

‘The Rise of the Eurosceptics’: A Europeanized Media Discourse about Euroscepticism

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Introduction

2014 can be considered a “breakout year” for Euroscepticism. Largely on account of the results of the 2014 European Parliament elections, national media outlets in many Member States reported about the “earthquake,” “virus,” or “rising tide” of Euroscepticism sweeping across the continent.

Our study answers two research questions:

- To what extent are national media discourses about Euroscepticism Europeanized?
- What factors explain the presence of a Europeanized media discourse about Euroscepticism?

A discourse is considered Europeanized when an issue involving non-national or EU level actors is discussed in a similar fashion across Member State borders.

Europeanized discourses increase the saliency of the EU within national public spheres as well as enable transnational communication across them.

Although Euroscepticism implies opposition to the EU and European integration, Europeanized media discourses about Euroscepticism may facilitate the type of cross-border communication and mutual understanding about the EU indicative of a European public sphere.

Data

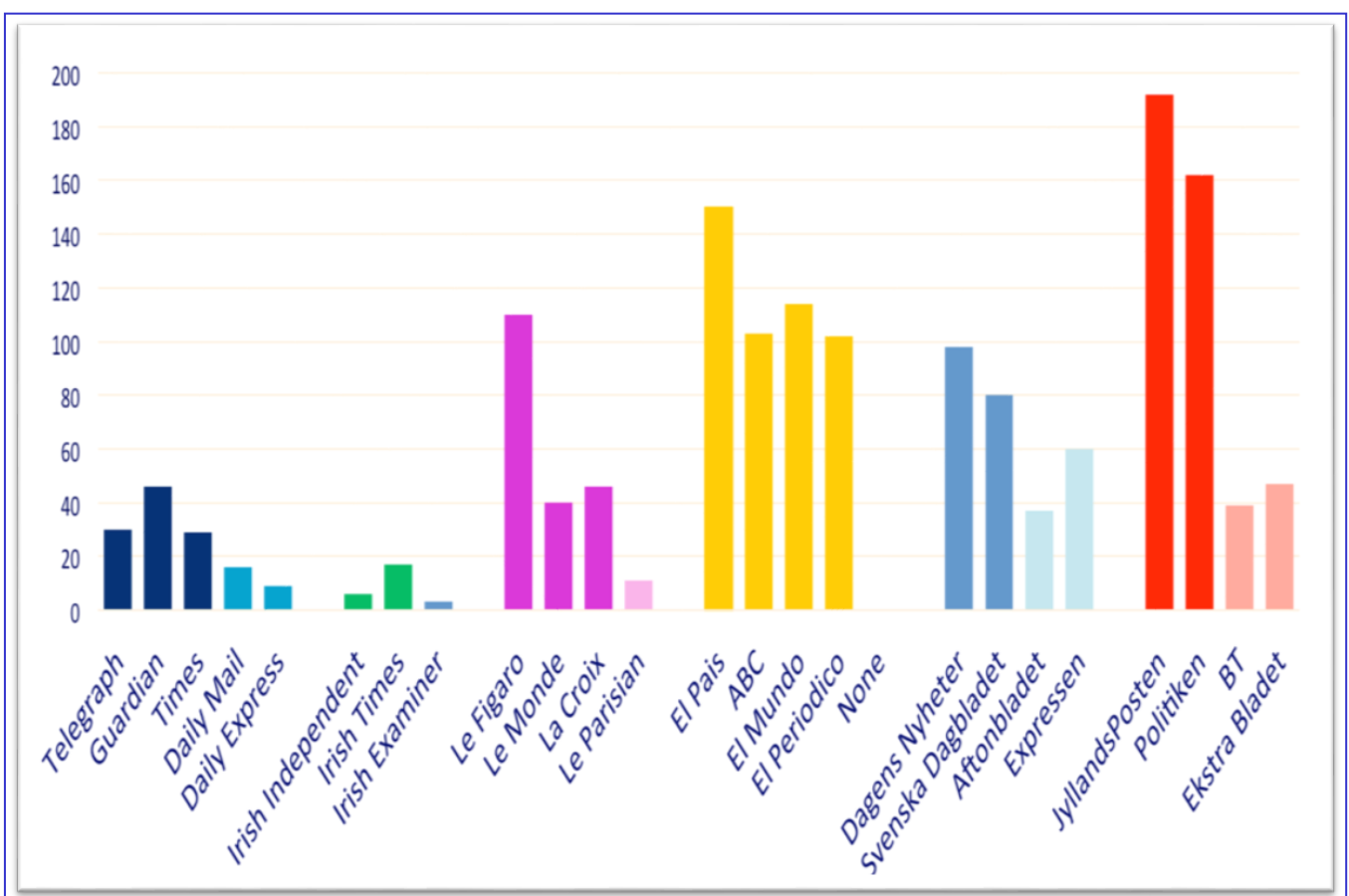


Figure 1: Distribution of articles by newspaper (N=1425)

Comparison of print newspapers across six cases (IE, UK, DK, SE, ES, FR) over the year 2014.

For each country, two tabloids and two broadsheets (where available).

The media discourse on Euroscepticism is operationalized by searching for all articles with the keywords “Eurosceptic” or “Euroscepticism” (in respective languages) in three databases: LexisNexis, Media Retriever, and Infomedia.

Method 1 LDA Topic Models

Using the ‘lda’ package for R, LDA topic models were produced for each national case. To account for differences in the number of articles, 20 clusters were chosen for DK, SE, ES, and FR; 15 for the UK; and 10 for Ireland. 1500 iterations were run with an alpha of .1.

Figure 2 reports the scope of the generated topics by country, i.e., whether the topic referred to national or European politics. National topics generally referred to contest-frames between national parties as well as articles on domestic issues like the state of economy. In every case but the UK, the discourse about Euroscepticism was discussed in a European context, with Ireland being exceptional in having a European context exclusively.

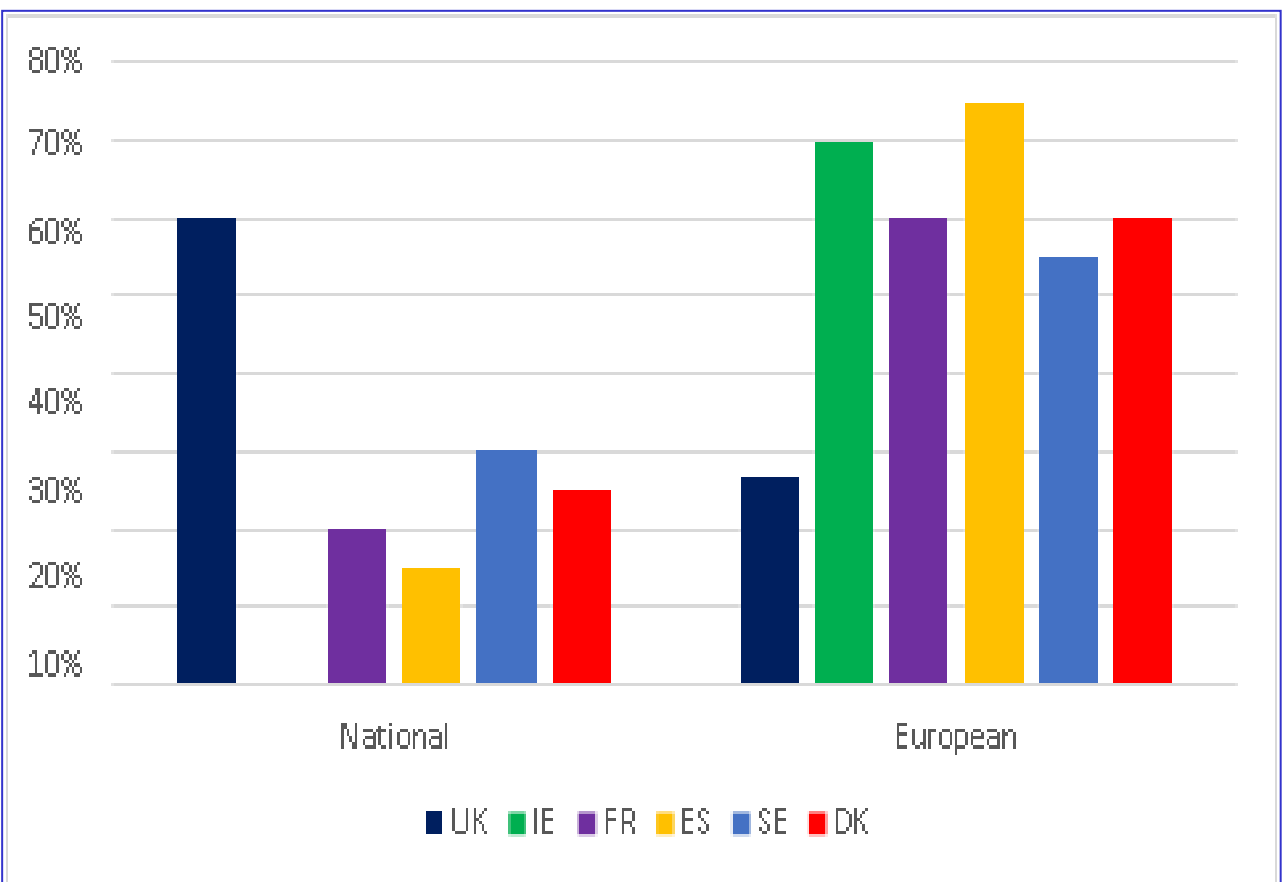


Figure 2: Scope of LDA topics

Finding that the content of the European topics was remarkably similar across the cases, we created a network visualization of all the European topics in Figure 3 (top-right). Notably, all countries included a topic about ‘British Politics,’ but the UK did not include other countries in its coverage of the Euroscepticism or of the EP elections. Rather, the UK coverage of Euroscepticism was largely self-interested.

For example, ‘German Eurosceptics’ refers to coverage of the German Eurosceptic party *Alternative for Deutschland*. ‘Eurosceptic Narrative,’ meanwhile, refers to reportage about the ‘rise of Euroscepticism’ across Europe following the 2014 EP elections. Figure 4 below provides an example of the LDA output of the ‘Eurosceptic Narrative.’

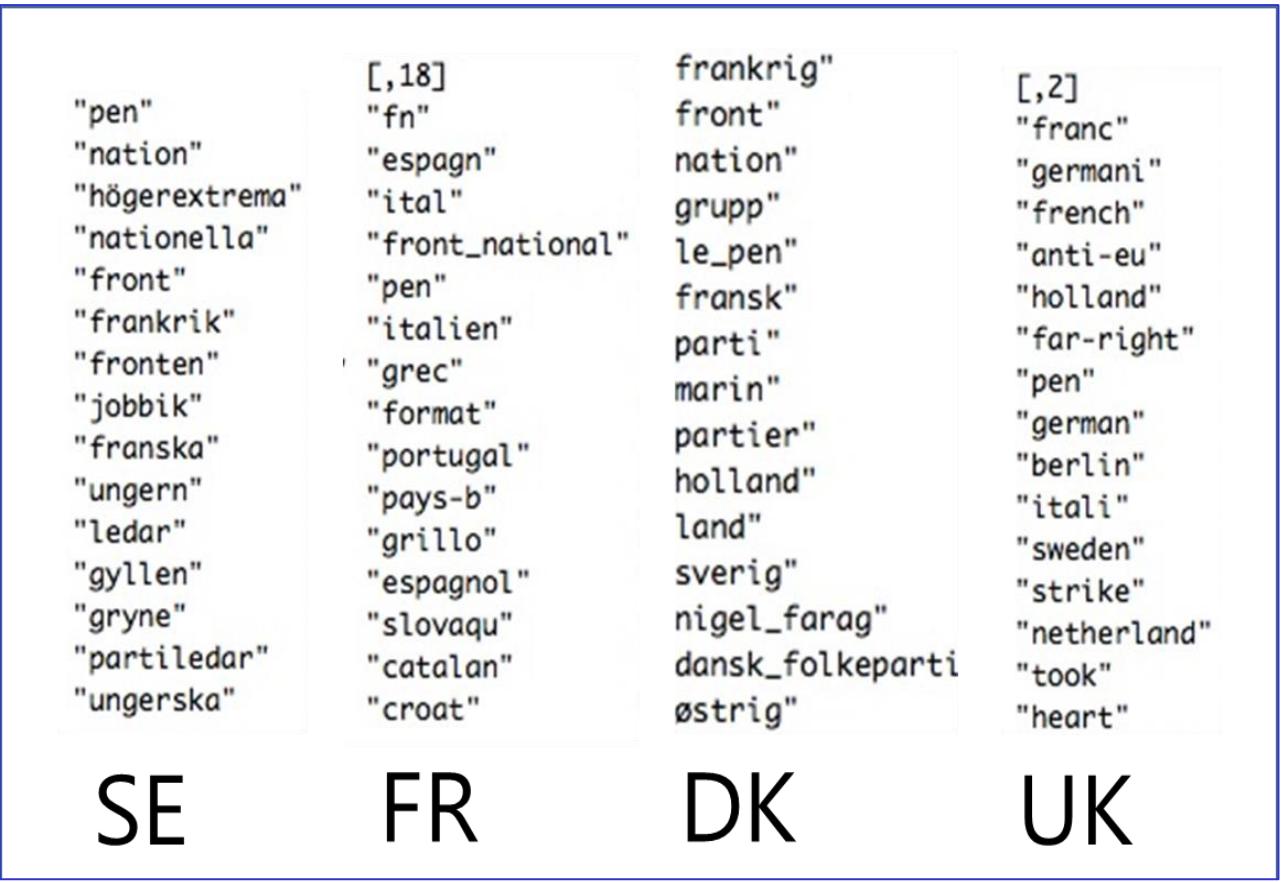


Figure 4: Eurosceptic Narrative LDA output

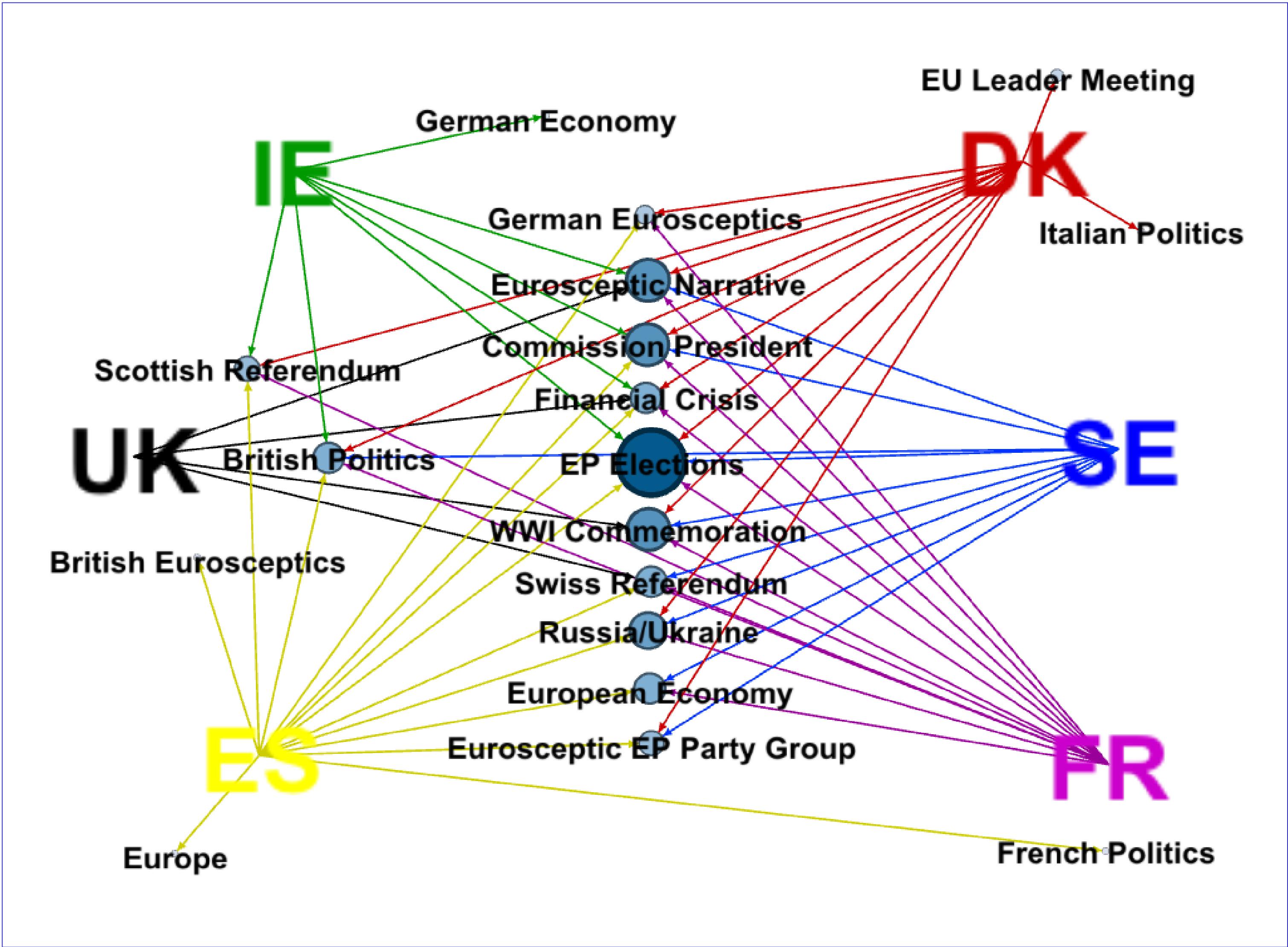


Figure 3: Network Visualization of European Topics
Color-coded edges marking the connection between national media and European topics.
The size of the nodes corresponds to the total amount of times a topic appears in our models.

Method 2 Bivariate Logistic Regressions

In the second phase of the method, human coding was performed on each article, assigning it either a National or European code depending on the scope of the article. Inter-coder reliability of a 60 article sample was 83%. Using bivariate log regressions, we then test what factors explain a Europeanized media discourse through three hypotheses:

H1: Tabloids’ Eurosceptic discourse will be more national

	Rate	Risk Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Log odds ratio
Broadsheet	0.7294		2.6952		
Tabloid	0.4198	1.7376	3.7257	1.3153	

H2: The more successful the Eurosceptic party, the more national the scope of the discourse .

Eurosceptic	0.8316	1.8529		
Non Eurosceptic	0.7448	2.9184	0.6349	-0.4543

H3: Newspapers from EU net contributor countries will have a more national discourse about Eurosceptics than net givers.

Receiver	0.8316	4.9398		
Giver	0.6337	1.7299	2.8556	1.0493

Findings

Using LDA topic modeling, we find a strong convergence in topics in five of the six cases studied. While the discourse about Euroscepticism in the UK appears the least Europeanized, we find that British Euroscepticism nevertheless drives other Member States’ media to discuss Euroscepticism using the shared frame of British politics. We did not test direct cross-border communication initiatives between Member State media or citizens; however, we consider the similar topics discussed by the media in the context of reporting about Euroscepticism sufficient to fulfil the precondition of ‘mutual understanding’ needed for a European public sphere to emerge.

The results of the bivariate log regressions demonstrate that: tabloid newspapers are 3.7 times more likely to report about Euroscepticism in a national scope than broadsheets; countries with a successful Eurosceptic party are slightly more likely (.6 times) to report Euroscepticism nationally than those without an anti-EU party; and countries that are net contributors to the EU budget are 2.8 times more likely to report Euroscepticism nationally than EU fun receivers.

Therefore, we conclude that :

- a) the discourse about Euroscepticism is Europeanized
- b) this Europeanization process is taking place through the media, and
- c) is influenced by the type of newspaper, the existence of a successful Eurosceptic party, and whether a country is a net contributor or receiver of EU funds.

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