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Politicization of the European Union in Czech media

Master's Thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.

2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.

3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Brussels on 26. 4. 2021   Filip Lukáš

References

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Abstract

This master thesis is focused on understanding the process of politicization of the European Union in Czech media between the years 2003 and 2017. The theoretical framework used to observe the politicization process is based on postfunctionalist theory of European integration which assumes that the governance of the European Union has been become publicly contested, i.e., politicized, which consequently constrained the process of European integration. To analyze the process two politicization indices that considered the visibility, i.e., salience, of the European Union and the divergence of opinions i.e., polarization, were created. The source of data were annual Eurobarometer surveys and 6750 articles from three Czech quality newspapers. The hypothesized drivers of politicization assumed increases of politicization during authority transfer moments such as Czech Republic joining the EU in 2004 or Lisbon treaty adoption in 2009; and during crisis events such as was the Eurozone crisis and refugee crisis. The results revealed that the overall level of politicization was low, and it was only during the hypothesized events of Czech-EU admission, Lisbon treaty and refugee crisis that the politicization level increased significantly.

Abstrakt

Tato magisterská práce se zaměřuje na vysvětlení procesu politizace Evropské unie v českých médiích v letech 2003 až 2017. K analýze tohoto procesu je použita postfunkcionalistická teorie evropské integrace, která předpokládá omezení dalšího postupu Evropské integrace z důvodu vyšší politizace. Dva indexy politizace, které měří viditelnost tématu Evropské unie a polarizace veřejné debaty byly vytvořeny za účelem změření míry přítomné politizace. Jako zdroj dat byl využit každoroční průzkum Eurobarometr a také 6750 článků ze třech tištěných novin. Předpokládanými momenty zvýšené politizace jsou například události spojené s předáváním národní autority směrem do Evropské Unie, tak jako to mu bylo při vstupu ČR do EU v roce 2004 nebo během přijímání Lisabonské smlouvy v roce 2009, nebo krizové momenty, jako byla například krize Eurozóny nebo uprchlická krize. Hlavním zjištěním práce je všeobecně nízká úroveň politizace EU, pouze během momentů jako byl vstup ČR do EU, přijímání Lisabonské smlouvy a také během uprchlické krize došlo k zásadnímu navýšení míry politizace.

Keywords

European Union, European integration, politicization, postfunctionalism, automated content analysis

Klíčová slova

Evropská unie, evropská integrace, politizace, postfunkcionalismus, automatizovaná obsahová analýza

Název práce

Politizace Evropské unie v českých médiích

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1. Introduction

The 2004 enlargement of the European Union was a historical event for Czech Republic. Fifteen years after the Velvet revolution and eleven years after splitting with Slovakia, Czech citizens made it clear that they want to be part of a grander Europe. Since then, the EU governance has been present both in the political but also daily life of the citizens.

The authority of the EU over the member states is not self-evident for many people. Despite the initial support towards joining the EU in 2003 referendum, when 77 % of voters supported joining the club, the contestation of the transnational governance followed soon. A case in point is the hesitancy towards the Lisbon treaty ratification in 2009 when president Václav Klaus remarked that: "*the entry of the Lisbon treaty into force means […] that the Czech Republic will cease to be a sovereign country."* (Klaus, 2009). This process of bringing attention to certain issues is called politicization, and it is this work's objective to analyze the politicization of the European Union in Czech media.

Over the course of the seventeen years that the Czech Republic has been the member of the EU, multiple events took place that suggest that politicization could be in fact present within the Czech sphere of politics. The joining of the EU itself was a landmark event which was followed by a further transformation of institutional arrangements with the Lisbon treaty in 2009. There were crises as well, the EU underwent a financial crisis tightly coupled with its currency and fiscal policies of member states. There was also an increase in migration that stirred passions and gave rise to nationalism. To see how these events have resonated among the Czech public and subsequently possibly affected the governance structure, an inquiry into the politicization is necessary.

Since it is probable that *some* level of politicization was present at least in some point in history, rather than asking on the (non)existence of the process of politicization, the first research question focuses on the evolution of the process:

RQ1 – Is there a process of rising politicization of the European Union present in the Czech Republic?

In addition to the description of the politicization, it is also important to observe the drivers of such process. Therefore, the second research question is formulated:

RQ2 – What are the drivers of the process of rising politicization?

To address these sovereignty concerns and tensions related towards the supranational governance of the EU, a postfunctionalist theory developed by Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks is used in this work. The key assumption is that the tension between functional pressure and identity concerns can be activated politically – politicized – should they be salient and mobilized (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 13). The reason for selecting this theory is that unlike neofunctionalism or liberal intergovernmentalism, postfunctionalism stresses that it is the identity and economic interests that commonly form the preferences over the jurisdictional architecture of transnational governance.

The idea that general public would in some way react or interact with the developments at the regional European level was first brought forward by Philipp Schmitter in 1969. Schmitter as a scholar of neofunctionalism assumed that the European integration can be explained through the functional spillovers, actor socialization and shift of loyalty towards the new core (Leuffen et al., 2013, p. 84; Schmitter, 1969, p. 166). Politicization is in this case the increase of *controversiality* related to the joint decision making which then leads to the expansion of audience interested in the integration process. Furthermore, the assumption is that the audience should be in favor of further integration rather than opposed to it as the "*publics would be aroused to protect the acquis communautaire against the resistance of entrenched national political elites determined to perpetuate their status as guarantors of sovereignty*" (Schmitter, 2009, p. 211). A second major theory – liberal intergovernmentalism – in itself does not incorporate the notion of politicization as it is, similarly to neofunctionalism, focused on economic preferences and "*distributional bargaining among (economic) interest groups*" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 4). The postfunctionalist theory, as presented by Hooghe and Marks, puts the concept of politicization at its center. In their seminal work "A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus" Hooghe and Marks argue that increased interest of citizens in the political affairs of the EU alongside heightened identity concerns lead to "constraining" of the prospective European integration plans. The breaking point between "permissive consensus" and "constraining dissensus" should have been the Maastricht treaty.

Hypotheses

The key postfunctionalist assumption of increased politicization in the period from the Maastricht treaty adoption onwards is captured in the base hypothesis on an increase of the levels of politicization in time:

H1: The level of politicization in Czech Republic increased over the observed period.

Following the research question on the level of politicization are the questions on the possible drivers of the politicization process. The starting assumption is that citizens care about who exercises authority over them and that citizens are also capable of identifying the institutions making decisions on their behalf (de Wilde et al., 2016, pp. 10–11; Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 2). De Wilde et al. and Grande with Hutter thus propose an *authority transfer hypothesis* that captures the gradual shift of individual state competencies to the supranational level (de Wilde et al., 2016, pp. 10–11; Grande & Hutter, 2016a, p. 26, 2016b, p. 26). The hypothesis is further nuanced with two aspects of institutional deepening and geographical widening. Consequently this hypothesis covers both the treaty reforms and enlargement of the union (De Wilde & Zürn, 2012, pp. 142–143; Grande & Hutter, 2016b, pp. 26–27). Since citizens notice these shifts in state authority towards the EU politicians are pressured to take public stances and justify the transfers which might stir conflict (Grande & Hutter, 2016b, p. 26). The second hypothesis is defined as:

H2: Politicization increases during authority-transfer moments such as the accession of the Czech Republic into the EU or during treaty revisions.

In the case of this work the authority transfer moments entail the accession of the Czech Republic into the EU and Lisbon treaty deliberations and subsequent adoption in 2009. The year 2009 presents an opportunity to test the authority transfer hypothesis against another relevant EU event, namely the first presidency of the Czech Republic at the Council of the EU. A sub-hypothesis is, therefore, formulated:

H2.1: Among the Czech public the Lisbon treaty adoption was more politicized than the Czech presidency at the Council of the EU.

The second hypothesized driver of politicization are the "crisis events." This expression encompasses significant EU-wide events where the EU is seen as the body that should

resolve them. The crises present a potential danger to the identity or economic standing of EU member states. There were two crises in the observed period – the eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis. Generally, the crises evoke negative feelings of threat, urgency and uncertainty (Boin et al., 2005, pp. 3–4). These negative emotions then make the citizens focused on the crisis itself and subsequently increase its salience (Degner, 2019, p. 3). Since both, the eurozone and refugee crisis, lasted for prolonged periods of time and were medialized, it is reasonable to assume that they could have driven the politicization. The third hypothesis is defined as:

H3: Politicization increases during EU-wide transnational crisis periods such as were the Eurozone and refugee crises.

The potential politicization during these crises could also stem from previous authority transfer that just might have not been noticed by the citizens. An additional sub-hypothesis is therefore formulated:

H3.1: It is the institutional questions of Dublin regulation and quota reallocation scheme rather than the identity issues that drove politicization during refugee crisis.

Case of the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic joined the European Union in 2004. That was after a highly positive referendum with 77 % of votes cast in favour of joining club with 55 % voter turnout. Soon after the accession the Lisbon treaty and first Czech presidency at the Council of the EU took place.The financial and subsequent eurozone crisis had moderate but protracted effect on the Czech economy in comparison to other EU countries. The unemployment and debt-to-GDP ratio was lower than in other EU countries. Lastly, starting in the 2015 the refugee crisis became a crucial event in political sphere. The issue was portrayed as a problem of governance while the media participated in the securitization of the refugees themselves (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 10; Jelínková, 2019, p. 39). The reality of negligeable number of refugees coming into the Czech Republic was therefore in contrast to the media debate.

The main motivation for researching politicization is to uncover how exactly does the process of politicization look like in the Czech Republic. This interest is underlined by the fact that the mainstream politicization research usually focuses on big western European countries.

Research design

To see whether the politicization is constraining integration a politicization measure as described by Hutter et al. in adjusted form was used (Hutter et al., 2016, p. 10). The politicization index in this work is thus composed of salience and polarization[1]. Salience represents the visibility of the issue while polarization is a measure of conflict intensity. Both elements need to be present as an issue could be hardly politicized when there is no discussion surrounding it or when there is harmony in the opinions towards it. The focus on mass media stems from their key role as an intermediary between the sphere of politics and general public (Dolezal et al., 2016, p. 43; Grande & Hutter, 2016a, p. 30).

The observed period spanned years 2003 to 2017, a period long enough to cover the grand majority of Czech membership in the EU. Three printed newspapers were selected as the source for data; left-leaning Právo, right-leaning Mladá Fronta DNES and a tabloid Blesk. These media were selected for three main reasons. First, they are the most read national printed media. Second, they cover both sides of the traditional political spectrum. Finally, their coverage is not limited to certain, e.g., financial, topic as their news coverage is broad.

For the purpose of this work the two operationalizations of the abovementioned politicization index were created. *Salience* measures the overall visibility of the European Union in the mass media. Both variants use the same measure of salience, which is operationalized as the share of articles mentioning the European union in a given medium in a given year to the overall number of articles in a given medium in a given year. *Polarization* measures the spread of opinions on the European Union. The first variant uses the Eurobarometer survey answers as the data source. Specifically, the standard deviation of answers on the question "*Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the European Union is...?*" is used to determine the opinion spread. The second variant uses the content of the articles themselves in content analysis to determine their sentence-level sentiment. Standard deviation of this sentiment is then once again used to capture the polarization. The main reason for selecting two operationalizations is to get clearer picture of the politicization process in Czech media.

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[1] Due to this work constraints the third dimension of politicization index the actor expansion was not used.

The Eurobarometer variant was featured in the literature and the second variant with article sentiment scrutinizes the articles themselves.

Before the analysis itself is possible text pre-processing and translation is necessary. All articles were downloaded from Newton Media Database and subsequently translated from Czech to English through R programming language with the Google Translate API. This step was necessary as the sentiment analysis library can only work with English language. Despite the certain loss of information during the translation the benefits outweigh greatly outweigh the risks. Lastly, the sentiment analysis was done on a sentence level with the R library *sentimentR* which uses an "*augmented dictionary lookup*" (Rinker, 2019). To increase the precision of the analysis only sentences containing the words related to the EU were selected.[2]

Descriptive part

The part common to both measures of politicization is the salience. Over the observed period there were three significant peaks, one in 2004, 2009 and in 2014 to 2016. These years correspond to three hypothesized events – the accession of the Czech Republic into the EU, Lisbon treaty adoption and refugee crisis. The absolute peak was in the year 2004 with 4.7 % salience; the overall average level of salience across the three media for the observed period 2003 to 2017 was at 3.5 %.

The polarization measured as the standard deviation of Eurobarometer answers started at a relatively high level in the years 2003 and 2004 followed by a significant drop. This was followed by two moderate yet noticeable increases in 2007 and 2009. Finally, the peak was attained in 2015. The second polarization measure of standard deviation of article sentiment presented a slightly different picture. This version started with polarization at the lowest level, followed by a sharp increase until the year 2006. The overall peak was in 2011.

The Eurobarometer politicization chart shows three distinct peaks, in 2004, 2009 and in 2015. The chart also reveals that it was rather the salience than the polarization which drove the politicization. The chart of the second politicization measurement using the article sentiment also shows three distinct peaks in 2004, 2009 and 2015. However, there are two additional increases in 2006 and 2011.

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[2] See the code in the Appendix.

Explanatory part

From looking at both politicization measurements it becomes clear that the politicization process is not predictable. Certainly, the attained politicization levels are not stable. Both measurements showed great variations in politicization levels. Nonetheless, out of the two measurements neither showed an increase in the politicization level at the end of the observed period in 2017 in comparison to the first year of observation 2003. These findings and the variation in the politicization levels are supportive of the "*punctuated politicization*" as described by Grande and Kriesi rather than the assumption of increasing politicization since Maastricht treaty as presented by Hooghe and Marks (Grande & Kriesi, 2016, p. 283; Hooghe & Marks, 2009). The punctuated politicization is described as singular events that significantly increased the levels of politicization for a short period of time.

Both measures of politicization show significant increases in the years 2004, 2009 and 2015. The dates correspond to the accession of Czech Republic into the EU, adoption of Lisbon treaty and the refugee crisis. The first two events are hypothesized under the authority transfer hypothesis, the last one under the crisis events. The results suggest that it was in fact the Czech accession into the EU that was responsible for the increased level of politicization as the salience of the accession among the EU-related topics reached 31.5 %. The politicization level in year 2009 could be attributed to the authority transfer hypothesis, however, slightly more important driver of the process was the Presidency at the Council of the EU. The salience levels for both topics were at 10.9 % and 13.4 % respectively. For the last spike in politicization in 2015 the driver was the refugee crisis with 28.3 % salience among the selection of EU articles. Breaking down the salience to uncover the second sub-hypothesis shows that it was actually both the identity concerns and authority transfer institutional arrangements equally that drove the salience and therefore the politicization.

Discussion

The results suggest that the politicization of the European Union in Czech media is not elevated and even the existing levels of politicization do not follow any clear pattern. The two drivers proved to be relevant to some extent. The authority transfer hypothesis assumption of citizens reacting to the giving up of certain national sovereignty was correct. However, it might be useful to distinguish the hypothesis further into a

"membership politicization" and "treaty revision" (cf. (Grande & Hutter, 2016b, pp. 26–28). These nuances are important as there were events that according to the hypothesis should have been politicized but were not. These events included EU constitution, two enlargements. Similarly, the crisis hypothesis was only proven for refugee crisis and not for the eurozone crisis. Finally, the analysis revealed that generally the complexity of EU-related articles is significantly higher than of random sample of general articles. And that the EU is hardly noticed in the observed media.

Project

The contents of this work generally follow the outline as presented in the project, however, for the purpose of clarity and conciseness some research questions and hypotheses were abandoned. The final work tries to answer some of the original research questions in the text itself without necessarily specifying them as research questions per se.

2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

The central concept of the postfunctionalist theory is identity. The feeling of (exclusive) national identity is, according to Hooghe and Marks, decisive for the form of multi-level governance and it provides better explanation for the European integration than just observing the economic preferences of interest groups (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 2, 5).

Unlike neofunctionalism or liberal intergovernmentalism, postfunctionalism regards the process of European integration as a tension between national identity concerns and functional design of multilevel governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 12-14). This argument stems from the dual nature of governance. First, the governance serves as a method of attainment of collective goods through coordination. Due to the nature of the world, the most efficient authority structure is multi-level. Second, the concept of governance also entails a sense of a political community with citizens being concerned about who exercise of authority over them. These two connected yet somewhat opposing forces put pressure on the nature of regional (European) integration as the "*Communities demand self rule, and the preference for self rule is almost always inconsistent with the functional demand for regional authority*" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 2). The authors indifference towards the functionality of the outcome of regional integration is represented in the name of the theory – *postfunctionalism*.

Historical perspective

After the unsuccessful ratification of the European Defence Community in 1954 national elites turned away from a union based on a political blueprint towards market-based integration. Hooghe and Marks describe the period between late 1950s and late 1980s the "*permissive consensus.*" They argue that this period could have existed due to three conditions – lack of knowledge, lack of salience and the remoteness of the integration. First, parties did not position themselves on the issue of European integration as the general public had only superficial knowledge of the issue. Second, parties did not compete among each other as the issue of European integration was not salient among general public, but only among business groups. Third, the content of the integration process was unrelated to the pre-existing national party conflict structure (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 6–7). Hooghe and Marks argue, the (market) integration process was largely unnoticed by citizens and it was mostly relevant for business interest groups.

The subsequent period starting with the deliberations around Maastricht treaty onwards is described as a period of "*constraining dissensus*" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 5). The reason being that the deepening of European integration reached the level of formalizing a monetary union which once again touched upon the prospect of a political union, stirring a party conflict. Subsequently: "*The issue has spilled beyond interest group bargaining in to the public sphere*" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 5). Confirmation referendums that followed in several countries the adoption process only further demonstrated the general public – elite gap.

2.1. Politicization

Hooghe and Marks put forward an argument that the decision making process and the content of European integration has changed because of politicization (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 8). Politicization is defined:

The disparity between function and form of integration leads to reform force. Political parties accommodate public and interest group opinions on the issue at hand and formulate a party strategy. In the next step the issue enters either a mass politics or interest group arena which also limits the political parties' actions by the arena rules. Lastly, the arena choice determines the conflict structure, whether the conflict will be based on the identity or distributional logic. The mass arena allows both conflict structures while the interest group arena follows only distributional logic structure. The identity conflict is based on the concept of gal/tan cleavage (green, alternative, libertarian/traditionalism, authority, nationalism); distributional conflict on the other hand follows the economic left/right dimension (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 8–9).

How does politicization happen?

The relation of identity concerns to jurisdictional transformation, such as the European integration, might create tensions. In order for them to be politically activated, they must be salient and mobilized by a political entrepreneur (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 13). Since citizens might not have the means to examine in detail the process of European integration, they might be reliant on cues by political parties, media, or traditional

organizations such as churches in order to form their own opinion. These cues might tap into both identity and economic cleavages (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 11).[3]

The opening up of the European integration process to general public led to Europe-related phenomena being mediated by political parties to their constituents in national arenas. Each country is of course different with their respective culture, institutions and history. "*National peculiarities are more pronounced among publics than elites because publics are more nationally rooted and are more dependent on information filtered by national media*" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 14). Which means that "*The result is greater divergence of politically relevant perceptions and a correspondingly constricted scope of agreement*" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 14). The examples include the effect of religious beliefs, liberal vs coordinated economies or specific experience of regional units such as the Central and Eastern European communist history. The emphasis put on the exclusivity of national identity makes it more difficult to build transnational European coalitions.

Hooghe and Marks note that the politicization could also arise from politicians, should they receive an advantage in seeking politicization of an issue. However, they also remark that certain issues connected to the European integration touching upon the identity concerns are cross-cutting across domestic cleavages and party positions (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 19).

Consequences of politicization

The attempts of political parties to accommodate the broad opinions on economic distribution and especially identity issues decreases the potential scope of agreement on further European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 14, 21–22). The idea of "constraining dissensus" is portrayed by politicians, wary of the public scrutiny of their EU deals, rather preferring smaller reforms to avoid referenda. However, just an indeterminate suspension of the integration might not be the final destination. In an update to the theory in 2019 Hooghe and Marks advance their argument by noting that a complete disintegration of the EU is among the potential outcomes of politicization (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, p. 1117).

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[3] Whether an issue enters mass politics depends not on its intrinsic importance, but on whether a political party picks it up. This is represented in Figure 2 as the interaction between public opinion, interest group pressures and party strategy.

The "constraining dissensus" manifests itself not only during debates on the nature of European integration, but also during crises where it constrains supranational problem solving by narrowing down the widely acceptable policy choices (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 14, 2019, pp. 1117, 1119, 1122). The crises might follow both the identity and distributional conflict structure as they might tap into the feeling of national identity and into the financial redistribution (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, pp. 1119, 1122).

Depoliticization

Politicians are aware of the gains and risks from politicization of European integration. For some the risks connected to it outweigh the benefits, therefore, they try to prevent the politicization from rising or defuse the already present tensions. One of the possible ways how to prevent the build-up of politicization is to play down the topic of European integration during elections. Bypassing the treaty change in order to avoid national referenda is also a viable option. That could be achieved through differentiation in European integration or by integration outside of the EU treaties, such as was done with the European Stability Mechanism. Another option is to delegate authority to non-majoritarian supranational institutions such as the Commission or the European Central Bank which are further away from national disputes (Grande & Kriesi, 2016, p. 296; Hooghe & Marks, 2019, p. 1119; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019, pp. 999–1000). This could, however, further increase the EU "democratic deficit" in the eyes of citizens as politicians would effectively go around the set-up rules.

2.2. Criticism

Despite presenting an interesting theoretical account for the perceived constraints on the process of European integration, postfunctionalism was criticized from multiple perspectives. These arguments could be summarized into three categories, arguments on the historical examples of *constraining dissensus*, arguments on the nature of politicization and finally arguments on the effects of the politicization.

One of the most outstanding claims is that the politicization led from the *permissive consensus* to *constraining dissensus*, i.e., low levels of politicizations from the mid-1950s until the Maastricht treaty which served as a breaking point. The level of politicization should be increasing in time from the treaty onwards. Grande and Kriesi have disputed this claim, they argue that politicization is not an exclusive post-Maastricht phenomenon with an example of high politicization present in Britain and France in the early 1970s.

Furthermore, the level of politicization in post-Maastricht period is not as high as expected by Hooghe and Marks (Grande & Kriesi, 2016, p. 281). Grande and Kriesi argue that even during the integration debates in the 2000s and the euro crisis, the levels of politicization were not exceptionally high. They rather describe the evolution as *punctuated politicization*: "*in which a significant but limited number of singular events produce high levels of political conflict for shorter periods of time*" (Grande & Kriesi, 2016, p. 283).

The consequences of politicization are equally disputed. The notion that politicization constrains further integration is challenged by Jabko and Luhman. In their view the sovereignty practices can be altered by a crisis; the eurozone and refugee crisis serve as an example. Both of these crises needed substantial and timely alteration of sovereignty practices while taking into account the changing nature of national politics and the crises themselves. Politicization served as a propeller of these reforms not as a constraint (Jabko & Luhman, 2019).

Authors such as Schimmelfennig, Leuffen and Rittberger argue that politicization per se does not constrain integration, rather when coupled with interdependence it might make the integration process more differentiated across the EU member states (Schimmelfennig et al., 2015, p. 9).

Question of legitimacy

The process of politicization is also tied to the question of EU legitimacy. The case of the EU is special in the selection procedure of the EU representatives. Citizens had and still have limited direct influence on the EU governance. The years dubbed as "*permissive consensus*" could be, therefore, described as "policy without politics." The EU governance was presented as apolitical and technical (Schmidt, 2019, p. 1032). On the other hand, in the national arenas the EU could be contested, but that does not necessarily change the policy outcomes, therefore, this phenomenon could be described as "politics without policy" (Schmidt, 2019, p. 1019).

The source of legitimacy could for example stem from democratic elements of the governance or it could stem from the effectiveness of transnational problem-solving. From the perspective of democratic legitimacy, politicization could be seen as a positive development as citizens relate more actively to the supranational level of EU governance. The governing efficiency, on the other hand, could be hampered by politicization as

finding agreement on the issues might prove difficult (Zeitlin et al., 2019, p. 966). The process of the EU contestation could lead from "politics without policy" to "politics against policy" and even to "politics against polity" (Schmidt, 2019, p. 1019).

2.3. Conceptual overview

The main conceptual framework used in this thesis to scrutinize the politicization of the European union in Czech media stems from the work of de Wilde (2011, 2016) and Grande with Hutter (2016) Politicization is described as an "*increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU*" (de Wilde, 2011, p. 560). The concept is further elaborated into a three-dimensional concept of *salience*, *polarization* and *actor and audience expansion* (de Wilde et al., 2016, pp. 6–7).

The *salience* component describes the visibility of the EU and the process of European integration. The operationalization varies, for example it could be observed through the number of newspaper articles covering the EU (Grande & Hutter, 2016b), speeches in national parliaments on EU-related topics (Hoeglinger, 2016b) or the salience of the EU on social media (Ademmer et al., 2019). *Polarization* portrays the taking of extreme positions on the range of opinions – from positive to negative – towards the EU governance. The most polarized scenario includes the opinions located on the two extremes of the spectrum with few opinions in the middle. The concept can be operationalized as the polarization of party system in national parliaments, or polarization of opinion indicated through public opinion surveys (de Wilde et al., 2016). *Actor and audience expansion* depict the expansion of people and organizations that actively voice their opinion towards the EU governance or consume the opinions of others. That applies to the arena of mass media, where more people cover the EU, or for example the protest arena, where the manifestations pro or against the EU might get a bigger following (de Wilde et al., 2016; Hutter & Grande, 2014).

According to de Wilde politicization demonstrates itself in three settings. The first one is *national parliaments*, where the EU-related matters are discussed in the parliamentary debates. Second setting is the *public sphere* which contains journalists, party members and interest groups. The EU polity and citizens are connected through it. The public sphere is often mass mediated and, therefore, is frequently considered to be central for the politicization process. Lastly, there is the public opinion.

The three-dimensional concept of politicization needs to be further specified into a politicization index that would allow for a summarization. One way of achieving this goal was presented by Grande and Hutter (2016a) who devised a simple formula combining all of the three dimensions:

Politicization = Salience x (Expansion of actors + Polarization)

The politicization index is formulated as an addition of *expansion of actors* and *polarization* multiplied by *salience* (Grande & Hutter, 2016a, p. 10). The single most important part of the formula is salience as even polarized opinions of broad range of actors are not relevant, if they are not publicly resonating or in other words, salient. For this reason, is salience multiplicative rather than additive. Actor expansion and polarization are to some degree interchangeable. Their relation in the formula is, therefore, additive (Grande & Hutter, 2016a, p. 10).

The final number of politicization index can be, however, calculated by many ways. Grande and Hutter, therefore, propose also a qualitative typology of types of politicization. The categorization has two dimensions – *actor expansions* with low and high extension of conflict and *polarization* with low and high intensity of conflict. Combined these two categories create four types of low/high-intensity elite/mass conflicts. However, this work will not be using the actor expansion parameter as it has proved quite difficult to capture meaningfully. Hence determining the type of politicization according to this concept is unfeasible.

Locus of politicization

The process of politicization has to take place in some public space. Examining mass media, parliamentary debates or social media is a common approach used for politicization research. Dolezal, Grande and Hutter (2016) base their research on an investigation of mass media. The explanation is as follows: "*A focus on the mass media as the key public forum for investigating political conflict seems all the more crucial in today's 'audience democracies' in which the mass media play a central role of intermediation between citizens and the state*" (Dolezal et al., 2016, p. 43; Grande & Hutter, 2016a, p. 30). "*Most importantly, mass media data allow us to examine the visibility of actors in a conflict, the specific issues addressed, the actor's issue positions and the way they justify these positions. Therefore, they allow every relevant dimension of our concept of politicization to be analysed*" (Dolezal et al., 2016, p. 44). Significant

benefit to using mass media as the data source is that it is not as exclusive as for example parliamentary debates when it comes to the actor expansion. Furthermore, mass media cover three "windows of observation," namely public debates on major integration steps, national election campaigns and protest events (Dolezal et al., 2016, p. 39). All these three aspects are crucial for understanding of the politicization process.

2.4. Drivers of politicization

As discussed above, certain conditions have to be met in a country to make politicization viable. The assumption surrounding the trend of politicization is that it is increasing over time. Therefore, the first general hypothesis is formulated:

H1: The level of politicization in Czech Republic increased over the observed period.

This hypothesis is connected to the core of postfunctionalist theory, as in the post-Maastricht period the "permissive consensus" has ended and "constrained dissensus" with politicization ensued.

Subsequent question is what drives the process of politicization. De Wilde et al. and Grande with Hutter put forward an *authority transfer hypothesis* asserting that it is the gradual transfer of individual state's authorities to the supranational level that drives the politicization (de Wilde et al., 2016, pp. 10–11; Grande & Hutter, 2016a, p. 26, 2016b, p. 26).

The assumptions are that citizens care about who governs over them and that they are able to identify the governing or decision-making institution (de Wilde et al., 2016, p. 10). The authority transfer can be further distinguished into two parts – institutional *deepening* and geographical *widening*. Deepening relates to the increase of the EU authority through the treaty revision leading to increases of delegation and pooling of national authority at the supranational level. Widening refers to the geographical enlargement of the union (De Wilde & Zürn, 2012, pp. 142–143; Grande & Hutter, 2016b, pp. 26–27).

The potential for political conflict manifests itself in three settings – "*conflicts over loss of sovereignty, threat to national identity and demands for transnational solidarity*" (Grande & Hutter, 2016b, p. 27). Sovereignty is critical for the attainment of nation's interests and, therefore, every transfer of it to the supranational body is debated. The

identity conflict is connected to the norms and institutions of a country. Lastly, the transnational solidarity conflict is associated with the re-distributional aspect of supranational funds.

These authority transfer moments further create political conflict and put pressure on politicians by forcing them to justify and take a public position towards the authority transfers at hand (Grande & Hutter, 2016b, p. 26).

Therefore, for the purpose of this work following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Politicization increases during authority-transfer moments such as the accession of the Czech Republic into the EU or during treaty revisions.

The *authority-transfer* moments would be the referendum in 2003 and subsequent entry into the EU in 2004 and the Lisbon treaty revision in 2009. The year of 2009 presents an opportunity to test the authority transfer hypothesis against another relevant event in that year, namely the Czech presidency at the Council of the EU. It is reasonable to assume that since it was the first Czech presidency it gained a substantial attention. In line with the authority transfer hypothesis a sub-hypothesis is, therefore, postulated that assumes that the significant change in the EU governance in the form of Lisbon treaty has gathered more attention than the first Czech presidency in the Council of the EU.

H2.1: Among the Czech public the Lisbon treaty adoption was more politicized than the Czech presidency at the Council of the EU.

The second hypothesized driver of politicization are the "crisis events." This term is used to describe significant negative EU-wide events that aroused public interest and that were expected to be resolved by policy action by the European Union. In the observed period this would entail the eurozone and refugee crisis. The crises present themselves as a potential danger to identity and economical standing of the EU member states.

The causal mechanism that would turn a crisis into a politicized event is based on the mechanism that links crises to European integration as described by Degner (2017). The crisis evokes a feeling of *threat*, *urgency*, and *uncertainty* in people. The element of *threat* relates to the potential of material or immaterial damage such as physical destruction during natural disasters or the prospect of losing a job. *Urgency* is the immediateness of a problem. Finally *uncertainty* is the vagueness of the nature of the crisis, its implications and the uncertainty on solution (Boin et al., 2005, pp. 3–4). The crisis instills these three

emotions that steers the focus of the people on the critical issue thus increasing its salience (Degner, 2019, p. 3). As mentioned above, salience is one of the three key components of politicization as formulated by Grande and Hutter (2016). The polarization could rise as well, the identity or livelihood of some might be threatened by a crisis more than that of others. The proposed crisis solutions might also damage social equilibrium. The increased salience and polarization would then in turn increase the overall politicization.

Generally, the longevity of a crisis depends on its political and operational closure (Boin et al., 2005, pp. 97–98). From the perspective of politicization, the essential quality of a crisis is its persistent media coverage, it is therefore the "political" closure of a crisis that defines its end. Boin et al. notes that "*Political attention may decrease through sheer exhaustion of the attention of mass media and political actors, as well as through the emergence of newly "discovered" crises*" (Boin et al., 2005, p. 95). Of course, just because a crisis is not publicly mentioned does not mean it does not exist, however, as the defined formula of politicization states, the crisis cannot be politicized if it is not present in the public discourse, i.e., it is not salient. The exact lifespan of a crisis is, thus, hard to predict.

The co-occurrence of multiple crises at once could affect both the salience and the polarization of the citizens. The logic of the mass media suggests that a coverage of multiple significant co-occurring events such as crises has its limits. The attention of both the media consumers and producers is finite, there is only so much that one can write or read. A crisis in itself might be enough for an extensive coverage, co-occurring crisis might not significantly increase the overall number of crisis-related articles. Polarization, on the other hand, might change during a multitude of crises. Since crises are events that are perceived negatively, the combination of multiple crises at once might wear down the citizens and drain the "loyalty pool." The polarization might move both ways; it is possible for the combination of crises to uniformly decrease the preferences over the government/the EU, i.e., reducing the polarization. Alternatively, citizens not affected by the crises to a significant extent might hold onto their opinions while the other parts of the society further reinforce their negative sentiment towards the government/the EU, i.e., increasing the polarization.

The crisis events explored in this work is the "eurozone crisis" and "refugee crisis." These (prolonged) events were medialized and affected the lives of EU citizens; it is therefore

reasonable to assume that politicization could have very well been present. Thus, the third hypothesis says:

H3: Politicization increases during EU-wide transnational crisis periods such as were the Eurozone and refugee crises.

The crisis itself might have tapped into the identity and distribution not only from the crisis event perspective but also from the authority transfer point of view. It is possible that the potential politicization was not as much driven by the feeling of exclusive national identity during the refugee crisis but that it was driven by the institutional framework that was already established but not discussed up until the crisis such as the qualified majority voting and Dublin regulation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is presented:

H3.1: It is the institutional questions of Dublin regulation and quota reallocation scheme rather than the identity issues that drove politicization during refugee crisis.

3. The case of the Czech Republic

3.1. History of Czech EU membership

The primary goal of this work is to observe politicization in the Czech Republic in the period 2003 to 2017. The Czech case is interesting in that it shows a lot of variation in the support towards the EU.

Czech Republic joined the EU with the enlargement in 2004. The admission was confirmed in a referendum held a year earlier in which 77 % of votes cast were in favor of joining with voter turnout at 55.2 %. Besides the significantly positive result in the referendum, the overall attitude was supportive of the membership. The 2003 Eurobarometer survey reveal that 46 % of respondents thought that the EU membership would be a "good thing," 32 % were neutral, 13 % thought the membership would be a "bad" thing and 9 % did not know.

The observed period could be divided into four parts according to the composition of the governments. There were multiple government iterations in the first two periods, however, the government coalitions remained the same.

Joining the EU

The first period spans from 2003 to September 2006. The parties forming the government were the Social Democrats (ČSSD), the Freedom Union – Democratic Union (US-DEU) and the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) with the Social Democrats being the strongest party in the parliament. The average position across the parties in government to the European integration was at 6.6 out 7 in favor of the integration according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017). The main event was the joining of the EU in 2004.

Lisbon treaty and Czech presidency

In the second period from September 2006 to May 2009 it was the Civic Democratic Party led by Mirek Topolánek which was the dominant force in the government. The coalition's position on the issue of European integration averaged at 5, however, the Civic Democratic Party was at 2.9 (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017). The significant event in this period was the first Czech presidency in the Council of the EU which started in January 2009. This government, however, did not see the presidency through as the

parliament passed the motion of no confidence in March, ending this government almost two months before the end of the Presidency on the 8th of May.

The main priorities of the presidency were the economy, energy and external EU relations. The priorities also reflected ongoing global issues of financial crisis and the dispute between Russia and Ukraine (Beneš & Karlas, 2010, p. 70; Marek & Baun, 2011, p. 133). From the perspective of priorities, Czech Republic managed to secure some victories, mainly in the domain of energy security, eastern neighbourhood policy and transatlantic relations (Beneš & Karlas, 2010, pp. 78–79; Marek & Baun, 2011, pp. 138–140). The overall assessment of the presidency performance, on the other hand, was rather critical or mixed at best (Marek & Baun, 2011, p. 141). What did not help the overall image of the presidency was the conduct of rather Eurosceptic president Václav Klaus.

The opposition voted for a motion of no confidence in March 2009, the civic democrats government received was therefore subsequently replaced by a caretaker government led by Jan Fischer from May 2009 until July 2010. The position of this government was not observed by CHES.

Economic crisis

The third period lasted from July 2010 to July 2013 when once again the government was formed around the Civic Democratic Party. The coalition average on the issue of European integration was at 4.56 out of 7. The main EU related issue was resolving the financial crisis.

The financial crisis which started in late 2009 had a somewhat moderate but prolonged effect on the on the Czech economy in comparison to other European countries. The unemployment rate started in 2008 at 4.4 % and peaked in 2010 at 7.3 % remaining stable until 2013 followed by a decrease. The unemployment peak across the EU was in 2013 at 11.3 % (Český statistický úřad, 2021; International Labour Organization, 2020). The debt-to-GDP was at 28.1 % in 2008 and peaked in 2013 with 44.4 %. On the other hand, the EU debt-to-GDP average peaked in 2014 with 86.9 % (Eurostat, 2021). Despite the global and European aspect of the crisis, it was mainly referred to in a national perspective (Havlík, 2019, p. 53). The crisis, however, as Havlík argues, had a significant effect on the party system as voters dissatisfied with handling the crisis started to turn away from the "traditional" parties towards parties with new faces (Havlík, 2019, p. 50).

The government rule was cut short as the prime minister was forced to resign in June 2013. The caretaker government that ensued lasted from July 2013 to the end of January 2014.

Refugee crisis

The last period covered here started in January 2014 and ended in December 2017. The government coalition was rather supportive on the issue of European integration with the position at 5.9 out of 7 (Bakker et al., 2015; Polk et al., 2017). The dominant issue that captured attention of Czechs was the refugee crisis.

The refugee crisis was mostly referred to as a problem of governance, distribution of resources and security (Tkaczyk, 2017, p. 106). The media also participated in the securitization of the process by accentuating the "*dichotomy between Czechia as a safe country and the dangerous anonymous mass of refugees*"(Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 10; Jelínková, 2019, p. 39).

The European Commission devised a plan to ease the problems of migration which was based around equitable distribution of non-EU asylum seekers among the EU member states. The intended goal was to help relieve the pressure on frontline states and states that were disproportionately selected as a final destination by refugees compared to other member states. Czech Republic political representatives such as the prime minister Bohuslav Sobotka (ČSSD) or the minister of interior Milan Chovanec (ČSSD) were critical of this scheme as they doubted its efficiency and whether the refugees would even be interested in living in the Czech Republic (Jelínková, 2019, p. 40). The negative stance towards the quota system was shared across the political spectrum, even by the most pro-European parties such as TOP09 or KDU-ČSL (Havlík, 2019, p. 60). Furthermore, as Jelínková observed, the articles presenting the opinions of Czech politicians were negative towards the EU (Jelínková, 2019, p. 39).

The salience of the issue decreased over time with the end of the year 2016 having approximately six times lower salience of the issue compared to the peak in September 2015.

3.2. Trends in Czech support towards the EU

The relationship between Czech Republic and the EU has been somewhat defined by a party-based Euroscepticism. The visible Eurosceptic actors were the Civic democrats and

especially the former president Václav Klaus (Havlík, 2019, p. 52; Hloušek & Kaniok, 2020, p. 62; Marek & Baun, 2011, p. 130). The diffuse and specific Euroscepticism, as measured by Hloušek and Kaniok from the survey on satisfaction with the EU membership and from the public trust in the European Commission respectively, show that Czech Republic is one of the most Eurosceptical EU member states (Hloušek & Kaniok, 2020, p. 64).

The chart of responses of the Eurobarometer survey on the question of the EU membership benefits reveals that initially the positive attitude towards the membership prevailed. This has changed between the years 2008 and 2010 when the positive attitude declined sharply from 47 % to 31 %. The decline was matched by a slight increase in negative attitude from 11.5 % to 16 % and by a more pronounced increase in neutral attitude from 39 % to 51 %. Whether this change could have been caused by the financial crisis, the Czech presidency in the Council of the EU or some other cause is up to speculation. The decline of positive attitude continued until an all-time low point in 2012. From then on, the positive attitude started to increase only to start going into decline from 2014 onwards.

Chart no. 1 – Eurobarometer on the question of EU membership benefits
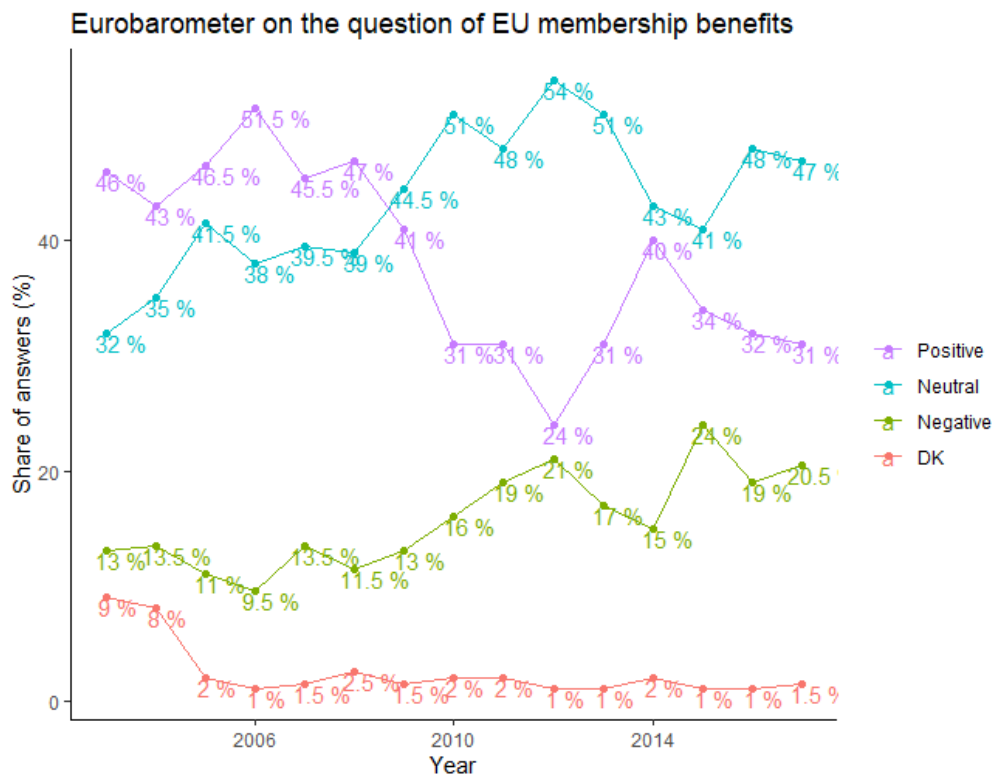
Source: Author

Political parties also take a position towards the European Union. Rather than observing their actual position the following chart no. 2 shows the salience of the EU for the parties in the Chamber of deputies of Czech parliament as the position of the party towards the EU is not that relevant unless it is also salient. The data is from Chapel Hill Expert Survey and it measures the importance of the EU integration on a 11-point scale with 11 meaning the highest importance of the issue for the party and 0 the opposite.

Chart no. 2 – Parties in the Chamber of Deputies – Salience of the EU
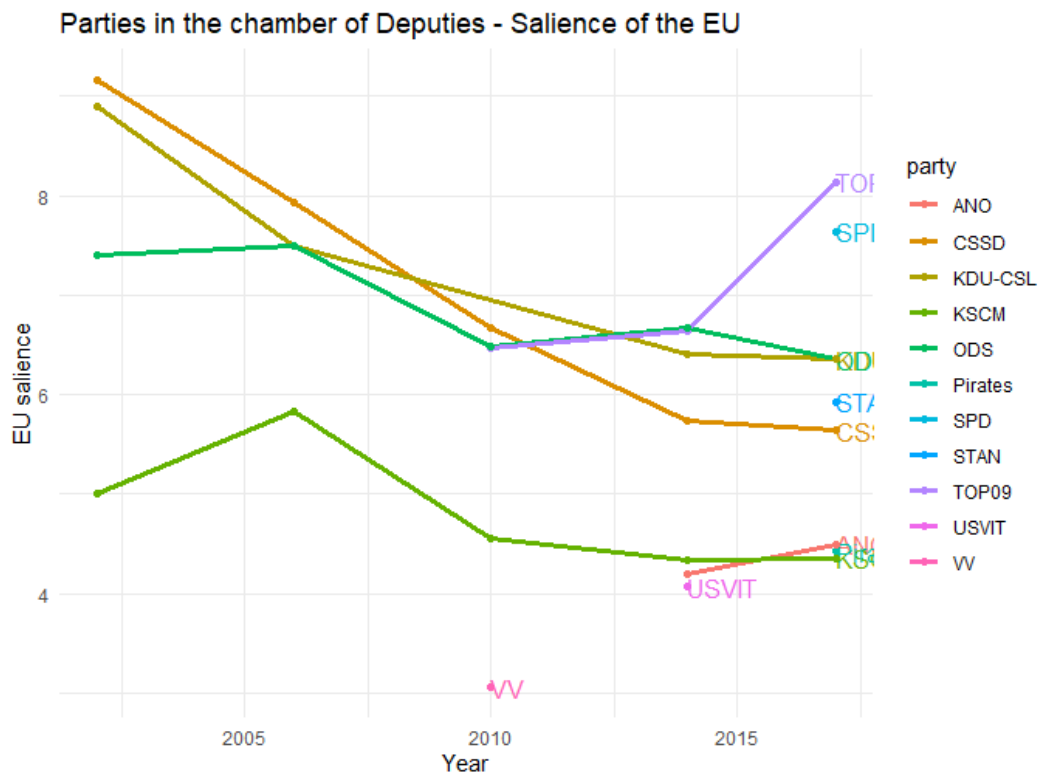
Source: Author

Chart no. 3 – Parties in the Chamber of Deputies – Position towards the EU
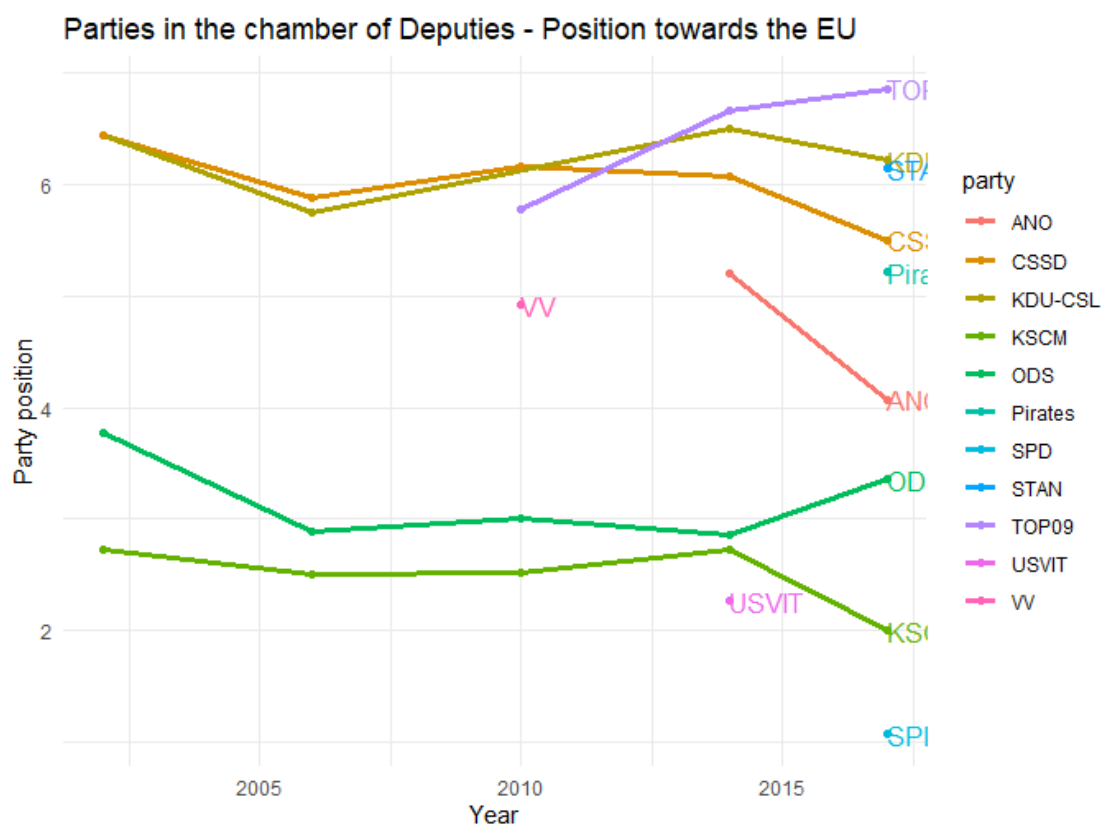
Source: Author

The charts reveal that the importance of the EU for most of the parties has been slowly declining from a level of high importance before the Czech accession to the EU to an issue of moderate importance. There are two parties from both sides of the GAL/TAN spectrum for whom the EU has increased in importance. The first one is pro-EU party TOP09 whose stance towards the EU increased from 5.8 in 2010 to 6.9 in 2017.[4] The second party, SPD, is a continuation of the party Úsvit which, like SPD, has been led by Tomio Okamura. Both Úsvit and SPD are significantly Eurosceptic, on a 7-point scale their position as per CHES was at 2.3 for Úsvit and 1.1 for SPD.

We can also notice that the traditional parties form two distinct blocks – on one side we have Social Democrats (ČSSD) and Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) with high levels of support towards the EU; and on the other hand, there are the Civic Democrats (ODS) and Communist party (KSČM) that are rather opposed to the EU. Lastly, it is noticeable how

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[4] This scale is 7 point with 1 being "strongly opposed" and 7 "strongly in favor".

the party of the prime minister Andrej Babiš ANO has changed its position over the three years, from being pro EU to a more reserved attitude.

4. Research design and operationalization

The research design of this work takes inspiration from contemporary research focused on observing politicization in mass media.

4.1. Case selection, data and temporal dimension

Case selection

The selected "unit" of research is the Czech Republic. The main reason for selecting this case is the lack of research into politicization in eastern enlargement countries. Some authors acknowledge the differences between the EU-15 countries and the former communist countries (Hoeglinger, 2016a, p. 40, 2016b, p. 58; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019, p. 1013). However, almost all research is focused on the EU-15 countries. The reason for the lack of research in the eastern enlargement states might stem from the lack of language skills and knowledge of the political system. Therefore, the second reason is the author's ability to understand both Czech language and Czech socio-political context. By writing this work in English this thesis could help non-Czech speakers to get a better understanding of the Czech-EU relation.

Data

The objective of this work is to observe the politicization of European Union. As mentioned above, the relevant and readily available data were articles in mass media. Both content and the number of articles themselves are of use for the purpose of answering the research questions.

To answer the research questions and hypotheses, this work uses full text articles gathered for an automated content analysis in R. However, due to translation constraints, only a limited amount of six thousand seven hundred and fifty articles could have been analyzed. With the time period spanning from the year 2003 to the end of the year 2017 a choice to select three printed media had to be done in order to have a representative sample of articles per year per medium.

Reflecting the article limit constraint, the media selection was based on three notions. First, the three media are the most read national printed media in the Czech Republic (Unie vydavatelů, 2020). Their cumulative impact measured as Gross rating point (GRP), with one GRP being equal to one percent of population older than 15 years that became acquainted with the medium in a given year, was high. The most read medium Blesk had

GRP of 17 in 2003 which declined to the level of 11 in 2017. The GRP of Mladá Fronta DNES decreased from 12.4 in 2003 to 6.7 in 2017. Lastly, Právo started with GRP of 4.8 in 2003 and ended with 3 in 2017. Furthermore, as in other mainstream academic articles, the selection contains two quality press journals – Právo and Mladá Fronta DNES. Second, the two quality press journals cover the both sides of political spectrum – Právo is left-leaning while Mladá Fronta DNES is right-leaning. Lastly, the journals are intended for broad audiences as they do not extensively focus on certain topics such as economics or politics. All three journals have also been well-established by 2003, the first year of observation.

The articles themselves were collected by using the NEWTON Media Search website, accessed through the university login.

The salience was calculated from annual Eurobarometer surveys gathered between the years 2003 and 2017 (European Commission, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2011a, 2013b, 2013a, 2014a, 2015, 2016a, 2017a, 2017b).

Temporal dimension

The observed period spans from the beginning of the year 2003 to the end of the year 2017. This period covers the referendum on accession of Czech Republic into the European union in May 2003 and the accession itself a year later in May 2004. The period also covers the deliberations around the EU Constitution and Lisbon treaty, the latter being especially relevant as the former Czech president Václav Klaus stalled to confirm the treaty and sign it into law (Reuters, 2009). Lastly, the period also covers two crises that have struck the EU in the second decade, namely the eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis, both of which were heavily discussed in Czech media.

The specific operationalization of the eurozone crisis is considers as the starting year of the crisis the year 2009 and as the ending year 2014. The refugee is considered to start in 2014 and to end by 2017.

4.2. Politicization index

The formula for calculating the politicization index is taken from the Hutter et al. monography Politicizing Europe: Integration and mass politics (2016, p. 10)[5].

Politicization = Salience x (Expansion of actors + Polarization)

Due to the constraints of this work the variable *expansion of actors* has been omitted as it proved to be too complicated to meaningfully operationalize on this scale. The expansion of actors can be for example operationalized as the expansion of people voicing their opinion towards the process of European integration. The expansion starts with ministries and continues with ruling party parliament members over opposition politicians, journalists to public protests (author). The nuclear sentence analysis, which allows for this level of detailed processing could have been used. However, with automated content analysis it has proved to be virtually impossible to create a reliable way of observing the actor expansion.

The omission of the *expansion of actors* variable is not decisive, as it is only additive element to the whole index.

Salience represents the importance citizens assign to European integration (de Wilde et al., 2016, pp. 6–7). The salience of European integration in the mass media is calculated as the yearly share of articles covering the European union[6] divided by the total number of articles published by the medium that year.

$$Salience = \frac{n(EU\ articles)}{n(total\ articles)}$$

The variable will always be in the interval from 0 to 1 which makes it easy for interpretation and understanding.

The variable of *polarization* corresponds to the spread of opinions towards the EU governance (de Wilde et al., 2016, pp. 6–7). The most polarized scenario is when exactly half of the values are against the EU governance, half are in favor with zero neutral. To capture the spread of the values standard deviation is used as higher standard deviation means higher spread.

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[5] This operationalization was also used for example by Hoeglinger (Hoeglinger, 2016a, p. 131).
[6] The whole keywords „Evropská unie OR EU OR Evropský parlament…"

This work uses two different operationalizations of polarization. The first one utilizes biannual Eurobarometer surveys that cover the whole observed period of pre-referendum 2003 to the end of 2017.[7] The specific question that best reflects the opinion of citizens towards the EU governance is "*Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY)'s membership of the European Union is...?*" with possible answers "A good thing," "A bad thing," "Neither good nor bad." This source for polarization was for example used by Rauh (Rauh, 2019). The standard deviation was not used on the aggregate values of the answer itself but on dummy variables where a positive response was coded as 1, negative as -1 and neutral as 0. The frequency of each of these entries depended on the number of participants in a given Eurobarometer survey.

The second method of operationalizing polarization uses the sentiment values of the articles themselves. Standard deviation was used as well to determine the dispersion of the values. However, there is a caveat, whereas the other approach is generalizable to the whole discourse, the polarization in this case only reflects the polarization presented by sentiments of the three media, namely Blesk, MF Dnes and Právo.

In order for some topic to be politicized it needs to be both salient and there must be significant divergence on the matter. That is why the politicization index proves to be an elegant indicator. Highly polarized yet marginal debate or mainstream debate with no dissenting voices do not represent a politicized debate.

4.3. Additional analyses

The second part of analysis delves into the content of the articles themselves. Each article is examined for topical key words and analyzed for determining the article's sentiment. This empirical part was done with the R programming language version 4.0.3, R Studio and following packages: readxl, googleLanguageR, sentimentr, tokenizers, openxlsx, lubridate, dplyr, ggplot2, quanteda, reshape2, moments, tidyr, stringr, Polychrome, rstatix, directlabels, patchwork (A. Mullen et al., 2018; Alboukadel, 2020; Benoit et al., 2018; Coombes et al., 2019; Dylan Hocking, 2021; Edmondson, 2020; Grolemund & Wickham, 2011; Komsta & Novomestky, 2015; Lin Pedersen, 2020; Rinker, 2019; Schauberger & Walker, 2020; Wickham, 2007, 2016, 2019; Wickham & Bryan, 2019; Wickham & Henry, 2020, 2020; Wickham & Müller, 2020).

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[7] For certain years only one Eurobarometer with this specific question was presented, therefore for these periods the one results were used for both semesters.

Text pre-processing and translation

As mentioned above, all articles were downloaded as Microsoft Excel sheets from the Newton Media Database which is a full text article database. The first step in the analysis was to clear every article of special metacharacters such as the new lines or tabs. Processed articles were then translated into English with the Google Translate API. A justification for this step needs to be presented. Despite the significant progress in recent years in the quality of the automated text translation, the loss of precision in the translation is inevitable. However, the quality of the translation is good enough to justify this decision. The packages readily available for sentiment analysis do not work with Czech language, the translation into English is therefore a necessity for this analysis. Lastly, unlike English which does not use declination, Czech have seven cases for singular and seven cases for plural nouns. It is, therefore, significantly easier to compute the topical analysis in English.

Sentiment analysis

For the purposes of deeper analytical insight and as one of the operationalizations of the politicization index sentiment analysis was used. This work is using the *sentimentR* package developed by Tyler Rinker which allows for reliable and understandable sentiment analysis.[8] The author describes the library as "*augmented dictionary lookup*". Essentially, the function calculates the sentiment based on a library of polarized words while acknowledging the role of "valence shifters" in the calculation. The sentence "I really like it." will therefore have different score than "I hardly like it." (Rinker, 2019).

The number of topics connected to the European Union is significant. For the sake of clarity only the sentence mentioning one of the keywords upon which were the articles selected from the Newton database were analyzed.[9] This approach attempts to reduce the noise present within the articles as described by Barberá et al. (Barberá et al., 2021, pp. 10–11). The sentiment analysis thus takes the average of sentence-level sentiment values of sentences mentioning the EU.

Topical analysis

The tools that come within the R framework also allows for the automated content analysis as needed for the second research question on the features of the politicization

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[8] https://github.com/trinker/sentimentr
[9] See the second part of Appendix for the keywords.

process in Czech Republic and the topics connected with it. The specific analytical tool used is the dictionary keyword matching. As the source of keywords, the Lexicoder Topic dictionary was used. Lexicoder offers 28 keyword categories such as macroeconomics, civil rights, healthcare, defense or labor (Albugh et al., 2013).

The European Union with its broad competences touches upon most of the national state's governance aspects. The categories within the topical library therefore cover healthcare, security and defense, migration, education, law and justice, social politics, welfare, economics, environment, finance. The main benefit of this analysis is discovering which topics are the most mentioned in the relation to the EU and the evolution of media coverage.

The matching process itself is based on regular expressions matching. See the first part of appendix for more details.

5. Descriptive part

This part focuses on description of the collected data and on the results of the analyses.

The collected text data from the Newton media archive represented a random sample of articles, with 4500 mentioning the EU and its institutions and additional 2250 articles not mentioning any specific topic used as a control group. The EU-related article selection contains 100 articles per year per medium while the control group contains 50 articles per year per medium.[10]

To answer the research question on the levels of politicization in the Czech Republic this work utilizes the *politicization index* as described by Hutter and Grande (Grande & Hutter, 2016a, p. 10). The index consists of two elements, namely salience and polarization that are multiplied by each other. Salience is operationalized as a yearly share of articles referring to the EU out of all articles. Overall, two politicization indices are presented within this work. Both use the same measurement of salience but differ on the operationalization of polarization. First index measures polarization through the standard deviation of Eurobarometer surveys, second through the standard deviation of media sentiment.

Salience

The salience is shown in the chart no. 4. It reveals three spikes in the years 2004, 2009 and 2014 through 2016, each followed by a notable decline. The peak of salience was reached in 2004 where the EU related articles reached a salience of 4.7 %. The low point was in 2013 with only 2.7 % salience. The average salience for the whole fifteen-year period was 3.5 %.

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[10] The number of selected articles is based on the Google Cloud Translate limit on the number of characters that can be translated.

Chart no. 4 – Salience as a yearly share of articles mentioning the EU
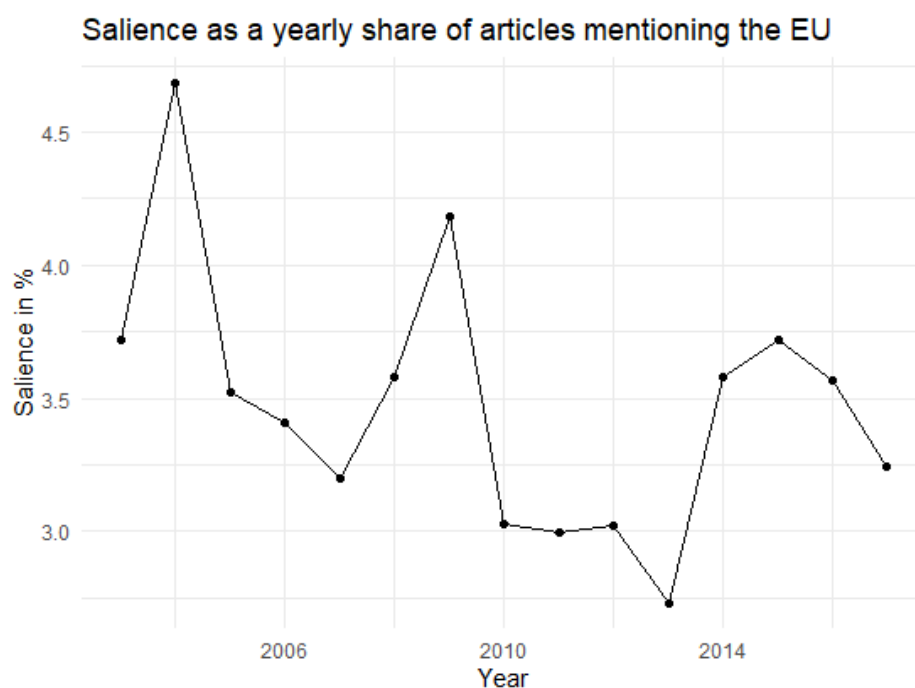
Source: Author

The topics mentioned in articles in 2003 and 2004 reflected the admission procedure to the European Union.[11] In 2003, when the national referendum on the accession took place, a total of 31.5 % of all EU related articles directly mentioned the Czech admission into the EU.[12] In 2004, the year Czech Republic entered the EU, the share of accession-related articles declined slightly to 28.8 %. The deliberations around the adoption of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe are discussed only in 2.7 % of the articles. Lastly, the first Czech European Parliament gathered attention of 7.3 % of articles. The overall rise of salience might be potentially explained by detailed and frequent description of topics connected to the EU as the Czech admission represented a historical landmark event.

The increase in salience from 2007 to 2009 correspond to the debates on the Lisbon treaty that reflected the previously failed ratification of the "European Constitution." The share of articles covering the Lisbon treaty started at 3.3 % in 2007 and increased over 8 % in 2008 to 10.9 % in 2009. In 2009 two additional EU events happened as it was also the year of the first Czech presidency of the Council of the EU and second European

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[11] For the exact search terms in the database see the second part of Appendix.
[12] The share represents the population of articles present in the Newton media search database rather than the sample of 4500 articles.

Parliament elections in the Czech Republic. The Czech presidency was covered by 13.4 % of articles and the European Parliament elections was covered by 5.3 % of articles. The global financial crisis was mentioned in 4.3 % of articles referencing the EU.

The third increase in salience started in 2014, the year of third European parliament elections and financial crisis. The elections were mentioned in 7 % of the articles referring to the EU. Financial crisis, on the other hand, was mentioned only in 2 % of articles. The third salience growth peaked in 2015; a significant event that garnered media attention was the refugee crisis that was covered by 26.5 % of articles. The share increased to 30.2 % in 2016 but decreased to 23.2 % in 2017.

The number of EU-related topics that could have been discussed is large, it is therefore expected that the total levels of salience will be added up from multiple topics beyond the ones described. Nonetheless, the data suggest that the driver of high salience could not have been the so-called first-order elections, i.e., elections to the chamber of deputies or presidential elections. The elections to the Chamber of Deputies took place in 2006, 2010, 2013 and 2017, the first direct presidential took place in 2013. In neither of those years did the salience grow in comparison to the previous year.

Next chart illustrates the salience by medium. The chart no. 5 shows an upward trend for all three media in 2004. In direct contrast to Právo and MF Dnes, Blesk salience decreased between the years 2008 and 2009. The salience increased for all three media between 2013 and 2014 albeit on a different scope. The chart also illustrates the vastly different salience levels across the three media. The 15-year average salience was 1.3 % for Blesk, 3.3 % for MF Dnes and 5.8 % for Právo.

Chart no. 5 – Salience by medium as a share of articles mentioning the EU

Salience by medium as a share of articles mentioning the EU
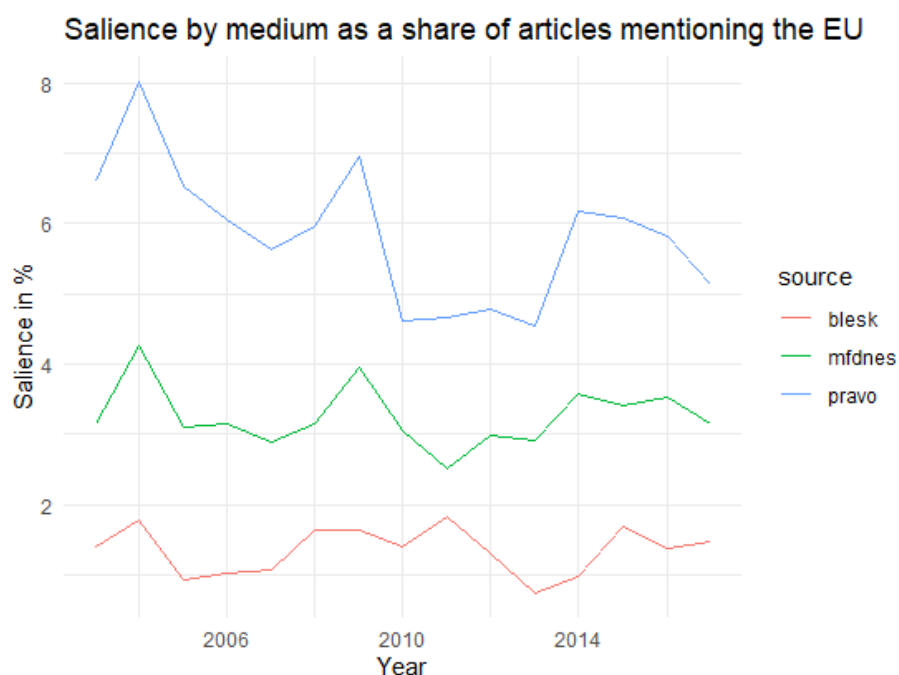
Source: Author

Overall, the coverage of the EU is not high given how substantial impact the EU governance has on Czech citizens.

5.1. Politicization index with Eurobarometer polarization

The first operationalization of politicization uses a standard deviation on the question of the benefits of the EU membership to approximate polarization of society at large.

Polarization in the years 2003 and 2004 was among the highest levels for the whole observed period followed by a drop to the lowest recorded levels. From then on it recorded two noticeable increases in 2007 and 2011 with temporary decline in the meantime. The steep upwards trend started in 2012 and peaked in 2015 which was, once again, followed by a sharp decline.

The initial polarization levels correspond to the admission of the Czech Republic into the EU. Similarly, the peak in 2015 corresponds to the year of refugee crisis. Further details are described in the following chapters.

Chart no. 6 depicts the salience and polarization combined and chart no. 7 shows the final politicization trendline, which is the multiple of the salience and polarization. The chart reveals three major spikes in polarization in the years 2004, 2009 and 2015 which

corresponds to the Czech Republic joining the EU, Czech presidency in the Council of the EU and the ratification of the Lisbon treaty. The increase in 2015 corresponded to the events of the refugee crisis. The chart suggest that it was the salience that drew the politicization, rather than polarization as the salience varied to much greater extent.

Chart no. 6 – Salience and Eurobarometer polarization
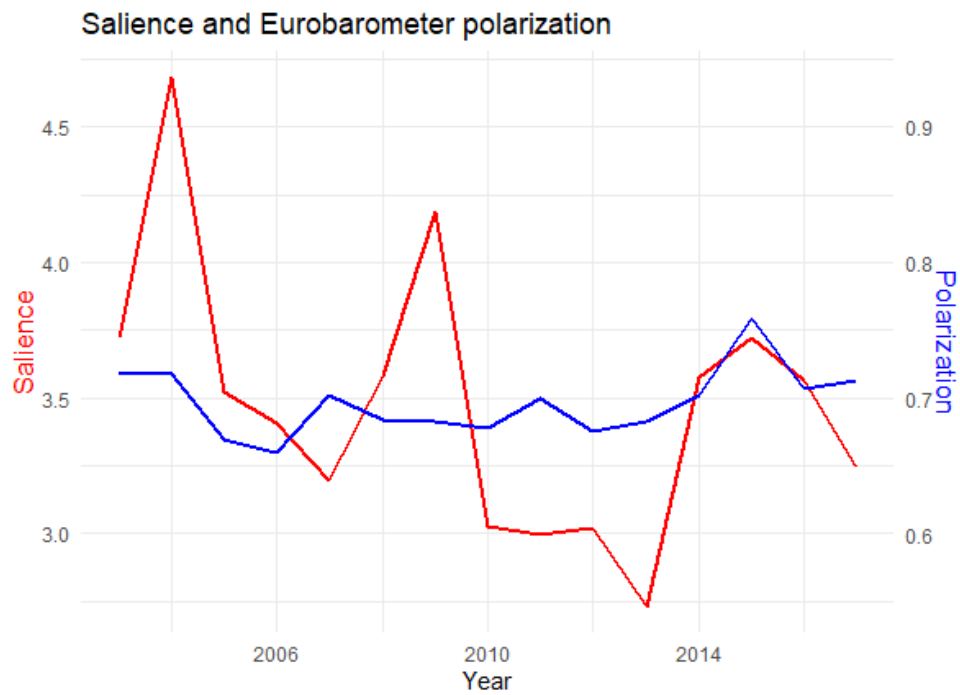
Source: Author

Chart no. 7 – Politicization line with salience and Eurobarometer polarization

Politicization line with salience and Eurobarometer polarization
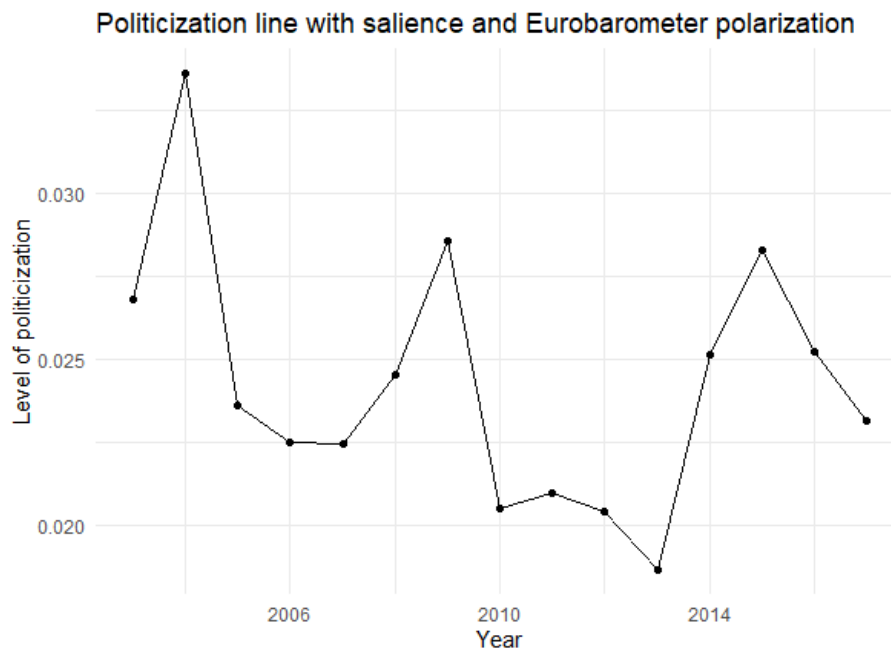
Source: Author

5.2. Politicization index with media sentiment polarization

Second method of measuring polarization was done through the standard deviation of the article sentiment. The following chart no. 8 represents the average polarization across the three media. The onset of the polarization in the years 2003 and 2004 was at all-time low levels which followed by a rapid polarization growth peaking in the year 2006. Polarization then decreased significantly to reach a low point in 2008 only to start rising again reaching the all-time high level of polarization in 2011. A decrease in polarization followed with a final increase in 2015.

Chart no. 8 – Salience and article sentiment polarization

Salience and article sentiment polarization
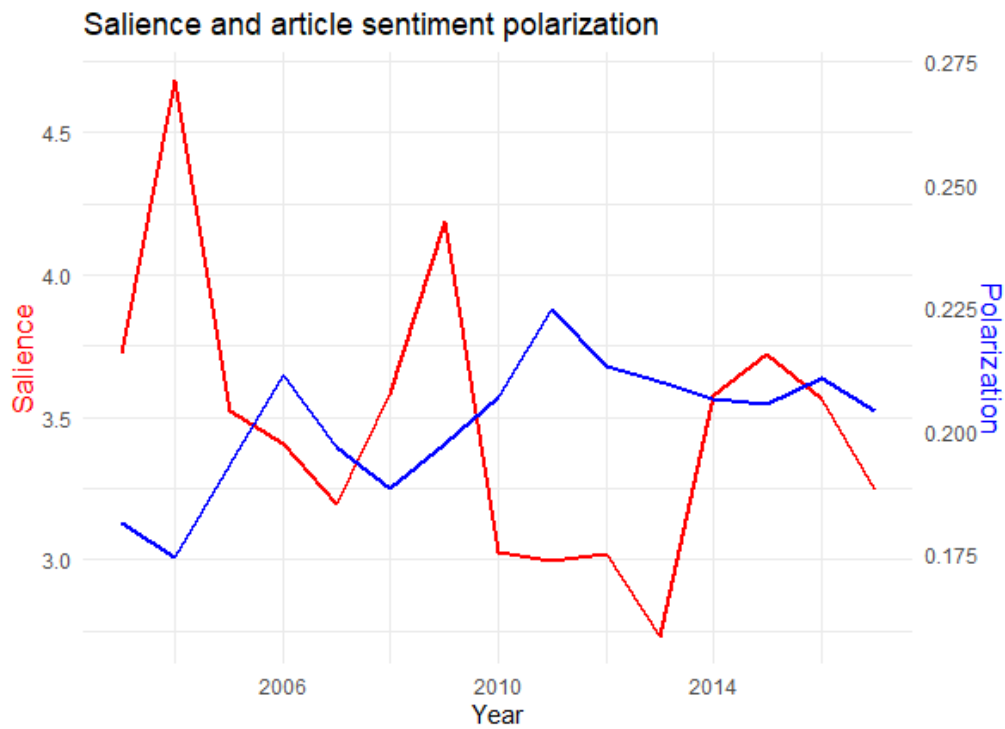
Source: Author

In a similar way to the previous politicization index using Eurobarometer as the source of polarization, this politicization trendline using the polarization measured through article sentiment shares the same peaks as can be seen in chart no. 9. The increases more pronounced in the years 2009 and 2014 to 2016. Furthermore, salience is also the main driver of politicization.

Chart no. 9 – Politicization line with media polarization

Politicization line with media polarization
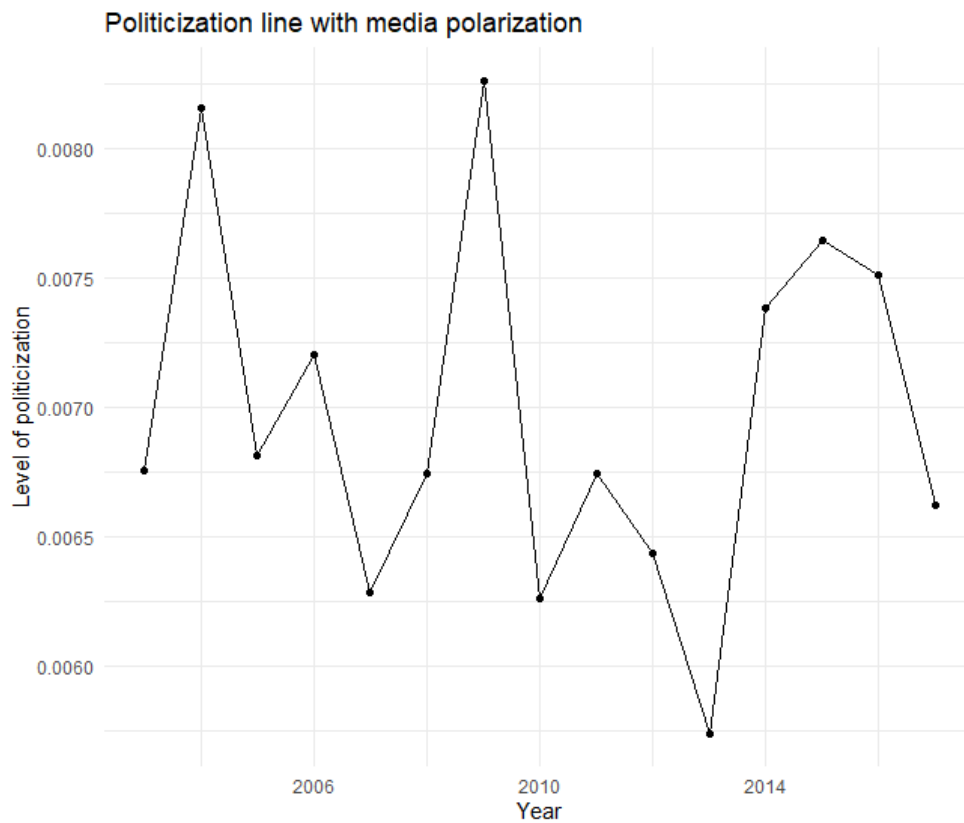
Source: Author

It is important to keep in mind that the polarization represents the divergence of opinion on the EU in a given year. Low polarization could, therefore, mean that most of the people agree that the EU is a good or a bad thing.

Comparison of the two polarizations shows that the media polarization is more pronounced in its variation. It is possible that people are first confronted with the narrative towards the EU in media and subsequently take their own position towards it. Another possible explanation could be the selection bias of the three media. Theoretically, should the analysis be done on all Czech media then the charts might overlap to a greater extent.

6. Explanatory part

This chapter evaluates the proposed research questions and hypotheses.

6.1. Research questions

The results presented in the previous chapter revealed that in relation to the first research question on the presence of a process of rising politicization in the Czech Republic there actually is not such a process. The politicization calculated based on the model using Eurobarometer survey as a proxy to polarization shows only several spikes in the levels of polarization. Furthermore, the last observed year of 2017 had lower levels of politicization than the first observed year 2003. Likewise, politicization calculated with the second measurement with article-level sentiment polarization showed increase during the same spikes as the first one, however, the overall level of politicization as of the year 2017 did increase in comparison to the 2003.

The politicization trendline of the Eurobarometer and media polarization models could be best described as the *punctuated politicization* as described by Grande and Kriesi because politicization does increase albeit not gradually (Grande & Kriesi, 2016, p. 283). Possible explanation behind these sharp increases could be delivered by the authority-transfer and critical period hypotheses.

6.2. Hypotheses

The answers to the third research question on the causes of politicization two hypothesized drivers are presented, the authority transfer hypothesis and crisis events hypothesis.

Authority transfer hypothesis

The authority transfer hypothesis is based on two assumptions – citizens care about who governs over them and they can identify the decision making authority (de Wilde et al., 2016, p. 10). This could take the form of joining the EU or by amending the already existing legal framework. Both cases happened in the observed period.

Closer inspection into the elevated level of salience revealed that indeed the topics related to the admission of Czech Republic to the EU in 2004 accounted for 31.5 % of salience value. Additional 2.7 % of articles mentioned the European constitution. In the following years the constitutional debate represented only a small fraction of the overall level of salience. The European constitution was mentioned in only 7.1 % of EU related articles

in 2005. The second eastern enlargement of the EU entailing Bulgaria and Romania was covered by 5.9 % of articles. Lisbon treaty was referred to in 3.3 % of articles in 2007 and in 8.1 % of articles in 2008. In 2009, when the Lisbon treaty was ratified by all member states, the share of EU articles mentioning it was at 10.9 %. Finally, the last hypothesized event was the enlargement which added Croatia to the Union in 2013 which was covered by 3.7 % of articles.

The first operationalization of politicization index based on Eurobarometer polarization identifies the 2004 and 2009 increases in politicization in line with the hypothesis. The increases in politicization as portrayed by trendline correspond to the hypothesized events of Czech accession and treaty revision in the form of Lisbon treaty. Scrutinizing the polarization as presented by Eurobarometers has one limit – the used EB question on the *EU being a good/neutral/bad thing for the member state* entails all the aspects of the EU governance. It is therefore important to recognize the limits of the possible interpretations as there is no hypothesized link between any single Eurobarometer question and the overall attitude towards the EU governance. Nonetheless it is reasonable to assume that during the years 2003 and 2004, i.e., around the accession of the Czech Republic into the European Union, citizens mostly referred to the accession. The polarization in 2009 is more difficult to precisely explain as the citizens could have projected their opinion towards the first Czech Presidency at the Council of the EU rather than the Lisbon treaty. Nonetheless, the peak of polarization in the year 2009 suggest that possibly either of these events substantially affected the opinions of the citizens towards the EU.

The second operationalization of the politicization index with the sentiment polarization shows similar peaks in politicization as the first measurement. To see whether the authority transfer events could have increased polarization a comparison of standard deviation (i.e., polarization) of articles mentioning the authority transfer moments and other articles was done. Unfortunately, neither of the hypothesized events came out from the analysis as statistically significant. Nonetheless, the increases in chart of this politicization trendline clearly supports the authority transfer hypothesis.

The authority transfer sub-hypothesis took advantage of the fact that in the year 2009 there were two events connected to the EU significant for the Czech Republic. Namely, the Lisbon treaty adoption and the first Czech Presidency at the council of the EU. The analysis of these two events allow for a deeper insight into the politicization level in that

year and also for a test of the authority transfer hypothesis from the perspective of a competing explanation, rather than from a perspective of an (absence of) increase in the levels of politicization. The analysis reveals that it was the presidency that was politicized more as it was more salient. The presidency was salient at 13.4 % of all EU articles versus the 10.9 % for the Lisbon treaty adoption. A t-test on the polarization of articles was done to see whether the polarization of Lisbon treaty adoption was more polarizing than the Presidency, however, once again the resulting p-value was not significant.

Crisis hypothesis

Second hypothesized cause of politicization expects the increase in politicization based on the EU undergoing certain crisis events. These events were operationalized as the eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis.

The share of articles mentioning the eurozone crisis started at 4.3 % in 2009, followed by 3.8 % in 2010, 6.4 % in 2011, 5.2 % in 2012, 2.8 % in 2013 and 2.1 % in 2014. The shares might seem low, but one should keep in mind that these values account only for articles mentioning both the EU and the specific crisis. This would also suggest that for example the financial crisis was mostly debated within the context of Czech institutions and solutions rather than in connection to the EU or Eurozone. The refugee crisis gathered attention by 6.7 % in 2014 followed by a steep increase to 28.3 % in 2015. A downward trend ensued with the share being at 25.1 % in 2016 and 16.8 % in 2017.

The results of the first operationalization of politicization index proved to be rather interesting. It is reasonable to assume that the questions in the Eurobarometer on the crisis events could reveal us some trends. In the years 2009 throughout 2013 the economic situation and member state public finances were seen as the top issues facing the EU by Czech respondents with the share ranging from 77 % in 2009 to 43 % in 2013 (European Commission, 2009c, p. 7, 2010b, p. 8, 2011b, p. 35, 2012, p. 35, 2013c, p. 10). In the year 2014 the importance given to economic situation of the EU was almost the same as that the issue of migration with share of 25 % to 26 % respectively (European Commission, 2014b, p. 3). From 2015 onwards the main issue of the EU as deemed by Czechs was migration and the threat of terrorism. In 2015 the immigration was by far the single most important issue the EU was facing at that time with 76 % of Czech responders selecting it; the second issue was terrorism with 32 % (European Commission, 2016b, p. 2). The economic situation was only the third issue with the share of responses at 12 %. In 2016 the shares were 63 % for immigration and 47 % for terrorism. In 2017, the last observed

year, immigration and terrorism had shares of 58 % and 53 % respectively (European Commission, 2017c, p. 2). The EU average share for immigration and terrorism was consistently lower by approximately 18 percentage points in comparison to the Czech share.

The polarization trendline recorded a year-on-year increase in 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2017. The all-time-high polarization was in 2015, the peak of the refugee crisis. The results suggest that the operationalized crisis events had a significant effect on the overall level of polarization.

The second politicization operationalization which used article sentiment as the measurement of polarization showed increases in politicization as expected by the hypothesis. This index identified increases during the eurozone crisis with a notable increase in 2011, as well as the politicization peak during refugee crisis in 2015.

Besides the politicization composite of salience, as described above, the data for this operationalization also allow for deeper insight into polarization on the article level. It is possible select articles based on the topics they mention and subsequently calculate their polarization to see whether the hypothesized event did indeed increase the politicization. The comparison between polarization of the articles mentioning the crises and other articles was also done. The t-test was statistically significant eurozone crisis in 2011, however, the results went against the hypothesis as the articles not mentioning the eurozone crisis had higher standard deviation, i.e., polarization. The polarization of articles mentioning the refugee crisis in 2015 was higher, therefore it contributed to the overall increase of politicization. For the other hypothesized years with crises the results were not statistically significant.

The second sub-hypothesis allows for a test of the main crisis events hypothesis against the authority transfer hypothesis. The logic is that the driver of politicization during migration crisis might not had been just the perceived threat to identity but also the institutional framework used to resolve the crisis. The abovementioned Eurobarometer results show that the identity related aspects were important for the people. The comparison of salience for each of these two issues shows that the articles mentioning the EU and identity aspects were at 11.3 % in 2015 while the institutional aspects were salient at 10.2 %. The following year in 2016 the identity salience was at 10.1 % and the institutional aspects at 8.7 %. In 2017, however, the shares switched as identity salience

was now lower than the salience of institutional aspects with 5.7 % and 7.7 % respectively. This sub-hypothesis, therefore, shows that the politicization during the refugee crisis was as much driven by the identity as by institutional arrangements.

The comparison of polarization of articles unfortunately did not yield results as the differences between polarizations were not statistically significant. Therefore, only the part of salience from the politicization index could have been observed.

The crisis events hypothesis offered an intriguing insight into the drivers of politicization. The Eurozone crisis as a driver of politicization remains unanswered. The increases in polarization in both politicization operationalizations are in favor of this hypothesis. The polarization of the second operationalization with article sentiment as polarization measurement recorded an all-time-high level of polarization in 2011. Furthermore, the citizens were concerned about the state of the economy during the Eurozone crisis as was recorded by Eurobarometer survey. On the other hand, the level of salience, both of the general EU level and the specific salience of the crisis itself, was quite low. The second hypothesized event of refugee crisis as a driver of politicization proved to be a rather good explanation of the overall level of politicization. Both operationalizations showed significant increases in both salience and polarization; the primary concern of citizens was immigration as recorded by the Eurobarometer and even the polarization as calculated from articles themselves showed that the articles mentioning the refugee crisis were statistically significantly more polarized than the articles not mentioning the crisis.

7. Additional findings

This part presents findings helpful to understanding of the politicization process in a greater context. It presents the description and comparison of the core and control sample articles as well as the sentiment and article complexity analysis.

7.1. Article length and complexity

The overall EU article length varied significantly among the three observed media. Presumably, the reason for that is the target audience of each medium. The length varied with Blesk averaging at 1808 characters, MF Dnes was at 3184 characters and Právo at 2696 characters. Apart from Právo, the length of the articles increased over time as shown by the chart no. 10. The length of control sample articles was quite different. The average length of Blesk article was 1071 characters, MF Dnes had the average of 1766 characters and the average of Právo was 1651 characters as can be seen in chart 10. The length of articles increased between the years 2003 and 2017 from 1047 characters to 3217 in the case of Blesk, from 2631 to 3859 characters in the case of MF Dnes. In the case of Právo the length did not increase significantly, the increase was from 2716 characters to 2741.

Chart no 10 – Article length comparison
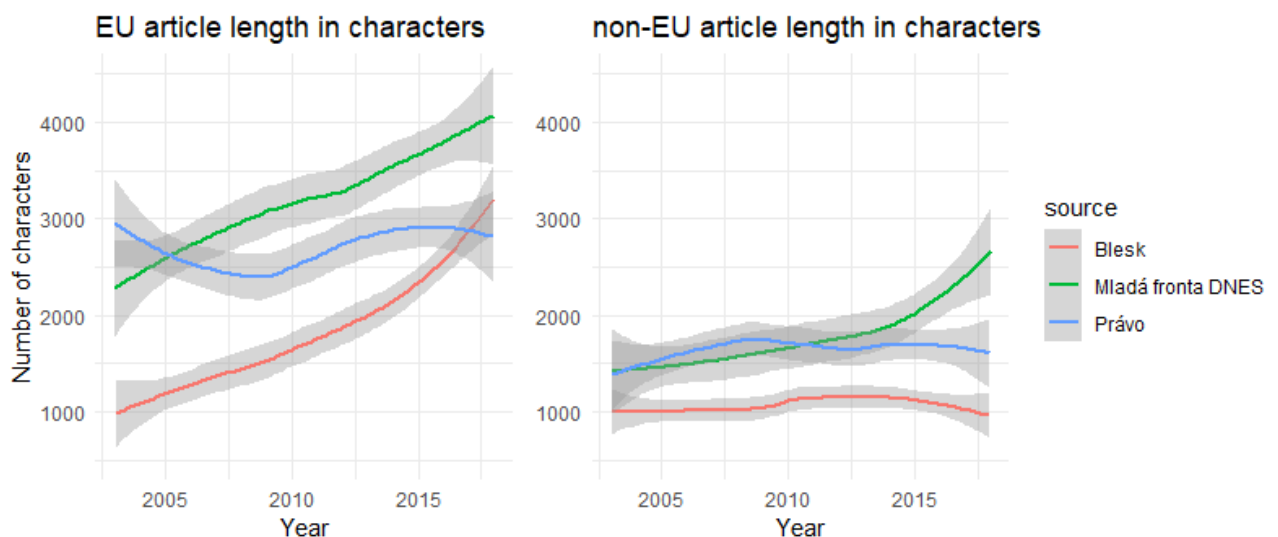
Source: Author

Another aspect of the articles is their complexity. One of the approaches of measuring the complexity was presented in an article on the rhetoric of public speeches of national and

European leaders by Rauh et al., where the authors used a Flesch readability test (Rauh et al., 2020). Similarly to this work, Rauh et al. auto translated the speeches into English and then calculated the Flesch readability score. However, since the test was designed for English, due reservation is warranted (Flesch, 1948). The complexity score is differentiated into levels with 5th grade level being the easiest to understand at the score of 100 to 90 over to the opposite end of the spectrum to professional school level of 10 to 0 complexity score (Flesch, 1948, p. 230). However, due to the fact that the articles were translated into English the Flesch test is presented here as a mere text-complexity comparison, rather than a definitive and authoritative score.

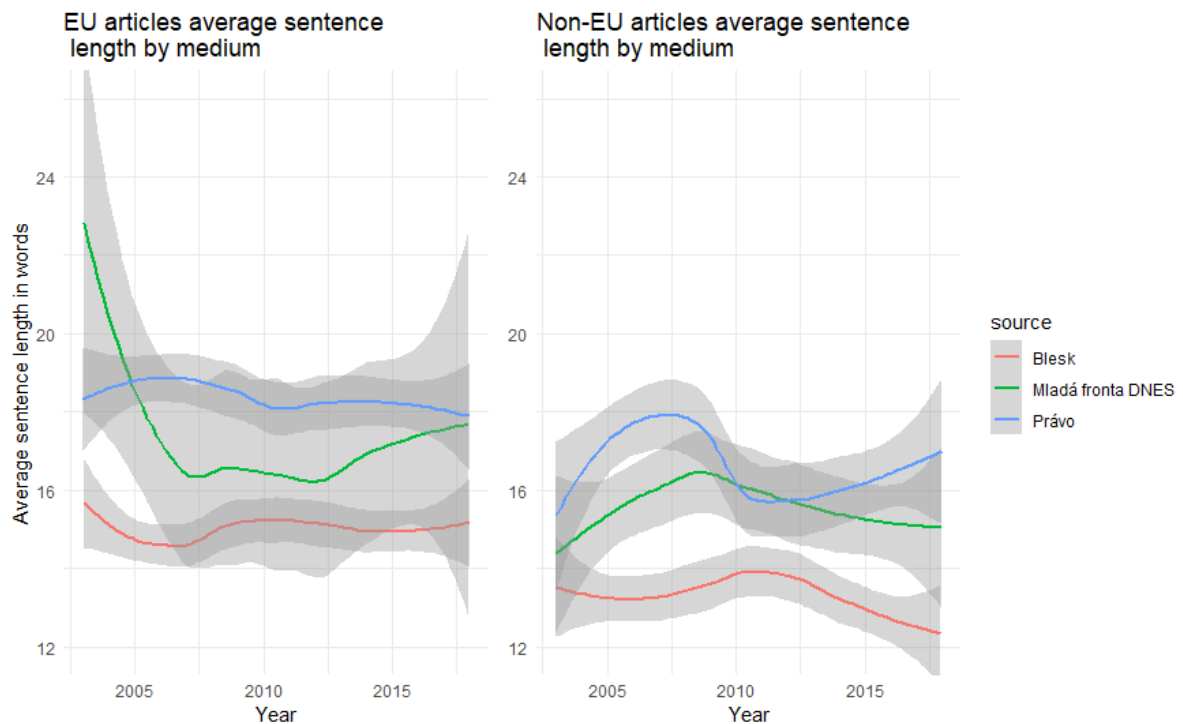Chart no. 11 – Flesch readability test comparison
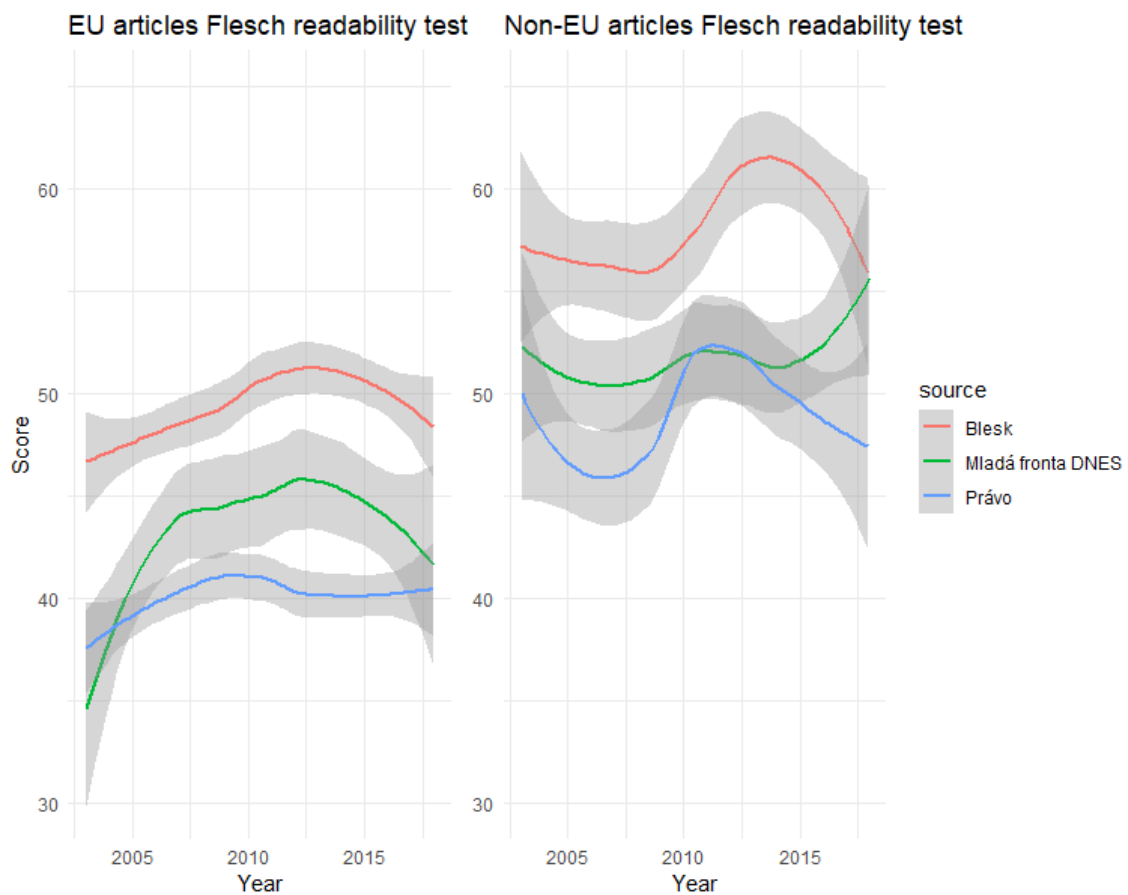
Source: Author

The chart no. 11 indicates that the EU articles published in Blesk are the most easily readable. On the other side of the spectrum is Právo that is on 81 % average of Blesk. MF Dnes started at the beginning of the observed period with more complex articles with the continuous trend for several years of decreasing the complexity. From 2012 onwards the

complexity of MF Dnes articles started to rise again. In comparison, the control sample reveals that the readability of the non-EU articles is easier.

Second way of calculating the complexity of articles that is not language-specific is to take the average sentence length in words. This is illustrated in the second chart.

Chart no. 12 – Average sentence length comparison

The chart no. 12 clearly illustrates that the tabloid Blesk articles referring to the EU are the least complex and, on the other hand, articles in Právo are the most complex. The resulting ranking of media are the same as in the Flesch readability test. The average lengths of articles were 15 words for Blesk, 17 for MF Dnes and 18 for Právo. The order of article complexity remains the same for the control sample of articles yet with lower complexity. The averages were 13 words per sentence for Blesk, 16 for MF Dnes and 17 for Právo.

Overall, the most complex articles were consistently published by Právo. The articles of MF Dnes were the most complex at the beginning of the observed period, however, sharply declined in the successive years. Unlike Právo or Blesk, the complexity of MF Dnes articles varied significantly.
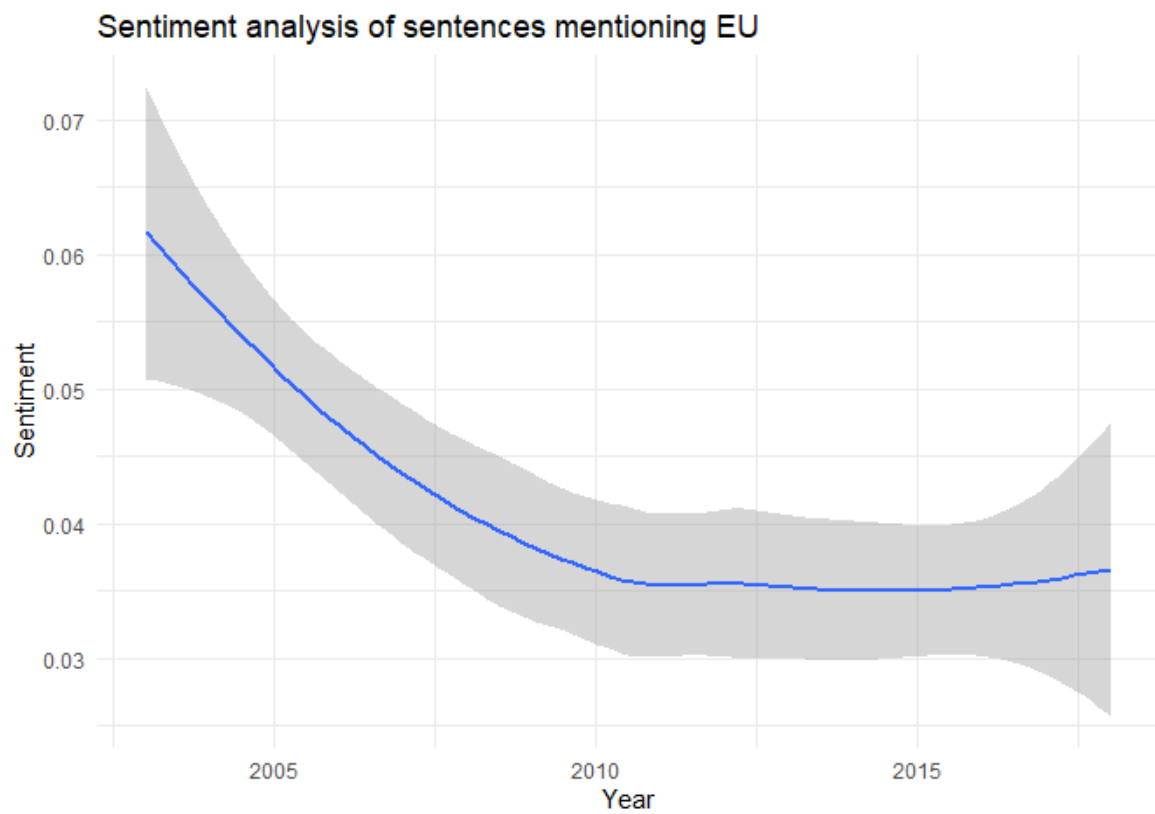
7.2. Sentiment

The sentiment analysis is another analytical tool used in this work to get better insight into the politicization process. The calculation of politicization has been done with the R package sentimentR that uses and augmented dictionary lookup to determine the sentiment of a sentence (Rinker, 2019). In order to decrease the noise, from for example long articles mentioning the EU only marginally, an approach of calculating the sentiment only for the sentences directly mentioning the EU was chosen. The sentence-level sentiments were then averaged on article-level and used for the analysis.

The overall sentiment towards the EU has been in a steady decline as shown by the chart no. 13. The cross-media yearly sentiment average has fallen by around half in the 15-year time frame. Despite this decline the overall average remains above zero, i.e., it has not reached a negative sentiment. Looking into the sentiment by medium reveals, once again, that there are noticeable differences between the three sources as depicted by the chart no. 14.

Both Blesk and Právo were at the all-time high levels of sentiment at the beginning of the observed period. Their sentiment then decreased continually only to be start rising again around the year 2012. In contrast, the sentiment of MF Dnes remained stable at levels close to all time high until approximately 2011, when the sentiment started to decrease significantly.

Chart no. 13 – Sentiment analysis of sentences mentioning EU

In this detailed look Blesk is shown to be the only medium whose sentiment partly reached negativity for a longer period of 2007 – 2015.

Chart no. 14 – Sentiment analysis of sentences mentioning EU by medium
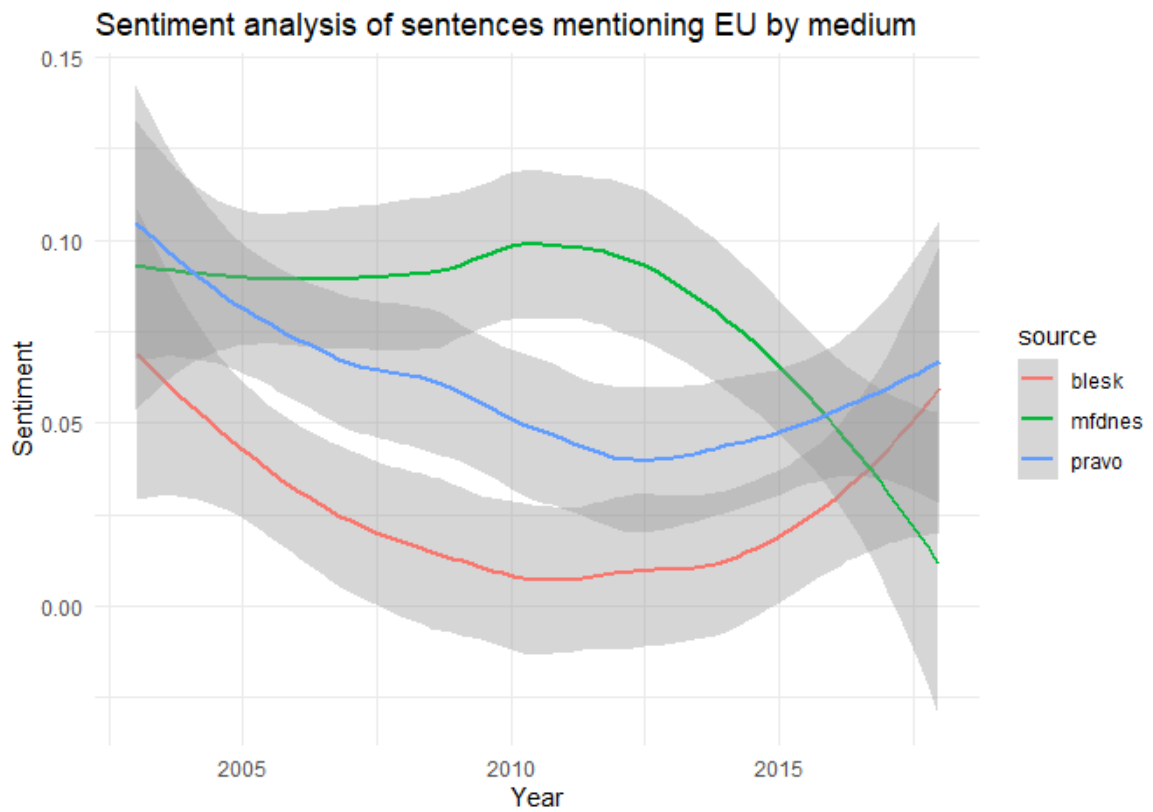
For the purpose of comparison with the control group article-level sentiment analysis was done on both core and control groups of articles.

Chart no. 15 – Sentiment analysis comparison
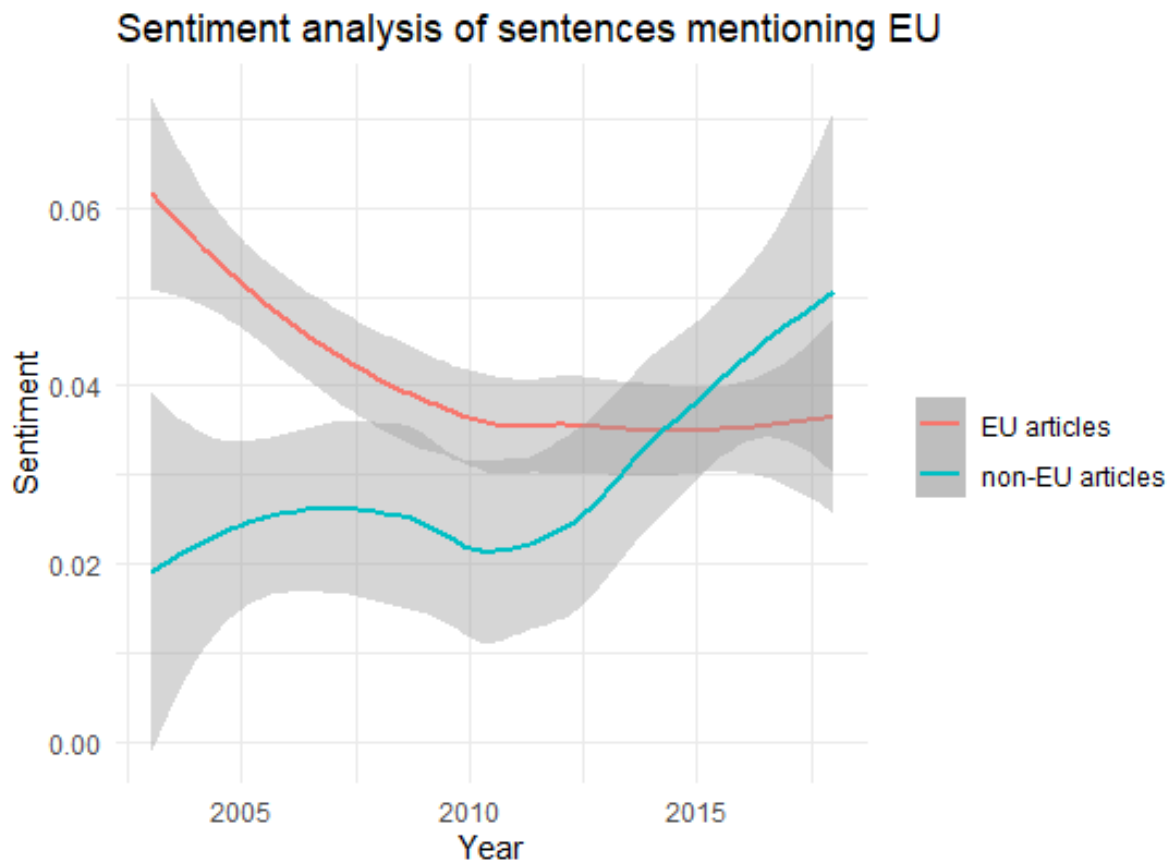
Source: Author

The chart no. 15 clearly shows that the gradual decrease in the sentiment of articles mentioning the EU is not a part of a broader trend of article sentiment decline. This is an essential finding as it shows that the EU-related news form a specific subgroup of articles. The sentiment values of both sets of articles are significantly different from each other.[13]

Chart no. 16 – Sentiment analysis of control sample of articles by medium

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[13] The p-value for this t-test was at 0.0004.

Sentiment analysis of control sample of articles by medium
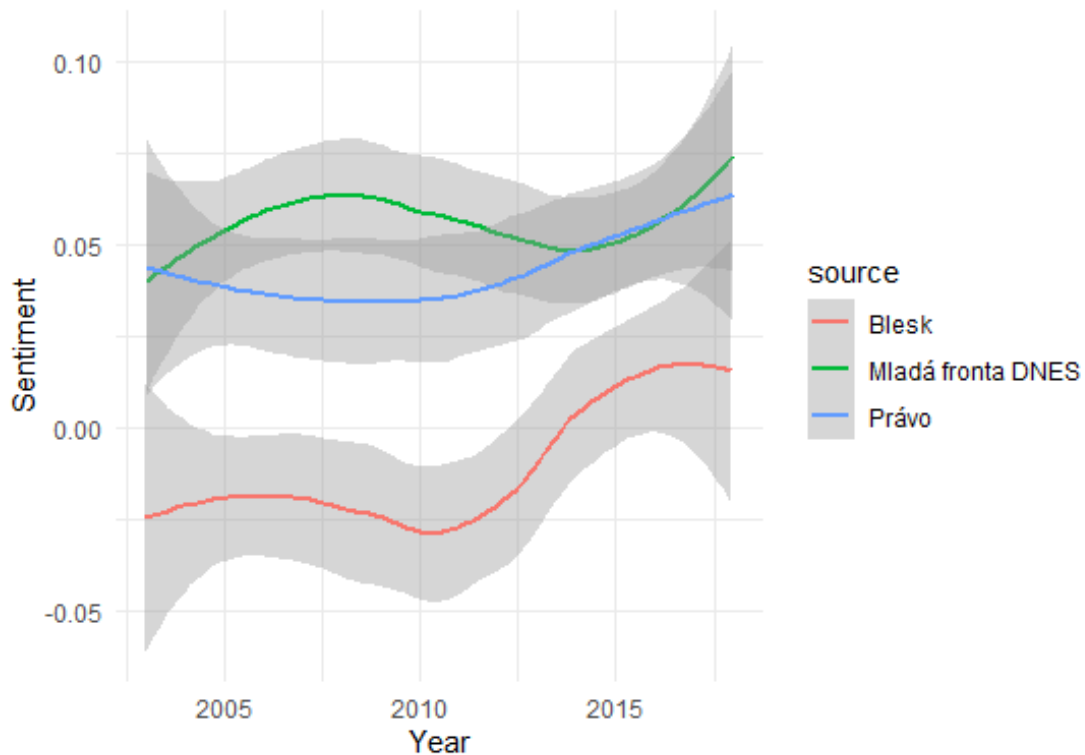
7.3. Topical analysis

In order to thoroughly understand politicization an automated content analysis was performed on the collection of all 4500 EU articles. The automated content analysis used topics from the Lexicoder topical dictionary; the included topics were agriculture, civil rights, defense, economics (combined dictionary of macroeconomics and finance), education, energy, environment, labor, and migration.

The results revealed that 684 articles did not mention any of these topics. The broad authority the EU has over or alongside the member states and the narrower selection of topics by this work mean that all the possible topics mentioned in connection to it span beyond the scope of this work. Furthermore, from the chart it is clear that the number of topics mentioned per article increased over the observed period while the overall number of articles mentioning the EU decreased. It means that in this sense the topics were getting increasingly more complex as the amount of topics per article increased steadily. This finding complements the fact that the average article length increased from 2131 characters in 2003 to 3272 in 2017.

Chart no. 17 – Share of topics in the EU articles

Share of topics in the EU articles.
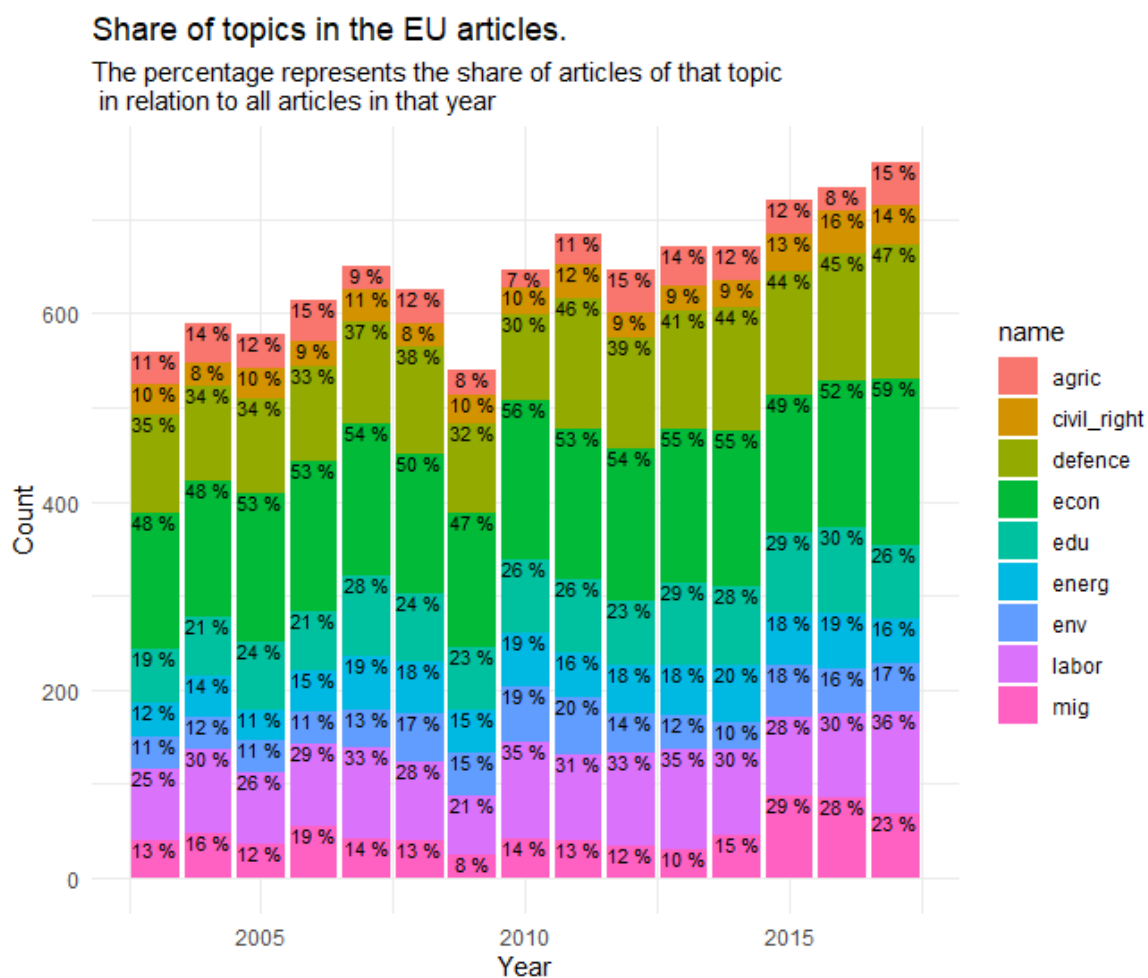
The percentage represents the share of articles of that topic
in relation to all articles in that year

The topical analysis of the articles mentioning the EU revealed that the three most covered issue mentioned within the EU related articles were economics[15], defense and agriculture. The share of articles mentioning economics oscillated between 47 % and 59 %, defense was covered by 30 % to 47 % of articles, lastly, coverage of agricultural topics ranged between 24 % to 38 % share of articles. Topics of labor and education followed with only a few percentage points less. On the other hand, the topics of civil rights, environment, migration and energy did not attract much attention. These results suggest that the EU is mostly connected to economics, defense and agricultural topics. This distribution of

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[14] The sum of shares goes over a hundred percent, the reason is that the share represents in what percentage of articles was the topic mentioned. For example, the topic of economy was mentioned in 48 % of all observed articles in 2003.

[15] Due to their topical similarity between dictionary entries of Lexicoder, finance and macroeconomics were combined into a single category.

topics is mostly stable across the whole 15 years, only with defense becoming more prominent in the recent years.

In comparison the topics from sample articles are more random and do not lean towards the topic of economics and defense that heavily. Nonetheless, the topics of defense, economics and labor are among the most frequently mentioned.

Chart no. 18 – Share of topics in the control sample of articles
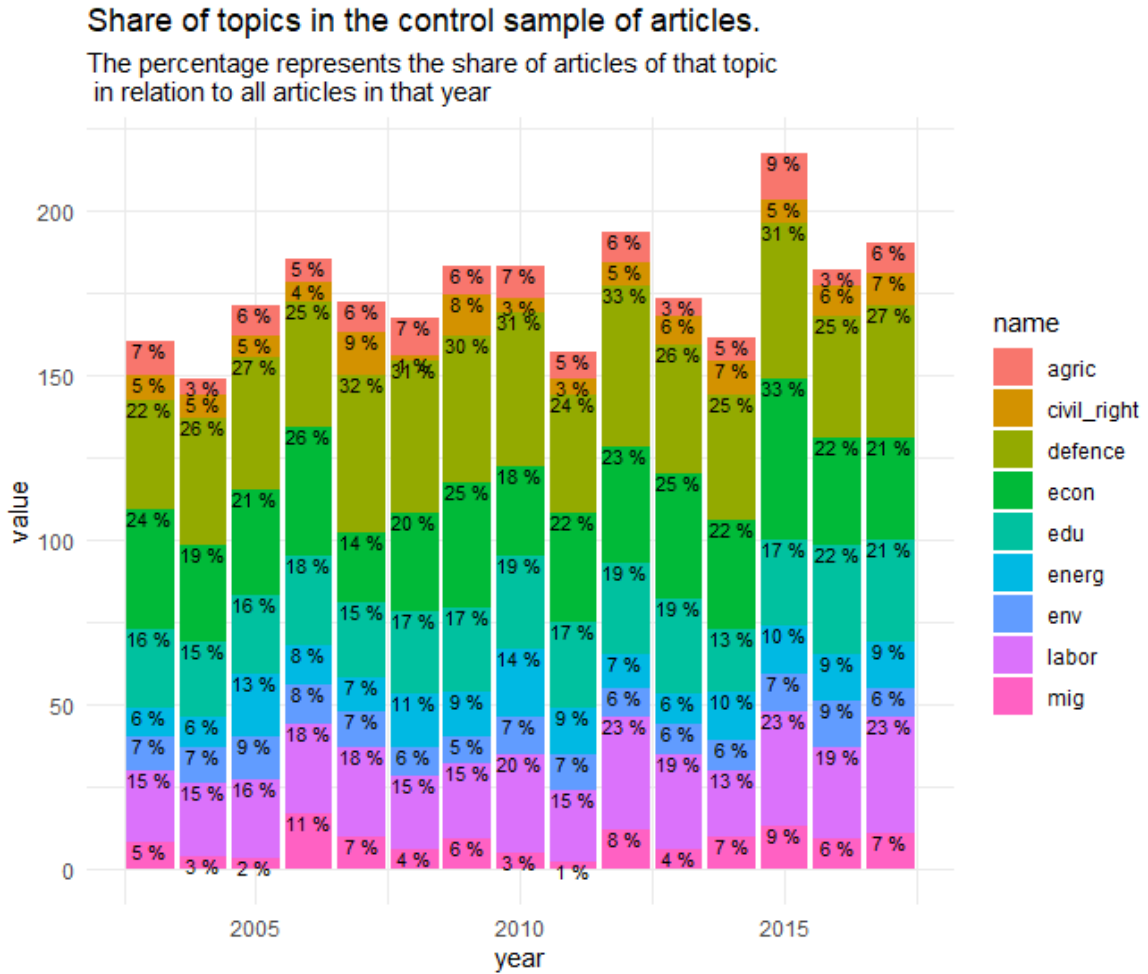
Source: Author

Politicians and politicization

The examination of media coverage of politicians in executive function reveal us what their position in the politicization process is. The observed functions were prime minister, president and minister of foreign affairs as all of these three functions interact with international politics in general and the EU specifically. Over the observed period, there

were eight prime ministers[16], five ministers of foreign affairs and two presidents. All of the ministers of foreign affairs were the least mentioned in EU related articles with the average share being 2.4 %, prime ministers had a mean share of 7.6 %.

The most frequently mentioned person with the share of 9.1 % was prime minister Bohuslav Sobotka (2013-2017), followed by the president Miloš Zeman (2013-) and prime ministers Jiří Paroubek (2005-2006) and Mirek Topolánek (2006-2009) who all had the share of 8 %.

This finding shows two interesting things. First, the people in main institutional functions are not mentioned in a significant number of articles. This suggests that the "average" EU related article does not concern itself with the "high politics" or at least does not mention the politicians directly. Second, the results also imply that the agenda related to the EU has been taken up by the prime ministers or presidents rather than by the ministers of foreign affairs. Due to the governance interaction among the EU which is based on the interaction between the heads of member states through the European Council and the ministers on specific agenda through the Council of the European Union this implication is not entirely surprising[17]. The fact that prime ministers had the average share of mentions in the articles at 7.6 % effectively mean, that they were in the best position to influence the media audiences.

The data also reveal further nuances. Václav Klaus, who is a vocal Eurosceptic, was the president when Czech Republic joined the EU and during the first Czech presidency in the Council of the EU, nonetheless, he was on the fifth place in terms of salience. On the other hand, Jiří Paroubek, who was the prime minister for only 16 months between April 2005 and September 2006 and during whose tenure there were no significant EU-related events had the second highest number of mentions.

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[16] Two prime ministers – Jan Fischer and Jiří Rusnok – had taken the function only temporarily as the heads of interim governments.

[17] This, however, could have been different. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in some countries focus more on the EU issues. Furthermore, during the Czech presidency in the Council of the EU, a position of Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs was temporarily brought into existence.

8. Discussion

The results present us with an interesting picture on the nature of politicization in Czech media. The two operationalized methods of calculating politicization revealed that politicization of the European Union is indeed present in the media and society at large, however, with levels that are not significantly elevated. This is confirmed by the absolute low level of salience, operationalized as the share of articles mentioning the EU out of all articles for a given newspaper in a given year, which varied on average between 2.7 % and 4.7 %. Given the importance the EU presents for the lives of the Czech citizens the number is surprisingly low. Furthermore, the general theoretical assumption on the significant and irreversible politicization after the Maastricht treaty adoption cannot be confirmed as the politicization levels varied significantly in both operationalizations during the observed period (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). The results of this work are in line with Grande, Hutter and Kriesi who note that the politicization of the EU is indeed limited (Grande & Kriesi, 2016, p. 281; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019, p. 1013). The reason for the low politicization could lie, besides the settings of the politicization measurement, in the fact that the institutional opportunity structure that would allow for increased politicization was limited. As Hoeglinger, Grande and Hutter notes, referenda present a significant opportunity to politicize an issue as they focus on one specific issue while allowing wide public participation across the political spectrum (Grande & Hutter, 2016b, p. 36; Hoeglinger, 2016a, p. 145). However, there were no referenda on the EU apart from the initial referendum on joining the EU.

The hypothesized drivers of politicization explained to a great extent the politicization variation. The authority transfer hypothesis, probably the most commonly used hypothesis and the starting point of the Hooghe and Marks postfunctionalist theory, explained significant part of variation around the Czech accession to the EU and during the Lisbon treaty adoption (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). The increased politicization during Czech accession is in line with the Grande and Hutter findings on the politicization of different authority transfer events such as accession, accession of other countries and treaty revisions (Grande & Hutter, 2016b, p. 32). The accession of third countries was to some, although limited, extent noticed in the case of Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia.

Moreover, the sub-hypothesis on the politicization of the Czech presidency at the Council of the EU versus the Lisbon treaty adoption revealed that it was in fact the presidency

that was driving the politicization levels. This result is a significant as the Lisbon treaty certainly have bigger impact on the lives of Czechs than the Czech Presidency at the Council of the EU. Nonetheless, it is understandable from the perspective of media as the Lisbon treaty is more difficult to explain and create headlines with comparison to the Presidency. These findings support the nuances within the authority transfer hypothesis as presented by Grande and Hutter who finds that country's own accession is much more conductive to politicization than treaty reforms (Grande & Hutter, 2016b, p. 39).

The second hypothesized driver of the crisis event hypothesis managed to explain some politicization variation especially during the refugee crisis. The politicization during eurozone crisis was quite low, which goes against the analysis of Hooghe and Marks (2019) or Jabko and Luhman expectations (Hooghe & Marks, 2019, p. 1119; Jabko & Luhman, 2019, p. 1047). The politicization during the eurozone crisis reveals that the crisis must have been talked about in the relation to the Czech economy rather than in relation to the Eurozone or the EU as a whole. The polarization as measured through the standard deviation of article sentiment showed that in 2011 the polarization level peaked for the observed period, however, it was not followed by an increase of salience, therefore, the politicization remained limited.

The peak of polarization in the Eurobarometer operationalization coincided with the 2015 refugee crisis. It seems reasonable to assume that the refugee crisis has contributed to this, especially since it was the most important issue for Czechs with 76 % people selecting immigration as the biggest issue of the EU at that time. Despite the fact that the Czech Republic was mostly avoided by refugees and migrants and therefore it was not forced to confront the immigration directly. The associated sub-hypothesis for the refugee crisis revealed that the institutional aspects of controlling migration were discussed almost as much as the identity related aspects. This is an interesting discovery as the mentioned institutional arrangements were connected to authority transfers that happened in the past but were not politicized at that time. An example could be the use of Dublin regulation on asylum which was noticed by general public only once it has been used on a large scale years after it came into force. The politicization of this regulation therefore came ex-post.

The results point to the fact that the politicization of the EU in the Czech Republic is not lasting, irreversible or elevated. How does it then relate to the theoretical assumption of

politicization constraining integration? Following this line of thought we can see that the Czech Republic did go through periods of elevated politicizations while successfully integrating more into the EU. The only noticeable issues have arisen with the Lisbon treaty being put to a constitutional court and the refugee reallocation scheme, which Czech politicians fought against both domestically and at the EU level. It seems that the approach of Czech politicians and the general public could, rather than constraining dissensus, be summarized as "*technocratic resilience*" (Rauh et al., 2020, pp. 4–5). Citizens form strong opinions on the matter at hand only during highly politicized events, in the meantime they do not get involved to a higher degree with the process of European integration. This is supported by the four facts. First, the EU was not a very salient topic in the media. Second, the support for the EU has been steadily above the opposition to it. Third, the importance of the EU for political parties has been in a constant decline during the observed period. Finally, Eurosceptic challenger parties had their representation in the parliament, however, their vote share has been low.

Although not researched thoroughly at first glance it is interesting to observe the seeming lack of relation between the national and European Parliament elections and the levels of politicization. The article sentiment polarization measure shows unexpected increase of politicization in election year 2006, but that is the sole case. The average share of articles mentioning the European Parliament elections was only at 4.8 %. More research is needed to make any claims reliable, nonetheless, it is an interesting notion given the opportunity structure the elections present.

Media and content analysis

From the perspective of media, the topic of European Union was rather a minor topic. There is no clear indication that the media would cover the EU based on their political leaning and the government coalition at a given time. This applies both to the sentiment and the salience (relative count) of the EU related articles.

The content analysis also presents us with interesting results in the terms of the articles themselves. The complexity of the articles increased dramatically as the articles got longer and denser with topics over time while the overall number of articles covering the EU decreased. The comparison between non-EU and EU articles only accentuates this finding. The already complex articles observed within this work increased in complexity without any clear indication as to what might be the cause. This finding implies that the

European Union related topics might be described in too complex language for wider audiences. The topics connected to the EU are mostly referring to economic, defense, agricultural and labor topics with economic topics being present in every other article. On the other hand, the control sample of articles show that the random selection focuses on defense and economics topic much less, about one in four articles are concerned with defense and one in five with economics.

An important aspect of the articles is their sentiment. The analysis revealed that the average sentiment of the articles across the three media has been in a steady decline. This fact cannot be caused by a general downturn in article sentiment as the random control sample of articles from the three media showed an opposite trend of increasing the sentiment. The EU articles sentiment disaggregated into the three media shows that for Blesk and Právo the sentiment level starts to increase from 2011 onwards. On the contrary, the sentiment of MF Dnes articles started to decrease from this year onwards. The reason for this downturn is unknown.

Limits of the work and future research

Despite the novel research into a politicization of the European Union in Czech media, some caution is warranted. First, this work focused on mass printed media as the source of politicizing statements. It is a common approach in the literature, however, one could also research mass television broadcasts and social media, both of which have arguably higher salience among the citizens than the printed newspapers. Second, the analytical approach of using quantitative content analysis means that certain more nuanced relations remain undiscovered. The goal of this work was to describe the politicization at the case of the Czech Republic, further research might focus on a comparison between countries from different enlargement rounds to keep the research balanced geographically and reflective of the diverging national histories. Additionally, the research can focus on political parties and their position within the Czech Parliament, detailed contextual analysis that would map the relationship among the actors, or for example on framing of events in line with Voltolini et al. research (Voltolini et al., 2020).

9. Conclusion

This work set out to explore the process of politicization of the European Union in Czech media between the years 2003 and 2017. The research questions focused on whether there in fact is a process of rising politicization of the European Union present in the Czech Republic and on the drivers of such process. The theoretical framework of this thesis was based on Hooghe and Marks postfunctionalist theory of European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). To answer the questions a measure of politicization in the form of politicization index that takes into account the visibility of the EU in media (salience) and the level of divergence of views towards the EU (polarization) was created. The analysis was based on the articles from three most read Czech printed media Právo, MF Dnes and Blesk and on the annual Eurobarometer surveys. This collection of 4500 EU-related articles and control sample of 2250 articles were then analyzed with automated content analysis.

Three main hypotheses were created to analyze the politicization process. The first hypothesis was inspired by the Hooghe and Marks argument that since the Maastricht treaty adoption, there is a process of rising and constraining politicization (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Therefore, the first hypothesis said that: *H1*: *The level of politicization in Czech Republic increased over the observed period.*

The second hypothesis focused on the increases of politicization levels during transfers of national authority towards the supranational center as expected by authority transfer hypothesis (de Wilde et al., 2016, pp. 10–11). The hypothesis is therefore formulated as: *H2*: *Politicization increases during authority-transfer moments such as the accession of the Czech Republic into the EU or during treaty revisions.* Given the fact that the observed period also covered the first Czech presidency at the Council of the EU in the same year as the Lisbon treaty was adopted a sub-hypothesis that tested the authority transfer hypothesis was presented: *H2.1: Among the Czech public the Lisbon treaty adoption was more politicized than the Czech presidency at the Council of the EU.*

Lastly, a hypothesis on EU undergoing critical periods was articulated. This hypothesis focused on the aspect of perceived threat to identity or economic standing of the EU member states. *H3: Politicization increases during EU-wide transnational crisis periods such as were the Eurozone and Refugee crises.* A second sub-hypothesis that tests whether the politicization during crisis events was really driven by the crisis itself or

rather by the discussed institutional solutions was formulated: *H3.1: It is the institutional questions of Dublin regulation and quota reallocation scheme rather than the identity issues that drove politicization during refugee crisis.*

To capture the politicization a politicization index was created. It was operationalized according to Grande and Hutter as the amount of salience multiplied by the level polarization (Grande & Hutter, 2016a, p. 10). The first part of politicization index, salience, was operationalized as the share of articles mentioning the European Union in a given year in a given medium out of all articles for that year and medium. For the second part of polarization, two different measurements were used. The first measure of politicization used the standard deviation of answers to the Eurobarometer question on the benefits of EU membership. The second measure used standard deviation of article sentiment, which was specifically calculated for the purpose of this work on a collection of 4500 articles.

The results of both politicization indices show distinct spikes in politicization in the years 2004, 2009 and 2015 in accordance with the proposed hypotheses. These increase in politicization in the year 2004 can be explained by the accession of the Czech Republic into the European Union as expected by the authority transfer hypothesis. The spike in politicization in the year 2009 could only be explained by the politicization hypothesis to some extent as the Lisbon treaty adoption was actually less salient than the Czech presidency at the Council of the EU. The polarization in this case did not allow for more detailed insight. The last increase in politicization in the year 2015 is in line with the crisis hypothesis as both politicization indices pointed towards the refugee crisis as the main issue of that year. Contrary to expectations, the Eurozone crisis was not significantly politicized in either of the politicization index operationalizations.

The results therefore disproved the notion that there is an elevated and ever-increasing level of politicization, on the contrary. The trendline is rather in the shape of *punctuated politicization*; overall low levels of politicizations are punctuated with singular politicizing events (Grande & Kriesi, 2016, p. 283). Furthermore, it proved to be valuable to further differentiate the authority transfer moments into treaty revisions, accession of own country and accession of third countries (Grande & Hutter, 2016b, pp. 26–28). Moreover, it is possible for the politicization of authority transfer moment to occur after

the change in the treaty or regulatory framework as was the case during the refugee crisis, when the Dublin regulation was frequently mentioned.

Lastly, the analysis also revealed that the articles are quite complex, noticeably more complex than the control sample of articles. This finding suggest that it might be harder for citizens to understand the topics connected to the EU.

This work will hopefully help in understanding of the intricate relationship between media, public opinion and European Union governance. Future research could focus on the positions of Czech parties in the Parliament or onto cross-country comparison with even geographical distribution of cases across the EU.

10. Appendix

Analysis in R

This part of the appendix is used to present the code used to conduct the analyses. Only certain parts of the code are shared as the articles themselves are protected by a copyright and cannot be shared publicly. The code used for data manipulation and loading of the articles is not shown in this work.

Sentiment analysis

The following script was used to calculate the sentiment analysis at the level of sentences containing one of the words connected to the EU defined in the variable "eu_words"; "data" was the name of the dataset; "tran" was the column with the translated full-text article from Czech to English.

```
eu_words <- c("european union", "[[:space:]]eu[[:punct:][:space:]]", "european parliament", "european council", "council of the eu"
,"council of the european union", "european commission", "european summit")

for (number in seq_along(data$id)) {
  sentim <- c()
  tokenized_sentences <- lapply(tokenize_sentences(data$tran[number]), tolower)
  for (sentence in seq_along(tokenized_sentences[[1]])) {
    if (any(str_detect(tokenized_sentences[[1]][sentence], eu_words))) {
      sentim <- c(sentim, sentimentr::sentiment(tokenized_sentences[[1]][sentence])$sentiment)
    }
  }
  if (is.null(sentim) == TRUE) {
    data$sent[number] <- NA
  } else {
    data$sent[number] <- mean(sentim)
  }
}
```

Topical content analysis

The second content analysis used selected Lexicoder dictionary to detect the presence of topics in the articles.

```
for (i in seq_along(data$id)) {
  for (article in data$tran[i]) {
    for (q in seq_along(dict)) {
      if (sum(stringr::str_count(tolower(data$tran[i]), dict[[q]])) > 0) {
        data[[q]][i] <- 1
      }
    }
  }
}
```

Keywords

The following keywords were used to determine whether an article is connected to the European Union, and subsequently to determine the salience of specific topics. The Czech keywords in the brackets were used in the full-text Newton media database to search for the articles. Logical operators OR and AND were used to refine the search query.

Finding the EU related topics in the Czech articles: *(Evropská unie OR EU OR Evropský parlament OR Evropská rada OR Rada EU OR Rada Evropské unie OR Evropská komise OR Evropský summit).* English translation: "European Union, European Parliament, European Council, Council of the EU, Council of the European Union, European Commission, European summit".

Every following keywords were always used in combination with the "main EU keywords" that are in italics. Therefore a search query for the 2004 Czech accession to the EU looked like:

(Evropská unie OR EU OR Evropský parlament OR Evropská rada OR Rada EU OR Rada Evropské unie OR Evropská komise OR Evropský summit) AND (členství OR člen OR vstup OR rozšíření) AND (ČR OR Česká republika OR Česko OR tuzemsko)

For the 2004 Czech accession the following keywords were used – (členství OR člen OR vstup OR rozšíření) AND (ČR OR Česká republika OR Česko OR tuzemsko). English translation: „membership, member, entry, enlargement AND Czech republic, Czechia"

European Parliament elections in 2004, 2009 and 2014 – (evropský parlament volby OR volby do evropského parlamentu). Translation: European parliament elections, elections to the European parliament, elections to European parliament

2007 Bulgarian and Romanian enlargement - (Rumunsko OR Bulharsko OR rozšíření EU OR rozšíření Evropské unie). Translation: Bulgaria, Romania, EU enlargement, enlargement of the EU, enlargement of the European union.

2009 Lisbon treaty adoption - (Lisabon OR Lisabonská smlouva OR smlouva o EU OR smlouva o evropské unii). Translation: Lisbon, Lisbon treaty, treaty on the functioning of the EU.

2009 Czech presidency at the council of the EU – (předsednictví OR české předsednictví OR předsednictví v radě EU). Translation: Czech presidency at the council of the EU, Czech presidency at the council of the European union, Czech presidency.

2009-2014 Financial crisis – (finanční krize OR krize eurozóny OR krize eura OR dluhová krize OR řecká krize OR portugalská krize). Translation: eurozone crisis, financial crisis, debt, bankrupt, euro crisis, Greek crisis, Portugal crisis.

2014-2016 Refugee crisis – (uprchlík OR migrant OR běženec OR migrace OR Dublin OR kvóty OR Frontex OR migrační vlna OR uprchlická vlna OR středomořská cesta OR Turecko OR Irák OR Sýrie OR Libye). Translation: migration, migrant, refugee, Mediterranean journey, migration wave, migration crisis, refugee wave, refugee crisis, Libya, FRONTEX, Turkey, Syria, Iraq

Sub hypothesis on the driver of politicization in the refugee crisis.

Institutional – (Evropská unie OR EU OR Evropský parlament OR Evropská rada OR Rada EU OR Rada Evropské unie OR Evropská komise OR Evropský summit) AND (dublin OR kvóty OR alokace OR přesídlení OR Schengen OR kvalifikovaná většina). Translation: European Union, European Parliament, European Council, Council of the EU, Council of the European Union, European Commission, European summit AND Dublin, quotas, allocation, resettlement, Schengen, qualified majority.

Identity – (Evropská unie OR EU OR Evropský parlament OR Evropská rada OR Rada EU OR Rada Evropské unie OR Evropská komise OR Evropský summit) AND (islám OR muslim OR Sýrie OR Irák OR hrozba identity). Translation: European Union, European Parliament, European Council, Council of the EU, Council of the European Union, European Commission, European summit AND Islam, Muslim, Syria, Iraq, identity threat.

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Thesis project

Politicization of the European Union in Czech media / Politizace Evropské unie v českých médiích – Filip Lukáš

Introduction

The process of evolution from the European Communities towards something we know today as the European Union (EU) in its current form has not been always smooth. The EU we are familiar with started as a rather technical project of transboundary cooperation and control on coal and steel commerce in 1951. Few years later additional two communities were founded in order to increase even further the mutual economic cooperation among its six members. The limits of further negative integration were exhausted, and the positive integration took place. It was around this time in the early 1970s that public attention and contestation led, according to some authors, to first instances of politicisation of the European Communities governance (Grande, Hutter, 2016, p39). It is, however, the Maastricht treaty that is considered to be the milestone in public contestation i.e. politicisation of EU governance (Zürn, 2015, p177).

Since then, the topic of politicisation of the European Union (EU) has become ever more prevalent in public and scholarly debates alike. Questions on the nature of public opinion towards European integration and European Union in general have been laid out by many scholars with each of them focusing on different aspects of this broad notion of societal politicisation. Research onto this topic has been mostly undertaken from the perspective of western European states (Grande, Hutter, 2016, Hutter, Kerscher, 2014) or from the perspective of the EU itself (Rauh, 2018). This thesis, therefore, sets an objective to broaden the existing knowledge on societal politicisation in the Czech Republic.

The thesis will try to answer both questions as to "why" and "to what extent" is the EU politicised in the society. Hypotheses developed by academics studying this phenomenon will be used in an attempt to answer these questions most comprehensibly and reliably; among these hypotheses is the authority transfer hypothesis as developed by de Wilde et al. (2015) and refined by Grande and Hutter (2016). The tool used for measuring the level of politicisation would be the politicisation index with its two facets of public salience and polarisation.[18]

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[18] For more detailed description of the index please consult the following chapters.

Research target, research question

The objective of the thesis is to deepen the existing politicisation research by observing and explaining the case of the Czech Republic. Ideally this thesis would present a comprehensive map of the politicisation process from the year 2000 until 2020. This thesis, therefore, sets out two main research questions:

> RQ1 – Is there a process of rising politicisation of the European Union present in the Czech Republic?

Should the process be found, then:

> RQ2 – What are the main specific features of the process in the Czech Republic?

> RQ2.1 – What topics related to the EU are covered in the media

> RQ2.2 – Which institutional function within the Czech political system is the most mentioned in articles referring to the EU.[19]

> RQ3 – What are the causes of the process of rising politicisation?

These research questions are descriptive and explanatory in nature as countries have various types of politicisation, therefore we must observe and explain the case of the Czech Republic first in order to proceed with further research into the details of the process (de Wilde et al., 2015, p9).

European Union is an ambitious project which is present in all domains usually reserved only for nation states. Consequently, citizens have certain expectations or associations from the EU. Following research question will try to uncover what the media focus on, whether it may be security, law and justice, economic progress, education, four freedoms[20].

These research questions should allow for solid description and explanation of politicisation in the Czech Republic.

Conceptual and theoretical framework, literature review

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[19] Institutional function for example means president, prime minister, minister of foreign affairs, member of the chamber of deputies, senator, etc.
[20] Free movement of goods, capital, services and labour within the EU.

The fundamental idea behind the concept of politicisation was described by Zürn as "*Politicisation, in general terms, means the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the field or sphere of politics – making previously unpolitical matters political*" (Zürn, 2015, p167). This process also applies to the contestation of the European integration and the EU in general. The basis for this thesis' conceptual framework stems from de Wilde et al. definition of politicisation as: "*an increase in polarisation of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU*" (de Wilde et al., 2011, p560) This multidimensional model contains three concepts – salience (visibility), polarisation and actor and audience expansion.

Salience is defined as "*the importance attributed to the EU and European integration*" (de Wilde et al., 2015, p6). In the context of this thesis, salience will be operationalised through the number of newspaper articles reporting on the European union, in accordance to Hutter et al. observation that one must publicly debate an issue to politicise it (Hutter et al., 2016, p8).

Polarisation is defined as "*an occupation of more extreme positions – either in favour of or against different aspects of EU governance – and/or a depletion of neutral, ambivalent or indifferent attitudes*" (de Wilde et al., 2015, p6). The issue is, therefore, polarized when opposing camps present differing positions (Hutter et al., 2016, p8). This concept would be operationalised as diverging support of Czech citizens towards Czech membership within the European union expressed in the Eurobarometer survey; operationalisation is inspired by Rauh (Rauh, 2018, p3).

The third concept of *actor and audience expansion[21]* would probably not be used in this thesis due to practical reasons; the data are not readily available, and the collection of the data would take excessive amount of time. Furthermore, considering that the actor and audience expansion is only an additive variable in the Politicisation index, the analysis can be still valid even without this variable. Nonetheless the concept of actor and audience expansion is defined as "*growing number of citizens and collective actors who dedicate resources in the form of time and money to follow and engage with EU governance*" (de Wilde et al., 2015, p7). For example, actor expansion may lead to non-government

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[21] Otherwise labelled by some authors as „Mobilization" (Rauh, 2018, p3).

parties' members, or members from the public, participating in these debates on the issues of the European union (Hutter et al., 2016, p8).

It is the (mass media) public sphere that is of a key importance; as it "*connects political decision-making processes to preference formation, articulation and aggregation.*" (de Wilde et al., 2015, p8). De Wilde et al. also note that there is no universal pattern of politicisation; it is contextually and locally dependent.

Observing the media for signs of contestation of the European integration has certainly its limits. Zürn highlights the fact that the reflection of public sphere within the mass media might not be identical to the political sphere i.e. apolitical issues might be highly contested in mass media and vice versa (Zürn, 2015, p166). Zürn also argues that the study of mass media is indispensable for the purpose of politicisation research but, he says, it might not be always sufficient. He, therefore, presents a concept of 3x3 matrix combining the three concepts, i.e. salience, polarisation, actor and audience expansion, with three levels of observation, i.e. Micro (beliefs), Meso (mobilisation), Macro (public debates), in order to create a more versatile and thick concept of politicisation (Zürn, 2015, p169-170). Due to the limited scope of this work, however, these more nuanced concepts would not be utilised.

Similarly, Kauppi and Wiesner criticise some of the politicisation research on the same basis of too narrow focus on mass media coverage and lack of research into political extremes or social media. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, analysis of social media is not envisioned (Kauppi, Wiesner, 2018, p231). Analysis of social media was done for example by Bosetta et al. (Bosetta et al., 2017). Focus groups are another method of data collection; for example, Baglioni and Hurrelmann organised 16 focus groups in four western European countries (Baglioni, Hurrelmann, 2016, p112).

The main hypothesis used in this work is the *authority transfer hypothesis*, which is based on two assumptions. First, citizens care about who makes decisions on their behalf; second, citizens are able to identify the authority making these decisions (de Wilde, 2016, p10). Or in other words "*the delegation and pooling of national competences at the EU level is the key force that triggers politicisation, because it increases demands for public justifications in general and provokes resistance from certain parts of the national population more specifically*" (Grande, Hutter, 2016, p26). Grande et al. also refines the hypothesis by distinguishing whether the authority-transfer debate is concerned with "*(a)*

treaty reforms, (b) accession of third-party countries, and (c) accession of one's own country" (Grande, Hutter, 2016, p24). This specification is especially useful since in the observed period[22], Czech Republic went through all three periods. Subsequently, hypothesis is postulated:

> H1 – Politicisation increases during authority-transfer moments such as accession of Czech Republic into the EU and treaty revisions.

European Union as a whole has undergone serious tests in the last two decades; mainly the Eurozone crisis and the Refugee crisis. Both of these events represented important milestones in shaping the idea of common European governance; let it be the limits of financial solidarity and redistribution or the questions on physical security and the nature of the EU itself. Because of this, another hypothesis is drafted:

> H2 – Politicisation increases during critical periods such as were the Eurozone and Refugee crises.

The second hypothesis complements the concept of authority-transfer politicisation as it focuses more on the contestation of already existing level of transferred authority to the EU in critical moments. People in their daily lives may not realize how much authority their country has already transferred on to the EU level, they then may contest the (EU) authority ex-post.

The EU in its current form has a trio of legislative institutions, European Commission, Council of the EU and European Parliament. When it comes to politicisation following hypothesis postulates that:

> H3 – The articles would mostly refer to the European Commission (EC) as a representative EU institution during the interval between elections to the European Parliament; either through naming the EC itself or the EC President. Whereas, European Parliament (EP) would be relatively more[23] mentioned institution around the time of the elections.

Followingly, in the time of crisis, one might expect that:

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[22] The observed period is from the year 2000 until the year 2020.
[23] Meaning relatively to the mentions of the EU in total.

H4: During the time of crisis, politicians in executive functions of both the EU and major EU countries would get relatively more mentions.

The hypotheses are connected to the abovementioned research questions. Deeper insight into the causes of rising politicisation as postulated by the research question no. 3 is connected to the first hypothesis with the concept of authority-transfer. Second hypothesis of politicisation increase during crisis events is related to the specifics of politicisation process and the causes of it as reflected in the research questions two and three respectively. Hypotheses three and four try to further clarify what is exactly meant in the general discourse when we talk about the EU. These two hypotheses tie to the research question 2.

The number of written articles that might serve as inspiration for the research is quite extensive. Further reading may include a special issue of West European Politics titled "*The Differentiated Politicisation of European Governance*" with articles such as "A structural approach to politicisation in the Euro crisis" by Anna Leupold, "*Assessing actually-existing trajectories of EU politicisation*" by de Wilde and Lord or "*The politicisation of European integration in domestic election campaigns*" by Hoeglinger. This special issue summarises the various perspectives on the process of European politicisation while retaining the common denominator of politicisation research in the three-dimensional concept of politicisation index. Similarly, articles in a monography titled "*Politicising Europe Integration and Mass Politics*" edited by Hutter, Grande and Kriesi, try to both map and observe the driving forces and consequences of the politicisation process. Hoeglinger also authored the extensive and thematically rich monography "*Politicizing European Integration Struggling with the Awakening Giant*" which covers for example the sources of data or framing and structure of the European integration.

Empirical data and analytical technique

The objective of this thesis is to map the politicisation with a longer observation period. The observation would start in the year 2000 and end at the end of the year 2019. The concept of Politicisation used in this thesis entails two indicators – Salience and Polarisation. The Salience indicator requires an analysis of newspaper articles written within the observed period. In order to access this data, Newton media search database[24]

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[24] https://mediasearch.newtonmedia.eu/login.php?r=%2Findex.php&m=-10

would be used as it contains all relevant media. Newton search engine tool also enables for precise filtration of results, its search engine would, therefore, be the core data source of this work. Second indicator, Polarisation, requires data on societal polarization on the topic of the EU. Eurobarometer biannual surveys are suitable for this purpose as Czech Republic was partaking in these surveys before joining the EU in 2004.

Data retrieved from the Newton media search would contain whole articles with matching key words e.g. EU, European Union, European Commission, European Parliament, etc.[25] This database of full-text articles would then be further analysed and categorised within R programming language through using dictionaries. Beside this automatic analysis, human based coding would be included over sample of the data for reliability check. Data on polarisation from Eurobarometer would be aggregated into the politicisation index together with Salience indicator.

Hutter et al. present the formula for politicisation as (Hutter et al., 2015, p10):

$$Politicisation = Salience \; x \; (Polarisation + Actor \; expansion)$$

They explain the formula followingly: "*Salience cannot be substituted by the other two dimensions, i.e., by actor expansion or polarisation. Therefore, its relation to these variables cannot be additive. At the same time, the latter two dimensions can to some extent replace each other*" (Hutter et al., 2015, p10). As mentioned above, this thesis would due to practical reasons not utilize the concept of Actor expansion and therefore the formula would look like this:

$$Politicisation = Salience \; x \; Polarisation$$

Where Salience is the monthly share of articles referring to the EU; Polarisation is approximated as a standard deviation of answers to the question regarding the opinion on the benefits the EU brings to the Czech Republic as measured by biannual Eurobarometers.

The result of this equation would then be plotted into a chart. Linear regression would be used to analyse the hypothesised trend of politicisation increase over time.

The thesis would have following structure

- Introduction

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[25] List of all keywords would be present within the thesis.

- Conceptual and theoretical framework

- Data – Methods

- Empirical section – Description

- Empirical section – Explanation

- Conclusion

Conclusion

The politicisation of the European Union is a topic which can have substantial implications for both individual and political level. The research should allow us to better understand the relationship between the EU and general public. This thesis specifically tries to approach the topic with an uncommon perspective, that of an eastern European country.

Questions on the origin and form of the politicisation process are posed within this work. Hypotheses focus on the concept of authority transfer politicisation and on the public discourse portrayal of the EU through references of specific EU institutions and representatives. This thesis also works with the frequently used politicisation index composed of two concepts – salience and polarisation. Salience is the monthly share of articles referring to the EU and Polarisation is the standard deviation of answers the question regarding the opinion on the benefits the EU brings to the Czech Republic as measured by biannual Eurobarometers.

Data scrutiny done with R programming language environment through a full-text analysis should provide for a versatile and detail-rich dataset of newspaper articles from the year 2000 onwards. Subsequent human based coding would be used for the reliability check.

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