

## FULL PAPER

### **Finding Europe: Mapping and explaining antecedents of 'Europeanness' in news about the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections**

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## Finding Europe: Mapping and explaining antecedents of 'Europeanness' in news about the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections

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**Abstract:** Previous research has characterized European news coverage as mainly domestic in focus, hampering the emergence of a European public sphere. This study analyses the European nature of the news coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary elections. We not only *describe* the level of Europeanness in news coverage but also propose a comprehensive model to *explain* differences across countries. We employ a cross-national media content analysis (N=52.009) conducted in all 27 EU member states. Findings show that especially public TV channels and broadsheet newspapers are more European in coverage than their private and tabloid counterparts. Newspapers are also more European in focus in general compared to television. Furthermore, coverage is more European in countries with higher public EU support, the coverage gets more European during the campaign and is more European in countries that are geographically closer to Brussels, and in which no other elections take place at the same time.

**Keywords:** Europeanization, European elections, election coverage, cross-national comparison, media content analysis

**Zusammenfassung:** Medienberichterstattung über die Europäische Union (EU) ist überwiegend national fokussiert, was sowohl für die Entwicklung einer *Europäischen Öffentlichkeit* hinderlich ist als auch einer aktiveren Teilnahme von Seiten der Bürger am europäischen Projekt entgegensteht. Die vorliegende Studie analysiert die Medienberichterstattung zur Europawahl 2009. Dabei beschreiben wir nicht nur, wie europäisch der Fokus der Berichterstattung zur Europawahl war, sondern entwickeln und testen zudem ein Model, um Unterschiede in der Berichterstattung zwischen den Mitgliedsstaaten anhand von länder-, medien- und zeitabhängigen Faktoren zu erklären. Unsere Analyse basiert dabei auf einer in allen 27 EU-Mitgliedsstaaten durchgeführten Medieninhaltsanalyse von Zeitungs- und TV-Nachrichten (N=52.009). Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Medienberichterstattung in öffentlich-rechtlichen TV-Sendern und in Qualitätszeitungen europäischer im Fokus ist, verglichen mit privaten TV-Sendern und anderen Zeitungen. Zeitungen sind zudem generell europäischer im Fokus ihrer Berichterstattung als TV-Sender. Desweiteren zeigen unsere Ergebnisse, dass Medienberichterstattung generell europäischer im Fokus ist in Ländern, in denen die öffentliche Meinung gegenüber der EU positiver eingestellt ist und in Ländern die geographisch näher zu Brüssel liegen und in denen keine andere nationale Wahl parallel zur Europawahl stattfindet. Zudem nimmt der Fokus auf Europa zu, je näher der Wahltag rückt.

**Schlagwörter:** Europäisierung, Europawahl, Wahlberichterstattung, transnationaler Vergleich, Medieninhaltsanalyse

Following the 2004 elections for the European Parliament (EP), de Vreese and colleagues (2009) concluded that there was “light at the end of the tunnel” and that the visibility and Europeaness of the news media coverage of EP elections was increasing. Since 2004 the European Union (EU) has not exactly been on hold and several new topics have entered the arena. Bulgaria and Romania have joined the Union, taking the member state number up to 27, referendums regarding a common EU Constitution have spectacularly failed, core treaties have been ratified, and recently the future of European collaboration has become focus of political and public debate and is discussed in the light of the global financial and European debt crises. In this article we investigate the *European nature* of the news coverage of the EP elections. This is important for at least three reasons: In the absence of European perspectives, actors, and topics, (1) citizens are more likely to conceive of the EP elections as domestic rather than European political contests, (2) the emergence of Europeanized public spheres or a European public sphere is less than likely, and (3) the legitimacy of the European Parliament is questioned and the ability for citizens to hold their elected representatives accountable on European issues is undermined.

Most studies of Europeanization focus on a selected number of countries, a limited number of media outlets or track specific issues (e.g., Mihelj, 2008; Pfetsch et al., 2008; Trenz, 2004; van Os et al., 2007). In this study we include all 27 EU member states and we study the degree of Europeaness in the context of a single event, the 2009 EP elections. We include both newspapers and television news in our study, public and private as well as broadsheets and tabloids, and we rely on multiple indicators for Europeaness. In addition, we are not only interested in *describing* the level of Europeaness, but also in *explaining* the differences. We identify a number of predictors of Europeaness, and propose a comprehensive model explaining differences across our different indicators and across countries.

## 1. Theoretical framework

### *European or Europeanized?*

One of the key debates in the literature on European integration has been the absence of a singular, pan-European public sphere (see Habermas and Grimm's discussions in the 1990s; e.g., Habermas, 1995). Most research has pointed out that a degree of Europeanized national public spheres is both the theoretically most viable scenario as well as the only one for which empirical evidence can be found (see de Vreese, 2007 and Machill et al., 2006 for overviews). Europeanization is studied in many different areas, including national party systems, voting behavior, the media, different policy areas, and public administration (see Goetz & Hix, 2000). In this study, we focus on the *media* because these are often seen as agents of Europeanization and crucial for the emergence and establishment of a common European public sphere (Machill et al., 2006; Trenz, 2004).

Studies that have turned to the media have considered different indicators to describe the European focus of news coverage, most commonly actors and issues

(Peter & de Vreese, 2004). Importantly, most such indicators can be looked at in different ways. The process of Europeanization, namely, is described as having both a *vertical* and a *horizontal* dimension (see Brüggemann & Kleinen-von KönigsLöw, 2009). Koopmans and Erbe (2004, p. 101) distinguish and define these different dimensions in the following way:

“*Vertical Europeanisation*, which consists of communicative linkages between the national and the European level. There are two basic variants of this pattern, a bottom-up one, in which national actors address European actors and/or make claims on European issues, and a top-down one, in which European actors intervene in national policies and public debates in the name of European regulations and common interests;

*Horizontal Europeanisation*, which consists of communicative linkages between different member states. We may distinguish a weak and a strong variant. In the weak variant, the media in one country cover debates and contestation in another member state, but there is no linkage between the countries in the structure of claims-making itself. In the stronger variant, actors from one country explicitly address, or refer to actors or policies in another member state.”

In the current study, we develop indicators for both types of Europeanization and we introduce a set of potential explanatory factors for each in our model below.

### *Europeanization – phantom or reality?*

The existence, scope, structure, and quality of a public sphere are closely related to questions of the legitimacy of a political system (Koopmans et al., 2010). As a general principle, the legitimacy of a political system hinges on the consent of the governed. Peters (2005) suggests that legitimacy requires citizens to hold beliefs about a political system. These beliefs should motivate them to support and accept obligations vis-à-vis the system, and act according to its rules. Crucially, these beliefs and attitudes should be articulated in public discourse (Hurrelmann et al., 2009). In the specific case of the EU, public communication can further advance democratization of the EU and it is a necessary condition that public communication contributes to knowledge about European affairs (van Os et al., 2007). The assumption behind the notion of a public sphere is that citizens are enabled to participate in debate. A European(ized) public sphere is therefore expected to not only inform about the EU but also to contribute towards the legitimacy of the polity and the understanding of EU politics (Koopmans et al., 2010).

Regarding the current state of a European public sphere previous research has analyzed the Europeanness of news coverage and came to sometimes more optimistic and sometimes more pessimistic conclusions. Trenz (2004), for example, analyzed European news coverage in six EU member states and argues that a European public sphere has come into existence. However, he focuses on national elite newspapers only and counts most cross-references to actors or countries as European public sphere. Recently Möller et al. (2011) analyzed the European network of news flows using network analysis and showed that there still is a clear division into an Eastern and a Western European news network.

Regarding the elections for the European Parliament specifically, Siune (1983) already concluded that the first 1979 EP elections were not particularly European in the news coverage. In more recent research based on the 2004 EP elections de Vreese et al. (2009) noted an increase in general visibility of the elections in media coverage and greater European focus, however, they conclude: “most of the EU news pertained to the campaigns as such and policy issues was mostly less dominant than the campaigns itself. Moreover, there is only limited evidence of the same policy issues being addressed in different countries but ample evidence to suggest that the issues are mostly idiosyncratic to the individual country” (p. 56).

Compared to 1999, there were some changes evident in 2004 (de Vreese et al., 2006). While the coverage was still focused on domestic actors, there was an overall increase in the proportion of EU actors. Therefore, while we see that EP election news coverage still predominantly features domestic political actors, there has been an increase since 1999 in attention paid to EU actors. Finally, there were slightly more EU actors in the news in the new member states compared to the old member states. News coverage in Luxemburg, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands – in terms of the location of the news – showed a considerable degree of Europeanization of the EU stories. In Luxemburg 30 percent of the EU news stories took place in another EU country while 45 percent of the news came from Brussels and the EU institutions. This was in contrast to, for example, Portugal where more than 80 percent of the EU news took place in Portugal. The old and new member states did not differ systematically in their degree of vertical or horizontal Europeanization of the news.

Thus, whereas previous research arrived at different conclusions regarding the exact or overall state of Europeanization in national news coverage there is some indication of an increase in European focus in news coverage over time. None of these studies, however, has engaged in *explaining* differences in Europeaness in news coverage across countries and throughout Europe in a comprehensive way, taking into account media-, time- and country-specific factors at the same time. Such an endeavour requires a large-scale media content analysis of news coverage in all EU member states, around the same time period or event, which is the backbone of the current study.

### *Explaining Europeanized news coverage: Formulating expectations*

In the present study we focus on *three* content analytic indicators for Europeaness of news coverage. First, we consider European/EU (1) *actors* and (2) *issues* in news coverage as common indicators of (vertical) Europeanization. Furthermore, we add to this the (3) *location* (country or entity) that is described as being either (a) the location from which the action described in a news story *originates*, or (b) the location which is *affected* by the action described in a news story. Thereby, we add another distinction, namely, as an indicator of *vertical* Europeanization we consider if *Europe* or the European Union is the location origin or affected in a news story; and as indicator of *horizontal* Europeanization we consider if *another EU member state*, other than the one the news outlet originates from, is the location origin or affected in a news story. This yields a total of six indicators for Eu-

ropeanness of news coverage which are further discussed below: 1) EU actors [vertical], 2) EU issues [vertical], 3 and 4) EU location (story origin / affected) [vertical], and 5 and 6) other EU member state location (story origin / affected) [horizontal].

Our *first* indicator (1) involves the *presence of political personalities and actors at the EU level* (such as candidates for the EP and members of EU institutions) in the news. This can be considered a necessary condition for the functioning of political representation in a democracy (de Vreese, 2002). Effective political representation and accountability is the primary function of elections (Powell, 2000). News attention to EU actors can be seen as facilitating dissemination of information about policy proposals, performance and personalities and therefore make vote choices more meaningful (Giebler & Wüst, 2011). We know from previous research that EU actors are largely absent from news coverage. Even in EU stories EU representatives are often less prominent than other political actors, e.g. in EU coverage in Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, UK, Spain, or Italy (Peter & de Vreese, 2004). The main problem with the EU being a 'faceless' institution is described by Meyer (1999): "Without the personalization of political debate and decisions, political accountability remains invisible" (p. 633). Peter et al. (2004) have shown that news coverage focus disproportionally on domestic political actors, however, comparing previous EP elections over time we have recently witnessed a modest increase in the share of EU actors across Europe (de Vreese et al., 2006).

Our *second* indicator (2) considers a *European issue* focus. A common European news agenda, enhancing a common public debate, would imply that during the campaign the debates in the various member states correspond with one another by means of shared points of reference, or "a common discourse that frames the particular issues as common European problems" (Risse & van de Steeg, 2003, p. 21). A discussion of similar European issues in the media can sustain democracy in the EU and develop it further (Rohrschneider & Loveless, 2008). Previous research has found only little evidence for a European discourse that would go beyond the agenda of domestic politics (Peter & de Vreese, 2004). Also Machill et al. (2006) conclude "national interests and debates often exert a very strong influence on the reporting related to EU topics" (p. 75). We also know that it is common journalistic practice to domesticize European news by focusing on national relevance (Statham, 2008). On the contrary, Trenz (2004) argues that a common European public sphere has come into existence exactly through mutual observation of institutional actors and their audiences with reference to issues and events of common relevance. In the present study our focus is not primarily on the extent to which European issue coverage corresponds with coverage in other countries in terms of shared topics, but more generally, on the overall focus and total salience of European issues in EP-specific campaign news coverage. More focus on European issues in absolute terms thereby is considered to be indicative of higher degrees of Europeanness in news coverage.

Our *third* indicator (3) is *location*, either in terms of the entity described as being the *origin* of the action or event described in news coverage or in terms of the entity described as being *affected* by it. Previous studies have looked at the focus

of news articles on EU politics as indicator for vertical Europeanization and at the focus of articles on other EU countries as indicator for horizontal Europeanization (Brüggemann & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009). Arguably, news portraying Europe or the EU as the origin of the action or event described in a news story adds relevance to the European dimension of any issue or topic discussed. Along the same lines, by locating the origin of the action or event described in a different EU member state any issue or topic discussed expands beyond the borders of domestic national debates. In the current study we add to this a second distinct dimension we consider relevant, namely if Europe/EU (vertical) or other EU member states (horizontal) are *affected* by the action or event described in news coverage. We do so because we believe this to be a distinct and relevant aspect less often focused on in previous research and because of the observations from research on EU journalism that stories are often told from European power headquarters such as Brussels, Paris, London and Berlin, but often affect citizens and governments elsewhere (e.g., Statham, 2008).

Rather than just *describing* the degree of Europeanization in news coverage across Europe the explicit aim of the current study is to *explain* differences across Europe by country-, time- and medium-specific characteristics. Recent studies have turned the attention to the explanation of differences in the national news media's coverage of European affairs, for example regarding visibility or framing of coverage (e.g., Peter et al., 2004; de Vreese et al., 2007; Boomgaarden et al., 2010; Schuck et al., 2012). Asking what might explain differences in the degree of Europeanization of news coverage across countries we develop a model in which we consider *four* different aspects as potential explanations for cross-country differences. Below we discuss and formulate our expectations:

(1) Our key interest lies in three *media-specific indicators*: (a) private TV programs (vs. public TV programs); (b) tabloid newspapers (vs. broadsheet newspapers); and television (vs. newspapers). Based on previous research we expect each of these factors to influence the Europeaness of news coverage. As Peter and de Vreese (2004) have shown, public broadcasting TV news programs devote more attention to European topics and attach greater prominence to them as their private counterparts. Furthermore, broadsheet newspapers have shown to devote more attention to European news than tabloids and newspapers generally are more European in focus compared to television (Peter et al., 2004; Peter & de Vreese, 2004; de Vreese et al., 2007). We derive from this the following three hypotheses:

*(H1) Public broadcasting TV programs show higher degrees of Europeaness in their coverage than private TV programs;*

*(H2) Broadsheet newspapers show higher degrees of Europeaness in their coverage than tabloid newspapers; and*

*(H3) Newspapers show generally higher degrees of Europeaness in their coverage than television programs*

(2) Our second set of explanatory factors pertains to *public support for the EU*. Peter & de Vreese (2004) and Boomgaarden et al. (2010) show how more



favourable public opinion contributes to the visibility of EU news. We consider two different indicators for EU support, first, average public support for one's country EU membership, and, second, the extent to which a country benefits or not from the EU budget (i.e., receives more than it contributes). We expect that countries in which public opinion is favourable towards the EU are more likely to draw on European issues, actors and locations. Second, we also test if profiting from the EU budget on average (i.e., being a net-receiver) is linked to the Europeanness in the coverage, since economic considerations are crucial for the linkages between countries and the EU and EU budget contributions made by individual EU countries are among the most contested topics within the EU (Zimmer et al., 2005). We expect that those countries profiting by and large from EU funds are more supportive of the EU and are likely to show higher degrees of Europeanness in news coverage. Thus, we pose the following two hypotheses:

*(H4) In countries in which public support for the EU is higher, news coverage is more European than in countries in which public support for the EU is lower.*

*(H5) In countries which profit on average from the EU budget, news coverage is more European than in countries with a negative net benefit.*

The media (H1-H3) and EU-specific variables (H4-H5) outlined above are the core focus of our analysis. Furthermore, we control for a number of other relevant time- and country-specific variables, which are part of our model and which we briefly introduce below. Since our main purpose here is to control for these factors in order to provide a more conservative test of our core hypotheses formulated above, we in the following describe each factor and our expectations but abstain from posing formal hypotheses for these:

(3) Thus, the third factor in our overall model is *time*, i.e. the proximity to election day. In line with other studies predicting particular media content features (such as particular news frames) and showing them to be increasingly present as election day approaches (Schuck et al., 2012), we take into account the week in which a particular news story has been published during the campaign and its relative distance to election day. In the current study we assume that the Europeanness of news coverage will increase throughout the campaign and as election day approaches.

(4) The final and fourth factors pertain to *physical aspects and domestic economic parameters of a country*, i.e.: geographic distance to Brussels, number of neighbouring countries, population size, and GDP. The first of these considers the geographic distance between the national capital and Brussels as the centre of the EU. We expect that the degree of Europeanness in coverage is higher the closer a country is to Brussels. A second aspect we introduce in this study is the number of neighbouring countries, i.e. the total number of other countries a particular country shares borders with. We assume that while the number of neighbouring countries should not matter for vertical Europeanization, it should play a role for horizontal Europeanization, i.e. we expect more references to other EU member states (both in terms of those other EU member states being the origin of the ac-

tion or event presented in a news story as well as in terms of those countries being affected by it) in news coverage of countries with more neighbouring countries. Furthermore, we consider the size of a country (in terms of total population size). Here our expectation is that coverage is less European in bigger countries because these are more self-sustained and potentially less outward-focused. In line with other studies we furthermore control for GDP as one factor pertaining to the economic situation in and the overall power status of a country (see e.g., Brüggemann & Kleinen-von KönigsLöw, 2009). Finally, since we analyse Europeaness of coverage in 27 countries around the same event (i.e. the 2009 EP elections) it is relevant to control for the co-occurrence of any other national elections taking place simultaneously since these can be expected to draw attention and thus be related to lower degrees of Europeaness in coverage.

## 2. Methods

To empirically test our expectations and collect information about our dependent variables, we rely on a large scale media content analysis. This content analysis was carried out within the framework of PIREDEU ([www.piredeu.eu](http://www.piredeu.eu)), Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union. PIREDEU is funded by the European Union's FP 7 program (for more details see data documentation report in Schuck, Xezonakis, Banducci, & de Vreese, 2010).

### *Sample*

The content analysis was carried out on a sample of national news media coverage in all 27 EU member states. In each country we include the main national evening news broadcasts of the most widely watched public and commercial television stations. We also include two 'quality' (i.e. broadsheet) and one tabloid newspaper from each country. Our overall television sample consists of 58 TV networks and our overall newspaper sample consists of 84 different newspapers. The content analysis was conducted for news items published or broadcast within the three weeks running up to the election. The date of the election varied across countries. Depending on the date of the elections in a given country, the coding period ran from May 14 to June 4 or from May 17 to June 7.

### *Data Collection*

All relevant news outlets were collected either digitally (TV and newspapers) or as hardcopies (newspapers). With regard to story selection, for television, all news items have been coded; for newspapers, all news items on the title page and on one randomly selected page as well as all stories pertaining particularly to the EU or the EP elections on any other page of the newspaper have been coded (within the political news, opinion-editorial, and business-economy sections). In total, 52,009 news stories were coded (32,041 newspaper stories and 19,968 TV stories) in all 27 EU member countries combined. 19,996 of these news stories dealt specifically with the EU (16,749 newspaper stories and 3,247 TV stories), of

which 10,978 news stories dealt specifically with the EP election (8,718 newspaper stories and 2,260 TV stories). The unit of analysis and coding unit was the distinct news story.

### *Coding procedure*

Coding was conducted by 58 coders at two locations, the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands) and University of Exeter (UK). Coders were trained and supervised and the coder training included repeated tests of intercoder-reliability which yielded satisfactory results (reported below). The study coordinators not only attended but also performed as trainers in all training sessions at both locations. The coder training and final intercoder-reliability test was conducted based on English language material (for more information about the procedure see Schuck et al., 2010).<sup>1</sup>

### *Dependent Variables*

In total we consider four indicators of vertical Europeanization and two indicators of horizontal Europeanization. The analysis is based on all news items dealing specifically with the EU and/or the EP election campaign, i.e. news items in which the EU and/or the EP election campaign was mentioned at least two separate times. The complete actor, issue and location appendices are publicly accessible as part of the PIREDEU data documentation report (Schuck et al., 2010) which is available online (<http://www.piredeu.eu>).

*EU actors.* EU actor count is the total number of EU actors mentioned among the six most prominent actors in a news story and thus could vary between 0 (minimum) and 6 (maximum). EU actors were defined as all actors fulfilling official EU functions as well as the EU as such or any of its institutions.<sup>2</sup> We include all candidates for the EP in this category regardless of their then current function. Krippendorff's alpha's for intercoder reliability was .65.

*EU issues.* We coded up to three main topics per news story which were defined as main subjects of the story, i.e. taking the most space or time and had to be mentioned or referred to at least twice in a news article or newscast. Coders could choose from an extensive list of (EU- and non-EU) topics. Examples of EU topics include, but are not limited to, EU integration, EU finances, competences of EU institutions, EU membership, EU enlargement, EU elections, the Euro etc. For the complete list of topics (EU- and non-EU) see Schuck et al., 2010. Our measure of *EU issues* in the current study is the total count of EU-specific issues among the three most important general topics coded for each news item and thus could vary between 0 (minimum) and 3 (maximum). A score of 0 is possible because even

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- 1 Language- (e.g., expressions etc.) and format-specific (e.g., formal outlet features etc.) issues emerging during the coding of the native language material later on were resolved in consultation with the coder trainers.
  - 2 The first actor of a news story was coded based on salience (number of mentions and overall prominence in the text), all other actors have been coded chronologically in order of appearance.

though the news items considered in the analysis are EU- and/or EP election specific (i.e. mentioned two separate times) it is of course possible that none of the three *most important* topics in such news items deals with the EU and/or EP elections but with other topics instead. Krippendorff's alpha's for intercoder reliability was .68.

*Location (origin)*. This variable assesses where the story or the action or event it depicts takes place. We derive *two* separate dependent variables from this measure. The first we refer to as "*EU location (origin)*" and consider to be an indicator for *vertical* Europeanization. It measures if the origin of the story is the EU as such (1) or any other (0). Krippendorff's alpha's for intercoder reliability for this measure was .78. The second we refer to as "*Other EU member state location (origin)*" and consider to be an indicator for *horizontal* Europeanization. It measures if the origin of the story is another EU member state (i.e. other than the country the medium stems from) (1) or any other (0). Krippendorff's alpha's for intercoder reliability for this measure was .73.

*Location (affected)*. This variable assesses the entity that is depicted as being affected by the action or event referred to in the story. Again, we derive *two* separate dependent variables from this measure. The first we refer to as "*EU location (affected)*" and consider to be an indicator for *vertical* Europeanization. It measures if the entity affected by the story contents is the EU as such (1) or any other (0). Krippendorff's alpha's for intercoder reliability for this measure was .69. The second we refer to as "*Other EU member state location (affected)*" and consider to be an indicator for *horizontal* Europeanization. It measures if the entity affected by the story contents is another EU member state (i.e. other than the country the medium stems from) (1) or any other (0). Krippendorff's alpha's for intercoder reliability for this measure was .65.

## Analysis

For each individual media outlet, data are aggregated to a weekly level. For each dependent variable, we take the share of total news items per outlet per week that contains the respective 'Europeanization' indicators under consideration. We ended up with a total of 426 observations in our analysis (which reflects the number of total outlet [142] – week [3] combinations).

We conduct six separate ordinary least squared regressions with each of the Europeanization indicators above as dependent variables, and the explanatory factors listed below as independent variables.<sup>3</sup>

## Independent Variables

Our key focus is on three key characteristics of the media. *Television* is a dummy variable indicating, for each case, whether the outlet was a television broadcast (1) or not (0). *Private Television* is a dummy variable indicating whether or not

3 The variance inflation factors (VIF) for the independent variables in all models presented in our analysis are all below the value of three and thus sufficiently low, indicating the absence of multicollinearity in our data.

the outlet was a commercial television broadcast (1) or a public television broadcast (0). *Tabloid* is a dummy variable indicating whether or not the outlet was a tabloid newspaper (1) or a broadsheet (0).<sup>4</sup>

Two variables capture key country characteristics with regard to EU relations as predictors of coverage. Public *EU support* is measured as the aggregated country scores of the percentage of the population who answered affirmatively to the question: “Generally speaking, do you think that (YOUR COUNTRY’S) membership of the European Union is a good thing?” We rely on *Eurobarometer* data of Spring 2009 (EB 71) for this variable.<sup>5</sup> *EU net benefit* measures the yearly percentage of the Gross National Income (GNI) that is being paid to the European Union (negative score) or is being received from the European Union (positive score). Data are collected from the 2008 annual budget report from the European Commission.<sup>6</sup>

### Controls

*Geographic distance* measures the distance between Brussels and each national capital in kilometres (divided by 100).<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, *neighbouring countries* is the total number of surrounding unique sovereign states a country shares borders with. *Population* is the total population size of a country (divided by 100).<sup>8</sup> Finally, *GDP* is the Gross Domestic Product per capita in a country.<sup>9</sup> Other explanatory variables we consider are, for example, *simultaneous elections*, a dummy variable indicating whether national or local elections were held at the same day as the EP elections (1) or not (0). *Proximity to Elections* captures the temporal aspect of the campaign coverage. This variable indicates the week number within the campaign, starting with the value ‘1’ for the first week of the research period and increasing by one point for each following week approaching the election. Thus, higher numbers indicate greater closeness to the election.<sup>10</sup>

4 An overview of outlets and their classification into private/public (TV) and tabloid/broadsheet (newspapers) is available from authors upon request. The total overview over all outlets included in the analysis can be found in the official PIREDEU data documentation report (Schuck et al., 2010).

5 Retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb71/eb71\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb71/eb71_en.htm).

6 EC budget report of 2008 retrieved from: [http://ec.europa.eu/budget/library/publications/fin\\_reports/fin\\_report\\_08\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/budget/library/publications/fin_reports/fin_report_08_en.pdf).

7 Distances from national capital to Brussels are calculated using the infoplease online distance calculator <http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/calculate-distance.html>.

8 “Eurostat Population Estimate” retrieved from: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>

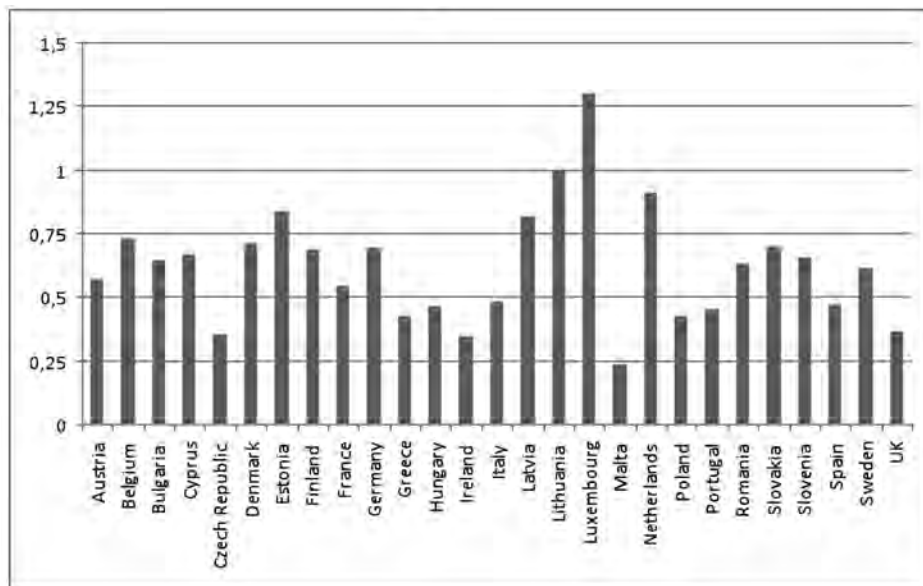
9 Numbers are based on the year 2009 and retrieved from the IMF “Report for selected Countries and Subjects”: <http://www.imf.org/external/index.htm>.

10 Furthermore, we also controlled for if a country is part of the Eurozone (1) or not (0). This factor proved to be unrelated to any of our dependent variables and thus is not included in the models presented here. Finally, we also considered how many years a country is already part of the EU, however, multicollinearity diagnostics (VIF) let us exclude this variable from our analysis.

### 3. Results

In the following, we present the results of our analyses explaining Europeanness in news media content. First, however, we take a look at the descriptive findings with regard to our six different content analytic indicators. Our first results show that EU actors were most present in EU news coverage in Luxembourg, Lithuania and the Netherlands and least present in Malta, Ireland and the Czech Republic. Figure 1 shows the cross-national variation in the presence of EU actors in media content.

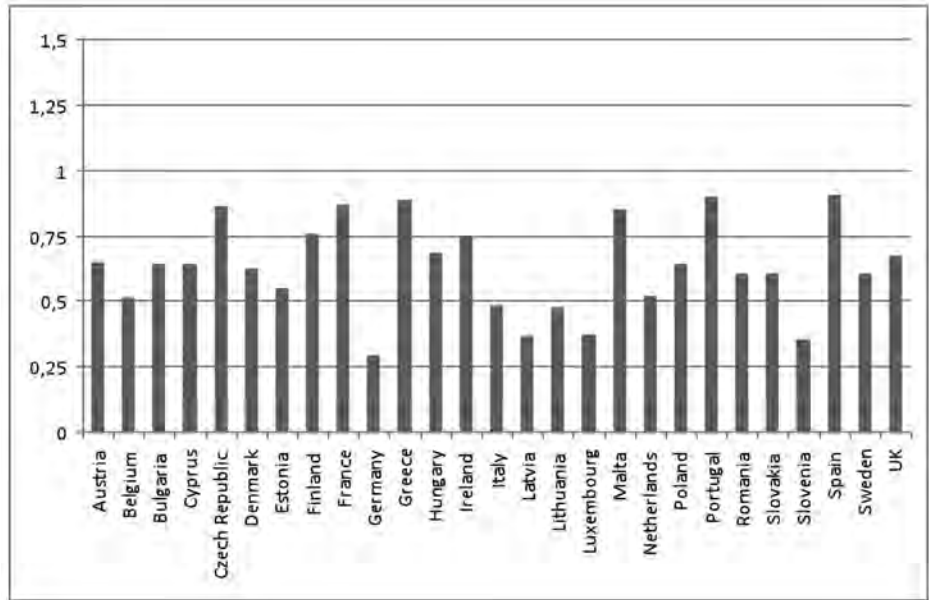
Figure 1: EU actors in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states



Note: Numbers are mean count scores which are aggregated from news outlet to country level (from 0-6).

EU issue focus was highest in EU and EP election coverage in Spain, Portugal and Greece. Noticeably EU actor focus in all of these countries was only modest (see Figure 1 above). The same is true for Malta, France and the Czech Republic which also show a comparably strong EU issue focus while at the same time EU actors in the countries do not feature prominently. Clearly, EU actor focus does not go entirely hand in hand with focus on EU issues. This suggests that when EU issues are the main focus of a story, the coverage is still dominated by domestic political actors. EU actors, on the contrary, receive more attention more so when EU issues are part of, but not central to the story.

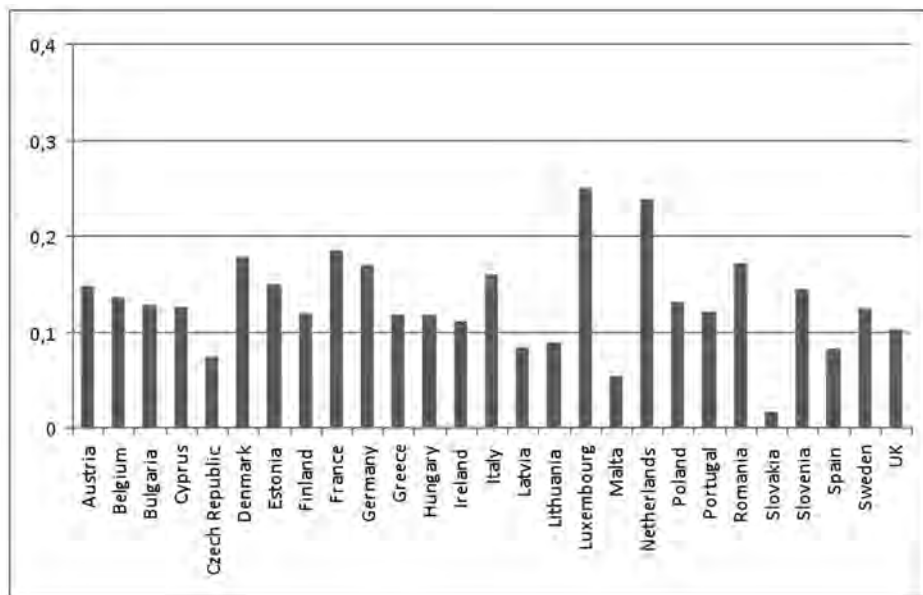
Figure 2: EU topics in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states



Note: Numbers are mean count scores which are aggregated from news outlet to country level (from 0-3).

Regarding the EU as the location being the story origin we find scores to be highest in Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Given the close geographic proximity, institutional ties, and/or generally the European history of these two longstanding EU members this finding comes as no surprise. The same is true for other long standing member states such as Germany, Italy and France or countries with a history of intense public debate about issues of EU integration such as Denmark. With few exceptions (e.g., Romania), coverage in many Eastern European countries (i.e., Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic) and/or countries which only recently joined the EU (e.g., Malta) focus less on Europe and/or the EU as story origin.

Figure 3: EU as *location of origin* in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states (vertical)

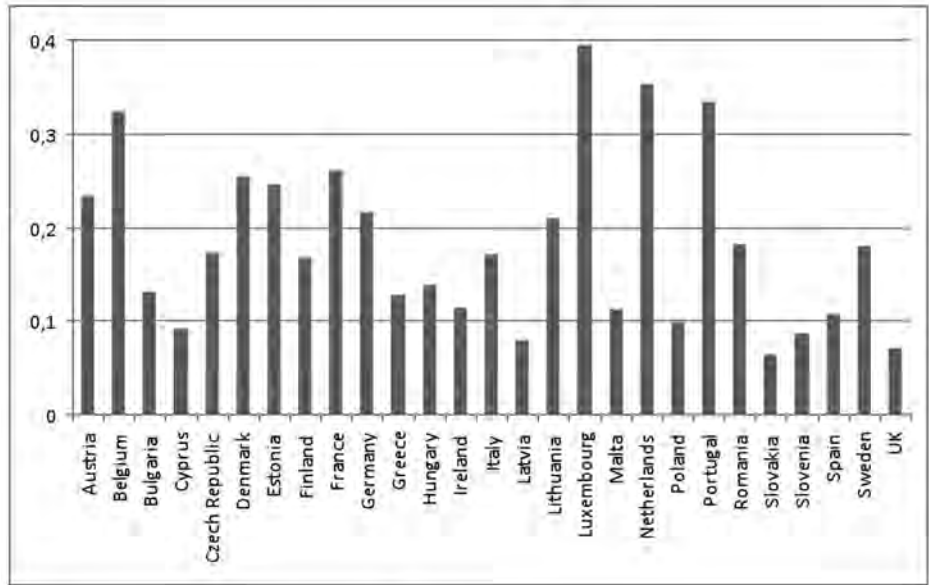


Note: Numbers are proportional scores (from 0-1) which are aggregated from news outlet to country level.

By and large the picture looks similar for the EU as being the entity affected by the story contents. Notable differences emerge with regard to Portugal and Belgium, and also regarding Estonia and Lithuania, scoring higher on this indicator than on the previous one.



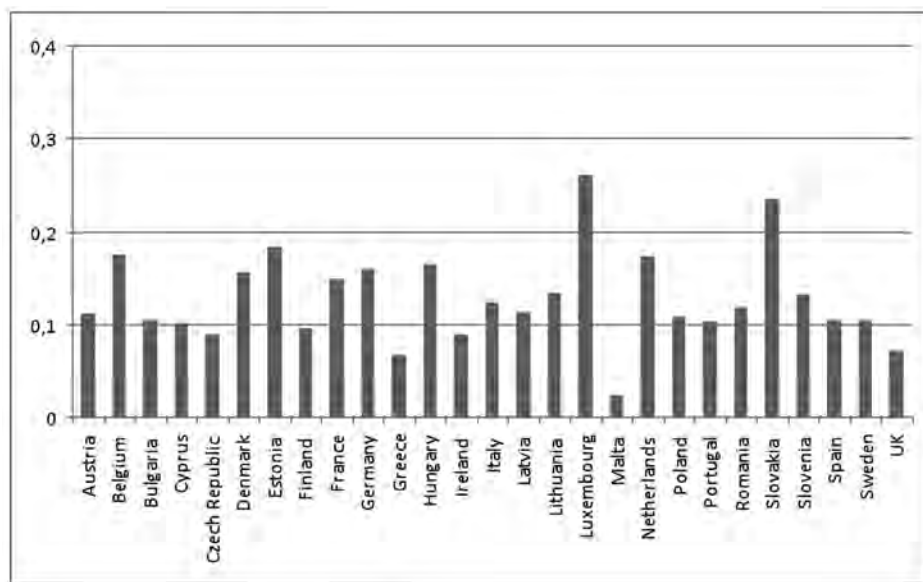
Figure 4: EU as *location affected* in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states (vertical)



Note: Numbers are proportional scores (from 0-1) which are aggregated from news outlet to country level.

Next we turn to our two horizontal indicators. Regarding the focus on other EU member states as story origin again Luxembourg scores highest and again Malta scores among the lowest. Also the Netherlands, Germany, France, Belgium and Denmark score rather high again. However, we notice that also news coverage in Estonia and Hungary and especially Slovakia show a focus on other EU member countries as story origin. Such focus is much less dominant in the UK, Greece or Ireland, for example.

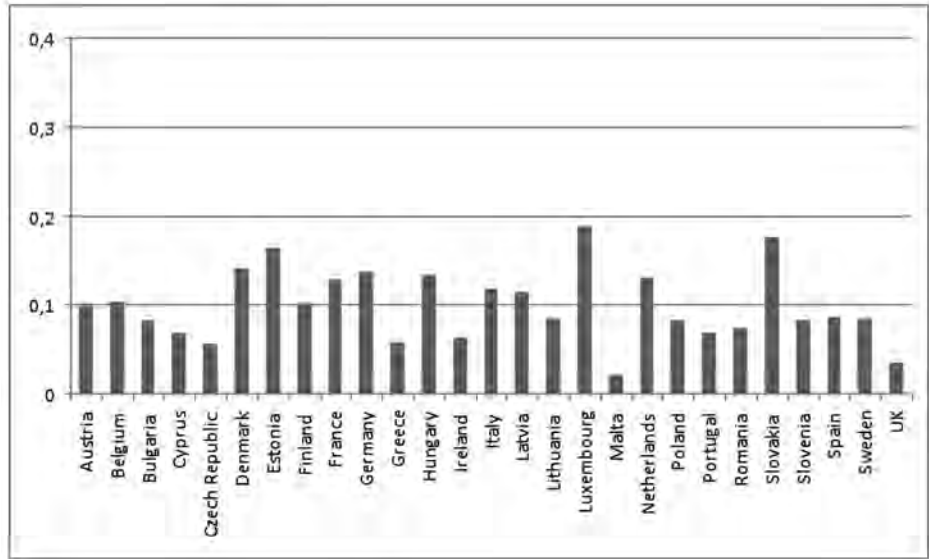
Figure 5: Other EU member country as *location of origin* in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states (horizontal)



Note: Numbers are proportional scores (from 0-1) which are aggregated from news outlet to country level.

Finally, regarding the focus on other EU member countries as the location being affected by the story contents we find a very similar picture, just on a generally lower level, i.e. there simply is less focus on this aspect in news coverage across all countries. Again news coverage in Luxembourg pays most and coverage in Malta pays least attention to other EU member states being affected by the story contents. Scores are again high for Slovakia, Estonia and Denmark, and again low for the UK, Greece and Ireland. Comparing our two vertical location indicators above (Figures 3 and 4) with our two horizontal indicators (Figure 5 and 6) it is noteworthy to stress the similarities (e.g., Luxembourg, Denmark and the Netherlands scoring high and the Czech Republic, Malta and the UK scoring low) as well as the differences (e.g., Slovakia scoring very low on the vertical and very high on the horizontal indicators).

Figure 6: Other EU member country as *location affected* in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states (horizontal)



Note: Numbers are proportional scores (from 0-1) which are aggregated from news outlet to country level.

Turning to our explanatory models, we first take a closer look at the factors that explain the presence of EU actors in the news and our media variables more specifically and see that there is less focus on EU actors in tabloid newspapers and in television coverage. These findings yield partial support for our media hypotheses (H2 & H3). Furthermore, as shown in Table 1 below, higher levels of support for EU membership in a country and being a net receiver from the EU budget both are associated with higher degrees of Europeanness in news coverage in terms of EU actor visibility (supporting H4 & H5). Some of our control variables also showed to matter as expected, i.e. countries with smaller population size, higher GDP and countries geographically closer to Brussels show more focus on European actors in the news. Finally, simultaneous national elections come at the expense of the number of EU actors in news coverage.

Table 1: Explaining EU actor visibility in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states

TV (private)	-.061	(.051)
Newspaper (tabloid)	-.226***	(.047)
Medium (TV)	-.181***	(.045)
EU support	.005**	(.001)
EU net benefit	.059*	(.026)
Simultaneous elections	-.172***	(.044)
Proximity to elections	-.011	(.020)
GDP	.007**	(.002)
Population	-.339**	(.108)
Geographic distance (Brussels)	-.010**	(.003)
Neighbouring countries (total)	.010	(.007)
Adjusted R-Square	.19	
N	426	

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).

(\*)  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed)

Next in our analysis, we turn to EU issue focus. Our descriptive findings discussed above already indicated that the picture looks different here than with regard to EU actors. Indeed, none of the effects we could observe in the previous EU actor model emerge again explaining the number of EU issues as most important topics in EU and/or EP election news coverage. Instead, we see that TV coverage shows stronger focus on EU issues as most important topic compared to newspaper coverage. This is opposite to our expectation (H3), however, considering that previous research has shown that general visibility of EU topics is higher in newspaper coverage in terms of total story count (also inherent to the newspaper format providing more space for coverage compared to TV), it could mean that *if* television does cover EU topics, these are more central to the story compared to newspaper coverage which might cover the EU more frequently but seemingly less centrally in terms of issue importance *within* EU coverage. This finding in fact also dovetails with Peter and de Vreese 2004 who also showed that television covers European issues less frequently compared to newspapers, but when it does, it is more centrally placed and receives more prominence. Furthermore, we see the interesting phenomenon that distance is related to more EU issues and, at the same time, less EU actors (see the EU actor model above). This could mean that if countries are far away from Brussels, they pick up more EU issues in their coverage, but rely more on domestic (non-EU) actors as an implication of being far away. Finally, we see a strong positive effect of our time variable, i.e. EU issue focus as most important topics of EU and/or EP election coverage increases during the campaign and as election day approaches.

Table 2: Explaining EU topic visibility in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states

TV (private)	.001	(.041)
Newspaper (tabloid)	.046	(.038)
Medium (TV)	.124**	(.035)
EU support	.000	(.001)
EU net benefit	.016	(.021)
Simultaneous elections	.037	(.035)
Proximity to elections	.153***	(.016)
GDP	.001	(.002)
Population	.000	(.086)
Geographic distance (Brussels)	.009**	(.003)
Neighbouring countries (total)	.002	(.005)
Adjusted R-Square	.22	
N	426	

*Note:* Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).

(\*)  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed)

We now turn to our two vertical EU location models. First, we find partial support again for our media hypotheses, i.e. coverage is more EU-focused in public broadcasting TV programs (H1) and in newspapers (H3). Furthermore, we find tentative support for our hypothesis that higher levels of public EU support in a country are related to stronger EU focus (H4). Finally, higher GDP is again related to higher EU focus.

Table 3: Explaining EU as *location of origin* in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states (vertical)

TV (private)	-.049**	(.017)
Newspaper (tabloid)	-.015	(.015)
Medium (TV)	-.043**	(.014)
EU support	.001(*)	(.000)
EU net benefit	-.001	(.008)
Simultaneous elections	-.021	(.014)
Proximity to elections	.006	(.007)
GDP	.002**	(.001)
Population	-.006	(.035)
Geographic distance (Brussels)	.000	(.001)
Neighbouring countries (total)	.004(*)	(.002)
Adjusted R-Square	.14	
N	426	

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).  
(\*) p < .10; \*p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001 (two-tailed)

Regarding our second vertical EU location model we see a similar picture emerging. Again, we find partial support for our media hypotheses, i.e. stronger focus on the EU as entity affected by the story contents in public TV broadcasting (H1). Public EU support is related to stronger EU focus (H4). Furthermore, focus on the EU as affected is stronger again in countries with higher GDP, with smaller population, countries closer to Brussels and is increasing towards election day.

Table 4: Explaining EU as *location affected* in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states (vertical)

TV (private)	-.048*	(.022)
Newspaper (tabloid)	-.029	(.020)
Medium (TV)	-.028	(.019)
EU support	.002***	(.001)
EU net benefit	.013	(.011)
Simultaneous elections	-.022	(.019)
Proximity to elections	.023**	(.009)
GDP	.002**	(.001)
Population	-.101*	(.046)
Geographic distance (Brussels)	-.006***	(.001)
Neighbouring countries (total)	.005	(.003)
Adjusted R-Square	.17	
N	426	

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).

(\*)  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed)

Table 5 presents the findings regarding our first horizontal location indicator. Again, we find partial support for our media hypotheses, i.e. there is more focus on other EU member states as story origin in news coverage in public TV broadcasting (H1) and broadsheet newspapers (H2). Also public EU support in a country is related to higher Europeanness in coverage (supporting H4). Several of our control variables exert an influence in the expected direction, Europeanness is higher in countries with smaller population and countries closer to Brussels. Furthermore, Europeanness increases during the campaign as election day approaches and decreases when simultaneous national elections draw away attention. Interestingly, different to (most of) the previous models explaining vertical Europeanization, GDP has no effect in this model explaining horizontal Europeanization whereas the number of neighbouring countries (having no impact in previous models) does result in more focus on other EU member countries as story origin.

Table 5: Explaining other EU member state as *location of origin* in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states (horizontal)

TV (private)	-.045**	(.015)
Newspaper (tabloid)	-.044**	(.014)
Medium (TV)	.010	(.013)
EU support	.001**	(.000)
EU net benefit	.010	(.008)
Simultaneous elections	-.033*	(.013)
Proximity to elections	.024***	(.006)
GDP	.001	(.001)
Population	-.079*	(.032)
Geographic distance (Brussels)	-.005***	(.001)
Neighbouring countries (total)	.004*	(.002)
Adjusted R-Square	.15	
N	426	

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).  
(\*) p < .10; \*p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001 (two-tailed)

Turning to our last model, explaining the extent to which other EU member countries are described as the location being affected by the story contents, we see the identical picture as with regard to the previous model. Most importantly, public TV broadcasting (H1) and broadsheet newspapers are related to greater focus on other EU member states as being affected by the actions depicted in a story. Also public EU support has a positive effect (H4). Interestingly, again GDP has no effect and the number of neighbouring countries has a positive impact. All other control variables have the same effect as in the previous model, providing a robust picture of which factors explain horizontal Europeanization in media coverage.



Table 6: Explaining other EU member state as *location affected* in EP election news coverage in all 27 EU member states (horizontal)

TV (private)	-.050***	(.014)
Newspaper (tabloid)	-.041**	(.013)
Medium (TV)	.015	(.012)
EU support	.001*	(.000)
EU net benefit	.006	(.007)
Simultaneous elections	-.031**	(.012)
Proximity to elections	.019***	(.005)
GDP	.001	(.001)
Population	-.061*	(.029)
Geographic distance (Brussels)	-.003**	(.001)
Neighbouring countries (total)	.005**	(.002)
Adjusted R-Square	.12	
N	426	

Note: Cell entries are unstandardized coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).

(\*)  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed)

## 5. Discussion

The debate on a European public sphere has evolved into investigations of the degree of Europeanization of national political debates and the conditions under which such Europeanization take place. This study is based on a unique EU-27 investigation of indicators for horizontal and vertical Europeanization. Our findings regarding the content of media coverage of the latest 2009 EP elections provide evidence to suggest that it is indeed appropriate to speak of a continuing trend towards more visibility and greater Europeanness of coverage (Schuck et al., 2011). This means that the ‘light at the end of the tunnel’ (de Vreese et al., 2009) shines a bit brighter after these elections, and that the political debates across Europe have become slightly more European.

This study was the first to address the factors that *explain* differences in Europeanness in media coverage across countries. Our findings corroborate and extend previous research: newspapers are still more important as agents of Europeanization than television news; the quality press and public television are more European in focus than their broadsheet and commercial counterparts. This means that when searching for Europe in the news, there are news outlets in which we are much more likely to find it than in other places. Our analysis is based on a comprehensive and conservative model in which we included and tested the impact of a range of other factors. Stronger public support for the EU in a country is related to more Europeanness in news coverage whereas benefiting financially from the EU budget showed to have much less of an impact. We also see that the European focus becomes stronger generally during the campaign

even though EU actors do not become more prominent. Geography matters so that closer proximity of a country to Brussels in most cases leads to more Europeanness. Noticeably, we found some differences with regard to our vertical and horizontal indicators of Europeanization. The number of neighbouring countries contributes to greater focus on other EU member states as focus of news coverage whereas GDP only matters with regard to focusing on the EU as such. This stresses the need for further research to not only carefully consider how to operationalize 'Europeanness' (i.e., the dependent variables under study) but also the fit with the respective explanatory factors before arriving at far-reaching conclusions regarding the degree of Europeanization and possible explanations. This is even more important considering that many studies only focus on single indicators or only on vertical or horizontal ones. As our findings show and we discuss, findings regarding the degree of Europeanness and the explanations behind it can look very different depending on if we consider the visibility of EU actors or, alternatively, EU issues as relevant indicators. Future research needs to further disentangle these nuances and employ models which consider multiple indicators as dependent variables which require the inclusion of different explanatory factors in order to provide more insight into the antecedents of European news coverage. The models presented in this study perform well in terms of explained variance, however, more relevant factors still need to be identified. Such an endeavor is sometimes confronted with practical constraints since studies aiming to explain European news coverage across all member states do not always have comparative data available for all countries and thus are restricted in their choice of explanatory factors that could be considered.

Our study points to the importance of paying specific attention to both the indicators for Europeanness as well as possible explanations. In this study we looked explicitly at Europeanness within the news coverage. Other research has considered visibility of EU institutions as an indicator of Europeanness (e.g., Brüggemann & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009) or simply visibility of EU news in general. While the 2009 EP elections indeed marked an increase in visibility of the elections (see Schuck et al., 2011), our endeavor here was to unravel the features of the coverage rather than merely assessing the presence of coverage. Second, we believe that our Europeanness indicators are quite inclusive. We consider the presence of EU actors and issues within several actors and issues in a given news story. Arguably a less lenient operationalization of Europeanness might be to focus on only the *most important actor or issue* in a story to obtain a more conservative estimate of the degree of Europeanness. The inclusiveness of our dependent variables might also have ramifications for the importance of explanations. Other research, for example, found that public EU skepticism was related to more Europeanness (Brüggemann & Kleinen-von Königslöw, 2009), but in fact this was only the case when visibility was considered part of Europeanness and no effect was found regarding other EU focus in coverage. We also find in our study that higher GDP is related to more Europeanness, though only for our indicators of vertical Europeanization. We tentatively interpret this both as a function of our inclusive operationalization and in the light of the 2009 EP elections in which the

economy played such a central role, which implies that European economic developments are highly relevant, also for richer countries.

Our study is based on a systematic, quantitative content analysis of newspaper and television news. While we believe that the scope of the analysis puts us in a comfortable position to draw conclusions about the degree of Europeanness in the news, we also realize that our study has a number of shortcomings. We limit our analyses to the EP elections, which arguably is one of the peak moments in the media coverage of European politics (see Boomgaarden et al., 2010). Others have argued (e.g., Koopmans et al., 2010) that a continuous flow of information about EU politics and other European countries is a prerequisite to ensure quality in the Europeanized public spheres. We cannot assess this with our study. Second, we cannot extrapolate our findings to the online news environment. Van Os et al (2007) focusing on the Internet during the 2004 EP was, for example, more optimistic about the emergence of a European public sphere than our data give reason to be. We cannot assess such differences and the inclusion of online communication was beyond the scope of this study. Finally, our study is a 'systematic snap shot' of the Europeanness of the news. As argued by Goetz and Hix (2000) Europeanization is a process. Future research should address the change over time and tease out the conditions that are conducive to the change.

Conceptually we extended the notion of Europeanness to include additional indicators. This is important to get a more nuanced and still comparable and systematic idea of Europeanization. However, we believe that the fruitfulness of the concept lies in further extending the research agenda to include both the antecedents and explanations, as pursued here, and in the work on how state actors, political parties, interest groups, and social movement organizations address this topic (see Kriesi et al., 2007) as well as the *effects* of varying degrees of Europeanness in the news. De Vreese and Klausch (2011), for example, showed that emphasizing European perspectives in the news can affect the willingness of citizens to allocate policy competences at the EU level and the importance of European perspectives for EU support has also been stressed elsewhere (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003).

Our study also has important implications for the EU and the study of Europeanization of media. In a time where public opinion about the EU is under pressure it becomes pertinent to map and understand the media coverage of European affairs in greater detail as the impact of media coverage of the EU on public opinion, policy evaluations, and vote choice is well documented (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Schuck & de Vreese, 2008; van Spanje & de Vreese 2011). The current financial crisis has emphasized the interconnectedness of European economies. Europeanness in the news is important for citizens to not only know about EU initiatives but also to have information about other EU countries. The legitimacy of European actions, also in the realm of the economy, is at stake and news coverage with sufficient Europeanness is a condition sine qua non for a viable public debate and understanding.

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