987-2006) – that ‘it is not possible to talk about the presence of a ‘pro-Europe’ or ‘anti-Europe’ cleavage in Italy’ (p. 129).

Further, Pinto and Pedrazzani (2013) performed an analysis of parliamentary debates dealing 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.

12 Among others, see Neuhold and Strelkov 2012 for more information about the new opportunity structure crowned by the Lisbon treaty.


13 an international agreement outside the EU legal framework signed by all EU member states but the UK and the Czech Republic, please find the online text at http://www.european-council.europa.eu/media/639226/10_-_tsbg_it_12.pdf
If one intends to focus on this perspective – the one pertaining domestic decisions and the behavior of parliamentary members (Members of the Parliament, MPs), the role of political parties within the parliament becomes central to the analysis, since parties are indeed the gatekeepers between institutions and public.

As Auel (2013) notes, ‘the promise of communication’ is not only kept through frequent contacts between the represented and the representatives, but also by guaranteeing the persistence of debate among different parliamentary parties. Naturally, ‘parliamentary debates are, of course, no guarantee that the promise of communication is actually kept’ […] but ‘provide the means by which the justifications of some (i.e. government, governing parties) can be continuously challenged by others within (the opposition) and outside of the parliamentary arena (media, interests groups etc.) and thus be exposed to the ‘best of disinfectants, sunshine’” (Louis Brandeis, in Auel 2013: 11).

2.2 Debating Europe: parties in the parliamentary arena

As de Wilde (2013) rightly noted, 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 particularly pertinent – especially when dealing with the EU-level and its interplay with the domestic one. Connected to this, EU-driven (or external) incentives may be at times undistinguishable from other kinds of ‘internal’ political/institutional stimuli – to the extent that the 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 salience44 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 discussions appears to require a revision (Maatsch 2013; Wendler 2013).

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 available to competing parties; (2) a reduction of the policy instruments available for the national governments’ perusal; (3) a limited policy repertoire. 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.

For the sake of conciseness, it may be stated that so far the literature has underlined the emergence of a new dimension of conflict between national parties, as connected to the EU integration path. However, the nature of this dimension has been interpreted in various ways, which lead back to the following main models (Hooghe et al. 2002):

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44 conceived as the level of attention devoted to European matters (either in a positive, neutral or negative way) –
- **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.

- **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.

Regardless of the model preferred, what is here important – and broadly recognized in 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 an increase in the salience of EU-related matters as the EU commitment mounts over time – e.g. following the occurrence of the socioeconomic and financial crisis. 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.

In spite of the possible incidence of intra-party dissent – whereby the cohesiveness of a party is questioned, scholars have found mainstream, center-located, parties as generally supportive towards Europe (Mattila and Raunio 2006); contrariwise, parties positioned at the extremes of the political spectrum are seen as mostly opposed (Ray 2007). Besides, it is right to underline how parties generally do not compete on the same matters: as a result, parties differ in the emphasis they place on the various topics on the political agenda (Meyer and Wagner 2013). According to Meguid (2005), the so-called ‘niche’ parties generally lay emphasis on smaller sets of issues as compared to mainstream groups. In addition, niche parties are more likely to emerge in later times, highlighting problems that their more established rivals had hitherto disregarded. More than that, established parties would be less inclined to change their profiles in response to electoral incentives than parties that enter competition at a later stage.
Size may be relevant as well, in that smaller parties would more easily change their salience profiles than their larger competitors (Meyer and Wagner 2013).

By and large, dealing with the European dimension, mainstream and governmental parties are usually pro-European also because they are or have been in government, thus they are part and parcel of the EU elite consensus. Niche parties may strategically react to this, interiorising the EU as a territory of competition, thereby opposing the consensual convergence of mainstream parties – thence sketching a line of difference from mainstream parties.

In short, some specifications may be added to H2-1(a): larger, established, ‘mainstream’ parties with vote-seeking strategies would react to the EU commitment in a more positive way than smaller, newer, ‘niche’ parties with policy seeking orientations. The latter will more probably provide more negative and critic interpretations of the EU commitment – seen as elements distinguishing a more distinctive and successful approach in the challenge against their mainstream opponents.

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 stances15.

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 neoliberal 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

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15 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.
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) rightly 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 \textbf{H1}: if Europe matters, one could expect an increase in the salience of EU-related matters as the EU commitment mounts over time. 

\textbf{(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 actors in the same 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 Analyzing plenary debates: claims-making analysis

Amongst the methodological alternatives available when dealing with a written text as source of data, \textit{claims-making analysis} (Koopmans and Statham 2002) 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. 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 methodological alternative is the most promising from the viewpoint of representation studies, 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’ (which are the represented constituencies). 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 material16, the present research proposes and adopts an original coding scheme17 – 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 present paper focuses its attention on the measurement of dependent variable, namely parliamentarians’ attitudes towards the European issue.

16 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; www.policyagendas.org)
17 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).
3b. Coding plenary debates on budgetary issues: the scheme

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-legitimating effects while positive tonalities are considered as entailing legitimizing effects. 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 & 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.

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.

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 2002: 4).

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 codebook hereby proposed keeps this into consideration.

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18 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.

19 neutral is considered as entailing a sort of ambiguity
attributing great importance to the frames included – which may be grouped into the following thematic areas: (a) Implementation: failures and policy outcomes; (b) EU governance; (c) Budget: spending EU funds; (d) identity; (e) domestic governance; (f) macro-economic background theories; (g) new European economic governance. Those frame areas shall be intended as a means to thematize the debate along broad subjects, without demanding completeness. Mostly, area (g) will be here recalled when dealing with H1a, the hypothesis about the presence of specific themes amenable to the current critical juncture.

4 Preliminary findings: waiting in the wings of Europe?

As said, the present paper aims to perform a tentative assessment of some preliminary hypotheses referred to the narrow time span under scrutiny (2008-2014) – 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.

The attention is thus focused on the measurement of the EU salience (bluntly, the level of attention devoted in terms of relevant claims), as well as of parliamentarians’ position towards the arenas where EU-related issues should be handled. While the former is simply calculated as the ratio of all the statements showing EU saliency by the total of claims present in each debate, the latter is obtained in a slightly more elaborated manner: the total amount 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.

Prior to the computation of those elements, hereby some basic structural data regarding the documents analyzed:

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20 More on the frames in the dedicated appendix.
21 The ‘mixed’ handling-level is not accounted for in the numerator, since it symbolizes the presence of a certain degree of ambiguity in the claim for what the handling of those matters is concerned.
Looking at the table above, votes are reported. As senator Morando\(^5\) 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\(^6\).

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

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\(^{5}\) At the Senate: speaking of the vote for the connected resolution (6-00048) on the ‘re-entry plan’ and the delay in the achievement of budgetary balance, in that occasion there were more favourable votes (YES: 170; NO: 87; ABSTENTIONS: 1) as compared to the ‘yes’ received by the 2014 DEF. The presents were also slightly more numerous (159, as compared to the 251 senators who were present during the 2014 DEF vote).

\(^{6}\) At the Chamber of Deputies: speaking of the vote for the connected resolution (6-00064) on the ‘re-entry plan’ and the delay in the achievement of budgetary balance, in that occasion there were more favourable votes (YES: 373; NO: 114; ABSTENTIONS: 4) as compared to the ‘yes’ received by the 2014 DEF.

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\(^{20}\) Sessions n.31-32-33 (8/9 July 2008)
\(^{21}\) Sessions n.246-247-248 (28/29 July 2009)
\(^{22}\) Sessions n.438-439-440 (13-14-19 Oct 2010)
\(^{23}\) Sessions n.547-548-549-550 (3/5 May 2011)
\(^{24}\) Session n.716 (26 April 2012)
\(^{25}\) Sessions n.18-19 (6/7 May 2013)
\(^{26}\) Session n.233 (17 April 2014)
\(^{27}\) Sessions n.29-30 (7/8 July 2008)
\(^{28}\) Sessions n.210-211 (28/29 July 2009)
\(^{29}\) Session n.382 (13 Oct 2010)
\(^{30}\) Session n.469 (28 April 2011)
\(^{31}\) Session n.626 (28 April 2012)
\(^{32}\) Session n.13 (7 May 2013)
\(^{33}\) Session n.214 (17 April 2014)

\(^{34}\) Democratic Party, minority rapporteur for DEF 2011, statement coming from Senate’s session 549, see relating note.

\(^{35}\)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’
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 linked to the commencement of the new legislature (XVII\textsuperscript{39}), as well as to the presence of a new parliamentary party, the one referring to the Five Star Movement (M5S, Movimento 5 Stelle\textsuperscript{40}). Newborn in the arena, it might have been impatient for expressing itself within the parliament.

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. 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\textsuperscript{41} 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.

The table below deals with the units of analysis, namely the claims, divided based on the skimming criterion, that is ‘EU saliency: present/absent’.

Graph 1 shows the amount of salient claims over time dividing the trends for majority and opposition lines. The level of European salience seems fairly distributed between the two groups – with a slight drop in 2009

\textsuperscript{39} 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.

\textsuperscript{40} 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, P. and Gualmini, E. ‘Il partito di Grillo’, Il Mulino, 2013.

\textsuperscript{41} Announced on 16 Nov 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 non-party Independent
and 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 – especially for what the technical government (Monti) and the grand coalition executive (Letta) are concerned. Overall, it seems fair to state that salience increases over time, and the zenith of the crisis might have had a role in this upturn (H1; H1a).

While looking at graph 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 (with a minimum percentage value of 40% - EU salient claims at the Chamber of Deputies in 2006, and a maximum percentage value of 76% in 2010 and 2011). 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, 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 government.

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. That said, the salience shows lower levels in 2009 (28% at the Senate).

In 2011 PdL still leads the governmental coalition (government Berlusconi IV): 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.

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42 The detailed table showing percentages and amount of claims per party and per year is available upon request from the author.
43 With the exception of year 2013, where the newborn Five Star Movement distinguishes itself for the highest number of claims stated during plenary sessions in both the chambers. The coming out of M5S is unsurprising, as the party is a newborn, therefore willing to ‘show off’ and be as active as a participant as possible.
44 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.
As of 2013, PdL broke down: Berlusconi rebranded its party (again) as Forza Italia (FI), whereas the group led by Angelino Alfano originated the New Centre Right (NCD, Nuovo Centro Destra). While FI located itself at the opposition in 2013-2014, NCD firstly supported Letta’s cabinet, and then entered Renzi’s government with three appointed ministers. Both the parties showed a rather high percentage of salient claims, on average 57% (NCD) 58% (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 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) 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 opposition parties are concerned, in 2013 the democratic-socialist party Left Ecology and Freedom (Sinistra Ecologia e Libertà, SEL) and the national conservative Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d’Italia, FdI), are characterized by a medium level of EU salience (being preferably ‘domestic’ as competence level) – even though in some cases the number of claims is too low for any, even superficial, conclusion.

When looking at the tone – displayed as a scale (+1, positive; +1, negative) in graph 2a, 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.

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45 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.
46 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.
47 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.
48 In December 2014, after the fall of Letta’s government, NCD joined the new coalition government led by Matteo Renzi.
50 The cabinet, in office since 22 February 2014, is composed of members of PD, NCF, 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.
51 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).
52 USC and SC supported Letta’s cabinet. In the graph it is included in the group labelled ‘UDC-DC-TERZO POLO’.
53 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.
Below displayed, Graph 2b confirms this impression by showing the graphs relating the two bigger and established parties (on the right, PD and PdL/FI) and other four littler (on the left, Italy of Values, Italia dei Valori, IDV; FdI; LN) and newer (M5S) parties. The trends are clearly dependent on the participation to the governmental coalition in the case of LN or IDV, while in the cases of M5S, for instance, there is not yet a counterfactual – in that it has not yet entered a government.

If the parties are grouped according to the pro/anti EU integration positioning scores (graph 2c) from the 2010 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (see Bakker et al. 2013), it is clear that the trends are mostly domestic-driven rather than led by an outweighing ‘European’ dimension.

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\[52\] This is the party founded by the former Mani Pulite prosecutor Antonio Di Pietro. Most recently, it withdrew its external support to Monti government during Dec 2011. As of late December 2012, IdV was among the founding components of Civil Revolution (Rivoluzione Civile, RC), a far-left coalition led by an Italian magistrate, Antonio Ingroia. At the 2013 general election RC won a mere 2.2% of the vote and IdV was thus out of Parliament for the first time in almost ten years.

\[53\] 2010 is the most recent survey year hitherto available.

\[54\] 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/](http://www.chesdata.eu/). Relevant scores are reported in Appendix B.
Briefly discussing graph 2c, 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 and negatively oriented when part of the opposition. As for the ‘pro-European’ parties (on the left side), same conclusions may be drawn when looking, for instance, at IDV, 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 founding members of the House of Freedom\(^5\) (for a review see Conti 2009) and lately ever closer to SC, the party created by Monti. In sum, it is solid the impression about how domestic logics (H2-0), such as the one distinguishing majority/opposition dynamics, overshadow any other ‘European’ dimension (H2-1; H2-1a).

\(^5\) 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
Graph 3 shows the ‘position’ scale, and – as disclosed above – there is a prevalence of the ‘domestic’-competence level (negative values on the ‘position’ scale). This disconfirms the expectation put forward by H1b. It is unsurprising, though: parliamentarians are seen as recognizing ‘EU-salience’, but they remain part of domestic elites. Thence, when the claim is dealing 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. As compared to the opposition line, the majority one displays a slight tendency towards values closer to the ‘European’ level, with picks in 2008 and 2011 – respectively connected to the beginning and the apex of the crisis.

Looking at graph 4, 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 (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) 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.

\[\text{Graph 4. Major parties: position over time (2008-2014)}\]

\[\text{Looking at graph 4, 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.}

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\[\text{56 FLI was formed by followers of Gianfranco Fini in July 2010 as a split from The People of Freedom (PdL), the major Italian centre-right party led by Silvio Berlusconi. Among others, he has been in office as Minister for EU politics from June 2001 to April 2005 (Berlusconi II’s cabinet). It is well-known the controversy behind its (unsuccessful) nomination for the European Commission (the so-called ’Buttiglione case’, his own viewpoint at }\]
http://www.secondspring.co.uk/articles/buttiglione.htm}
With regards to other hypotheses, graph 5 looks at one of the ‘frames’ provided for by the coding scheme developed: ‘Keynesian vs. neoliberal attitudes’ (area ‘macro-economic background theories’), considered in the formulation of H3. Indeed, it seemed central to enquire whether parties – when discussing budgetary issues – moved along these two strands.

The ‘neoliberal scale’ adds the tone (pos/neg): positive (+) values on the scale stand for positive claims framed within a neo-liberal approach, or else, claims which are negatively oriented towards Keynesian views. Vice-versa for negative (-) values. The ‘crisis-effect’ is quite remarkable when looking at the trend regarding years 2011-14: attitudes clearly lean towards the Keynesian paradigm (hence, negative attitudes towards the neoliberal one are prevalent, too).

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14 The scale is constructed as a calculated field on Excel and takes into account 2 variables and the tone (e.g. neo-liberal, positive; neo-liberal, negative; Keynesian, positive; Keynesian, negative). Please see variable ‘300’ in the appendix included.

15 Everywhere in the present work percentages are weighted and refer to the amount of claims per variable. This is the easiest mathematical way to render two different units (parliamentarians’ interventions with different length) comparable.
Graph 6 shows the differences between majority and opposition on the neoliberal scale: here it is clearer how the mentioned ‘crisis-effect’ has also affected the traditional view opposing parties representing the economic ‘left’ (and Keynesian measures) to parties representing the economic ‘right’ (generally standing for neoliberal outlooks). While the distinction still holds at the beginning of the crisis (2008), an executive-led responsiveness to ‘European’ rigid targets (of neoliberal imprint) brings to the fore consensual arrangements over the scale in 2011. In 2012-14, majority and opposition alike come to negative attitudes vis-à-vis the neo-liberal scheme – consequential to the strict austerity thereby put forward.

In light of these considerations, one could appreciate how the hypothesis pairing right with ‘neo-liberal’ and left with ‘Keynesian’ definitely goes through the ‘crisis-mill’ and seem to require some adjustments.

From a mere qualitative stance, the analysis performed may also confirm other researchers’ insights on the point (Pinto and Pedrazzani 2013). For instance, the debate during Monti’s cabinet has strongly linked the management of EU affairs with the legitimization of the technical government, creating a political environment 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, in 2013-14, the same contested outlook came out – but it seemed not enough to prevent the formation of diffuse negative tones on the topic considered.

More specifically – 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, 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).

60 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
For what the other frame areas are concerned, the frames relating the area labeled ‘new European economic governance’ are summarized in graph 7, in order to shed some light on the thematization anticipated in H1a.

Graph 7 shows the occurrences (in terms of percentages of total salient claims) for the frames grouped in the mentioned area, and it aims to visualize the onset of themes specifically amenable to the current critical juncture. One frame pertains the mentions to specific features of the European economic governance framework – whose relevance for domestic debates, such as this one under scrutiny, seems to be acknowledged from 2010 onwards, and in percentages that do not go upper than 8.8% (in 2010, bar on the left side) on the overall total of salient claims. The other set of bars displayed are those of a merged variable comprising mentions to the role of specific actors within the framework, and in particular an increased role of ‘triple-A’ countries and of banks and private institutions such as rating companies in the making of macroeconomic measures at the EU-level (e.g. anti-crisis measures). As it is apparent when looking at the histogram, the mentions do not go upper than 4.7% (in 2012, bar on the right side).

Even though these percentages do not allow the formulation of relevant conclusions, it could be certainly said that a focused thematization on crisis-specific issues – as envisaged in H1a – did not happen, or at least not in a significant manner. More generally, the crisis as such has acted as a catalyzing agent for what the salience of EU-related issues is concerned, but the Italian parliament has not managed to fully articulate and thematize those matters.

5 Conclusive remarks

Although, as repeated, this analysis has to be read as a very preliminary product of a continuing and more extensive research, it is already distinguishable how country-specific patterns (government/opposition; mainstream/peripheral logics) tend to play a key-part for what the political discourse about planning documents placed within the new European economic governance is concerned.
However, the picture is not as bleak as one could imagine, at least regarding the salience of the European matters: parliamentarians often refer to EU-related issues – the average percentage of relevant claims being 57.5%. Hence, it seems that the parliamentary arena has actually become a forum where the European governance is discussed – especially because of the crisis. For example, the patterns of voting behavior and discussion preliminary to the approval of the resolutions accompanying the planning documents testify a someway-renovated interest on behalf of parliamentarians –trivially in terms of attendance to sessions. As of voting behavior, the patterns observed in this occasion confirm what pundits (Maatsch 2013) argue about the importance of the national parliament as veto-player, particularly following the Lisbon treaty.

Of course – with a view to better evaluate those instances, analyses covering a larger time span 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.

As a final point, the present analysis has been a reasonable attempt to go beyond a mere focus on legislative/scrutiny or electoral aspects. In particular, it has probably helped to show the relevance of the European ‘pressure’, in terms of reduction of policy decidability (Lupato 2014), other than of occurrence of this topic within the debate. Further, it has provided valuable information about other features, more strictly relating the topics discussed by parliamentarians in such a singular time span.

Hopefully, the importance of the ‘communicative function’ as a valid theoretical starting point has been tentatively proved. Certainly, it can easily serve as a complement for other ‘broader’ types of analyses – providing evidences at both actor (party) and context levels. Indeed, it takes the two to get a more complete picture on this multi-faceted topic.
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Appendix A – thematic variables and frames (including frame areas)

**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
45. **Macro-economic issues** (explicit references to the performance, structure, behavior, and decision-making strictly dealing with macroeconomics, e.g. aggregated indicators such as the GDP, price indices, etc. or references to short-run fluctuations in national income, or attempts to understand or evaluate the determinants of long-run economic growth. Last, direct reference to the documents analyzed – namely, the programmatic documents – will also fall in this category).

451. European  
452. Domestic  
453. Mixed

46. **Agriculture**  
461. European  
462. Domestic  
463. Mixed

**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 – see Cavatorto 2012)
372 More powers to the domestic Parliament (e.g. in favor of the govt/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)
**Frames: context area map**

Hereby some of the frames are grouped per thematic area, in order to clarify their use in indexes for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. ‘Implementation: failures and outcomes’ area:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Failures: where the actor puts the responsibility:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 391/394: blaming the executive or supporting its actions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 392/393: blaming the length of decision-making processes of the parliament (auto-blame) or blaming the European Commission (externalizing blame)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Implementation outcomes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 482/483: supporting or resisting to changes prompted by feedbacks received from the EU arena</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. ‘EU governance’ area:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- EU institutions and public:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 381 democratic deficit / lack of transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Relationships among institutions in the EU:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 361/362: preferring more intergovernmentalism or supporting a power transfer in favor of the EU institutions, e.g. European Commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. ‘Budget: spending EU funds’ area:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- European funds:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 282/283: responsibility for spending EU funds or waste/corruption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. ‘Identity’ area:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 291/293: support for or reaction to the formation of a ‘European’ identity feeling.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. ‘Domestic governance’ area:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Parliament and legitimacy:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 371: more powers to the domestic Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Centre/periphery relations:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 472/473: centralism vs. federalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. ‘Macro-economic background theories’ area:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 301/302: neoliberal vs. Keynesian views</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<tr>
<th>7. ‘New European economic governance’ area:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- References to the general governance framework:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 284: European economic governance framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Role of specific actors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 351: balance of power and coalitions among members states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 352/353: increased weight of Germany/ ‘Franco-German axis’/ ‘triple-A’ countries or private institutions, e.g. banks or rating companies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B – Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 2010. Scores relevant to this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Pro/anti European position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LN</td>
<td>2.666666746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDC</td>
<td>6.333333492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDL</td>
<td>4.666666508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDV</td>
<td>6.142857075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD</td>
<td>6.555555344</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

FI: Forza Italia – Forward Italy

FdI: Fratelli d’Italia – Brothers of 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

DPEF: Documento di Programmazione Economico-Finanziaria – Economic and Financial Planning Document

ECB: European Central Bank

EMU: Economic and Monetary Union

ESM: European Stability Mechanism

EP: European Parliament

EU: European Union

MPs: Members of the Parliament

NPs: National Parliaments

PNR: Programma Nazionale di Riforma – National Reform Program


PS: Programma di Stabilità – Stability Programme