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Diffuse support for the European Union: spillover effects of the politicization of the European integration process at the domestic level

Abstract

This paper investigates the link between attitude formation at the national and the supranational level of the European Union (EU). While the existing studies have provided strong evidence that attitudes towards national institutions fundamentally condition attitudes towards the EU, the mechanisms through which these spillovers occur are not clearly spelled out. Our main contribution is to theorize the complex ways in which the national politicization of the European integration process affects support for the EU by focusing on critical moments in the EU integration process, and the electoral fortunes of the political parties doing the cueing. To test our theoretical claims, we employ multilevel models using six rounds of the European Social Survey combined with party level data from Chapel Hill Expert Survey, and various country-level data. The analyses show that spillover effects are crucially conditioned by the level of politicization of European integration at the national level.

Keywords: cues, diffuse support for the EU, politicization, spillover effects

Introduction

This paper investigates the link between attitude formation at the national and supranational level of the European Union (EU). We are interested in unpacking the specific mechanisms through which support for and the legitimacy of national institutions affects the legitimacy of the European level of governance. We start from the same premise as Hooghe and Marks (2008: 2), who have noted that '[d]omestic and European politics have become more tightly coupled as governments have become responsive to public pressures on European integration'. In studying this coupling between domestic and European politics in terms of political support, we build on three recent studies by Hobolt (2012), Armingeon and Ceka (2014) and Harteveld et al. (2013), who have adopted Easton's (1975) heuristic framework to come to terms with the problem of the legitimacy of the European Union in the eyes of its citizens. Our study builds on these three contributions and offers a more comprehensive account of how and under what circumstances domestic support influences diffuse support for the EU.

While the existing studies have provided strong evidence that attitudes towards national institutions fundamentally condition attitudes towards the EU, the mechanisms through which this happens are not clearly spelled out. Most of the existing research linking support for national institutions to support for the EU relies on cue theory according to which national political actors provide cues to their supporters regarding European integration. What is less clear from the extant research is the origin of these cues (i.e. who is doing the cuing), and how exactly they operate. Our main contribution is to theorize the complex ways in which the national politicization of the European integration process affects support for the EU by focusing on critical moments in the EU integration process, and the electoral fortunes of the political parties doing the cuing.

Therefore, the argument we propose is twofold. First, and in line with other studies, we argue that both specific and diffuse support for national institutions spills over to support for the EU. If citizens are dissatisfied with the performance of their national government or are distrustful of national institutions, they will be less likely to support the EU. It might be useful to think of this as the baseline model of spillover effects during times with relatively low levels of politicization of the EU. Second, we theorize the conditions under which politicization of European integration and the heightened cues from national political actors moderate the spillovers between the two levels of government. For our purposes, the most important actors involved in politicizing Europe are national governments and political parties. Specifically, at critical moments of the EU integration process when national governments become focal points in the relationship between a given country and the EU, specific support for national governments plays a bigger role than usual in shaping views towards the EU. Examples of such critical points include the eastern enlargement, referenda, and publicized conflicts between a national government and the EU. Political parties are essential in aggregating and representing citizen interests but also in molding attitudes in the two-way street that is representative democracy. As such, we expect the cues parties give to their followers regarding European integration to have a significant impact on support for the EU. In this regard, domestic arenas where European integration is highly politicized, usually by Eurosceptic parties, will be home to more Europeans harboring deep anti-EU sentiments. Among these Europeans, supporters of Eurosceptic parties who find themselves as electoral losers in national elections will be particularly likely to channel their discontent with governing parties towards the EU.

It is possible that the coupling between national and EU support can be the result of reciprocal spillovers. Thus, Mair (2013: 117f.) argued that there may be a negative spillover effect from EU politics to national politics: because the European Parliament fails to generate much commitment

and enthusiasm on the part of citizens, it may – through contagion or learning – lead to declining commitment and enthusiasm for national institutions. Although we do not deny the possibility of spillovers of diffuse support from the European to the domestic level, following the preceding studies, we assume that it is primarily national support that drives EU support: it is national politics with which citizens are most familiar and where most of the political socialization occurs; it is also at the national level that European integration is politicized and where citizens take their cues with respect to European integration.

We begin by presenting our theoretical considerations. We then move on to the description of our data, operationalizations and estimation procedures, before we present the results, which will, indeed, document the importance of the expected spillover effects between the national and the EU level.

Theory

Studies of political support regularly take as their point of departure David Easton's seminal work, and so do we. As is well known, Easton (1965, 1975) distinguished between two *modes* of support (diffuse and specific) and three *objects* of support (the authorities, the regime, and the community). He conceived diffuse support as a basic 'reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effects of which they see as damaging to their wants.' He equated diffuse support to the belief in the legitimacy of the political object (a regime, a government, or a politician), or, alternatively, to trust in the given object. By contrast, as he conceived of specific support, it was related to 'the satisfactions that members of a system feel they obtain from the perceived outputs and performance of the political

authorities' (Easton 1975: 437). In other words, specific support is based on the economic and political performance of the political object in question.

Given this distinction, it is important to keep in mind that, according to Easton's (1975: 446; 1965: 119-20) conception, diffuse support is not only based on normative procedural beliefs, but may also be 'a product of spillover effects from evaluations of a series of outputs and of performance over a long period of time'. This is to say that specific support based on one's own experiences with the political authorities, institutions or with the political regime as a whole may give rise to diffuse support in the long run. If socialization into the ideals of democracy plays a central role for fostering diffuse support to democratic regimes, the authorities' ability to find and implement satisfactory solutions to basic policy problems or the fact that your own party is in government may also contribute to the 'reservoir of favorable attitudes and good will'. Conversely, as Linz (1978: 54) has observed: 'Unsolved structural problems... undermine the efficacy and, in the long run, the legitimacy of the regime.' Thus, if adverse economic conditions persist for a more extended period, as has been the case in some countries during the current Great Recession, the deteriorating economic conditions may have long-term effects on diffuse support, which cannot be easily repaired by possible future upswings.

In a multi-level governance system like the European Union, the relationship between diffuse and specific support is complicated by the fact that the supranational level of governance is added to the national level. However, existing studies have successfully extended Easton's framework to conceptualize the multidimensional and multilevel nature of EU support (Boomgaarden et al. 2011), and to theorize the role that political community plays in attitude formation towards the EU (Weßels 2007). Since we are primarily interested in the link between support for national and EU institutions, we focus on support for political authorities and the institutions they run at both levels of government as the *objects* of political support. Our basic argument is that diffuse as well

as specific support, or the lack thereof, may spill over from the national level to the supranational level.

Several studies have provided evidence for such spillover effects with respect to *diffuse support*. Thus, Hobolt (2012) showed that trust in national parliament contributes to the citizens' satisfaction with democracy in the EU, while Hartevelde et al. (2013) and Armingeon and Ceka (2014) documented the contribution of trust in national institutions to trust in the EU. As a matter of fact, trust in national institutions proved to be by far the most important determinant of trust in the EU. These previous studies differed with respect to their interpretation of these spillover effects. Building on Anderson (1998, pp. 574–5), both Hobolt (2012) and Armingeon and Ceka (2014) suggest that, given the low levels of awareness about the EU among citizens of member states, attitudes about the EU may essentially reflect more firmly held attitudes about the national political reality. This is especially true for citizens of new member states from Central and Eastern Europe for whom the EU is even more remote (Wagner 2012). In other words, trust in national institutions functions as *a cue* for attitudes about the EU. By contrast, Hartevelde et al. (2013) suggest that the close association between the trust in national and EU institutions results from a common source, a '*trust syndrome*', the origins of which they propose to locate in personality characteristics. The two sources of association between diffuse support at the national and supranational level are not mutually exclusive, but might well both contribute to the observed close association. This, however, has not been tested by previous studies.

It is important to note that in Easton's framework diffuse support is more stable than fluctuating evaluations of performance that track closely economic outcomes. Thus, to test the full implications of Easton's theory, we would need panel data, which we unfortunately do not have. But there are good reasons to believe that, in the case of the EU, the spillover effect from specific to diffuse support are direct and nearly simultaneous. Ever since Scharpf (1999) introduced the

distinction between input- and output legitimacy into the discussion of the legitimacy of the EU, the literature has suggested that, because of its inadequate democratic input procedures and the lack of accountability of its decision-makers, the EU mainly relies on output legitimacy. This, as Hobolt and Tilley (2014:134) have indicted, implies that ‘the legitimacy of the EU institutions hinges almost exclusively on its performance.’ In fact, these scholars have confirmed empirically that citizens who hold the EU responsible for its policy output, indeed, respond to poor economic performance (as in the Great Recession) with diminished trust in the EU institutions (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, Chapter 8).¹ This means that, at least among citizens who identify the EU as responsible for the economic counter-performances during the Great Recession, the EU bears the brunt of poor (domestic) economic performance (see also Gomez [2015]; Serricchio, Tsakatika, and Quaglia [2013]).

We would like to suggest, however, that most citizens above all hold the national government responsible for the domestic economic performance. Even if EU policies increasingly have a direct impact on the performance of the national economy, and even if national governments blame the EU for poor domestic economic performance, most citizens are unlikely to discern much difference between the policies of the EU and those of their national government. Given that the visibility of EU politics is much lower than that of national politics, they tend to blame the national government in the first place and, as Hobolt (2012: 95) suggests, ‘use the national level as a proxy when evaluating how the EU functions.’ If this is the case and if the EU’s diffuse support relies disproportionately on its ability to deliver outcomes, specific and diffuse support would track one another much more closely and directly than it is implied by Easton’s theory. Accordingly, we expect the evaluation of the national government’s performance to be the key mediator between the citizens’ evaluation of economic performance, on the one hand, and diffuse support of national and EU institutions, on the other hand. In line with this argument, Hobolt

(2012) not only documents spillover effects of domestic economic performance on diffuse support at the EU level, but, crucially, also provides evidence for such spillover effects of one's satisfaction with the national government (government approval).

This argument implies that a decline in institutional trust at the EU level is not necessarily due to a lack of accountability at the supranational level. It may also be the result of the proper functioning of the accountability mechanism: holding the national governments accountable for the economic performance contributes, indirectly, to the accountability of the decision-makers at the EU-level (who are, in part at least, identical with the key members of national governments) and to corresponding spillover effects with respect to diffuse support at that level.

Summarizing this literature, we expect both diffuse and specific support of national political institutions to influence diffuse support in EU institutions. We expect:

H1: higher dissatisfaction with economic performance to directly lead to more dissatisfaction with national government performance (domestic specific support);

H2: higher dissatisfaction with national government performance (domestic specific support) to directly lead to lower trust in national institutions (domestic diffuse support) and directly and indirectly (via trust in national institutions) to lower trust in EU institutions (diffuse EU support);

H3: lower trust in national institutions (domestic diffuse support) to lead to lower trust in EU institutions (diffuse EU support);

H4: independently of the impact of economic and government performance, trust in national and EU institutions to also be a function of individual 'trust and satisfaction syndromes.'

Figure 1 displays the way we conceive of the general relationship between specific (performance-related) and diffuse (trust-related) support in the two-level polity of the European Union, taking

into account the impact of individual ‘trust/satisfaction syndromes.’ Note that, to keep the figure as simple as possible, we have not drawn any direct effects of crisis conditions or economic dissatisfaction on specific or diffuse political support at either the national or the EU level. We do not exclude that such direct effects exist, but we assume that the economic crisis exerts an effect on political support mainly via the individual’s evaluation of the country’s economic performance, and that this evaluation, in turn, mainly influences diffuse support via its effect on specific political support.

<FIGURE 1>

Let us next focus on the mechanisms responsible for the spillover effects from the national to the EU level. Following previous research (Armingeon and Ceka [2014]; Hobolt [2012]; Steenbergen et al. [2007]; Vössing [2015]) we suggest that *cues* provided by political actors play a decisive role for such spillover effects. The unresolved question is, however, where these cues come from, and how they are establishing a link between national and supranational support. In order to discuss this question, we would like to introduce the concept of the *politicization of the European integration process* at the *national* level. Following Schattschneider (1960), we can define politicization as the expansion of conflict within a political system, which, as Hutter and Grande (2014) as well as de Wilde et al. (2016: 4) have argued, can be broken down into three components – salience (the conflict’s visibility), actor expansion (its scope), and actor polarization (its intensity). Following Hutter and Grande, we assume that only issues that are raised by political actors in public debates can be considered to be politicized. Salience is the most basic dimension of politicization, but it is not the only one. Actor expansion refers to the types of actors involved in the public debate. In the case of the European integration process, it is common knowledge that the process has been dominated by executive actors from both the national (governments and their agents) and the European level (Commission, European Council,

Council of Ministers). Politicization of European integration implies the extension of the actors involved in the debate on the EU beyond the narrow circle of executive actors, above all to actors in the domestic party systems. Third, the intensity component of politicization refers to the degree to which the participants in the debate take opposing positions. Politicization is especially high, if a controversy is not only salient, but also involves sharply opposing views among the participants to the debate.

For our purposes, we would like to distinguish between two types of politicization of the European integration process at the national level, one involving national governments, and one involving national political parties. As far as *national governments* are concerned, they constitute, as already observed, the key national actors when it comes to the management of the relationship between the EU and its member states. First of all, it is the national governments who negotiate a country's accession to the EU – as happened in the Eastern enlargement round in 2004, and with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 and of Croatia in 2013. Second, once a country is a member of the EU, it is the national governments who become the key actors linking national politics to European politics: they represent the member states in the EU's intergovernmental channel of representation (the European Council and the Council of Ministers) and they are charged with the implementation of European policies in the member states. During the Euro-crisis, the key role of the national governments has become particularly visible for the general public, because the crisis management has primarily been executed within the intergovernmental channel of representation at the EU level, and because the national governments of the debtor states were obliged to implement the harsh programs imposed by the European and other supranational actors (the 'Troika' most notably). Some have even concluded that the EU's policy process was increasingly characterized by 'new intergovernmentalism' (Bickerton et al. 2015).

But the Euro-crisis has by no means been the only occasion when national governments have played a highly visible role in the relationship between national and EU politics. We generally expect increased spillover effects from specific support of the national government to diffuse support of EU institutions *at critical moments of the EU integration process*, when the role of the national government in this process becomes particularly salient (H5). As a corollary, we at the same time expect that the direct spillovers from diffuse national support to diffuse EU support are reduced at these critical moments (H5a). As the relationship between national politics and EU integration becomes more transparent and diffuse support at the EU level becomes more conditional on the national political performance, citizens are less likely to rely on diffuse national support as a proxy for diffuse EU support.

The second type of politicization more explicitly involves the *national parties*. We know from previous studies (see, e.g., Hooghe and Marks [2008]; Hutter et al. [forthcoming]) that political parties are particularly relevant for the politicization of European integration at the national level. Accordingly, we expect the degree of politicization of European integration within the national party system to have an influence on the diffuse support of European institutions. Early on, Schmitter (1969) had expected this effect to be a positive one, i.e. the higher salience of European integration would lead to more support for Europe. However, Hobolt and Tilley (2014) have shown that increasing salience of European integration does not invariably increase support for Europe. As a matter of fact, given that the politicization of Europe has been primarily driven by parties critical of European integration (de Wilde et al. [2016: 6]; Hoeglinger [2016: 55]), we expect the politicization of European integration in the national party system to have a primarily negative direct impact on diffuse support of European institutions (H6).

Moreover, irrespective of the politicization of the EU issue at the national or supranational level, we expect respondents to follow cues provided by the parties they support in forming their diffuse

support towards the EU. Hence, the adherents of Eurosceptic parties, who will be attentive to the critical cues provided by their parties, will be particularly unlikely to support European institutions, independently of whatever spillover effects we may find from diffuse and specific support of national institutions to diffuse support of EU institutions (H7).

In addition to these direct effects of party positioning on diffuse support for EU institutions, we also expect the cues provided by parties to their voters on the issue of EU integration to moderate the spillover effects from specific support of the national government to diffuse support of EU institutions. This moderating effect hinges on the distinction between winners and (Eurosceptic) losers of national elections. It is well known that the losers of national elections are less supportive of domestic democratic institutions than the winners (Anderson et al. 2005). In particular, we can expect the losers to be less supportive of the national government than the winners (who have voted for the parties which control the government) – independently of how well this government actually performs. Once we control for support of the national government, however, losers may not be less supportive of EU institutions. Their diffuse political dissatisfaction/distrust may be entirely driven by their dissatisfaction with the national government by which they do not feel adequately represented. But the dissatisfaction with the national government can be expected to have particularly important spillover effects on trust in European institutions for Eurosceptic losers: given that, with few exceptions, national governments tend to support the European integration process, the fact that one does not feel adequately represented by the national government is likely to be particularly consequential in terms of diffuse support of EU institutions for Eurosceptic losers (H8).

To summarize, we expect:

H5: increased spillover effects from specific support of the national government to diffuse support of EU institutions at critical moments of the EU integration process;

H5a: decreased spillovers from diffuse national support to diffuse EU support at critical moments of the EU integration process (H5a);

H6: a negative effect of the politicization of European integration at the national level on diffuse support of EU institutions, independently of spillover effects;

H7: a negative effect of adherence to Eurosceptic parties on diffuse support for EU institutions, independently of spillover effects;

H8: an increased spillover effect from specific support for the national government to diffuse support for EU institutions for Eurosceptic electoral losers.

Data and operationalization

To test these hypotheses we rely on a dataset that combines information from three different levels – data characterizing the economic situation and the critical moments in a given country and at a given point in time, data on the position that parties take on European integration (weighted by the salience parties attribute to this issue), and data at the individual level on specific and diffuse support, trust and satisfaction syndromes, and other control factors. The individual level data we use come from the six rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS), which have been fielded every other year from 2002 to 2012. The party level data come from three rounds (2002, 2006 and 2010) of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). To combine the CHES party level data with the ESS we needed to assign parties to individual respondents². To do this we relied on information from two items in the ESS: the party the respondent voted for in the last national election and the party the respondent felt closest to at the time of the survey. If

individuals voted for a party in the last national election they were assigned that party. If they did not report having voted for a party, they were assigned the party they felt closest to³. It is important to keep in mind that by limiting the analyses to respondents that can be considered partisans the number of observations in the analyses is reduced by a third.⁴ In the data used for the analyses individuals who support the same party are, hence, nested in the party units, and these party units are further nested into country-year units.

Our main dependent variable is trust in the European Parliament (EP). This is the only indicator of institutional trust at the European level that is available in the ESS. Correspondingly, we chose trust in the national parliament as our indicator for diffuse support at the national level. At the individual level, the key independent variables of interest are satisfaction with the way the government is doing its job and satisfaction with the present state of the country's economy, which we take as indicators for specific support. All four trust variables are measured on an 11-point scale. Additionally, we include in all models a measure of the trust and satisfaction syndromes, which were constructed from items in the ESS asking about trust towards different objects (other than those mentioned above).⁵ The logic for controlling for the satisfaction syndrome is that if you are satisfied with a wide range of phenomena, your satisfaction is to some extent independent of the phenomenon in question and reflects basic psychological predispositions. We include a dummy indicator of whether respondents are adherents of a governing party (winners=1) or of an opposition party (losers=0). Other control variables include gender, age, and level of education. At the level of parties, we introduce the position with respect to the European integration process of the party the individual adheres to. This is calculated based on the party's position on European integration weighted by the relative salience of European integration in the party's public stance (as measured in CHES).

At the country-year level, we first introduce a continuous measure of politicization of the issue of European integration, which takes into account two aspects of the concept of politicization – salience and polarization – and corresponds to the product of the weighted average salience and the degree of polarization of this issue in a given party system.⁶ At this level we also introduce two control variables indicating whether or not the country has been subject to IMF-conditionality in the year in question, and whether a country receives benefits from the EU or whether it is a net payer.⁷

To address hypothesis H5 and assess the impact of critical moments on government-related spillover effects we identify five key critical moments which we consider to be the most important critical moments of the period under study:

- The first effect relates to Eastern enlargement: in May 2004, the year of the second ESS-round, ten Central- and Eastern European countries became members of the European Union. Six of these countries – the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia – were part of the second ESS-round. In these six countries, the issue of EU-integration and the role of their national government in this process were particularly salient in this year.
- The second effect refers to the impact of EU referenda. It is well known that referenda heavily contribute to the politicization of the European integration process (see Hutter et al., forthcoming). Two referenda, both in Ireland, took place in a country covered by the ESS that year – the first Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty in June 2008 and the Irish referendum on the Fiscal Compact in May 2012.
- Two effects relate to the euro-crisis – one refers to Greece (a ‘debtor’ country) and one to Finland (a ‘creditor’ country). Greece has been the object of a first bail-out in May 2010, a year when Greece was covered by the ESS. This was the beginning of a large-scale revolt of

the Greek population against the terms imposed by the ‘Troika’ on Greece, and against the Papandreou government that had accepted these terms. In Finland, the Greek bail-outs and the euro-crisis they unleashed became key issues in the May 2011 elections, which saw the rise of the True Finns, a populist radical-right party that skillfully exploited the rampant dissatisfaction of the Finns with their government’s support of these bail-outs into the year 2012.

- Last, but not least, we introduce an effect for three instances of governments that provoked conflicts with the European Union. While satisfaction with the government is usually positively related to trust in the EU institutions, in these three cases, the opposite is expected to hold. The first of these three cases concerns the British government under David Cameron in 2010 and 2012, which explicitly turned against the policy adopted by the Eurozone members. The British government not only opposed the bail-outs, but it also strongly rejected structural reforms. Its refusal to sign up to the Fiscal Compact on December 9, 2011, illustrates this point. Cameron’s veto forced the other member states to opt for an inter-governmental treaty (instead of EU law) to adopt the Fiscal Compact – following an approach they had already adopted in the case of the Schengen treaty in 1985.⁸ The second case refers to the Orban government of Hungary, which came to power in May 2010, and whose illiberal constitutional reforms which entered into force on January 1, 2012, met with increasing national and European criticism. Finally, the third case concerns the Slovak Fico government which faced controversies with the EU in 2006 due to its affiliation with radical populist right parties (Fico’s party was suspended from the Party of European Socialists at the EU-level) and again in 2008 because of its explicitly anti-European position of not recognizing Kosovo. The British governments in 2010 and 2012, the Hungarian government in

2012 and the Slovak government in 2006 and 2008 are hence coded as anti-EU governments, for which we expect a negative effect of government support on trust in EU institutions.

Model estimation

Our modeling strategy applies a three level structure, while individuals are hierarchically nested within parties, parties are not perfectly nested within country and year units. Given this non-hierarchical structure of the data we need to specify crossed random effects models. In our estimation we treat respondents as nested within a cross-classification of parties and country-year units. The parties respondents voted for are treated as level-2 units, and we use 108 random effects for the country-year combinations at level-3 (all nested within a single artificial super cluster) (see Beretvas 2011, Leckie 2013). For the relationships between our indicators of specific and diffuse support, we not only estimate the direct effect of satisfaction with the national government on trust in the EP, but we also calculate the indirect effect through trust in the national parliament. Assuming uncorrelated residuals, the calculation of indirect effects is straightforward (see Duncan 1975): we can just multiply the regression coefficients along corresponding causal paths.⁹

Results

Table 1 presents the results from the multi-level regression analyses of trust in the EP. *Model 1* presents a base model that excludes the two variables capturing the trust and satisfaction syndromes. The results from this model indicate that there is a strong association between trust in the national parliament and trust in the EP: a one unit increase in trust in the national parliament raises trust in the EP by 0.463 points (on the 0-10 scale). This coefficient is, however,

substantially reduced in *Model 2*, where we introduce the control for the trust and satisfaction syndromes. In this second model, a one unit increase in trust in the national parliament is associated with an increase of 0.153 points of trust in the EP. The significantly reduced effects show that we tend to overestimate the spillover effect from the domestic to the EU-level, if we do not take into account the variation that exists between individuals in terms of overall satisfaction and trust and which reflects basic psychological predispositions. Similarly, the spillover effects from specific support of the national government to diffuse support at the EU level are still significant, although much less substantial. The coefficient for satisfaction with the national government is more than halved (from 0.136 to 0.062), while the spillover effect of satisfaction with the national economy even turns out to be no longer significantly associated with trust in the EP in *Model 2*.

<TABLE 1>

An unexpected result from *Model 2* is that being a supporter of a governing party (*Winner*) decreases trust in the EP by 0.131 points, compared to supporters of national opposition parties. One possible explanation for this finding is that given the higher support that ‘winners’ have for national governments (see *Table 2*), there is a higher opportunity cost of delegating sovereignty up to the European Union (Sánchez-Cuenca 2000). Consistent with other studies (Armingeon and Ceka, 2014), IMF-conditionality has no significant effect on trust in the EP (neither in *Model 1* or *2*). However, as we shall show below, it does have a significantly negative effect on trust in the national parliament. This suggests that IMF-conditionality mainly undermines diffuse support at the national level– an issue to which we shall return in the final discussion. Referring also to the country-year level, the negative coefficient (-0.632) associated with the politicization index indicates that higher salience and polarization around the issue of EU integration decreases trust in the European Parliament, which confirms H6. At the party level, the coefficient for weighted

EU position is positive, indicating that the more supportive a party is of European integration, the higher the trust in the EP among its supporters. This confirms H7 and indicates that the parties' role in how domestic attitudes relate to EU diffuse support goes beyond the issue of politicization, because the cues parties send to their supporters have an impact independently of the degree of politicization of European integration. Let us add that the EU balance for a given country and year has the expected sign: the more benefits a state receives from the EU the higher the diffuse support for the EP among its citizens.

Model 3 in Table 1 adds the interactive terms that account for the moderating effect of critical moments in the European integration process on spillover effects from diffuse and specific support at the national level on diffuse support at the European level. As a result of the introduction of these interactive terms, the coefficients for the main effects of trust in national parliament and satisfaction with the national government now indicate how trust in the EP responds to changes on those two variables for country-year combinations that do not constitute critical moments. These effects are very similar to those in model 2, which is not surprising, given that the critical moments we introduced concern only a few country-year combinations.

Let us now consider the moderating impact of the politicization of European integration at critical moments. With respect to spillover effects from domestic specific support to diffuse support for EU institutions, we find that this type of spillover is, as we expected, enhanced or attenuated at critical moments of the EU integration process, depending on the stance of national governments (H5). Four of the five coefficients introduced in this model are statistically significant and signed as expected. One of them (Eastern enlargement*Satisfaction with government) is in the expected direction but is not statistically significant. The strongest effects we find for the two Euro crisis cases – Finland and Greece. In both cases, satisfaction with the domestic government has an enhanced effect on trust in the EP at the height of the crisis (an additional 0.164 and 0.110 points

in the trust scale respectively for each of these cases). Additionally, in the case of national governments that stood in opposition to the EU, the interactive term has a negative coefficient, which indicates that in these cases the spillover effects from satisfaction with the national government to trust in the European institutions are reduced. These results confirm our expectations about the crucial moderating role of politicization of European integration at critical moments on the spillover effects from domestic specific to diffuse European support.

As hypothesized in H5a, all the effects of the cross-level interactions between critical moments in EU integration and domestic trust are negative and, with the exception of Finland, statistically significant, confirming that at critical moments citizens are less likely to rely on diffuse national support as a proxy for diffuse EU support.

<TABLE 2>

Table 2 presents the three-level regression analysis of satisfaction (*Model 1*) and of trust (*Model 2*) in the national parliament. *Model 1* in this table provides evidence in favor of hypothesis 1 about the consequences of satisfaction with the national economy on domestic specific support. Satisfaction with the economy has a highly significant effect on satisfaction with the national government. An improvement of one point in the respondents' satisfaction with the economy is associated with an increase of 0.484 points in satisfaction with the national government, even controlling for the impact of the satisfaction syndrome.

Model 2 in Table 2 presents the regressions results for trust in the national parliament. Thus, satisfaction with the national government, satisfaction with the country's economy, and the trust syndrome are positively associated with trust in the national parliament, with the strongest impact coming from the trust syndrome (with a coefficient of 0.724), followed by satisfaction with the

national government (0.218). This confirms previous findings in the existing literature on spillover effects from specific to diffuse support at the national level, and the positive association between trust in political institutions and overall levels of trust (in other institutions). In contrast to EP trust, being under IMF conditionality significantly influences trust in the national parliament, decreasing it on average by 0.366 points. This finding is consistent with Armingeon and Guthmann's (2014) recent study that also shows a negative impact of IMF/EU conditionality on satisfaction with democracy and trust in the national parliament. Also in contrast to the analyses on EP trust, politicization of the issue of European integration at the party level has a positive effect on domestic trust (although only significant at the 0.10 level). The higher the salience and polarization of the issue of European integration in the national party system, the higher the levels of trust in the national parliament and the lower the trust in the European parliament. These combined findings are actually not surprising and can be explained by the fact that European integration in these polarized settings is framed as undermining national sovereignty thus leading, in a defensive reaction, to higher levels of support for national institutions. In other words, in domestic arenas where European integration is successfully politicized, the European Union is portrayed as constantly undermining national democracy which resides in the national parliament. Therefore, increased politicization would lead to more trust in the national parliament and less trust in the EP.

<FIGURE 2>

Model 2 in *Table 2* permits us to compute indirect effects of satisfaction with the national government on EP trust. Using the information from this model and from *model 3* in *table 2* we can calculate the total (direct and indirect) effects of satisfaction with the government on EP trust at the different critical moments of the EU integration process. These total effects are presented in *Figure 2*. As shown in this figure, the resulting differences in the spillover effects of government

satisfaction on EP trust between the different critical moments are substantial. The total effects range from almost zero (for governments opposing the EU) to 0.256 (Finland). In the case of Finland, this means that an increase of one point in satisfaction with the national government leads to an increase of 0.256 points in trust in the EP, compared to almost no effect in the case of a government opposing the EU, for which the direct and indirect effects virtually cancel out. For countries and years in which the EU integration is not particularly politicized (absent of critical moments) for each unit increase in satisfaction with the government for a respondent EP trust will increase in total (and on average) by 0.098 points.

Finally, we test H8 which states that there should be higher spillover effect from specific support for the national government to diffuse support for the EU for Eurosceptic electoral losers. To do so, we present the results for a three-way interactive model in which the spillover effects from satisfaction with government on EP trust are moderated simultaneously by whether the respondent is a supporter of an incumbent or an opposition party (i.e. whether she is an election winner or loser) and by the position taken by this party on the issue of European integration. As the coefficient of the three-way interaction term indicates (see *Table A.3* in the Appendix), there is a positive and statistically significant moderating effect of these factors. To facilitate interpretation of the complicated interaction pattern, we present average marginal effects of satisfaction with the national government on EP trust (with 95% confidence intervals) for different positions taken by parties on the issue of EU integration and separately for election winners (Figure 3[a]) and losers (Figure 3[b]). The two panels in the figure make apparent the differences in the slope for election winners and losers, which support H8. For election winners, the impact of their satisfaction with the national government on EP trust barely depends on the position these parties take on the issue of European integration. To the extent that there is an effect among election winners, satisfaction with the national government has a stronger impact on

trust in EP for those who support parties more markedly pro-EU integration. By contrast, for election losers, the association between spillover effects from domestic specific support to EP trust and the position taken by parties on the EU issue is strongly negative. Among the election losers, the spillover effects are shown to be more pronounced for partisans of Eurosceptic parties than for partisans of pro-integration parties. For the latter these effects are close to zero but still statistically significant.

<FIGURE 3>

Discussion and conclusion

In a multi-level governance system like the EU, the citizens' evaluations of outputs at the national level do not only have an impact on domestic diffuse support (as we also have shown), but they also directly and indirectly affect trust in European institutions. Specific support in the form of satisfaction with the national government depends on the citizens' experiences with what the national political authorities deliver in terms of economic performance. In turn, specific support has implications for diffuse support not only at the national, but also at the European level. In line with previous literature that already documented spillover effects from domestic diffuse support to diffuse support at the EU level, we find that trust in the national parliament is positively associated with trust in the European parliament. In addition, we also find spillover effects of specific support (satisfaction with the national government) on trust in European institutions. These spillover effects are, however, much less important than suggested by the earlier literature once we control for the individuals' overall levels of trust and satisfaction.

In addition, we have shown that these spillover effects critically depend on the politicization of European integration. Our analyses suggest that the political context plays an important role on the extent to which we find a spillover effect from satisfaction with the national government to

trust in the European parliament. At critical moments of the EU integration process, when the salience of this issue is high, and when national governments play a highly visible role in the relationship between national and EU politics, the spillover effects from specific domestic to diffuse European support are stronger. We found that they are especially high for the two Euro-crisis cases. At a time when both the Greek and Finnish governments were under strong pressure from parties and citizens critical to European positions, satisfaction with the domestic government had a stronger positive impact on trust in the European Parliament. Similar enhanced spillover effects also appear for the cases of the referenda in Ireland. As we also expected, satisfaction with governments that explicitly took critical stances towards the EU integration process was translated to a lesser extent into trust in the EP. As a matter of fact, the spillover effects estimated in those cases were almost zero.

The results presented above highlight how diffuse EU support hinges on attitudes towards domestic institutions. We have not, however, so far referred to specific EU support or to citizens' evaluations of the EU's performance. Although the results suggest that most citizens hold national governments accountable for domestic policy performance (as we have seen for satisfaction with the economy), recent literature has suggested a rising awareness among the citizenry about the influence of the EU on domestic policy (e.g. Hobolt and Tilley 2014). In the context of the recent economic crisis, we observe an increase in the visibility and salience of the EU's influence especially on the economic policies implemented in the countries most affected by the crisis. As a consequence, citizens increasingly hold the EU responsible for poor performance and they increasingly become dissatisfied with the EU (specific support) and, as a result of spillovers, put less trust in the EU (diffuse support). The omission of this variable could be a problem for our results to the extent that it might generate some spuriousness in the association we find between domestic and EU diffuse support. Poor EU performance could be

driving down trust in the EU as well as trust in national institutions, especially in the context of European intervention in Southern European countries. Since the ESS does not include any item gauging this type of support, we unfortunately cannot account for EU specific support in our models.

To indirectly assess the extent to which the omission of specific support could be causing spuriousness in the spillover effects of diffuse support from the national to the supranational level, we fit a regression model (building on model 2 in table 1) that allows for an interactive effect of the post-crisis period on the association between diffuse national and EU support (results are reported in Table A.4 in the supplemental appendix). Since we expect spuriousness to be especially problematic in the post crisis period, we expect a strong and substantial positive interactive effect between trust in the national parliament and the post-crisis indicator. And, indeed, the results of this model show that diffuse support for the EU decreases during the post-crisis period (the constitutive term for the post-crisis indicator), while the spillover effect of diffuse national support to diffuse EU support is reinforced in the crisis. The reinforcement is small (0.016 increase in trust in the EP for every unit increase in trust in the national parliament in the post-crisis period), but statistically significant. This means that, as a result of the joint impact of specific EU support on both, diffuse national and diffuse EU support, the spillover effect of diffuse national on diffuse EU support may, indeed, be partially spurious. However, the fact that the pre-crisis spillover effect of diffuse national support on diffuse EU support is much more sizeable (0.148 unit increase in trust in the EP associated to a one-unit increase of trust in the national parliament) than the additional post-crisis effect suggests that the spurious element of the overall spillover is at best very partial. Moreover, recent research that has directly accounted for the impact of EU specific support still found a strong relationship between national and EU diffuse support (Armingeon and Ceka 2014).

It should be noted that Easton's original theory of political support envisioned a political reality in which short-term evaluations of government performance did not directly and immediately affect diffuse support and only manifested themselves over time. To properly test such temporal dynamics, we would need panel data which we do not have, and this is a weakness of our research design. Recent studies, including our own, suggest that there might in fact be a direct relationship between the types of support, so future research would need to trace this relationship with a heightened attention to time.

The most important implication of our findings for understanding EU support is that the EU continues to be evaluated from decidedly national vantage points. Regardless of what the EU does, national actors, particularly political parties and governments, remain the key conduits for interpreting EU policies and their impact domestically. The level of politicization of European integration, however, determines the undertones of these interpretations. There is little doubt that the visibility of the EU and its actions has increased significantly since the beginning of the Great Recession. Still, recent research shows that even after we account for EU performance during the crisis, cues from the national context are crucial for diffuse support for the EU. Thus, the health of national economies and the resultant trust in national institutions is intrinsically linked to diffuse support for the EU, suggesting that prolonged economic downturn, such as the one Europe has witnessed since 2010, does not bode well for the legitimacy of the EU.

Supporting data and materials for this article can be accessed on the Taylor & Francis website, doi: [publisher to add the doi at proof].

¹ For evidence suggesting that diffuse support for EU institutions has proven highly stable in the context of the Great Recession see Ringlerova (2015).

² Because the CHES is conducted every four years the three rounds of the CHES were matched to two rounds of the ESS each (CHES 2002 for ESS 2002 and 2004, CHES 2006 for ESS 2006 and 2008, and CHES 2010 for ESS 2010 and 2012).

³ There are some instances in which in the CHES two parties are coded as a single unit but the corresponding parties are treated separately in the ESS (and vice versa). In the first case, voters of the two parties were assigned the same CHES code. In the second, we assigned voters the different parties in the coalition based on the party they felt closest to. Those who did not specify a party they felt close to were assigned the major party in the coalition.

⁴ There is no trend in this respect across the six rounds. The countries and rounds included in the analyses are: Austria (rounds 1 to 3), Belgium (rounds 1 to 6), Bulgaria (rounds 4 to 6), Czech Republic (rounds 4 to 6), Germany (rounds 1 to 6), Denmark (rounds 1 to 6), Estonia (rounds 3 to 6), Spain (rounds 1 to 6), Finland (rounds 1 to 6), France (rounds 1 to 6), United Kingdom (rounds 1 to 6), Greece (rounds 1 to 2 and 4 to 5), Hungary (rounds 2 to 6), Ireland (rounds 2 to 6), Italy (round 1), Lithuania (rounds 5 to 6), Latvia (round 4), the Netherlands (rounds 1 to 6), Poland (rounds 2 to 6), Portugal (rounds 1 to 6), Romania (round 4), Sweden (rounds 1 to 6), Slovenia (rounds 2 to 6), and Slovakia (rounds 2 to 6).

⁵ The trust index was constructed as respondents' average trust on: the legal system, the police, politicians and the United Nations. The satisfaction index was constructed as respondents' average satisfaction with: his/her life as a whole, the state of education in his/her country, and the state of health services in his/her country. A factor analyses was conducted separately for each set of items, indicating that for each set all items strongly load on a single dimension, with only one eigenvalue above one. Results of the factor analyses are presented in tables A.1 and A.2 in the Appendix. Cronbach's α is of 0.804 for the trust syndrome and 0.643 for the satisfaction syndrome. Additional factor analyses were conducted separately by country and ESS round (not shown), they all return a one-factor solution.

⁶ The third aspect – the expansion of the actors to non-executive actors – does not make sense here, since we are only dealing with one type of actors, i.e. political parties.

⁷ A detailed description of how variables are coded is available in the online Appendix.

⁸ The Czech Republic, which was the only other state to follow the British veto, later on adopted the 'Treaty on stability, coordination and governance' which covers the Fiscal compact.

⁹ Although the assumption of uncorrelated residuals is unlikely to hold – there probably are exogenous variables jointly influencing our endogenous variables – this procedure still allows us to get an approximate estimate of the indirect (and total) effects.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Regression analyses of trust in the European Parliament

VARIABLES	(1) Baseline model	(2) Control for trust and satisfaction syndromes	(3) Interactive model
Individual level			
Trust in national parliament	0.463*** (0.003)	0.153*** (0.003)	0.161*** (0.003)
Satisfaction with national government	0.136*** (0.003)	0.062*** (0.003)	0.063*** (0.003)
Satisfaction with the economy	0.061*** (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)
Trust syndrome		0.708*** (0.004)	0.708*** (0.004)
Satisfaction syndrome		-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
Female	0.194*** (0.011)	0.136*** (0.010)	0.138*** (0.010)
Education	0.008*** (0.001)	0.004** (0.001)	0.003** (0.001)
Age	-0.011*** (0.000)	-0.010*** (0.000)	-0.010*** (0.000)
Party-level			
Winner	-0.241*** (0.018)	-0.131*** (0.016)	-0.130*** (0.016)
Weighted EU position	0.041*** (0.002)	0.028*** (0.002)	0.027*** (0.002)
Cross-level interactions			
Opposed government*Satisfaction with government			-0.084*** (0.011)
Eastern enlargement*Satisfaction with government			0.013 (0.015)
Ireland*Satisfaction with government			0.079*** (0.018)
Finland*Satisfaction with government			0.164*** (0.029)
Greece*Satisfaction with government			0.110*** (0.026)
Opposed government*Trust			-0.055*** (0.011)
Eastern enlargement*Trust			-0.069*** (0.014)
Ireland*Trust			-0.069*** (0.017)
Finland*Trust			-0.026 (0.027)
Greece*Trust			-0.044+ (0.023)
Country-year-level			
Opposed government			0.743** (0.269)
Eastern enlargement			1.398*** (0.297)
Ireland			0.270 (0.467)
Finland			-1.231+

			(0.644)
Greece			-0.054
			(0.693)
IMF conditionality	0.032	-0.134	-0.104
	(0.220)	(0.267)	(0.278)
Politicization	-0.626*	-0.632+	-0.864**
	(0.281)	(0.340)	(0.327)
EU balance	0.292***	0.376***	0.385***
	(0.043)	(0.053)	(0.050)
Constant	2.085***	0.516***	0.504***
	(0.126)	(0.151)	(0.144)
Observations	123,236	123,236	123,236
Random-effects parameters			
Party-level			
Constant variance	0.038	0.034	0.032
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.0040)
Observations	378	378	378
Country-year-level			
Constant variance	0.294	0.442	0.382
	(0.042)	(0.062)	(0.054)

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10

Table 2: Regression analyses of attitudes towards domestic institutions

VARIABLES	(1)	(2)
	Satisfaction with national government	Trust in national parliament
Individual level		
Satisfaction with government		0.218***
		(0.003)
Satisfaction with the economy	0.484***	0.050***
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Trust syndrome		0.724***
		(0.003)
Satisfaction syndrome	0.282***	-0.010**
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Female	0.015	-0.130***
	(0.010)	(0.009)
Education	0.002	0.032***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age	0.004***	0.001+
	(0.000)	(0.000)
Party-level		
Winner	0.969***	0.014
	(0.019)	(0.015)
Weighted EU position	0.007*	0.007***
	(0.004)	(0.002)
Country-year-level		
IMF conditionality	-0.038	-0.366**
	(0.189)	(0.135)
Politicization	-0.045	0.337+
	(0.252)	(0.174)
EU balance	0.025	-0.096***

	(0.039)	(0.027)
Constant	-0.296**	-0.679***
	(0.116)	(0.082)
Observations	123,236	123,236
Random-effects parameters		
Party-level		
Constant variance	0.184	0.029
	(0.017)	(0. .004)
Observations	378	378
Country-year-level		
Constant variance	0.198	0.108
	(0.031)	(0.016)

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.10

Figures

Figure 1: Theoretical model for the relationship between specific and diffuse support in the multi-level European polity

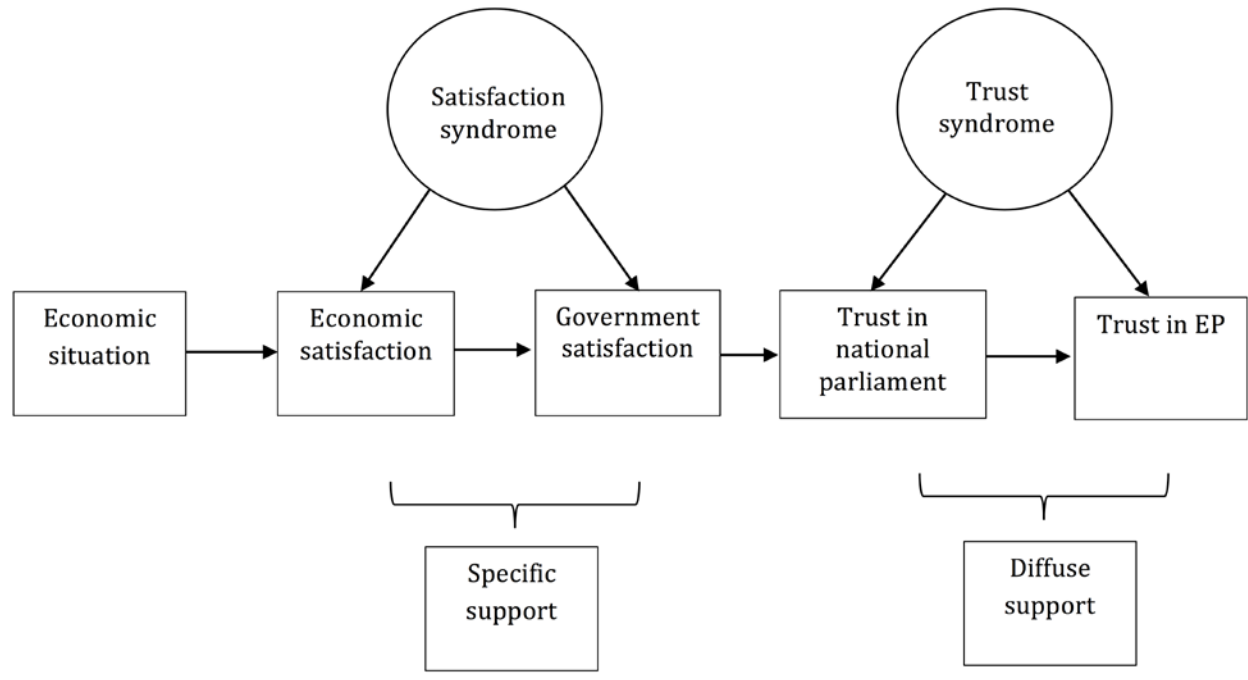
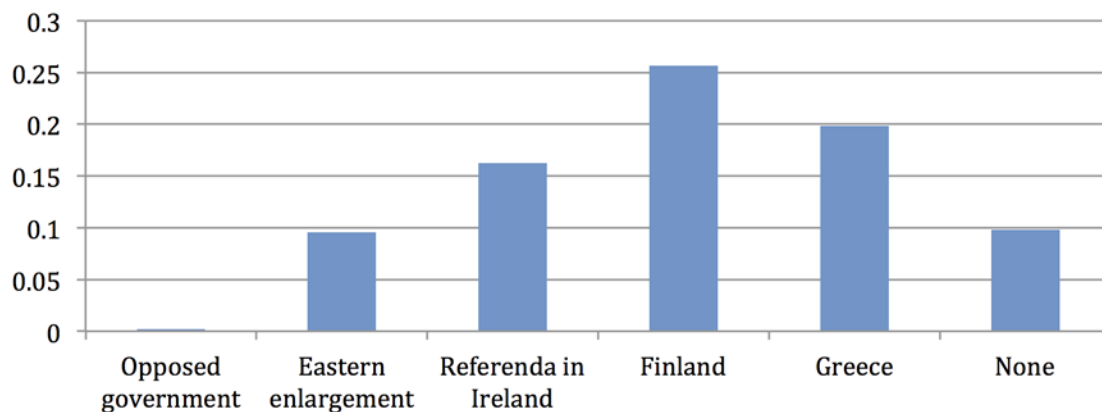


Figure 2: Total effects of satisfaction with national government on trust in the European Parliament



Note: Total effects of satisfaction with national government on trust in the European Parliament = (Direct effect of satisfaction with government on trust in the EP + effect of trust in national Parliament on trust in the EP * effect of satisfaction with national government on trust in the national Parliament)

Figure 3: Average marginal effects of satisfaction with national government on trust in the EP

