„To hear some parties talk about Europe, you would think that...“

EU issues in Austrian general election campaigns

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Abstract

To what extent do political parties politicise European Union issues during national election campaigns? This paper examines the salience and framing of European issues in Austrian general election campaigns in 2008 and 2013. Using press release data we investigate in detail how much parties talk about the European Union and, just as importantly, when and how they do so. Our results suggest that parties with strong incentives to raise the EU throughout the campaign constantly pay attention to the topic. Mainstream parties, on the other hand, talk about the EU mainly in reaction to external events. Moreover, there is evidence that parties frame EU issues according to their ideological focus. In sum, this paper provides us with information on the extent of party-political contestation over European integration and shows how the EU is incorporated into everyday national politics.

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Introduction

In the past, it has often been argued that national election campaigns have remained largely untouched by the growing importance of European integration. Instead of turning the EU into an issue in national elections, parties were said to prefer to avoid the topic as much as possible (Mair 2001). More recently, this view has been challenged: the EU may be more important in national elections than previously thought, with parties tending to politicise European issues in the national electoral arena (Bartolini 2005, Kriesi 2007). For one, there is evidence that attitudes towards the EU shape electoral decisions by voters even at national elections (Benoit and Laver 2006, De Vries 2007). Moreover, recent research has studied how much parties politicise the EU in national campaigns. While the overall level of politicisation is rather low, there is definite cross-country variation and it is not the case that the EU is ignored completely (Hutter and Grande 2014). Furthermore, scholars have studied how the topic of the EU is addressed and framed by the different parties, suggesting that there has been a shift towards an emphasis of the cultural dimension of European integration (Hooghe et al. 2002, Höglinger et al. 2012).

In this paper, we extend this research by considering in detail how parties address the EU in their national election campaigns. We are interested in the following questions: How much do parties talk about Europe, and how they do so? Which parties include the issue of the EU in their campaigns, and at what point in the campaign do they do so? And what aspects of the European Union do parties emphasise?

Studying how and how much parties talk about the EU is important for several reasons. As Mair (2007) noted ‘(…) we need to know more about how Europe actually plays in national political discourse, as well as about the way in which it is conceived’. The author argues that since most research in this field has relied on standardised quantitative variables, a case study analysis enables us to extensively investigate the arguments used in national election campaigns and contributes to our knowledge about ‘what is really happening on the ground’. Second, doing so provides us with information on the extent of party-political contestation over European integration. It is normatively desirable for parties to discuss and debate important issues instead of concealing or repressing them. It is thus important to analyse which parties show such a willingness to address the EU. It may be particularly important how the EU is discussed at national elections as European elections with their low turnout and second-order characteristics are perhaps insufficient arenas for this (Reif and Schmitt 1980, Schmitt 2005).

Third, answering these questions will show how the EU is incorporated into everyday national politics. European integration presents a challenge to parties as it has raised a wide range of new
political questions that cannot always be accommodated in a country’s existing dimensions of contestation. Yet parties, as the main actors in the national political arena, are often forced to deal with European integration. Political actors use different strategies to do so. Following recent results on party positioning on the issue of European integration (Marks and Wilson 2000, Marks et. al 2002), we suggest that the EU is integrated into national campaigns in ways that build on the party’s previous ideological focus and orientation. In studying these questions, we will also gain insight into how political parties in general react and adapt to new issues and how they integrate these in pre-existing dimensions of ideology and party competition (e.g. Hix and Lord 1997; Mair 2007).

Thus, in this paper we examine how much different parties talk about the EU in a national election campaign, and which aspects of the EU they address in particular. Our analysis is based on the two most recent parliamentary election campaigns in Austria in 2008 and 2013. Studying election campaigns is central in representative democracies. They are the proper periods for the analysis of a party’s issue strategy as they offer a window of opportunity to emphasise topics that are of major importance (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). We believe the Austrian campaigns to be suitable objects of study as the EU was moderately important in both elections, but not especially so. Moreover, since Austria contains a variety of parties from four key party families (Social democrats, Christian democrats, Greens and the radical right), it is likely that their mobilization strategies also apply to parties in other multiparty systems with similar patterns of party competition. To cover the politicisation of European Union issues in these campaigns, we examine the content of party press releases. Since most other studies rely on manifesto data or news coverage, this allows us new insights to the politicisation of European issues during campaigns. Most importantly, press releases allow for a dynamic analysis of the issue development in the course of the campaign and provide us with unfiltered information about the way a party frames the issue.

In sum, our analysis points to several interesting patterns. First, the way in which parties campaign on the EU matches their overall ideological focus. While the mainstream parties emphasis economic and other utilitarian aspects of the European Union, the strongly Eurosceptic right-wing FPÖ addresses EU issues in nationalistic frames. Furthermore, it appears that opposition parties that have incentives to raise the salience of the EU issue attempt to pay constant attention to the issue throughout the election campaign.

The paper proceeds in four sections: first, we present the major theoretical approaches regarding EU issue politicisation and our hypotheses. Second, we give an insight to the 2008 and 2013
election campaign background. Third, the empirical data and the coding scheme are described. Fourth, we report our findings and, finally, discuss the implications of our results.

Campaign strategy and the politicisation of the EU in party communication

We will consider three decisions taken by parties in campaigns: the extent to which to talk about the EU, when to talk about the EU and how to talk about the EU.

Salience of EU issues in party communication

The first strategic decision is how much to address the topic of European integration and the European Union. In other words, what leads parties to want to raise or diminish the salience of the EU in voters’ minds?

Salience is a central part of campaign decisions relative to issues because election results may depend on which issues dominate the agenda (Green-Pedersen 2007). Voters may evaluate their ideological distance from competing parties differently depending on the weight of individual issues: they may be close to one party on economic policy, but closer to another on policies relating to immigration, education or the environment (Van der Brug 2004). If voters evaluate parties mainly on competence, then parties will gain if those issues on which they are seen as particularly capable are at the forefront of voters’ minds (Bélanger and Meguid 2008, Green and Hobolt 2008, Green 2011). Long-run competence reputations may result in parties gaining ‘ownership’ over certain issues, and parties will want their ‘owned’ policy areas to stay at the top of the issue agenda (Petrocik 1996, Guinaudeau and Persico 2014). These considerations are clearly stated by Carmines (1991): ‘All successful politicians instinctively understand which issues benefit them and their party and which do not. The trick is to politicize the former and depoliticize the latter.’ In sum, then, parties will want to raise the salience of issues that promise electoral success and reduce that of those topics that are electorally threatening.

These dynamics, which have been identified for issue competition in general, will also apply to the topic of the European Union. Variation in salience of EU issues across parties could thus be attributed to a considerable extent to the strategic behaviour of the political parties (Steenbergen and Scott 2004, Hobolt and De Vries 2012). What kinds of parties should then try to push the EU as a campaign issue? In terms of positions, a party should want to raise the salience of the EU if their position is shared by more voters than they currently have (Carmines and Stimson 1993). This will be true in particular if its competitors take up a different position, so that the EU issue distinguishes the party from key opponents.
There will be added benefits for parties to emphasise the EU in such a situation. For one, their views will be distinctive within the party system. Emphasising distinctive views may garner media coverage and attract public attention, making the party a more relevant player in national politics and raising its profile among voters (Kitschelt 1994). In the long term, emphasising a distinctive stance will lead to an association in voters’ minds between the party and that stance (Wagner 2012). In this way, that party may develop ownership over the EU issue.

It is for these twin reasons, positions and distinctiveness, that we should expect parties with a Eurosceptic stance to emphasise the EU issue more than their competitors, especially since there is evidence that pro-European mainstream parties lack both distinctiveness and electoral incentives (Green-Pedersen 2012). Our first hypothesis is therefore:

H1: In campaigns, Eurosceptic parties will address the EU more than other parties.

Of course, this hypothesis does not exhaust all the possible reasons why parties will address the EU during a campaign. Often, parties, especially those with governmental responsibility, will be forced to address the issue because of external events, for example an important EU summit or an international (financial or political) crisis where the EU is called to act. A party may also have to talk about the EU if its competitors succeed in making the EU a salient campaign issue. If the media start to cover an issue extensively, it will be hard for other parties to avoid that issue completely, at least if it wants to remain a part of mainstream political debate (see Harris et al. 2005). This is what Steenbergen and Scott (2004) term ‘systemic salience’. There are also other motivations for parties to de-emphasise issues, for example internal dissent (Aylott 2002, Hobolt and De Vries 2012; Steenbergen and Scott 2004). If party cohesion is related to electoral success, party elites will have an incentive to downplay divisive issues. In this paper, however, we concentrate on the role that ideological positioning has in determining efforts to raise salience.

Patterns of salience in the course of a campaign

So far, we have mainly treated a campaign as an aggregate phenomenon: we have asked which parties emphasise the EU and which parties avoid the topic over the course of the campaign as a whole. However, campaigns are dynamic processes that can be broken down into individual days, or even into smaller units than that. Consequently, press releases allow political actors to strategically put them to use throughout the campaign period. How can we then expect different parties to address the EU over the course of a campaign?

First, parties that want to raise the salience of the EU should pay relatively constant attention to the issue. Their aim is to ensure that voters keep the issue at the forefront of their minds and that
other parties and the media keep addressing the topic. In a campaign, one way in which a party can try to achieve this is by persistently mentioning the issue in its public communication (Brandenburg 2002). While the party’s overall attention to the issue may fluctuate, it should address the topic throughout the campaign, without letting up to a great extent. This may be possible especially for opposition parties, who do not have to react to as many issues as government parties (Meguid 2005). Such evidence for government-opposition differences in the duration of attention to issues has been found for parliamentary activities in Denmark (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010). Our second hypothesis is therefore:

H2: Parties that want to raise the salience of the EU will address EU issues throughout the campaign.

However, as already noted, parties are not always free in deciding when to address an issue. For one, parties will react to external events (Van der Eijk and Franklin 2007). When the EU becomes salient through political events – and the media coverage that ensues – parties are likely to react by addressing the EU themselves. This is particularly true of government parties, which will to a significant extent be forced to react to issues that fall within their remit because this is what is expected of parties in government (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010). If, for example, an EU summit or the European Parliament takes an important decision, government parties may be called on to explain or react to this. Even opposition parties will have an incentive to talk about the EU in the context of such events because they do not want be left out of the national conversation and because they may want to appear to be potential government parties (Winzen 2010). However, opposition parties will nevertheless be freer in deciding which issues to address so will be less constrained by external events. Our third hypothesis is therefore:

H3: Government parties address EU issues when reacting to events.

The consequence of H3 is that government parties who do not otherwise want to raise the salience of the EU issue will address European topics intermittently, when this is required of them by external events. This stands in contrast to the pattern predicted by H2, that parties who want to raise the salience of the EU will address these topics throughout the campaign.

Framing of the EU in party communication

Finally, the EU as an issue is not monolithic. While some studies consider European integration as a single topic (e.g. Steenbergen and Scott 2004), the EU today is actually a diverse collection of individual issues. As a consequence parties have changed the way they address European issues. The end of the permissive consensus incident to the increase of the politicisation of European integration raised the question of how parties incorporate European issues to the existing pattern
of party conflict in the national arena (Down and Wilson 2008). At first the conflict over European integration was oriented along the left-right dimension. Following this logic, which structures political conflict in most European countries, scholars have contrasted two party coalitions along economic factors. The first is made up of liberals, conservatives and Christian democrats supporting de-regulated market capitalism. The second coalition unifies Social democrats and left socialists who want to protect national welfare regimes and preserve national spaces for redistribution (Hooghe and Marks 2009).

However, recent research has shown that economic positioning towards European integration draws an incomplete picture of political contestation over European integration. As Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002) have shown, there is another line of conflict over European integration between parties: national identity. The politicisation on this second non-economic dimension is mostly structured by extreme right- and left-wing as well as green parties. While the first are concerned about the national sovereignty, the latter frame European integration in a pro-European multi-cultural manner (Hooghe and Marks 2009). To capture a parties’ position on national identity the authors added to their first, left-right dimension a second one ranging from green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) to traditionalism/authoritarian/nationalism (TAN) (Hooghe et al. 2002).

These enlarged lines of conflict between political parties are also reflected in the framing literature on the EU, which considers what aspects of the issue are emphasised. More precisely, studies on how parties frame European integration are interested in the arguments chosen by political actors to justify their positions. Most recently, scholars have considered three ways of framing EU discourse in campaigns: cultural, economic and other utilitarian (Helbling et al. 2010, Hutter and Grande 2014). Their approach builds on the work of Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008, and 2012), which argues that the issue of Europe relates to both principal axes of party competition: the economy and culture. Moreover, such a differentiation of frames is in line with recent research of individual level attitudes which are related to national identity and utilitarian motives and also speaks to Habermas’ distinction of how media and elite discourses on European integration are framed (e.g. Lerch and Schwellnus 2006).

However, notably relevant in terms of party contestation, Kriesi et al. (2012) argue that the two ideological dimensions of economy and culture continue to dominate political conflict in Europe, even if their meaning has changed by the growing importance of globalisation. This development has led parties to re-interpret and re-define the two dimensions based on the impact of globalisation, but it has not led to a disappearance of the two dimensions. The issue of European
integration is a particularly interesting one within this framework as it can be addressed and discussed in ways linked to both dimensions. In economic terms, we can oppose a neo-liberal model of the EU based on an unregulated free market on the one hand and a social-democratic model of the EU based on regulated capitalism on the other. In terms of culture, cosmopolitan and multicultural attitudes are one pole, and nationalist and authoritarian beliefs the other. While the authors acknowledge that European integration can in theory relate to both dimensions, they expect that in practice the issue will be dominated by a cultural rather than an economic logic.

In this paper, we build on the categorisation of the most recent framing literature and test whether parties differ in the aspects of European integration that they address during an election campaign. Indeed, some parts of the EU as it exists today are mostly related to economic concerns, for example the single market and the Euro. These issues reflect the original emphasis of European integration on economic cooperation. Many other aspects are less clearly related to the economy, for example the foreign, environmental and migration policies of the EU. Often, these non-economic topics relate more to questions of culture and identity, so for example how citizens and parties think of their national identity within a European context.

Since the economic and cultural dimensions dominate political conflict in general, they will also help to determine how parties address the EU, so which aspects they will address in particular. Thus, our expectation is that those parties that emphasise economic concerns in their general ideological programme will also consider the issue of the EU through that lens. In contrast, parties that focus on non-economic concerns will also address aspects of the EU that are less directly related to the economy and perhaps closer to questions of culture and identity. Our final hypothesis is therefore:

**H4: Parties emphasise EU issues in ways that match their overall ideological focus.**

In sum, our hypotheses cover the overall salience of EU issues during the campaign, the mobilization strategies of parties throughout the campaign and the ways parties address European issues. But what are the major implications for the Austrian case?

The first two hypotheses clearly refer to the strategy of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ). As the FPÖ has the most distinct anti-EU position, we expect the party to actively raise EU issues throughout the two campaigns and to keep the European Union salient during the campaign period. The two mainstream parties, the Social democrats (SPÖ) and the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) by contrast are expected to downplay the European issues or rather react to certain events. Thus, the two parties may emphasise the EU in certain sub-periods of the election
campaign, but in general, we assume that they try to talk as little as possible about European issues. Regarding our framing hypothesis we expect the two mainstream parties to positively address the economic or utilitarian dimension of the EU. Social and Christian democrats both generally support the European integration project and particularly address the economic dimension. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that there are differences, as Social democrats rather focus on labour and social security and Christian democrats and conservatives emphasise economic prosperity (Helbling et al. 2010). Moreover, they are expected to address other utilitarian frames, such as political efficacy or security issues (see data and design section). The radical and moderate opposition, we assume, will focus on the cultural dimension. With reference to the Austrian case, it is the Austrian Freedom Party that is expected to emphasise awareness about national sovereignty, whereas the Greens are likely to support multicultural-universalist EU issues. However, as their overall positions towards the EU suggest we should also see clear positional differences in the various frames between these two major opposition parties.

Case and its political context

Austria is a suitable case for analysing EU issue politicisation for three reasons. First, since European integration (compared to other salient issues) has rarely been politicised, it is argued that cross-national comparative studies tell us little about the factors that cause politicisation (Green-Pedersen 2012). As a consequence, studying politicisation and framing from a single country perspective can give us more detailed information about the necessary and sufficient conditions to make the European Union a salient campaign issue. Second, Austria can be seen as a crucial case, as we can observe most of the factors that are considered to have a beneficial effect on the politicisation of European integration, such as a clearly Eurosceptic public opinion and relevant Eurosceptical parties (Pelinka 2004). ¹ Third, the same holds true in terms of issue framing. As mentioned above the Austrian party system contains parties from four party families, including conservative and social-democratic mainstream parties, an extreme right-wing party as well as an left-wing Green party. Thus, the Austrian case seems to be a suitable object for testing our framing hypothesis and our results will allow implications for European democracies with similar party systems. In addition to justifying our choice of Austria as a case study, it is also important to discuss the political context of the two general elections in order to explain the initial position, the most important campaign topics as well as the general course of the campaign.
Election campaigns in 2008 and 2013

The snap election in 2008 ended the shortest parliamentary term, a ‘grand coalition’ between the Social Democratic Party and the Austrian People’s Party, in Austria. The coalition was led by chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer (SPÖ), who has also been the leader of the party. His counterpart, Minister of Finance and vice-chancellor, in the ÖVP was Wilhelm Molterer. Although the coalition was an unpleasant result for both parties, it was the only available choice, since the two parties ruled out other possibilities beforehand (Müller 2009). The Social democrats, despite the fact that they had won the election, were not able to take over major portfolios and thus fell short on their campaign pledges. In June 2008, after the SPÖ dropped behind the Conservatives in opinion polls, Gusenbauer was replaced by Werner Faymann as party leader but retained as chancellor. This move seriously affected the party’s position towards the EU. While Gusenbauer unconditionally supported the European Union, Faymann frequently criticised the EU and especially opposed its neoliberal orientation. The party’s new stance quickly became salient as Faymann committed to accepting further major EU treaty changes only after holding a national referendum. His commitment was made public in a letter to the Eurosceptical editor of Austria’s influential tabloid ‘Neue Kronen Zeitung’, which received a lot of media attention. Shortly afterwards, the pro-European ÖVP ended the coalition, justifying their decision with a loss of trust in the SPÖ after the party had broken the EU consensus. However, throughout the main campaign period, which began in mid-August 2008, other issues such as the cost of living and a discussion about reducing value added tax came to the fore, again reducing the EU to a more moderate role in the public debate.

The election was contested by the five parliamentary parties SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, BZÖ and the Greens. The Social democrats campaign focused on the new party leader Werner Faymann and stressed the following issues: inflation fighting, taxes and welfare benefits. The Austrian People’s Party emphasized crime fighting, asylum rights, taxes as well as budget discipline and it presented Wilhelm Molterer as a competent and reliable government actor (Luther 2009). The Austrian Freedom Party and the BZÖ (Alliance for the Future of Austria), a split-off faction from the FPÖ, concentrated on taxes, social benefits, fighting inflation and to a lesser degree as before on immigration and asylum. For the BZÖ the former FPÖ leader Jörg Haider ran the election campaign. The Greens focussed on environment, climate change, female equality and education. Throughout the campaign, the television confrontation between the party leaders were considered as more important than ever, as about 40% of the electorate were undecided at the beginning of the election campaign (Müller 2009).
Despite the dissatisfaction with the previous period of governance, the snap election of 2008 resulted in a renewed ‘grand coalition’ of the Social democrats and the Austrian People’s Party, headed by Werner Faymann. The government period was characterised by the global financial crisis, the troubles within the Eurozone as well as several corruption scandals (Dolezal and Zeglovits 2014). Although Austria’s economic performance and especially its unemployment rate was above average the coalition was constantly criticised for its unwillingness to tackle major reforms. Throughout the governmental period several parties have experienced substantial changes and two new competitors (Team Stronach and NEOS) entered the electoral arena (Aichholzer et al. 2014). As a result, at the start of the election campaign in mid-August 2013 seven political parties were in contention for entering the Nationalrat. Similar to the 2008 campaign, traditional means of campaign advertising such as newspaper ads and posters as well as the televised debates between the top candidates were of high importance (Dolezal and Zeglovits 2014). In campaign issue terms, the parties mostly focused on economy, welfare and corruption (Kleinen von Königslöw et al. 2014). The governmental parties especially addressed economic and welfare issues. While the Social democrats particularly focused on unemployment and pensions the Austrian People’s Party had a less concentrated issue campaign and instead emphasized that Austria could do even better with its top candidate Michael Spindelegger as new Chancellor.

The opposition parties all addressed the fight against corruption. However, there were also major differences within their issue agendas. The Austrian Freedom Party again opted for welfare issues. The BZÖ emphasised economic issues such as tax cuts and the budget in order to distance itself from its right wing opponent. The Greens, the only parliamentary party without any scandal, strongly focused on fighting corruption and stressed the environment and education. The new electoral competitors Team Stronach and NEOS also had very different campaign strategies. The Team Stronach, in line with the government parties, stressed welfare and economic issues, often related to the achievements of the party leader and top candidate Frank Stronach. The NEOS, a new liberal party, concentrated on their abstract approach of renewing Austria. Thus, they hardly emphasised specific issues. If so, then they stressed education and welfare.

It shows that traditional means of campaign advertisement play an important role in Austrian election campaigns. While in 2013 online campaigning also gained some importance, in both campaigns parties made substantial use of press releases to communicate the issues they care about. Thus, the following section presents the data and coding of party press releases.
Data and design

This paper makes use of two data sets. The first dataset is a detailed manual coding of the 2008 and 2013 general election campaign party press releases of the five major parties represented in parliament (SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, Greens, and BZÖ). Second, the Chapel Hill expert survey data (Bakker et al. 2012) provides us with necessary information about the parties’ ideological positions.

Press releases and coding scheme

Press releases play an important role in party communication strategies. One characteristic of press releases is that their influence on voters is overwhelmingly indirect: parties send out press releases in order to reach journalists and opinion leaders (Dolezal et al. 2014). It is through those conduits that their content reaches the public. As a consequence, most recent studies that have analysed press releases were interested in whether parties, in sending out press releases, are able to influence the political agenda (Harris et al. 2006, Hopmann et al. 2012). In terms of EU issue politicisation scholars exclusively focus on newspaper coverage, arguing that media content directly reflects public contestation related to European integration (Höglinger et al. 2012, Hutter and Grande 2014). However, since we are interested in the parties’ saliency and framing strategies it seems appropriate to omit this mediated interim stage. The point here is that newspaper coverage filters party communication and merely focuses on what is considered as newsworthy. Thus newspaper coverage mirrors party strategies only to a limited extent. It is for this very reason that we focus on party press releases, as they allow us to directly investigate the extent and context of a party’s EU issue communication in national election campaigns.

There are further reasons why press releases are of particular importance to a party’s campaign communication. In contrast to other tools of communication such as election posters, advertisements or personal campaign appearances, press releases tend to focus on actual issues and present the party’s or candidate’s opinion on specific topics (Norris and Evans 1999). Other than election manifestos, which cover a party’s entire issue agenda, press releases offer the opportunity to particularly focus on those issues that the party wishes to be on the agenda during the campaign. They are therefore well-suited to studying the issue-based strategies of political parties. Moreover, in sending out press releases parties can act quickly and are able to respond to and address actual events. They therefore provide information on how parties in fact carry out their campaign. Unlike manifestos, which are one-shot games and cannot be modified after their publication, press releases thus give us some idea about how the campaign unfolds and the actual issue strategy parties implement.
The Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES) provided a database of all press releases by parties during the core election campaign. This dataset contains the title, date and full text of each press release, collected via the database of the Austrian Press Agency, which archives every press release published in Austria. In total, there were 1605 issue related press releases by the five major parties in the last six weeks of the election campaign in 2008. The two government parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP, sent out 508 and 429 press releases, respectively, which is over 300 more than the three smaller parties.

In 2013 we see a different picture. The five parties sent out 1792 issue related press releases, and thus slightly more than in 2008. However, the Austrian Freedom Party clearly changed its behaviour, as the party sent out the most press releases in 2013: FPÖ (533), SPÖ (503), ÖVP (457), Greens (171) and the BZÖ (128).

We coded these press releases using a hierarchical three-step approach:

- First, we identified whether a press release was related to the European Union or not. This was done by simply searching for the root words ‘europ’ and ‘EU’ in the main text box of the press releases. Non-related cases that contained the root word but were not related to the EU were eliminated.

- Second, each press release was assigned to an actor category, issue area and directional position. To identify the actor, we coded the source of each press release. It is not the case that only the party itself sends out press releases. Instead, individual politicians may do so as well. So, we code the source of the press release into six categories: government member; Member of Parliament (MP); party official; party organisation; federal state level and member of the European Parliament (MEP); or regional party official. In some cases political actors match to more than one category, as they are, for example, both MPs and party officials. In this particular case we coded the actor’s role that has been emphasised in the main text.

- The issue categories were based on the AUTNES manifesto coding scheme (see Müller et al. 2012). However, we adapted the original issue categories, e.g. by creating a single category referring to EU accession by candidate states. On the other hand, we had to extend the issue list, since party press releases emphasised issues that were not covered by the original issue list (e.g. health/health system/patient rights). Our coding approach means that each press release is treated as one unit of analysis as they are quite short, usually not more than a paragraph long. Thus, each press release is matched to one specific issue. If a press release covers more than one issue, we have identified the main
issue in text field by the number of words. Our coding scheme also covers the direction of the actor – issue relationship. Thus, we have considered whether a political actor in his press releases approves or rejects a certain European issue. The variable includes the following categories: +1 (approval, positive); 0 (ambiguous, neutral) and -1 (rejection, negative).

- Third, following Helbling et al. (2010) the party press releases were assigned to two framing levels, which cover the actor’s patterns of justification. On the first level, the general frame, we therefore differentiate between cultural, economic and other utilitarian frames. Each general frame is then divided into two specific frame categories. Cultural frames refer to ideas and values that are connected to a particular community. Literature has identified two ways of framing this cultural dimension. The first, labelled nationalistic, has reference to statements that are favourable to a cultural homogenous society in order to secure an exclusive national identity. Thus, these frames also include statements which express xenophobic attitudes. The second frame, multicultural-universalist, addresses support to cultural openness, religious diversity or the approval of civil and political rights as well as international solidarity. In terms of economic frames we distinguish labour & social society from economic prosperity. Apart from economic considerations there are also other utilitarian frames. These include organisational considerations, which aims at the functionality of the European Union and its institutions (political efficiency & efficacy). Other utilitarian frames also consider particular interests that are not necessarily connected to the economy, such as security and ecology. Table 1 summarises our coding scheme including actors, direction and frames. A list of all issue categories is to be found in the appendix.

Table 1. Coding scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Direction</th>
<th>Specific frame</th>
<th>General frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEP</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Nationalistic</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Multicultural-universalist</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>Labour &amp; Social security</td>
<td>Economic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party official</td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic prosperity</td>
<td>Economic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Political efficiency &amp; efficacy</td>
<td>Other Utilitarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal state level</td>
<td></td>
<td>Security &amp; ecology</td>
<td>Other Utilitarian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ideological positions

To understand the strategic decisions taken by parties in election campaigns, it is important to know what the ideological profiles of the key players were. Here, we will make use of the 2006 and 2010 Chapel Hill expert survey (Bakker et al. 2012). The Austrian part of the survey was completed by eight experts in 2008 and 14 in 2010. In terms of the EU, the Austrian party landscape is simple. There are three broadly pro-European parties: the SPÖ, the ÖVP and the Greens, though as noted above the ÖVP is traditionally the most in favour of European integration, with the SPÖ somewhat more sceptical (Column 2, Table 2). In contrast, the radical-right FPÖ and BZÖ are both clearly Eurosceptic, with the FPÖ slightly more so than its somewhat more moderate competitor. The range that measures the overall position towards European integration reaches from strongly opposed (1) to strongly in favour (7). The expert survey also indicates that all parties are mostly united on the issue of the EU, though the Greens, the BZÖ and the SPÖ are perhaps a little more divided than the other parties (Column 3). However, as the measure for a party’s dissent ranges from 1 to 10 (extremely divided), all Austrian parties can be considered as more or less united towards the EU issue. These two ratings confirm that we should expect the FPÖ to emphasise the EU in the campaign in particular.

Table 2. Ideological positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>L/R econ</th>
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<td>3.5</td>
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<td>5.5</td>
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<td>5.0</td>
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<td>7.7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>1.9</td>
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<tr>
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On economic policy, the ÖVP and the BZÖ are most right-wing, with the SPÖ and the Greens on the left (Column 4). The FPÖ is rather centrist. The economy is moderately salient to most parties, but less so for the two radical-right parties (Column 5). Turning to non-economic issues, using the GAL-TAN measure, the Greens and the SPÖ are the most liberal, with the ÖVP clearly conservative, but slightly less so than the two radical-right parties (Column 6). The cultural dimension is most salient to the three niche-type parties: the radical right and the Greens (Column 7). The SPÖ stands out in its low emphasis on non-economic concerns, whereas the Austrian People’s Party addresses cultural issue to a substantial extent. According to our fourth hypothesis these ideological patterns mean that we should expect the SPÖ to emphasise economic aspects of integration more than non-economic aspects; the Greens and the ÖVP should strive towards a balance of both aspects; while the radical-right should stress the non-economic aspects of the EU.

Results

We begin by presenting the results for the overall salience of the EU in the 2008 and 2013 campaigns. Then, we consider the dynamic of EU salience over the course of the campaign. Finally, in presenting the framing strategies, we consider which aspects of the EU each party addressed.

Salience of EU in party communication

In 2008 a total of 146 EU related press releases was retained. Of these, 50 are from the SPÖ, 49 from the ÖVP, 35 from the FPÖ, 8 from the Greens and 4 from the BZÖ. In 2013 the five parties sent out 167 press releases related to European issues. Again the Social Democrats addressed the issue most often, with a total of 66 press releases. Unlike in 2008, the FPÖ (44) sent out more press releases than the ÖVP (35). Again the Greens (20) and the BZÖ (only 2) were the least active parties in terms of EU related party communication. In sum, the European Union was addressed in 9.1% of all issue related press releases in 2008 and 9.3% in 2013. The EU topic was therefore important, but not in any way dominant. As Rußmann (2012) shows the most salient issues in party press releases in the 2008 campaign were social and economic policies. In 2013 parties particularly stressed public sector reforms and the economy (Kleine von Königslöw et al. 2014).

Our key concern, however, is with patterns between the five parties. While they all addressed the EU in their campaign communication, they did vary in the extent they did so. Our results show that both government as well as opposition parties address the EU differently in the two campaigns (see Table 3). In 2008 the SPÖ referred to the EU in 9.8 per cent of press releases and
the ÖVP in 11.4 per cent. Most noticeable is the high degree of salience in FPÖ press releases: 13.6 per cent of their press releases dealt with the EU in some way. In contrast, the Greens (5%) and the BZÖ addressed the EU less often during the campaign. Indeed, the BZÖ only sent out four press releases (1.6%) pertaining to Europe throughout the entire campaign.

In 2013 we see a different picture. The Social democrats stressed EU issues the most in their campaign communication, both by absolute numbers and share of press releases (13.1%). Moreover, the Green party substantially increased their amount of EU related press releases to 11.7 per cent. The pro-European coalition party ÖVP on the other hand addressed the issue less frequent (7.7%) as in 2008. Most interestingly, while the Freedom Party increased its total amount of EU press releases from 35 to 44, its share dropped to 8.2%.

Table 3. EU salience in press releases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SPÖ</th>
<th>ÖVP</th>
<th>FPÖ</th>
<th>Greens</th>
<th>BZÖ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>50/9.8</td>
<td>49/11.4</td>
<td>35/13.6</td>
<td>8/5</td>
<td>4/1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>66/13.1</td>
<td>35/7.7</td>
<td>44/8.2</td>
<td>20/11.7</td>
<td>2/1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EU-related press releases: total/ %  
N=1605 in 2008  
N=1792 in 2013

The results only partially support our first hypothesis. The FPÖ, who clearly had the greatest incentive to talk about the EU, addressed EU issues the most in its share of total press releases, at least, in 2008. In 2013, the party put even more focus on the issue; however since the number of press releases more than doubled from 258 to 533 in 2013, the amount of EU-related releases decreased about 6%. The Social democrats and the Greens also increased their number of press releases related to the European Union in the 2013 campaign. While the ÖVP stressed the issue more frequently in 2008, the two mainstream governing parties both talked about the EU to a significant extent, so there is little sign that they were avoiding the topic at all.

EU salience in the course of the campaign

To examine how parties campaign on the EU throughout the election period, we present the number of daily press releases on EU topics by party for 2008 and 2013 (Figure 1 and 2). Several patterns are clearly visible. In both campaigns the Greens (more active in 2013) and the BZÖ hardly addressed the EU at all. Hence, the two parties are not included in the analysis of campaign dynamics. Second, the ÖVP and SPÖ emphasised the EU, but did so intermittently. In the 2008 campaign, there are clear spikes in attention from both parties around 1 September and 8 September, as well as just before the election. What explains these spikes in the number of
press releases the governing parties sent out? Looking at the precise issues these press releases cover shows that the governing parties were largely reacting to external agenda-setting. The spike in early September is mainly due to the parties’ reaction to the extraordinary EU council meeting on 1 September, which dealt with the war in Georgia. The spike in mid-September stems from the debate about whether a reduction of value-added tax would be in line with EU legislation. The reduction of VAT was one of Werner Faymann’s major policy pledges, whereas the ÖVP opposed the proposal and emphasised that it might violate EU legislation. The third spike is due to the final phase of the campaign, where the parties emphasised their core issues and attacked each other.

*Figure 1.* Party press releases throughout the campaign in 2008

The press releases from the FPÖ show that this party paid relatively constant attention to the EU throughout the campaign. This is true even in periods, such as late August and mid-September, when the two large parties failed to pay much attention to EU-related topics. The topics addressed by the FPÖ are diverse, including the Common Foreign and Security Policy, national and EU-wide referenda, the common market, the access of membership aspirants and also environmental and energy issues.
In 2013 we can observe a similar pattern. Again the FPÖ constantly addressed European Union issues throughout the election campaign. In sum, there were only ten days in the six week campaign period where the party did not send out a press releases related to the EU. While the right-wing party acted according to our hypothesis in both election campaigns, the two mainstream parties slightly changed their behaviour in 2013. This is especially true for the Social democrats in the first two weeks of the campaign when the party, together with the FPÖ and the Green party, constantly stressed the issue. However, again there are two spikes in the beginning and in mid-September. Both government parties increased their communication around these points in time. Before that, the People’s Party totally neglected EU issues in its press releases.

Figure 2. Party press releases throughout the campaign in 2013

What caused the awakening of the junior coalition partner in 2013? In contrast to 2008 there was no single event, but rather several issues within a European parliament plenary were responsible for the two spikes. These include the absorption of Syrian refugees, data protection in relation with NSA scandal as well as the discussion about bank supervision and youth unemployment. If we take a closer look at the actor level, it turns out that unlike the scenario in 2008, the MEPs of the government parties have made the EU a salient party issue in 2013.
Finally, we consider which aspects of the EU parties address. We have already seen how certain EU-related topics were important in the campaign, such as the war in Georgia, the value-added tax or the protection of personal data. We argued that these topics can be framed as cultural, economic and other utilitarian. Moreover, parties should follow their overall ideological focus in whether they concentrate on economic or non-economic topics. The aspects emphasised by each party towards the EU are presented in Figure 3 and 4.

The results match our predictions very closely. Most clearly, the FPÖ strongly frames its press releases in a nationalistic way and for the most part negatively talks about the European Union (Figure 5). In 2008 43% of all EU-related press releases were negative and nationalistic framed statements.
This pattern emerges also in the 2013 election campaign, however, to a lesser extent. This is mostly due to the party’s criticism towards the EU’s crisis policies. Indeed, the party focus more on economic and other utilitarian frames, but again clearly reject EU policies. In sum, 78% of the party’s press releases in both campaigns negatively address the European Union. Also the results for the two mainstream parties are in line with our expectations. Most notably, both parties strongly focus their press releases in an economic manner. Furthermore, only the two government parties address the political efficiency and efficacy of the EU. If they do so, then in a positive way, indicating that the two parties actively support the institutions of European Union. However, in specific framing terms, we can observe crucial differences between the two coalition parties.

The SPÖ particularly pays attention to economic and other utilitarian aspects of the EU: its percentage of economic and utilitarian topics in both election campaigns is around 90%. Thus, and in accordance with our hypothesis the party talks little or not at all about cultural aspects. In economic framing terms, one can also see that the party stresses labour & social security more often than economic prosperity. Moreover, if one takes a closer look at the framing strategy, we see that the party clearly is in favour of European integration as most of its press releases (52% in 2008 and 60% in 2013) approve EU policies.

For the ÖVP, we predicted a mixture of economic and cultural concerns, since the party has a relatively high score on cultural saliency. Indeed, in 2008 the party pays attention to cultural aspects of the EU but most press releases address utilitarian, especially economic issues. In 2013, by contrast, it totally neglected cultural frames. Instead, and in contrast to the Social democrats, the party emphasised economic prosperity frames as well as ecology and security. In line with our expectations the party clearly frames its EU related press releases in a positive way.

Finally, the Greens mostly pay attention to multicultural-universalist as well as ecological aspects of European integration. Interestingly, even though equal opportunities for women and education were major campaign issues, the party’s press releases have no reference to labour & and social security as well as political efficiency and efficacy. Though, most notably and in contrast to its overall position towards European integration, the party critically addresses the EU in its press releases. In the 2013 campaign 50% of the party’s press releases purport a negative stance towards the EU. In issue terms, the Greens focused on foreign policy, immigration as well as the quality of democracy. The economic aspects it mentions exclusively relate to economic prosperity issues.
Conclusion

The increasing importance of European integration has a crucial effect on domestic actors and institutions. Recent research has shown that the European Union and its policy making are important, even in national election campaigns. Thus national parties have to decide whether, to which extent, and which aspects of the European Union they address in in their campaign strategy. We have argued that these decisions depend on how beneficial EU issues are for the competing parties in order to get votes. In EU issue framing terms, we have illustrated that it seems reasonable to expect parties to follow their overall ideological focus.

Our analysis of party press releases in this paper illustrates several interesting patterns of parties’ campaign strategies. A party’s emphasis on the EU matches its overall ideological focus. While the mainstream parties emphasise economic and other utilitarian aspects of the European Union, the strongly Eurosceptic right-wing FPÖ as well as the Greens address EU issues in cultural frames. Second, we find evidence that opposition parties that have incentives to raise the salience of the EU issue attempt to pay constant attention to the issue throughout the election campaign. The FPÖ, in both elections, actively keeps EU issues on the agenda. Mainstream parties, on the other hand, seem to be forced to talk about the European Union, as they mainly react to external events.

However, our results for the Austrian mainstream parties clearly show that we need further research in order to comprehensively understand how parties strategically address EU issues throughout national election campaigns. Most importantly, we need to understand whether mainstream parties are actually forced by events or certain issues are just overly related to the EU, with the result that it is just not possible to address the topic without, at the same time, also referring to the European Union. Second, it appears that mainstream parties have a tendency for adapting their strategy in terms EU issue politicisation between election campaigns. Third, our data indicate that the various party actors show different levels of interest in politicising the EU in national election campaigns. While this article has focused on salience, campaign strategy and EU issue framing, it seems worthwhile to analyse the differences in actor behaviour, especially since MEPs aim at making the EU a salient issue in national election campaigns. Hence, much research remains to be done, but there is every reason to expect, that such efforts will contribute to our understanding of party-political contestation over European integration.
Notes

1 However, one crucial factor conducive to EU issue politicisation, is not satisfied in the Austrian case: national referenda. There was only one national referendum on the accession to the EU in 1994.

2 Two further parties were considered as serious contenders: the LIF (Liberal Forum) and FRITZ, a list of Fritz Dinkhauser an ÖVP dissenter, however, they did not reach the 4% threshold for having a seat in parliament and are not included in our analysis.

3 We applied Krippendorff's alpha testing for inter-coder reliability. After two rounds of coding we reached the following values: 0.96 for actor; 0.92 for issue, 0.89 for position and 0.95 for frames

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Appendix

Table 4. Issue categories

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 European integration (general)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Federal/strong EU/ extension of powers/ Europe of nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Subsidiarity principle in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Core Europe/ Europe of different speeds</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 EU centralism</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Repatriation of powers</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Austrian accession/membership/influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Influence of small or medium sized member states in the EU</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 European constitution (general)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 EU treaties</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 European economic area (EEA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Single European act (general)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC) (general)</td>
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<td>14 Euro/crisis/currency/stability mechanisms</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 EU enlargement/ transition period for access to the labor market</td>
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<td>16 EU-accession</td>
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<td>17 Democracy / participation in the EU / power of the EP/ direct EC elections</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 National/ EU-wide referenda</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 EU budget (general)</td>
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<td>20 Austrian net contribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 Subsidies/ regional policy (except agriculture)</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 EU- services directive/ Bolkestein directive</td>
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<td>24 Social Europe</td>
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<td>25 AFSJ/ Schengen/ Frontex/ Police/ European warrant</td>
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<tr>
<td>26 Refugees/ immigrants/ asylum-seekers/ safe third countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP)</td>
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<td>28 Education/ Bologna process/ Universities</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 Environmentalism/energy/traffic/car-lorry toll</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 health/health system/patient rights</td>
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<td>31 Data protection/internet security/ citizen rights</td>
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