

Who influences Europeanized debates? A comparative analysis between Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom

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Structure of the proposal:

- 1- Research question.
- 2- Previous literature and hypotheses.
- 3- Research design and methodology.

1- Research question

This PhD project is aimed to explain, to what extent, the Euro crisis and the Brexit have brought about unprecedented media attention to EU affairs in Northern and Southern Member States and, especially, their consequences on the distribution of resources and incentives of several political actors for influencing EU related debates. To do so, we rely on insight from domestic usages of the EU to answer the following research question: Under which circumstances and why domestic actors influence EU related public debates? Concretely, we are focusing on explaining possible differences in the capacity and incentives to influence EU related debates between mainstream and challenger parties, interest groups and social movements and the impact of two critical junctures: The Euro crisis and the Brexit.

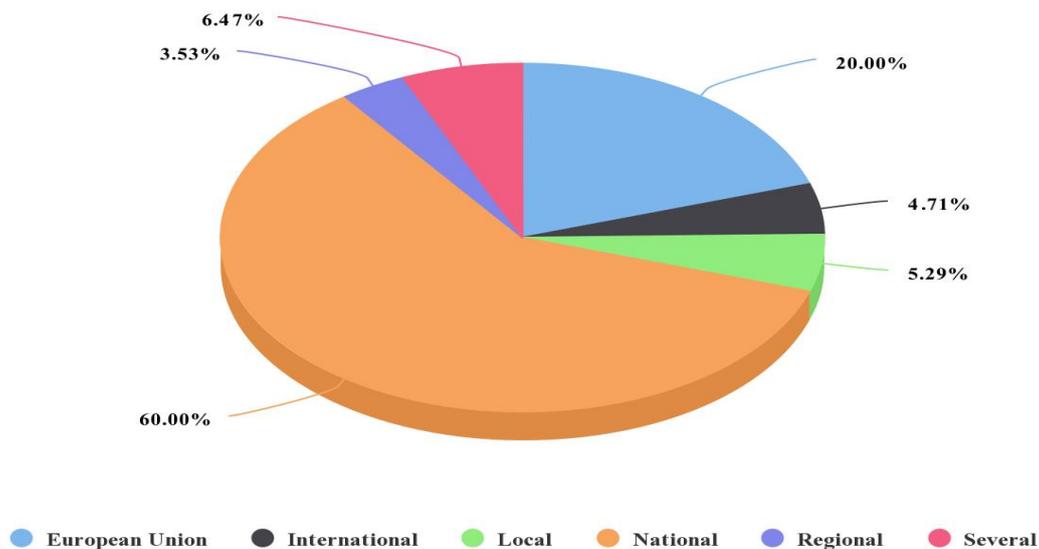
Research on how the media inform us about EU affairs is an increasing significant topic within the research field, mainly due to the political impact of the EU integration over the national spheres. Since the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty (1991-1992), the public concerns about the implications of the EU integration for the country have gradually increased as the permissive consensus has eroded (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). In this regard, the impact of some recent events, such as the Euro crisis, the refugees' crisis and the Brexit, have placed the EU at the center of the political debate, even being questioned the future of the EU integration process itself. Because of these factors, there is an increasing perception that national executives are not able to offer accurate alternatives to solve national problems anymore, due to both the lack of own resources and the capacity to define their own policies autonomously (e.g. Brouard et al., 2011; Mair, 2011).

Despite this increasing importance of the Europeanization process for national politics, after conducting a literature review of 175 academic articles on how political actors influence public debates in the media agenda, we have noted the existence of significant gaps of knowledge within the research field.

Existing research has been more prone to analyze how political actor influence national public debates at the national arena (60% of the academic articles) (e.g. Semetko and Boomgaarden, 2007), whereas EU related literature has remained in the background (20%) (e.g. Gatterman and Vasilopoulou, 2015). Even though EU related research is the

second most analyzed approach by scholars, it barely remains explored and, therefore, there is a clear discrepancy between existing literature and the current importance of the Europeanization for national spheres. Nowadays, the gradual transference of significant power domains to the EU political level has resulted in an increasing Europeanization of national policy-making processes. In countries such as Spain, more than the 60% of the national legislation passed in is directly or indirectly related to the EU (Palau and Chaqués, 2011).

Figure 1: Level of Government analyzed by research on how political actors influence public debates in the media



Source: own elaboration

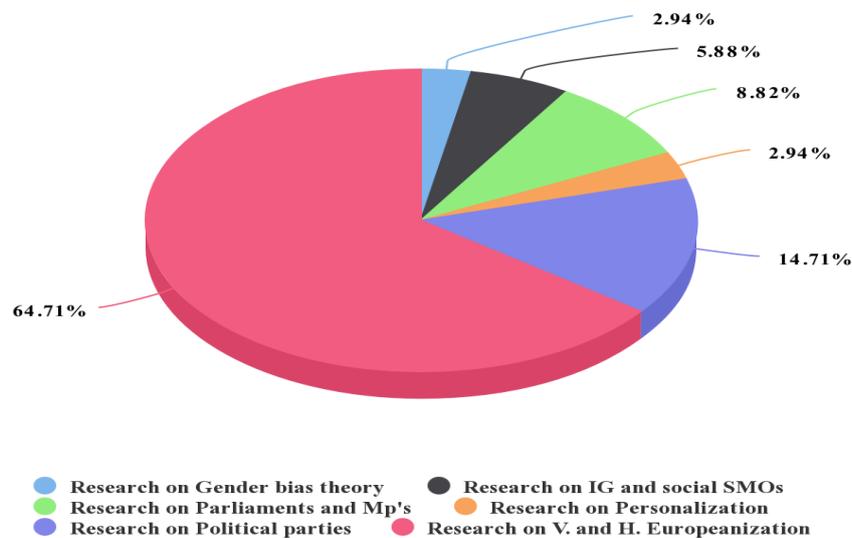
Basing on these gaps of knowledge, we will contribute to three key existing theoretical approach to obtain more insight into how political actors influence EU related debates: 1) existing research on the EU democratic deficit; 2) existing research on the strategies employed by political actors, interest groups and social movements to obtain their objectives; and 3) existing research on the role of the media and media functions.

Previous research on the EU democratic deficit (e.g. Scharpf, 1999) has mainly been discussed at the EU political sphere, focusing on the communication deficit between the EU institutions and public opinion (e.g. Meyer, 1999). The existing literature has conditioned this communication deficit to the existence of an EU common public sphere (e.g. Meyer, 1999; Gerhards, 2000; De Vreese et al., 2006; Koopmans, 2007), following the definition of public sphere proposed by Habermas (1996) as a network of public deliberation between the political centre and the periphery. Concerning the EU, this concept is related to a common space for deliberation, engagement and discussion where political actors and citizens can exchange their viewpoints, claims and opinions about societal issues and common interests (e.g. Meyer, 1999; Brantner et al., 2005; Dahlgren, 2005; Pfetsch, Adam and Eschner, 2008).

Existing research highlights the centrality of the media to create and configure an EU public sphere (e.g. Gerhards 1993, 2000; Kevin, 2003), as it is the main channel through

citizens may influence the policy-making process (e.g. Habermas, 2001). In this sense and according to Kevin (2003), the Europeanization “is for the most part dependent on the output of the national media”. However, since the existence of a transnational pan-EU sphere, which would require a common language, a transnational media and a common identity (Habermas, 2001; Grimm, 2004), is unrealistic (De Vreese, 2007), research so far has focused on the Europeanization of national public spheres (e.g. Gerhards, 1993, 2000; Neidhardt et al., 2000; Koopmans and Pfetsch, 2006). According to the data obtained from our literature review, most studies have followed two key approaches to analyse the degree of Europeanization of the media agenda: vertical and horizontal Europeanization (e.g. Peter et al., 2004; Brüggeman and Königslöw, 2009).

Figure 2: Theories and objectives analyzed by EU related research



Source: own elaboration

However, we still know little about how the media inform us about EU affairs from a national process perspective, in other words, focusing on the mobilization of domestic actors around EU affairs. For example, only the 14.71% of EU related research illustrates how the strategies and interactions among political parties may influence their media saliency.

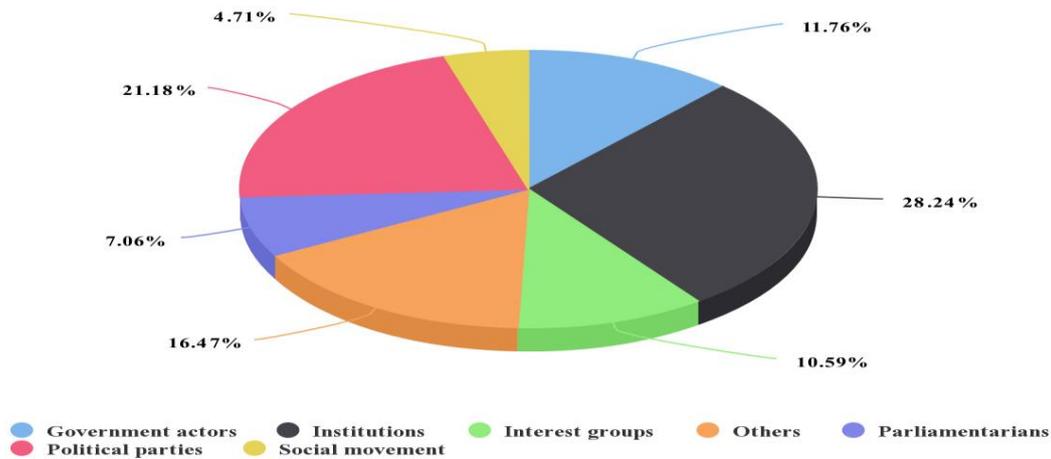
However, because of the intergovernmental dynamics (De Wilde, 2014) and the difficulties that feature the access to the EU policy-making process, political entrepreneurs and civil society organizations still focus on national politics (Kriesi, 2016). While political decisions are taken at the EU political sphere, public debates and citizens’ participation in the policy-making process remains placed at the national level and directed by national authorities (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004). This discrepancy between the EU institutional development and the national space as the arena where public debates are developed, is considered one of the main sources of the EU democratic deficit (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004). In this sense, the national media may contribute to reduce or promote this EU shortcoming of the EU, depending on the capacity of several domestic actors to set the EU on the media agenda.

Research conducted by the *EUROPUB* project on domestic actors, has illustrated that executive elites are the main beneficiaries from the Europeanization of public debates, while legislative actors, political parties and, especially, actors stand to lose from the Europeanization of political communication (Koopmans, 2007). However, these conclusions are mainly reached following a top-down approach to analyze the Europeanization, relying on structural factors such as the position of the political actors within the EU policy-making process. In this paper, instead, we follow a different approach to explain to what extent critical junctures, and more specifically the economic crisis initiated in 2008 and the Brexit, have transformed public debates on EU affairs. Additionally, existing research during the Euro crisis period has been conducted to explain the framing of this critical juncture (Kaiser and Kleinen-von Königsloew 2016) and its impact on the media saliency of EU actors and other member States (vertical and horizontal approaches) (Kriesi and Grande, 2015). However, these analyses in basing their conclusions on the crisis period, since 2010, do not allow identifying variations compared to the pre-crisis period. Thus, they do not contribute to obtain conclusions on the impact of the Euro crisis and the Brexit upon the mobilization of domestic actors.

Thus, we expect to contribute to the existing research on the EU democratic deficit by means of a new normative debate on the Europeanization of the media, following a national process perspective. Contrary to existing literature, our analysis is conducted to obtain more insights into the government-opposition dynamics and the mobilization of interest groups and social movements around EU affairs, comparing the pre-crisis with the Euro crisis and the Brexit. From this national perspective, is the democratic deficit also a communication deficit? Does mainstream status matter to gain media saliency? Have the Euro crisis increased the capacity and incentives of civil society actors for influencing EU related debates? Do the media cover intensively the government-opposition dynamics around EU affairs? Have the Euro crisis and the Brexit change the patterns of mobilization of political actors?

Concerning existing research on the strategies employed by political actors, interest groups and social movements, scholars and research groups, such as the *PIRIDEU* project, have mainly conducted analysis of the strategies of political parties in EU related stories (21.18% of the EU related academic articles on the literature review) and the media saliency of EU institutions (28.25%) to obtain conclusions on vertical Europeanization (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2006).

Figure 3: Type of actor analyzed by EU related research



Source: own elaboration

These analyses have mainly been conducted to explain how Eurosceptic positions and party contestation, increase the media saliency of EU actors (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2006; Schuck et al., 2011; Boomgaarden et al., 2013). Research on the strategies followed by Eurosceptic parties in EU related debates is a key topic within the research field, as these political actors are the main drivers of Europeanization (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Grande and Kriesi, 2016) whereas pro-EU positions followed strategies to depoliticize the EU integration process (e.g. De Wilde and Zürn, 2012). Despite of this fact, research into Eurosceptic parties has mainly been conducted to analyze their strategies during electoral processes (e.g. Schuck et al., 2011; Strömbäck et al., 2011; Boomgaarden et al., 2013). We still know little how these parties employed the EU to get their objectives during routine periods. Furthermore, previous literature neither allows identifying the main differences and, to what extent, the Euro crisis and the Brexit have transformed the mobilization and incentives of pro-EU and Eurosceptic actors in EU related debates.

In this PhD project, instead, we are focusing on strategies employed by political parties, both pro-EU and Eurosceptic parties, and other political actors less analyzed by existing research, such as national executives (11.76%), interest groups (10.59%) and social movements (4.71%), from the pre-crisis period until the referendum of the Brexit. From an intergovernmental perspective (De Wilde, 2014), the analysis of the capacity of executive elites to influence EU related debates is a relevant topic, due to their privileged position within the EU policy-making process. From an EU governance perspective, interest groups play a fundamental role within the EU policy-making process, putting pressure on policymakers to obtain their objectives and shaping EU policies (e.g. Beyers, 2004). Finally, from a Europeanization perspective, despite vertical and horizontal Europeanization perspectives are key factors for the Europeanization of national spheres, government-opposition dynamics (Gerhards, 2001) are another key element to increase the importance of the EU public debate. Increasing interactions between executive elites, opposition parties and social movements may transform and assimilate the EU as a common component of the political contestation at the national sphere.

Through an exhaustive and comparative analysis, we expect to contribute to the research field with a new normative debate around: 1) the circumstances and motivations of interest groups and social movements to mobilize around EU related debates. Are economic groups more positive towards the EU integration than other interest groups? Have the Euro crisis and the Brexit increase evaluations of interest groups towards the EU integration? During the Euro crisis, have interest groups and social movements mainly employ negative evaluations towards the EU and its policies, especially in Southern countries and Ireland? Or, do they focus their negative evaluations to blame national executives? In the United Kingdom, are there a balance in the news between positive and negative evaluations towards the EU integration process? 2) Under what circumstances national executives and political parties may employ an EU frame to obtain their political objectives. Do national executives employ a positive EU frame towards the EU integration? Do the Euro crisis and the Brexit increase the mobilization of pro-EU political parties?

As a last contribution to existing theoretical approaches, this project fits within existing research on the role and functions of the media (e.g. Norris, 2000; Habermas 2001; Koopmans and Erbe, 2004). From a democratic (Norris, 2000) and legitimation perspectives (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004; Koopmans, 2007), the media should act as public forums where all viewpoints, claims and positions were represented. In this sense, national media should contribute to increase the transparency and the public accountability (Norris, 2000) of the EU policy-making process. Growing transparency may increase citizens' knowledge (Norris, 2000) about the political positions and the distribution of power among political actors within the EU policy-making process. Furthermore, better-informed citizens, together with an increasing media attention to political entrepreneurs, may stimulate the public debate around the EU integration process.

However, existing research has conducted their analyses as if the media act as neutral actors and impartial chroniclers, being an ideal scenario to analyze the strategies of political parties. Conversely, the media may act as independent actors, covering more intensively some political positions according to their own ideological preferences (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Therefore, there may be a media bias between the positions and strategies of political actors around EU affairs and the way the media inform us about these positions. Previous literature on the topic has mainly focused on national related debates at the national political level (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Chaqués and Baumgartner, 2015). Contrary on existing literature, we are not focusing this analysis on the average tone of the news, but conducting a claim analysis on the evaluations of media actors regarding political actors to obtain more insights into the media bias in news contents. For example, negative news may be associated to executive parties regardless their ideological positions in general terms during the euro crisis. However, from a claim analysis perspective, there may be a media bias in evaluations make by the media, not by other political actors, analyzing claims as a unit of analysis. Our expectation is to bring more clarity into the research field on whether the media fulfill their functions or there is a media bias. However, we are conducting on a new normative debate placed on EU related debates, instead of focusing on national related debates. Do political actors have more capacity to influence EU related debates in the media linked ideologically to them?

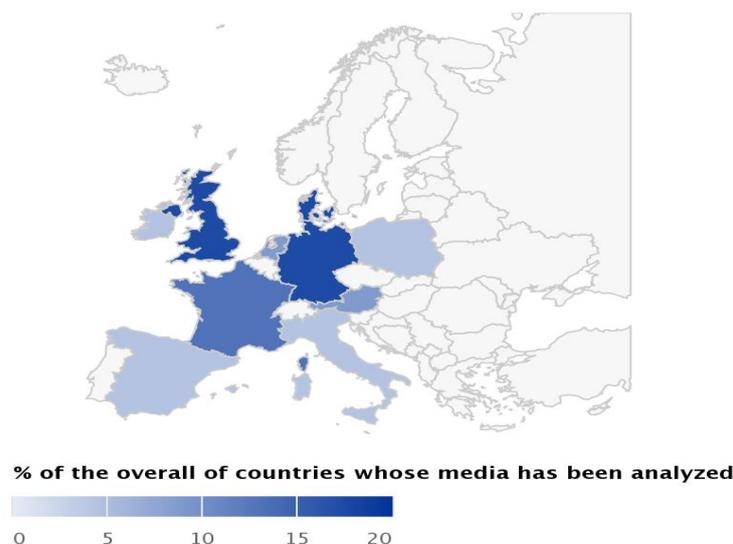
Do the media associate political allies to good news, whereas political enemies are associated with bad news for national interests? During the Brexit, pro-EU parties have more capacity to influence EU related debates in the United Kingdom, mainly in the pro-EU media? In the case of an increasing capacity of political entrepreneurs to influence EU related debates during the Euro crisis and the Brexit, is this capacity associated to ideological affinities with the media?

The expectations outlined above are tested by means of a macro study, considering any political actors in EU related news and any EU affair, on: 1) time-series analysis of all the front-pages published in the two most important national newspapers of Ireland, the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*, Italy, *Il Corriere de la Sera* and *La Repubblica*, Spain, *El País* and *El Mundo*, and the United Kingdom, *The Guardian* and the *Daily Mail*, from 2004 to 2016; 2) the full content of these newspapers during three months to obtain more insights into the media saliency of political actors; and 3) Content analysis of tweets published by political actors from 2006 to 2016, as a exogenous variable to compare their media saliency with their activity in EU affairs.

Thus, contrary to most of the existing literature, our analysis relies on a long-time period that includes the entire media agenda, beyond the focus on EU events (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2006) and the analysis of the media saliency of political actors in specific policy areas (e.g. Koopmans, 2007). Additionally, existing research on the entire media agenda (e.g. Boomgaarden et al., 2010) have been mainly conducted to explain the mobilization of political actors in the media of Northern countries, especially in German and British media, and mainly placed at the pre-crisis period.

Finally, the current research proposal has been prepared with the future objective to allow us to collect enough data to elaborate several academic articles related to the topics under study.

Figure 4: Countries whose media outlets have been analyzed by EU related research in exhaustive analysis, beyond specific policies areas and EU events



Source: own elaboration

The selection of Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom respond to the fact that all these countries have especially been impacted by critical junctures. Southern countries and Ireland were specially hit by the Euro crisis and object of budgetary austerity policies, resulting in an unprecedented mistrust of public opinion towards the EU institutions. Concerning United Kingdom, where Eurosceptic positions have traditionally stronger within the media agenda (e.g. Usherwood, 2012), the Brexit may have stimulated the mobilization and the resonance of public debate around the EU between both the Eurosceptic and pro-EU positions. Thus, a key question is, to what extent, these critical junctures have resulted in unprecedented attention to EU affairs and variations in the number and type of actors who can speak about the EU in the media.

2- Previous literature and hypotheses.

Who influences EU related public debates

Previous literature illustrates the amount of EU related stories has tended to increase over time (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2006; Boomgaarden et al., 2010; Schuck et al., 2011), although EU affairs are still marginal covered by national media (e.g. Norris, 2000; Peter and De Vreese, 2004; Boomgaarden et al., 2010). This phenomenon may be explained by theories of path dependence and positive feedback, as routines of journalism take time to develop and public audiences get used to new topics slowly, especially regarding abstract issues such as the EU integration process (Brüggemann and Königslöw, 2009). Additionally, from a functionalist perspective of the EU integration (De Wilde, 2014), increasing media attention to EU affairs may partly be explained by the gradual transfer of sovereignty from member States to the EU sphere. The growing transfer of important power domains to the EU, especially since the introduction of the Euro, has been accompanied by an increasing media attention to Brussels and public debate around the EU integration (Brüggemann and Königslöw, 2009).

Other scholar, instead, argue the media coverage of the EU does not tend to follow a linear trend, but it is more prone to follow a cyclical pattern (e.g. Norris, 2000). This media attention to EU affairs increases around certain infrequent events, such as EU Parliament elections, EU referenda, EU enlargements, installations of a new EU Commission or during EU Council summits, decreasing after these events and being practically marginal during routine periods (Norris, 2000; De Vreese, 2001; Peter et al., 2003; Peter and De Vreese, 2004; Steenbergen and Scott 2004; Trenz, 2005; Netjes and Binnema 2007; Guineaudeau and Palau 2016). The EU is marginal covered by the media prior the start of these events and its media coverage disappears once these ones have finalized (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2006).

Another important question approached by existing research is how the EU integration may have provided of new opportunities for political mobilization and changed the distribution of resources among political actors for influencing EU public debates. Previous analyses have shown that national media in some countries have experienced a vertical Europeanization in their contents, paying an increasing attention to EU actors and the linkages between the national and EU spheres (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004; De Vreese et al, 2006; Koopmans, 2007; Brüggeman and Königslöw, 2009; Boomgaarden et al., 2013). Furthermore, this vertical Europeanization of the media agenda has also tended to be accompanied by a horizontal Europeanization, per which the national media have

increased the attention to other member States or to events and debates around the EU integration that take place in them (Peter et al., 2004; Koopmans, 2007; Brüggemann and Königslöw, 2009). These analyses concur in the fact that domestic actors dominate the media coverage of EU related stories (Peter et al., 2004; De Vreese et al., 2006; Boomgaarden et al., 2013).

Within the national sphere, research conducted by the *EUROPUB* project in seven countries from 1980 to 2002 show that executive elites with positive attitudes towards the EU integration are the most influential actors in EU related debates, whereas the Europeanization of public debates has weakened the position of legislative actors, political parties and, especially, civil society organizations (e.g. Koopmans, 2004, 2007; Della Porta 2003; Díez Medrano 2003, 2004). The dominance of executive elites in EU related debates may be explained by the inherent intergovernmental dynamics of the EU policy-making process (De Wilde, 2014). Executive elites, both European and national, have a privileged and authoritative position within the EU policy-making process and, at the same time, the EU suffers from a deparliamentarisation process that has weakened the position of national parliaments (O'Brennan, 2007). Another explanation may be related to the higher difficulties of less resourced actors to influence EU public debates, mainly due to news selection processes which tend to rely on institutional sources and news routines (Schulz, 1997; Meyer, 1999). Finally, this dominance would be consistent with the Bennet's Indexing Theory (Bennet, 1990), per which the media are prone to cover more intensively those official sources and voices that participate within the governmental debate. Media outlets are more prone to focus on covering the routine reporting of executive elites, dismissing those voices that are considered marginal within the governmental debate.

Nevertheless, the capacity of several domestic actors for influencing EU public debates may depend on the deep cultural roots of the country and the position of these actors towards the EU integration process (Díez Medrano, 2007).

In countries where the EU integration tends to be a more consensual issue, such as Italy, Ireland and Spain, pro-EU executive elites are the main source of information of the mainstream media, whereas Eurosceptic positions which are challenger parties and have less resources have been marginalized in EU public debates (Koopmans, 2007).

Generally, Eurosceptic mobilization is more pronounced, instead, in countries where the EU is a high controversial issue among political actors and public opinion tend to be Eurosceptic as in the case of the United Kingdom (Díez Medrano, 2007). Previous research has already highlighted the key importance of party conflict around the EU to explain increasing attention to EU affairs (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2011; Peter et al., 2004; De Vreese et al., 2007; Schuck et al., 2011; Boomgaarden et al., 2013). As more Eurosceptic the public and political parties are regarding the EU integration process, more media attention is given to the EU (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Peter et al., 2004; De Vreese et al., 2007; De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2012; Brüggemann and Königslöw, 2009). Even though executive elites may have more capacity to influence EU related debate, Eurosceptic positions, specifically the Conservatives and the new populist right in the United Kingdom, have been the main drivers of the EU integration within the domestic party competition (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Grande and Kriesi, 2016). Executive elites

have usually tried to depoliticize the EU integration (Kriesi, 2016), keeping EU affairs off the media agenda. Even Eurosceptic executive elites, which should have more incentives to criticize the EU integration, are not likely to deal with EU affairs as they may mobilize Eurosceptic opposition such as the new populist right or deal with internal divisions (Schuck et al., 2011; Chris, 2014; Snaith, 2016). Finally, Eurosceptic media outlets are more likely to be very critical towards the EU integration and dismiss pro-EU voices, increasing the capacity of Eurosceptic positions to influence EU public debates (Usherwood, 2012). Even more pro-EU media, such as the British media outlet The Guardian (Usherwood, 2012), are hesitant to open their communicative space to deepen into the EU integration (Daddow, 2013).

These conclusions obtained by existing research have mainly relied on structural factors to explain why some actors have a higher privileged capacity to set the media agenda and, therefore, to influence EU public debates than others. This is a structural bias that features research on the Europeanization of national spheres based on top-down approaches. To overcome this structural bias, existing literature has focused on analyzing the news media from agency-centered perspectives (Bache et al., 2006). In this sense, Woll and Jacquot (2003, 2010) highlight that domestic actors are not just passive actors in the domestic arena, but they use the EU arena to strengthen their positions, even in the absence of specific pressure exercised top-down by the EU (see also: Dardanelli, 2004). Thus, research on the Europeanization of national public spheres should consider the “usages of Europe” perspective. This approach is focused on explaining the Europeanization of domestic policies, basing on a sociological perspective.

In countries where the EU is a more consensual issue, we could expect that executive elites use their privileged access to the media to make a “legitimizing use of Europe” (Woll and Jacquot, 2010). Domestic executives play a key role as main representatives of their countries in front of the EU institutions, participating in EU negotiations in different institutional settings. Because of this privileged position, they are the main receivers of the information related to the EU, being the responsible for transferring it at the domestic political level. They may be more interested in reporting successful developments and positive impacts for the national interests, transmitting the image of good negotiators of these interest within the multilevel political game.

From a utilitarian perspective, there are output (Scharpf, 2009) and specific forms of legitimacy (Gabel, 1998). These perspectives are based on perceptions of the country regarding the benefits obtained from the EU integration at both the political and economic levels (Díez Medrano 2003; 2007). They rely in the advantages that the EU membership offers in terms of economic policies and the development on public policies (Díez Medrano, 1995; 2003). Thus, the legitimating perspectives employed by executive elites may be more likely to be followed during economic prosperity periods and when the perceived benefits from the EU integration are high, framing the EU as a governmental success. Although opposition parties may also use legitimating strategies, these actors have a more restricted access to the media agenda than executive elites (Guinaudeau and Palau, 2015).

H1.1) In consensual countries, domestic executive elites are those with more capacity to influence public debates on EU affairs, as they enjoy of a privileged access to the media.

These actors will use an EU frame following legitimating strategies to give media visibility to positive developments and successful policies and a positive evaluation of the EU integration.

By the contrary, executive elites would avoid using the EU integration as a part of their political strategy, even during good economic terms, in countries where the EU is controversial among citizens and policymakers. EU affairs may mobilize political opposition, having a negative electoral impact among Eurosceptic public opinion (Schuck et al., 2011; Chris, 2014; Snaith, 2016). Eurosceptic parties, instead, would have more incentives to politicize the EU integration. They perceive the EU as a combination of several threats which undermine the national sovereignty, such as external and cultural influences or issues related to the national economy and immigration (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, 2002). Their doubts have resulted in the consideration of the EU and its institutions as a “symbolic enemy” (Leconte, 2010; Caiani and Conti, 2014) against the own values of their country. Traditionally, Euroscepticism is a characteristic of challenger parties on the extreme left and the new populist right rather than mainstream parties (Taggard, 1998; Sitter, 2001). The mobilization of extreme left is based on the threats of the economic liberalization and globalization over the achievements of the left at the domestic sphere, whereas the new populist right holds a clear opposition towards the EU integration in both political and cultural approaches (Kriesi, 2007). Notwithstanding, according to Kriesi (2007), the new populist right cannot be reduced to their positions regarding the EU integration. These parties also use a populist appeal to increase the resentment against mainstream parties to mobilize citizens who are likely to lose from the EU integration (Kriesi, 2007), even becoming the party of the working class in many countries (Oesch, 2013) like the United Kingdom. However, Euroscepticism is a key element of their ideology, so new populist right would mainly use an EU frame to attack the EU integration and its institutions to gain credibility and legitimacy in front of the Eurosceptic public in EU related debates. Concerning the presence of Eurosceptic conservative mainstream parties, they would be more prone to use negative evaluations towards the EU integration and EU institutions as opposition parties. The general trend of left mainstream parties towards the “Third Way” and more centrist political agendas has turn EU affairs into a political issue where there may be a clear distinction between mainstream parties (e.g. Giddens, 1998; Evans and Butt, 2007; Fox and Goodwin, 2014). Furthermore, due the concerns for the increasing electorally successful of the new populist right, these mainstream actors are more likely to adopt a Eurosceptic message as a part of the national electoral competition (Meguid, 2005).

H1.2) In countries where the EU is a controversial issue, executive elites share the capacity to influence EU public debate with Eurosceptic parties, as these actors are interested in politicizing the EU integration. Executive elites will avoid using legitimating strategies, whereas Eurosceptic positions will use an EU frame to attack the EU integration and its institutions to gain credibility and legitimacy in front of Eurosceptic voters.

The impact of critical junctures

Previous literature has already illustrated that, given the inherent and intrinsic economic nature of the EU, the economic policy is the most covered issue by the media (Gavin,

2000, Meyer, 2005; Schuck et al., 2011), followed by topic related to development processes of the EU integration such as EU institutions, policy-making process or new potential members (Norris, 2000). According to Meyer (2005), economic policies go more into the media agenda because they “deal with clearly identifiable, single quantitative benchmarks against which national performance can be measured”. Policies related to taxation, spending, inflation or unemployment are considered as the key levels of governmental power and are closely scrutinized by the media due to their electoral significance (Meyer, 2005; Soroka, 2006). Instead, other policies with a lower electoral impact are marginal covered by the media and only in exceptional circumstances their media saliency increases enough to have a potential influence in public opinion (Norris, 2000).

Due to the relationship between the visibility of the topics and their potential impact on public opinion and voting behavior, the media tend to pay a higher attention to bad economic trends than routine economic issues (e.g. Harrington, 1989; Aragonés, 1997). According to this perspective, the Euro crisis may have accentuated the process of politicization of the EU integration, because of the importance and the significant social consequences of EU decisions for citizens’ daily lives (Cramme and Hoolt, 2014; Hobolt and Tilley, 2014; Hobolt and Wrátil, 2015). Medrano (2007) prove that economic and institutional crisis have a negative impact on citizens’ perceptions toward the EU institutions. In this way, the euro crisis may have increase the saliency of EU issues because of the negative redistributive consequences between and within countries of EU decisions taken at the EU political sphere.

Similarly, the Euro crisis may also change the redistribution of resources, the capacity and incentives of political actors to influence EU public debates at the domestic level. This worst-case scenario may have provided new opportunities to set the EU on the media agenda to political actors who were previously excluded systematically by journalists or were not interested in EU public debates.

The economic crisis with a combination of political crises at both the EU and domestic political spheres (Kriesi, 2016) have undermined the output based form of legitimacy of EU integration (Jones, 2009) and, at the same time, has also accentuated the process of politicization of the EU integration (Grande and Kriesi, 2016). According to Kriesi et al. (2006), the politicization of the EU integration is “likely to give rise to a new structural conflict between winners and losers from these transformations”. The winners of these processes are educated and well-positioned citizens, owners and highly qualified employees which are open to the globalization and international competition (Kriesi et al., 2006; Grifford, 2010). These actors tend to be more positive towards the EU integration, as they make a profit of the Single Market and the project itself (Grifford, 2010). Instead, protected sectors exposed to foreign competition and groups with a lower degree of education and economic security are considered as losers of the EU integration (Grifford, 2010). Thus, they are more likely to mobilize against the EU (Grifford, 2010).

Even in countries such as Spain, Italy and Ireland where attitudes towards the EU had traditionally been positive (Medrano, 2003; 2007; Taylor, 2008; Caiani and Conti, 2014), the budgetary austerity policies taken by the EU and national institutions have resulted in an unprecedented mistrust of public opinion towards both the EU institutions and domestic

incumbents. This has served as a catalyst for the increase of “soft Euroscepticism” (Taggard and Szczerbiak, 2001) or “constructive Europeanistic” claims (Stathma and Koopmans, 2009) on the part of domestic actors, that has resulted in the rise of a new left movement (like the 15-M in Spain) in Southern countries (Kriesi, 2016). However, they do not reject the EU itself, but questioning specific policies or specifying alternatives in how the EU integration should be driven. Previous research has previously shown that civil society organizations tend to be critical towards EU institutions, but they hold more positive views of the EU integration (Koopmans and Pfetsch, 2006; Koopmans, 2007). In Southern countries and Ireland, citizen’s grievances and behaviors are directly related to the expectations about how should be their conditions of life and the realization of these expectations (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016b). These countries had previously experienced economic growth and an important decline of unemployment before the Euro crisis, so the bad economic trend and its effects was especially galling for them (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016b). However, the main target of these actors has been the domestic elites (Kriesi, 2016), whereas the importance of EU institutions remains limited (Hutter et al., 2016). The voters in these countries perceive the impact of the austerity measures as a failure of national incumbents (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016b), being the electoral punishment massive (Bartels, 2014).

However, voters of more open economies like the United Kingdom are less likely to evaluate national incumbent through variations in the economy (Hellwing and Samuels, 2007). The British economy was not affected by the Euro crisis in a similar way than debtor countries, being their effects more moderated. From a utilitarian and identity perspectives, Eurosceptic civil actors mobilize against the EU integration, as they consider immigration and the free movement of people as threats against national identity and the own values of the country (e.g. De Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2015). From a political perspective, Goodwin and Milazzo (2015) illustrate that the increasing mistruth and undermined popularity of incumbent parties could increase the mobilization of these actors against the EU integration, as it was an opportunity to protest political institutions. However, we could expect that mobilization of interest groups and civil society actors with more positive attitudes towards the EU integration to increase during the Brexit, because of the consequences of the political consequences associated to the withdrawal of their country. In this sense, the Brexit may have increased the capacity and incentives of these actors to set the EU on the media agenda and, therefore, increasing media visibility of pro-EU evaluations in EU public debates.

The Euro crisis has also affected negatively the interests of economic groups, mainly banks, which usually have a higher media coverage than civil society actors, as they have more resources and higher capability to overcome the difficulties of collective action (Binderkrantz, Chaqués and Halpin, 2016). Previous research has illustrated that economic groups, such as business organizations, tend to be more positive towards the EU integration and less critical towards the EU institutions than civil society organizations (Koopmans and Pfetsch, 2006; Koopmans, 2007).

As a result, we expect that following the outbreak of the economic crisis and the Brexit:

H2.1) Actors from civil society and economic actors have more capacity to influence Europeanized debates. Economic groups will hold more positive evaluations about the

EU integration and less critical towards the EU institutions than civil society organizations.

H2.2) In consensual countries, civil society actors will mainly use a EU frame to attack national incumbents during the economic crisis. Instead, in controversial countries, these actors will mainly employ an EU frame to criticize the EU integrations and its institutions, although we expect positive evaluations to increase during the Brexit.

We still expect that executive elites to maintain their privileged access to the media agenda, as they are those actors which participate in intergovernmental negotiations at the EU political sphere. Moreover, Eurosceptic parties have become part of government coalition in some countries like Italy. According to Kriesi (2016) “they are likely to become mainstream parties themselves”, introducing national resistance towards the EU governance. Notwithstanding, despite the negative consequences and unpopularity of EU decisions, previous research illustrates EU-positive elites still dominate the media coverage of EU issues, especially in debtor countries (Auel and Höing, 2014; Leon et al., 2015; Picard, 2015). However, they would no longer have the capacity to frame positive developments and successful developments using an EU frame.

H3.1) In countries where the EU is a more consensual issue, executive elites keep on influencing EU public debates, but they do no longer use an EU frame following legitimating strategies.

Regarding the United Kingdom, we expect that the Brexit to have increased the incentives of executive elites and pro-EU political actors to influence EU related debates. A Conservative and Liberal coalition ruled the country since the year 2010. Liberal democrats are more favorable towards the EU integration and its intuitions, whereas Conservatives have been more critical towards the both aspects. However, Conservatives during the Brexit has held a favorable position to remain in the EU, although renegotiating the EU membership of the country. Conservatives are more likely to be more positives regarding the relationship between the economic impact upon national economic interests and the Single Market (e.g. Grifford, 2010; Welling, 2012), whereas they have been more critical about other aspects of the EU integration advocating for the recovery of the national sovereignty in key political areas.

H3.2) During the Brexit, we expect executive elites to have more incentives to influence EU related debates. Liberal democrats would use a general EU frame to defend the EU integration and its institutions, whereas Conservatives are more likely to employ positive evaluations regarding the EU integration especially in economic issues.

Challenger parties are increasingly assuming representative functions of citizens' demands, as they are the most beneficiaries of the punishment to incumbents since the Euro crisis (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016). By the contrary, mainstream parties do not generally tend to make any profit of incumbents' losses due to the lower public support to parties that have already been at the office previously (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016). They do not hold any responsibility in front of the EU institutions due to their low probability of entering office in the next elections, so they are more likely to use Europeanized claims and make a “delegitimizing use of Europe”. Besides the radical left and the new populist right, which are against the EU integration, the civil mobilization

and the conflict with the domestic elites has driven the rise of new challengers (Kriesi, 2016) mainly from the left. The objective of these New Left parties is a more social EU in solidarity with the circumstances of the South, situation for which they blame both EU institutions and domestic incumbents (Kriesi, 2016). In the case of Spain, it must also add the case of Ciudadanos, a left-liberal party which their goals are the renewal of politics and their support to an economically liberal program (Rodríguez-Teruel and Barrio, 2015). These new parties are not incompatible with the EU and the EU membership (Altıparmak, 2016), so they are more likely to make Europeanized constructive claims and to attack to incumbents in response of citizens' demands.

H4) Challenger parties with low likelihood of entering office in the next election will increase their influence in EU public debates during critical junctures. To obtain electoral advantages, extreme parties will mainly use a delegitimizing strategy to attack the EU integration and their institutions, whereas news parties will mainly use an EU frame to attack national incumbents.

The impact of ideological ties between domestic actors and the national media

From a neutral professional journalism perspective (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), national media should act as a mirror of the political reality (McQuail, 1992; Tresch, 2009). They should act as neutral actors and impartial chroniclers of the political sphere, increasing the public accountability of political actors (e.g. Norris, 2000) and the transparency of the policy-making process (McQuail, 1992).

Other scholar, instead, argue that the media act as independent actors with their own ideological preferences (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). From this perspective, EU affairs may be more likely to be set on the media agenda by domestic actors with similar ideological positions to media outlets in countries with a high degree of political parallelism. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), the Italian and Spanish media systems correspond to a Pluralist Polarized or Mediterranean media model, whereas Ireland and the United Kingdom are considered as Liberal or North Atlantic media systems. The Pluralist Polarized or Mediterranean media model is featured by a high political parallelism in media contents, a high state intervention, a low degree of journalist professionalism and low newspaper circulations. On the contrary, the main features of the Liberal media model are high degree of journalist professionalism, high newspaper commercialization and a low degree of political parallelism in quality media. Despite these features, in the case of British tabloids there is a strong political parallelism in their contents. In this line, Guinaudeau and Palau (2015) illustrate that mainstream parties have more opportunities to set the media agenda in quality newspapers, whereas challenger parties are more associated to tabloid in the United Kingdom.

H5.1) Mainstream parties will have a higher capacity to set and influence EU public debates in Southern quality media as well as challenger parties in British tabloids due to the strong political parallelism in their contents.

Nevertheless, the ideological ties between political parties and media outlets may go a step further. Chaqués and Baumgartner (2015) illustrate that national media may be more interested in association rival parties, mainly when they hold executive positions, with bad news as a part of the political game that is played in the media arena. On this basis,

political allies of media outlets may have a higher capacity to set EU public debates on the media agenda when these are related to positive developments and positive impacts for national interests, whereas the agenda-setting capacity of political enemies is related to bad news for the country.

H5.2) Political allies will have a higher capacity to set EU public debates associated to successful developments and positive claims for national interests, whereas political enemies have more capacity to set EU affairs related to negative news for the country.

Research design and methodology

Two widely read newspapers per country are analyzed, covering the period January 2004-December 2016. Regarding story selection, we will code all front-pages during all the period under study and the full content of the newspapers for three months to obtain more insights into the agenda-setting capacity of domestic actors. The code of EU related stories is based on the methodology proposed by *The Spanish Policy Agendas Project* databases (www.ub.edu/spanishpolicyagendas), which provide information about the issue content of the stories (e.g. Economic, fiscal and monetary policy, Fishery).

Our dependent variable includes distinct types of measures of media attention to EU affairs. First, those stories with EU content. We consider that a story has EU related content, if it mentions specifically an EU policy (e.g. Economic policy, Fishery, the Common Agricultural Policy) or a decision or action taken by an EU institution or EU actors (e.g. EU Commission, EU Parliament, Eurogroup, EU Council). We do not consider stories without political content. A story like “Irish research links climate change to the timing of European floods” is not coded as having EU content unless it mentions specifically an EU policy or EU institution. Second, to measure the (de)legitimizing strategies followed by domestic actors, we rely on the analytical approach of claim analysis (Koopmans and Statham, 1999) to code public evaluations towards the EU integration, the EU institutions and national incumbents in EU related stories. A claim may be a political opinion or demand, criticism or physical action such as demonstrations where the interest of the claimant and other actors are affected. We code the actor who makes the claim (the claimant), the target of the claim (the addressee) and the claimant’s evaluation towards the addressee. To code the public evaluations, the following scheme is used: negative evaluations towards the addressee are coded as 0, positive as 1 and neutral as 2. Furthermore, to obtain insights into legitimating strategies employed by executive elites and whether the media related positive or negative developments and impacts for national interests to political actors, we analyze the content of the claims to check whether these have a domestic impact for national interests and report a positive or negative tone for them. To code this tone towards the national interest, we employ the following code scheme: negative tone is coded as 0, positive as 1, neutral as 2, and 3 claims that present a combination of both positive and negative statements.

Regarding our independent variables, critical junctures could be measured through questions of the Eurobarometer data and, especially, answers to the questions: “Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (your country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Community (Common Market)?”. However, this indicator has three key problems. First, it is based on citizens’ perceptions that could have been influenced at the same time by the media coverage itself. Second, it is just

available semiannually, while the dependent variable is measured through monthly data. Finally, this question is only available until the year 2011. Therefore and due to some of our hypothesis are oriented to corroborate the impact of the Euro crisis, we use as an indicator the variations in the risk premium (data available on Eurostat) of the countries under analysis. Risk premium has a very high correlation with the question of the Eurobarometer related to perceptions in the benefits obtained from the EU integration during the period under study (0.9***). To test the capacity of domestic parties to set the EU on the media agenda and influence EU public debates, we code, in addition to the number of the published claims made by a domestic actor, the main actor of the story. More specifically, we consider that the domestic actor which has initiated the EU related story as a main actor. This variable will allow us measuring which domestic actors have a higher capacity to set the EU on the media agenda. For example, the following EU related story “Liam Fox accuses EU of trying to ‘blackmail’ UK over Brexit deal” is coded as an EU story initiated by the executive elites. We use the following specific code to identify the type of actor that initiates the story or the claim: 1) National executive elites; 2) political parties; 3) interest groups; 4) Social movements; 5) Others; 6) Two or more actors or not specified. In addition, to identify political parties and their positions towards the EU integration process, we use a list of specific political parties e.g. PP, PSOE, Liberal Democrats, Conservative Party, Sinn Féin), identifying Eurosceptic positions following the Chapel Hill Index as a previous literature. We also use a dummy variable to differentiate whether a political party has an incumbent status or not. Regarding the code used to classify different types of interest groups, we are following the classification proposed by the existing project *InterEuro*. Finally, the hypothesis related to the ideological ties between domestic actors and media outlet are measured in a qualitative way through the ideological positions of the media outlets and the differences between media systems proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004).

We do not have included in the study any hypothesis considering the impact of EU events, as existing research has already illustrated the relationship between these events and the media saliency of EU affairs. Nevertheless, we have included the following EU events as a control variable following the Guinaudeau and Palau’s methodology (2015): signature of EU treaties, including enlargement treaties and referendums, EU Parliament elections, EU Council summits, EU presidencies and key events related to the EMU like the introduction of the euro or the publication of convergence reports.

Since we are using the same source to measure both our dependent variable, media attention to EU affairs, and our independent variable, domestic actors which set the EU on the media agenda, may arise an endogeneity problem in the analysis. To know whether the capacity of domestic actors to set the EU on the media agenda is due to the existence of a media bias in favor to certain actors or, on the contrary, it reflects their actual activity in EU affairs, we use as an exogenous variable the tweets published by domestic actors in relation of EU affairs during the period 2006-2016. In this way, if a domestic actor has a high activity in EU public debates through its twitter account but having a limited capacity to set the media agenda, it may be due to the existence of a media bias by journalists. Years prior to the creation of a twitter account by a domestic actor and the period 2004-2005 should not be a problem, as our dependent and independent variables are neither correlated by construction. A high percentage of articles

on EU issues do not imply that, within these stories, the percentage of stories mentioning a specific domestic actor is high as well.

Acknowledgements

This research project has been possible thanks to funding from the Generalitat de Catalunya (AGAUR, grants FI-DGR) with the support of the European Social Fund.

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