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V. Lorient, A. Marciniak, S. Nandi, M. Herve, G. Karras, et al.. Attosecond delays in photoionization of diatomic and polyatomic molecules. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 2020, 1412, pp.072045. 10.1088/1742-6596/1412/7/072045 . hal-02905060

HAL Id: hal-02905060

<https://hal.science/hal-02905060>

Submitted on 3 Dec 2020

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To cite this article: V Lorient *et al* 2020 *J. Phys.: Conf. Ser.* **1412** 072045

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Attosecond delays in photoionization of diatomic and polyatomic molecules

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Synopsis We have investigated the photoionization dynamics of several molecular systems using attosecond interferometric techniques based on ultrashort extreme ultraviolet (XUV) pulses. For diatomic molecules such as N₂, we can get a detailed picture of the photoionization process by measuring the attosecond delays. For polyatomic molecules such as naphthalene, such measurements can provide the average timescale over which photoionization processes at different electron energies can occur in complex quantum systems.

After photoionization of an atom, the resulting photoelectron evolves in the combined field of the ionic core and the remaining electrons. For molecular photoionization, in addition to these effects the interplay between the electronic and nuclear degrees of freedom can also influence the photoelectron. Attosecond interferometry techniques, e.g., RABBITT (Reconstruction of Attosecond Beating by Interference of Two-photon Transitions) [1] can provide snapshots of such electron dynamics in their natural timescale inside parent molecules [2].

In our experiment, one part of a near infrared (NIR) pulse ($\lambda \sim 800$ nm) was used to generate high-order harmonics in the XUV regime. The remaining part of the NIR pulse was used as a dressing field either directly or after frequency-doubling ($\lambda \sim 400$ nm). Following photoionization of the target molecule by a dressed XUV field, the photoelectrons were detected using a Velocity Map Imaging (VMI) spectrometer. The angle-resolved photoelectron spectra show redistributions of photoelectron signal which oscillate (Fig. 1) with the delay between the XUV and the dressing fields at twice the frequency of the fundamental. The phase of the oscillation contains the imprint of the dispersion dynamics of the photoelectron wavepacket scattered in the molecular potential.

For N₂, the 400 nm pulse was used as the dressing field (hence, Blue-RABBITT) to significantly reduce the spectral congestion in the photoelectron spectra [3], compared to standard RABBITT-measurements [2]. The corresponding phase-differences ($\Phi_A - \Phi_X$) between the A- and the X-states in the N₂⁺ ions are shown in Fig. 1. The overall decreasing trend in ($\Phi_A - \Phi_X$) values along the measured photoelectron energies is qualitatively well reproduced by the the-

oretical calculations [4] for single photon ionization of N₂ molecules.

For polyatomic molecules such as naphthalene, many different ionization pathways lead to the same electron kinetic energy due to photoionization of several close-lying electronic states by the broadband XUV pulse. Using 800 nm pulse as the dressing field, the phase of the molecular photoionization can still be extracted. The phase provides a measure of the average timescale over which an electron with a given kinetic energy can escape the molecular potential. This shows the applicability of attosecond interferometry techniques for complex systems, and can serve as a starting point towards studying quantum transport phenomena in two-dimensional materials.

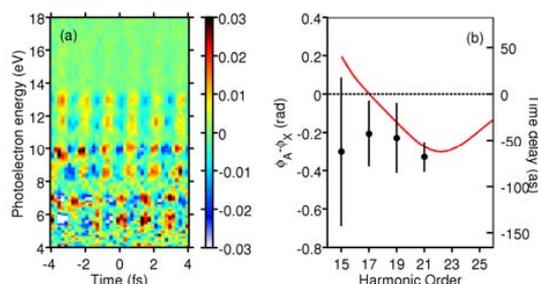


Figure 1. (a) Redistribution of photoelectron signal for photoionization of N₂. (b) Attosecond delay-differences between A and X-states of the N₂⁺-ion, compared with that for single photon ionization of N₂, taken from [4].

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