

Media Logic and Grand Theories of European Integration

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Abstract

How does media coverage of European Union (EU) politics affect the process of European integration? This contribution investigates the nature and logic of media coverage of EU affairs and identifies the news value criteria that underpin it. It subsequently confronts the key causal mechanisms and processes of grand theories of European integration with this media logic. This generates several key insights in which media impact the EU and European integration. First, it functions to empower the intergovernmentalist nature of the EU, by providing a platform for member state governments, focusing on conflicts between them, reinforcing the primacy of national identity, and by amplifying the European Council as the main locus of EU decision-making. But media also create opportunities for new supranational entrepreneurship that is executive in nature, in policy fields where the EU has significant powers, facilitates action in public interest fields such as consumer policy and supports majoritarian rule.

Introduction

Mass media cover European Union (EU) affairs to a significant extent. The EU features on a regular basis in the evening news bulletins, newspapers, websites and social media, (Barisione and Michailidou 2017; De Vreese 2001; Risse 2015; Walter 2017b). This raises the question how media coverage of EU affairs affects the EU and the European integration process. Does media coverage work to solidify the Union, providing a stepping-stone to further pooling of sovereignty? Or does it damage its stability or legitimacy, leading to disintegration? So far, research has primarily focused on the extent to which media coverage of EU affairs is conducive to a European public sphere, often seen as a prerequisite for democracy in the EU (e.g. Koopmans and Statham 2010; Risse 2015; Trenz 2004; Walter 2017b). Ways in which it affects Euroscepticism among EU citizens have also been investigated (De Vreese 2007). While extant research is thus indirectly linked to the process of integration, the direct question about impact is rarely posed.

This contribution confronts the three Grand theories of European integration – neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism central to this special issue (see Hooghe and Marks FORTHCOMING) – with the media logics that underpin news coverage. While the EU is intensely covered in the news for many years now, it has neither ushered in the birth of a truly federal United States of Europe, nor heralded the demise of the Union. A strategy of relating media coverage to the expected outcomes of grand theories is thus unlikely to help answer the question. Instead, this contribution aims to gain traction on the question by confronting media logic theory with the various causal mechanisms and processes that each of the grand theories is built upon to generate hypotheses about the impact of media coverage on European integration.

This theoretical exercise leads to the identification of four key mechanisms at play. First and foremost, the paper conceptualizes *discursive intergovernmentalism* to describe the dominant focus in the news on executive actors, particularly Prime Ministers and Heads of State, the conflicts between them, and the European Council as primary locus of EU politics. Second, media enable a form of *new supranational entrepreneurship*, where charismatic EU officials can push integration through executive action in areas where the EU has significant competencies. Third, *public interest spillover* describes the media's facilitation of consumer policy and policy add-ons that establish 'something nice for the people'. Fourth, *democratic spillover* is at work as the presence of citizens in the news empowers those who can credibly claim to represent the people and to push an agenda of majoritarian rule in the EU.

Europe in the News

Mass media play an important role in European politics, functioning both as actor in its own right – for example, in publishing editorials and op-eds – and as arena for contestation (Boomgaarden et al. 2010; De Wilde et al. 2016; Koopmans and Statham 2010). It is through mass media that political actors reach mass audiences and mobilize them in favor of or against European integration. Whomever is present in media coverage has the advantage of a stage in front of a wide audience to shape the discourse, frame policy issues and set the agenda.

Studies analyzing media coverage of EU affairs highlight that there is a primary focus on major events, such as enlargement, the introduction of the Euro or major EU summits in which important decisions are made (Boomgaarden et al. 2013; De Vreese 2001). In the coverage of such events, the dominant actors covered in the news are executives, particularly the Prime Ministers and Heads of State of the member states (Koopmans 2007; Walter 2017b). That does not mean that other actors such as national parliaments (Auel et al. 2018) or the European Parliament (Gattermann 2013) are absent, but they are clearly less visible than national governments in EU affairs. The more competencies the EU has in a particular policy field, the more prominent EU actors such as the European Commission or the European Court of Justice are in media coverage of that policy field. Thus, we find a stronger prominence of the European Commission and the European Parliament in newspaper articles about international trade than we do in newspaper articles about defense, or immigration (Koopmans and Statham 2010).

Mass media remain nationally organized. There are a few specialized Europe-wide mass media, but media organization and language barriers have so far restricted the emergence of a genuine European public sphere in which the same issues are debated in the same terms at the same time across Europe (Eder and Kantner 2000). Instead, what we are witnessing is a Europeanization of national public spheres (Koopmans and Statham 2010). The EU is covered in national media outlets with national frames of references for national audiences. Social media do not fundamentally change this dynamic, as much political discussion on social media starts with the sharing or retweeting of stories from classic national mass media (Barisione and Michailidou 2017).

EU news features a striking presence of citizens (Walter 2017a; 2017b). News stories might feature more or less random individuals as representatives of the citizenry or journalists present ‘the people’ as a quasi-actor. The latter could be in the presentation of polling results. For example in such sentences as *“Support for European Union membership has hit a 35-year high across the bloc, with a strong majority of citizens saying it has been a force for good in their country”* (Reuters 2018). Besides such representations, citizens feature in EU media discourse in more populist ways. An infamous example is the following headline in the Daily Mail: *“ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE: Fury over ‘Out of Touch’ Judges who have ‘Declared War on Democracy’ by defying 17.4m Brexit Voters and who could*

Trigger Constitutional Crisis” (Slack 2016). The heading gives a quasi-actorness to citizens as a monolithic ‘people’, employed in the hands of a journalist to demand a certain political agenda. It is thus a clear example of populist communication where journalists act as populists themselves, yet where citizens feature as actor in the news (Aalberg et al. 2017).

The overview of the nature of EU media coverage confirms extant knowledge in media studies that journalists act as ‘gatekeepers’ (Shoemaker and Vos 2009). “*In selectively amplifying [EU] political issues and giving prominence to particular actors and stories, media rely mainly on generally applicable news values ...*” (Trenz 2008: 305). A long line of research documents the news value criteria journalists apply when making and selecting news. Key criteria for the reporting on political news are: *status* (elite nations, elite institutions and elite persons); *valence* (aggression, controversy, values, success), *relevance* (consequence, concern); and *identification* (proximity, ethnocentrism, personalization, emotions) (O’Neill and Harcup 2009: 165). Supranational actors have inherent difficulty to score high on *identification*. They are almost always distant and foreign, except perhaps in their member state of origin. *Status* explains why executive actors dominate in the news. This applies primarily to national executives, but also to actors with executive powers at supranational level, like the European Commission, President of the European Council and President of the European Central Bank. The pooling of sovereignty in an increasing number of policy fields since the 1980s has led to a recognition among journalists that EU institutions meet the *relevance* criteria in ever more policy areas (Koopmans 2007). The *status* and *relevance* criteria thus explain why the EU in general and EU institutions feature more prominently in news on issues with high levels of pooling of sovereignty than on issues that remain member state competencies.

Given that mass media are now a dominant player and arena in the politicization of European integration, the logic of mediatization starts playing a role at early stages of EU policy making. “*The amplificatory logics of the media affect the communicative behaviour of political actors and institutions whenever they step out of the arenas of bargaining and deliberation to communicate with the external publics.*” (Trenz 2008: 305). This is an obvious, but at the same time superficial component of the mediatization of the EU. The impact of media coverage is much more fundamental. The process of mediatization implies that EU civil servants internalize media logic. They will ask themselves “How will it play in the media?” (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999: 214) already at a policy drafting stage. Here, the rising prominence of ‘the people’ in EU news coverage logically implies that the EU can convincingly sell its policy as serving the needs of Average Joe, Otto Normalverbraucher and Jan Modaal (De Bruycker 2017; Rauh 2016).

To see how all this effects European integration, this contribution now proceeds to confront the key mechanisms and processes of grand theories of European integration with the above mentioned characteristics of media coverage of EU affairs.

Media Logic and Neofunctionalism

Haas (2004) and his fellow neofunctionalists saw European integration as a rational response to deal with problems that increasingly were border-crossing in nature. In contrast to classic functionalism, neofunctionalism incorporates in its theory a dynamic perspective on how integration would create a self-reinforcing development of integration through functional and political spillover. It also ascribes a stronger role to agency of societal interests and EU institutions in the form of supranational entrepreneurship.

Spillover

The core mechanism underpinning neofunctionalist logic is spillover. This, according to the neofunctionalists, comes in two variants: functional spillover and political spillover (Haas 2004; Lindberg 1965). Functional spillover works as follows. First, political leaders of the member states agree on integration in a particular policy field. Once integration in one policy field has started, it becomes evident that there are side effects for other policy fields and that limited integration in other policy fields hampers the functioning of common policy. This means that, “... *a given action, related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action, and so forth.*” (Lindberg 1963: 10). Integration in the coal and steel sectors, generated pressure to integrate in other economic sectors as well. As the Euro crisis has testified to, the creation of a common currency and monetary policy generates pressure to create a common fiscal policy, so that the system can absorb asymmetric shocks.

The logic behind functional spillover is deeply technocratic. It builds on the notion that policy making in EU framework is largely done by civil servants operating in problem solving mode. Their main modus operandi is to seek consensus amongst themselves as policy experts and to propose a pareto optimizing policy (Majone 1994) to their political superiors. Such consensual problem-solving ethics have long been documented to be pervasive in Brussels (e.g. Bickerton 2012).

The most important way in which media coverage can affect spillover at the micro level of causal mechanisms is by changing this tendency towards consensual problem solving of national and EU civil servants. When EU issues are in the news, technocratic problem-solving is challenged. Political

tradeoffs and redistributive effects are amplified in conflict framing to meet the valence criteria of news. The sentiment that EU policy needs to serve ‘the people’ may engrain itself into the minds of civil servants, while often leaving open an interpretation of what exactly ‘the people’ want. The logic of mediatization starts playing a role at early stages of EU policy making, where functional spillover logic is at its strongest. Already at a policy drafting stage, civil servants in Brussels ask themselves how the policy or Treaty change they are drafting will play in the media. The more visible in the news the Commission is, the more it starts catering to ‘the people’ in its communication of policy (De Bruycker 2017), for example in consumer policy (Rauh 2016). To illustrate, Directive 2015/2366, the Revised Payment Services Directive (PSD2), removes credit card surcharges for ordinary citizens. EU politicians sold it as such to the wider audience. That the same Directive also opens up the possibility to tech giants like Google, Facebook and Apple to compete with Europe’s banks on the European market for digital payment services, was not stressed in EU public relations. It stands to reason that the credit card provision was added to the Directive for the sole purpose of making it more sellable to the wider audience. Confronting media logic with the dynamic of spillover therefore generates the hypothesis that media coverage of EU affairs stimulates *public interest spillover* (see also Rauh 2016).

Public Interest Spillover Hypothesis: Media coverage of EU affairs leads to EU legislation in consumer policy and public interest add-ons in other policies.

To the extent that this hypothesis holds, the main policy problems observed by civil servants shift from market inefficiency and internalizing negative externalities to consumer rights. Beyond PSD2, the Roaming Regulation (EU) 2017/920 abolishing roaming mobile phone charges while in other EU member states and the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) imposing new privacy protection rules on companies and government agencies, support this hypothesis.

The political spillover expected by the original neofunctionalists has not become a reality. They thought that the build-up of political competency at supranational level would lead to a shift of citizens’ political orientation to the new level. It is, after all, rational for citizens to direct their demands to those people and institutions who have the authority to enact them into policy. Yet, supranational institutions and actors do not get covered in the media as much as national ones do. This, however, does not mean it is impossible to mobilize citizens’ expectations at EU level. Valence criteria often lead journalists to focus on scandals, corruption and other testimonies that the EU is undemocratic and technocratic. Confronting media logic with political spillover leads to the hypothesis that people may not be mobilized to support more integration, but they can be mobilized to make the EU more democratic and less technocratic. This is not political spillover, but rather *democratic spillover*. It is not about a transfer of loyalty to the supranational level, but about making EU decision-making procedures more transparent and

majoritarian (on a related logic of democratic functionalism, see Statham and Trenz 2014; Trenz and Eder 2004).

Democratic Spillover Hypothesis: Media coverage of EU affairs fosters the democratization of its decision-making procedures, strengthening transparency, accountability and majority rule.

The Spitzenkandidaten process provides powerful support for this hypothesis. In 2014, the dominant party groups in the European Parliament nominated candidates for the position of European Commission President. Appealing to the principle of majority rule, they argued that whichever party got the most seats in the European Parliament would be allowed to catapult its candidate into the office of Commission President. As the European People's Party was victorious, its candidate – Jean-Claude Juncker – was presented as the logical new Commission President. This candidacy was openly opposed by powerful voices in the European Council, including Angela Merkel, David Cameron, Victor Orbán, Fredrik Reinfeldt and Mark Rutte. Together, these member state leaders easily constituted a blocking minority. According to the Lisbon Treaty, a blocking minority in the Council would be sufficient to stop a candidate from becoming Commission President. It is striking that the EP was able to push through its nominee against the open and vocal opposition of this powerful coalition. They only managed to do so by appealing to the principle of democracy, understood in the narrow terms of majority rule. Amplified by German media like *Der Spiegel*, Angela Merkel was maneuvered into a position where opposing Juncker equaled opposing democracy. She abandoned her opposition to Juncker, followed by the quiet retreat of her Dutch and Swedish coalition members. In other words, rhetorical use of the principle of democracy in mass media defeated the governments of Germany, the UK, Hungary, Sweden and The Netherlands. Without the media amplification of the Spitzenkandidaten process in Germany, it seems unlikely that this would have been the outcome. What this shows, is that media provide a powerful discursive position to those actors who can convincingly argue that they the champion democracy, even if these are otherwise fairly weak actors, facing superior opposition.

Supranational entrepreneurship

Supranational actors have inherent difficulty to score high on the *identification* criterion of media logic. They are almost always distant and foreign, except perhaps in their member state of origin. When it comes to *status*, however, the EU level features similar logics as the national level. Just like national executives feature more prominently in the news on EU issues than national legislative or judicial actors, the European Commission and Council are more prominently in the news than the European Parliament or the Court of Justice. As the EU increasingly affects the daily lives of citizens, journalists

recognize that the European Commission and European Council are elite institutions making consequential decisions, and thus deserve media coverage.

While status, relevance and identification are more or less institutionally determined and can be considered a given to any (potential) supranational entrepreneur, valence is the one key news value that individual actors can manipulate. Charismatic individuals who make a stand at times of crisis or go on a crusade on important issues against powerful adversaries are likely to make the news, whether they represent EU institutions, or not. One of the most famous and consequential political acts in EU politics in the past decade, Mario Draghi's 2012 intervention in the Eurozone crisis to do "whatever it takes" to save the Euro, is a prime example of *new supranational entrepreneurship* made possible due to media coverage. The President of the most powerful institution on the issue at hand took the stage in clear language in dire times, staring down a powerful adversary: the markets. Thus, Draghi's intervention scored high on the media values of status, valence and relevance, even if not so much on identification. Mass media covered Draghi's intervention extensively and thus played a major role in averting the crisis and solidifying the ECB's credibility as guardian of the Euro. Other notable examples of new supranational entrepreneurship include Margrethe Vestager's charges against tech giants Apple, Google and Facebook as Commissioner for Competition Policy and Frans Timmermans' engagement of the Polish government on Rule of Law and Democracy in Poland, culminating in the activation of Article 7 TEU. Draghi, Vestager and Timmermans are all charismatic individuals. They represent powerful EU institutions with the formal competencies to make an impact on people's daily lives. They clearly engage in conflict with a powerful adversary, be it 'the markets', Apple, or Kaczynski and they time their intervention to coincide with already existing media attention for the issue at hand.

New Supranational Entrepreneurship Hypothesis: Media coverage of EU affairs allows charismatic EU officials with executive powers to push integration forward at times of crisis, using conflict framing.

Classic neofunctionalist supranational entrepreneurship depended on superior information. EU institutions possessed superior information vis-à-vis their principals and used it to expand their own competencies. It thus took the form of legislative initiatives on technical issues, where the Commission or Court of Justice managed to make a logical, expertise-based, argument for European integration (Burley and Mattli 1993; Lindberg 1965). Media coverage of EU affairs does not make supranational entrepreneurship go away, but it does fundamentally change its nature. In contrast to classic supranational entrepreneurship, new supranational entrepreneurship depends on media savviness. EU institutions can act as supranational entrepreneurs if they successfully manage to meet news value criteria. Valence is a news value criteria supranational entrepreneurs can generate by pitting themselves against powerful adversaries at times of crisis. Relevance depends on the policy field they operate in and clearly favors EU actors with executive powers in policy fields that feature high levels of

sovereignty pooling. The identification criteria inherently stack the decks against supranational entrepreneurs, but they can be met sufficiently if the entrepreneur is a charismatic individual. Thus, new supranational entrepreneurship takes place in already highly integrated policy fields, in the form of executive actions rather than legislative proposals, engaging in conflict with powerful adversaries, and conducted by charismatic individuals carefully timed at moments of crisis or otherwise heightened media attention.

Media Logic and Intergovernmentalism

When Charles de Gaulle reasserted the primacy of member state governments in EU politics during the empty chair crisis in 1965, it appeared the neofunctionalist expectation of self-propelling integration had overlooked the continued prominence of member state governments in EU politics. Hoffmann (1966) identified the doctrines of national political elites as a relevant structuring factor in EU politics. Later, Moravcsik's (1993) influential theory of liberal intergovernmentalism stressed the primacy of economic interests in European integration and how they were defended and translated into European Treaties through national preference formation, intergovernmental bargaining and credible commitments. Finally, as already discussed above, the new intergovernmentalists stress the powerful norm of consensus among member states and creation of *de novo* bodies as key features of the most recent phase of European integration (Bickerton et al. 2015). Member states, according to these various strands of intergovernmentalism, remain firmly in control of the EU and the integration process. How does media coverage affect the key mechanisms and processes of intergovernmentalist theory: national preference formation, intergovernmental bargaining, credible commitments and elite doctrine?

National preference formation

According to Andrew Moravcsik (1993; 1998), key decision-making in EU framework starts with a process of national preference formation. National collective actors demand specific policies. The national government moderates to form a national interest. Moravcsik stresses the influence of organized actors with an economic profile in this process. Key domestic interest groups shaping national preference formation are thus employers' organizations, big industry and trade unions. More recent scholarship has included newer civil society organizations, such as environmental and consumer interest organizations (Beyers and Kerremans 2004). Yet, so far, the role of the media in this process remains largely overlooked. With increasing media coverage, "the people" or "the average citizen" starts to become a societal force influencing national preference formation. They are not organized and can

rarely be considered an ‘actor’ in the classic sense. More often, they are a resource, used by key domestic political actors, including journalists. Invoked by political actors in mediated debate as a key ally, “the people” gain quasi-actorness and presence in public discourse. Brexiteers have frequently used the 17.4 million Leave voters as ally in the British national preference formation process following the 2016 referendum, see for example the quote from *The Daily Mail* in the introduction.

EU budget negotiations provide a classic example of bringing in “the people” as collective actor in national preference formation. As the EU budget becomes more politicized within member states, the discussion boils down to paying less as a country and – less prominently – receiving more (De Wilde 2012). All the way from Thatcher’s swinging handbag to demand a British rebate in the 1980s, to the red bus in the Brexit campaign demanding that the UK funds the National Health Service instead of the EU, money has been a very salient mobilizer of the general public in EU affairs. As media focus their attention on the EU budget in net contributing countries like the UK or The Netherlands, the interests of British and Dutch farmers, poorer regions and research institutions lose out in national preference formation to the mediatized people’s demand to pay less.

Intergovernmental bargaining

Arguably the most important impact of media coverage on EU affairs concerns the change in the balance of power between member state governments on the one hand and supranational institutions and societal interests on the other hand. European Council summits receive a lot more media coverage than either Commission initiatives, Court rulings, EU agency activities, EP debates or any other EU activity (Boomgaarden et al. 2013; De Vreese 2001). Media often portray Brexit as conflict between the UK government and the EU27, the Euro crisis as conflict between “Northern saints and Southern sinners” (Matthijs and McNamara 2015) and the refugee crisis as a conflict between member states advocating and opposing a redistribution of refugees in the European Agenda on Migration.

Based on news value criteria, it is easy to see why intergovernmental bargaining in the Council receives so much media coverage. It scores high on all key values. Mass media recognize the Prime Minister or Head of State of their own country as an elite actor, he or she enjoys high status. Only issues where civil servants and COREPER cannot agree upon are discussed at high political level (Fouilleux et al. 2005). This means that the issues that the European Council discusses are the most important and most controversial issues in EU governance. Everything else has already been agreed upon at lower level. Moreover, European Councils feature great suspense. Will they manage to reach agreement? How long into the night will they need to do so? Which country comes out victorious? If they do not manage to reach agreement, does that mean the end of the Eurozone, Schengen, or even the entire EU? Thus, the

council scores high on relevance and valence criteria. Finally, European Council summits score high on the identity criteria. Individual people, like Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel and Theresa May, conduct negotiations. They are well-known and lend themselves more easily to visualization than abstract organizations.

The EU as entity is not just a legal product of the Treaties, it is a social construct living in the minds of both the politicians and civil servants that operate in it and in those of EU citizens more widely (Van Middelaar 2009). The discourse developed and spread through mass media continuously reconstructs what the EU is in the minds of decision-makers and citizens. If the primary glimpse people get of EU politics is European Council negotiations dragging on into the deep of night pitting May vs Macron, Merkel vs Tsipras or Renzi vs Orban, then they will likely perceive the EU as an intergovernmental organization and the Council as the most important political arena.

The intergovernmental bias in media coverage likely becomes a self-reinforcing mechanism. Because media coverage focuses predominantly on member state governments as key actors, citizens believe that they are the most important actors. They thus direct their political demands at member state governments at times of Council meetings. This political frenzy surrounding Council meetings, subsequently, strengthens the belief among journalists that member state governments are the most important actors in EU governance, and thus the most worthy of media coverage. To the extent that this constructivist logic holds, it creates a positive feedback loop between media and audiences.

Discursive Intergovernmentalism Hypothesis I: Media coverage of EU affairs strengthens the intergovernmental logics of the EU over the supranational ones, through amplification of intergovernmental conflict in Council setting.

In short, the nature of media coverage is not neutral in terms of the balance of power between key actors in EU governance. It tends to strengthen the hand of member state governments over other actors, and continuously reconstructs the image that the EU is primarily an intergovernmental organization, with the European Council as the most important political body. To paraphrase Elmer Schattschneider (1960: 35): “the heavenly chorus of EU media coverage sings with a strong intergovernmental accent”. While the scholars of new intergovernmentalism (Bickerton et al. 2015) rightly stress the continued intergovernmental dominance within the EU, they underestimate the powerful force of media coverage in discursively reconstructing this dimension of EU governance.

Credible commitments

In Moravcsik's perspective, the institutional build-up of competencies at supranational level within the European Union ought to be understood as credible commitments. That is, member states agree on certain policies and empower a range of supranational institutions with the legal and administrative capacity to make sure that all contracting partners stick to the deal. Powerful supranational institutions, therefore, should not be understood as the idealistic realization of a new quasi-federal state, but as the rational choice of member state governments to sustain and optimize cooperation.

Treaty changes are a major event. As the fundamental law guiding EU politics, the Treaties clearly meet relevance criteria for news coverage. They tend to generate strong media coverage over a prolonged period of time. In the process, the complex nature of constitutional law tends to be reduced to sound bites. Referenda are notoriously unpredictable, as the government does not fully control the media narrative, meaning that media coverage makes Treaty change an uncertain process for member state leaders. This strengthens the hypothesis that member states' tend to create *de novo* institutions (Bickerton et al. 2015) rather than to empower and change already existing ones. New institutions do not have the status yet that existing ones do and thus generate less media coverage. If they have vague names such as the 'Fiscal Compact' or the 'European Stability Mechanism', they will generate even less media coverage because it scores low on the identification criteria. Avoiding media coverage, especially through avoiding Treaty change processes, minimizes the risk that credible commitments cannot be made.

Elite Doctrine

Stanley Hoffmann articulated his original intergovernmentalist critique against the background of traditional international relations, which ascribed a dominant role to national doctrine. He assumed that each state had a particular worldview that contained normative and empirical assertions about geopolitical interests and state missions. The national political elite shared a perspective on the national interest and what goals should be pursued. Media coverage has the potential to influence this through its capacity to reconstruct the social imaginary of what the EU is, does and should do through national narratives.

Intense media coverage implies an accelerated process of national discourse formation. Most frequently, episodes of contestation focus on the definition of what the national interest is in relation to Europe. Should our country be a member state? Should we support closer fiscal integration? Should we open up our borders for refugees? The 'we' in these questions tends to be the nation. Through such debate, national narratives about European integration and national self-perceptions may change. It has been

shown that media coverage of EU affairs can influence people's identity perception, especially in the long run (Bruter 2009). If elites are not impervious to such narratives and identity, their worldviews and national doctrines may also change as a result of media coverage. The more media coverage, the greater the potential for a rapid change in national doctrine. To illustrate, consider the history of the EU's migration crisis. On 2 September 2015, the body of Alan Kurdi was recovered on a beach in Turkey. The three-year-old Syrian boy had drowned in the Mediterranean sea, on his way to Europe as a refugee. It was widely covered in the news. The image was devastating to the public discourse that refugees posed a security risk, because they were terrorists. The image of Alan Kurdi told the story of innocent suffering more powerfully than a thousand words could have. In its wake, the influential German tabloid newspaper *Bild* changed its editorial stance 180 degrees. It had warned against welcoming refugees before, but now advocated open borders for humanitarian reasons. Not long after, Angela Merkel followed suit. As the memory of Kurdi faded, media discourse started reverting back to security issues and cultural protest (Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). Again, Angela Merkel followed suit. In the process, Germany's self-image changed to an open country of 'Wir Schaffen Das' and back again to a more conservative stance on immigration and culture. Surely, many factors played into Merkel's decisions, but it is likely *Bild* and other media had a decisive influence. Because of the continued dominance of national media outlets and the subsequent existence of Europeanized national public spheres, media coverage of EU affairs tends to reaffirm rather than weaken national narratives about European integration (cf. Diez Medrano 2003).

Discursive Intergovernmentalism Hypothesis II: Media coverage of EU affairs reconstructs a national doctrine vis-à-vis the European Union and European integration.

Media Logic and Postfunctionalism

Following a range of studies on public contestation over European integration in the wake of the Maastricht Treaty, Hooghe and Marks synthesized a large body of literature – including many of their own previous studies – to articulate a postfunctionalist theory of European integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009). They argue that politicization functions as a break on integration. This is so, because the public is less pro-European than political elites. The majority of citizens have a strong national identity and they infer relatively Eurosceptic preferences from it. The previously existing political climate of the 'permissive consensus' shifted to a 'constraining dissensus'. Challenger parties from both the left and the right mobilize Euroscepticism. They keep political mainstream elites in check with the threat of electoral punishment. Hence, member state governments are no longer willing to engage in significant pooling of sovereignty in EU framework. While postfunctionalist theory correctly identifies politicization as a major factor in shaping European integration, it focuses more on public opinion and

party politics than on the role of mass media. Yet, mass media are arguably the central arena of politicization, because they are key in establishing the communicative link between citizens and party politicians (Statham and Trenz 2014).

Identity

As we know from sociological and psychological literature, most individuals have multiple identities (Herrmann et al. 2004). The extent to which people's different identities are triggered as politically relevant in relation to a particular political matter at hand, depends on their active discursive mobilization. That is, political entrepreneurs appeal to a particular identity. They present politics as a struggle between 'us' and 'them', thereby triggering the audience to consider whatever binds 'us' as salient. Without such an identitarian component in a public mobilization strategy, it contains less news value. In other words, identity politics is a successful media strategy. Actors engaging in convincing identity politics will have a better chance to shape EU media coverage than those who do not.

From a media logic perspective, the question about identity is not 'which identity do citizens ascribe most importance to?', but rather 'which identity is most frequently and most powerfully mobilized in public debate?'. Here, existing empirical studies show how the national identity is dominant in discussions about European integration (Koopmans 2007; Leupold 2016). Take the post referendum Brexit debates in the UK as example. Much of the continued contestation between brexiters and remainers focuses on what the 'right way of being British' is. Remainers argue that staying in the EU is best for Britain, more so than best for Europe, women, or any other identity group. Coverage of intergovernmental conflict is even more likely to fuel national identity perceptions. If EU politics appears in the news in the context of our Prime Minister defending the national interest against other Prime Ministers in European Council framework, it reaffirms our national identity. Journalists may also actively try to tell EU stories through national lenses to score higher on the identification news values, and thus to reach a larger audience. Media coverage thus reconstructs the nation state as preeminent frame of reference for EU politics. Hence, the more we are exposed to media coverage about the EU, the more British, French or Hungarian we feel. Consequently, it makes sense that we would direct our political demands in EU politics through the national channel of representation. In other words, if we want something from the EU, we want our Prime Minister or Head of State to arrange it for us in EU framework.

Discursive Intergovernmentalism Hypothesis III: Media coverage of EU affairs increases the salience of people's national identity, which reinvigorates the national channel of representation and intergovernmental institutions in EU politics.

I thus argue here that postfunctionalism is right to point to identity as an important factor in explaining EU politics, but it has so far underestimated the role of the media in reasserting and reconstructing the preeminence of national identity.

Constraining dissensus

According to Hooghe and Marks (2009), politicization of European integration has changed the permissive consensus of the early integration period into a constraining dissensus. Operating in the spotlights of media coverage, member state leaders are no longer able to compromise. Hence, the EU cannot make key decisions anymore. While media coverage likely contains this effect, two important caveats need to be made.

First, we should not overestimate the politicization of European integration. Yes, there is generally more media coverage of EU affairs now than before the 1990s (Boomgaarden et al. 2010) and it amplifies dissensus, but the EU is rarely the most pervasive issue in the news. Many other issues are covered in the news. When a particular issue of EU politics is in the news, it tends to be so for relatively short peaks in media cycles. Few EU related issues receive a lot of coverage throughout the EU at the same time. More often than not, one will see a differentiated politicization of European governance (De Wilde et al. 2016), with diverging media cycles from country to country. Savvy politicians can make use of this variation in media coverage. They can postpone unpopular compromises until mass media has directed its attention elsewhere.

Second, the more attention mass media pay to EU politics, the higher the pressure on member state and EU executives to come with solutions to problems. There are limits imposed by the spotlights on the extent to which politicians can compromise, but those same spotlights also put a price on failure. Prime Ministers coming out of a European Council meeting without being able to claim success risk reputation loss and criticism at home (Carpenter and Krause 2012).

Discursive Intergovernmentalism Hypothesis IV: The dissensus amplified by media coverage of EU affairs does not necessarily constrain EU politics.

Dissensus is only likely to be constraining when EU issues are similarly salient in the news throughout the EU at the same time, when there is a significant reputation price to be paid for failure and when EU leaders cannot reduce the news value of decisions, for example through the creation of de novo bodies.

Conclusion

This contribution sets out to assess the impact of media coverage of EU politics on European integration. To do this, it confronts media logic theory with the key causal mechanisms and processes underpinning the three grand theories of integration at the heart of this special issue (Hooghe and Marks FORTHCOMING): neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism. This synthesis identifies new dynamics and generates new hypotheses.

By and large, media coverage favors member state governments, reconstructing European politics decidedly toward a form of *discursive intergovernmentalism*. We see this in the opportunity provided to the chief executives of member states to shape the discourse in the public sphere. Moreover, we see it in the feedback loop of a reconstruction of national identity as the prime frame of reference for citizens and the amplification of the European Council as the primary locus of EU politics. Finally, we see it in the flexibility provided by differentiated media coverage, which – in the hands of savvy politicians – allows them to circumvent the constraining effects of dissensus.

But it also creates opportunities for EU actors. Supranational entrepreneurs can successfully engage in EU politics, if they manage to play by media rules. The *new supranational entrepreneurship* is executive in nature, where charismatic EU officials with significant competencies engage with powerful adversaries in moments of crisis. We have seen Vestager and Draghi exercise it with accomplishment. Since the new supranational entrepreneurship relies heavily on executive action, it reasserts rather than challenges executive dominance in EU politics. Both national and supranational executive actors are empowered through media coverage vis-à-vis national and supranational legislative, judicial and civil society actors.

Finally, the prominence of ‘the people’ as a quasi-actor in the news allows a form of *public interest spillover*. The Roaming Directive and the abolition of credit card surcharges in PSD2 testify to this. Since the presence of citizens in the news is easily linked to a concern for democracy within the EU, actors who can credibly claim to represent ‘the people’ and champion majoritarian rule can use media coverage as an instrument to overcome more powerful opposing coalitions and push *democratic spillover*. The successful assertion of the Spitzenkandidaten process in the 2014 EP election testifies to this.

Future research should investigate the extent to which these four dynamics are at play through a careful exploration and testing of the validity and scope conditions of the hypotheses. This goes beyond the scope of the present paper, which restricts itself to theory generation based on anecdotal evidence. Such empirical research could also investigate the net effects of the dynamics. Overall, which of these four dynamics is dominant? Does it ultimately allow us to predict whether the EU becomes more federal,

more intergovernmental or disintegrates? This paper argues that discursive intergovernmentalism is dominant, as it is fueled by the most prominent form of EU media coverage and works in several mutually reinforcing ways. But only further empirical research can substantiate or refute this claim. While there is an extensive literature on media effects, these tend to be focused on the effects of media exposure on individual citizens. Mass media have been ascribed a key role in nation state formation processes in the past, but the discussion on the effects of mass media on center formation beyond the state and consolidation or development of a supranational polity is in its infancy. Much about this question remains difficult to answer if we want to relate the presence of media coverage to the (intermediary) product of the integration process. The redirection of the study of media effects toward the mechanisms of integration rather than its product, as started here, helps gain more traction on this important question.

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