Title: Blurring the public-private divide: How citizens respond to and manage political polarisation

Levels of political polarization seem to have reached new heights: while some polarization between competing sides of the electorate is to be expected and may even be conducive to the crystallization of democratic alternatives, polarisation levels today seem to translate into a growing dislike for other-minded citizens; potentially undermining the principles of political pluralism on which our democracies are founded. Some scholars (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2019) have labelled citizens’ growing dislike for other-minded citizens, affective polarisation. Citizens’ mutual dislike seems to surmount ideological differences and has become deeply personal: within the current political climate, personal tastes and ways of expressing oneself have become heuristic tools for identifying loathed others. The hostility between supporters of different parties is even seen to spill-over to citizens’ personal lives; affecting job hiring, economic decisions, and even people’s private dating life (Gift & Gift, 2015; Huber & Malhotra, 2017; McConnell et al., 2018). As a result also of social media, the boundaries to traditional demarcations between the public and private sphere have become increasingly blurred. These blurred boundaries suggest that in-depth understanding of micro-level politics, or how citizens make sense of politics in their everyday lives, may be crucial in providing effective answers against polarisation. Against this backdrop, I welcome empirical research that dives into the personal sphere of politics; and that researches how citizens – in their everyday lives – interpret, manage, resist, affirm, or otherwise give meaning to political polarisation. Additionally, I welcome research that investigates the affective textures that underpin political polarisation and ensuing processes of Othering one’s political opponent.

The researcher will be embedded in two scholarly networks mainly: the VUB strategic research programme EDGE and the inter-university programme EOS RepResent.

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