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Cross-national Media Debates about the European Union's Socio-economic Strategy

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Caroline de la Porte and Arjen Van Dalen

Abstract

This paper studies the Europeanization of media coverage of the EU's socio-economic strategy, which is a crucial building block for developing a European Public Sphere. As the EU level increasingly influences public policy in Member States, there should correspondingly be a more intense and visible media debate with attention for EU-level and cross-national policies and developments. On the basis of a content analysis (2000 to 2010) in Denmark, France, Poland and the United Kingdom, we find that media attention for the EU's growth and jobs strategy is limited, that it does not increase over time and that it is mainly driven by the EU agenda. There are cross-national similarities in thematic focus and EU level actors are omnipresent in reporting on the strategy. Finally, we find that coverage of the strategy has a transnational dimension in all four cases, with reference to peer countries in terms of benchmarking and reporting on criticism and advice to member states. This criticism is more often diffuse than aimed at specific member states. Therefore, we conclude that media coverage of the EU's socio-economic strategy is Europeanized, but that it remains a debate by and for EU-interested actors.

Introduction

This paper contributes to the literature on the Europeanization of media discourses by studying the Europeanization of media debate about Europe's socio-economic strategy (EUSES). We know little about how the EUSES is picked up in national media, which is important as it has increasingly important repercussions for member state institutions and policies (Borras and Radaelli, 2011; de la Porte and Natali, 2014). Media debate about European public policy is important in the crystallization of a European public sphere. In 2000, the main aim of the strategy – then called 'Lisbon Strategy' - was for Europe to become the world's most competitive and socially cohesive region in the world. In 2010, the strategy was renamed as 'Europe 2020' with a strategic aim of achieving "smart, sustainable and inclusive growth" (European Commission, 2010) with high levels of growth and employment across Europe. Since its institutionalisation, the policy aims covered by this strategy has broadened, to areas such as employment, pensions, innovation, social exclusion, climate change and education policy (Borras and Radaelli, 2011). While several studies have looked at how this central strategy has been institutionalised and implemented in Member States (Borras and Peters, 2011; de la Porte and Jacobsson, 2012) we know less about the way the policy is represented to the public through the media. Given the impact of the economic recession on the EU, and with it rising Euroscepticism, it is crucial that the EUSES be publicly debated to EU citizens.

Input legitimacy in EU politics and policy is guaranteed by the EU's system of checks and balances (Moravcsik, 2002; Bang et al. 2015) and by public consultations on key topics, including EUSES (European Commission, 2014). However, participants in public consultations are an informed elite and not the public at large. It is therefore crucial that EU policy and politics, particularly when it shapes national policy-making, be part of the public debate in national media. As argued by Meyer

(2005: 122) the more political power is shifted up towards the EU level, such as through the EUSES, the more “compensatory Europeanization” of national public discourse becomes necessary. Compensatory Europeanization is the expectation of an increase in media coverage on European affairs in line with the increased influence of Europe on public policy development (Meyer, 2005: 124). From a normative perspective, political communication about the European politics could contribute to the emergence of a “European Public Sphere”, where citizens would be more informed about and involved in debates relating to EU politics and policies. If there is an intense (highly visible) as well as transnational and critical media coverage of European topics across ‘national public spheres’, then that would signify that a European public sphere is emerging (Bärenreuter et al., 2009)

Since debate about policy issues cross-nationally is central for the development of European public sphere, we analyse coverage of the EUSES in four European countries. In particular we want to answer three questions, which are central for the media to contribute to compensatory Europeanization and with it, the emergence of a European Public Sphere. First, how much is EUSES covered, which topics are covered and does its coverage increase over time? Second, do national media adopt a transnational dimension, by giving attention to developments from other EU countries (horizontal Europeanization)? How strong is the EU presence of EU actors in reporting on the EUSES? And third, does media coverage of the EU include diffuse and/or specific criticism of other member states? These four questions tap into three key dimensions of Europeanized media coverage: visibility, horizontal Europeanization, vertical Europeanization and contestation. We study these questions on the basis of a longitudinal content analysis (covering the 2000 to 2010 period) of newspaper articles in Denmark, France, The United Kingdom (UK) and Poland.

Europeanization of media coverage: three dimensions

Our paper contributes to the literature about the Europeanization of media discourses in the crystallization of a European public sphere. From a normative perspective, a Europeanized media discourse in national public spheres is an important component of a European public sphere. Recognizing that there are important historical and linguistic boundaries which inhibit the development of one European public sphere, research has focused on Europeanization of national media coverage in ‘national public spheres’ where the EU has an influence. Trenz (2004) argues that there are two analytical elements which should be taken into account when studying the Europeanization of media debate: the visibility of communication about Europe and the connectivity, that is the transnational dimension, of this communication. As a corollary to this, it is possible to distinguish between vertical Europeanization (the presence of European policy and actors in the news) and horizontal Europeanization (reference to actors and developments in other EU countries) (Brüggeman and Kleinen-von Königslöw 2009; Koopmans, 2007). By including the horizontal dimension, the study of the Europeanization of media discourse takes the decision-making structure of the EU - involving the European Commission, the European Parliament and member states – into account. It is also important to consider contestation that is in-depth media analysis and debate about EU issues, rather than simply one-way information about the EU to the media (Koopmans and Stratham, 2010: 5). In order for the media to further European debate among the audience, European coverage should be characterized by critical debate, rather than a more passive ‘permissive consensus’ (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970).

Building on these important contributions, we conceptualize ‘Europeanization of media debate’ as national media debate about European policies, which should mirror the degree of intervention of

Europe in public policy, in line with the notion of compensatory Europeanization. We distinguish the following empirical dimensions of the Europeanization of media debate: first, the visibility of European policy in the media, second, the attention to actors and developments at the EU level and in other European countries, and third the attention to debate and criticism.

Studies of Europeanization of media debate during European elections and routine periods provide thin evidence of a minimal level of compensatory Europeanization in national public spheres, let alone the more demanding requirement of an integrated European public sphere. Content analysis of the European election coverage has shown that it is dominated by national actors and mainly deals with national issues (Kevin, 2001). The thematic issues associated with elections for the European Parliament vary widely across countries and are related to particularities of Member States (for example, date of entry to the EU) and national public attitudes towards the EU (De Vreese et al. 2006; Schuck et al. 2012). Studying the coverage of European politics during non-electoral periods, Brüggeman and Kleinen-von Königslöw (2009) found that the media in smaller countries pay more attention to the EU than larger, more powerful countries.

By contrast, other studies have found a more substantial degree of Europeanization in media discourse (e.g. Trenz, 2004, Van de Steeg, 2002). Kandyla and De Vreese (2011) showed that media debate about the European Common Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) was more Europeanized than coverage of other EU topics. This conclusion corroborates with the work of Christoph Meyer (2005) and Koopmans and Erbe (2004) who showed that the degree of Europeanization varies across policy fields and modes of governance. Comparing the coverage of the policy coordination in economic and employment policies in 1998 and 2000 Meyer (2005) showed that national media coverage and debate about the “soft” European Employment Strategy (EES) was less visible, and

included less reference to the EU, than the “harder” Stability and Growth Pact governing the coordination of economic policy. He argues that the degree of Europeanization of the EES is low because it has multiple and diffuse objectives, low salience and limited sanctions. In addition to this, Koopmans and Erbe (2004) showed that media coverage of policy areas where the EU has strong competences (like monetary policy or agriculture) referred to more EU-level actors than policy fields where agreements are mainly intergovernmental (like immigration) or where the EU has no direct competencies (like pensions policy). We build on this research, by analyzing Europeanization of EUSES over time in four countries. Furthermore, we pay special attention to the transnational dimension of media reporting, which is only now starting to gain attention in the literature.

Analysing Media Europeanization of national public spheres: case selection, method, data, hypotheses

Case selection

To analyse media Europeanization of EUSES, we study its coverage in four cases - France, the UK, Denmark and Poland – that each have distinct institutional features and public attitudes towards the EU (See Table 1). France has from the outset been one of the drivers of Europe (Howarth, 2007; Ross, 1995) and is a full member of the EU and the EMU. The UK is a reluctant EU member, and tellingly, has an opt-out of the EMU. At the same time, it fully supports market liberalization, and does not want any regulation in the social policy field. Denmark is a small open economy and has often been considered a model for emulation in many areas, such as labour market and social policy, through its “flexicurity” model (Kongshøj Madsen, 2006). Denmark is only a partial member of EMU, although the Danish kroner is pegged to the euro. Poland is a new EU member,

and has not (yet) met the convergence criteria required for EMU membership. Like many of the central and eastern European countries, EU membership held many promises for Poland, such as more economic growth and welfare. Since EU accession, Poland has been the largest recipient of EU funds. Most of the funds are spent on initiatives to support growth, employment and innovation, linked directly with the aims of Europe 2020 (Ministry of Regional Development, 2007). We expect national differentiation, in line with public attitudes towards the EU and economic growth. Previous research has shown that media coverage resonates with whether the population sees European integration as a positive or negative development (Diez-Medrano, 2003). Support for European integration is lowest in the UK and higher in Denmark and Poland than in France, which should be reflected in the framing of the Strategy.

-Insert Table 1 here-

Data and Method

We conducted a content analysis of two quality newspapers in each of the four countries. In each country, we selected a newspaper with a left- and a right editorial profile, respectively *Le Monde* (247 articles) and *Le Figaro* (176 articles) for France, *The Guardian* (102 articles) and *The Times* (79 articles) for the UK, *Politiken* (63 articles) and *Jyllands Posten* (100 articles) for Denmark and *Gazeta Wyborcza* (283 articles) and *Rzeczpospolita* (191 articles) for Poland. Quality newspapers are a common source to study the way European policy is discussed in different countries (Pfetsch, 2008; Trenz, 2004), since they have an important role in inter-elite debate and since quality newspapers generally dedicate more space to European issues than tabloid newspapers (De Vreese et al., 2006) and allow for more elaborate arguments than television news (Stratham and Koopmans,

2010). Furthermore, quality newspapers play an important role in intermediary agenda-setting and often influence the agenda of other media.

For each of these newspapers we analyzed all articles about the EUSES published between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2010. Throughout this period, there were several revisions and adjustments to the policy aims, resulting in a broadened policy agenda. To retrieve the relevant newspaper articles, we first inductively created a list with terms which are used to refer to the Strategy (on the basis of Commission positions, Presidency conclusions of spring European summits). These terms were translated in the four languages of the project and used for a test search. The resulting articles were analyzed to identify missing terms, which were then included. This final list was once again translated into the different languages and each article containing at least one of these terms was retrieved from the newspaper article database LexisNexis.¹ Before coding, each retrieved article was checked to make sure that it mainly deals with the EUSES. This resulted in a total of 1241 articles for the four countries.

To measure Europeanization of media coverage of the EUSES in the four countries, a codebook was designed. It combines coding instructions from previous content analyses of EU coverage, together with coding that seeks to tap into specificities of the Lisbon Strategy and Europe 2020, such as performance comparison and reference to models of best practice. The unit of analysis selected was a newspaper article. We opted for the article as unit of analysis since we are interested in analyzing how the EUSES is discussed in national media, rather than the position taken by the actors and sources in the media.

Coding was done by master students and graduates in social sciences who knew at least two of the languages required for undertaking the coding. We assessed inter-coder reliability with Holsti's method of agreement, which has been used in several cross-national content analyses studies (e.g. Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2006). To assess inter-coder reliability, coders were paired to code a subsample of 25 articles. If inter-coder agreement was too low, coders received further training and a second inter-coder test was conducted. This resulted in inter-coder reliability scores of .70 or higher for 21 of the indicators. Exceptions were policy theme in French (.6) and in English (.57), and sources in French (.63). We thus paid special attention to these indicators. For these indicators, results of the content analysis did not deviate from the results in other countries. Thus we consider that our results are robust.

Hypotheses

The first dimension of Europeanization of media coverage we analyse is visibility. Previous research has found that coverage of growth and jobs issues is low (Meyer, 2005; Koopmans and Erbe, 2004). Nevertheless, as the EUSES broadens to different fields and now also includes more sanctions in the case of non-compliance (de la Porte and Heins, 2015), we would expect an incremental increase in attention to it in the media, as time is a dimension along which change can occur (Bartolini, 1993). The theory of compensatory Europeanization expects an increase in attention to EU policies over time. Therefore, we formulate the following hypothesis: *Hypothesis 1: Media attention to the EU's socio-economic strategy increases over time.* To test our first hypothesis, we study whether there the yearly attention for the EUSES increased over time. Visibility was measured by counting the number of articles about the EUSES per year and per country.

The second aspect of visibility is the thematic coverage of the EUSES in the media. Since the EUSES touches upon multiple policy areas, ranging from the environment to the economy, it is therefore open to a wide variety of national narratives. As each member state has its own interests, national media could, correspondingly focus on different themes related to domestic debates and policy issues. This would lead us to expect variation (and low Europeanization) in reporting in the different member states. By contrast, if reporting is mainly in line with the EU agenda, then topics could be similar across countries. The latter would be an indicator of Europeanized media discourse. Thus we formulate the following two competing hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Thematic focus of media reporting on the EUSES is different across countries

Hypothesis 2b: Thematic focus of media reporting on the EUSES is similar across countries

To test hypotheses 2a and 2b, we study *thematic focus* we coded for each article the present of nine policy themes which were central in the EUSES: economic policy/growth, financial regulations, internal market, employment, research and development, climate change and energy policy, education policy, and the European social model (for example poverty, social protection, social inclusion, pensions). We then assess how they compare across countries.

The second dimension of Europeanized of media debate is attention for the positions of actors from the EU level and other European member states. Based on the specific characteristics of the EUSES, we expect horizontal and vertical Europeanization. The EUSES involves many European actors: the European Commission plays an important role in agenda-setting and increasingly, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy. Governments and interest organisations are involved in so far as the EUSES is important for national policy agendas. However, the strategy is evaluated in multiple different European reports and process, making it extremely technocratic (de la Porte and Heins, 2015), and therefore, not as such a sexy topic to report on. Another distinctive feature of the

EUSES is that it relies heavily on peer learning and models of best practice. The European Commission is often instrumental in seeking these models and re-packaging them as European solutions. For example, flexicurity originated in Denmark and the Netherlands, and was subsequently developed as a European policy in the EUSES (European Commission, 2007; Kongshøj Madsen, 2007). We expect there to be a high focus on peer learning, with attention to the views of other EU member states (horizontal Europeanization) and the views of EU actors, as it is a strategy involving multiple EU actors (vertical Europeanization). On this basis, we develop two complementary hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3a: The views of European Member States are highly visible in the media coverage of EUSES.

Hypothesis 3b: The views of European actors and institutions are highly visible in the media coverage of EUSES.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b deal with the views of other EU member states and the views of EU institutions, which are operationalized by looking at the appearance of actors related to these two groups as sources. For each article, we coded the (main) source that received most space or was quoted most often. For opinion pieces and columns, the author was coded as the main source. We coded the presence of 56 different types of sources, which were later recoded into three categories: national sources, EU sources and sources from other EU Member states. Since we compare three categories of sources, we consider EU member states or EU actors and institutions to be highly visible if they make up one third of the main sources or more. This is the same coding adopted by Kandyla and De Vreese (2009) who found one third of the actors in CFSP news to be EU actors and thereby concluded that Europeanization was high.

The EUSES is not only interested in models for best practice in other countries, but also in how different member states are performing with regard to common EU aims and benchmarks. In the EUSES, where many policy aims are not binding, ‘naming and shaming’ via common scoreboards and yearly assessment of performance are important methods of disciplining. Compensatory Europeanization is not only about a high level of reporting on a European issue, but also discussion and contestation. We therefore compare the degree of criticism and advice to the attention to peer learning in media coverage of the EUSES. Media coverage of criticism is positive in the light of compensatory Europeanization, as it suggests a genuine rather than more superficial media debate (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). Meyer (2005, p. 141) concluded that “negative recommendations [...] were hardly ever picked up in domestic debate and almost never commented on.” This contrasts with other findings, which suggest that there is more news value in negative stories (Soroka, 2014; Galtung and Ruge, 1965),

Compared to criticism, praise for good performance, particularly when the EU picks up on models for emulation, might be more widespread in the media. In recent research, Hobolt and Tilley (2014) found that attributing blame is not a common strategy when discussing EU politics. Thus we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: There is more attention for best practice than for criticism in media coverage of EUSES.

Going one step further, we study whom criticism is aimed at. Following the literature on blame attribution (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014) a distinction is made between criticizing one specific country and the EU as a whole. Building on findings from the literature on blame attribution in European politics, we expect that most criticism will be aimed at the EU as a whole, rather than specific countries. Daugbjerg and Swinbank (2007) have argued that the complex institutional setup of the

European Union offers the opportunity to diffuse blame for inconvenient decisions and developments (Maestas et al., 2008). Recent research finds many instances where blame was diffused making “responsibility so opaque and shared that no one can be blamed” (Hobolt and Tilley (2014: 103). We expect this to be reflected in media coverage of the EUSES, since it has many broad and diffuse aims in multiple different policy areas, and thus formulate the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: Diffuse criticism of the EU as a whole is more present in the media coverage of the EUSES than criticism of a specific country.

In the content analysis attention for best practice was analyzed by counting the number of articles which presents national regulations and/or institutions and/or positive trends in specific member states, countries, or regions as a model for other EU members to imitate. The presence of specific and diffuse criticism was analyzed by counting respectively which percentage of news stories refer to explicit criticism of or advice to the policy strategy of one or several individual EU countries and to the EU as a whole.

Findings

Low visibility but similarity in thematic reporting

-Insert Figure 1 here-

From our data, we can identify four distinct periods of media attention to the EUSES, which are similar across the four countries under examination (See Figure 1).² Peaks in attention are

characterized by major revisions to the EUSES, and conversely, low points in media attention are characterized by scarce changes to the EUSES. In the first period, between 2000 and 2002, little attention is devoted to the EUSES (with an average of 49 articles per year). The second period, from 2003 to 2005, represents the peak of media attention to the EUSES in all four cases. This can be explained by the political context: Wim Kok (a key player in European politics) initiated two high profile and very politicized initiatives (Armstrong et al., 2008). On the basis of these initiatives, the EUSES was re-defined in 2005, focusing more forcefully on economic growth and jobs. There was high attention to the EU during this period overall with the referenda and rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands, and the eastward enlargement of the EU, to include 10 new member states. In the third period, from 2006 to 2009, there was a declining interest in EUSES in all countries. From 2010 – in this period, the strategy is renamed Europe 2020 - there has been a revival of interest and major alterations to the strategy (de la Porte and Heins, 2015). 2010, like the 2004-2005 period, represents a period of major revision of EUSES, where economic and employment growth were emphasized further, particularly in the context of the 2008 financial crisis (Scharpf, 2011).

The pattern of alterations in the national media's attention to the EUSES does not support hypothesis 1, which expects an increase in attention to the EUSES over time in line with its increasing importance for member state public policies (compensatory Europeanization).

Throughout the whole period visibility of the EUSES is rather low – with a total of 1273 articles across the four countries over a ten-year period. This suggests that in national public spheres there is no genuine debate about EU policy issues, which corroborates recent findings that reporting on European policy issues is sparse and rarely involves in-depth analysis and debate (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). The second major finding about visibility is that there are similar periods of increase

and decline in attention to the EUSES in the media across the four countries. From our data, we can observe that the EUSES develops in a similar pattern in each of the four countries, although there are differences in the overall attention to the EUSES per country and over time. This could indicate that the EUSES was overall reported superficially and providing main information on the strategy rather than having a critical debate. Related to this, the attention for the EUSES in the media is driven by European elites (European Commission and European Council).

When scrutinizing the visibility of the Strategy in the four countries in more detail, we can see that it is similar across countries at the launch of the EUSES, in 2000 and 2001, but after that, two groups of countries can be distinguished: In Poland and France, there are more than two times as many articles devoted to the Strategy compared to the UK and Denmark. Poland and France are also the two only countries where the EUSES appeared on the front pages of the newspapers, suggesting more in-depth analysis related to the EUSES. This trend of attention to the EUSES in the two pairs of countries continues throughout the time period under examination. This could be explained by more interest and less Euroscepticism in the EU in both France and Poland, compared to Denmark and the UK. In France, the overall attitude of political elites is that France should continue to contribute to European integration, as it would be of benefit to France and to the European Union as a whole (Howarth, 2007). From this, we can infer that since domestic politicians engage actively in Europe, the French media's attention should be correspondingly high. Poland, as a new member state and crucially, the biggest recipient of European funding for economic and employment development, has much to gain from the EUSES, not only politically, but also economically. In Denmark and the UK, by contrast, the media pays less attention to the EUSES overall, which may be because they are only partial members of EMU and therefore have less stakes in the strategy. It may also be because there is more euro-scepticism. Our findings suggest,

contrary to the existing literature, that there are no striking differences between big and small EU countries in reporting on issues of EU policy.

-Insert Table 2 here-

Across the four countries the thematic focus seems to be driven by the European priorities on the agenda. In all countries most attention is devoted to economic policy, which is in line with previous findings (Meyer, 2005; Koopmans and Erbe, 2004). The second and third most reported themes across the countries are employment policy and R&D. These policy areas are both accompanied by (non-constraining) benchmarks, suggesting that quantitative goals have a very significant impact on media attention to an issue (presumably reflecting domestic attention to an issue). Climate change and education are the least covered themes in all of the four countries. Based on these common patterns, we conclude that the thematic focus of media reporting on the EUSES is similar across countries, supporting hypothesis 2b. Additional analysis (not shown) revealed that 44 per cent of the articles are triggered by actions from European institutional actors, which could explain why there is so much evidence for hypothesis 2b. Thus, thematic reporting seems to be driven by European priorities, although mitigated slightly by national agendas. In Denmark and the UK, the EUSES is interpreted mainly as a growth agenda and the international market gets relatively more attention than in France and Poland. These differences are also partially reflected in the section of the newspaper in which the EUSES is reported. In the UK, half of the articles about the EUSES appear in the economy section of the newspaper, reflecting the UK's interpretation of the EUSES as a growth strategy, as well as its characteristic as a liberal market economy (Hall and Soskice, 2001) (Results not shown). In France, only one fourth of the articles about the EUSES appear in the economy section of the newspaper and articles can be found more often in the opinion or foreign

news section. Denmark has more focus on the European Social model than the other three countries. Despite these minor cross-national differences, the strong overlap in thematic focus can be seen that as an indication of Europeanized media coverage of the EUSES. There is therefore only weak evidence for hypothesis 2a, suggesting that European issues are not framed and discussed with national issues.

High Vertical Europeanization, Low Horizontal Europeanization

Table 3 gives an overview of the appearance of national sources, sources from other member states, and EU level sources in articles about the EUSES. In line with previous research on EU coverage (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2006), there is a high level of domestication. The most covered sources are national sources, ranging from 39 per cent of the sources in the UK to 58 per cent in Denmark and Portugal. The presence of sources from other EU countries in coverage of the EUSES is limited. Horizontal Europeanization (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004) is only present in about 10 per cent of the articles, suggesting that the EUSES is mainly discussed among the national political elite and stakeholders. Since voices from other member states make up far less than one third of the sources we conclude that hypothesis 3a is not supported.

By contrast, there is a high degree of vertical Europeanization: in France and the UK about half of the articles have an EU actor as main source. In Denmark and Poland, EU level actors are main actors in about one third of the articles. This high presence of EU level actors in the findings suggests that the coverage of the EUSES is initiated by EU level actors and concerns. The single European actor that dominates debate about the EUSES is the European Commission. Other European actors, such as the European trade union institute and Business Europe, also appear as

sources. Taken together we see this as evidence of the fact that EU sources drives forward reporting on the strategy, supporting hypothesis 3b.

-Insert Table 3 here-

More criticism than best practices reported

Between 8 per cent (UK) and 20 per cent (Poland) of the EUSES coverage refers to positive trends and developments in other EU countries, as well as identifying models for emulation (Table 4).

Contrary to hypothesis 4, criticism and advice to other member states are more common than references to best practice. In particular, the Danish media focus on countries that do not live up to promises or failing to make necessary reforms to reach the aims of the EUSES. From our findings, we can infer that the news value of negativity and critical analysis of societal developments, makes criticism more visible and newsworthy than describing positive developments abroad. The only exception is Poland, where criticism and advice are as common as best practice examples. This may be because Poland is a relatively new member state, and has in reform efforts since 1990, often looked to the EU and abroad for models of best practice and policy advice. Looking to other models for emulation is clearly a strong operational principle in Poland, which can be explained since it is the newest EU member state in our sample of cases. Examples of this are the articles “The Scandinavian model wins competition in Europe” in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 28 June 2006 or “We are far from Sweden” in the same newspaper, on 18 July 2007. The UK has the lowest number of articles referring to developments in other EU member states.

In France, the UK and Denmark criticism is more often diffuse than aimed at specific member states, providing support for hypothesis 5. An example of this is the article “Brown prods EU to

hasten reform” in the Guardian on 10 March 2003. Here the EU member states as a whole are urged to take action, rather than specific EU countries. Although less common than advice to all member states, specific member states are criticized in between 23 of the articles in Poland and 32 per cent of the articles in France, like for example in the article “Germany and France are the new sick men of Europe” in The Guardian on 22 September 2005.

-Insert Table 4 here-

Discussion and Conclusion

Our longitudinal and comparative analysis of media Europeanization of the EUSES, which is a corner stone for national reform agendas in public policy, had disappointing empirical results, but also important lessons for how to take analysis of the European public sphere further. First, we found that coverage of the EUSES was low, that it rarely triggered front page stories and that there was no linear increase in attention to the Strategy over time. Despite the efforts of the EU to increase national ownership of the EUSES, for example by appointing a political appointee for Europe’s socio-economic strategy in each country, the EUSES never became a major issue on national media agendas. This lack of compensatory Europeanization can be explained by the limited sanctions of the Strategy and by the fact that the EUSES covers a broad range of areas. Slogans such as ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ are too diffuse to gain media attention. The lesson for analyses of the European public sphere is that low visibility may obfuscate a wider influence of the EU and public policy in the national context, without reference to the EU. This is likely since we know that when ideas, policies and rules travel, they are transformed. In particular, reference to the EU may be dropped along the way, especially in Eurosceptic countries. This would then require

qualitative process-tracing analyses to complement quantitative coding of media coverage of selected topics.

When the EUSES was reported, the media framing of the Strategy was clearly driven by European institutions. Peaks of visibility are highly correlated to major changes in the strategy and media reporting about the Strategy was often triggered by actions from European institutional actors. In line with this finding, we saw that EU level actors, rather than actors from other countries often appear as sources in articles about the EUSES. This suggests an EU bias in reporting on the EUSES, and a rather shallow level of analysis, as well as lack of connection to national public policy.

Concerning critical news value, we found that the media reported on other national models, as well as criticism and advice to member states. The media paid more attention to criticism and advice to member states, than to best practice examples, which may be because of the news appeal of such stories. Criticism was more often diffuse than aimed at specific countries. Previous research has shown that the media criticism in multilevel government structures influences whom audiences attribute responsibility to. Following this argument, media practice of reporting on diffuse responsibility in the context of the EUSES rather than specific criticism might lead to audiences attributing responsibility to EU institutions rather than individual member states. This is problematic, particularly in the current political climate with rising Euroscepticism in the aftermath of the eurozone crisis and the growing popular appeal of more extreme political parties. Future research should assess the linkages between diffusion of responsibility in media reporting, growing Euroscepticism and the rise of new Eurosceptic political parties.

While the functionalist tilt of normative ideals about European public debate expect citizens to accept Europe when they European policies are debates in national public spheres, this seems to be far from the way the media do report on Europe. When sparsely reported, a technocratic and complex European policy is associated with diffuse attribution of blame. This may, in turn, reinforce negative perceptions of Europe, even in quality newspapers. Thus, the *quality of reporting* is crucial for journalist to develop and for academics to study in order to develop an integrated European public sphere.

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Tables and figures

Table 1: Key characteristics of the four countries under study

	France	UK	Denmark	Poland
EU member since	1956	1973	1973	2004
EMU member	Yes	No	Partial	No
Public support EU (2000) ¹	49	25	53	
Public support EU (2005) ¹	51	36	59	53
Public support EU (2010) ¹	44	29	44	63
In your opinion, which level is most suited to providing solutions for the following issues? Economic growth (2005) ² % saying EU/national government	54/37	26/58	43/38	54/32

¹% of population saying Membership of the EU is a good thing. 2000 Eurobarometer53, question2.1a; 2005 Eurobarometer 63, QA8; 2010: Eurobarometer 73.4 Q9abc

²Source: Eurobarometer 2005 Special Eurobarometer 215/wave 62.1 Question 19.4.

Table 2: Percentage of articles which include reference to each of the central policy areas of EUSES in four European countries

	France	UK	Denmark	Poland
Economic policy and growth	52.5	86.2	78.5	47.5
Research & development	37.6	29.3	29.4	37.8
Employment	36.2	50.3	36.2	31.6
Internal market	15.6	30.4	26.4	16.0
Financial regulation	7.6	16.0	3.7	5.1
European social model	11.6	16.0	27.0	10.3
Climate change and energy	8.7	9.9	12.9	7.6
Education	6.9	6.1	9.8	7.2
N (mimimum)	426	190	172	483

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100%, since one article can include reference to more than one policy area

Table 3: main sources in articles about EUSES (%)

	France	UK	Denmark	Poland
National actor	46.0	39.1	57.6	57.7
Actor from other EU Member state	8.9	11.5	12.2	9.9
European Commission	25.8	29.9	16.5	15.9
European Council	3.1	1.1	2.9	0.8
European level interest group	5.2	5.7	2.9	7.1
Other EU actor	11.0	11.0	7.9	8.5
N	100% 291	100% 87	100% 139	100% 364

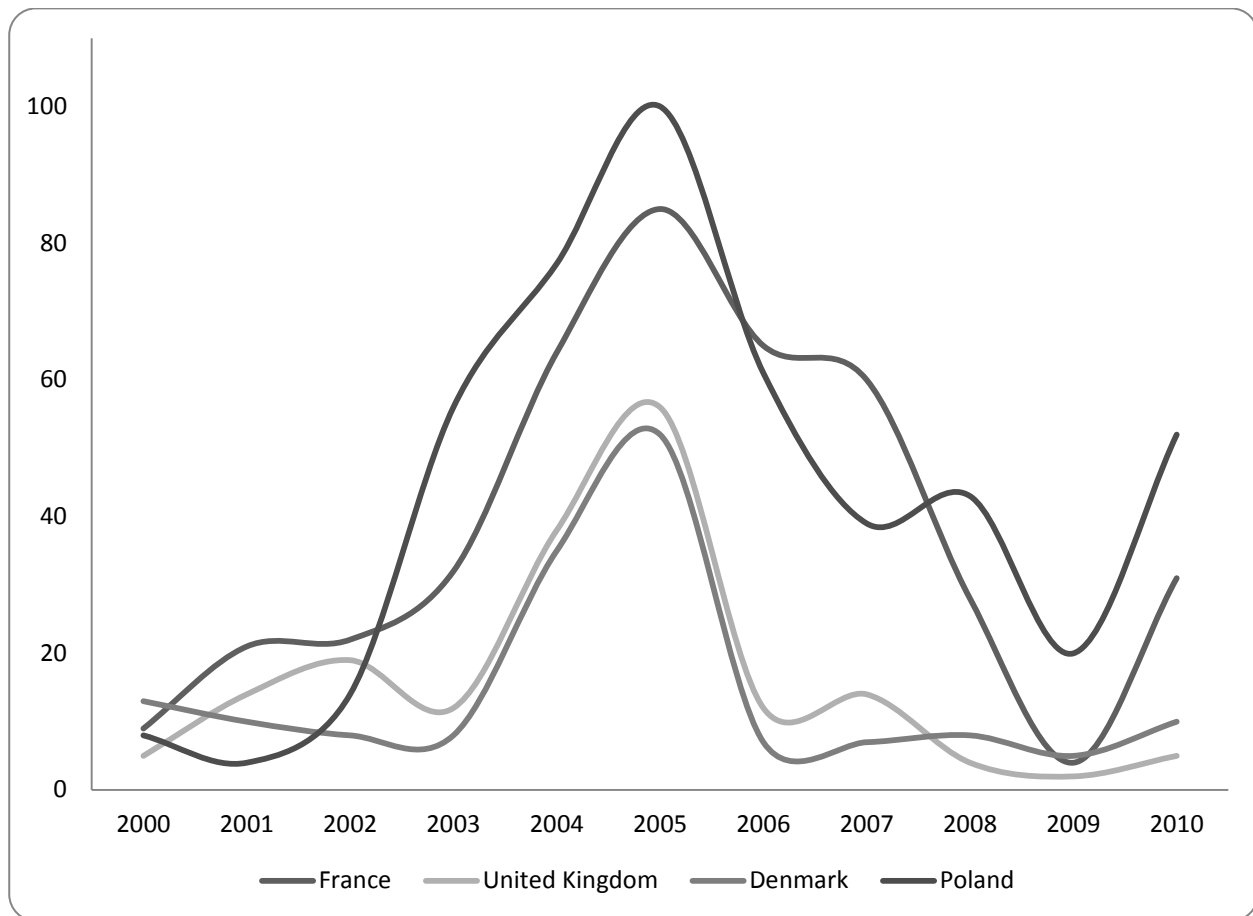
Note: For opinion pieces and columns, the author is the main source

Table 4: Cross-national perspective in French, British, Danish and Polish coverage of EUSES

	France	UK	Denmark	Poland
Best practice examples from other EU member states	14.7	8.3	16.0	20.3
Criticism or advise to all member states	41.2	35.4	83.8	20.4
Criticism or advise to specific member states	32.2	30.4	25.9	22.5
N (mimimum)	423	181	163	474

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100%, since articles can include references to different geographical region

Figure 1: Visibility of EUSES in French, British, Danish and Polish newspapers



Note: number of articles per year in two broadsheet dailies per country

Endnotes

¹The following search terms were translated by native speakers and used to retrieve the articles:

Lisbon strategy, Lisbon agenda, Lisbon process, Lisbon program, Lisbon objectives, Lisbon targets, Lisbon goal, “Jobs and growth strategy” and Europe, “Jobs and grown strategy” and EU, EU growth strategy, European growth strategy, “spring summit” and EU, “spring summit” and Europe, “march summit” and Europe, “march summit” and EU, Lisbon European council, European benchmarking, EU benchmarking, EU and flexicurity, Europe and flexicurity, “most competitive

economy” and EU, “most competitive economy” and Lisbon, “most competitive economy” and Europe. Europe 2020 was also included as a search term in the four languages. For the two Polish newspapers, articles were retrieved from their archives which are directly accessible through their websites.

² The number of articles in left and rightwing newspapers are combined, since the visibility showed similar developments within countries.